

False Start:

Quantitative representation of sportswomen in *The Sydney Morning*

***Herald* in 2005, 2007 and 2011**

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Abstract

Despite the increasing participation and success of women in sport in Australia, sportswomen continue to receive a significantly lower quantity of media coverage than sportsmen. This thesis will examine the impact of the 2006 Senate inquiry ‘About time! Women in sport and recreation in Australia’ and the 2010 Australian Sports Commission (ASC) report ‘Towards a Level Playing Field: sport and gender in Australian media’, which were designed to address the underrepresentation of sportswomen in the media. Content analysis of *The Sydney Morning Herald*¹ sports section was conducted to quantify the representation of sportswomen in 2005, prior to the inquiry, and in 2007 and 2011, following the publication of the inquiry and report. This thesis highlights that, despite the issue being deemed important enough to warrant a parliamentary inquiry and large-scale government-backed research, the quantitative coverage of sportswomen in *SMH* has not improved. Interviews with *SMH* sports journalists and an editor, combined with academic scholarship, offer insights into *why* underrepresentation of sportswomen in *SMH* still exists.

Keywords: media; gender; sport; content analysis; *The Sydney Morning Herald*; Australia.

¹ *The Sydney Morning Herald* will henceforth be referred to as *SMH*.

Statement of Original Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis is my own, except in instances where acknowledged within the text. I also certify that this thesis has not, in part or whole, been submitted previously for assessment.

Any help that was received in the production of this thesis has been acknowledged.

I further certify that all human research involved in this thesis was conducted in strict accordance with the Human Ethics protocol approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Low-Risk Ethics Committee, which operates as a delegated sub-committee of the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference Number AH00091).

Signed:

Date:

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Introduction

Sport is about more than just physical activity in Australia; it is part of our national identity. The media are central to sport, with practitioners making daily choices about which sporting events to include and exclude from coverage. Sportswomen are one such group that continue to be excluded from regular coverage, persistently underrepresented, despite their participation and success in a wide range of sports.

In 1980, sportswomen accounted for a paltry two per cent of media coverage (ASC 1985, p. 39). Almost thirty years later, that figure had only risen to nine per cent (Cagle, Greenwood & Lumby 2010, p. 76). These disappointing results were the catalyst for this thesis, which seeks to explore the complex relationship that exists between gender, sport and the media, by specifically examining the quantitative coverage of sportswomen in *SMH* sports section, particularly in response to recent government inquiries and reports.

Sport makes an important contribution to the Australian way of life. Australians play it, watch it, bet on it, coach it and boast about it. According to Zion, Spaaij and Nicholson, sport in Australia has developed into a globally relevant “social, cultural and financial institution” (2011, p. 81). Australia’s successful bids to host several mega sporting events, including the Melbourne (1956) and Sydney (2000) Olympic Games, and the Brisbane (1982), Melbourne (2006) and the Gold Coast (2018) Commonwealth Games, and major sporting events, such as the Australian Open Tennis Championships, Australian Open Golf, the Ashes², and the 2003 Rugby World Cup for example, signals this importance. The Australian Government has recognised the significant role sport plays in Australia, creating a stand-alone Federal portfolio for sport, establishing the Australian Sports

² Test cricket series played between Australia and England.

Commission³ (ASC), developing the Australian Institute of Sport⁴ (AIS) and commissioning reports to address challenges in sport and physical activity, including gender inequity (ASC 1985; Caple et al. 2010; Independent Sport Panel 2009; Mikosza 1997).

Traditionally, sport has been considered a male domain (King 2007; Pedersen 2002; Wensing & Bruce 2003). In recent years, women have been challenging that tradition. The sport and physical recreation participation rate of female adults in 2009/10 was 63 per cent, almost on par with the 65 per cent for male adults (ABS 2011, p. 2). Adult female attendance rates across all sporting events was 37 per cent, compared to the higher rate of 50 per cent for male adults (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, p. 5). Female athletes accounted for 45 per cent of the 2012 Australian Olympic team, and 44 per cent of the 2012 Australian Paralympic team (Australian Olympic Committee 2012). Despite accounting for less than half the Australian Olympic team, of the total 35 medals won by Australians at the 2012 Olympics, women won a total of 20 medals, or 57 per cent (Australian Olympic Committee 2012). Elite Australian sportswomen also have increasing access to female national sporting competitions, such as the W-League⁵ and WNBL⁶, and international tournaments, such as the ICC Twenty20 Women's Cricket World Cup and FIFA Women's Football World Cup.

The media and sport have a mutual relationship, connected both commercially and culturally. For Zion, Spaaij and Nicholson, the media “played a decisive role in the transformation of sport from an amateur pursuit into a hyper-commercialised global

³ The Australian Sports Commission is Australia's principal national sports administration and advisory agent. It has a dual focus: participation and elite achievement.

⁴ The Australian Institute of Sport, a division of the ASC, is a sport training facility for elite Australian athletes.

⁵ W-League is the female equivalent of the A-League, an Australian football competition.

⁶ WNBL is the female equivalent of the NBL, an Australian basketball competition.

industry’ (2011, p. 81). Based on Whannel’s three-part media communicative chain of production, content or message, and reception or audience (2000, p. 291), this thesis will focus predominantly on production and content to analyse the quantitative coverage of sportswomen in *SMH* sports section in January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011. These particular years were chosen to determine whether government reports have impacted on the quantity of media coverage of sportswomen. This thesis will examine the impact of the Senate inquiry ‘About time! Women in sport and recreation in Australia’⁷ (ECITA 2006) and the ASC report ‘Towards a Level Playing Field: sport and gender in Australian media’⁸ (Caple et al. 2010). After contextualising the applicable ideas and recommendations through examination of the aforementioned inquiry and report, this thesis will focus on a specific content analysis of the quantity of coverage of sportswomen compared to sportsmen in *SMH* sports section in 2005, and in 2007 and 2011, the years following the publication of the inquiry and report, with analysis of coverage in 2005 acting as a base year for comparison. It will then highlight possible reasons for the differences in coverage in *SMH* using a combination of scholarship in the field of sport, gender and media, and interviews with sports journalists and an editor from *SMH*.

Research Questions

While previous studies tend to offer a broad picture of the underrepresentation of sportswomen in Australian media, this thesis is unique with its specific focus on *SMH*.

This thesis seeks to answer two main research questions. The first question asks: Has the

⁷ The 2006 Senate inquiry ‘About time! Women in sport and recreation in Australia’ will henceforth be referred to as ‘About time!’.

⁸ The 2010 ASC report ‘Towards a Level Playing Field: sport and gender in Australian media’ will henceforth be referred to as ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’.

quantity of coverage of sportswomen in *SMH* sports section changed in response to the 2006 Senate inquiry ‘About time!’ and the 2010 ASC report ‘Towards a Level Playing Field?’ The second question is dependent on the answer to the first. It asks: if coverage has increased, why might this be the case? If coverage has not increased, how can this be explained?

Significance of Research Questions

There is already substantial scholarly literature that highlights the disproportionate amount of newspaper coverage that male athletes receive compared to female athletes (Bernstein 2002; Caple, Greenwood & Lumby 2011; Crossman, Vincent & Gee 2010; Fullerton 2006; Messner 2002; Pedersen 2002). There is however, only a limited range of literature that examines *why* this difference exists (Claringbould, Knoppers & Elling 2004; Hardin 2005; Knoppers & Elling 2004). This thesis will seek to address this gap in an Australian context. With a specific and original focus on *SMH* in select months, the typically sport-filled months of January and October in 2005, 2007 and 2011, content analysis will be undertaken in order to compare coverage of sportsmen and sportswomen. Interviews with *SMH* sports journalists and an editor will then be conducted to gain insight into *SMH*-specific practices that may influence decisions regarding the amount of coverage of male and female athletes.

The Australian Government has conducted a series of reports and inquiries, the first published in 1985, which examined the differences in media coverage of sportsmen and sportswomen. This thesis is unique as it does not look at the phenomenon of disproportionate media coverage in isolation, but rather specifically examines *SMH* in the year directly following the release of ‘About time!’ in 2006 and ‘Towards a Level Playing

Field' in 2010. In doing so, it will test the assumption that such inquiries and reports lead to change in media practice.

The aims of this thesis then, are three-fold. Firstly, to contribute to the broad field of gender, sport and media studies, and particularly to the growing literature that specifically addresses the differences in media coverage of male and female athletes. Secondly, to provide new empirical data specifically regarding *SMH* content about the quantity of coverage of female sportswomen compared to sportsmen. Thirdly, to combine insights gained from academic scholarship with interviews with *SMH* journalists and an editor in an attempt to explain why male and female athletes receive an unequal quantity of coverage in *SMH*.

Several avenues of research related to sport, gender and the media are beyond the scope of this thesis. This thesis is not able to examine: whether the gender of journalists influences sports media content (see Caple et al. 2010; Claringbould et al. 2004; Hanitzsch & Hanusch 2012; North 2009); the impact of nationalism on the quantity of sports media content (see Crossman et al. 2010; Crossman, Vincent & Speed 2007; Wensing & Bruce 2003); or whether technological developments, such as the Internet, have influenced the quantity of media coverage given to male and female athletes (see Carter & Steiner 2004; English 2011; Jones 2006). This thesis does, however, provide original empirical work interpreted through insights gained from scholarship and industry practice that could provide the basis for further research.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One will take a two-part approach to examining the literature relevant to this thesis. Arguments about sportswomen in the media will be located within a larger theoretical framework and academic scholarship about the representation of women. The first part of the literature review will examine this scholarship, exploring the main scholars, texts, and ideas regarding gender, sport and the media. The second part this chapter will look specifically at the literature on the representation of sportswomen in the media, including reports commissioned by the Australian Government.

Chapter Two will closely examine the two methods, namely quantitative content analysis and interviews, utilised in this thesis. The decision to combine multiple methodologies was made in order to achieve methodological triangulation and increase the validity of the results.

Chapter Three aims to provide contextual insights into public discussion about the coverage of sportswomen in the media, as ignited by Australian Government reports and inquiries. This chapter will examine ‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’, highlighting the key information and acting as a platform for content analysis results in Chapter Four

Chapter Four seeks to answer the first research question. It will present the results of data collected from content analysis of *SMH* in January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011. This chapter will examine the results of four categories, features, news in brief, photographs, and back page, with each examining coverage in terms of male, female, mixed gender and non-gendered representation. For each of the years examined, results

will be presented as raw data, that is the number of observations for each gender category, and as analysed data, that is each gender category as a percentage of total observations.

Chapter Five will attempt to determine the reasons for the content analysis results outlined in Chapter Four. This chapter will draw on a range of scholarship, supported and inflected by the insights gained through interviews with *SMH* sports journalists and an editor. It will focus on the role of gatekeepers, the interpretation of news values, the conservative effect of the commercial business that is *SMH*, the correlation between sports media coverage and profile of athletes, and the persistence of gender bias and hegemonic masculinity underlying the editorial practices of *SMH*.

Chapter One – Literature Review

In order to examine the quantitative representation of sportswomen in *SMH*, it is important to first contextualise the thesis within broader scholarly debates. This literature review will explore four key areas: gender and the media, gender and sport, sport media theory and government action addressing the representation of sportswomen in the media.

Gender and the Media

It was not until the ‘second-wave’ of the women’s movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s that media emerged as a focus of scholarship (Carter & Steiner 2004; Gill 2007). Central to early feminist studies of the media were several key ideas. The ‘blind spot’ concerning the coverage of women in the media became increasingly apparent, with studies seeking to examine the ‘male as norm’ issue (Gill 2007, p. 9). “The concern was that the sexist messages of these media forms socialized people, especially children, into thinking that dichotomized and hierarchical sex-role stereotypes were ‘natural’ and ‘normal’” (Carter & Steiner 2004, p. 2). Studies also sought to explore the lack of opportunities available for women in the media industry, such as an absence of female newsreaders (Carter & Steiner 2004; Gill 2007). Carter and Steiner also highlight another development that helped shape feminist scholarship, the distinction between *gender*, a “social construction”, and *sex*, meaning biological differences (2004, p. 3).

Tuchman articulated that, despite the progression of the women’s movement from being ridiculed to legitimised, “newspapers continue to view women in the news as occasional oddities that must be tolerated” (1978, p. 29). Signifying they were not newsworthy or

important enough to be in the main pages of the newspaper alongside men, women were segregated to separate women's pages (Gill 2004; Harp 2006; Tuchman 1978; Yang 1996). While the creation of such women-only spaces could also be a "strategy used to challenge the representation of women in the media", it generated debate about the "ghettoization of women's concerns in to a small number of bounded spaces" (Gill 2004, p. 35). The result was ultimately a continued "symbolic annihilation and trivialization of women" (Tuchman 1978, p. 38).

Another debate central to the topic of gender and the media is reality versus representation. Cole and Harcup explain that the concept of representation is not static, but rather it shifts as interests and attitudes in society change (2010). "If one role of a newspaper is to reflect society then the newspaper agenda will change as society changes, to reflect current interests, preoccupations and concerns" (2010, p. 107-108). Many scholars stress however, that the role of the media is not to represent reality (Carter & Steiner 2004; Gill 2007; Lowes 1999; Whannel 2000). "The media are involved in producing or constructing particular versions of reality in order to make them 'real' and persuasive" (Gill 2007, p. 44). In sport, 'reality' goes through a process of interconnecting factors that in turn produce the event that is ultimately represented in the media. Using football as a case study, Oriard explains cultural narratives and meanings are "created by an interplay" of producers (rule makers, college authorities, players); consumers (spectators and readers); intermediary interpreters (sportswriters); a medium of communication (the daily press and popular periodicals); political, social, economic, and cultural contexts; and the inherent qualities of the game itself" (1993, p. 119).

Given females in the media cannot be studied in isolation from males (Beynon 2002; Messner & Sabo 1990; Sabo & Jansen 1998), the concept of masculinity warrants further exploration. Although typically associated with males, scholars stress the importance of distinguishing between males and masculinity, that is, between the biological and the constructed (Beynon 2002; Carter & Steiner 2004). As Carter and Steiner explain, masculinity is “a social construction rather than a ‘natural’ fact” (2004, p. 3). Concepts of masculinity vary from individual to individual and over time, although masculinity is typically associated with attributes such as exertion, physical toughness, aggression and strength. “Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting” (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, p. 836). Sport is one such setting where masculinity is prominent. “From the ancient Olympiad to the present, sport has been a primary site for defining, cultivating and displaying Western ideals of masculinity” (Sabo & Jansen 1998, p. 202). The traditional notion of masculinity can be reinforced through the media “when they emphasize the power of the male athlete, the institution of familial patriarchy, and mythos of the frontiersman” (Trujillo 1994, p. 109).

The concept of hegemony, first elaborated by Antonio Gramsci, is a key term in gender and media scholarship (Carter & Steiner 2004; Hargreaves 1982; Miller 2001). Creedon defines it as “an infrasystem of values that overshadows our awareness and helps dominant groups maintain their power. The sports coverage hierarchy model is a manifestation of it” (1998, p. 93). It is an “ideological and cultural power” through which certain groups can “claim social, political and cultural leadership throughout a society or social formation” (Gill 2007, p. 55). This ‘leadership’ is achieved by winning “approval or consent” (Gill 2007, p. 55). The media, through their inclusion and exclusion of some athletes and sports over others, play a significant role in this process. “The media are

instrumental in the processes of gaining public consent” (Carter & Steiner 2004, p. 2).

Hegemony is also a dynamic concept; its meaning can shift. “It is an active, ongoing process which is always temporary and contested” (Gill 2007, p. 55). This means hegemonic power can be challenged, and subsequently altered.

Hegemonic masculinity is therefore an ideological construct that draws on both hegemony and masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt define it as “the pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue” (2005, p. 832). This definition is confirmed by Pedersen, who explains it as “the acceptance of masculinity as the defining characteristic of western society that places women in the position they are in” (2002, p. 305). This notion of “acceptance” contributes to the sustained presence of hegemonic masculinity in sport and as a function of society.

Gender and Sport

Over the past three decades, gender in sport has slowly become a subject of academic scholarship (Coakley & Dunning 2000; Creedon 1994; Hargreaves 1982). The study of sport emerged in the mid-1960s following a realisation among many sociology academics that “sport was an increasingly visible and important social practice” (Coakley & Dunning 2000, p. xxii). The International Review for the Sociology of Sport (IRSS) for example, first published in 1966, was established to meet the increasing demand of publication outlets for the study of sport. With “institutional sexism” prevalent in sport, Creedon explains sport was even “virtually ignored” by feminist scholarship until the late 1970s (1994, p. 7). Since then, gender and sport have formed a significant part of feminist and other academic scholarship (Markula 2005, p. 3). “The impact of feminism

helped to generate a growing field of analysis of sport that challenged the cosy masculine hegemony within sport sociology, and the expansion of sport-related feminist scholarship prompted some more critical examinations of masculinity and sport” (Whannel 2002, p. 67). For Messner and Sabo, sport “is conceptualized as a cultural terrain in which meanings are always subject to contest and redefinition” (1990, p.8).

Sport became recognised as a site of production of the ideology of male domination, and as a result, female subordination (Creedon 1994; Markula 2005; Wenner 1998). “Sport represents a potent medium through which biological or physical differences interface with social and cultural interpretations of gender role expectations” (Creedon 1994, p. 31). The positioning of males as superior to females in a sporting context transpires to other contexts, to the extent it becomes naturalised in other aspects of society. “Sport is an expression of the sociocultural system in which it occurs” (Creedon 1994, p. 3). As Kane and Synder explain further, the “physical, biological, ‘natural’ supremacy of males in sport becomes translated into the ‘natural’ supremacy of males in the larger social order” (1989, p. 77).

This notion of male superiority in sport has also translated into media practice, which as subsequent chapters will reveal, underlies attitudes and traditions that are difficult to shift. The next section of this chapter will explore this link between sport and the media.

Sport Media Theory

There is a symbiotic relationship between sport and the media; the value of each is enhanced by the other (Creedon 1994; Pedersen 2002). The relationship, according to Rowe, is “the happiest of marriages, with both institutions becoming mutually dependent

in an increasingly extensive and expensive exchange” (2004, p. 32). There is however, a “gendered value system” which “underlies and supports both sport and traditional sports media” (Creedon 1994, p. 6). Gender bias that occurs in the sporting context is reinforced through media coverage that is substantially different for the majority of sportsmen compared to sportswomen. As a result, through selection and exclusion of certain athletes and sports over others, the media plays a role in influencing societal norms. When sportswomen are not represented in the media for example, sport is seen and reinforced as a male domain. “Media help to shape the norms, values and beliefs that underpin these gender inequalities” (Carter & Steiner 2004, p. 5). Seen as inferior to male athletes, female athletes have thus traditionally been trivialised, marginalised and sexualised in the media, which has contributed to a sustained oppression of women in sport (Creedon 1994; Markula 2005; Rowe 2004; Tuchman 1978).

Scholarly literature to date has examined gender, sport, and the media across time, in terms of a variety of media, and in relation to different types of sports, such as commercial, professional, elite and scholastic. Analysis examining the underrepresentation of sportswomen typically utilises quantitative content analysis (Crossman et al. 2007; Crossman et al. 2010; Eastman & Billings 1999; Fullerton 2006; King 2007; Pedersen 2002; Vincent, Imwold, Johnson & Massey 2003).

“Underrepresentation by the mass media does more than simply create an impression that women are absent from the sporting arena. Rather, it creates a *false* impression of women’s athleticism by denying the reality of the modern female athlete” (Creedon 1994, p. 36). Qualitative content analysis and textual analysis of gender in sports media on the other hand, tend to examine how women are represented, often examining masculinity and femininity (George, Hartley & Paris 2001; Knight & Giuliano 2001; Wensing & Bruce 2003).

Government Action

As highlighted previously in this section, sport and the media exist in an important relationship (Creedon 1994; Pedersen 2002; Wenner 1998). The media can support sportspeople as role models, can raise the profile of individuals, teams and sports, and can lead to sponsorship and other endorsements (Rowe 2004; Wenner 1998; Whannel 2002). Sport offers the media a lucrative product that can attract a large audience or readership and provides them with a niche audience or readership for targeted advertising (Wenner 1998). However, a recurring theme in literature on sport and the media is the unequal media coverage of sportsmen compared to sportswomen, in terms of both quality and quantity. Miller explains that a “counter-power” emerged in Australia to address differences in media coverage (2001, p. 38). The development of Womensport Australia in the 1990s, for example, signalled the government’s commitment to improving the predicament of women in sport. Australia also benefited from international inquiries into women’s involvement in sport, such as the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport⁹ and the Windhoek Call for Action¹⁰ (ECITA 2006). Central to the Australian government’s commitment to addressing differences in the media coverage of sportsmen and sportswomen, is the establishment of inquiries and publication of reports.

Commissioned reports are not only a response from the government recognising the strength of community concerns about the media coverage of sportswomen, they also

⁹ The Brighton Declaration was the first world conference on Women and Sport held in 1994 by the International Women’s Group on Women and Sport (IWG). It developed an international set of principles for improving the involvement of women in sport.

¹⁰ The Windhoek Call for Action was the second world conference on Women and Sport hosted by the IWG in 1998. It had the aim of further developing equal participation opportunities for females in sport. The three subsequent conferences were held in Montreal (2002), Kumamoto (2006) and Sydney (2010).

act to initiate public debate and change (Beer 2011; Ratushny 2009). In Australia, Senate inquiries and government commissioned reports to address the lack of media coverage given to sportswomen have been published regularly since the 1980s (ASC 1985; Caple et al. 2010; ECTTA 2006; Independent Sport Panel 2009; Mikosza 1997; Phillips 1997; Stoddart 1994). “For too long, and in the face of overwhelming evidence and persistent advocacy, irrelevant attitudes, ignorance and blatant prejudice have allowed women to be treated as second class sporting citizens” (ASC 1985, p. 9). This section will highlight the key empirical findings and ideas raised in government reports into media coverage of sportswomen, prior to ‘About time!’.

By replicating the methodology across studies, the results offer a consistent indication of the lack of sports media coverage of sportswomen. The coverage of women’s sport in newspapers increased from two per cent in 1980 to 10.7 per cent in 1996, as presented in Figure 1 (Phillips 1997, p. 5). Although a significant increase, the figure was substantially lower than that for sportsmen, who accounted for 79.1 per cent of newspaper coverage¹¹ in 1996 (Phillips 1997, p. 4), and was not representative of the increasing participation of women in sport in Australia, at both at amateur and elite levels. “These figures support unequivocally our assertion that, taking into account the numbers involved in Australia now and in the past and the levels of excellence achieved, women’s sport simply has not received the media coverage it deserves and needs” (ASC 1985, p. 39). The coverage of women’s sport in *SMH* reflected a similar rise, increasing from 1.4 per cent in 1992 to 10.7 per cent in 1996 (Phillips 1997).

¹¹ Mixed sports coverage comprised the remaining 10.2 per cent of newspaper coverage in 1996 (Phillips 1997, p. 4).

Year	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996
Amount of Coverage (%)	2.0	1.3	2.5	4.5	10.7

Figure 1: Newspaper coverage of women’s sport (Phillips 1997, p. 5).

The reports also assessed the context in which women’s sport was framed, some of which helped establish the content analysis categories for this thesis. Women’s sport was used as a “filler” when there was less men’s sport to cover, and women’s sport was typically relegated to the inside pages of newspapers, with men’s sport making up over 90 per cent of all back page stories (Mikosza 1997; Phillips 1997). The reports also highlighted the differences in language used when discussing male and female athletes, with female athletes often described in terms of “weakness, passivity and insignificance” (Phillips 1997, p. 8). The resulting issues from underrepresentation and discriminatory coverage for women were identified as less publicity, coaching and support services, facilities, and sponsorship opportunities (ASC 1985). This is disconcertingly similar to the vicious cycle of women’s sport and media coverage that still exists today, almost four decades later. The outlined resolution for the difference in coverage was, “responsibility for making sure that [fairer media coverage for sportswomen] happens lies in equal measure with sports themselves, the media, governments at all levels and the wider community” (ASC 1985, p. 11). The persistence of concern and the ongoing approach is evident in the similar conclusion drawn from ‘About time!’. “It [the Senate committee] believes that if the recommendations in this report are implemented by the government, sport and recreation organisations, and media outlets they will make a significant contribution to improving the media profile of women’s sports” (ECITA 2006, p. 114).

The subjects of sport, media and gender have emerged as individual topics worthy of academic attention. When combined, the topic of gender in relation to sports media

offers a catalyst for the discussion of concepts and actions, such as the underrepresentation of sportswomen in the media, which are recurrent in Australian society. The following chapter will detail the methodology that will be used to study the underrepresentation of sportswomen in *SMH*.

Chapter Two – Methodology

This thesis utilises methodological triangulation, firstly undertaking content analysis to quantify the representation of sportswomen in *SMH*, and secondly conducting interviews with *SMH* sports journalists and an editor to determine why differences in the quantity of coverage of male and female athletes in *SMH* sports section exist. Methodological triangulation was chosen in favour of a single method as it strengthens the validity and reliability of findings (Gray & Densten 1998; Neuendorf 2002; Oleinik 2011; Stokes 2003).

The objective of this chapter is to explore the methods of quantitative content analysis and interviews, by justifying the choice of these methods, explaining how they are suited to answering the research questions and discussing their potential limitations.

Quantitative Content Analysis

Content analysis is a research method that can be employed to examine differences in the media representation of various groups in society. It is recognised as “an effective way to examine media images of minority or historically oppressed groups” (Hardin, Lynn & Walsdorf 2005, p. 110). As such, it is particularly useful in examining differences between the representation of males and females, such as in sports media coverage. “Content analysis presents gender researchers with a set of useful tools for comparing messages generated by males and females, and for studying messages containing information about sex and gender roles” (Neuendorf 2011, p. 276). Content analysis can be both qualitative and quantitative, and Wright’s definition is broad enough to cover both. “Content analysis is a research technique for the systematic classification and description of

communication content according to certain usually predetermined categories” (1986, p. 125-126). Although both types of content analysis are effective in examining gender representation in the media, this thesis chose to focus on quantitative content analysis given recent studies have convincingly proven that the *quality* of media coverage of women’s sport has improved dramatically to be almost on par with men’s (Bruce 2010; Caple et al. 2010; Caple et al. 2011). This is in contrast to the *quantity* of coverage, which has not shifted to the same extent, highlighting there is significant potential for change.

The first research question – has the quantity of coverage of sportswomen in *SMH* changed in response to ‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field?’ – will best be answered by conducting quantitative content analysis. Due to time and space constraints, content analysis was limited to a sample of two months in each year of analysis, for a total of six months. This thesis examined *SMH* from Monday to Saturday during the months of January and October across the three years of 2005, 2007 and 2011. Sunday was excluded from analysis, as *SMH* is not published on Sundays. 2005 was used as the base year, that is, the year of analysis that could be used as comparison for the data collected for 2007 and 2011. 2005 was specifically selected, as it was the year before ‘About time!’ was published and before public debate about the representation of women in the sports media escalated again. In order to allow substantial time for *SMH* to implement changes, data was collected during the year following ‘About time!’ (2006) and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’ (2010). This particular Senate inquiry and ASC report were chosen for analysis as they were the most recent government publications to examine the media coverage of sportswomen, and the years following their release, 2007 and 2011, were not Olympic Games or Commonwealth Games years¹². Studies have

¹² The 2009 Crawford report, ‘The Future of Sport in Australia’, was hence excluded since the Commonwealth Games were held in 2010, the year following publication. The Crawford report

shown mega international sporting events, such as the Olympic and Commonwealth Games, tend to skew the representation of gender in the media, offering women a more favourable quality and quantity of coverage than usual (Bernstein 2002; Crossman et al. 2010; Eastman & Billings 1999; Wensing & Bruce 2003). “The implication is that bending the rules is most likely to occur in events such as the Olympic Games when national identity overrides all other identity markers such as gender” (Wensing & Bruce 2003, p. 388).

Coverage of women’s sport is typically restricted to sporting events in which athletes are successful, “the dominance of success as a news value in sports reporting – with the majority of coverage focusing on results, and the dominant message being that athletes are successful” (Caple et al. 2011, p. 140). As a result of the findings outlined by Caple et al., this thesis decided to build its content analysis around months in which women are more likely to be competing, thus reported. The aim was to choose months when *SMH* was most likely to cover women’s sports, to not to skew results by deliberately choosing off-season periods. January and October were specifically selected as numerous major sporting events, including male, female, and mixed events, were held during frame of analysis, including but not limited to the Ashes, Asian Cup¹³, Athletics World Championships, Australian Open Tennis Championships, Rugby World Cup and Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) Finals.

This thesis specifically chose to examine newspapers, namely *SMH*, in favour of other mediums, including radio and television, as press accounts for 94 per cent of all female sports coverage (Caple et al. 2010, p. 77). Choosing newspapers as the focus ideally

was conducted by the Independent Sport Panel and examined various aspects of sport in Australia, including elite sport, media, funding, sponsorship and sports institutes.

¹³ International football tournament.

offers a larger sample to analyse to prevent small differences skewing results. Print was chosen in favour of online media as this thesis sought to analyse the gender of athletes on the back page – the ‘front page’ of the sports section – with the print layout not available online. A Sydney newspaper was chosen in favour of other metropolitan daily newspapers due to Sydney’s strong sporting identity. Sydney has hosted several major and international sporting events, including the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, the Ashes, the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and National Rugby League (NRL) Grand Final, among numerous others. Sydney is also home to a number of teams in national competitions across a variety of sports in both men’s competitions, including Sydney FC (football), Sydney City Roosters (NRL), Sydney Swans (AFL), Sydney Sixes (cricket) and Sydney Kings (basketball), and women’s competitions, including Sydney FC (football), NSW Breakers (cricket), NSW Arrows (hockey) and NSW Swifts (netball).

SMH was specifically selected as the newspaper to be analysed as it has the lowest volume of coverage of female sport by 10 leading Australian newspapers, including *The Herald Sun*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Advertiser*, *The Canberra Times*, *The Courier-Mail*, *The Gold Coast Bulletin*, *The Sunday Mail*, *Geelong Advertiser* and *The Australian* (Caple et al. 2010, p. 81). This low coverage means even a small change in the coverage of sportswomen in *SMH* would be apparent in content analysis.

SMH is a broadsheet newspaper based in Sydney and owned by Fairfax Media, originally established as the *Sydney Herald* in 1831 (Fairfax Media 2005). It is now Australia’s largest metropolitan daily newspaper, “read by more people than any other newspaper across six days of the week” (Fairfax Media 2011). Its print edition has a weekday circulation of 184,613 and readership of 717,000, and a Saturday circulation of 314,683 and readership

of 978,000 (Fairfax 2011). The sports section, currently titled 'SportsDay', is a separate lift out section.

Procedure

A single principal coder, the author, conducted the initial stages of content analysis. This thesis utilised a priori coding, with the coding categories designed in full before the content analysis began (Neuendorf 2002; Weerakkody 2009). Using previous studies as a guideline, four gender categories were established: male, female, mixed gender, and non-gendered (Crossman et al. 2007; Crossman et al. 2010; Caple et al. 2010). Mixed gender denoted the article or photograph contained both males and females, while non-gendered denoted the article or photograph did not focus on a male or female, but rather referred to something else, such as the weather, a stadium or an animal, for example. In order for consistency within this content analysis, all horse and dog racing related articles were considered non-gendered.

This thesis focuses on an analysis of manifest content, that is, "elements that are physically present and countable" (Gray & Densten 1998, p. 420). Four coding categories were established: features, news in brief, photographs and back page. Articles and photographs were measured for frequency, rather than measured in terms of column inches or area (Fullerton 2006). The features category included any article in *SMH* that was not categorised as news in brief. The news in brief category included any article published under the headings 'In Brief', 'Sport Focus', or specific sport news in brief heading, such as 'Football Focus'. News in brief articles are typically snapshots of events that do not necessitate a feature-length article. The frequency of photographs was used to assess the differences in "visibility" between sportsmen and sportswomen (Pedersen

2002, p. 314). Due to time constraints, photographs were not analysed in terms of size or type, such as action or posed shot, but such analysis could be incorporated into future studies. The back page category referred to the feature on the back page of *SMH*, or in cases where there were multiple features, it referred to the most prominent feature. The back page is symbolic of the most important sporting news event of the day (Crossman et al. 2010; Pratt, Grappendorf, Grundvig & LeBlanc 2008) and can be “used as a measure of editor perception of readership interest” (Pratt et al. 2008, p. 36). The number of observations in each gender category were calculated as a percentage of the total number of observations across all categories in each of the three sample years. Through such findings from content analysis, “it should be possible to draw inferences about how a printed medium, such as a newspaper, covers and portrays female athletes” (Vincent et al. 2003, p. 7).

Omitted from the analysis of *SMH* were advertisements, article previews, ‘The Fitz Files’, results pages, ‘Letters to the Editor’, and ‘On the Box’ sport television guide. Additional sport lift outs not published regularly, such as the Rugby World Cup lift out in October 2011, were also omitted in order to only “analyse what people see in the print media on a regular basis” (Fullerton 2006, p. 2).

Using the pre-established coding categories, content analysis was conducted over several weeks using microfilm. Although this method was time-intensive, analysis necessitated examining the newspaper in printed layout rather than an online format. While a more nuanced result would come from more detailed and extensive content analysis, such as length of articles, size of photographs, or placement of articles in the inside pages of the sports section, this content analysis achieved its purpose of determining the quantity of coverage of sportswomen in *SMH* in 2005, 2007 and 2011.

Reliability Measures

In order to evaluate the reliability of content analysis results and eliminate possible bias from the principal coder, an additional two coders, Coder A and Coder B, were engaged to re-analyse a sample of the content. Each coder was briefed in person by the principal coder on how to use the microfilm machine and the process of content analysis, before being left to independently complete the sample using the provided instructions (Appendix A) and coding sheets (Appendix B). Each coder re-analysed a sample of 10 per cent, or 16 days, of the total content (Weerakkody 2009, p. 158). Coder A and B recorded a per cent agreement (PAo) of 97 per cent (Figure 2) and 99 per cent (Figure 3) with the principal coder's results, respectively. Both these percentage agreements were significantly above the prescribed minimum 80 per cent agreement (Weerakkody 2009, p. 158). To eliminate the impact of chance however, a second intercoder reliability measure, namely Cohen's kappa (κ), was utilised (Cohen 1960). As a chance-corrected measure, kappa is widely used to determine reliable agreement between multiple coders (Banerjee, Capozzoli, McSweeney & Sinha 1999; Lombard, Snyder-Duch & Campanella Bracken 2002; Oleinik 2011). Coefficients greater than .75 represent excellent agreement between coders, coefficients between .40 and .75 represent fair to good agreement, while coefficients lower than .40 represent poor agreement (Banerjee et al. 1999; Neuendorf 2011). The kappa coefficients for the content analysis undertaken in this thesis were .92 for Coder A (Figure 2) and .96 for Coder B (Figure 3) (see Appendix C). Both these coefficients were significantly greater than the kappa of .75 outlined above, which indicates excellent agreement beyond chance. Therefore these two measures suggest that the content analysis undertaken in this thesis is reliable.

	Total	Male	Female	Mixed gender	Non-gendered
Principal Coder	738	593	41	45	59
Coder A	760	619	37	37	67
Product of Marginals (pmi)	560,880	367,067	1,517	1,665	3,953
Agree	738	593	37	37	59
Disagree	22	26	-4	-8	8
Number of observations (n)	760	619	41	45	67
Per cent Agreement (PAo)	97%	96%	90%	82%	88%
Expected agreement (PAe)	65%				
Cohen's kappa (K)	0.92				

Figure 2: Coder A intercoder agreement using Cohen's kappa

	Total	Male	Female	Mixed gender	Non-gendered
Principal Coder	849	734	24	27	63
Coder B	841	733	24	22	62
Product of Marginals (pmi)	714009	538022	576	594	3906
Agree	841	733	24	22	62
Disagreed	-8	-1	0	-5	-1
Number of observations (n)	849	734	24	27	63
Per cent Agreement (PAo)	99%	100%	100.00%	81%	98%
Expected agreement (PAe)	75%				
Cohen's kappa (K)	0.96				

Figure 3: Coder B intercoder agreement using Cohen's kappa

Interviews

Empirical findings form just one part of this thesis, with the second, and perhaps most important component the completion of interviews with journalists to gain industry insight into *why* differences in coverage between males and females in *SMH* sports

section exist. The triangulation of content analysis and interviews is a widely recognised and used approach to examining gender differences in the media (Caple et al. 2010; Caple et al. 2011). Although content analysis quantifies the amount of coverage, interviews help address the shortcoming of content analysis in its inability to answer ‘why?’. While content analysis will be used as a “method to analyse products of journalists activity” (Kolmer 2008, p. 117), interviews will attempt to gain insight into the choices made by editors and journalists about what is included and excluded from *SMH* and why.

Interviews are an effective way to gain insight into the practices of a news organisation (North 2009; Hardin & Whiteside 2009). Interviews can be used to “obtain the point of view of the respondent on a topic, phenomenon or subject under study and seek as much detail as possible about the research subject’s views on the topic via their opinions expressed” (Weerakkody 2009, p. 178). Interviews were employed as a method to aid answering the second research question: if coverage has increased, why might this be the case and if coverage has not increased, how can this be explained? They sought to explore the institutional, editorial, and journalistic practices at *SMH* that may influence the amount of coverage given to male and female athletes in the sports section.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted by the author after the completion of content analysis, during September 2012. They were conducted with one editor and two journalists from *SMH* sports department, who had different levels of experience in journalism and number of years at *SMH*, and specialised in a variety of sports. All efforts were made to contact additional editors and journalists, but the current situation at *SMH* made responses less

likely¹⁴. Potential interview subjects were initially contacted via email to gauge their interest in participating, with email addresses obtained from *SMH* website¹⁵. Interviews were conducted either in person, when logistically feasible, or via email. The in person interview followed oral history protocol, as outlined by Sommer and Quinlan, with the interview audio recorded, transcribed in full, and a copy provided to the interviewee via email to offer them the opportunity to review and clarify their responses (2002). As described in The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee approved ethics application¹⁶ (Appendix D), interviewees, except those who could be identified by their position at *SMH*¹⁷, were guaranteed anonymity by being referred as a randomly allocated number in this thesis. Full interview transcripts are included in the appendices (Appendix E, F & G).

Interviews that occurred in person were semi-structured, with open-ended questions prepared to guide the interview in the initial stages, while additional questions were asked during the course of the interview dependent on the direction of the discussion (Berger 2011; Jensen 2002). Interviews conducted via email asked three or four open-ended questions. Interview questions were shaped by several factors, including content analysis results (see Chapter Four), insights from scholarly work on gender, sport and media (see Chapter One), and the interviewee's role as either an editor or journalist. The decision to interview editors in addition to journalists was made as editors "can determine whether a journalist covers certain events and how they cover them" (Magnay in Caple et al. 2011, p. 144).

¹⁴ In June 2012, the Fairfax Media announced a major restructure of *SMH* and *The Age* to address decreasing advertising revenue, which included the loss of 1900 jobs.

¹⁵ www.smh.com.au

¹⁶ Reference number AH00091, approved 13 June 2012.

¹⁷ Editors were unable to be guaranteed anonymity.

While scholarly theorisations about the inadequate representation of women in sports media have contributed to the explanatory section of this thesis (see Chapter Five), interviews with *SMH* sports journalists and editor offer an additional and detailed layer of insight into the specific practices employed by *SMH* that may influence coverage. North emphasises however, that interviews with news practitioners can only offer “experiential truth” rather than “objective truth” (North 2009, p. 508), with Jensen highlighting further that “people do not always say what they think, or mean what they say” (Jensen 2002, p. 240). Regardless of these limitations, interviews with *SMH* journalists and editor proposed to offer specific insight into their decisions that could nuance and complexify scholarly insights.

The multiple research questions in this thesis necessitated the use of multiple methods. Content analysis aimed to quantify the coverage of sportsmen and sportswomen in *SMH* during January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011, while interviews sought to answer why such differences in coverage between genders exist. As such, triangulating the two methods is an effective “strategy for gaining several perspectives on the same phenomenon” (Jensen 2002, p. 272).

The following chapter, ‘Government Action: Addressing media coverage of sportswomen’, will offer a comprehensive overview of the figures, arguments and recommendations presented in ‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’.

Chapter Three – Government Action: Addressing the media coverage of sportswomen

In order to shed “light in dark corners”, Senate inquiries and government commissioned reports are carried out on matters that require detailed examination (Parliament of Australia 2012). The underrepresentation of sportswomen in the media is one such matter the Australian Government believes warrants continued investigation. In particular, this chapter will examine ‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’, in order to provide the contextual framework for the subsequent quantitative content analysis of *SMH*. It will act as a platform for the question of whether government inquiries and reports about the representation of sportswomen in the media have had an effect on media and journalistic practice, in particular in *SMH*.

Given the differences in the way the 2006 Senate inquiry and 2010 ASC report are presented, this chapter will address them individually. In ‘About time!’, media is the focus of one chapter, so the inquiry will be examined in part. In ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’, media is the central focus, however, this thesis will examine Section One and Four, which specifically refer to newspaper coverage.

‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’ ironically both received significant coverage in mainstream media around Australia at the time of their publication. Further both have continued to receive ongoing coverage in national, metropolitan and regional newspapers, such as in *SMH*, *The Herald Sun*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *Canberra Times*, for example.

‘About time! Women in sport and recreation in Australia’

‘About time!’ was conducted by the Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (ECITA) References Committee¹⁸ at the request of the Senate. The inquiry sought to examine women in sport and recreation in Australia, with particular reference to four key areas: the health benefits of women participating in sport and recreation activities; the accessibility for women of all ages to participate in organised sport, fitness and recreation activities, with additional reference to state and federal programs; the portrayal of women’s sport in the media; and women in leadership roles in sport. “The Committee acknowledges that this inquiry follows a large body of work over the last 25 years addressing the challenges facing women in sport” (ECITA 2006, p. 117). The focus of this thesis however, will be on Chapter Six, ‘Women’s Sport and the Media’, and in particular the findings and recommendations of the inquiry in relation to this area.

Following the request of the Senate on 29 March 2006 for an inquiry, the Committee invited submissions by advertising details of the inquiry in *The Australian* and by contacting individuals and organisations who they thought may be interested in participating. There were a total of 81 submissions. In a specifically media capacity, there were seven submissions, which came from: the Women in Sport Media Group; Department of Communications, IT and the Arts; Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC); sports journalist Julie Tullberg; Premier Media Group; Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association (ASTRA); and Television New Zealand Limited (TVNZ). Submissions from non-media specific organisations about the media came from several organisations, including from ACTSport, Australian Workers’ Union

¹⁸ The ECITA References Committee will henceforth be referred to as “the Committee”.

(AWU), Bowls Australia, Football Federation Australia (FFA), Professional Golfers Association Australia, South Australia Premier's Council for Women, VicSport, WA Sports Federation, Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA), Womensport and Recreation New South Wales, and several individual submissions including from Janice Crosswhite¹⁹, Jennifer Riatti²⁰, Liz Ellis²¹ and Margaret Henley²².

Key Findings

The Committee reported back to the Senate on 6 September 2006, after almost six months of research, submissions, public hearings and media analysis. The key conclusion from the Committee was they were “disappointed at the continuing poor coverage of women’s sport by all media” (ECITA 2006, p. 114). They made reference to the increasing international success of Australian female sporting teams, including: the female swimming team at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens; the Hockeyroos²³ winning gold at the Olympic and Commonwealth Games, in addition to multiple World Cups and several Champions Trophies; the Australian Netball Diamonds winning eight of eleven World Netball Championships; and the Sydney Swifts²⁴ becoming only the second team in any Australian modern sporting league to complete an entire season undefeated. The Committee also noted the individual success of golfer Karrie Webb, basketballer Lauren Jackson, cricketers Zoe Goss and Belinda Clark, and swimmers Susie O’Neill, Libby Trickett (née Lenton) and Leisel Jones. The Committee determined, that despite the recent success of Australian female athletes internationally and the flourishing

¹⁹ President, Australian Womensport and Recreation Association Inc.

²⁰ Secretary, Australian Womensport and Recreation Association Inc.

²¹ Captain of Australia’s women’s netball team, the Diamonds, from 2004-2007.

²² Henley, M 2004, 'Going mainstream: women's televised sport through a case study of the 1999 Netball World Championships', in R Horrocks & N Perry (eds.), *Television in New Zealand: Programming the Nation*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne.

²³ Australia’s female hockey team.

²⁴ Former Sydney team in National Netball Championship.

participation of females at a grassroots level, “the coverage of women’s sport was improving only slowly” (ECITA 2006, p. 100).

Using analysis from previous studies, principally ‘An Illusory Image: A Report on the Media Coverage and Portrayal of Women’s Sport in Australia’ (Phillips 1997), the inquiry highlighted crucial quantitative and qualitative differences in the media coverage of sportsmen and sportswomen in Australia. In terms of the amount of coverage, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) was noted to televise the largest proportion of national women’s competitions, with women’s events accounting for approximately one third of ABC’s television sports coverage, while women’s sport accounted for approximately only 10 per cent of Fox Sports broadcast. In terms of the quality of coverage, the inquiry highlighted the differences in the type of language, images and descriptions between sportsmen and sportswomen. The inquiry concluded women’s sport was more likely to be sexualised and female athletes were more likely to be subjected to stereotyped descriptions.

The inquiry also briefly outlined possible explanations about why such differences in media coverage between male and female athletes and sports exist. Based on submissions and other external media articles, the inquiry outlined four possible reasons: the advantage of incumbency for men, that is, the advantage of historically having the greater quantity of coverage; the already “crowded” sports media market; the attitude of media organisations and sporting bodies; and women’s sport being “trapped” in an ongoing cycle of neglect, lack of funding, second-rate infrastructure and lower levels of interest (ECITA 2006, p. 103). Further possible reasons were outlined, including the perception that women were not as good as men at sports and audiences “want to watch and read

about the best” and that women’s sport lacks “depth of talent” (ECITA 2006, p. 100-101).

After establishing the differences in the quantitative and qualitative media coverage of sportsmen compared to sportswomen, and outlining of possible reasons for such differences, the Committee highlighted the need to improve the media coverage of sportswomen and offered four recommendations for how this could be achieved.

Recommendations

The recommendations offered by the Committee sought to offer potential solutions for sporting bodies, media organisations and the government to address the lack of media coverage of female sports and athletes. The Committee offered four key recommendations, which if implemented, had the potential to “make a significant contribution to improving the media profile of women’s sports” (ECITA 2006, p. 114).

The Committee’s first recommendation that specifically addresses the media, Recommendation 15, emphasises the ongoing role the Australian Government should play in reducing the deficit in media coverage for sportswomen:

The committee recommends that the Australian Government provide financial support, to be administered by the Australian Sports Commission, for initiatives that provide specific opportunities for greater ongoing coverage of women's sport. The committee believes the ASC should administer funding of up to \$3 million per annum, and that the initiative be reviewed after approximately three years. (ECITA 2006, p. 112)

This recommendation was supported by retired Australian netball captain Liz Ellis, who called on the Australian Government to offer tax incentives for companies who provide

female athletes and sporting teams sponsorship and for media outlets that provide fair coverage. “What I would like to see is [the Federal Government] to take a punt and see corporations rewarded via tax breaks, there should be a mandate similar to Australian content rules ... should offer financial incentives for corporations and media outlets” (in Magnay 2006).

The second recommendation offered by the Committee in regard to the media, Recommendation 16, also focused on the role of the Australian Government, specifically their funding contribution to the coverage of the Paralympics:

The committee recommends that the government consider allocating up to \$1 million to the Australian Paralympic Committee to assist with production and associated costs of televised coverage of the forthcoming Paralympics, and that the arrangement stipulate that a condition of accessing this funding be that there be balanced coverage of male and female athletes. (ECITA 2006, p. 113)

The third recommendation regarding the media, Recommendation 17, suggests the Australian Government offer financial support for the ASC to take advantage of media opportunities for athletes:

The committee recommends that the Australian Government provide financial support, to be administered by the Australian Sports Commission, for the training of athletes and sports administrators to better utilise media opportunities. (ECITA 2006, p. 114)

The final recommendation regarding the media, Recommendation 18, highlights the level of importance the Committee placed on the ongoing re-assessment and subsequent publication of research into media coverage of sport in Australia.

The committee recommends that the government fund the Australian Sports Commission to replicate in 2008/09 the surveys and analysis performed in the 1996 report *An Illusory Image*. (ECITA 2006, p. 115)

In concluding, the Committee emphasised the importance of increasing the media coverage of Australian sportswomen, as it is “inextricably linked” to other issues affecting sportswomen. “It is tied into issues of the financing of women’s sport, which in turn affects the capacity of sports to be professional, the availability of female role models, the encouragement women get to participate, the quality of venues available, and so on” (ECITA 2006, p. 107). The Committee also recommended the Australian Government establish an annual survey to “track progress” of the media coverage of women’s sports (ECITA 2006, p. 114). While the Australian Government is yet to introduce an annual survey, the ASC did replicate the 1996 study ‘An Illusory Image’ for 2008/09 (Caple et al. 2010), which will be the focus of the next section of this chapter.

The nature of the inquiry in outlining differences in coverage, possible reasons for differences and recommendations to address differences, acts as a platform for future studies, such as this thesis, to delve deeper into the issue of differences in quantitative and qualitative media coverage afforded to male and female athletes.

‘Towards a Level Playing Field: sport and gender in Australian media’

The 2010 ASC report ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’ was commissioned as a direct result of the 2006 Senate inquiry ‘About time!’. As discussed previously, the inquiry recommended that the ASC replicate the analysis performed in ‘An Illusory Image’ for 2008/09. It was designed to establish a clear picture of the differences in both the quantitative and the qualitative media representation of female sport and athletes

compared to male sport and athletes, and act as a platform for potential policy changes and future new policies. The research was completed jointly by the Journalism and Media Research Centre (JMRC) at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and Media Monitors, led by Dr Helen Caple, Dr Kate Greenwood and Professor Catharine Lumby.

This section of the chapter will focus on highlighting the key statistics, ideas and suggestions presented in the report, in particular those relating to newspaper coverage, in order to analyse whether *SMH* appears to have implemented any changes following the report. In order to focus on results that can be linked to *SMH*, this thesis will focus on Section One and Section Four of the 'Towards a Level Playing Field'. A key overall statistic to emerge from this publication was a decrease in the coverage of women's sport. While 'About time!' highlighted the improvement in the coverage of sportswomen in newspapers to 10.7 per cent in 1996, this report presents a slight decrease to nine per cent in 2008/09 (Caple et al. 2010).

Section One

Section One of 'Towards a Level Playing Field' focuses on the quantitative figures and qualitative media analysis of press coverage from 25 November to 8 December 2008. Mass media outlets were surveyed on a national, metropolitan and regional level, and included newspapers, magazines, radio and television. The study presents the top four sports, calculated by the frequency of newspaper articles, as athletics, surfing, cricket and swimming. It also calculated that 49 per cent of newspaper stories about women included a photograph. Highlighting improvements in the quality of coverage, the report noted that only six photographs could be categorised as "relationship" photographs and "very few" considered "glamorised or sexualised" (Caple et al. 2010, p. 9). This

represents a shift from the poorer qualitative results recorded in ‘An Illusory Image’ (Phillips 1997).

A key component of this report was the inclusion of views of stakeholders about the state of media coverage. Interviews were conducted with nine figures in journalism, sports management and promotion, such as Shelley Maher²⁵, Jacquelin Magnay²⁶, and Dr Sue Brown²⁷. The interviewees offered insights on areas including the role of women in the media, editorial decisions and the aesthetic appeal of certain media coverage. Both Magnay and Brown highlighted that covering sportswomen in the media should not necessarily be the responsibility of female journalists. “They’re not being employed to speak about women’s sport and talk it up” (Brown in Caple et al. 2010, p. 16). Magnay offered insight into the media practice of newspapers by highlighting the role of the editor in selecting stories and the angle of those stories:

I think it’s very much a cultural thing that is driven from the top. It’s driven by the editor and in particular the sports editor and he can determine whether a journalist covers certain events and how they cover them. I say ‘he’ because there are no female sports editors. (in Caple et al. 2010, p. 16)

Most interviewees acknowledged the “broader and less stereotyped” media coverage that is now afforded to sportswomen. However, many also added that their positive remarks should not overshadow the fact “there was still an overwhelming bias towards covering male sport, and this coverage was not necessarily a reflection of the quality of the athleticism on display or the popularity of the sport with spectators” (Caple et al. 2010, p. 16).

²⁵ President, Women’s Lacrosse Australia.

²⁶ *SMH* sports journalist, 1992-2009.

²⁷ University of Ballarat Sport Management lecturer.

Section Four

Section Four of 'Towards a Level Playing Field' focuses on a quantitative media analysis of press, radio and television in Australia from 1 January to 31 December 2008. It utilised a top-line analysis, calculating the quantity of reports about female athletes and teams as a proportion of all sports coverage. The analysis included the examination of a total of 431,775 sport-related reports.

In an interview with the *Southern Courier*, lead researcher Catharine Lumby explained that despite the improvement in the quality of representation, there had been no improvement in the quantity of representation. "The bad news is the lack of news and coverage of female athletes and women's sport generally, despite very clear evidence that Australians love participating in and watching women's sport" (Lumby in Bliss 2010). This was echoed by Di Day, Cricket Victoria's female project officer, who emphasised the media saturation of the Australian men's cricket team compared to the Australian women's cricket team. "It's very frustrating that we're making all these achievements and we've got great role models and just nothing: no coverage at all" (in Schetzer 2011).

In terms of press coverage, female sports coverage accounts for only nine per cent of all sports coverage, as shown in Figure 4 below. This compares less favourably to television and radio where female sports coverage accounts for 13 per cent (Figure 5) and 12 per cent of all sports coverage (Figure 6), respectively. Despite this, press accounted for 94 per cent of female sports coverage across all media types compared to only three per cent for each of radio and television, as shown in Figure 7. This demonstrates that press represented a higher proportion of sports coverage than either radio or television, however women received only a fraction of this coverage.

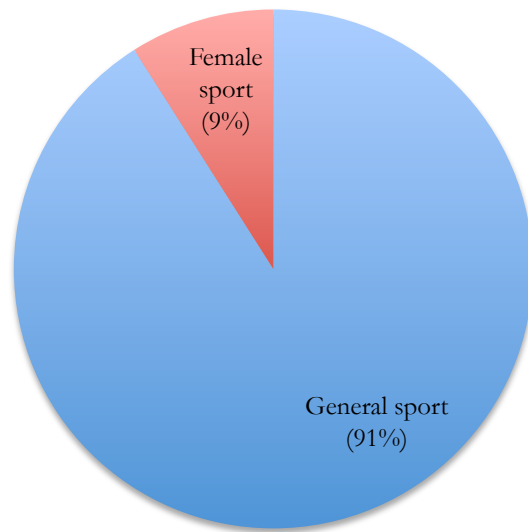


Figure 4: Female press sports coverage as a percentage of all sports coverage (Caple et al. 2010)

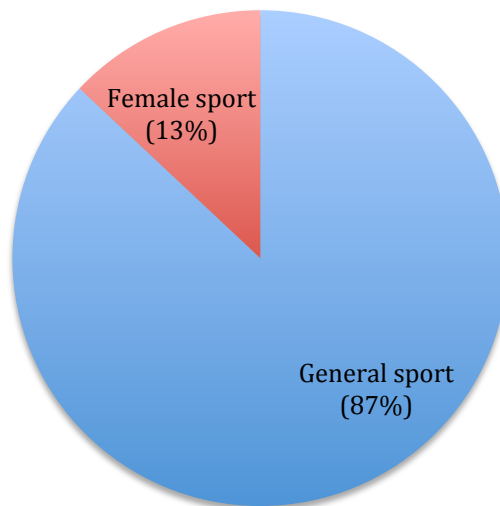


Figure 5: Female television sports coverage as a percentage of all sports coverage (Caple et al. 2010)

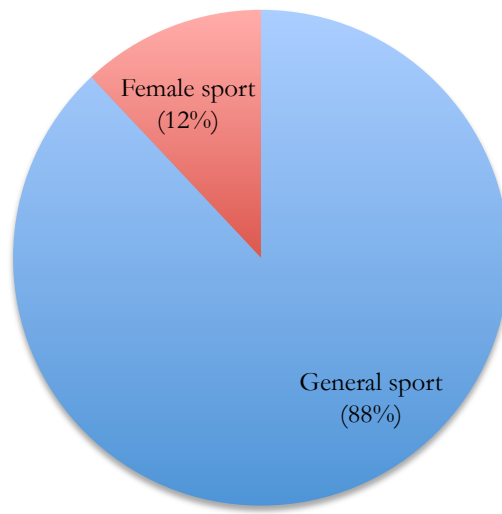


Figure 6: Female radio sports coverage as a percentage of all sports coverage (Caple et al. 2010)

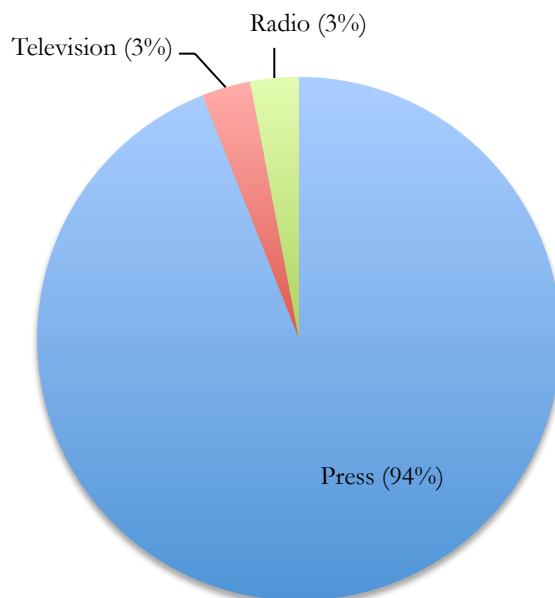


Figure 7: Female sports coverage by media type (Caple et al. 2010)

The ASC reported the *Herald Sun* in particular had the highest volume of coverage of female sport out of 10 leading newspapers, followed by *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Advertiser*, while *SMH* had the lowest volume of coverage. In May 2010, following a funding announcement of an additional \$195 million for sport in the Federal Government budget, including part of that dedicated to boosting the representation of sportswomen in the media, *SMH* reported on the lack of coverage of female athletes in the media (Lewis 2010). The article highlighted the discrepancies in media coverage as presented in ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’ and referenced Federal Minister for Sport Kate Ellis²⁸ speech at the fifth conference of the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG). “We’re determined to work in partnership with sport to make sure we lift the profile of our female champions” (Ellis in Lewis 2010). The article highlights *SMH*’s awareness of the underrepresentation of sportswomen in the media.

This chapter aimed to highlight the key information in ‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’. It serves as a platform for the subsequent chapters’ discussions of whether the inquiry or report resulted in any shift in quantitative coverage of sportswomen in *SMH*. The following chapter will present the results of content analysis of *SMH* in January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011.

²⁸ Subsequently the Federal Minister for the Status of Women.

Chapter Four – Content Analysis Results

This chapter has the aim of quantifying the amount of coverage sportswomen receive in *SMH* sports section and determining whether this appears to have changed following ‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’. For this thesis, a total of 158 days of *SMH* sports section were analysed. The analysis focused on the Monday to Saturday editions of *SMH* across the months of January and October in 2005, 2007 and 2011, as “comparative research over the years allows for monitoring of trends rather than simply providing a snapshot approach to news content” (Fountaine & McGregor 1999, p. 115). Content analysis was divided into four article categories: features, news in brief, photographs and back page, and four gender categories: male, female, mixed and non-gendered. Across the four article categories, each gender category was calculated as a percentage of observations across all gender categories. By way of illustration, in January and October of 2005 females appeared 64 times in *SMH* features, which represented 5.7 per cent of all 1,122 features that year. As highlighted by Mikosza, due to the sample size, results of content analysis should be “regarded as indicative rather than prescriptive” (1997, p. 17). Based on the findings of previous research, this content analysis expected to find a marginal rise in the relative representation of coverage of sportswomen post ‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’ (Bruce 2010; Crossman et al. 2007; ECITA 2006). Surprisingly, this was not the result the content analysis undertaken in this thesis reveals.

Features

The number and percentage of features in *SMH*, the largest article category analysed in this thesis, are highlighted in Figure 8 and Figure 9 below. There were a total of 3,828

features across January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011. There were 2,838 features about males, which equalled 74 per cent of all features. In stark contrast, females were the subject of just 259 features, or seven per cent of the total content analysed. The highest number of features about males in a single edition was 45, which occurred on 1 October 2007. The features in this particular edition were dominated by NRL, with the Grand Final held the previous day on 30 September 2007. In contrast, the highest number of features about females in a single edition was just eight, which occurred on 15 January 2007, the majority of which related to the Australian Open Tennis Championships, a mixed gender event. This low female representation is compounded by the fact there was a greater number of non-gendered features compared to female features, totalling 499 across the six months of analysis, or 13 per cent. Mixed gender accounted for the least number of features at 232, or six per cent.

	Jan-05	Oct-05	Jan-07	Oct-07	Jan-11	Oct-11	Total
Male	377	427	426	525	565	518	2,838
Female	49	15	63	21	88	23	259
Mixed gender	51	21	54	31	54	21	232
Non-gendered	67	115	54	94	56	113	499
Total	544	578	597	671	763	675	3,828

Figure 8: Number of features in *SMH* in January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011

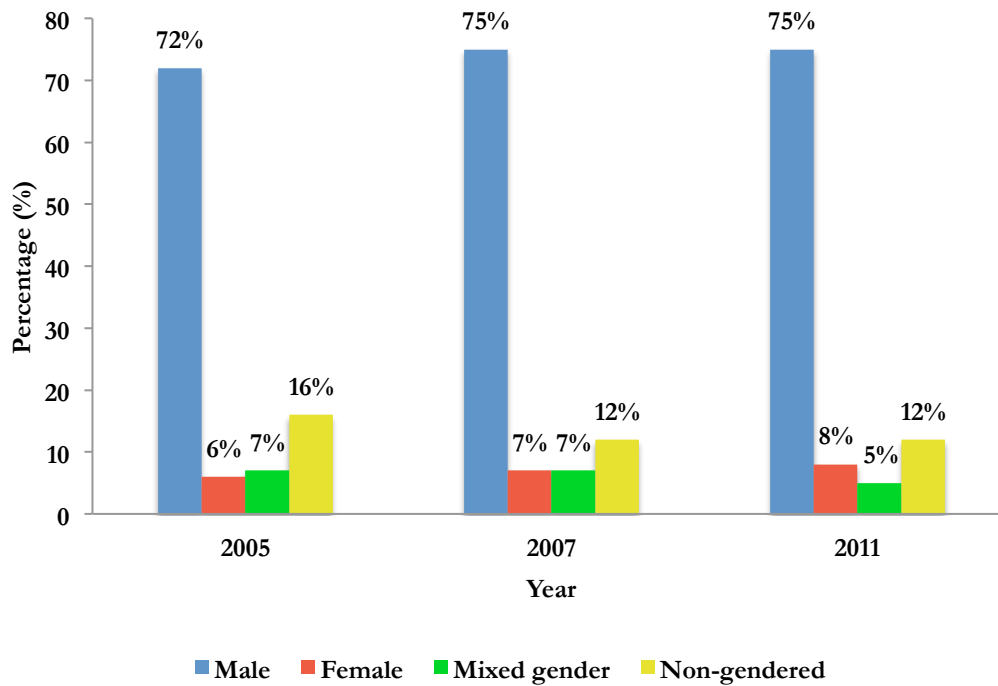


Figure 9: Percentage of features in *SMH* in January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011

The vast majority of the female features published in the January editions in 2005, 2007 and 2011 were about tennis players involved in the Australian Open Tennis Championships. Tennis is considered gender neutral, that is, a sport considered ‘appropriate’ for both genders (Caple et al. 2010; Jones, Murrell & Jackson 1999; Jones 2006; Matteo 1986; Vincent et al. 2003). The coverage included a mix of Australian and international female tennis players, such as Samantha Stosur, Alicia Molik, Li Na, Amelie Mauresmo, Ashleigh Barty and Kim Clijsters. Women were also featured in other sports including diving, hockey, skeleton²⁹, golf, cricket, swimming, cycling and soccer. In contrast, October coverage was dominated by the typically male sports of NRL, rugby union, AFL and motor sport (Caple et al. 2010; Matteo 1986).

²⁹ An individual winter Olympic sport where athletes slide head-first down an ice track on a sled.

News In Brief

Figure 10 and Figure 11 below highlight the key numbers and percentages to emerge from the analysis of news in brief in *SMH*. Across the six months of analysis, there was a total of 1,168 news in brief articles examined. Of these, 937 were about males, which equalled 80 per cent of the total news in brief articles. Females on the other hand were the subject of 135 news in brief articles, equalling only 12 per cent. Mixed gender and non-gendered news in brief articles both accounted for four per cent with 50 and 46 articles, respectively.

	Jan-05	Oct-05	Jan-07	Oct-07	Jan-11	Oct-11	Total
Male	206	160	163	143	140	125	937
Female	29	33	24	20	14	15	135
Mixed gender	9	7	7	7	13	7	50
Non-gendered	8	21	7	8	0	2	46
Total	252	221	201	178	167	149	1168

Figure 10: Number of news in brief articles in *SMH* in January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011

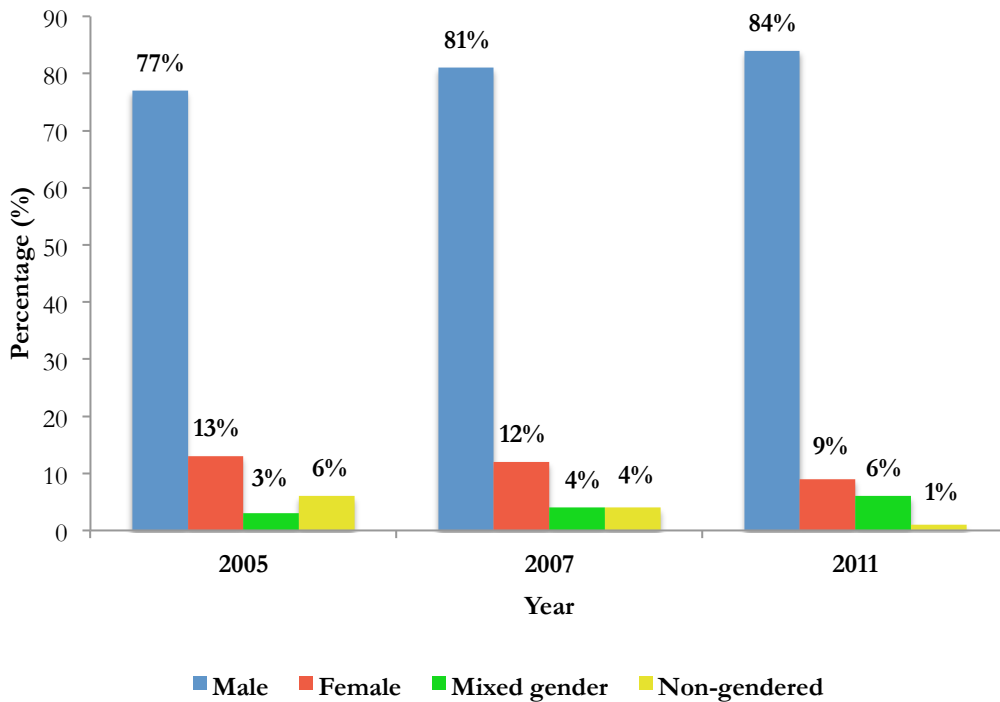


Figure 11: Percentage of news in brief articles in *SMH* in January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011

The most surprising statistic to emerge from the analysis of news in brief articles was a *decrease* in the amount of coverage women received in this category over time. The percentage of news in brief articles about sportswomen as a total of each year's analysis decreased from 13 per cent in 2005, to 12 per cent in 2007, before dropping even further to nine per cent in 2011.

Photographs

The key numbers and percentages to emerge from the analysis of photographs in *SMH* sports section are outlined in Figure 12 and Figure 13 below. A total of 2,568 photographs appeared in *SMH* during the frame of analysis. Males accounted for 1,923 of these photographs, or 75 per cent. In contrast, there were only 262 photographs of females, or 10 per cent. Over the entire month of October 2005, there were only eight

photographs of females, with coverage dominated by the NRL Grand Final, AFL Grand Final and Rugby World Cup. The highest number of photographs of females in one month was 86, which occurred during January 2011, largely attributable to the Australian Open Tennis Championships. There were however, more non-gendered photographs than females, which equalled a total of 320 across the six months, or 13 per cent, which is perhaps attributable to the fact the horse racing is year-round sport. Mixed gender photographs again represented the lowest figure, with just 63 in total, which equalled two per cent.

The highest number of photographs of males in a single edition of *SMH* sports section was 47, which occurred on 8 January 2011. This is in stark contrast to the number of photographs of females. The highest number of photographs containing females in a single edition was only 17, which occurred on 15 January 2005. All 17 of these photographs were of players competing in the Australian Open Tennis Championships, including Venus Williams, Serena Williams, Alicia Molik, Maria Sharapova and Anastasia Myskina. The non-gendered category, which is predominantly attributed to horses, had a higher number of photographs on a single day compared to women, recording 18 on 29 October 2011. This high number of non-gendered photos can be attributed to the lead up to Melbourne Cup, which was held on 1 November in both 2005 and 2011.

	Jan-05	Oct-05	Jan-07	Oct-07	Jan-11	Oct-11	Total
Male	227	213	252	284	500	447	1923
Female	57	8	70	17	86	24	262
Mixed gender	5	4	7	9	24	14	63
Non-gendered	18	87	28	52	36	99	320
Total	307	312	357	362	646	584	2568

Figure 12: Number of photographs in *SMH* in January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011

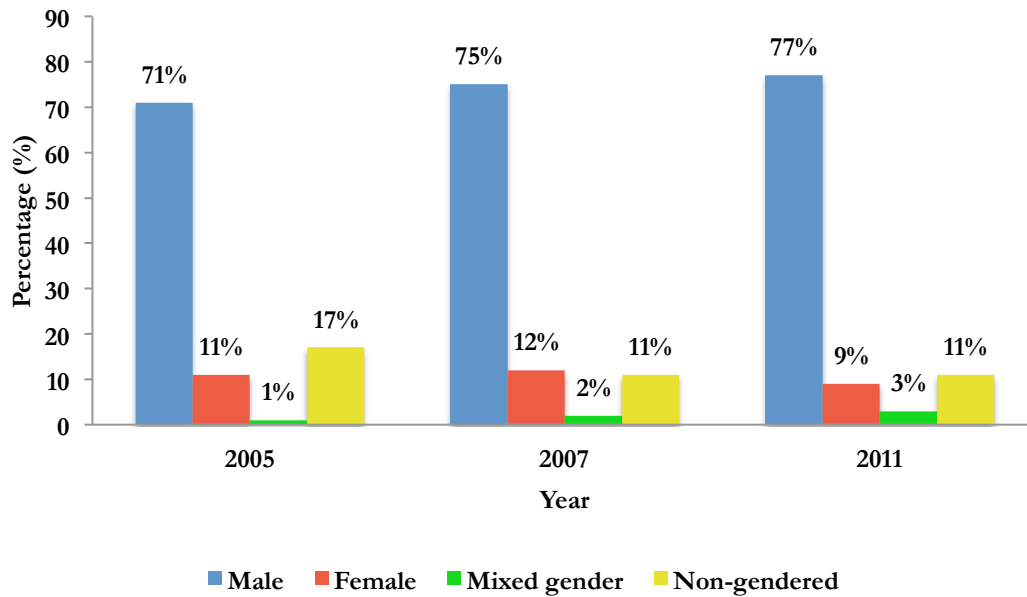


Figure 13: Percentage of photographs in *SMH* in January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011

As with the news in brief category, the most notable statistic to emerge from the analysis of the amount of photographs in *SMH* sports section was a decrease in the percentage of photographs of women. The percentage of photographs of women as a total of each year's analysis rose marginally from 11 per cent in 2005 to 12 per cent in 2007, before a substantial decrease to nine per cent in 2011.

Back Page

The feature that appears on the back page of a newspaper is considered the most newsworthy sports story of the day. King explains it shows "the importance attached to certain male or female athletes" (King 2007, p. 189), while Pratt et al. explain it is "a measure of editor perception of readership interest" (2008, p. 36). On occasion, the back page contains more than one article. In such situations, only the most prominent feature on the back page is analysed.

As shown in Figure 14 and Figure 15, which present the main numbers and percentages for the back page analysis of *SMH*, males were featured on the back page of *SMH* more than any other gender category across all three years of the analysis. Males appeared on the back page of *SMH* 69 per cent of the time in 2005, which increased to 83 per cent in 2007, and remained consistent at 83 per cent in 2011. Females on the other hand, decreased from 10 per cent in 2005 to 4 per cent in 2007, before no females featured on the back page in 2011. Pedersen highlights that “less prominent” positioning of stories on female athletes indicates the newspaper “deemed female sports participation as less important and less newsworthy than male sports participation” (2002, p. 314). Crossman et al. explain the high proportion of male athletes or teams who appear on the back page of a newspaper create a “masculinity ‘masking’ effect” where the coverage of women on the inside pages is “camouflaged” by this predominant coverage of men on the back page (2010, p. 237). Mixed gender representation on the back page of *SMH* also decreased, falling from 21 per cent in 2005 to 13 per cent in 2011, while non-gendered representation rose from zero per cent in 2005 to four per cent in 2011.

	Jan-05	Oct-05	Jan-07	Oct-07	Jan-11	Oct-11	Total
Male	21	15	25	20	25	18	124
Female	5	0	2	0	0	0	7
Mixed gender	0	0	0	2	0	2	4
Non-gendered	0	11	0	5	1	6	23
Total	26	26	27	27	26	26	158

Figure 14: Number of back page articles in *SMH* in January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011

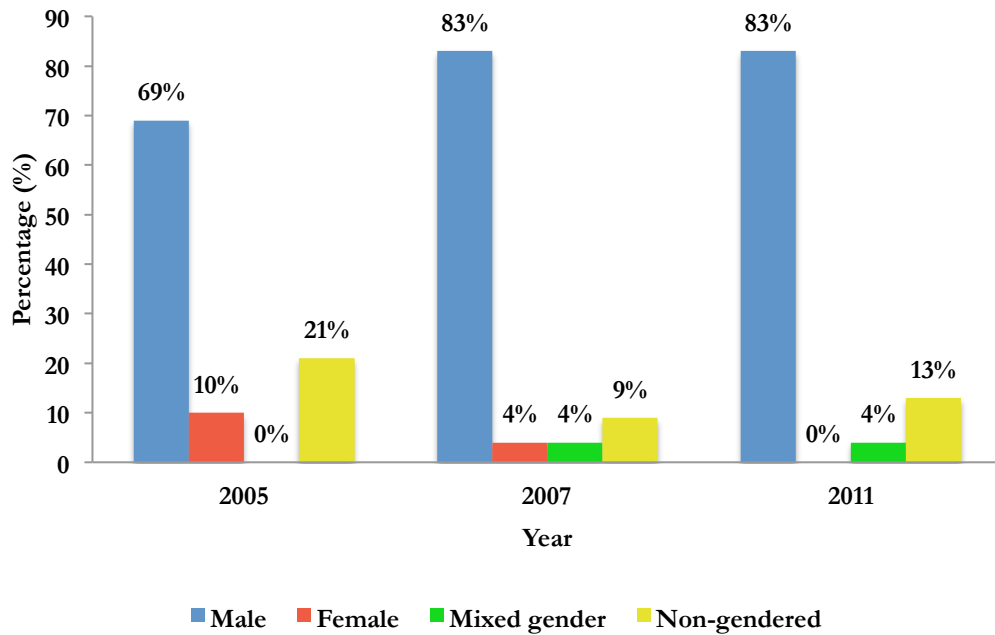


Figure 15: Percentage of back page articles in *SMH* in January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011

Fifteen different individual male athletes and two male sporting teams appeared on the back page more than once in a single month, including tennis players Andre Agassi, Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer, Lleyton Hewitt and Rafael Nadal, cricketers Ricky Ponting, Andrew Flintoff, Shane Watson, Michael Clarke and Glenn McGrath, rugby union players Berrick Barnes, Quade Cooper and Stirling Mortlock, NRL players Brett Stewart and Glenn Stewart, the Australian men’s cricket team, and the Wallabies³⁰.

In contrast to the high number of males, only one female athlete, Alicia Molik, was featured on the back page of *SMH* on more than one occasion in a single month, during January 2005. Molik was featured on the back page for her success in the 2005 Australian Open Tennis Championships, reaching her first Grand Slam singles quarterfinal, which promoted her singles ranking to world number 10. While Molik was the only female to make the back page more than once in a month, a total of four horses, Makybe Diva, Maldivian, Miss Finland and Dunaden, appeared on the back page on multiple occasions

³⁰ Australian men’s rugby union team.

in a single month, in October 2005, October 2007, October 2007 and October 2011 respectively.

These results largely show what this content analysis expected to find – that coverage of male sports and athletes dominate coverage in *SMH* across all four of the categories of analysis. What this analysis was not expecting to find however, was that females were often represented less than the non-gendered category, which consisted predominantly of horses. Equally unexpected was that the percentage of coverage female athletes received *declined* over time in three out of four of the categories: news in brief, photographs and back page.

‘About time!’ highlighted the disconnect between the increased success of female athletes yet continuing poor media coverage, and recommended a dual partnership between the Australian Government and the media in implementing a fairer quantity of media coverage of sportswomen (ECITA 2006). Similarly, Caple et al. classed *SMH* as having the lowest volume of coverage of sportswomen among leading Australian newspapers (2010). Despite the aforementioned classification of *SMH* by Caple et al. and the recommendations presented in the inquiry, this content analysis highlights that the coverage of sportswomen in *SMH* has not improved.

Addendum

While the content analysis results suggest ‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’ had little effect on the coverage of sportswomen in *SMH* during the years of analysis, the creation of *Daily Life* by *SMH* in February 2012 could be seen as a response.

SMH promotes *Daily Life* as “a proudly female biased website³¹ with content tailored to women” (in Wicks 2012a). The ‘Health & Fitness’ section, which includes sports coverage, essentially acts as an acknowledgement by *SMH* that they have previously not afforded females the same attention they have males.

The creation of *Daily Life* can be viewed both positively and negatively. It essentially provides sportswomen a greater quantity of media space that their training, talent and success deserves, and offers interested readers female sports content. Kathryn Wicks, *SMH* Deputy Sports Editor, said the website was created largely in response to feedback from readers. “For as long as I have worked at *The Sydney Morning Herald* – and that is quite some time – we have had complaints from readers, mostly women, that we do not cover women’s sport nearly enough, nor nearly well enough. *Daily Life* allows us to change that” (Wicks 2012a). Harp explains that niche-specific newspaper sections allow these groups media coverage they would not otherwise get. “Important news issues related to women, topics that likely would not have received coverage elsewhere in the newspaper, found a place within these sections” (Harp 2006, p. 200).

Sportswomen being segregated into a section independent of *SMH* sports pages however, could be perceived as ghettoisation. It could be interpreted as a throwback to the women’s pages, with Mills explaining that separate sections act as “an anachronism in the modern world” (1988, p. 119). Although *SMH* is making a recognisable effort to publish articles, photographs and score updates of sportswomen on *Daily Life*, sportswomen are still technically not included in the main sport pages. “The whole idea that women’s news and issues are special or subordinate to men’s is implicit in the creation of these sections” (Cox 1992). Messner explains that in a contemporary context,

³¹ www.dailylife.com.au

new media, such as the Internet, have “not launched a feminist revolution in sport”, but rather “set a stage for the creation and exploitation of new, ever more precisely defined marketing niches” (2002, p. 92). The effect of such niches is the relegation of women’s sport to marginal mediums, such as pay television channels and websites (Messner 2002, p. 92). While Messner suggests such niches suit a small minority, the overwhelming result is that the actual sport pages are left “largely intact [as] the masculinist cultural center of the sport-media-commercial complex” (2002, p. 92).

Chapter Five – The Self-Perpetuating Cycle: Why are women underrepresented in *The Sydney Morning Herald*?

Underrepresentation of sportswomen is an ongoing phenomenon across all forms of media, and is clearly not isolated to *SMH*. The aim of this chapter is to offer possible explanations for the stubborn persistence of this underrepresentation, with the recent practice of *SMH* as the focus. Using a combination of gender, sport and media scholarship and interviews with current *SMH* sports journalists and editor, this chapter will offer five possible explanations for the quantitative underrepresentation of sportswomen in *SMH* sports section: gatekeeping; news values; commercial enterprise; the ongoing cycle of underrepresentation, funding and infrastructure; and gender bias and hegemonic masculinity.

Gatekeeping

Even on a slow news day, not every single sports story can fit in the printed sports section of *SMH*. Newspapers are restricted by space constraints that essentially dictate the length of stories, the size of photographs and the exclusion of some items (Cole & Harcup 2010; Hartley 1982; Shoemaker & Reese 1996). “The very term gatekeeper suggests the idea of adapting to physical limits. That is, given the number of stories and the limited space, decisions must be made to funnel many news events down to a few” (Shoemaker & Reese 1996, p. 119). The items that are printed in *SMH* each day, that is features, news in brief articles and photographs, have therefore undergone a process of selection, with the items that eventually end up in the newspaper ultimately deemed the most newsworthy. This process is known as gatekeeping, which Wahl-Jorgensen and

Hanitzsch define as “the process of selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news” (2009, p. 73).

The final decision regarding inclusion and exclusion of sports articles ultimately comes down to the editor. Kathryn Wicks, *SMH* Deputy Sports Editor, confirms that at *SMH* it is up to the editor to make the final decision about “what goes in the paper and what goes where”. Wicks is occasionally responsible for these decisions, “on the days it is my decision, it’s entirely up to me”. Wicks explains that the process of selecting which athletes and sporting events make it in to the printed *SMH* is a “hard” decision, “we let the reporters make some of those decisions, we [editors] make some of those decisions”. Journalist One (J1) elaborates, “Journalists can pitch ideas, and lobby to cover events, but all decisions of significance are made by the Sports Editor”.

While the editor is seen as the typical gatekeeper in the newspaper industry, other members of the sports department also play a gatekeeping role. Weaver et al. explain that a gatekeeper is anyone who has “editorial responsibility for the preparation or transmission of news stories or other information, including full-time reporters, writers, correspondents, columnists, news people, and editors” (2007, p. 3). With sports journalists at *SMH* responsible for some of the decisions regarding what is included and excluded, Shoemaker and Reese explain, “journalists now have much more autonomy – an individual-level interpretation” (1996, p. 107). Regardless of the gender of the athlete, Wicks explains *SMH* journalists are expected to determine what to cover based on “the value of the story”.

While some scholars suggest institutional factors are influential in the decision making process at newspapers (Hallin 1992; Hirsch 1977; McQuail 2000; Shoemaker & Reese

1996), Wicks explains there are no such influences at *SMH*. “There’s none at all. It’s just purely based on news judgement. There are no rules.” J1 elaborates, “Sports Editors will put their own stamp on the section but few stray from the framework of what works in their market”. The use of news values aid the evaluation of the newsworthiness of items, and help “predict what an audience will find appealing and important; and, in practice, they direct gatekeepers to make consistent story selections” (Shoemaker & Reese 1996, p. 111). The next section of this chapter will examine the role news values play in the differences of coverage between sportsmen and sportswomen in *SMH*.

News Values

The application of news values in the decision of which items are included in newspapers and which are excluded is an element of gatekeeping. Editors make a conscious decision about what to include and exclude based on how they perceive the news item will be received by their newspapers target readership, that is, what items they consider the most newsworthy (Conley & Lambie 2006; Hartley 1982; Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch 2009). This perception of newsworthiness is largely shaped by news values. “To win inclusion in any particular news, they must fulfill a certain number of criteria; in short, they must be seen as newsworthy ... newsworthy events themselves must jostle for inclusion in the limited number of slots available” (Hartley 1982, p. 75-76).

There is no universal set of news values that media organisations determine newsworthiness from (Conley & Lambie 2006; Creedon 1994; Galtung & Ruge 1965; Harcup & O’Neill 2001). Galtung and Ruge identify twelve news factors that “seem to be of particular importance” in the selection of news: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite

nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons, and reference to something negative (1965, p. 70-71). By adapting Galtung and Ruge's original list of news values, Harcup and O'Neill created an updated set of news values: the power elite, celebrity, entertainment, surprise, bad news, good news, magnitude, relevance, follow-up, newspaper agenda (2001, p. 279). Harcup and O'Neill highlight the complexity of studying news values, which "prompts at least as many questions as it answers" (2001, p. 269). Conley and Lamble's set of news values however, can be seen to represent the industry standard: impact, conflict, timeliness, proximity, prominence, currency, human interest, and the unusual (2006, p. 83). "Taking into account slightly different ways of expressing them, these values are widely accepted as the key components of news" (Conley & Lamble 2006, p. 83). News values offer a standard approach to news production and in turn minimise human influence. "The strength of news values transforms difficult decisions into routine choices, reduces an ambiguous and infinite mandate – covering the news – into a set of unproblematic routines, all but removing doubts and options" (Tiffen 1989, p. 66-67). J2 explains how news values play an important role in the selection process of which particular sports, athletes, and events are included in *SMH* sports section:

Decisions about what stories are chosen for the section, and how they are displayed, are again made on the grounds of newsworthiness, reader interest, importance in the context of that sport – ie. a grand slam tennis event is, obviously, afforded greater prominence than a regular tour event – and general impact.

Several scholars advocate news is inherently influenced by the individual who produces it (Cole & Harcup 2010; Henningham 1990). "News is not some sort of independent, autonomous entity. Rather, it is a human-made construct, a set of conventions which may make intuitive sense to one group of journalists in one time and place but which is

subject to change as people's ideas and values change" (Henningham 1990, p. 1-2). It thus appears instinctive decision making has an impact on the selection of content, with Wicks explaining while the "quality of the story", "quality of photograph", "newsworthiness" and "timeliness" all influence what is published and where it is published in *SMH*, Wicks explains ultimately "you just have a feel for it as it happens". This 'feel' for news is what Schultz terms "journalistic gut feeling" (2007, p. 190). This gut feeling often outweighs news values, as journalists "do not evaluate stories against a given tick-list of standards. Instead, they use their news 'feelers' as their yardstick for measuring the worth of incoming material" (Niblock 2005, p. 74). It is not a feeling that can be taught, but rather a person develops it over time through experience. "Having worked in the environment over time, they [journalists] internalise the ideals and aspirations of their news organisation and can apply them swiftly and confidently" (Niblock 2005, p. 74). While a feel for news is developed through experience, it could also be speculated that it offers a convenient cover for newspapers, such as *SMH*, making editorial decisions based on tradition and an irrational, because largely unexplainable, justification for the underrepresentation of sportswomen in the media.

Of particular relevance to sports reporting is an additional news value to the eight outlined by Conley and Lambie (2006). Caple et al. explain that in sports reporting success is considered the most important news value, with "the majority of coverage focusing on results, and the dominant message being that athletes are successful" (2011, p. 140). Wicks made a similar suggestion, explaining that their decisions at *SMH* are influenced by an athlete's "level of achievement... If Stosur were to win the US Open, she'd be on the back page the next day, no doubt about it".

Using the assertion made by Caple et al. that success is a news value, it needs to be questioned then, why did the failure of the Australian men's cricket team in the 2010/2011 Ashes, feature more prominently, more regularly, and in greater depth in *SMH* during the frame of analysis, than the Australian Women's cricket team who won the Ashes? The women's victory was ultimately outweighed by the "bigger stars" in the likes of Ricky Ponting, Michael Clarke, Michael Hussey and the rest of the men's team even though they were not successful in winning the Ashes. In this case, it seems that other news values, such as impact, prominence and currency, trumped 'success'.

Furthermore, the success of the Australian women's cricket team was also overshadowed despite the prominence of cricket in *SMH* (J1; Wicks). "Generally in winter you'll find rugby league on the back page and in summer you'll find cricket on the back page" (Wicks). Content analysis found this to be true, with 15 out of 26, or 58 per cent, of back page articles in January 2011 about cricket. These articles ranged from features about Australian captain Michael Clarke, to then coach John Buchanan, to the Indian Premier League³² (IPL) auction, and even inclement weather. Yet even with their success in reclaiming the Ashes, no one from the Australian women's cricket team featured on the back page of *SMH* in January 2011. Similarly, when the Australian Netball Diamonds reclaimed the world number one ranking by beating the New Zealand Silver Ferns in the Constellation Cup³³ in October 2011, their success was minimised to a single article on the second last page of *SMH* sports section. Despite their victory, the Diamonds received less favourable coverage than previews of the Melbourne Cup, which was featured on multiple pages. Typically a victory over New Zealand in male sport however, such as in rugby league or rugby union, results in bragging rights that are played out in the media. Bryson explains however, that evidence suggests success does not necessarily

³² An professional Twenty20 cricket league played by international players in India.

³³ Is awarded annually to the team who wins the most test matches between Australian and New Zealand.

equate to media coverage. “Ignoring of women’s achievements is by no means confined to situations in which they fail to win, it extends to situations in which they do win” (1987, p. 354). It thus appears that masculine gender is an additional and primary news value influencing the selection of sports coverage in *SMH*.

While in theory news values provide criteria for editors and journalists to select news items for coverage, they do not entirely prevent subjectivity and interpretation (Hartley 1982; Henningham 1990; McQuail 2000). Therefore, even if one sports news event encompasses all the news values, another news item that does not encompass all the news values might be chosen if it is more likely to be of interest to a greater proportion of readers and in effect sell more newspapers. “The readers, in this game, are of course king and as much as it would be great to see all sports, no matter the sex, covered widely and regularly, companies such as ours are slaves to the market” (J1). However, as McManus argues, “consumers cannot tell whether what is presented really comprises the most important events and issues of the day ... consumers are vulnerable to exploitation when owners/investors seek to maximize their returns” (2009, p. 226-227). This concept of commerciality influencing decisions in newspapers will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

Commercial Enterprise

Newspapers have always been businesses and profits have always been linked directly to survival.

(Cole & Harcup 2010, p. 102)

While content analysis produced unexpected results, highlighting the extent to which sportswomen are still underrepresented in *SMH* sports section in 2011, it is easy to be quick to judge and equally easy to forget that *SMH* is a business. It is a commercial entity that relies on its readers being satisfied with the content of the newspaper to the extent they continue to purchase it. J2 reinforces this idea, “*The Sydney Morning Herald* is a commercial enterprise. The nature of the quantity and display of stories reflects, as far as we can judge, the demands of our readers – both male and female”.

The relationship between the mass media and sport is a unique one. Sport relies on the media to generate sponsors, promote events and raise the profile of athletes, while newspapers in particular rely on sport to generate large and loyal cohorts of readers (Lowes 1999; Pedersen 2002; Rowe 2004). “Sport and the mass media are inextricably linked together in a symbiotic relationship – the mass media sell sport and sport sell the mass media” (Pedersen 2002, p. 304). For this reason, newspapers such as *SMH* choose to focus on covering sports that the majority of their readers will want to read about. For Wicks, it is the sport “stars” who readers most like to read about. “Some blokes or some women are just bigger stars than others. Ben Barba, who will probably win the Dally M tonight, will probably be on the back page in the morning because he’s a big star that people like to read about.”

Wicks, J1 and J2 all alluded to the dominance certain sports have over others in *SMH*. J2 explained football codes are all covered frequently. “There is certainly a bias toward mainstream, male football codes – NRL, rugby union, AFL and soccer – during their seasons. Justified, I believe, on reader interest.” By predominantly covering major professional and commercial sporting events, *SMH* is attempting to satisfy the greatest proportion of readers. “In casting the sports news net, newspapers aim to capture major-

league sporting spectacles – those intense entertainments so useful for marshalling large male audiences” (Lowes 1999, p. 35). J1 believes the dominance of certain sports however, is not an issue of gender. “I don’t see this as necessarily an issue of sex – it is not as if all men’s sport (think surf lifesaving, baseball or even basketball) is covered widely by newspapers in Australia, just a select few. For this reason I see it as a cultural issue.” With readers accustomed to reading about certain sports more than others in *SMH*, it is difficult to predict how they would react if more female sports and athletes were featured regularly, with other male sports and athletes having to forego some of their coverage for it to occur. It is hard to imagine a drastic change in quantitative coverage of sportswomen will come any time soon, as J1 argues:

The key point is that the sports section of a newspaper is largely a reflection of what readers want, and until an editor can be convinced that there is enough demand for something that dramatically alters the accepted framework – such as two pages a day on women’s cricket – that won’t change. I find it difficult to see papers running considerably more women’s sport for the sake of it.

A response that emerged from each of the three interviews was the idea that decisions regarding what stories are published in *SMH* are influenced by reader interest. This notion of what “readers want” (J1; Wicks) is an inherently conservative justification. Interestingly, Wicks is not even aware of the gender breakdown of the readership of *SMH* sports section. “It’s a really difficult thing to tell... If I had to guess, I’d probably say about 80/20 [male/female], but that would be an educated guess, it’s not fact.” This suggests the notion of what a reader wants is at least partly imaginary. It appears that interpreting the reader’s desires relies on the traditions of *SMH* and the sort of items that have previously been published, as well as an imaginary perception of what readers want to read. “I’ll make a decision based entirely on what *I think* [emphasis added] our readers

want to read” (Wicks). This perception can be partly shaped by reader complaints, such as those fielded by Wicks (see Chapter Four).

The decision by *SMH* to create *Daily Life*, an online women’s network as discussed in Chapter Four, can be seen as a largely commercial decision and suggests *SMH* knows there are readers who want to read about women. It has a “completely different” readership to *SMH* print and online editions, with readers typically women aged between 30 and 50 years old. “*Daily Life* is a separate product, much like an extension of what we’ve already got... We’ve had articles I’ve written for *Daily Life* that have been re-published in the newspaper” (Wicks). Although this women’s network does not only focus on sport, its targeted readership creates a niche audience for advertisers. Since *Daily Life* is an online media source, it is effectively available to readers at no cost, with revenue instead made from advertising. Berry explains such “spin-offs” are an effective way for media sources to meet the demands of an audience beyond their traditional target:

Media companies began to use targeted public relations to add ‘below the line’ value to their marketing expenditure, to create multimedia personalities and to build loyalty to any news, sport or entertainment product through the masthead or station brand. The main brand was used to launch new programs, weekly newspaper sections, online sporting games, and a suite of book or magazine publishing spin-offs. (2012, p. 147)

The creation of niche media forms, such as *Daily Life*, act to segregate or enclose women’s sports and to an extent female readers. While *Daily Life* actively covers sporting events featuring women, the total quantity of coverage of sportswomen in the main *SMH* sports pages has not improved. In fact, as the content analysis demonstrated, it has decreased. It could be argued that this commercially motivated segmentation of the

market works against any significant change in widespread social perceptions of women's participation and success in sports, by niching this coverage away from the mass public that *SMH*, as a generalist newspaper, aims to speak to. Carter and Steiner argue that such a practice constitutes the 'co-option' of feminist arguments. "The mainstream media have increasingly incorporated or co-opted this counter-hegemonic view, particularly when it has proven to be in their economic interest" (Carter & Steiner 2004, p. 3). A further argument could be that the decision to cover women's sport in *Daily Life* rather than the main sports pages of *SMH* indicates the stubborn resilience of hegemonic masculinity when it comes to sport, gender and media representation, which contributes to an ongoing cycle of media neglect for sportswomen.

The Ongoing Cycle

The media is at the centre of a vicious cycle that threatens to keep women's sport at a subpar level to men's. Since *SMH* is a commercial entity, as previously discussed, it therefore means for women's sport to be commercially viable for *SMH*, and for other media outlets in general, the sport itself needs to be commercially viable; it needs to be an event that readers want to read about. As previously highlighted, Wicks indicates *SMH* readers want to read about "stars". An elite athlete does not become a star until they receive long-term, favourable media coverage, since stars are produced through the "professional ideologies and production practices of the media" (Whannel 2002, p. 49). "Star image is a social product, the result of a set of institutional structures, productions practices, representational conventions and the relations of production and consumption" (Whannel 2002, p. 49). But to be a star, an athlete not only needs to consistently perform well at the top level, they need to be able to "brand" themselves

effectively to get the attention of the media and the public (Magnay in Caple et al. 2011, p. 144).

Without regular, favourable media coverage, it is difficult for athletes to progress from successful elite athletes to high-profile athletes. With high-profile status comes sponsorship, endorsements and various other benefits. “Corporate sponsors want to associate their brands with athletes who are deemed influential and popular, and media coverage is a critical link in this chain” (Caple et al. 2011, p. 143). Despite the success of female teams and athletes, such as the Diamonds, the Matildas³⁴, Sally Pearson³⁵ and Stephanie Rice³⁶ for example, male athletes continue to receive the majority of coverage in *SMH* and the media in general, making it hard for female athletes to make this progression to high-profile status. Sponsorship of individual athletes, of teams and of sports, provides revenue which helps fund elite athletes and promote sports.

“Sponsorship revenue means sports can invest in the best players, coaches, administration” (Lundy 2012). Many female athletes and sports however, are without major sponsors. Many individual athletes train full-time in their respective sports, whilst also working to supplement the small amount of money they receive from playing their chosen sport. Melissa Barbieri³⁷ for example, works part-time as a first aid officer in a primary school to supplement the \$32,000 she earns a year to represent Australia (Nadar 2011). Similarly, the Hockeyroos, despite having won three Olympic gold medals, two World Cups, six Champions Trophies and three Commonwealth Games gold medals, do not have the support of a corporate sponsor. In the lead up to the 2012 Olympics, they instead hosted a gala dinner to raise the funds to help them get to the Olympics. “Very

³⁴ The Australian women’s football team.

³⁵ Olympic and Commonwealth Games gold medallist in the 100m hurdles.

³⁶ Olympic gold medallist in swimming.

³⁷ Captain of the Matildas, 2010-2012.

few female athletes derive a living wage from their sport, despite the professional nature of their commitment, world-class talent and high (sometimes the highest) international ranking” (Lundy 2012). For an athlete to be noticed by potential sponsors, their sport also needs to be noticed by the public. Leeanne Grantham³⁸ explains Football Federation Australia (FFA) usually loses money when the Matildas play in Australia, with sales from tickets not enough to cover the costs outlaid to host the event. As a result, sponsors are not going to provide funds if their company is going to only get minimal exposure from doing so. “Without coverage, sponsorship appeal is undermined” (Lundy 2012).

For women’s sports to be able to “grow and promote” their codes to both the public and the media, infrastructure, funding and sponsorship are required, none of which are possible to a great extent without media coverage and promotion (Caple et al. 2011), while media coverage is not possible without an appealing event to sell to readers. “This circle between sponsorship, profile, media coverage and the capacity of sporting codes to grow and promote their code is a real dilemma for women’s sporting codes trying to boost their visibility” (Caple et al. 2011, p. 143). As highlighted by Wicks, J1 and J2, a chicken and egg scenario of where change first needs to happen is currently occurring. Whether the media is the cause or the result is difficult to ascertain. However, it is clear that as long as this vicious cycle continues, it will keep women’s sport subordinate to men’s, both in terms of sport itself and in media representation.

Gender Bias and Hegemonic Masculinity

Women runners, jumpers, throwers, cyclists and swimmers do their best
but it is, by definition, second-best.

Greg Baum (2006)

³⁸ Ex-Head of Women’s Football at Football Federation Australia.

There is no denying the quality of media coverage afforded to sportswomen in Australia has improved remarkably in recent years (Bruce 2010; Caple et al. 2010; Caple et al. 2011). There have also been considerable improvements in several other facets of women's sport, such as prize money, and participation. The Australian Open Tennis Championship for example, now offers equal prize money to male and female players. Likewise, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) decided in 2009 that from 2012, women would be allowed to participate in boxing at the Olympics and at the 2012 Olympics, every one of the 204 nations competing had at least one female athlete representing their nation.

Despite these improvements, there continues to be an ongoing attitude among some media practitioners and members of society that sportsmen are better than sportswomen. Most recently, when 16-year old Chinese female swimmer Ye Shiwen swam faster in the 100m freestyle at the 2012 London Olympics than her male counterpart Ryan Lochte, rather than being congratulated and held in high esteem for her success, she was instead accused of being a drug cheat by fellow swimmers, coaches and the media, despite all her drug tests returning negative (Cowley 2012). This example of reversed superiority highlights the inherent gender bias that exists in sport, with Duncan and Messner explaining, "athletic women and girls symbolically threaten masculine hegemony" (1998, p. 170). In addition to journalist Greg Baum's comment outlined above and the accusations levelled at Shiwen, comments by Sam Newman³⁹, "there is no place in sport for women" (in Bannan 2012) and John Mangos⁴⁰, "the fact of the matter is blokes hit the ball further, kick the ball harder, go in harder, it's better to watch, end of story" (ECITA 2006, p. 97), are representative of the notion of superiority afforded to males in

³⁹ Ex-AFL player, currently a radio and television presenter.

⁴⁰ Ex-Sky News presenter.

sport. Bryson explains, such “negative evaluations of women’s capacities are implicit in the masculine hegemony in which sport is embedded” (1987, p. 350). The Committee describes such examples as “an entrenched sexism that underpins the lack of balance in coverage of sport” (ECITA 2006, p. 97), which threatens to continue if it remains unchallenged.

Gender bias however, is not limited to sexist comments. In many sports, there is a significant disparity in the wages paid to sportsmen compared to sportswomen.

Players in the Australian female football league for example, the W-League, earn a share of \$150,000 per team annually (Crabb 2012). In the men’s equivalent however, the A-League, the salary cap is \$2.48 million per team annually (Crabb 2012). In 2009, Associated Press named the top 10 athletes in their Female Athlete of the Year poll, two of which were horses (Funnell 2010). Similarly, *The Australian* identified the most influential people in Australian sport in 2012, as voted by *The Australian* sport editors and senior sports writers. Only four females, one of which was a horse, made the top 50 (Mason 2012). The inherent exclusion of female athletes from such lists, lists that are presented to the public as truth when in fact they are simply subjective interpretations, has the effect of reinforcing gender stereotypes, such as the superiority of men in sport. “Hegemony works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity (e.g., professional sports stars), symbols that have authority” (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, p. 846).

The existence of different rules for male and female athletes, such as the best of three sets for female tennis players and the best of five sets for male tennis players in Grand Slam matches, carries the implication that men are physically supreme and as a result “establish male hegemony” (Crossman et al. 2007, p. 31). This is not isolated to tennis

however, with different rules applied to men and women across various sports, including at the Olympics for example, where women are only eligible to compete in the 20km race walk, while men are eligible for the 20km and 50km walks, while in swimming the maximum distance women can swim is 800m, while men can compete in the 1500m. The 2012 Olympics in London revealed another layer of sexism, with Australian male athletes given preferential treatment over Australian female athletes. The Opals⁴¹ travelled to the Olympics in premium economy class, after Qantas upgraded them from economy class, while the Boomers⁴² travelled in business class (Lane 2012).

There is also a disproportionate percentage of male representatives compared to female representatives on the boards of Australian sporting organisations, with 22 percent female and 78 percent male representation (AWRA 2012). Bryson highlights the result of such disproportion is that the organisation of sport “is largely in the hands of men even when the sport has a largely female following” (Bryson 1987, p. 351). AWRA President Janice Crosswhite explains this lack of female representation on sporting boards will continue to contribute to gender bias in sport until representation becomes more equal. “Until we have more women elected to national sporting organisations’ boards, where women’s views and ideas can be considered, we will continue to see these situations and decisions affecting female participation and representation” (AWRA 2012). Caple et al. summarise how they currently view sport in Australia:

It’s played by men, it’s run by men and it’s funded by the men who run Australia’s leading corporations. It is, quite explicitly, a highly gendered story in which elite sport is equated directly with masculine prowess in a country where watching and playing sport are the most popular cultural activities for contemporary Australians. (2011, p. 138)

⁴¹ The Australian women’s basketball team.

⁴² The Australian men’s basketball team.

These gender biases occurring within sports themselves serve to reinforce societal attitudes about the differences between sportsmen and sportswomen, which are then consequentially played out in the media. “What’s easily accessible and heavily promoted becomes familiar ... provided to the public ready-made. Media’s content reflects what their managements choose to offer rather than instinctive public preferences (Bogart 1995, p. 221). Through constant media coverage, the dominant ideology of sportsmen being more athletic and more successful, thus more appealing, becomes normalised in society.

Worth the Effort? The effect of the Senate inquiry and ASC report

With the considerable costs, resources and time associated with the process of conducting studies in gender representation in the media, particularly ‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’, the minimal effect they appear to have on media coverage of sportswomen, as evident in content analysis of *SMH*, prompts one to question the value of such inquiries and reports. While they generate substantial debate, evident in the publication of a significant quantity of news items on the topic (Bannan 2012, Baum 2006; Bliss 2010; Bossi 2011; Lewis 2010; Magnay 2006; Schetzer 2011), actual changes in media coverage do not appear to be as forthcoming. Since it has previously been proven that quality of media coverage has improved (Bruce 2010; Caple et al. 2010; Caple et al. 2011), what this thesis expected to find in response to ‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’ was a positive shift in the quantitative representation of sportswomen in *SMH*. Although the quantity of female sports coverage in *SMH* did increase slightly from 8.6 per cent in 2005 to 9.0 per cent in 2007 following ‘About time!’, the quantity of female sports coverage dropped below the 2005 figure to only 8.2 per cent of all *SMH* sports coverage in 2011 (Appendix H). These

minor fluctuations suggest there has been no overt response from *SMH* following the inquiry or report and that their decision to allocate sportsmen and sportswomen different quantities of coverage are driven by other factors.

Interviews with *SMH* Deputy Sports Editor and journalists revealed evidence of resistance to change in terms of gender representation in sports reporting. While Wicks acknowledges the existence of the inquiry and report, her response could be interpreted as believing that *SMH* is not one of the media organisations in question. “I don’t think you take it [inquiry or report] into account when you make a decision; you have it in the back of your mind. Certainly we wouldn’t be belittling anyone, not in the *Herald*, nor sexualising anyone.” J2 however, is more defensive in response. “The measurement of column centimetres for male and female sports is a deeply flawed measure ... It is naive and simplistic to suggest we should produce stories to fill space that, all our research shows, even female athletes themselves would not read.” Fountaine and McGregor explain that such responses from media practitioners are not uncommon. “While empirical studies exploring gender representation in sports news are published frequently in peer reviewed journals and accepted as a legitimate and valid line of inquiry in academic terms, such studies are persistently rejected as irrelevant by industry” (1999, p. 113). As a commercial enterprise, with readership figures and financial targets at stake, it appears moving beyond the scope of “what is traditionally covered” (J1) is a risk *SMH* have been unwillingly to take. Interviews with *SMH* journalists and the power of the five key elements identified as explanations for the quantitative underrepresentation of sportswomen in *SMH*: gatekeeping, news values, commercial enterprise, ongoing cycle, and gender bias and hegemonic masculinity, reinforce the ongoing resistance to representing sportswomen in sports reporting.

Where to From Here?

The underrepresentation of sportswomen in *SMH* sports section, and in the media in general, has significant and lasting implications for sportswomen. Female athletes and their sports continue to be overlooked for the opportunity of regular, favourable coverage. With women's sport in Australia currently in a relentless cycle of a lack of media coverage, sponsorship and infrastructure, female athletes will continue to be treated as second best unless this cycle is broken. If *SMH* are unwilling to initiate changes to improve the quantity of coverage of sportswomen, as indicated in the interviews, where then does the ultimate responsibility for making this improvement lie?

Looking specifically at *SMH*, which can be seen as representative of commercial journalistic media in Australia, editorial decisions are made based on the perception of what its readers want to read, hence what will sell. Wicks articulates this idea further:

I've never made a decision based on gender. I'll make a decision based entirely on what I think our readers want to read. Now if I think the netball story is the best story, that will go on the back page but if I think the rugby league story is the best story that will go on the back page.

Wicks and both journalists who were interviewed are adamant it is not their responsibility to promote women's sport. "It's not the media's job to promote sport ... Our job is to find the good stories. Sometimes they're about women" (Wicks). But, as Caple et al. point out: "If news culture today is being driven by appeals to commercial imperatives, which in turn hinge on media talent being available, skilled and appealing the audiences, then a circuit breaker is needed or the circular problem is likely to continue indefinitely" (2011, p. 146).

Wicks and J2 both argue this 'circuit breaker' is the responsibility of sporting organisations. "It is not the media's role in any sense to 'promote' women's sport. Promotion lies in the hands of the bodies who run those sports, those they pay to conduct public relations and the athletes themselves" (J2). Wicks highlights the progress Netball Australia has made in breaking this cycle:

Netball's probably the best example, outside of Stosur and maybe Karrie Webb in the old days, it probably gets the best coverage because it has a good product, it has full house crowds, it's really well run, the PR people are always telling you what's going on, no one ever declines to speak to you.

The success of netball marketing itself as an appealing product for fans and for the media has seen the growth of the sport and its visibility. The ANZ Championship, Australasia's first semi-professional netball competition, was launched in 2008, and has been growing steadily since. Key broadcast partnerships were established with Channel Ten and Sky Sports, with 11.4 million viewers tuning in throughout the 2009 season (ANZ Championship 2012). This was in addition to the total live attendance of 224,000 for the season, including a full house of almost 10,000 people at the grand final (ANZ Championship 2012). The marketing of the sport, the effectiveness of the PR staff and the cooperation of athletes in providing the media with interviews, means "there's a lot that they're doing right" (Wicks).

While there is agreement among Wicks and *SMH* journalists that improving the media coverage of women's sports lies with sporting organisations, Caple et al. argue that the reality is more complex. They are not suggesting, "female athletes and their sporting organisations are responsible for this lack of coverage" (Caple et al. 2011, p. 145). Rather, sporting organisations are seen to have the best potential to break the cycle. While in theory, this is a plausible solution, the authors highlight that sporting bodies often "lack

the funding and infrastructure” (Caple et al. 2011, p. 145). As J1 explains, “It would require significant financial and public relations input whether from sports or government bodies or corporate entities to help build the profile of a particular sport that is striving to break into the so-called mainstream”. With new additional funds for women’s sports difficult to obtain, a possible solution would be the redirection of funds from male competitions, such as more equal distribution of government funds between the Socceroos⁴³ and the Matildas. However, in sports such as hockey, where there is only a marginal difference in funding between male and female teams, or in the case of netball where there is no men’s equivalent, this solution would not be possible.

In recent years, the lack of media coverage sportswomen have received has resulted in substantial attention from the government, community and media. The Australian Government launched Women in Sport Media Grants in 2011, an initiative aimed at improving the exposure of women’s sport in the media, and pledged \$1.4 million funding. Minister for the Status of Women Kate Ellis⁴⁴ noted the importance of such funding in promoting women’s sport. “This funding will see the Government stepping in to directly assist with production costs, marketing and promotion of national and international level Australian women’s leagues, competitions, teams and athletes” (ASC 2011). Similarly, various community initiatives, such as the *Australian Women’s Health* magazine’s ‘I support Women in Sport’ campaign, have also been established in an attempt to improve the coverage of sportswomen through non-traditional media channels, such as social media. Ironically, *SMH* often provides media coverage of these initiatives, such as in January 2011 at the announcement of the ‘I Support Women in Sport’ campaign (Bossi 2011).

⁴³ Australian’s men football team.

⁴⁴ Formerly the Federal Minister for Sport.

It is difficult to believe that when quantifiable factors, such as participation and success, have increased for sportswomen, that media coverage has not followed. *SMH* and other Australian commercial media organisations, sporting bodies, the government and the community all have the potential to shift the quantity of media coverage currently allocated to sportswomen. While each group continues to attempt to pass the blame for the lack of coverage to other parties, the problem will remain, furthering the current vicious cycle. Without the ongoing support of other parties, no single party will be able to significantly shift the quantity of media coverage of sportswomen.

Conclusion

Sport and the media have a complex interconnected relationship. The ongoing success of each is noticeably reliant on the other. While the talent, success, participation and commitment of women in sport have increased significantly in recent years, the quantity of coverage of sportswomen in *SMH* sports section has not improved to reflect this. By tracing the quantitative coverage of sportswomen in *SMH* across 2005, 2007 and 2011, this thesis has mapped an ongoing trend of underrepresentation following the publication of ‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’, despite their purpose of highlighting the issue.

By firstly examining the broader field of sport, media and gender, this thesis was able to contextualise the subject of quantitative representation of sportswomen in *SMH* within a wider scholarly framework. The examination of ‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’ acted as an anchor for the subsequent content analysis of *SMH*, offering a further layer of context and ensuring the quantitative content analysis of sportswomen in *SMH* was not studied in isolation. Content analysis of *SMH* sports section across January and October of 2005, 2007 and 2011 quantified the representation of sportswomen over time across four categories: features, news in brief, photographs and back page. Results from this content analysis revealed an unexpected trend: quantitative representation of sportswomen in *SMH* had decreased in three of the four categories – news in brief, photographs and back page. These figures reveal that despite the public debate and media attention of the issue, ‘About time!’ and ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’ have not had the intended effect on *SMH*.

Content analysis itself however, was unable to answer the question of *why* sportswomen continue to be underrepresented in *SMH*. It was for this reason that methodological triangulation was employed, by conducting interviews with *SMH* Deputy Sports Editor and two anonymous journalists. These interviews were used to supplement scholarly explanations about the underrepresentation of sportswomen in the media and offer further insights into *SMH*-specific practices that may influence the quantity of coverage. Despite *SMH*'s awareness of underrepresentation, evident in the publication of articles in *SMH* about the issue (Bannan 2012; Bossi 2011; Lewis 2010; Magnay 2006), including two during the production of this thesis (Hinds 2012; Wicks 2012b), it has been argued that the endemic forces of gatekeeping, news values, commercial enterprise, the ongoing cycle, and gender bias and hegemonic masculinity, are preventing a significant change in the quantity of representation of sportswomen in *SMH* sports section.

As foreshadowed in the Introduction, this thesis is contributing to the broader field of sport, gender and the media, and specifically the difference in media coverage allocated to sportsmen compared to sportswomen. By specifically analysing *SMH* following 'About time!' and 'Towards a Level Playing Field', this thesis offers original empirical work that is situated within the ongoing phenomenon of underrepresentation of sportswomen in the Australian media.

On numerous occasions over the past few decades, various strategies to shift the quantity of media coverage for sportswomen have been implemented. Time after time however, these strategies have succumbed to false starts. Senate inquiries, government commissioned reports and community initiatives, all aimed at improving the quantitative coverage of sportswomen in the media, have only had minimal impacts on the quantity of media coverage given to sportswomen in Australia. It is difficult to see what the

catalyst will be to break the ongoing cycle of underrepresentation of sportswomen in the Australian media. What appears to be clear is that the media do not believe the responsibility lies with them. Until all parties take responsibility, it is likely to be a significant period of time before there is equal representation of sportsmen and sportswomen in the Australian media, in particular in *SMH*.

Appendix A: Instruction sheet for additional coders

The following are the coding instructions for content analysis for ‘False Start:

Quantitative representation of sportswomen in *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 2005, 2007 and 2011’.

Using microfilm, analyse the 16 days of *The Sydney Morning Herald* sports section that have been allocated by the principal coder. Only analyse content from Monday to Saturday, as Sunday is excluded from analysis. Using the categories of male, female, mixed gender and non-gendered (definitions below), tally the results for each of the four categories of features, news in brief, photographs and back page (definitions below), using the provided coding sheets.

Gender Categories:

- Male – male/s only.
- Female – female/s only.
- Mixed gender – a combination of males and females. For example, an article about the Australian swimming which discusses both men’s and women’s races.
- Non-gendered – non-gendered items. For example, an article about a horse, a stadium or the weather.

Article Categories:

- Features – any article in *SMH* that was not categorised as a news in brief article.
- News in brief – any article published under the headings ‘In Brief’, ‘Sport Focus’, or specific sport news in brief heading, such as ‘Football Focus’.
- Photographs – any photograph.
- Back page – the feature on the back page, or in cases where there are multiple features on the back page, the most prominent feature.

Excluded from Analysis:

- Advertisements
- Article previews – usually on the back page
- ‘The Fitz Files’
- Results pages

- Letters to the Editor
- 'On the Box' – sport television guide
- Additional sport lift outs – for example, Rugby World Cup lift out in October 2011

Additional Information:

- For the purpose of consistency, all horse racing and dog racing material will be categorised as 'non-gendered'.
- Photographs that extend beyond one page are considered a single photograph.

Appendix B: Sample coding sheet

Coder: (for example, Coder A)

Coder sample period: (for example, 1st – 19th January 2005)

Coding category: (for example, Features)

Date:

	Male	Female	Mixed gender	Non-gendered
Total				

Date:

	Male	Female	Mixed gender	Non-gendered
Total				

Date:

	Male	Female	Mixed gender	Non-gendered
Total				

Date:

	Male	Female	Mixed gender	Non-gendered
Total				

Date:

	Male	Female	Mixed gender	Non-gendered
Total				

Appendix C: Inter-coder agreement calculation

$$\text{Cohen's kappa } (\kappa) = \frac{PAo - PAe}{1 - PAe}$$

where:

- Percentage Agreement (PAo) = $\frac{\text{Total A's}}{n}$
- Expected Agreement (PAe) = $\left(\frac{1}{n^2}\right) (\sum pm_i)$
- $pm_i = \text{Coder A Codes}_n \times \text{Coder B Codes}_n$

Appendix D: Ethics approval



The University of Sydney

Human Research Ethics Committee

Web: <http://www.usyd.edu.au/ethics/human>

ABN 15 211 513 464

Dr Fiona Gill
Chair
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Low Risk Ethics
Committee

Telephone: +61 2 9351 6889
Email: fiona.gill@sydney.edu.au

Ref: 00091

June 13 2012

Dr Megan Le Masurier
Department of Media and Communications
Holme Building A09a
Email: megan.lemasurier@sydney.edu.au

Dear Dr le Masurier,

Thank you for your responses to the committee's concerns about the project titled

"False Start: public debate and the representation of sportswomen in the Sydney
Morning Herald from 2005 to 2011"

We are now able to approve the project.

Details of the approval are as follows:

Ref No:	AH00091
Approval Period:	June 13 2012 – December 31 2012
Authorised Personnel:	Dr le Masurier Ms Kirsten Wade

The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Low Risk Ethics Committee operates as a delegated sub-committee of the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee, and in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (2007)*.

The approval of your project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the *National Statement*. We draw your attention to the requirement that a report on this research must be submitted at the conclusion of the Honours year.

The Chief Investigator/Supervisor is responsible to ensure that

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Low
Risk Human Research Ethics Committee
University of Sydney
NSW 2006 Australia

E Vanessa.holcombe@sydney.edu.au
sydney.edu.au

ABN 15 211 513 464
CRICOS 00026A

- 1) all serious and adverse events should be reported to the Arts and Social Sciences Low Risk Ethics Committee as soon as possible;
- 2) all unforeseen events that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project should be reported to the Arts and Social Sciences Low Risk Ethics Committee as soon as possible;
- 3) the Arts and Social Sciences Low Risk Ethics Committee must be notified as soon as possible about any changes to the protocol. All changes must be approved before continuation of the research. These include:
 - if any of the investigators change or leave the University; and
 - any changes to the Participant Information Statement and/or Consent Form;
- 4) all research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Statement and Consent Form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee. The Participant Information Statement and Consent Form are to be on University of Sydney letterhead and include the full title of the Research project and telephone contacts for the researchers unless otherwise agreed by the Committee, and the following statement must appear on the bottom of the Participant Information Statement:

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Deputy Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 8627 8176 (Telephone); (02) 8627 7177 (Facsimile) or human.ethics@usyd.edu.au (Email).

- 5) that copies of all signed Consent Forms must be retained and made available to the H.R.E.C. on request;
- 6) that you provide a copy of this letter to any internal/external funding agencies if requested;
- 7) a report is submitted at the conclusion of the project; and
- 8) a copy of any published material should be provided at the end of the project.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Fiona Gill
Chair,
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Low-Risk Ethics Committee

cc Ms Kirsten Wade
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Appendix E: Interview Transcript One

Transcript excluded to meet confidentiality agreement.

Appendix F: Interview Transcript Two

Transcript excluded to meet confidentiality agreement.

Appendix G: Interview Transcript Three

Transcript excluded to meet confidentiality agreement.

Appendix H: Percentage of female sports coverage in *SMH* over time

	2005	2007	2011
Back page	9.6%	3.7%	0.0%
News in brief	13.1%	11.6%	9.2%
Features	5.7%	6.6%	7.7%
Photographs	10.5%	12.1%	8.9%
Total	8.6%	9.0%	8.2%

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