

**The influence of the print media in portraying women in sport:**

**A case study of *The Independent on Saturday***

**By**

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## **Declaration**

I, Nereshnee Govender hereby declare that the work presented in this research paper is my own. All sources have been duly acknowledged and referenced.

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(March 2010)

## **Abstract**

During the Apartheid era in South Africa, women were marginalised from sport. The ability to participate in sport in South Africa is intrinsically linked to the political history of the country. Sport played a dynamic role in the struggle against the diabolical system of apartheid in South Africa and has a powerful role to play in the transformation and nation building of South Africa.

Women have made great strides in sport in recent years in South Africa and the way in which media portray these sporting achievements is critically important to dislodging negative stereotypes and overcoming discrimination of women in sport. The unfair coverage of women's sport displays gender based attitudes which systematically disadvantage women's position in society. Women's participation in sport has grown dramatically but despite this growth coverage of women in sport remains inferior to that given to men in sport across all media. Media need to acknowledge, promote and celebrate the wealth of talent that there is to be enjoyed by society.

Newspaper reports are seldom challenged for not being accurate or truthful. But readers have a right to truthful information and reporting, and being trustworthy to the reader is the basis of good journalism. Media need to collectively reflect a diversity of content to ensure public access to a variety of viewpoints and they should expect societal intervention if the media fail to meet professional standards. The print media has a fundamental role to play in shaping public opinion and undoubtedly have an influence in portraying women in sport in South Africa. This study critically analyses the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport.

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# ***DEDICATION***

***To my family and friends who are the  
strength behind all my achievements.....***

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# CHAPTER ONE

## 1.1 Introduction and Background

The media contribute significantly to the definition of the world around us, and thereby also to the definition of ourselves. They present ways to understand the world and represent the world, in images, sounds and writing. They suggest ideas of what is important and what isn't, what is good and what is bad, what is boring and what is fun.

Lippmann's (1922:185) study provides examples of how the factual features of the world often have little relationship to the beliefs that people entertain about that world. He states that the press interpretation of events can radically alter people's interpretation of reality and their consequent pattern of action as people act not on the basis of what truly is taking place or has occurred, but on the basis of what they think is the real situation obtained from depictions provided to them by the media. These meanings and interpretations will often have only a limited correspondence to what has truly happened.

Jefferson (in Greer, 1999:22) affirms Lippmann's view and states that "the press is the best instrument for enlightening the mind of man". He believes the press has the power to improve man as a rational, moral and social being. Agee, Ault and Emery (1998:22) state that the media touches people's lives at diverse levels often without people even realising their impact. One such area that the media influence is the way women are represented.

Parry and Karam (2001:383) support that media touches people's lives at diverse levels and maintain that the media have always possessed the power to impart ideological and patriarchal messages. Ashford and Clifton (2005)

report that although women constitute over fifty percent of the world's population, they are under-represented in the media. Of specific importance to this study is the way women in sport are represented in the media.

Sport is a global phenomenon and therefore has a symbiotic relationship with the media. Sport transcends all social, political and ethnic barriers and its appeal crosses educational levels, religious preferences and language groups. However, just as sport is critical to the media, the media is critically important to sport. The media help shape our perceptions and beliefs, affect how people think; affect emotion, shape ideas, and create heroes. Consequently the media communicate the importance of sport in our lives.

During the Apartheid era in South Africa, women were marginalised from sport. The ability to participate in sport in South Africa is intrinsically linked to the political history of the country. Sport played a dynamic role in the struggle against the diabolical system of Apartheid in South Africa and still has a powerful role to play in the transformation and nation building of South Africa's emerging democracy.

Women have made great strides in sport in recent years in South Africa and the way in which media portray these sporting achievements is critically important to dislodging negative stereotypes and overcoming discrimination of women in sport. Rodgers and Dearing (1988:148) state that issues which are not given attention by the media will hardly be disseminated beyond their points of origin. The media, therefore, need to reflect reality and not the deeply embedded community attitudes and stereotypes about women in sport.

Kane and Greendorfer (1994:90) state that the wrong kind of messages sent by the media, those that further entrench 'appropriate' feminine roles rather than accurate athletic roles, could possibly do more harm to societal acceptance on women in sport than no attention at all. This notion denotes

that the media has the power to reinforce stereotypes on women in sport. The media, however, has the responsibility to provide an objective account of events.

Public opinion is a significant element in state formation, and the conditions for public opinion can be seen as an indicator of the political level of development in any given society. According to Gripsrud (1999:59), "It is clear that the media in all its functions influence how society and human beings develop and understand themselves". This means that the mass media, simply by paying attention to some issues, communities or individuals and neglecting others, will have an effect on public opinion. The omnipresence of the media, their role in society and their impact on everyday life clearly can no longer be ignored.

Van Zoonen (1994:17) states that women who appear in media content tend to be young and conventionally pretty, defined in relation to their husband, father, son, or boss and portrayed as passive, indecisive, submissive and dependent. Images are powerful tools that shape and reflect attitudes and values. Rodgers and Dearing (1988:152) affirm that newspapers, radio and television are significant elements in influencing public opinion. By portraying sportswomen either as sex objects or as "pretty girls", the message sent to society is that sportswomen are not strong, powerful and highly skilled individuals. Images that ignore or trivialise females undermine the importance and respect of the abilities of women in sport.

The media is assumed to have a potential for significant influence, but it is the particular ideas and values conveyed by media in their content, which are seen as the primary causes of social change. According to Greer (1999:22), "because the newspaper is one of the most efficient forms of mass communication ever created, huge numbers of people read and trust newspapers." It is for this reason that the media ought to give an accurate account of sporting events.

Roberts (1993) states that for many years women have been disadvantaged in sport participation. Now, however, women all over the world have become more participative in sport and the researcher would like to analyse the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport.

The role of women in sport has changed dramatically over the past few years as the country strives towards a non-racial, non-sexist society. South Africa's constitution was approved and accepted, guaranteeing and protecting the rights and equal treatment of all people. The Women's Charter for Effective Equality was formed by the Women's National Coalition (WNC) in 1993 and served as the base for a broad range of initiatives aimed at achieving gender equality in South Africa. According to Pretorius (1999) the charter document contained twelve articles dealing with equality and included education and training, culture, religion and the media. A study was carried out to establish the charter and the findings were used in the constitution-making process. According to A Work in Progress (1994:19) the charter states, "Women want to control their lives. We bear important responsibilities, but lack the authority to make decisions in the home and society".

Since April 1994 South Africa has undergone huge changes and transformation is taking place at all levels of South African society. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996:7), section 9 states, "Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law." The right of equality protects anyone with respect to unfair discrimination, on one or more grounds of race, sex, colour, religion, language, ethnic or social origin. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) also states that the Commission of Gender Equality must promote gender equality and the protection, development and attainment of gender equality.

Roberts (1993:16) asserts that the campaign for gender equity in sport must grow as women are determined to show their mettle in the sporting arena.

Women should therefore be given a fair amount of coverage by the media and media have a huge responsibility to provide unprejudiced, unbiased, objective information that is reflective of the evolving South African population. Roberts (1993:16) writes:

South Africa's women in sport are outstanding. Achieving so much under difficult conditions indicates their strength, tenacity and power. But are their achievements and significant contributions to the development of sport ever applauded and recognised? And are women in sport given the recognition and honour, which they deserve?

Sport has played a major role in effecting changes in South Africa and in moving the country towards democracy. Sport holds a significant place in society and it can be one of the vehicles toward transformation and democracy. The role of women in sport is also significant as it shows the society's move towards its transformation and democratic ideals. Sport has played an instrumental role in fostering a spirit of nation building and enhancing reconciliation by building and nurturing the spirit of patriotism and pride for the country. The media serves as an instrument in this process. Because the media shapes the interest of the public, under-reporting women in sport will keep accomplishments of women at a distance. This in turn will minimise the achievements of more than half of the world's population. The way in which the newspaper media addresses or ignores this pressing situation is critical. According to Boyle and Haynes (2000:262),

Mediated discourses of sport play an important part in producing, naturalising and even constructing values, attitudes and sometimes prejudices, which circulate in wider society. Issues about media representations are fundamentally about power and status in society. A community or individual's ability to feel represented within a media discourse is in part related to assumptions about the power of the media to shape and change public opinion.

What is needed from the media is an accurate representation of sporting events rather than distorted constructions presented to the public. This

study, therefore, sets out to explore the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The ways, large and small, the mass media touch people's lives each day are beyond counting. Often one does not realise that one is being affected because one takes the media's presence for granted. The media's impact can be subtle as well as compelling. The mass media do not exist to serve as moral preceptors or ethical taskmasters, although some of the material they deliver serves these purposes. The media's principle task with regard to the news is to distribute the information in a fair, honest and objective way.

A critical question is what is the role of the print media in shaping public opinion of women in sport? This study therefore explores the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport.

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

The objective of this study is to critically analyse the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport.

This will be achieved through the following sub-objectives:

- To review how public opinion is formed regarding women in sport;
- To analyse textual and image representation of women in sport in the print media; and

- To explore how the representation of women in the print media shapes public opinion with a view to offering guidelines for objective reporting of women in sport.

## 1.4 Delimitations

Some of the limitations that may influence the outcome of this study are:

- There is very little published information available on media's coverage of women in sport from a South African perspective. This shortage impacts on the study as it affects the depth of material and information available for the study.
- The study is limited to the South African media's coverage of women in sport specifically in *The Independent on Saturday* - a weekly newspaper.
- It is limited to the sports section of *The Independent on Saturday* and is further delimited to a timeframe of six (6) months.
- This study acknowledges the political economy approach (Herman and Chomsky: 1988) that contributes to the commercial media environment in South Africa.

## 1.5 Literature Review

The Literature Review sets up a theoretical framework for the study. It does so by identifying and discussing the principle theories that frame media representation. This study will explore the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport by using normative theories of the press and media effect theories. This study also looks at feminist media theory that

lends a gendered inflection to this study. The Literature Review further provides a background to the primary unit of analysis, *The Independent on Saturday*.

The specific theories presented in the Literature Review suggest that an interpretive research strategy, employing qualitative methods of data gathering and analysis will be required. These strategies will be discussed further in the methodology section.

## **1.6 Research Methodology**

This research project is textual and essentially thematic content analysis. The researcher analyses print media texts to evaluate the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport. The approach decided on was the case study method. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:193) define the case study method as a "...limited number of units of analysis (often only one)...., such as an individual, a group or an institution (which) are studied intensively." *The Independent on Saturday* serves as the primary unit for evaluation.

The researcher interprets whether the particular issue is placed in context and the implied meaning. Hence, the researcher will highlight and italicise particular choices of words and phrases to show the ambiguity of words or sentences, implied meaning and the different ways that they can be read.

## **1.7 Overview of the Study**

The researcher explores the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport. Chapter One provides a background and introduction to the study. Chapter Two reviews related literature. This is done by firstly establishing a theoretical framework and identifying principle theories from which to embark



on a content analysis and secondly identifying core themes.

Chapter Three explains the methodology used for this study. It provides an overview of the research design, data collection methods, research instrument and data analysis techniques. In Chapter Four, the data collected is analysed and interpreted. Chapter Five offers conclusions and recommendations. The researcher suggests ways in which feminist praxis can be achieved and issues addressed as an agenda for change concerning the construction of male and female sportspersons through newspaper reporting.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the chapters that follow and has in this way laid the foundation for this dissertation. On this basis, this dissertation now proceeds to the literature review in which dominant theories and themes that pertain to this study are explored.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has provided a background and an introduction to this study. It maintains that the key objective of this study is to critically analyse the influence of the <sup>1</sup>print media in portraying women in sport.

This chapter sets up a theoretical framework. It does so by identifying and discussing the principle theories that frames media representation. In order to attain the goals of this study various concepts are explored. The dominant theories that address the media's impact on public opinion and theories that pertain to this study are discussed. The researcher further provides a background to the primary unit of analysis, *The Independent on Saturday*.

### 2.2 The Media as an Instrument of Representation

Media plays an important and constructive role in any community and society as a source of information, education and entertainment. It accommodates the world into a single village which is saturated with media information. The media is a powerful tool and through its representation shapes the understanding, perception and views of society.

Hall (1997:15) describes representation as an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It involves the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things. Hall has explored representation as a signifying practice in a rich diversity of social contexts. These include film and image;

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<sup>1</sup> This study uses the term print media synonymous with *The Independent on Saturday*. It does not assume to address other print media publications in South Africa.

photography; fantasies of 'the racialised other' in popular media and the gendering of narratives in television soap operas. Hall (1997:225) looks at a variety of images which are on display in popular culture and mass media. He explains that some are commercial advertising images and magazine illustrations which use racial stereotypes, dating from the period of slavery or the late nineteenth century. Racism is one of the traditional and prominent areas of study in terms of media and representation. However, this study will focus specifically on how the representation of women in the print media shapes public opinion.

The representation of women in media can be analysed from various perspectives. It could be representation in terms of portrayal of women, coverage of women's issues, empowerment in the workplace and the presence of women in important reported issues. When we talk of portrayal of women, we refer to the extent to which media depict women especially in comparison to men. The stereotypical perceptions are endowed in our society and issues of masculinity and femininity are constructed by our societies.

According to Trans Media International - TMI (2009), representation refers to the construction in any medium, especially the mass media, of aspects of 'reality' such as people, places, objects, events, cultural identities and other abstract concepts. Such representations may be in speech or writing as well as still or moving pictures. The involvement of mass audiences in the representations proposed by popular culture has been one of the main areas of debate in work on the mass media. According to Geraghty (in Curran and Gurevitch, 1996:265) questions that are crucial to one's understanding of the media are:

How far can the mass media produce culture which speaks of popular concerns rather than interests of ownership? How do audiences engage with cultural texts as varied as for example, photographs, television series and bestselling novels? And to

what extent do the values of popular press or television  
dominate or control the way in which we think about the world?

Geraghty's questions are very relevant and this study attempts to use Geraghty's concerns to specifically address the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport.

According to Hall (1997:15) representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent the world meaningfully to other people. Hall (1997:16) adds that representation is the construction of meaning through language. Language plays an important role in shaping and developing what people perceive as reality. Talbot, Atkinson and Atkinson (2003:4) state that a common perspective is that language plays a vital role in constituting people's reality and this insight has evident implications for the power and influence of media language.

Hall (1997) through his work has focused on the way that media keep those who are powerful in society in control, while at the same time, keeping the powerless people powerless. His main concern is how the media creates support for the ideology of capitalism, which he describes as a 'hegemonic' system. In other words, it is a dominating system that imposes control over people.

According to Griffin (2000:337–347) Hall was influenced by the ideas of Karl Marx who criticised the capitalist system extensively and who also predicted that it would eventually fail. He believes that media representation of culture reproduce social inequalities and keeps the average person powerless<sup>2</sup>. Corporate control of information prevents many stories from being told. Hall's focus is not on what information is being presented but rather whose

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<sup>2</sup> The relationship of power and the powerless will be addressed under feminist media theory.

information it is. In terms of this study it can be argued that if media do not provide an accurate reflection of women then women will not be recognised for their achievements. According to Griffin (2000:337–347) Hall's view is that the media does not represent the pleas of the powerless in society, and provides little coverage of the conditions under which the majority of the world's population live.

The mass media often brings information and entertainment into our lives and we find ourselves relying on those sources to provide a conceptualised image of the real world. The media presents parts and dimensions of the world that we ourselves have not experienced directly, and may never come to experience. According to O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005:34) "The media in their representations, give us information and then explanations, ways of understanding the world we live in." These authors maintain that media take on an interpretative role and teach us how to 'make sense' of the world, other people, and ourselves. They maintain that in doing so, media consistently privilege some issues and identities while devaluing others, thus giving us an evaluative framework, a judgmental view of the information about the world that we receive. In relation to this study the above quotation relates to how the media has the power to present a 'judgmental view' or bias when reporting on women in sport. According to McQuail (2000:491) being bias is any tendency in the news report to deviate from an accurate, neutral, balanced and impartial representation of the 'reality' of events.

The media has the ability to influence public perceptions. McQuail (2000:491) puts it as follows:

A distinction is usually made between intended and unintended bias. The former serves mainly from partisanship, advocacy and the ideological standpoint of the media or source. The latter is generally attributed to organisational and routine factors in selection and processing of news.

Curran, and Gurevitch (1991:378) state that the way in which media representations resource and guide consciousness and understanding, and therefore exert influence through interpretation, can be seen to vary according to generic forms and purposes. Waldahl (1989:216) states “The content of the opinion formation process depends on the kind of people and groups, which are granted access to the media with their attitudes and views, the issues the media assign priority and the angle of presentation”.

According to the Media Development and Diversity Agency - MDDA<sup>3</sup> (2008:7) media is considered to be the fourth pillar of the democratic society and is also the watchdog of democracy. The media is particularly important in contemporary society for a variety of reasons. Talbot, Atkinson and Atkinson (2003:5) affirm,

For many people media has become increasingly accessible and often dominant in daily life, partly or wholly substituting more traditional sources of information such as the church, trade unions and so on. They make powerful contributions to our understanding of what is public and what is private in contemporary life and they tend to naturalise these distinctions so that they appear as common sense.

The above quotations clearly highlight the power of the media and its impact on society. Further research (Fitzpatrick, 2009; Fields, 2005; Moy and Van Halem, 2001; and Liu, 2006) also support this view. This study will look specifically at the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport.

The media influences society by conveying stereotypical and patriarchal representations of women. While stereotyping is a complex issue, many

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<sup>3</sup> The Media Development and Diversity Agency was set up by an Act of Parliament (Act 14 of 2002) to enable the “historically disadvantaged communities and persons not adequately served by the media” to gain access to media. One of the MDDA’s core objectives is to encourage research regarding media development and diversity.

myths are communicated through these stereotypes. Fourie (2001:248) provides these examples of stereotypes: Afrikaans people are essentially racist; Black people are essentially inferior to white people; Zulu people are essentially warlike; gay people are essentially sexually promiscuous and women are essentially inferior to men. In this regard Fourie (2001:255) states it has been suggested that the media may often serve to strengthen these beliefs or, at best, do little to expose them.

Leading media theorist Dyer (1993:11) illustrates that the word 'stereotype' is today almost always a term of abuse. He explains that this stems from the wholly justified objections of various groups – in recent years, blacks, women and gays, in particular – to the ways in which they find themselves stereotyped in the mass media and in everyday speech.

According to Fourie (2001:263)

It is proposed then that in order to change stereotypes every media worker should be critical of his or her own views and interpretations; sensitive towards the feelings of others; and aware of the possible harm his or her view, perceptions and interpretations may cause for others.

The first major studies of gender stereotypes in media focused on print advertising, due to the ease of content analysis and accessibility of print advertisements. Courtney and Lockeretz (1971); Goffman (1976); Tuchman (1978); and Williamson (1978), published significant and often cited and replicated studies on women's images in mass media. Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) is one of the first studies to analyse women's role portrayals in magazine advertisements. This study reveals that women are depicted in occupational roles, non-working activities, and the type of products being sold using women's images. This study reinforces the stereotypical role of women as Courtney and Lockeretz (1971:94) affirms:

The advertisements reflected four types of stereotypes; "A woman's place is in the home," "Women do not make important decisions or do important things," "Women are dependent and need men's protection," and "Men regard women primarily as sexual objects; they are not interested in women as people".

In relation to this study the statement above refers to how attitudes, beliefs, and opinions that are prevalent in our society are perpetuated by media. The researcher has reviewed numerous studies that have been done in the field of women, media and representation including Len-Ríos, Rodgers, Thorson and Yoon (2005); Jones (2006); and Pretorius (1999). Len-Ríos, Rodgers, Thorson and Doyle Yoon's (2005) study uses a feminist framework of masculine cultural hegemony to examine the representation of women in two newspapers. The above clearly illustrates the power of the media and the diverse areas that media influence.

It is evident that there are a variety of ways that the media influences our lives. One such area that the media influence is the way women in sport are represented in the media. This study specifically explores the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport. It uses a normative theory framework of the press and media effect theories. In doing so it further addresses how the representation of women in the print media shapes public opinion. This study also looks at feminist media theory that lends a gendered inflection to this study.

### **2.2.1 The Media's Representation of Women in Sport**

Since the liberation of South Africa in 1994, sport plays an instrumental role in ensuring that it is an active participant in the reconstruction and development of the country towards a truly non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society. According to Sage (1990:1-2) "Sport relates to the entire fabric and structure of society and, as such, is a social institution, carrying with it many potential meanings and value systems." Sport has often been



used to unite people from diverse backgrounds, races, genders and can be seen as a tool to remove barriers that exist in society. Fourie (2001:361) affirms this view saying that sport as the enjoyment of physical activity and competition is clearly a pervasive and popular culture practice in all societies. As such it is an important form of social and cultural expression.

South Africa is a developing country and a fledgling democracy with many challenges and problems. South Africa's transition to democracy has brought great progress to many of its people and numerous untold advances have been made in bridging past divisions. Sport plays a vital role in contemporary society. For the majority of people, sport forms an integral part of life whether as active participant or spectator. Sport is not only a physical activity but an area where people interact socially. Jarvie and Maguire (1994) state that sport and leisure activities form an integral part of social life in all communities and are intrinsically linked to society and politics.

Media's coverage of women in sport is significant because the media play a central role in informing our knowledge, opinions and attitudes about women in sport and informing perceptions that influence its future development. Sport is a global commercialised phenomenon and it is no wonder that the media has a profitable symbiotic relationship with it. Sport is used to sell newspapers, magazines, boost television ratings and attract sponsors. At the same time sport coverage serves to attract people to sporting events, to create interest in sport and to increase the demand for sport. The relationship between sport and the media is the defining commercial connection for both industries at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The media has transformed sport from an amateur pursuit into a hyper-commercialised industry, while sport has delivered massive audiences and advertising revenues to the media.

Many media scholars and institutes have looked at media's coverage of women in sport including George, Hartley and Paris (2001), the DSRC<sup>4</sup> (2007); and FEPSAC<sup>5</sup> (1998). This study looks specifically at the print media's coverage of women in sport from a South African perspective and addresses the influence of the print media in shaping public opinion.

According to Roberts (1993) research was conducted in South Africa on media's coverage of women's sport in the hope of moving towards empowerment of female athletes. The Sports Information and Science Agency (SISA), an initiative of the South African Sports Commission, (SASC) conducted the research in 1997. As part of the study respondents were asked to indicate how they felt about the amount of coverage given in the major newspapers and on television to sports dominated by women. According to SISA (1997:66) the study found that 80% of women felt that there was not enough coverage of women dominated sports on television. Major newspapers fare little better, with 70% of women feeling that not enough coverage of women's sports was given. SISA (1997:67) states "All groups felt that not enough coverage is given to women's sports. Women participating in sport feel more negative about the coverage given to women's sport than those not doing any sport."

There are many great sportswomen and some of them are at the height of their own sport, yet we hear little about their achievements. There are many women around the country actively engaged in regular sporting activity, yet they receive little public encouragement and media coverage. Just as the participation of men has been nurtured and developed through support and popular media images of men in sport, so it should be for women. South

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<sup>4</sup> DSCR – Dublin Sports and Recreation Council

<sup>5</sup> FEPSAC - European Federation of Sport Psychology or Fédération Européenne de Psychologie des Sports et des Activités Corporelles

Africa has a national women's soccer team Banyana Banyana that participates in numerous tournaments throughout the year, however we hardly ever hear of them. The under-reporting of women in sport is a tragic undervaluing of the sacrifices, dedication and extraordinary talent of South Africa's exceptional sportswomen.

Jacobs (2002:1) provides this example of a quotation that appeared in a 1971 *Sports Illustrated* article: "A cool braided California blonde...her perfectly tanned, well-formed legs swinging jauntily. The hair on her arms was bleached absolutely white against a milk-chocolate tan. Her platinum hair pulled smartly back in a Viking modern braid..." This description seems like a description of a movie star or a romance novel heroine, however it's a description of a professional golfer, Laura Baugh. According to Jacobs (2002:1) in 1983, a *World Tennis* article described professional tennis player Andrea Temesvari as 'tennis' latest sex symbol,' with brightly polished fingernails and 'magically dancing blue eyes.' Society's notions about athletic women are reflected in the media's treatment of women's sporting events. Jacobs (2002:1) states "male athletes, however, are judged on their performance, not their looks so coverage often emphasises the aesthetics of women's spoils but the athletics of men's events." This study will look at whether *The Independent on Saturday's* coverage of sport has parallels to Jacob's statement.

According to George, Hatley and Paris (2001:1) throughout the years, society has sought to legitimise the argument that sport is the 'natural' domain of men due to the innately different biological and psychological natures of men and women. Sport to a certain extent has historically been seen as a male domain. Harris (in George, Hatley and Paris, 2001:1) states, "centuries of discrimination shaped by cultures and beliefs of a number of societies has deemed it 'unladylike' for women to partake in numerous physical activities." This view has been entrenched in societies for centuries throughout the world.

Koivula (1999:1) states, "Male athletes are generally represented in a favourable vein as manly, strong mentally, physically, and forceful. Women athletes are instead presented according to cultural stereotypes, which associate femininity with weakness, dependency, emotion and submissiveness". According to Berger (2000:282) stereotypes are,

Commonly held, simplistic, and inaccurate group portraits of categories of people. These stereotypes can be positive, negative or mixed but generally they are negative in nature. Stereotyping always involves making gross overgeneralisations. They serve as mechanisms of social control.

Koivula (1999:1) adds that women are often framed in terms of their social position, for example, as girlfriends, wives, or mothers. Meanwhile, Hartley (1982:12) emphasises the way in which language can play a part in structuring and controlling our world: "Language is also a form of social control, because people generally voluntarily submit to its rules and conventions. It is also through language that we learn to accept the social force and institutions around us as natural."

According to Bernstein (2002:1) as a point of illustration: During Wimbledon 2000 there were twenty pictures of Anna Kournikova in British newspapers for every one of the singles finalist Lindsay Davenport. The amount and type of coverage Kournikova gains does not correlate with her tennis achievements. The extensive media attention to the blonde, model-looking Kournikova - also dubbed tennis' pinup girl - clearly shows the importance that at least certain branches of the media ascribe to looks and image over tennis skills. Bernstein (2002:1) states that one web-based writer put it as follows: the Anna Kournikova phenomenon proves you don't need to win tournaments to get your name - and photo in the media.

Moreover, Bernstein (2002:1) provides an example of an introduction to an eight page spread of Hello! Magazine featuring Kournikova. Bernstein (2002:1) states that the journalist reported: 'the waist-length flaxen hair,

endless legs, smooth tan and metallic silver-blue eyes have undoubtedly helped her into the celebrity stratosphere.’ According to Bernstein (2002:1) in a 2001 issue of the same magazine paparazzi photos of the sun-bathing Kournikova were accompanied by statements like: ‘Tennis heart-throb Anna Kournikova, whose stunning looks have launched thousands of websites and sold millions of bras and Adidas trainers, was topping up her tan recently at her 3 million pounds Miami mansion.’ These media statements undoubtedly have the ability to influence society's attitude towards female sport players.

In addition to Anna Kornikova and Maria Sharapova, it must be noted that there is clearly no under-reporting for some women athletes like former world class athlete Marion Jones. However, it is worth considering her coverage in the American media prior to the 2000 Sydney Games in which she planned on winning five gold medals. According to Bernstein (2002:1) a British journalist put it as follows: “From the beginning, Jones did not dare to suggest, wish, or hope she might win five medals. She declared it a certainty.” Bernstein (2002:1) states the journalist writing prior to the Games included in her report:

Jones is too much. She is too boastful, too assertive, too cocksure she will bring home the gold. In short, she is displaying character traits Americans ascribe to male athletes. But in men the chest- thumping is admired. In women, it is shocking and has led to Jones being called arrogant, pretentious, and a certain word that rhymes with rich.

In addition to these offensive descriptions it must be noted that physically, Jones is not frail or model-like-thin, she is visibly strong and muscular which has long been viewed as being unfeminine. According to Bernstein (2002) it should come as no surprise that in the US in the media build-up towards the Sydney Games, the most photographed female athlete was not Marion Jones but Amy Acuff, a 6 foot 2 inch blonde, part-time model high jumper whose ambition, as it was reported, was not to win an Olympic gold medal but to work on the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition: ‘Because people get a lot of attention for that.’ Although Jones certainly attracted much media attention

prior to, and during the Sydney Games, this pre-Games bias is yet another example of the fact that female athletes tend to gain media attention - at least as far as photographs are concerned - for what they look like and not necessarily for their sporting achievements.

Bryson (1994:54) states that a survey of media coverage in Australia revealed that in 1980 only 2% of sports reporting in major city newspapers was devoted to women's sport. In 1984 that figure decreased to 1.3%. Studies dealing with different types of broadcast media show conclusively that female athletes have been under-represented. According to Bryson (1994:54) in 1980 Australian television devoted 200 hours of coverage to sport during the survey period. Of this total only five minutes were given to women's sport.

In 1934 the first women's cricket test was played in Brisbane between Australia and England. Betty Archerdale led the Australian team. The teams toured all states to huge crowds, ensuring that the Australian women who had organised the match made a handsome profit. In recognition of community interest in the game, public holidays were declared wherever the Australians and English played country matches. Despite this, Brisbane's *Courier-Mail* reported the match under the heading "*No Powder-Puffs at Play.*" According to Appleton (2003:1)

The two umpires seemed quite lonely among so many bright young ladies who tripped like sylphs across the brilliant green oval...If the girls lacked the strength of the men players, the spectators found compensation in their graceful bearing and willowy movements. Figures flying across the green after the ball, as if swept by a stiff breeze denoted great resilience, and the upright poses of the fair ones knocked out all the unpleasant arguments associated with bodyline.

In the above quotation the words 'graceful' and 'willowy movements' undervalues women's cricket and focuses on the sportswomen's femininity rather than their talent. Furthermore, in this article the women are referred to

as 'girls.' However in coverage of men in sport, men are not referred to as 'boys' but as 'men'. According to Dunstan (1973:1, in Hill, Galligan and Mangan, 2007:121) "Sport is the ultimate Australian super-religion, the one thing every Australian believes in passionately." The media - by their use of the language and the way in which they depict, or report news about women - are the most insidious and powerful force for creating and maintaining attitudes in society. Dunstan (1973:2), in Hill, Galligan and Mangan, 2007:121) states, "Within language, male experience is the 'norm', and woman is the 'other' against which the norm is defined. As 'other', woman is always both in a subordinate and negative position." For example, '*A mother on the run*' was the caption for Sandra Best, 1985 winner of Brisbane's Moreton Bay Marathon. This patronising caption plays down the athlete's truly marathon effort. Furthermore, this story was placed in the leisure section rather than the sports pages. Appleton (2003:1) states that obviously her run did not rank in comparison to other male sporting endeavours.

Alexander (in Adams and Tuggle, 2004:239) states:

Stereotypes suggesting women should be graceful and glamorous and avoid sports involving contact and sweat are reinforced by the media – the message is clear: female athletes are second-rate, female sport is of little importance and society accepts only certain sports for female competitors.

According to FEPSAC (1998:1) the last few decades have shown a rise in levels of participation in new and existing areas of sport. Many sports have been and still are 'gender stereotyped' – that is they are commonly held to be more appropriate for one or other gender. Media reinforces the myths surrounding women's participation in sport in their concentration on mainly 'feminine' sports such as figure skating and gymnastics. South African women in sport - particularly the South African netball team, have excelled over the last decade, however their achievements are seldom heard of.

Robinson (in George, Hatley and Paris, 2001) states that although both men and women participate in sport, the male voice remains the dominant force as sports journalism is predominantly male. The paucity of coverage afforded to women in sport stems from the belief that sport is just for men. This is affirmed by Jones (2006) and George, Hatley and Paris's (2001) studies that highlight that no matter which countries and events are studied, the results consistently show that women's sport is relatively under-represented in the sport media and framed as less exciting and newsworthy than men's sport.

The unfair coverage of women's sport displays gender based attitudes which systematically disadvantage women's position in society. Women's participation in sport has grown dramatically but despite this growth coverage of women in sport remains inferior to that given to male sport across all media. Duncan, Messner, and Williams (in Fink, 1998:37) found that women's sport received only 5% of television air-time while men's sport received 92%. These authors also found that articles devoted totally to men's sports received 28.8 times as many column inches than those devoted to women's sport. According to Tuchman (in Van Zoonen, 1994:16) television symbolically annihilates women, and tells society women are not very important by showing an overwhelming majority of men in almost all kinds of television output. Tuchman (in Van Zoonen, 1994:16) adds "Not only does television tell us that women don't matter very much except as housewives and mothers, but also it symbolically denigrates them by portraying them as incompetent, inferior and always subservient to men." Tuchman (in Van Zoonen, 1994:16) believes that the symbolic annihilation of women will endanger social development, for girls and mature women lack positive images on which to model their behaviour.

Kane and Greendorfer (in Fink, 1998:38) point to the extensive coverage given to Florence Griffith Joyner during the 1988 Olympics and how a great deal of attention was given to her long, elaborately painted nails, her one-



legged running suits and extravagant make-up: The important point of this portrayal is to note how accommodation and resistance have occurred simultaneously. According to Fink (1998:38) Joyner's presence on the covers acknowledges that societal change has taken place; yet the specific type of portrayal indicated resistance to fundamental social change because she is primarily linked to her 'appropriate' role as a female, not athlete.

It is evident that the responsibility for the text (content) is inherent in the very nature of media reporting, and that the selection process is critical as the mass media has become one of the most powerful institutional forces for shaping values and attitudes in contemporary society. It is not only the depicting of an event, but also the interpretation of that event that is crucial for the shaping of perceptions, attitudes and values. Women are in need of and rely on the media to sustain and maintain promotions of gender equality and to prevent the stereotyping of sports women.

Duncan and Messer (1998:170) claim that sport in the twentieth century has given men an arena in which to create and reinforce an ideology of male supremacy; "By excluding women from this arena and by making athleticism virtually synonymous with masculinity, sport provides opportunities for men to assert their dominance at a time when male hegemony is continuously being challenged and opposed in everyday life."

A 2002 Southern African Gender and Media Baseline Study analysed 25,100 news items printed and broadcast during September 2002 by 116 media in 12 Southern African countries: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. According to Gender Links (2003) the findings of this study indicate that the southern African media give very little space to the views of women, and, when it comes to subjects such as sport, politics, economy or agriculture - their voice is virtually unheard. The Media Monitoring Project (MMP: 1999) findings in relation to gender representation in media has

shown that news tends to be constructed for a male audience, thus portraying limited representation of women in all sectors of society.

The quantity as well as the quality of engendered coverage presented by the media has been, and remains a cause for concern. According to Women's Sport Foundation (2007:1) an evaluation of seven newspapers measuring the number of articles, headlines, female journalists and use of imagery, demonstrated that in 2006 the average space dedicated to women's and girls' sport was 4.8%, and only 5.2% of all articles were devoted to female sports. In the African continent, specifically in South Africa, the researching of print media as a function to gender construction still warrants deeper research. This further reinforces the need to explore the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport.

According to Miller (1975:52) a study of photographs from the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Post*, found that the sports section in each newspaper devoted a significantly smaller percentage of photographs to women than the other sections of the papers and that male photographs dominated the sports section. A study by Rintala and Birrell (1984:231) shows that only 15% of all newspaper sports coverage was about female athletes. This reaffirms that female athletes are clearly under-represented in the media.

Shifflett and Revelle (in Duncan and Messner, 1998:172) states that even a review of selected issues of the *NCAA News*, a publication that serves those associated with both men's and women's sports, found that women were under-represented in articles and photographs. These authors affirm that in some cases issues of this publication devoted less than 10% of written coverage to female athletes and women's sports. Duncan and Messner (1998:172) wrote that the 1991 Amateur Athletic Foundation (AAF) newspaper study also showed disproportionate space given to men's sports:

Stories focusing exclusively on men's sports outnumbered stories addressing only women's sports by a ratio of 23 to 1 and front-page stories covering only women's sports were even more scarce, comprising 3.2% of page one articles, compared to 85.3% devoted exclusively to men's coverage. 92.3% of all photographs were pictures of men.

When the concept of journalistic objectivity was questioned in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it did not imply that journalists are free of bias. Objectivity is "not being influenced by personal feelings or opinions." Mencher (1991:46) states the term objectivity was applied to the method journalists use to test information and provide their audiences with a transparent look at evidence they gather. According to 'Nieman Reports' (1999:54) at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University, this method of reporting was developed precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work. Discussions about objectivity evolved in the pages of Nieman Reports. Nieman fellow John L. Hulteng writes about his concern that reporters, by interpreting events rather than strictly reporting them, are crossing the line into what he believed is the purview of editorial writers. "If we make it official policy to spice our whole news report with gobbets of opinion in the guise of background facts, we can't expect reader's trust to hold up," he cautioned. He emphasises that reporters need to stick to reporting the facts and steer clear of giving an opinionated version of the story.

In 1970, Severeid notes in the Nieman Reports that journalists were arguing, "even the quest for objectivity is a myth, that the prime purpose of the press is not to report the world but to reform it, and in the direction of their ideas." Writing a commentary, Taflinger (1996:5) reaffirms that objectivity is a myth because the world is a subjective construct unique to each person, and it isn't possible for there to be an objective discussion of the world or the events that take place in it. What is possible according to Taflinger is for people to describe the world they have created on the basis of what they have perceived. However Taflinger (1996:5) acknowledges that the often

stated and highly desired goal of contemporary journalism is objectivity, which is the detached and unprejudiced gathering and dissemination of news and information. Taflinger (1996:2) claims "Such objectivity can allow people to arrive at decisions about the world and events occurring in it without the journalist's subjective views influencing the acceptance or rejection of information". Granting that a sense of objective reality is not possible, how much less possible is objectivity when reporting the news?

According to Mason (2000:4) sport has become a media commodity and an important, even critical part of the content being delivered to the readership/viewership. In fact the relationship is quite complex since an argument can be made that the sports pages create as well as sustain the fan interest, which, in turn, requires regular feeding in the form of an endless stream of stories, snippets, photos and statistics. However Mason, points out clear distinctions between journalism and sports journalism. Mason (2000:4) believes that journalism and sports journalism are two separate areas of media work, which demonstrate, to a certain degree, incompatible values, work cultures and professional outlooks. He states that these differences impact significantly on news production, content selection and the place of objectivity in journalism. Mencher (1991:458) also highlights two major differences between sports reporting and other coverage.

One is that sports reporters are generally closer to the people they write about, often travelling with them and being around them on a regular basis. The other is that sports reporters are generally allowed more latitude in expressing their opinion.

Mencher (1991:459) states that there is almost always room in the game story for why the reporter thinks the winner won and the loser lost as well as who, what, when and where, but these factors can have both a good and a bad effect. Mencher (1991:459) puts it as follows:

If you are around a group of people a lot, you are going to learn a great deal about them and this can only help your

reporting yet your control must not – play favourites in your coverage even while you are expressing your opinion. You must guard against letting your prejudices show.

Mencher reaffirms that the nature of sports writing and commentary differs from traditional news reporting and hence, can include making subjective and interpretive statements. He believes the corporate universe establishes the context of modern sports journalism, but this does not go the entire way towards explaining why or even if, 'sports journalism' is a contradiction in terms. Mason (2000:8) believes that sports journalism is a contradiction in terms precisely because of the wider accepted journalistic qualities or fairness and balance. However Mason (2000:2) claims:

Other critics are adamant that the field of "journalism... is essentially ideological – a communicative vehicle for the transmission to the audience (intentionally or otherwise) not just of facts but of the assumptions, attitudes, beliefs and values of its maker(s), drawn from and expressive of a particular world-view.

According to Greer (1999:134) many people see sports writing as a form of writing all on its own. Greer (1999:134) notes that, "Sports writing is simply a combination of news and feature writing about sport". Sports journalism is ideological and reflects power relations in society. Mason (2000:5) says no matter what the distinction between sports journalism and journalism the ideals of a pluralistic, liberal democratic society are embodied in mainstream journalistic values of political neutrality, objectivity and balance. Sports readers also expect an application of the traditional news values of objectivity, fairness and accuracy in sports journalism. Taflinger (1996:7) emphasizes, "If reporters are aware that their world-view is a component of the news, then reporters, if they are ethical in a sense that most people will accept, will consciously minimise the impact of subjectivity." They will not accept, but allow for and consider that no one person's world-view is the only reality. Taflinger (1996:15) states that reporters must examine their work to be sure that prejudice, bias and a personal world-view is not the one that

dominates in gathering, preparing and disseminating the news. Likewise, readers of *The Independent on Saturday* deserve an accurate and objective portrayal of women in sport.

Media need to acknowledge, promote and celebrate the wealth of talent that there is to be enjoyed by society. Women in sport have historically struggled for recognition of their achievements and under-reporting women's sporting achievements limits progress towards gender equality in our country. The print media has a fundamental role to play in shaping public opinion and undoubtedly have an influence in portraying women in sport in South Africa. Based on this, the study sets out to critically analyse the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport. It does so by using *The Independent on Saturday* as a primary unit for evaluation for this study. The next section provides an overview of *The Independent on Saturday*.

### **2.3 The Independent on Saturday**

*The Independent on Saturday* is a weekend newspaper and forms part of the Independent Newspaper group. The Independent Newspaper group is one of the four largest publishing groups in South Africa. *The Independent on Saturday* serves as the primary unit for evaluation in this study.

It is important to look at the background of the Independent Newspaper group in relation to the South African media landscape. Independent Newspapers is the only foreign owned media company in South Africa and is owned by Irish businessman Tony O'Reilly.

*The Independent on Saturday* was launched on April 18, 1998 to replace The Saturday Paper. According to Fourie (2001:130) monopolisation of the newspaper market in the United States started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and reached its zenith in the eighties, a phenomenon that was reflected in Britain

and Europe at the same time. Not only were media conglomerates buying up large shares of the market, they were also doing this in foreign countries.

According to Fourie (2001:65) Irish media mogul Tony O' Reilly who has stakes in media groups around the world – bought shares in the Argus group now known as Independent Newspapers. Argus was then South Africa's major newspaper group. According to MDDA (2008:30) the group sold more than 50% of all daily newspapers in the country in the 1990s.

According to the MDDA (2008) more than five million newspapers are sold daily in South Africa. MDDA (2008:60) states that Independent Newspapers currently owns 35 titles and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Independent News and Media (South Africa) limited. This further highlights that *Independent Newspapers* is one of the dominating players in the media industry in South Africa. MDDA (2008:31) states that the group enjoys aggregate weekly sales of 2.8 million copies, reaches about 63% of English newspaper readers and receives about 48% of total advertising spend in the paid newspaper market.

According to the MDDA (2008:8)

We should be deeply concerned about the increasing concentration of media production and distribution in the hands of a few minorities. The effect of such lack of diversity in media may result in narrow opinions and contents, impeding in creativity and an imbalanced distribution of information to the society.

The above quotation points to the fact that concentrated media ownership can powerfully impact on shaping public opinion. Independent Newspapers publish 14 daily and weekly newspapers in South Africa's three major metropolitan areas. MDDA (2008:30-31) states that the dailies include *The Star*, *The Cape Argus*, *Isolezwe*, *Cape Times*, *Daily News*, *The Mercury*, *Pretoria News*, *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, *Business Report* and *Daily Voice*

and weekend newspapers include the *Sunday Tribune*, *Sunday Independent*, *The Independent on Saturday* and the *Post* published on Wednesdays and Fridays.

According to Rafiq Rohan the editor of *The Independent on Saturday* (2009), *The Independent on Saturday* is an authoritative, controversial and fiercely independent weekend newspaper which caters for all the people of KwaZulu-Natal who are emerging into, and who are established in, the top-end sectors of the market (LSM 6-10)<sup>6</sup>. He affirms that the newspaper features hard news, discussion pages, a comprehensive leisure component, sports coverage and a personal finance section.

According to Rohan in *The Independent on Saturday* (2009) the newspaper has carved itself a special place in the hearts of readers' in Kwa-Zulu Natal and the target market of the newspaper is focused under 50 years; 60/40, male/female; non racial; urban focus; innovative; progressive and extroverted; young minded. Rohan maintains that the newspaper fulfils readers Saturday needs and among their regular columnists are the controversial William Saunderson-Meyer and Mike Shafto. According to MDDA (2008:148) the newspaper's circulation is 60 568 and has a readership of 205 000. Rohan (2009) further states that since its launch, the newspaper has had phenomenal advertising support from the province's

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<sup>6</sup> LSM – Living Standard Measurement – A widely used marketing research tool in Southern Africa. It divides the population into 10 LSM groups, 10 (highest) to 1 (lowest). Previously eight groups were used but this changed in 2001 when the new SAARF Universal LSM consisting of 10 groups was introduced. SAARF stands for South African Advertising Research Foundation and the SAARF LSM is a unique means of segmenting the South African market. It cuts across race and other outmoded techniques of categorising people and instead groups people according to their living standards using criteria such as degree of urbanisation.



business community which has benefited immeasurably from placing advertisements in the paper.

According to Media Report (2007:26) *The Independent on Saturday* is entertaining, informative and sporty, it's the most popular, must-read Saturday newspaper in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Clyde Bawden the 2007 editor of the newspaper, in Media Report (2007:27) states, "entertainment and sport are important parts of the weekend and naturally comprise an important ingredient of our mix, and coverage of sport is mainly focused on previews and columns – by some of the country's top columnists." Media Report (2007:27) further reveals that 71% of readers read at least 4 out of 6 editions of *The Independent on Saturday*. According to MDDA (2008:148) *The Independent on Saturday's* readership is 47% Indian, 33% White and 15% Black.

Rohan in *The Independent on Saturday* (2009) states that the newspaper also makes sure it has the weekend sport in the province and the county covered, with particular focus on cricket, soccer and rugby - there is also a horse racing page as well as a people 'paparazzi' page. Further to this Bawden (in Media Report, 2007:27) states major features are the *Independent Football on Saturday* - a four page special which takes an in depth look at soccer. This indicates that most of the content of sport coverage at *The Independent on Saturday* focuses on male dominated sport. A number of studies such as Pretorius (1999) and DSRC (2007) have indicated that a huge proportion of television time and newspaper inches are taken up with reporting men's sport and with discussing male sports personalities and that the coverage of female sport differs in terms of the type of content and the allocation of space from male sport. This disproportionate coverage would then influence the way women are portrayed in the media. This study therefore sets out to analyse the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport and in doing so the above section has provided a

background to *The Independent on Saturday* which serves as the primary unit for evaluation.

To provide a theoretical underpinning for this study, the next section examines the dominant theories such as normative theories, agenda setting theory, diffusion of innovation and social expectation theory that address media's impact on public opinion. In doing so it will provide a theoretical base in order to evaluate how the media shape public opinion in terms of women in sport. The study also looks at Feminist Media theory which lends a gendered inflection to this study.

## **2.4 Normative Theories**

Normative theories and Media Effects theories are the dominant theories that address the media's impact on public opinion. The researcher acknowledges that there are many more theoretical perspectives and themes that can be identified, but uses the dominant theories below as a means to discuss the literature.

Theory and research about the functions and the role of the press in society is known as normative theories. Normative theories also look at ideal views (from different perspectives and within different conditions) about the role of the press in society and what the press can do and what the press ought to be doing.

According to McQuail (2000:8) normative theories are concerned with examining or prescribing how media ought to operate if certain social values are to be observed or attained. Although normative theories refer to the press it also applies to other media. McQuail (2000:8) states, "Normative theory is important because it plays a part in shaping and legitimating media institutions and has considerable influence on the expectations concerning

the media that are held by other social agencies and by the media's own audiences".

According to Oosthuizen (2002:15) normative theories are the result of and culminated in, the making of policy for the media in different societies in that they led to a greater or lesser degree of implicit and explicit control. Normative theories represent an effort by communication science to classify the public philosophies of communication.

White (in Oosthuizen, 2002:15) explains,

Different sets of legal prescriptions, public policy and professional ethics have emanated from such philosophies. These normative theories represent one way of classifying media systems; another is to focus on media performance norms – the public communication values through which the media are held accountable to the public interest in democracies.

According to McQuail (2000:8) a society's normative theories concerning its own media are usually found in laws, regulations, media policies, codes of ethics and the substance of public debate<sup>7</sup>. Norms are general rules that are understood and followed by all members of a group. They cover many activities, from simple rituals such as what to do when answering a

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<sup>7</sup> In South Africa these laws, regulations, media policies and codes of ethics are often guided by organisations such as ICASA – Independent Communication Authority of South Africa which is responsible for developing regulations and policies and regulating the telecommunications and broadcasting industries in the public interest to ensure affordable services of a high quality for all South Africans, PMSA – Print Media South Africa – represents over 700 newspaper and magazine titles in South Africa. PMSA represents all the titles of South Africa's four major publishing groups – Avusa, Independent News and Media (South Africa) (PTY) Ltd, Media 24 Ltd and Caxton and CTP Publishers and Printers Ltd. Journalists are also guided by the Code of Conduct of the South African Union of Journalists.

telephone. Irrespective of whether they pertain to trivial or serious forms of action and whether they are informal or formal, norms are general rules that presumably apply to all members of a given group, community or society. Behaviour within group settings requires that people have internal, that is acquired 'maps' of these norms, which can be very subtle and complex - if they are to interact smoothly with others within the bounds of accepted conduct.

Behaviour in terms of this study refers to how the media can be seen as a major source of pervasive influence. As stated by the MDDA (2008) five million newspapers are sold daily in South Africa alone. All over the world, billions of people, in one way or the other, have access to information through the media. It is widely accepted that what we know about, think about and believe about what happens in the world is to a degree shaped by how these occurrences or events are reported in newspapers and communicated through radio and television. The media can and often does decide on what is reported, and these stories, in whole or part are assimilated and accommodated into the emotional fabric and cognitive structures of individual readers and viewers. How the media chooses to report and to comment on those events and issues will also have an impact too and will inevitably influence the thinking of many.

If the media focus their attention on sport played by men and continuously play down the sporting ability of women by trivialising their sport, these patterns may become internalised and accepted by the public as the norm. The mass media are a major source of patterned social expectations about the social organisation of specific groups in modern society. That is, in their content they describe or portray the norms, roles, ranking and sanctions of every kind of group known in contemporary social life.

According to Lim and Hussein (1999) mass media define various events in society not simply by presenting the objective reality but rather through their

interpretation of the events. Therefore if sport is reported unfairly, and from a male perspective regularly, the public may tend to start believing that sport is a male domain. Adoni and Mane (1984) further state, the reality presented by the media is a socially constructed one, a symbolic social reality. The next section will look at the social responsibility theory and how the media has a responsibility to society.

A critical question that emerges from Andoni and Mane's statement is how free is the media, when fifteen years into South Africa's new democracy it is still unrepresentative of the people whom it serves? This was one of the questions posed by "Glass Ceiling Two: An Audit of Women and Men in South African newsrooms" - a project of the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF). According to Morne (2008:1) the first phase of the study 'Glass Ceiling One' found that despite having a South African constitution that entrenches equal rights, "discriminatory practices, structural inequalities, cultural factors, prejudices, patriarchy and sexism are still alive and well in our South African newsrooms."

Morne (2008:1) states that while there are now roughly equal proportions of women and men in the editorial divisions of newsrooms, women dominate the presenter and lowest paying administrative categories while men make up 86 percent of the better paid technical category. However, many South African journalists affirm that there are huge disparities in the number of male and females in management positions in the country's newsrooms. According to Odayan (2009) and Chetty (2009) senior positions at Independent Newspapers are dominated by men. Morne (2008:1) states

Male journalists dominate in all of the hard beats - such as politics, economics, investigative reporting, crime and sport - in which promotion chances are better, while women journalists predominate in the "soft" entertainment, education and general reporting categories.

Women journalists are also often sidelined. According to Gender Links (2003) they are however, given more exposure than men in reporting on subjects that have to do with the body, home and beauty. According to UNESCO (2003) "It is in television that they find the best professional opportunities - essentially as presenters - but they are only employed for a limited time, because in that part of the world it is uncommon to see women working beyond the age of 50 in any media".

UNESCO (2003) states that this figure is slightly less than the 18% obtained in 2000 by the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) in its study 'Who Makes the News,' in which the group monitored 16,000 news items published in 70 countries during one day. The study revealed that representation of women working in the print media is also poor: only 22% of the journalists who write news are women.

UNESCO (2003) elucidates,

In most of the southern African countries, women are primarily identified as wives, sisters or mothers, unlike men who are rarely described as husbands, brothers or fathers. When their jobs put them in the public eye, men are able to 'shed' their private lives; women, in contrast, are split between their private and public lives, and are expected to always carry their private identities with them.

The above statement clearly highlights the unequal treatment of men and women. Morne (2008) maintains that while governments in Southern Africa have committed themselves to achieving gender parity in all areas of decision making by 2015, none of the media houses in the South African study could point to specific targets for ensuring gender equality.

On 22 April 2009 South Africa held its fifth democratic elections. According to Government Communication and Information System – GCIS<sup>8</sup> (2009) fourteen Ministers and 11 Deputy Ministers are women, putting the representation of women in the new Cabinet at almost 40%. Judged by these measures, the media has lagged behind tremendously.

GCIS (2009) states that this increase in the number of women in parliament places South Africa third in the global women in Parliament rankings, behind Rwanda and Sweden. This puts the country firmly on course to achieve the Southern African Development Community (SADC) target of 50 percent women in political decision-making by 2015. Gender Links spokesperson Kubi Rama in GCIS (2009) maintains that the increase in women's representation in the National Assembly was the largest seen in South Africa since the first democratic election in 1994.

A frequently asked question by media practitioners and critics within the media fraternity is why the preoccupation with these numbers: What difference would more women media managers really make? One may ask whether increasing the number of female sports journalists will provide a more objective and fair coverage of the sporting achievements and ability of women. According to Women's Sport Foundation (2007), research suggests that if more women were involved in sports journalism this would result in better coverage of women in sport. Morne (2008:1) states that some media and gender activists agree that having more women decision-makers in newsrooms would not necessarily lead to more being written for and about women. However, 'Glass Ceiling Two' establishes a positive correlation between having women in senior and top management positions and hiring

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<sup>8</sup> To show its commitment to communication, the South African government instituted the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS). GCIS is primarily responsible for communication between Government and people.

higher numbers of women journalists to having more written about women in the media.

According to Morne (2008:1)

The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) in which South Africa participated in 2005 showed that women journalists are more likely to consult female opinion in their reporting (28 percent female sources) compared to their male counterparts (19 percent of female sources).

The media is seen by many as having a duty to lead by example in ensuring a level playing field in its backyard and in the content that it produces. Media and journalists have a huge obligation and responsibility to provide content that is fair and objective and likewise need to provide an accurate account of women in sport.

A critical question is why are women so inadequately represented in the sports pages of our country's newspapers? According to DSRC (2007) the most common explanation offered is that it is men who read the sports pages and therefore the material is tailored to suit their tastes in sport. However, freelance journalist at Independent Newspapers Odayan (2009) states that if we stick with that logic – nothing will change because women will not be interested in the sports pages as long as there is nothing there of interest to them – and the vicious cycle will continue.

It is accepted that selection is necessary in allocating coverage of sporting events because of space constraints. Adams and Tuggle (2004:239) state that in the interest of maximising readership, media managers base such decisions on the perceived level of public interest and Belliotti in Adams and Tuggle (2004:239) affirms that it is assumed that there is greater interest in men's competition.

According to DSRC (2007) in 2004 in a column titled *An Irishman's Diary*,



Kevin Myers of the *Irish Times* argued that women are simply not good to justify more sport coverage. Myers column was in response to a complaint by Jimmy Deenihan about the way in which the Irish media cover women in sport. Deenihan in DSRC (2007) states that a lot of the time you would be hard pressed to find a female face in the sports pages. Myers' deeply sexist response in DSRC (2007:7) states 'we don't want to watch women playing sports because generally speaking they're not very good - they're small and they're weak and they're slow and watching an average woman throw an object is a deeply moving tragedy.' This statement clearly illustrates the sexist attitudes that are evident in society.

Meanwhile, Carolyn Byerly the United States principal investigator for the International Women's Media Federation (IWMF) had entrancing comments about women and the media at the 2008 gender and media summit held in Gauteng. According to Byerly in Bizcommunity (2008),

The absence of women in news stories globally, in public affairs and serious magazines and media's over sexualisation of women, and women's under-employment by media organizations all amount to a symbolic annihilation of women by media and should be stopped at all costs. I think there is no single answer to this dilemma. Increasing the number of women in media, changing policies and increasing public funding for media and the inclusion by media companies of gender policies and mechanisms to put them in place might help solve the problem and contribute to parity in media.

According to journalist Sikiti da Silva in Bizcommunity (2008) not everyone agreed with Byerly and some male practitioners interviewed by Bizcommunity.com, who declined to be named, said that many media organisations are reluctant to employ female journalists due to certain technical factors. Sikiti da Silva in Bizcommunity (2008:1) states "one of them said 'media is a tough job and not for sissies. I am not a sexist or a conservative person as I would like to see gender parity but I am just concerned about the not-so mentally tough attitude of our female colleagues

who often fail to get it right all the time.” The above quotation further reinforces the deeply sexist views that exist in society.

Normative theory is mainly concerned with the freedom of, or restrictions on, the newspaper industry in various situations and how this impacts on the functions of the press in society. In 1956 Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm developed four theories: the authoritarian theory; the libertarian theory; the social responsibility theory and the soviet communist theory. For the purpose of this study the researcher will look at the social responsibility theory as this theory addresses media's responsibility to society.

#### **2.4.1. Social Responsibility Theory**

In terms of the social responsibility theory and according to Roelofse, McQuail and Mundt (in Oosthuizen, 2002:42) the media should accept certain responsibilities towards society. These include setting professional standards for the supply of information and the truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance of their reporting; and they should apply self-regulation<sup>9</sup> within the framework of the law. O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005:465) define objectivity as perceiving, reporting, or presenting things from an impersonal, neutral, unbiased perspective.

Roelofse, McQuail and Mundt (in Oosthuizen, 2002:42) state that the media should collectively reflect a diversity<sup>10</sup> of content to ensure public access to a

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<sup>9</sup> Self-regulation – ethics and principles of professional conduct are adopted and controlled by journalists themselves.

<sup>10</sup> This dissertation also acknowledges that diversity is not only addressed in terms of gender but also factors such as race, class and political views. It further implies that journalists of varying races, sexes and class should be involved in creating media content.

variety of viewpoints and they should expect societal intervention if the media fail to meet professional standards. Further to this, diversity also implies that a variety of journalists including an increased number of female journalists should be involved in the creation and selection of content as this can be argued as a responsibility of the press. The emphasis on the social responsibility theory is self-control. Mundt (in Oosthuizen, 2002:42) state that the media are accountable to society and controlled by community opinion and consumer action. This brings to question objectivity of media's coverage of women in sport. Taflinger (1996:6) states objectivity is not a possible goal in human interaction, and that includes journalism. Taflinger (1996:6) maintains, as long as human beings gather and disseminate the news, then subjectivity will be the rule, not the exception.

Meanwhile Merrill develops further arguments against objectivity in journalism. According to Merrill (1990:272), selectivity introduces an element of subjectivity into reporting: "the reporter selects, and the selection of what to put into a story automatically subjectivises it, in a sense biasing and distorting the reality that the reporter is claiming to objectify in the report." As Merrill (1990:272) sees it, objectivity implies integral reproduction or representation of reality, an impossible goal he describes with irony:

Objective reporting is reporting that is detached, un-prejudiced, unbiased and omniscient and infallible. The objective report would in effect, match reality; it would tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. No reporter knows the truth; no reporter can write a story which can match reality, for... the "map is not the territory.

Merrill (1984:104) states the story is never what it purports to be; it is always much bigger than its verbal image. Merrill emphasises the different ways in which intervenes in journalism - which facts are reported, which questions are used, which individuals are interviewed, which viewpoints are presented, which aspects are shown – he also demonstrates the impossibility of any journalist to adequately report every element of the context of a story.

Furthermore according to media scholars McDonald (1971) and Merrill (1984) objectivity in journalism is impossible (or is at least very difficult to achieve in reality) because of the formal and material constraints affecting the press. McDonald (1971:77) claims that the nature and the respective forms of representation in the media – writing, sound and images – adversely affect their objectivity. Likewise, Merrill (1984:104) maintains that the techniques relative to these forms of representation or to the particularities of the publication and publicisation of the media is loaded with subjectivity and works against objectivity rather than promoting it. McDonald (1971:73) claims that the environmental conditions in which journalism is practised affect its objectivity: according to him, the working conditions of journalists, the news policies of the media, their commercial nature and their appetite for profit determine their approach to objectivity.

However, Gauthier (1991:4) in the paper 'In Defence of a Supposedly Outdated Notion: The Range of Application of Journalistic Objectivity' defends the concept of objectivity. Although there are a certain number of external constraints affecting reporting due to the different media and their different modes of representation and due to the conditions of the practice of journalism, Gauthier (1991:7) reaffirms that these factors do not imply that objectivity is impossible.

It could sometimes be hampered, but objectivity is still a possibility, both in theory and in reality. Potentially, an article is no more or less objective according to the type of medium it uses – newspapers or radio is no more objective than television, for instance. And writing, sounds or images, or even reporters' general working conditions, do not comprise in themselves a total barrier to objectivity in stories.

According to Mencher (1991:46), objectivity in reporting means that the story is free of the reporter's opinion or feelings, that it contains facts and that the account is by an impartial and independent observer. Mencher notes that stories are objective only when they can be checked against some kind of

record. According to McQuail (2000:172), objectivity is a particular form of media practice and also a particular attitude to the task of information collection, processing and dissemination. He states that the main features include adopting a position of detachment and neutrality towards the object of reporting. This means an absence of subjectivity or personal involvement. McQuail (2000:172) states that in objectivity there is a lack of partisanship – not taking sides in matters of dispute or showing bias. McQuail (2000:500) sums up objectivity as follows,

A theoretically contested term applied to news, although in common sense terms it sums up a number of the qualities that make for trust and reliability on the part of the news audience. These include factual accuracy, lack of bias, separation of fact from comment, transparency of sources, not taking sides.

According to Oosthuizen (1997:338) the average person is totally dependent on the media for most of its information. Therefore it must be presented in a fair and accurate manner. In many spheres of life we freely admit to being “influenced” – by parents, friends, educational institutions, colleagues and partners. According to Curran, and Gurevitch (1991:378) we can boast of this influence and be proud of it as a positive formative feature in making us who we are. However, to be “easily influenced” is not seen to be a good thing, indicating a sense of weakness in the boundaries separating the inner us from the outer world. Fauconnier (in Oosthuizen, 1997:338) defines information as, “The representation of facts without being coloured in any way by any personal attitude or interpretation by the communicator without any intentions to persuade.”

The ultimate question is whether journalism can be objective, and in order to answer this question one has to look at the journalist. According to Ferguson and Patten (1993:26) “The journalist’s job is to report, to even tell a story and they have a duty to do so without including their own bias or subjective opinion to their published work”. Inevitably however many journalists may let

a feeling that they have about an event be seen or felt clearly enough in their writing through the use of language. McDonald (1971:81) states, "This may or may not be done intentionally or may not even be done at all but this loophole for subjectivity does threaten journalism's claim to objectivity". McQuail believes there should be a separation of fact from opinion when reporting. According to McQuail (2000:173), the media themselves find that objectivity gives their own news product a higher and wider market value. McQuail (2000:174) puts it as follows:

Information should be objective in the sense of being accurate, honest, sufficiently complete, true to reality, reliable and separating fact from opinion. Information should be balanced and fair (impartial), reporting alternative perspectives in a non-sensational, unbiased way.

Is it actually possible to be objective? According to Greer (1999:19) a journalist can deal with this difficulty by interpreting events for the reader and giving as much background information to the story as possible. He says this does not mean that the journalist should mix news and opinion. Greer (1999:19) states, "Newspaper reports seldom get challenged for not being accurate or truthful. But readers have a right to truthful information and reporting, and being trustworthy to the reader is the basis of good journalism".

According to the Code of Conduct of the South African Union of Journalists (in Greer, 1999:25) "A journalist shall strive to ensure that the information he/she disseminates is fair and accurate, avoid the expression of comment and conjecture as established fact and falsification by distortion, selection or misrepresentation". News is required to be non-manipulative, but is it possible to achieve detachment in presenting the news in order to be objective? Greer (1999:26) states that "A journalist shall not originate material which encourages discrimination on the grounds of colour, sex, race, creed or sexual orientation".

According to McQuail (2000:150), a journalistic code of ethics refers to a set of principles of professional conduct that are adopted and controlled by journalists themselves. McQuail (2000:152) states that the most frequent principles in journalistic codes are “truthfulness of information; clarity of information; defence of the public’s rights; responsibilities in forming public opinion; standards of gathering and presenting information and respecting the integrity of the sources”.

In terms of the role of the media in society, this theory implores the media to support the democratic process, by providing a diversity of opinion by diverse people. The media are expected to avoid content that could in any way cause violence, crime or public disorder. According to Mundt (in Oosthuizen, 2002:42) the main purpose of the media would only include traditional functions – to inform and to educate – but also to support social progress. McQuail (2000:149) states,

A responsible press should provide a full, truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day’s events in a context which gives them meaning. It should serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism and be a common carrier of the public expression.

In social responsibility theory the media have obligations to society and media ownership is a public trust. News media should be truthful, accurate, fair and relevant and the media should be free but self-regulated. Therefore it can be argued that the media have an even greater responsibility to ensure that they are fair and unbiased. According to McQuail (2000:149), the media should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct. Likewise, when reporting about women in sport, media ought to give the due regard of the events and women’s sport should be given the coverage it deserves. Women in sport should not be sidelined and when coverage is afforded to women it should be reflective of their sporting abilities and not the stereotypical sexualised representations that are often presented to public.

Bias of women in sport in newspaper coverage can be seen through the selection, omission and placement of articles in a newspaper. In Chapter Four the researcher will investigate whether there is a bias in the reporting of women in sport in *The Independent on Saturday*.

One way media may sexualise women athletes is by focusing on their physical appearance. Schell (1999:1) maintains that in written texts, visual images, and spoken commentaries, women athletes are often portrayed as sexual objects available for male consumption rather than as competitive athletes. Under-representation and stereotypical portrayals of sportswomen in newspapers may instill in its news audiences the belief that women's sports are less powerful, less interesting and thus separate and different from men's sports. This will be investigated in this study with specific focus on the print media's influence in portraying women in sport.

Duncan (1990:22) states

Photographs tell stories. They are 'so much a part of our daily lives we rarely think about how they influence us and what that influence is'. Yet photographs, like other media images, can be used to legitimise the interests of hegemonic groups seeking to shape consensus or consent to existing social arrangements.

In addition to photographs used, the language used in an article can affect perception of the importance of an issue. According to O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005:65) language always carries some associations, connotations, or values with it.

Roland Barthes' seminal work on the semiotics of photographic images and language addresses the study of meanings of symbols of mass culture, media, advertising and fashion. In his early work he argued that literature like all forms of communication, is essentially a system of signs, as such he argued that it encodes various ideologies or 'myths' to be decoded in terms



of its own organizing principles or internal structures. The media, in representing women in this stereotypical manner reproduces patriarchal systems of women being seen as sex objects, mothers and caregivers. These portrayals are therefore not a true representation of the abilities of women in sport.

According to Rowe (1999:124) the quantity of images is only one aspect of power in the sports media; there is also the second issue raised by Kane and Greendorfer of their quality. Rowe writes that there are many other quantitative and qualitative studies that produce a starker contrast in the 'gendering' of sports photography. Stoddart (in Rowe, 1999:124) found that quantity was not the main problem, in that "photographs of sportswomen are plentiful in newspaper sport sections. However, representations are not necessarily about sport and frequently show women as passive rather than active participants." Duncan (in Rowe, 1999:124) in an analysis of 186 photographs from the 1984 and 1988 Olympic Games noted that the frequently close similarity of images in sport and in soft pornography. Curran and Gurevitch (1991:34) state that the media can contribute to change by portraying more women and men in non-traditional roles and by using non-sexist language.

Hargreaves (in Rowe, 1999:120) states "In newspapers and magazines, images of sportsmen in action proliferate, but we constantly see symbols of sportswomen's femininity (and particularly images that are saturated with sexuality), rather than pictures of female athleticism." Hargreaves (in Rowe, 1999:120) gave the following examples:

A female athlete posing with a male athlete where he has a dominant stance and she a submissive one; photographs of female athletes crying with elation or embraced by husbands or boyfriends; in situations and poses that have no apparent connection with sport; in domestic contexts; pregnant or with children; and

photographs of female athletes highlighting hairdos, make-up and clothing.

Becker (in Rowe, 1999:122) maintains, in newspapers, photographs have no meaning independent of their relationship to the words, graphic elements and other factors in the display, which surround and penetrate them. Rowe (1999:122) claims, "It is the action shot that is the staple of sports photography, reinforcing and conferring status on the elite sporting body by showing it doing the extraordinary things that many people admire and envy." Rowe states that research on sports photography has found that it is heavily gender biased in that we see sportsmen much more than sportswomen, and that they are often shown doing different things in a manner that confers greater prestige on male than on female athletes.

Crossman (in Duncan and Messner, 1998:172) states that the Toronto Globe and Mail, from July 1988 to June 1989, devoted 82% of the total space for articles, editorials and photographs to males and 6.3% of the total space to females. Studies indicate that young female athletes are abysmally under-represented in the media. Rintala and Birrell (1984:232) studied the photographs that appeared in the magazine *Young Athlete* and found that only 31% of all pictures showed female athletes, while only 9.2% of cover photographs featured females. Rintala and Birrell (1984:232) indicate in their magazine study that pictures of men featured more often than those of female athletes. Their study also indicates that cover photographs of men featured more often than of female athletes. Rintala and Birrell (1984:18) documented striking differences in portrayals of females and males in the magazine *Young Athlete*. According to Rintala and Birrell (1984:18) in every category – cover photographs, text, and inside photographs – there was far less representation of female athletes than male athletes.

In addition according to the *Daily News* (2007) in an article on the Comrades coverage was given to Elena and Oleysa Nurgalieva. The article states

*‘Zhirkova won the 2005 Comrades marathon in 5:59:50 beating the then hot favourite – twins Elena and Olesya Nurgalieva – in one of the most amazing races in recent years.’* The word hot has sexual connotations and can be seen to be derogatory as it denotes objectification of women.

The researcher will also examine the message conveyed about the story by the words and language chosen for the headlines and captions. Front page stories and news items that appear earlier in the newspaper is perceived as more important by both newspaper editors and the public. The importance of headlines cannot be underestimated as it is widely recognised that many readers will first scan a newspaper rather than read the entire newspaper. Often just the headline or first and second paragraph is read.

Social responsibility theory relates to this study in that it addresses media bias in reportage. In other words social responsibility theory implies that coverage of women in sport should not objectify women and should provide an accurate reflection of women in sport. This theory implores that those who write and edit articles have a heavy obligation to conform to acceptable, objective and unbiased standards regarding women in sport. Exponents of this theory attempt to reconcile the ideas of freedom and independence with responsibility towards society.

The above section looked at the normative theories of the press, specifically the social responsibility theory in order to evaluate how the media shape public opinion in terms of women in sport. In the following section the researcher will look at long term media effect theories that influence public opinion. There are many long term media effect theories including agenda-setting theory, social expectations theory, accumulation theory, spiral of silence theory and diffusion of innovation theory. The researcher will look specifically at agenda setting theory and social expectation theory as these illustrate the power and influence of media on society.

## **2.5 Media Effects Theories**

According to Fourie (2001:103) media effects theories started by focusing on the effect of the media on personal behaviour and then developed to a more holistic approach to the effects of the media on society and culture in general. It thus began with simplified assumptions about the power of the media and gradually developed into complex and multiple assumptions, saying a lot not only about the media, but about society and humanity as such.

According to Fourie (2001:237) the underlying assumption of long-term theories is that media do not have an immediate impact on behaviour and people's way of thinking, but can affect behaviour over a longer period of exposure to media content. There are many long term media effect theories including agenda-setting theory, modelling theory, social expectations theory, accumulation theory, spiral of silence theory, framing theory and diffusion of innovation theory.

For the purpose of this study the researcher will look specifically at agenda setting theory and social expectation theory. However the researcher will also make reference to the spiral of silence concept and accumulation theory which resonate with the agenda setting theory and social expectation theory.

### **2.5.1 Agenda Setting**

Among several theories about the effects of mass communication is the theory of agenda setting. The influence and the role of media cannot be disputed. Griffin (2000: 360-372) discusses agenda setting theory formulated by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972). According to this theory, the media does not tell the public what to think, but what to think about. They believe that the mass media has the ability to transfer the prominence of items on their news agendas to their public agenda. It is the ability of media

to direct thought processes and attention towards certain issues by the possible exclusion or scant coverage of others which seem to decide for media audiences what they should focus on. The agenda setting theory reaffirms the power of the press. This theory states that the mass media, simply by the fact of paying attention to some issues and neglecting others will have an effect on public opinion. This theory clearly relates to this study in that it refers to how media's coverage or lack of coverage of women in sport can impact on society and influence their perception of women in sport.

According to McQuail (2000:491)

Agenda setting is a process of media influence (intended or unintended) by which the relative importance of news events, issues or personages in the public mind is affected by the order of presentation (or relative salience) in news reports. It is assumed that the more the media attention, the greater the importance attributed by the news audience. The media influence is not on the direction of opinion, but only on what people think about.

In relation to this study, the quotation above refers to how concentrated media attention on sport played by men and a lack of focus on female athletes could lead to the trivialisation of female athletes. In other words, this theory explains that people will tend to know about those things, which the mass media deal with and adopt the order of priority assigned to different issues covered in the media. For example if the media focus their attention on sport played by men and continuously play down the sporting achievements of women, the public may tend to regard sport played by women as insignificant.

Rodgers and Dearing (in McQuail, 2000:456) concluded several generalisations about agenda setting:

Firstly, different media do tend to agree about the relative salience of a set of issues; secondly, media indicators do not closely match 'real world' indicators. It is not the absolute

significance of an issue that counts but the relative strength of forces and people trying to define and promote an issue. Finally the position of an issue on the media agenda importantly determines that issue's salience in the public agenda.

Rodgers and Dearing (in McQuail, 2000:456) claim that agenda setting is related to several other kinds of effects, including: the bandwagon effect, the spiral of silence, diffusion of news, and media gate-keeping. An important question is who sets the agenda for agenda setters. Media scholars such as Fourie (2001) and McQuail (2000) target major news editors or 'gatekeepers' who can open or close the 'gate' on a story. Each medium has its own set of gatekeepers. According to Straubhaar and La Rose (2003:49) in this regard newspapers, books and magazines have their own hierarchies of editors who swing the gate on new events and new ideas. Fourie (2001: 196) states gatekeeping can be defined as the process through which certain information passes a series of checkpoints before finally being accepted as news material.

Gatekeepers are the people or groups that have an impact on this process. They are part of the news organisation and their influence can also extend beyond the daily tasks of news identification, newsgathering and publication. Gatekeepers primarily decide what is going to appear and how it is going to appear in the media. Fourie (2001:197) states once gatekeepers have selected the news events that they want to publish, they allot varying amounts of space (in newspapers) or time (radio and television) to news items. This leads to emphasis or de-emphasis of news events. If they allot more space to an event it means they regard it as being more important. With regard to gatekeeping, Hiebert (1991:91) maintains that most media regulation starts internally, and that media's self censorship can often be more crucial than outside pressures.

Though gatekeeping is introduced by the media themselves, it also seriously influences the content of newspapers. Fourie (2001:197) affirms that the

primary effect of gatekeeping is that it changes the original message in some way. This implies that what readers read in a newspaper may be a distorted reflection of reality simply because it has passed through various 'editorial checkpoints' before being disseminated to the public.

On the issue of 'what' will be published or presented, gatekeeping could be regarded as essential. Most news media receive more news than allowed for in terms of space (newspaper) or time (radio and television). Only that which is regarded as the most important is selected and, in the process, that which is regarded to be of no value is left out. As a result, readers, viewers and listeners are presented with only part of daily reality. Further to this, readers get a 'constructed reality' determined by factors such as economic power and editorial alignment. It is important to look at the political and economic influences on the media. Contrary to the usual image of the press in the U.S.A as obstinate, ubiquitous and cantankerous in its search for truth, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) in their work depict how an underlying elite consensus largely structures all facets of the news. In their seminal work in critical media analysis entitled "Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media", these authors skillfully dissect the way in which the marketplace and the economics of publishing significantly shape the news – they reveal how issues are framed and topics chosen.

What emerges from their path-breaking work is an account of just how propagandist the mass media can be and how we can learn to read them and see their function in a new way. These authors affirm that the mass media, far from performing an autonomous and adversarial role in society, actively frame issues and promote news stories that serve the needs and concerns of the elite.

In *Manufacturing Consent* (1988), Herman and Chomsky provide a systematic 'propaganda model' to account for the behavior of the corporate news media in the United States. However their work can be applied to the

South African media landscape as well. According to Herman and McChesney (in Monthly Review, 1989:1-13) the authors preface their discussion of the propaganda model by noting their fundamental belief that the mass media "serve to mobilise support for the special interests that dominate the state and private support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity."

Herman and Chomsky (1988:3) provide a simple yet powerful model that explains how the media function to serve the large propaganda requirements of the elite and together and individually, they have written numerous articles and books which have chronicled the ways in which the media have actively promoted the agenda of the elite. In their propaganda model, Herman and Chomsky present a series of five 'filters' to account for why the dominant U.S. media invariably serve as propagandists for the interests of the elite. Herman and McChesney (in Monthly Review, 1989:2) states that only stories with a strong orientation to elite interests can pass through the five filters unobstructed and receive ample media attention. According to Herman and Chomsky (1988:3) these include:

1: the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant-mass media firms; 2: Advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; 3: The reliance of the media on information provided by government, business and experts funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; 4: 'Flak' as a means of disciplining the media; and 5: 'Anti-communism' as a national secular religion and control mechanism.

For the purpose of this study the researcher applies these five filters to the South African media context. The first filter that influences media content is that ownership of the media is highly concentrated among a few dozen of the largest for-profit corporations in the world. Many of these corporations have extensive holdings in other industries and nations. According to Herman and McChesney (in Monthly Review, 1989:2) objectively, their needs for profit severely influence the news operations and overall content of the media and



subjectively, there is a clear conflict of interest when the media system upon which self-government rests is controlled by a handful of corporations and operated in their self-interest. It is important to also consider that the challenge to provide fair and balanced media services is a huge issue in South Africa because media ownership is not broad based. MDDA (2008:19) maintains that this is in part due to great commercialisation, media not performing its role properly, which is not healthy for society. It can be argued that skewed ownership results in skewed media content and hence bias towards the few owners' opinion. MDDA (2008:20) states that this is so despite the purported editorial independence of journalists. One of the major challenges facing the South African media industry is that the ownership and control of media houses is skewed towards big corporations which have been operating for many years. MDDA (2008:8) states that despite various interventions through the promotion of transformation processes, majority of media in South Africa is still owned by few companies and individuals. In terms of this study the effect of a lack of diversity in media may result in narrow opinions and contents, resulting in imbalanced distribution of information on women in sport to the society.

The second filter is that of advertising, which is responsible for most of the media's income. Herman and Chomsky (1988:14-18) review much of the evidence concerning the numbing impact of commercialism upon media content. This filter relates to this study in that sport is a global commercialised phenomenon and the media has a profitable symbiotic relationship with it. Sport is used to sell newspapers and while media has transformed sport from an amateur pursuit into a hyper-commercialised industry, sport has delivered massive audiences and advertising revenues to the media.

The third filter according to Herman and Chomsky (1988:18-26) is that of sourcing, where "the mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of

interest". The media rely heavily upon news provided to them by corporate and government sources, which have themselves developed enormous bureaucracies to provide this material to the media. This is evident in the South African media context and these sources have often been said to have developed great expertise at "managing" the media. In effect, these bureaucracies subsidise the media and the media must be careful not to antagonise such an important supplier. This filter relates to whether the story is coming from government departments or other powerful players.

The fourth filter is 'Flak' as a means of disciplining the media. According to Herman and McChesney (in *Monthly Review*, 1989:3) it refers to the development of right-wing corporate "flak" producers such as Accuracy in Media to harass the mass media and to put pressure upon them to follow the corporate agenda. In other words Flak refers to if the story is covered can the subjects of it such as government and advertisers pose a real threat? In South Africa the government can be seen as a major producer of flak, regularly assailing, threatening and correcting the media. If flak is produced on a large scale this can become very uncomfortable and costly for the media.

The fifth and final filter is 'Anti-communism' as a national secular religion and control mechanism. This filter refers to anticommunist ideology and according to Herman and McChesney (in *Monthly Review*, 1989:3) anticommunism has been ingrained into acceptable journalistic practices in the United States, to the point that even in periods of "detente" it is fully appropriate and expected for journalists to frame issues in terms of "our side" versus the communist "bad guys." In relation to the South African context, this filter relates to whether the story justifies political manoeuvring and defined corporate interest around the world. The political economy of the news is an important concept when addressing factors that shape the news and frame selection of articles. Berger (2000:269) states that the agenda setting theory suggests that the institutions of mass communication do not

determine what we do but do determine what we think about. He maintains that in so doing, they set an agenda for our decision making and thus influence our social and political life.

In relation to this study, if the sporting achievements of women are not included in the sports pages of newspapers the public will not be aware of the accomplishments of women in sport. In terms of this study it can be argued that if media focus majority of their attention on sport played by men, the public may tend to think that sport played by women is trivial and sport is a male domain and in turn this would have an effect on public opinion.

In terms of how public opinion is formed, Lippmann (1922:174) argues that the public, and especially those exposed to media messages, do not respond to actual events, but to a pseudo-environment or the pictures in our heads. Explaining that the real world is far too complex for the ordinary person to handle, he said that people generalised and simplified reality. The relationship between this phenomenon and the role of the media was later described by McCombs and Shaw (1972:178) who state that here lies the most important effect of mass communication, its ability to mentally order and organise our world for us. In short, the media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about.

McCombs and Shaw (1972:178) regard the influence of the media to be concentrated on issues of salience and images in the mind of the public. They believe that audiences not only learn about public issues and other matters but also learn how much importance to attach to an issue. Thus, the media's under-reporting of women in sport may lead the public to believe that sport played by women is insignificant as compared to sport played by men. According to Oosthuizen (1997:42) in selecting and omitting items and issues for reporting, the basic social agenda is published; in the placement and arrangement of items, the relative value and importance of items are

underlined. Agenda setting occurs because of journalistic practice and the variables that influence this process include the nature of the available items as well as the type of news medium. The media sets the climate within which individual issues are perceived and evaluated.

Oosthuizen (1997:43) puts it as follows: "Since most newspapers are not neutral, and since readers habitually read those newspapers whose views tend to support their own beliefs, newspapers are in the position to influence readers gradually and over many years." This indicates that over time media has the power to influence public opinion and in relation to this study this theory refers to the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport.

In terms of the media's power, McCombs (1985:132) argues:

Audiences not only learn about public issues and other matters through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the mass media place upon it. This ability to affect cognitive change among individuals is one of the most important aspects of the power of mass communication. However there is consequently some uncertainty about whether agenda setting is initiated by the media or by the members of the public and their needs, or by institutional elites who act as sources for the media.

McCombs discusses the power of the media and the influence the media can have on individuals. While it is true that the media are not the only agents of influence in society this theory found solid practical evidence that the media do have an influence in society. This influence is often an important influence on the thinking, attitudes and opinions of their readers. However, Oosthuizen (1997:43) states that this influence could be argued to stem simply from the media's sensitivity to those social, economic and political issues, which are salient in the societies in which they operate.

According to McQuail (2000:462) the agenda setting theory also has affinities with the position of Noelle-Neumann (1974, 1984, 1991) and her concept of 'Spiral of Silence,' which has been developed and tested over a number of years. The theory purposes that in order to avoid isolation on important public issues, many people look to their environment for clues about what the dominant opinion is and which views are gaining strength or are in decline.

The assumptions of the theory according to McQuail (2000:462) are as follows:

Society threatens deviant individuals with isolation, individuals experience fear of isolation continuously, this fear of isolation causes individuals to try to assess the climate of opinion at all times and the result of the estimate affect their behaviour in public, specially their willingness or not to express opinions openly.

Waldahl (1989:125) claims that if one believes one's own personal views are amongst those in decline, one is less inclined to express them openly. As a result, the views perceived to be dominant appear to gain even more ground and alternatives decline further. Noelle-Neumann (in McQuail, 2000:461) states, "The more individuals perceive these tendencies and adapt their view accordingly, the more one faction appears to dominate and others to be on the downgrade." Therefore Waldhal (1989:126) states "The tendency of the one to speak up and the other to be silent starts off a spiralling process which increasingly establishes one's opinion as the prevailing one".

Noelle-Neumann (in McQuail, 2000:461) adds that this behaviour in public "is considered responsible for the formation, defence and alteration of public opinion." In emphasising only certain elements of an issue, the media's emphasis tends to be adopted by the public. The media therefore have a huge role in terms of shaping public opinion and in terms of this study it can be argued that if the print media under-reports women in sport, the public may adopt a negative attitude to sport played by women. This will deeply inhibit South Africa's resolve to create a gendered society.

The people's need for information is also imperative. An increased need for information will as a general rule lead to a higher and more purposeful use of the media. According to Waldhal (1989:153), the manner in which an issue evolves will ultimately depend on how the issue is handled in society's communicative channels, which organisations assume interest, and the particular societal contexts in which it is placed. Hence, if the public is given an objective and fair amount of coverage of sport played by women, a greater awareness of women in sport will be created. This reinforces that the media's role in shaping public perception on sport played by women is significant. It further highlights the crucial role that media owners have in terms of ensuring that the content they produce is a true reflection of the diverse South African population. Further to this McQuail (2000:97) claims that the mass media do not define reality on their own but give preferential access to definitions of those in authority.

According to O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005:24)

Agenda setting is the process by which media producers set up the issues – the agenda – that the media will focus on and that audiences will subsequently perceive to be important. Agenda setting refers to instances in which media coverage draws attention to an issue or events and 'puts it on the agenda' for public discussion and debate.

O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005:25) state the media also participates in agenda setting, simply by giving extensive coverage to events. They state that a snowball effect can result, as the media coverage of the topic gains momentum and generates the perception that the issue is of great importance partly because it is getting so much press coverage. If coverage of sport played by men continuously dominate the sports section of newspapers, the public may be influenced into believing that sport played by women is trivial and therefore not worth mentioning. This in effect highlights the important role of the print media in portraying women in sport.

The above section has addressed the agenda setting theory, a long term media effect theory that influences public opinion. There are many long term media effect theories but for the purpose of this study the researcher will now focus on the social expectation theory and will also make reference to the accumulation theory which purposes that repeated and relatively consistent media focus on an issue can over a long period of time change people's attitude and behavior.

### **2.5.2 Social Expectations Theory**

Social expectation theory is an explanation or account of long-range and indirect influences of the media. Social expectation theory pertains to socialisation influences of mass communications that result from their portrayals of stable patterns of group life. This theory shows that people can use the mass media as sources, either deliberately or without conscious awareness, from which to acquire guides to appropriate behaviour that will help them to adapt to the complex world in which they live.

The theory helps in explaining how certain kinds of media presentations and content can play a part in the long-term socialisation of people in a society where mass communications are available. This indicates that when sporting events, of women are ignored or trivialised as compared to men's sporting events the public may unconsciously develop a negative attitude to women sport players. Jones (2006:108) states for decades journalists have been accused of telling only half the story in their coverage of sport. According to Donohoe (2003:4) when women do get newspaper space, it is less likely to be accompanied by photographs and a 'substantial proportion of it is actually derogatory or focused excessively on the sportswoman's physical appearance.'

Media, through their news reporting, may often reflect and reinforce symbols of a patriarchal society. Van Zoonen (1998:34) affirms this stating, "Because

the news is made by men, it is thought to reflect the interests and values of men too". What is needed by media is to provide information that is balanced. O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005:455) state that balanced reporting entails the presentation of both sides of an argument, giving them equal space and time. South Africa's sportswomen have overcome huge challenges to become active participants in sport and their achievements need to be recognised. This means that media have a responsibility in providing an accurate portrayal of women in sport.

Media influence can have a long term effect on the public. When one considers the different forms of media, television often stands out to be emotionally moving because it combines images with information. However, Dr Connie De Boer, a specialist in Communications Science at the Amsterdam School of Communications Research (in Moy and Van Halem, 2001) states that newspapers have been shown to have a more long-term effect, because you have to make a cognitive effort to read the text and by doing so the information processing goes deeper and you are more involved.

Herman and Chomsky (1988:1) state the function of the mass media is to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the wider society. O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005:457) further postulate that media has a cumulative effect on audiences. They believe long term exposure to media 'cultivates' attitudes and beliefs through the persistent repetition of messages and images. If women in sport are not awarded the recognition they deserve, they will remain the 'weaker sex' because of media influence. The media will then indirectly influence the public in thinking that sport played by women is insignificant. This theory relates to this study in that it indicates that the media sometimes indirectly influence people and can influence public opinion on women in sport.



Fourie (2001:241) maintains in social expectation theory we can over a period of time learn the social norms adhered to by certain social groups, people and organisations in society – by watching television, films, reading newspapers, listening to the radio and surfing the internet. This theory explains that we learn and get an image from media on for example who the leading sportspersons are - and often this coverage and these images are idealised. The emphasis on social expectations theory is on social norms and roles.

DeFleur and Dennis (1994:591) list the assumptions of this theory:

- Various kinds of content provided by the mass media often portray social activities and group life;
- These portrayals even if they are fictitious are representations of reality that reflect, accurately or poorly, the nature of many kinds of groups in society;
- Individuals, when exposed over a long period of time to these representations, receive information, one can even say unintended lessons and education, about the norms and roles that prevail within the groups;
- The experience of exposure to portrayals of a particular kind of group results in incidental learning of behavior patterns that are expected by others when acting within such a group;
- These learned expectations concerning appropriate behavior for self and others serve as guides to action when individuals actually encounter or try to understand such groups in real life.

Fourie (2001:242) states that the social expectation theory can also be useful in explaining the role of the media in multicultural societies where one group is expected to understand the social norms and values of another group and to act accordingly when mingling and working with such a group. Fourie

(2001:242) provides the example of how in South Africa people learn through media portrayals how different cultural and social norms and values are portrayed in soap operas such as *Isidingo*, *Egoli* and *7de Laan*.

The social expectation theory also has affinities with the accumulation theory. In accumulation theory it is believed that if media focus repeatedly and in a relatively consistent way on an issue, it can over a long period of time change people's attitude and behavior. If the various media corroborate each other by presenting the same interpretations, significant changes can take place in peoples' beliefs, attitudes and behavior. DeFleur and Dennis (1994:579) list the following as basic propositions of the accumulation theory;

- The mass media begin to focus their attention on and produce messages about a specific topic, problem, situation or issue: for instance race discrimination, the environment, social habits and crime;
- Over an extended period, the mass media continue to focus their attention in a relatively consistent and persistent way and their presentations corroborate each other;
- Individual members of the public increasingly become aware of these messages, and on a person-to-person basis, a growing comprehension develops in the interpretations of the topic presented by the media;
- Increasing comprehension of the messages regarding the topic supplied by the media begins to form (or modify) the meanings, beliefs and attitudes that serves as guides to behavior for members of the audience;
- Thus, minor individual-by-individual changes accumulate and new beliefs and attitudes emerge to provide significant changes in norms of appropriate behavior related to the topic.

According to Fourie (2001:239) it is argued that accumulation theory provides an explanation for the role of the media in changing people's attitudes about topics such as divorce, sex, style and politics, over a period of time. If the South African media, over a period of time report in the same way about women in sport, either positively or negatively, such reporting can have an impact on people's perception of women in sport.

Many theories including normative theories, agenda setting theory, diffusion of innovation, social expectation theory and accumulation theory that validate the media's impact on public opinion have been developed over the years. The above section looked specifically at Normative theories and Media Effects theories in order to evaluate how the media shape public opinion in terms of women in sport and as a means to discuss the literature. This study will now look at Feminist Media theory which lends a gendered inflection to this study.

## **2.6 Feminist Media Theory**

Feminist theories according to The Feminist Majority Foundation (2007) are methods of creating and organising knowledge that assume, as points of departure, the socio-cultural construction of gender and the institutionalisation of unequal power relations in society. Women's experiences and perspectives have been frequently excluded from traditional systems of knowledge, which tend to devalue them or subsume them under 'normative' male experience. By developing alternative conceptual frameworks for analysing gender relations and social relations in general – particularly the circumstances of women's lives – critical feminist theory attempts to illuminate women's social positions and construct strategies for social, political, and personal change. The Feminist Majority Foundation (2007) state that feminist theories and their critical application offer a variety of bases from which to question and enlarge our epistemologies, values and our culture.

Van Zoonen (1994:11) states the media have always been at the centre of feminist critique. Furthermore the media has been thought to act as socialisation agents. Curran and Gurevitch (1991:34) explain that experimental research done in the tradition of cognitive psychology tends to support the hypothesis that media act as socialisation agents – along with the family – teaching children in particular their appropriate sex roles and symbolically rewarding them for appropriate behaviour. It is thought that media perpetuate sex role stereotypes because they reflect dominant social values and also because male media producers are influenced by these stereotypes.

According to Talbot (1998:216) challenges to sexist practices have been taking place in public and private domains since the 80's. Talbot (1998) explains that these practices involve struggle over all sorts of things including over how men and women are represented in the press and in everyday conversation. Talbot (1998) provides the example of the way women are defined in terms of physical attributes such as hair colour (a blonde, a red head), attractiveness to men or otherwise (beauty, stunner, dog). Talbot (1998:216) adds that feminist critics have also taken issue with the extent to which women are defined in terms of home and family and in particular in terms of their relationship with men. Talbot (1998:216) maintains that if she had to be reported on in a British tabloid newspaper she would probably be identified as a working wife or as a mother of two, adding that men would not get this treatment. In Chapter Four the researcher will address the way in which women are described by the print media.

According to SABC News (2008:1) during the third Gender and Media awards ceremony organised by Gender Links, Media Institute of Southern

Africa (MISA)<sup>11</sup> and the Gender and Media Southern Africa Network, South Africa's Agriculture Minister Lulu Xingwana said media institutions can play an important role in advancing gender equality. Xingwana in SABC News (2008:1) states that it is unacceptable that there are still instances of gender stereotyping where women are presented by newspapers as objects, and not news sources.

Hall (1997); Dyer (1993) maintain that media are perceived as the main instruments in conveying respectively stereotypical, patriarchal and hegemonic values about women and femininity. According to McQuail (2000:97) hegemony refers to a loosely interrelated set of ruling ideas permeating a society, but in such a way as to make the established order of power and values appear natural, taken for granted and commonsensical.

Rakow (1986:17) states gender research on media portrayals of women and their effects on audiences began to appear in academic communication journals in the early 1970s, signaling that the topic was becoming a legitimate one within the existing frameworks of media research. According to Rakow (1986:18) the research tended to be undertaken by feminists who, operating within those mainstream social science frameworks, advocated changes in media content and the representation of women in media industries but left unchallenged the legal, economic, and social arrangements of the media.

By 1978 feminist research had informed a large body of gender stereotype literature, enabling the publication of two major texts on stereotypes studies. During the 1980s and 1990s liberal feminist theory maintained a place in mainstream academia, business, and government agencies. Acceptance of

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<sup>11</sup> MISA is a non-governmental organisation with members in 11 of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries. Its focus is primarily on the need to promote free, independent and pluralistic media in southern Africa.

liberal feminist research, especially content analysis research, can be found not only in mainstream academia, but also in government agencies and media industries, such as advertising. According to Rakow (1986:18) it is easier to accommodate women and minorities by instituting policies and making content changes in media than it is to change the socio-economic systems.

Curran and Gurevitch (1996:184) state that since mass media are in the hands of male owners and producers, they will operate to the benefit of a patriarchal society. This means that women in sport will not be given the coverage it deserves simply because male media bosses may be of the view that sport played by women is trifling as compared to men's sport. According to Butler and Paisley (in Van Zoonen, 1994:17) the media function in a counterproductive way and one of the reasons for this is the dominance of male editors, producers and journalists whose gender socialisation causes them to reproduce society's dominant values. Van Zoonen (1991:219) reiterates that the under-representation of women in news results in part from the male dominance among reporters.

According to Len-Ríos, Rodgers, Thorson and Yoon (2005) feminist media scholars do not agree on how to achieve equal representation for women in news content. In fact, feminist philosophies differ on how to approach equality and U.S. feminists have preferred the radical or liberal feminist viewpoint. As Van Zoonen (1991) explains, liberal feminists argue that parity in public representation will ultimately lead to the acceptance of women in public life. Liberal feminists believe women can achieve equality through the current system whereas radical feminists argue for societal intervention. The researcher affirms that equal representation is a precursor to greater equality, but that representation is a product of attitudes and beliefs ingrained by decades of cultural hegemony.

Studies have shown that women often appear in the mass media but are stereotypically portrayed as wife, mother, daughter, girlfriend; as working in traditionally female jobs 'secretary, nurse, receptionist; or as sex object.' This representation is problematic as it is a 'skewed' view of reality that misrepresents the role of women in society.

According Van Zoonen (1994:15)

In Dennis McQuail's bestselling Introduction to Mass Communication Theory, first published in 1983, there is no reference to 'women', 'gender', 'sexuality' or other feminist concerns. In the revised second edition in 1987 one paragraph on feminist content analysis has been added."

Van Zoonen (1994:15) adds that in special issues on communication research in Western and Eastern Europe published by the European Journal of Communication (1990) and Media, Culture and Society (1990) references to gender and feminism are all but absent.

Gender equality and the right of women to participate in sport are paramount and likewise the media needs to represent women in sport fairly. Sport is an important part of the human experience and the media is a powerful medium. Despite the phenomenal growth of women's sport, sports coverage in newspapers and on television and radio is still largely devoted to men's sports.

The dominant theories discussed in this section allow the researcher to look at the context of newspapers in this study. The Literature Review spelt out the theoretical base of the study and identified issues to be covered in the study. In addition feminist media theory lends a gendered inflection to this study. The specific theories presented suggest that an interpretive research strategy, employing qualitative methods of data gathering and analysis will be

required. These strategies will be discussed further in Chapter Three of this study.

Based on the literature reviewed, central themes have been identified and the researcher will interpret the articles based on these themes. The researcher will address the issues of objectification of women in sport. Among the themes identified are: Objectivity of print media's coverage of women in sport; Language used in sport coverage and Visual Imagery that are presented to readers. These themes will be used to analyse the way the print media specifically *The Independent on Saturday* portrays women in sport.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the theoretical underpinning for this study. It has discussed dominant theories that address the media's impact on public opinion. Based on this discussion core themes have emerged. These themes will be used to analyse the way *The Independent on Saturday* portrays women in sport. This next chapter provides an overview of the methodology for this study.



## **CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter provided a theoretical base for the study by discussing the principle theories that frame media representation. Based on the literature reviewed central themes have been identified and women in sports articles will be analysed and interpreted based on these themes. This chapter will explain the methodology used for this study. It will provide an overview of the research design, data collection methods, research instrument and data analysis techniques.

From the literature reviewed it can be concluded that an interpretive research strategy, employing qualitative methods of data gathering and analysis is required. Qualitative analysis draws primarily on thematic content analysis as a research mechanism and this will be explored further in this chapter. The researcher will also outline the time frame of this study. It must be noted that the analysis is not only analytical but also interpretive. This analysis seeks to get beneath the surface meanings and examine more implicit social meanings.

### **3.2 Research Design**

This study uses a qualitative methodology to explore the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport. Based on this a case study approach will be used with *The Independent on Saturday* as the case. Yin (1994:13) states that a case study is a research strategy (that) comprises an all-encompassing method – with the logic of design incorporating specific approaches to data collection and data analysis. It relies on multiple sources of evidence and often makes use of propositions to guide data collection and

analysis. According to Yin (1994: 12), “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.”

Babbie and Mouton (2001) and Yin (1994) state that in qualitative research a case study is an intensive investigation of a single unit and uses multiple variables. This study thus firstly examines newspaper clippings of women in sport from *The Independent on Saturday*. The primary unit of analysis will therefore be texts of women in sport from *The Independent on Saturday* over a six month period. There is no intention to measure the change of representation of women over time therefore a cross-sectional methodology will be used. Secondly, it will examine the literature pertaining to the media and sport reportage. Lastly, interviews with journalists and editors at *The Independent on Saturday* will be conducted. It is also essential to highlight that *The Independent on Saturday* does not have designated sport journalists and a sport editor however a common pool of journalists and editors are used at *Independent Newspapers*. Chetty (2009:1) states that this has occurred due to restructuring at *Independent Newspapers* and journalists report for various newspapers including the *Daily News*, *The Mercury*, *The Independent on Saturday*, *Sunday Tribune* and many other publications.

This study is qualitative in nature and Strauss and Corbin (in Van Zoonen, 1994:134) define qualitative as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. Rudestam and Newton (1992) state that qualitative research can be defined as involving descriptive data that is made up of words rather than numbers. Qualitative research is centrally concerned with understanding things rather than with measuring them. The qualitative approach is also known as the interpretative, constructivist or post positivist approach. These authors explain that qualitative research studies share one or more of the following purposes:

- Verification: they allow a researcher to test the validity of certain assumptions, claims, theories or generalisations within real-world contexts.
- Description: they can reveal the nature of certain situations, settings, processes, relationships, systems, or people.
- Interpretation: they enable a researcher to (a) gain insights about the nature of particular phenomena, (b) develop new concepts or theoretical perspectives about the phenomenon, and/or (c) discover the problems that exist within the phenomenon.

The researcher carried out the research in the following way:

- A variety of different techniques to collect data – field notes, interviews, transcripts and documents – were used
- Small sample was used - consistent with one organisation and the researcher selected *The Independent on Saturday* as the unit of analysis where interviews were conducted
- Interpretation was carried out concurrent with the data collection.

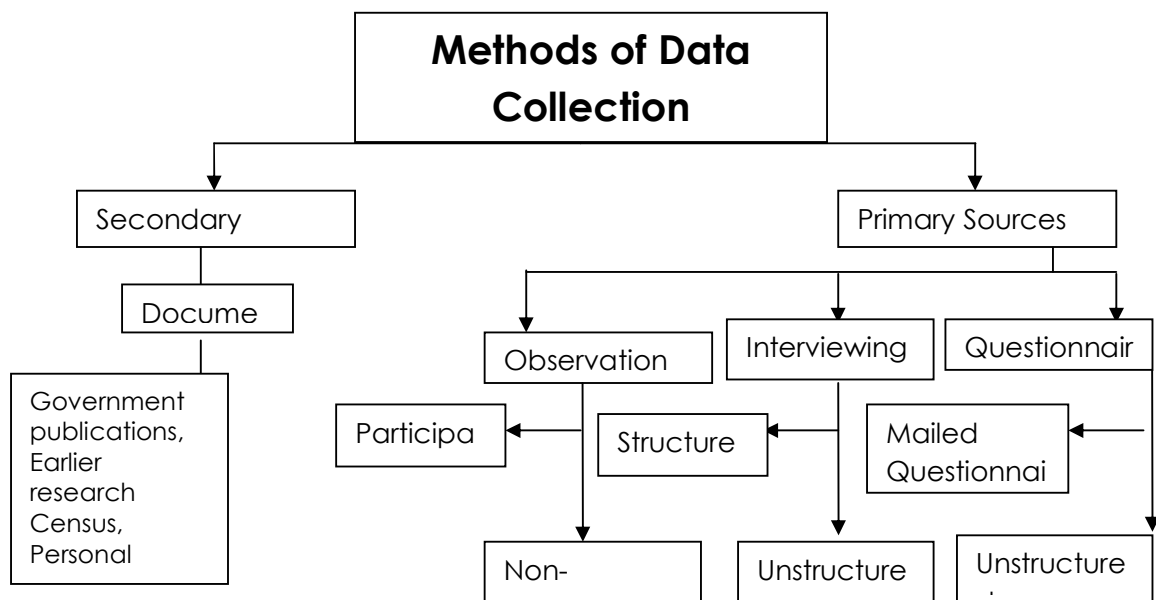
### **3.3 Data Collection Methods**

In this section the procedure used for collecting the data will be discussed. The researcher selected *The Independent on Saturday* because it has a large readership base which is representative of men and women and has a strong focus on sport. This is consistent with the objectives of this study, as the intention is to understand the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport. According to Media Report (2007:22), *The Independent on Saturday* demographics is 56% male readership and 44% female readership. This finding indicates that there is a very narrow margin between male and female readers.

Stake (in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:243) maintains “...nothing is more important than making a proper selection of cases. It is a sampling problem. The case will be selected to represent some population of cases.” Therefore considerable effort was spent in the selection of the sample. Articles from *The Independent on Saturday* were gathered through the researcher’s personal collection of hard-copy cuttings. Furthermore, interviews were administered to journalists and editors at *Independent Newspapers*. The researcher will analyse the data based on various themes including objectivity of sports media’s coverage of women in sport, language used in sport coverage and visual imagery that are presented to readers.

There are two main approaches to gathering information about a situation, person, problem or phenomenon namely secondary data and primary data. According to Kumar (2005:118) information gathered using the first approach is said to be collected from secondary sources whereas sources used in the second approach are called primary sources. This study used primary sources and interviewing is the research instrument employed.

**Figure 3.1: Methods of Data Collection**



**Source: Kumar (2005:118)**

### 3.4 Research Instrument

The interview schedule, comprising predominantly of open-ended questions, was compiled and administered to the sport journalists and editors at *The Independent on Saturday*. As interviews were conducted, they were recorded and transcribed. Interviews were audio recorded with the permission of participants. However, some analysis was done during the data collection phase of the study, as is recommended by some authors. For example, Coffee and Atkinson (in Oka and Shaw, 2000:8) state “We should never collect data without substantial analysis going on simultaneously.” In line with this approach, preliminary analysis were conducted on the field notes taken after each interview, as the interviews were conducted intensively over a short period of time (3 days).

The researcher probed questions such as: *South Africa has entered a new political and social dispensation characterised by democracy, non-racialism and non-sexism. It is important for these values to be entrenched in our sport. As a sport journalist do you think that there is gender equity in the print media's coverage of sport? Elaborate.* According to Kumar (2005:132) the form and wording of questions is extremely important in a research instrument as they have an effect on the type and quality of information obtained.

In an interview schedule or a questionnaire, questions may be formulated as open ended or closed ended questions. In an open ended question the possible responses are not given. In the case of a questionnaire, the respondent writes down the answers in his or her words, whereas in the case of an interview schedule the investigator records the answers either in verbatim or in a summary describing a respondent's answer. In a closed ended question the possible answers are set out in the questionnaire or schedule and the investigator ticks the category that best describes the

respondent's answer. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:175) suggest that closed ended questions are extremely useful for eliciting factual information while open-ended questions for seeking opinions, attitudes and perceptions.

Open-ended questions further provide in-depth information and can provide a wealth of information provided respondents feel comfortable about expressing their opinions. On the other hand Kumar (2005:134) states that analysis of open-ended questions is more difficult as the researcher usually needs to go through another process, content analysis – in order to classify the data. This will be discussed further in the section below. This study employed predominantly open ended questions with the intention of providing respondents with the opportunity to express themselves freely, resulting in a greater variety of information.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

This research project is textual and the research tool is essentially thematic content analysis. According to Wright (in Berger, 2000:173) content analysis is a research technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain qualitative analysis or both. Content analysis is a non-intrusive way of conducting research. McQuail (2000:493) describes content analysis as, “a technique for the systematic, quantitative and objective description of media texts, that is useful for certain purposes of classifying output, looking for effects and making comparisons between content and ‘reality’”. Content analysis provides an empirical basis for monitoring shifts in public opinion. According to Van Zoonen (1994:69) the general aim of content analysis is to compare features of media output with concomitant features in reality.

Van Zoonen (1994:134) maintains that interpretive research can vary widely. According to Glaser and Strauss (in Van Zoonen, 1994:135) interpretative research is an inductive procedure to arrive at empirically grounded

understandings and explanations of social phenomena. Van Zoonen authenticates Glaser and Strauss's statement by stating that interpretative refers to a particular inductive research strategy and design, and qualitative concerns a particular non-quantitative way of gathering and analysing data. Van Zoonen (1994:135) maintains that qualitative techniques of data gathering are most adequate to gain insight into the meanings of everyday life. Van Zoonen (1994:140) states that qualitative methods of data analysis use words, texts and language as primary units, as opposed to the numbers of quantitative analysis.

According to Fowler (1991:4) a meaning interrogated is often not the surface meaning, but the deeper meaning. Thus, the researcher will examine more implicit social meanings. Fowler (1991:5) describes this as "an enquiry into the relations between signs, meanings and the social and historical conditions which govern the semiotic structure of discourse, using a particular kind of linguistic analysis". The researcher has chosen this method to point out the ideological perspective from which the story is written. Fowler (1991:5) states what is ideological can be identified as that which presents itself, as the obvious, natural way of representing an issue, including what is not said, or what other views are not represented. Hence, the researcher will highlight particular choice of words, phrases, or the logic of sentences and their implied meaning to show the different ways that it can be read. The analysis is thus mostly interpretative.

The researcher will explore *The Independent on Saturday* publications' coverage of women in sport and will analyse objectivity of sports media's coverage of women in sport, language used in sport coverage and visual imagery that are presented to readers.

### **3.6 Reliability and Validity**

The interpretation of the articles is subjective to the researcher's interpretation. However, the interpretation is grounded in the Literature review. Weber (1990) notes "To make valid inferences from the text, it is important that the classification procedure be reliable in the sense of being consistent". Thus, the researcher's deductions from the analysis of the articles will be grounded on the various theories discussed in the literature review. Furthermore, the analysis will incorporate previous research that has been conducted regarding media coverage of women in sport. According to Padgett (1998:88) it is always necessary to judge the soundness of the research to identify if its findings are authentic and its interpretations credible. Therefore the reliability and validity of this study is discussed. However the concept of 'trustworthiness' is also explored. According to Steinmetz in Padgett (1998:92) trustworthiness implies that the study is carried out fairly and ethically and its findings represent as closely as possible the experiences of the respondents.

Babbie and Mouton (2001:276-278) maintain that validity can be tested using the trustworthiness approach. Trustworthiness is an approach that can be used to clarify the notion of objectivity in qualitative research. It can be assessed using four principles, which are credibility, transferability, dependability and conformity.

These four principles and how they relate to this study will be discussed below.

- Credibility is the "compatibility between constructed realities that exist in the minds of the respondents and those that are attributed to them" (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 277). This study has used the method of triangulation to achieve credibility.



- Transferability is the “extent to which the findings can be applied in other contexts” (Babbie and Mouton 2001:277). Since qualitative research is not intended to generalise, it is the responsibility of the researcher who wishes to generalise these findings to assess their transferability. This will be made possible by providing sufficient detailed data that will be collected from the interview schedule.
- Dependability implies that, if a similar study were conducted with similar participants, then a similar finding would be made. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) there can be no credibility without dependability. The fact that the credibility of this study has been justified means that the findings must be dependable.
- Conformity according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) is the degree to which the findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not the biases of the researcher. Source material: tape recordings, transcripts, interview schedules and field notes will be made available on request to assess the quality of the findings.

Lincoln and Guba (in Padget, 1998) claim that there are three main threats to trustworthiness. These are reactivity, researcher bias and respondent bias. Mason (2003:284) states reactivity refers to the possible influence the researcher’s presence may bring to the study in terms of attitudes, feelings and behavior. Reactivity was minimised in this study in the following way:

- Firstly, all interviews were held in a neutral setting to ensure that the respondent did not feel threatened.
- Secondly, respondents were kept ignorant of a complete understanding of the study being explored to ensure that their responses were unplanned.

According to Padget (1998:92) researcher bias involves filtering one’s observations and interpretations through a lens clouded by preconceptions

and opinions. There are various techniques that can be used to reduce researcher bias. In this study the researcher ensured that questions in the interview schedule were not leading and all interviews were audio-taped to create a 'formal' communication process. In addition careful selection of respondents was made through the guidance of senior members of Independent Newspapers.

Respondent bias as explained by Padgett (1998) involves either lying or withholding information, or giving answers that they think the researcher wants. In order to prevent this, the researcher emphasised that the respondent's participation is voluntary and therefore requires complete and accurate participation.

Yin (1994: 68) suggests that certain issues need to be planned for in the data collection protocol to ensure reliability as follows:

- Gaining access to the key interviewees – appointments were made in advance usually through the Editor or through a person nominated;
- A clear selection of data collection activities within specific periods of time should be developed. This was carried out;
- Unanticipated events, such as changes in interviewee availability, must be provided for. Where such problems were experienced, the appointment was rescheduled and continued at a time that better suited the interviewee.

Telephone calls were made to the journalists and editors at Independent Newspapers, the research was explained to them and their co-operation was requested. An appointment was thereafter confirmed. At the appointment the nature of the study was explained. It is important to note that considerable effort was made to obtain participants who met the criteria of for a 'good informant'. Morse (in Flick, 1998:70) provides the following recommendation for a 'good informant'. The participants:

- Should have necessary knowledge and experience. The editors and news editors as well as senior sport journalists were interviewed. However, people in lower hierarchy were also interviewed because as Taylor and Bogdan (1998:9) state, “the perspectives of powerful people are (not) more valid than those of the powerless.”
- Should have the capability to reflect and articulate – most of the participants had many years of experience in their respective field of work and were able in most cases to reflect on the questions asked and answered them competently.
- Should have time to be asked – in all cases specific appointments were made and in most cases the interviews were conducted in a meeting room, away from the participant’s office or desk, thereby reducing interruptions.
- Should be ready to participate in the study – all participants voluntarily submitted to interviewing, with the understanding that it was not compulsory.

These ‘good informants’ were contacted personally in most cases and individual appointments made. Although Padgett (1998: 53) implies that the use of incentives to encourage participation is not uncommon, no individual incentives were offered as they were not necessary – the informants participated voluntarily. The researcher however explained that the findings will be available for perusal on completion.

One of the most powerful techniques to enhance trustworthiness is Triangulation. Furthermore in qualitative research, validation takes the form of triangulation. According to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:194) triangulation is used “...to corroborate findings according to at least three different approaches.” This not only increases the validity of the study, but increases the “...enriching and completing [of] knowledge...[and] increase [d] scope, depth and consistency of methodological proceedings.” Erlandson,

Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) state that triangulation lends credibility to the findings by incorporating multiple sources of data, methods, investigators, or theories. According to Denzin (in Padgett, 1998) there are four types of triangulation.

- Theory triangulation – the use of multiple theories to interpret the data. Many dominant theories including normative theory, agenda setting theory and feminist media theory was used in this study to address the media's impact on public opinion.
- Methodological triangulation – use of multiple methods in a single study, often a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. According to Bowen (1996:10) methodological triangulation can enhance, illustrate and clarify research findings thus improving the validity of a study. Although this study uses the qualitative methodology primarily, some degree of quantitative analysis has been included for example, the frequency of articles and photographs regarding women in sport.
- Observer Triangulation – use of more than one observer in a single study. This was not applicable to this study as one observer was used to collect data.
- Data Triangulation – use of more than one data source. Different types of data were collected in the study and multiple data types can be seen as the main source of triangulation in this study. Firstly the researcher reviews literature and discusses the dominant theories that address the media's impact on public opinion and theories that pertain to this study. Secondly analysis of media texts that is articles in *The*

*Independent on Saturday* over a six month period. Thirdly interviews were conducted with media professionals at *The Independent on Saturday*.

It is important to recognise that a methodology is always employed in the service of a research question. As such, validation of the inferences made on the basis of data from one analytic approach demands the use of multiple sources of information. It is for this reason that the researcher has included many other studies that have been done regarding media representation of women in sport to serve as a sort of validation study built into the design.

The analysis is mostly interpretative. According to Marshall and Rossman (in Van Zoonen, 1994:139) ideally, interpretative research does not rely on a single type of data but takes advantage of triangulation, “the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point.” By including previous studies regarding representation of women in sport the researcher hopes to enhance the quality and value of this study.

The researcher will examine the print media’s coverage of women in sport by reading the articles to analyse objectivity of sports media’s coverage of women in sport, language used in sport coverage and visual imagery that are presented to readers. Babbie and Mouton (2001: 122) maintain that validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concepts under consideration. Validity is concerned with the idea that the research design fully addresses the research questions and objectives you are trying to achieve.

From the above it can be concluded that considerable effort has been made to ensure the validity and reliability of this study. It is also evident that this study meets the requirements of trustworthiness. The triangulation approach and the trustworthiness approach will ensure that the data collected and analysed is valid and reliable.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology, outlining the research instrument, reliability and validity and data collection methods for this study. Firstly the research design involving the qualitative approach was explained and thereafter the chosen method being the case study was explained and justified. Secondly the data collection methods and the research instrument were outlined. Thirdly data analysis techniques and strategies were explained. Fourthly, the reliability and validity of the study was explored.

In Chapter Four the researcher will analyse data and provide a clear interpretation of the results. Core themes have been developed from the Literature Review and the researcher will analyse articles based on these themes.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explained the methodology used for this study. In order to achieve the key objectives, this chapter will analyse sport articles from *The Independent on Saturday* for the period February 2008 to July 2008 (6 months). The key objective of this study is to explore the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport.

The theory and literature discussed in Chapter Two will be confirmed or challenged in this chapter. This chapter will also present the qualitative findings of the thematic content analysis of newspaper texts from *The Independent on Saturday* and the interviews conducted with media professionals. To keep coherence throughout, this chapter consists of summaries and broad observations of the unit of analysis and then leads into the thematisation of both the sport articles and interviews. The researcher will concurrently analyse and discuss these findings.

Central themes have been identified and articles will be interpreted based on these themes. The themes identified are objectivity of print media's coverage of women in sport, language used in sport coverage and visual imagery that are presented to readers. Sub-themes identified are selection criteria used in newsrooms; gendered newsrooms and depth of coverage of women in sport.

The chapter outline is as follows:

- Summary: A sequential (monthly) generalisation of the findings of the prominent matters and gaps within the unit of analysis.
- Thematisation: Based on the theory and literature discussed in other chapters this is a 'theory driven' description of the themes that have

been identified throughout the unit of analysis and interviews conducted with media professionals. This section will analyse and interpret the themes and interview responses.

## **4.2 Overview of the Unit of Analysis**

*The Independent on Saturday* serves as the unit of analysis in this study. Launched on April 18, 1998, *The Independent on Saturday* is a weekend newspaper and forms part of the *Independent Newspaper* group. *The Independent on Saturday* is based at the *Independent Newspapers* offices in Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal. *Independent Newspapers* is the only foreign owned media company in South Africa and is owned by media mogul and Irish businessman Tony O'Reilly.

It is important to look at the semiotic differences between still and action photographs and understand that still images make meaning. Furthermore 'action' and 'still' photographs are technically stills. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:57) explain that when participants are connected by a vector, they are represented as doing something to or for each other. Harrison (2003:51) states

Narrative images allow viewers to create a story about the represented participants (RPs) because the images include vectors of motion whereas conceptual images do not include vectors and RPs tend to be grouped together to present viewers with the 'concept' of who or what they represent.

For the purpose of this study narrative images will be referred to as 'action' and conceptual images will be referred to as 'still'. The following section will provide a sequential summary of the coverage of women in sport during the period February 2008 to July 2008 (6 months). It will further illustrate the



findings within the unit of analysis. These findings are represented graphically.

#### **4.2.1 Summary of sport articles from *The Independent on Saturday***

##### **4.2.1.1 February 2008**

Most of the content in the sport pages were dedicated to football, cricket and rugby coverage. These sports are considered to be the three main sports that are covered in *The Independent on Saturday*. This confirms Rohan's (2009) assertion that there is a particular focus on cricket, soccer and rugby in the sport pages. Women were often only mentioned in the *Results and Scores* section of the newspaper namely in golf and athletics. It is clear that the sport coverage awarded to men and women in *The Independent on Saturday* is disproportionate. The articles reviewed also raises the question of objectivity of sport journalists and editors and selection criteria used in the sport section.

*The Independent on Saturday* covered one hundred and eight sport articles in the sport section of the newspaper. It featured one hundred and six articles of male dominated sport and two articles featuring women in sport. The newspaper featured seventy-seven sport photographs of men and three of women in sport. Seventy-five of the photographs of men in sport were in colour and three photographs of women in sport were in colour. Further, *The Independent on Saturday* featured two black and white photographs of men in sport. Different values are assigned to colour and black and white photographs. The perceived semiotic difference between these is that colour has impact and black and white photographs shows less importance. Colour photographs attract the reader and thus readers will tend to focus more on colour photographs. In terms of action and still photographs *The Independent on Saturday* featured thirty-two action and forty-five still photographs of men in sport and one action and two still photographs of

women in sport. This highlights that women athletes are often portrayed in 'passive' rather than 'active' poses in the print media.

The coverage of sport articles in *The Independent on Saturday* clearly illustrates that male sport not only dominates pages in the sport section but is also awarded space in the main section of the newspaper. Further to this women in sport did not feature on the main page of the sport section during this month.

The coverage of sport articles further illustrates that not only are the number of stories on female athletes limited, articles featuring sportswomen are much less detailed than those featuring men. *The Independent on Saturday* also featured a section titled "Fastballs" with five brief articles. Women were featured in only one article in this brief column. Further to this, male reporters dominated the coverage of sport.

#### **4.2.1.2 March 2008**

The bulk of the articles featured men in sport and were dedicated to football, cricket and rugby coverage. Male reporters dominated the coverage of sport. Women in sport are featured towards the end of the sport section. Furthermore language used in coverage differs from gender to gender. The coverage highlights that in sport such as surfing men are often given more coverage as compared to women and articles are frequently accompanied by action colour shots. The coverage clearly illustrates that male sport tends to be reported factually and constructively while female sport and sportswomen themselves are often reported more in terms of their appearance, femininity and sexuality. There is clearly is disregard for female's sporting prowess. This affirms that media reinforces the myths surrounding women's participation in sport in their concentration on mainly "feminine" sports. It is also evident that in sport such as tennis women receive coverage however they are mentioned in the latter part of articles. These articles are often not

accompanied by photographs. Women in sport did not feature on the main page of the sport section or any other section of the newspaper.

*The Independent on Saturday* covered one hundred and seventy sport articles. One hundred and sixty-six articles featured male dominated sport and four articles provided coverage of women in sport. This month's coverage featured one hundred and four photographs of men's sport and five photographs of women's sport. In addition ninety-three of the men's photographs were in colour and eleven were in black and white. Only two of the women's photographs were in colour and three were in black and white. In terms of action and still photographs the newspaper featured sixty eight action and thirty three still photographs of men in sport and five action photographs of women in sport. This month did not include any still photographs of women in sport.

It is further evident that when women's results are presented often only the top three names are provided as compared with the top five of men. *The Independent on Saturday* is saturated with large action colour photographs of male dominated sport.

#### **4.2.3.3 April 2008**

The coverage highlighted that when women do make it into the sport pages it is often in sport such as golf and tennis. The coverage was dominated by rugby, cricket and international football. Furthermore the main pages of the sport section were dominated by large action colour shots of cricket, rugby and soccer. Male reporters dominated the coverage of sport.

The coverage of sport articles further highlights that even when women in sport are reported in the news in brief column only a few lines of the articles focus on women's achievements. It is also evident that the sport articles that appear on page one of the main edition of *The Independent on Saturday*

often leads the reader to a more detailed and full match report of the male dominated sport. However, women in sport did not feature in any other section of the newspaper.

*The Independent on Saturday* covered one hundred and thirty sport articles in the sport section. Men were featured in one hundred and twenty seven of the articles and only three articles were dedicated to the coverage of women's sporting events. However it is also evident that women often do not receive exclusive coverage but their inclusion is visible in sport such as golf, surfing and tennis. Sport articles were accompanied by eighty-one photographs. Seventy-seven of the photographs were of men in sport and only four featured women. The bulk of the coverage of male dominated sport was accompanied by large, colour, action shots. This month featured seventy colour and seven black and white shots of men in sport. The four photographs that appeared on women in sport were in colour. Forty-nine of the men's photographs were large action shots as compared to four female action shots.

During the month of April women were featured mostly in the *Results and Scores* section and reference was made predominantly to the women golf players and women bowls. It is also evident that in the *Results and Scores* section women are mentioned secondary to male sport players.

#### **4.2.4.4 May 2008**

It is evident that when women do receive coverage in the sport section the coverage reinforces women's stereotypical role as 'mother,' 'sister,' 'feminine role-model' or 'caregiver.' The coverage further illustrates that women athletes are often portrayed in 'passive' rather than 'active' poses in the print media. In addition when females are given coverage emphasis is often placed on their sexual attractiveness rather than their sporting performance. Male reporters dominated coverage of sport. It is further evident that the

sport coverage awarded to men and women in *The Independent on Saturday* is disproportionate.

Most of the articles in the sport pages were dedicated to football, cricket and rugby coverage. The coverage also reinforces that male dominated sport is often featured on the main page of *The Independent on Saturday* and is often accompanied by large action colour shots. These articles lead the reader to the main page of the sport section where more detailed coverage and images are provided.

*The Independent on Saturday* covered one hundred and sixty-nine articles in the sport section of the newspaper. The newspaper featured one hundred and twenty-six photographs of men in sport and six photographs of women. One hundred and thirteen of the male dominated sport photographs were in colour and four photographs of female sport players appeared in colour. In addition the coverage included ninety eight action shots of men and four of women in sport.

#### **4.2.5.5 June 2008**

June is the only month in the unit of analysis that featured women on the main page of the sport section. However the coverage on the main page was dominated by rugby, soccer and cricket. The coverage of sport articles also highlights that language used in women's sport is derisive and detracts attention away from women's sporting abilities. Male reporters dominated the coverage of sport.

It is also evident that the main pages of sport section are dominated by the coverage of soccer, rugby, cricket and motorsports. It is further evident that photographs of women in sport are virtually absent on the main page of the sports section. Furthermore the bulk of articles on women in sport are

placed towards the end of the sport section. Further depth of the coverage of women in sport is disproportionate to the coverage of men in sport.

*The Independent on Saturday* covered one hundred and forty-seven articles in the sports section. The inclusion of women in sport was evident in six articles. This month featured ninety-eight photographs of male dominated sport and four photographs featuring women. All photographs featuring men and women appeared in colour. Seventy of the male dominated sport photographs were large action shots as compared to two action shots of women in sport.

#### **4.2.6.6 July 2008**

The coverage of sport indicated that women often only appear towards the end of the sport section. Furthermore the coverage of women in sport was minimal with women often only being mentioned in the *Results and Scores* section of *The Independent on Saturday*.

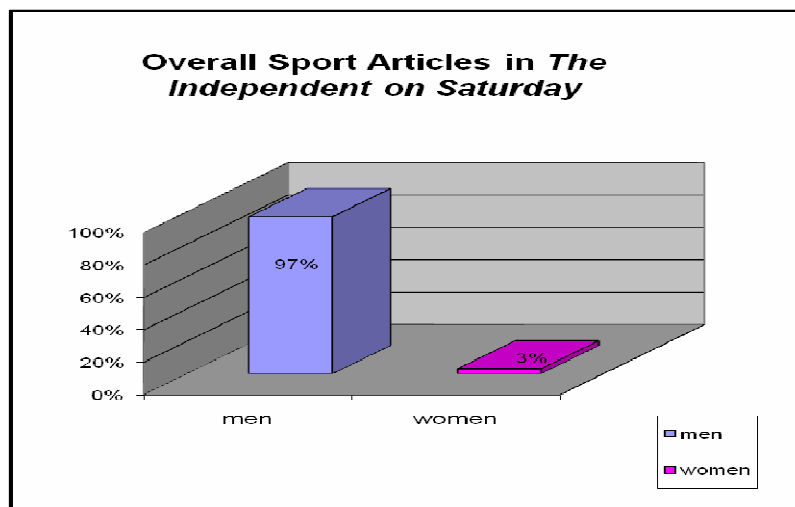
Language used during this month focused on negative aspects such as women's injuries and withdrawals from sporting events. The coverage clearly reinforces that when female athletes do make their way into the sport pages it is rarely for their sporting talent. The coverage reinforces the supposition that when reporting on women in sport, media often choose a negative angle of the story than focusing on the athletes sporting achievements. Most of the content in the sport pages were dedicated to football, cricket and rugby coverage. Once again male dominated sport articles and photographs appeared not only in the sport section but in the main section of *The Independent on Saturday*.

*The Independent on Saturday* featured one hundred and fourteen sport articles. Only four articles included women in the coverage. Of the one-hundred and ten articles of men in sport seventy four were accompanied with

photographs. There were two photographs of women in sport for the month of July. This highlights that photographs of women in sport are virtually absent in the sports section. In addition to the number of photographs, seventy-three of the male dominated sport photographs appeared in colour and sixty-three of these photographs were large, action shots. There were only two action shots of women in sport.

The following graphical interpretations are based on the articles analysed and reinforce the textual analysis. The analysis clearly confirms that there is a lack of coverage of sport played by women.

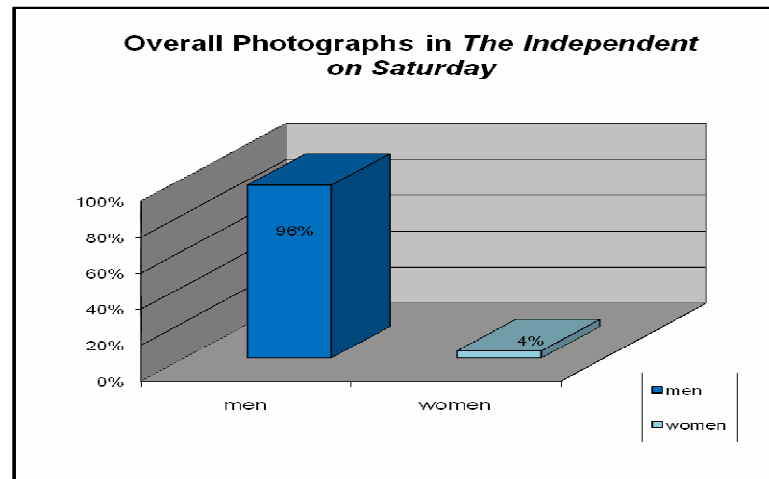
It has been concluded that during the period February 2, 2008 to July 26, 2008 *The Independent on Saturday* covered only 3% of women in their overall sport articles compared to a significant 97% of men. This implies that there is a vast disparity between *The Independent on Saturday's* coverage of men and women in sport.



**Figure 4.1:** Overall sport articles in *The Independent on Saturday*

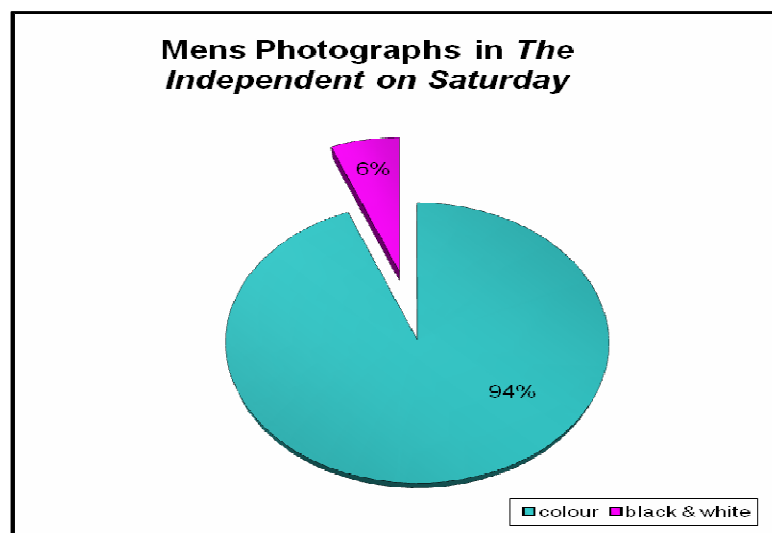
During the period February 2008 to July 2008 *The Independent on Saturday* covered a significant 96% of photographs of men and 4% of women. It is

evident that photographs of men in sport dominate the sport pages of *The Independent on Saturday*. The graphical representation clearly reveals the disproportionate representation of men and women sport photographs.



**Figure 4.2:** Overall Sport photographs in *The Independent on Saturday*

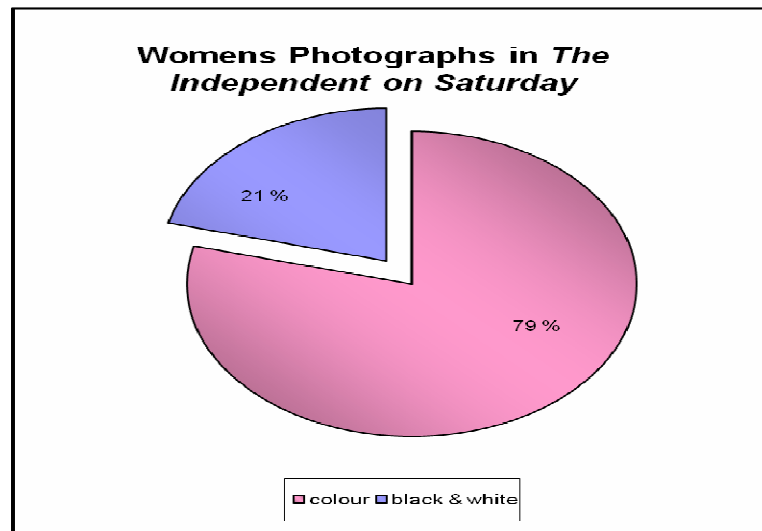
Of the men's photographs a significant 94% of them were in colour and 6% were in black and white.



**Figure 4.3:** Men's photographs in *The Independent on Saturday*

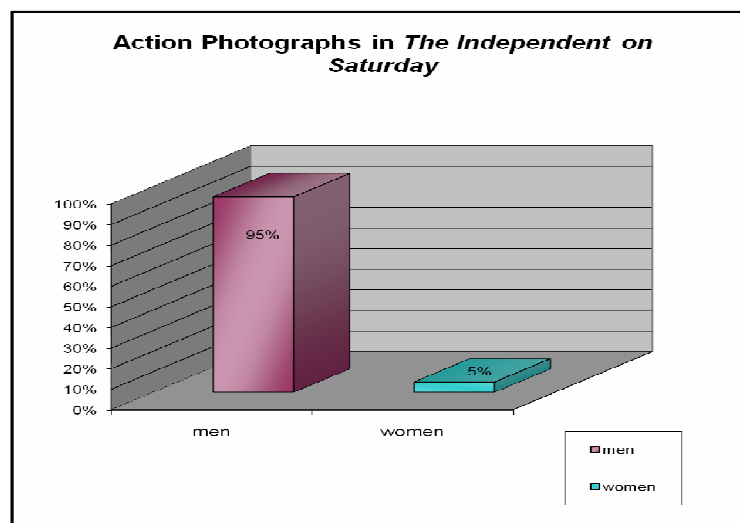


Of the women's photographs 79% of them were in colour and 21% were in black and white.



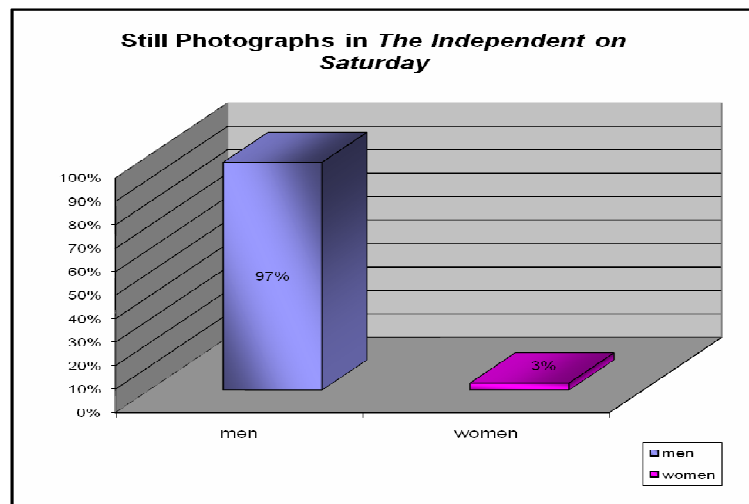
**Figure 4.4:** Women's photographs in *The Independent on Saturday*

With regard to action and still photographs *The Independent on Saturday* featured a significantly larger percentage of action photographs of men than of women athletes. 95% of action photographs were of men and 5% represented women. This exemplifies that action photographs of men during the period February 2, 2008 to July 26, 2008 dominated the sport pages.



**Figure 4.5:** Action photographs in *The Independent on Saturday*

With regard to still photographs in *The Independent on Saturday*, 97% depicted men as compared to 3% of women.



**Figure 4.6:** Still photographs in *The Independent on Saturday*

### 4.3 Thematisation of articles and interviews with media professionals

Based on the literature reviewed; contextualisation of the theories; analysis of articles and interviews with media professionals, central themes have been identified and articles are interpreted based on these themes. Among the themes identified are objectivity of sports journalism; language used in sport articles; and visual imagery that are presented to readers. Sub-themes identified are selection criteria used in newsrooms; gendered newsrooms; and depth of coverage of women in sport.

These main themes identify the primary discussion within the unit of analysis. The sub-themes are smaller debates that occur in the context of print media's coverage of women in sport. There is a constant interplay of themes and sub themes implying that messages are not always clear cut but often complex

and intertwined. This section will also present the responses of interviews conducted with media professionals.

Journalists have to make decisions on a daily basis. Their actions and behaviour are judged by society as being right or wrong, fair or unfair, good or bad, responsible or irresponsible. Hence, in examining media coverage, focus will be placed on contextualization of the issue and implied meaning of sport played by women. Particular choices of words and phrases will be highlighted and italicised to show the ambiguity of words or sentences, and the different ways that they can be read.

#### **4.3.1. Objectivity of print media's coverage of women in sport**

An article headlined "*World elite ready to compete*" (23 Feb 2008; pg 23) featured Australia's Stephanie Gilmore and Mick Fanning who were arriving at the surfing ASP World Champion Crowning. This article was accompanied by a colour, still photograph of both surfers in a helicopter. These surfers were recently presented with their ASP World Title Trophies and were to feature in an upcoming Quiksilver and Roxy Pro event. This is undoubtedly a huge accomplishment for both surfers. However, the ninety-eight line article focused primarily on Fanning and other male surfers and only one line mentioned Gilmore – this despite the fact that she was crowned with the previous year's world title. Columnist Pierre Tostee interviewed only Fanning who provided comments on the general spirit of the race. The article then goes on to mention other international male surfers as well as local rookie male surfers. The exclusion of Gilmore's comments and emphasis on Fanning, indicates that journalists may view women athletes as insignificant in enhancing a sport article and raises the question of journalistic objectivity. It is essential that journalists present sport readers with objective, fair and balanced reports of events. This is affirmed by Taflinger's (1996:15) assertion that reporters must examine their work to be sure that prejudice, bias and a personal world-view is not the one that dominates in gathering,

preparing and disseminating the news. In an interview with media professionals, Tony Oosthuizen, an editor at Independent Newspapers maintains that in terms of providing a true reflection of women in sport, emphasis in newspapers is incorrect in the actual sports pages. Oosthuizen (2009:3) states “But I would redeem that by saying that I’m sure that the effort is being made. Whether it is enough at this stage I’m not sure.”

In an article headlined “*Big seed semi showdown*” (22 Mar 2008; pg 9) coverage is provided on the men’s and women’s tennis semi-finals. The entire page of this edition was dedicated to tennis coverage. However, dominating the coverage were two, large, colour action photographs of Novak Djokovic of Serbia and Spain’s Rafael Nadal who both made it through to the semi-finals of the Pacific Life Open in California. The article focused mainly on the men’s semi-final game however the latter part of the article featured the women’s semi-final match played between Lindsay Davenport and Jelena Jankovic. The coverage detailed two-time champion Davenport’s injury that led to her retiring from the match. The report also included quotes from Davenport regarding her injury and back problem. It states, “*Davenport, who has had back trouble in the past, said she thought the lingering tightness might go away while she was playing.*” Davenport went on to say “*It was pretty obvious to me after two games that I was pretty sore and it was hard to rotate. I tried to do the best I could.*” The bulk of the content of the article focused on Davenport’s unfortunate circumstance rather than the tennis players’ sporting abilities and achievement of reaching the semi-final. This in turn, undermines the status of women in sport and affirms that when female athletes do make their way into the sport pages coverage is mostly negative and rarely for their sporting prowess.

This is further evident in an article headlined “*Hard(y) times await US swimmer*” (26 Jul 2008; pg 14). This article reports on Jessica Hardy’s uncertainty of participating in the Beijing Olympics due to her appeal to the banned substance clenbuterol. This article was not accompanied by a

photograph. The coverage clearly reinforces that negative coverage on female sport players in the sport pages is more prevalent than coverage of their sporting abilities.

Further to this a second tennis article featuring a woman tennis player was included in (22 Mar 2008; pg 9) headlined *"Big Spender Jankovic loves 'the swipe,'* with caption *"Big on Property: Jelena Jankovic"*. The entire article related to Jankovic's love for shopping *"Shopping sprees are a perk of tennis stardom for Jelena Jankovic, but the 23-year-old Serbian isn't confining her spending to trinkets."* Only one sentence of the seventy-six line article covered Jankovic's spot in the 5.7 million dollar WTA and ATP Pacific Life Open semi-finals. The article illustrates that Jankovic owns a house in Miami and is building a house in the same upscale neighbourhood north of San Diego that golfer Phil Mickelson calls home. This article is accompanied by two black and white photographs, one of Jelena Jankovic and the other featuring golfer Phil Mickelson and captioned *"Famous neighbour: Phil Mickelson."* The article indicates Jankovic's love for shopping and spending and quotes her saying *"I'm a big spender. I like to swipe my card. I just like doing it, you know, that motion."* The article also reveals that her latest big-ticket item was a gift from her father – a limited edition Louis Vuitton bag worth \$4000. By referring to the gift from her father the coverage implies that the tennis player is still 'dependent' on her father. Furthermore by focusing on these character traits, attention is shifted from the tennis players' sporting ability and this further reinforces the stereotypical beliefs that women should remain in their subordinate role of 'housewife', 'care-giver' and 'shopper.' This type of reporting clearly objectifies women and undermines their sporting prowess. This further confirms Van Zoonen's (1994) notion that women who appear in media content tend to be young and conventionally pretty, defined in relation to their husband, father, son, or boss and portrayed as passive, indecisive, submissive and dependent.

In two articles on golf headlined “*Millar, Hedblom lead*” and “*Etsebeth’s putter puts him in pole position in Zambia*” (22 Mar; pg 16) in-depth coverage of golf is provided. These articles were accompanied by a photograph of female golfer Angela Stanford. However, both articles focused solely on the men’s event and there was no mention of Stanford or any other female golfer. Stanford is only mentioned in the *Results and Scores* column of the sports section which appeared on the same page. If women in sport are sidelined and absent in sport pages the negative stereotype around women in sport will be difficult to overcome. Journalists and media workers have a responsibility to ensure that fair, accurate and objective coverage is provided on women in sport. This has been affirmed by Fourie (2001) who maintains that in order to change stereotypes every media worker should be critical of his or her own views and interpretations; sensitive towards the feelings of others; and aware of the possible harm his or her view, perceptions and interpretations may cause for others. In an interview, sport journalist at *Independent Newspapers* Kamlesh Gosai explains that journalists have a huge role to play in eliminating negative stereotypes of women in sport. Gosai (2009:2) added “journalists can contribute towards eliminating negative stereotypes of women in sport by focusing on athletic performance and highlighting their achievements in the same way that we do for men.”

In an article headlined “*Romantic Finish at Ironman*” (19 Apr 2008; pg 23) columnist Tommy Ballantyne provided coverage of a tri-athletic event. Most of the coverage focused on the men’s event however the inclusion of women was also evident in Ballantyne’s column. The article’s opening two sentences read: “*Bella got her fella at last weekend’s Spec-Savers ironman SA in Port Elizabeth. The women’s event winner Bella Comerford of Edinburgh was swept off her feet at the finish by her fiancée, Stephen Bayliss of Croyden, who’s men’s open victory made it a double for the British Pair.*” In this article emphasis was placed on her relationship with the male sportsman rather than on her victory and accomplishment. This confirms UNESCO’s (2003) assertion that in most of the southern African countries,

women are primarily identified as wives, sisters or mothers, unlike men who are rarely described as husbands, brothers or fathers.

Meanwhile Tim Whitefield in his Mountain Bike column (26 Apr 2008; pg 23) provides the Cumberland Classic results. The columnist names the top seven men and the top five women winners. A similar pattern of coverage is evident in Ballantyne's column (26 Jul 2008; pg 23) where he provides coverage to the 13<sup>th</sup> Braai Ketts Longest Day 12 Hour track race. Ballantyne reported that 75 men and 31 women athletes will be participating in the event. Ballantyne in his column also indicated that six additional players both men and women have been added to the Port Natal Bowls Master Singles. However the female participants are listed and detailed coverage of the male participants are provided. This once again raises the question of journalistic bias and objectivity regarding sport played by women.

In an article headlined "*New stars set to shine in Durban*" (17 May 2008; pg 23) coverage was provided on the Spar Interprovincial women's hockey tournament. The article states "*The country's top female players will take over the friendly city of Durban tomorrow as they assemble at the Queensmead Hockey Grounds for the annual Spar Interprovincial tournament taking place throughout the week*". However the fifty-seven line article does not mention or provide any detail of the female participants. Clearly the journalist did not feel the need to interview any of the female hockey players. Journalists need to set professional standards for the supply of information and the truth, accuracy, objectivity and their balance of their reporting and present neutral coverage of sporting events. Furthermore they need to be challenged for not being accurate. This has been affirmed by O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) who confirm that objectivity is perceiving, reporting, or presenting things from an impersonal, neutral, unbiased perspective. This is in keeping with Greer's (1999) view that readers have a right to truthful information and reporting, and being trustworthy to the reader is the basis of good journalism.

News editor, Oosthuizen (2009) explains that it is important to look at the traditional role of the journalist. Oosthuizen (2009:2) maintains “The journalist is the eye and ear of the public – everywhere where the public can’t go. Journalists can contribute to eliminating negative stereotypes by changing the way that their newsrooms or even themselves in many instances actually look at sport and how they portray it. The stereotype can be beaten but it has got to start at source.”

An article headlined “*Williams sisters out of Italian Open*” (17 May 2008; pg 3) focused on Serena and Venus Williams’ defeat in the Italian open. The thirty-five line article was not accompanied by a photograph. The researcher has concluded that Serena and Venus Williams are constantly looked at as ‘siblings’ rather than for their individual performance as world class athletes. The constant representation of women as wife, mother, daughter, girlfriend, and sister is problematic as it is a ‘skewed’ view of reality that misrepresents the role of women in society. Adjacent to the women’s tennis article was a one-hundred and eight line article headlined “*Federer, Nadal, Djokovic cruise through.*” This article was accompanied by two large action photographs of Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal. This further highlights the bias in sport coverage.

Meanwhile an article headlined “*Abbey eyes Berg river hat-trick* (5 July 2008; pg 23) clearly shows the disparity in men’s and women’s sporting events not only in terms of coverage but also in terms of prize-giving. The forty-three line article reported “*Abbey Miedema is lining up a hat-trick of wins in the Izuzu Berg River Canoe Marathon that starts in Paarl next Wednesday but she is anticipating a tough race-within-a-race for the top women, which will materially affect their prize money. Miedema, 28, will start the four day 228km race as the clear favourite to take the women’s title on what promises to be a very full and fast flowing berg river. The eventual prize money that the women’s winner stands to earn will be determined by their overall finishing time as a percentage of the men’s winner’s time. If the top women*



*can finish 110% of the overall winner's time she will earn the same prize money as the top man.* The article was not accompanied by a photograph. This coverage further highlights the disparity in men's and women's sporting events. This confirms Oosthuizen's (2009) assertion that in terms of coverage and awards women are often marginalised.

An article headlined "*Aussie coach expects new world records*" (22 Mar 2008; pg 10) provided coverage on the Australian swimming team in preparation for the Olympics. The article was accompanied by a black and white photograph of male Olympic Gold medallist Grant Hackett and only the second half of the article focused on women swimmers Leisel Jones, Libby Lenton and Jessicah Schipper. This article appeared towards the end of the sport section. Bias of women in sport in newspaper coverage can be seen through the selection, omission and placement of articles in a newspaper. Readers of *The Independent on Saturday* have a right to truthful, objective information and reporting and media professionals need to strive to ensure that the information he/she disseminates is fair and accurate to avoid the misrepresentation of women in sport. Furthermore, reporters need to stick to reporting the facts and steer clear of giving an opinionated version of a story.

#### **4.3.1.1 Selection criteria used in newsrooms**

In order to understand the relative absence of women in the sport section of newspapers, we need to understand how stories are gathered and selected. Further, a certain amount of selection criteria is necessary in allocating sport coverage in newspapers because of space constraints. It is important to know who makes these decisions and what they are based on. An interview with News Editor at *Independent Newspapers* Kuben Chetty indicated that this decision is made by a publications' sport editor. Chetty (2009) explains that the publication's sports editor makes the decision and the decision is discussed with the editor of the newspaper. This affirms that sport editors are, the arbiters of what gets reported and how it gets reported. This

confirms Fourie's (2001) belief that what readers read in a newspaper may be a distorted reflection of reality simply because it has passed through various 'editorial checkpoints' before being disseminated to the public.

Chetty (2009:2) states "At our morning conference - the 6am conference we discuss the big sporting events of the day and it's very rare that we would lead on a women's sporting event – it's the Springboks, Bafana Bafana - local soccer or the cricket." Chetty (2009) explains that there is no set criterion used however a sport editor makes these decisions based on readership as well what's on at the time and what's showing on television as well. This was confirmed in an interview with Sport Editor at *Independent Newspapers*, Michael Tarr. According to Tarr (2009:1) "There are normally five or six stories that stand out as real stories but the three big sports are rugby, soccer and cricket." Journalist, Gosai affirms Tarr's statement adding that "as journalists they automatically slant towards the major codes - rugby, cricket and soccer as the women's game has only come to the fore in some of these codes in the past five or six years."

The bulk of back page articles in *The Independent on Saturday* feature male dominated sport. Further to this often the front page of the main edition also enjoys male sport coverage. This is evident in an article headlined "*Perfect Farewell for Kingsmead hero Polly*" (2 Feb 2008; pg 1). This article featured on the main page of the newspaper and was accompanied by a colour photograph of Shaun Pollock with his four-year old daughter Jemma as he walked onto the Kingsmead turf for the last time for South Africa. Further to this, the back page of the sport section of *The Independent on Saturday* (regarded as the main sport page) also featured an article headlined "Polly bows out in style" (2 Feb 2008; 24) and was accompanied by a colour photograph of Shaun Pollock. This article also covered Pollock's final appearance in his twelve year international career. It is clear that male sport dominates the pages of the *Independent on Saturday* in terms of articles and photographs. According to Chetty (2009:3) "You often see a big headline

“Springboks Win” and a big picture and a little story as a brief 50 or 80 words on Michelle Wee in the golf – I think it actually just shows you which is more important to everyone in the newspaper production process.”

This raises the question of selection criteria used in allocating sport coverage in newspapers. According to Chetty (2009) newspapers are dominated by male sports and there is no equity. Chetty (2009:2) indicated “although you may get coverage of women’s tennis there is very little coverage of for example women’s golf and percentage wise - more than 90 percent of sport coverage is male dominated sports.”

In an article headlined “*ANC stumps quotas*” (22 Mar 2008; pg 1) reporters Rooney Hartman and Stuart Hess provide coverage on sport quotas in SA. This article was accompanied by two colour, still shots of Andre Nel and Charl Langeveldt. The one-hundred and sixty line article on sport quotas did not make mention of any sport played by women. Further to this it is important to note that articles of women in sport are rarely accompanied by photographs and when photographs of women do appear in the sport section they are often portrayed in passive rather than active poses.

#### **4.3.1.2 Gendered Newsrooms**

In an article headlined “*Burry blasts them away again*” (Feb 16 2008; pg 23) Tim Whitefield illustrates how the dominance of male journalists can affect coverage afforded to women in sport. Whitefield’s column focused on a male mountain bike rider, Burry Stander and his achievements. This article was accompanied by an action, colour photograph of female rider Yolande Speedy. However the only mention of Speedy was in the last eighteen lines of the eighty-two line article. In the opening line of the article Whitefield states: “*Last week I apologised for giving Burry Stander too much publicity....well, nothing has changed since then, so sorry again.*” The article then goes on to describe Stander’s performance as well as those of other

male athletes and the mention of Speedy is towards the end of the article. The statement by Whitefield reinforces the fact that dominance of male reporters can and does affect the coverage afforded to female sport participants. This is affirmed by Van Zoonen's (1991) assertion that under-representation of women in news, results in part from the male dominance among reporters. According to Chetty (2009:3) "it would be interesting to see if there was a women's editor – a women's sports editor whether you would see more emphasis on women in sport." Chetty postulates that under-representation of women has got to do with who is behind the news and who selects and makes these choices. Chetty explains (2009:2-3) "newspapers stick to the old structures and there is not really a focus on women and women in sport. You would find that the Lifestyle section of the newspaper gets a revamp every once in a while but not so much the sport section." Oosthuizen (2009:3) affirms this view stating "there is a strong lingering element of male – yesterday males still running newsrooms. Women are trying to change that." This further confirms Curran and Gurevitch's (1996) notion that since mass media are in the hands of male owners and producers, they will operate to the benefit of a patriarchal society. This implies that women in sport will not be given the coverage it deserves simply because male media bosses may be of the view that sport played by women is negligible as compared to men's sport.

The above statements clearly indicate that there is disproportionate reporting of women's sporting events and the dominance of male journalists affect the type of coverage awarded to women in sport. An interview with sport journalist at *Independent Newspapers* Carl Peters confirms this view. Peters (2009:1) maintains "Sport is still dominated by males and females have to fight for a place in the coverage - they have to do something special."

In an article headlined "*Big seed semi showdown*" (22 Mar 2008; pg 9) coverage is provided on the men's and women's tennis semi-finals. The entire page of this edition was dedicated to tennis coverage. The semi-final

between Russia's Maria Sharapova and Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova did not receive any coverage apart from an action photograph of Sharapova. Unlike most of the action photographs that accompany sports articles of male dominated sport, this photograph is not accompanied by an article. Was the game between Sharapova and Kuznetsova so insignificant that it did not feature a write-up? In addition the inclusion of the photograph of Sharapova is also questionable as she is often regarded as a 'sex symbol' in the media. This clearly indicates that the media chooses to reflect Sharapova's sexual image rather than her tennis achievement, paying less attention to her athleticism and skill. Oosthuizen (2009:2) maintains "male dominated newsrooms are a definite persuasion of emphasis being placed on women's sexual attractiveness as opposed to the sporting performance - who gets the tennis coverage – the ones who double as models."

Meanwhile, Whitefield's Mountain Bike column (14 June 2008; pg 23) highlights the negative attitudes of many male journalists. In his column Whitefield states *"And just to prove that I am not 'chauvinistic and biased,' I am also going to tell you about the SA women who will be joining Greg Minaar in the World Championship downhill team....oh, I can't, there are none."* Whitefield added *"But there are two elite SA women who will be competing in the cross country and they do deserve mention. Amy Jane Mundy will be carrying KZN's hopes, while Yolande Speedy will be hoping for a confidence-boosting race as she prepares for Beijeng."* The secondary mention of female sport participants affirms that the domination of male journalists in newsrooms can affect coverage afforded women's sporting achievements. Further the sarcastic comment from Whitefield reinforces the negative mind-set of male journalists regarding women in sport and highlights men's domination in the sport pages of *The Independent on Saturday*. This confirms Robinson's (in George, Hatley and Paris, 2001) assertion that although both men and women participate in sport the male voice remains the dominant force as sports journalism is predominantly male.

#### 4.3.1.3 Depth of coverage of women in sport - Space

In an article headlined *"Midmar braces for big invasion"* (9 Feb, 2008; pg 23) the reporter provides coverage on the 35<sup>th</sup> Halfway Telkom Midmar Mile. Tommy Ballantyne's one-hundred and twenty-eight line article makes mention that this event attracts more than 18 000 male and female participants worldwide. However only thirty-nine lines of the article were dedicated to the women participants. In addition to this article a second article headlined *"Two of SA's best qualify for Beijeng"* (9 Feb 2008; pg 22) illustrates the minimal space awarded to coverage of women in sport. This article features women however the 'two' that the article referred to in the headline does not include any female athletes. The only mention of women was visible in sixteen lines of the one-hundred and eight line article. Most of the article focuses on the male sport players that have qualified for the Olympics. This highlights the disproportionate space of coverage of men and women's sporting events.

It is further evident that male dominated sport not only receives in-depth coverage in the sport section but often receive full page coverage of sport. In addition to coverage in the sport section male dominated sport such as rugby, motorsport, cricket and soccer also enjoy coverage in other sections of the newspaper. Tarr (2009) maintains that motorsport coverage has become very popular in newspapers. On (23 Feb, 2008; pg 7) the newspaper featured a full page spread on the A1GP in the *"Behind the News"* section. This full page spread was accompanied by six colour photographs. Further to this the front page of the main section of the newspaper also featured an article and a colour photograph of the A1GP.

In an article headlined *"KZN Senior Champs Return"* (1 Mar 2008; pg 23) columnist Tommy Balantyne featured an upcoming surfing championship that is open to male and female surfers as well as Kwa-Zulu Natal track and field events. However, only one sentence and four lines are dedicated to women

surfers stating *"The corresponding women's event looks like being a two way tussle between Tash Mentasti and Danielle le Roux."* All other one-hundred and sixteen lines were devoted to male surfers and athletes. This clearly indicates that the journalist does not rank the sportswomen's performance in the same category as the men's event. However in an interview Tarr (2009) expressed that the surfer girls get just as much coverage as surfer guys. This trend of reporting is also clear in Tim Whitfield's Mountain Bike column (1 Mar 2008; pg 23). Here the columnist dedicates only one sentence to coverage of the women's race. Further to this, mountain bike results are provided with the top five names and finishing times of male bikers being displayed and only the top three of the female bikers' results are published.

Women were featured in a column headlined *"Durbanites to defend Titles"* (29 Mar 2008; pg 23). The article included four sports - archery, water polo, life saving and artistic gymnastics. Seventy-two lines were dedicated to the South African Archery National Association Championships taking place in Durban. Only sixteen lines were dedicated to the female archery participants. The forty-nine line water polo section focused primarily on male participants with only six lines dedicated to women's coverage. The only other mention of women was in a list of lifesavers representing KZN at the South African Stillwater Lifesaving Championships in Durban. In the artistic gymnastic section of the article all fifty-nine lines are dedicated to the Women's Artistic Gymnastics Competition. This reinforces that many sports have been and still are 'gendered stereotyped' – that is they are commonly held to be more appropriate for one or other gender. This column clearly indicates that media reinforces the myths surrounding women's participation in sport in their concentration on mainly 'feminine' sports such as figure skating and gymnastics.

Tommy Ballantyne's column headlined *"Iron people converge for test of strength"* (12 April 2008: pg 23) makes reference to four sporting events, an endurance race; the Uber Cup – badminton; surfing and canoeing. In

covering the endurance event Ballantyne explains that athletes from around the world will be participating in one of the world's greatest endurance races that calls for an initial 3.8km ocean swim followed by a 180km cycle ride and ending with a standard marathon 42.2 kilometer run. Ballantyne added "*The standard time splits for the Pro Elite class athletes will be around fifty minutes for the swim, four-and-a-half hours for the cycle ride and another three hours for the marathon run totaling around eight hours.*" The reporter added that "*the first Pro Elite woman to finish is expected to take about an hour longer.*" The female entrants are mentioned towards the end of the coverage. Only fifteen lines of the forty-eight line article made reference to female participants. In the badminton section of the column the columnist leads the article explaining that a former KZN provincial player Michelle Edwards will captain the South African squad for the upcoming finals.

The balance of the twenty line article focuses on the men's event. In the surfing section there is no mention of female surfers apart from their names listed in small print in the results section. Here, the reporter presents the overall results and the inter-provincial results. In presenting this information all the boys' results are presented first in bold font as compared to the girls' results thereby making it difficult for a reader to locate on the page. The last section of the column focused on canoeing and the journalist mentioned the women participants in four lines of the thirty-four line article. This clearly highlights the disproportionate coverage afforded to female sport participants. Oosthuizen (2009) confirms that women are often sidelined and when coverage is provided it is often in the results sections. According to Oosthuizen (2009:1) "You would often find that women's results and awards are reported secondary to men's and if there was an event of comparable importance – it will still be men's way first – I have no doubt about it." He maintains that the only time this would change is if there is a shock horror, a stunner or some really big upset.



Coverage was provided on the upcoming London marathon (12 April 2008; pg 22) which is an event open to men and women. The article was headlined "*All to run for at the London Marathon*" and eight lines of the sixty-three line article made reference to women athletes. Most of the content of the article focused on various athletes from all over the world that will be participating in the event. The article made reference to the top male competitors in Africa and also more specifically referred to the South African male participants. There was no mention of female South African competitors.

In the "Fast balls" section where sport news is presented in brief, women are also afforded minimal coverage. On (12 April 2008; pg 22) five news in briefs snippets were presented in this section and one of the snippets focused on women in sport. This brief article headlined "Record for Kirsty" only featured women in nine lines. According to Chetty (2009) "Young boys who are very much influenced by their sporting idols would want to go out and play rugby and soccer and golf because they see Tiger Woods and the big pictures -I don't know if the young women readers (teenagers) would get the same from the kind of influence from the brief coverage of women – the emphasis is not the same." This confirms Tuchman's (in Van Zoonen, 1994) belief that the symbolic annihilation of women will endanger social development, for girls who lack positive images on which to model their behaviour.

Ballantynes column (3 May 2008; pg 27) covered two sporting codes - canoeing and bowls. In the canoeing section coverage to women is provided in thirty-three lines of the one-hundred and eleven line article. In addition Whitefield's Mountain Biking column headlined "*Burry steps up at World Cup*" (3 May 2008; pg 27) illustrates that the bulk of the article focused on the men's race and women are only awarded coverage in four lines of the ninety-eight line article. Whitefield in his column reported "*In the women's race, Jeanie Bomford cruised to a massive 15-minute victory.*" This column is accompanied by a black and white action photograph of Jeanie Bomford

crossing the line to win the Juicy Luicy Classic. In describing the Giants Challenge Whitefield states *“Tania Raats was the top woman, almost exactly an hour behind Stewart.”* Stewart is a male competitor. Further, women finalists are only mentioned in the results section of this column. The top sixteen of the men’s race are listed as compared to the top three of the women’s race.

Women have made great strides in sport in recent years. Despite this, coverage is not equitable to men. This is evident in an article headlined *“World record for Ethiopia’s Dibaba”* (7 June 2008; pg 28). This article appeared on the main page of the sports section and focused on athletics. The article states that Ethiopian athlete Tirunesh Dibaba broke the women’s world 5000m record at the Bislett Games. This is a huge achievement. However, only fifteen lines of the article referred to this accolade – the balance of the article focused on male participants. This coverage highlights that when female sport players do make it into the sport pages they are often overshadowed by male competitors.

#### **4.3.2 Language used in sport coverage**

While the lack of coverage of women in sport speaks volumes about the media’s treatment of women athletes, even more insidious is the type of coverage provided. By the use of language, media often chooses to focus on the other roles of the female athlete such as wife, sister, mother or ‘feminine’ role model. In addition, language used in reporting women in sport is also often riddled with sexual innuendo. This is evident in an article headlined *“Women’s tennis powerbrokers looking at a Sharapova-Ivanovic final”* (24 May 24 2008; 25). This article was accompanied by two still shots of tennis players Maria Sharapova and Anna Ivanovic. The article states *“The two glamour girls of the sport have the youthful talent, movie-star good looks and contrasting personalities to forge a compelling rivalry that could bankroll the women’s game for years to come.”* *“One is a 21-year-old*

*blonde, ranked first in the world and the most famous and best paid woman in sport. The other is a six months younger brunette and full of ambition to usurp the top ranking. Sharapova is explosive, sometimes moody at press conferences and single-minded. Ivanovic is niceness personified, a beaming smile never far away and ever courteous to players and press alike.*” “*For her part, Ivanovic, who has notably been shedding her squeaky-clean-girl-next-door image in recent months, with a series of sultry magazine photo shoots, feels she is getting closer all the time to making a Grand Slam breakthrough.*” This report clearly annihilates women as leading sports figures. The description emasculates their sporting talent. Further when reporting on men’s tennis there is no mention of hair colour and neither are male tennis players referred to as ‘glamour boys’. In addition the words ‘movie-star good looks’ immediately detracts attention away from their sporting ability and achievements. This authenticates Donohoe’s (2003) assertion that when women do get newspaper space a substantial proportion of it is actually derogatory or focused excessively on the sportswoman’s physical appearance. The detailed descriptions of the tennis players and their characters are ambiguous in that they are riddled with sexual innuendo as Maria Sharapova for one, is often portrayed as a sex symbol in the media. The above coverage highlights the media’s power in reinforcing stereotypes on women in sport and this has been confirmed by Kane and Greendorfer (1994) who maintain that the wrong kind of messages sent by the media, those that further entrench ‘appropriate’ feminine roles rather than accurate athletic roles, could possibly do more harm to societal acceptance on women in sport than no attention at all.

An article headlined “*Ivanovic clinches top spot for first time*” (7 June 2008; pg 25) clearly indicates that reporters often use words that place emphasis on ‘femininity’ and underplay women’s sporting accomplishments. The opening line of this article states “*Ana Ivanovic let out a girlish squeal and covered her face, delighted with what she had just achieved. And this was before the young Serb learned she had clinched the No. 1 ranking for the*

*first time.*” By use of the words ‘*girlish squeal and covered her face*’ the reporter focuses on the tennis players femininity and Ivanovic’s sporting achievement is downplayed and trivialised.

An article headlined “*Sisters sail into semis*” with the caption “*Sibling Rivalry*” (8 March 2008; pg 16) shows that when coverage is afforded to women, journalists often focus on other roles of the female athlete such as wife, sister, mother or ‘feminine’ role model. The article states “*The sisters playing for the first time on Indian soil, were excited over their semi-final showdown.*” The article was accompanied by a large, colour, action shot of Venus Williams in her tennis gear. In this article the frequent reference to Venus Williams and Serena Williams as ‘sisters’ compromises their individuality.

This is also evident in an article headlined “*Train like a Russian and win – Fordyce*” (14 June 2008; pg 24) where reporter Iqbal Khan interviews Bruce Fordyce and gets his views on the best way to beat the Russians who have dominated the marathon for the past few years. This article appeared on the main page of the sport section but was not accompanied by a photograph. In his article Khan states, “*It looks like tomorrow’s 83<sup>rd</sup> Comrades will be no different with Oleg Kharitonov, Leonid Shvetsov and Grigoriy Murzin likely to fill the top three places while the women’s race is expected to be dominated once again by the Russian twins Elena and Olesya Nurgalieva, plus Tatyana Zhirkova and Marina Bychkova.*” The researcher maintains that by referring to Elena and Olesya Nurgalieva as ‘twins’ it compromises their individuality and performance as world class athletes. Only six lines of the one-hundred and four line article were devoted to coverage of female comrades’ participants. Further to this, the mention of female athletes is only seen in the latter part of the article. The print media can contribute to change by portraying more women in non-traditional roles and by using non-sexist language. The print media by their use of the language and the way in which they depict, or report sport news about women create and maintain attitudes in society.

An article headlined *“Not all in the family: Venus”* (5 Jul 2008; pg 30) reported on the Wimbledon final between Serena Williams and Venus Williams. The article states *“Beaten fifth-seeded semi-finalist Elena Dementieva expressed innocent doubts when she suggested confusingly that the outcome of today’s title match was going to be ‘a family decision.’ Dementieva’s relatively good spoken English could have perhaps let her down as she tried to express the nuances of what she felt, but Venus Williams erupted in fury at any hint of a fix.”* Venus states *“I find the question pretty offensive because I’m extremely professional in everything that I do on and on the court”*, she snarled. The bulk of the article focused on the above comments rather than the actual Wimbledon final. The article further states *“The sisters warmed up for their singles final by teaming up yesterday to reach the doubles title match as well. The Williams sisters have also won the Australian Open doubles title twice as well as the French Open once.”* The two tennis players are also often referred to as ‘the pair’ or ‘sisters’ in the article and this discounts their individual sporting prowess. This article is accompanied by a colour photograph with the caption *“On the Double: Serena and Venus Williams walk past each other during their doubles match against Nathalie Dechy of France and Casey Dellacqua of the US at Wimbledon.”* Furthermore, this page of the sport section is dedicated to the coverage of tennis and the main feature of the page is an article headlined *“Dream Final for Rafa and Roger.”* This article is accompanied by two large, colour, action shots of male tennis players Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer. This coverage highlights that men dominate the sport pages of *The Independent on Saturday*.

In an article headlined *“King of the groms series heats up”* (8 Mar 2008; pg 23) journalist Pierre Tostee provides coverage on South Africa’s junior male surfers. There is also mention of the Roxy Invitational and the inclusion of female surfers is evident. The article states *“Also under way this weekend is the Roxy Invitational taking place in Mozambique where a handful of our top female surfers are having a trip of a lifetime”*. Tostee’s use of the word ‘handful’ is ambiguous and implies that there are not many female surfers

‘making waves’ in this sport. This further reinforces sport writers negative attitude of women in sport. The above quotation also affirms Butler and Paisley’s (in Van Zoonen, 1994) assertion that the media function in a counterproductive way and one of the reasons for this is the dominance of male editors, producers and journalists whose gender socialisation causes them to reproduce society’s attitude and dominant values.

Meanwhile an article on the pro junior surfing championship headlined “*Rudy flies the family flag*” (22 Mar 2008; pg 23) included the performance of a female surfer, Roseanne Hodge. However seven lines of the ninety-seven line article referred to Hodge’s performance. The single sentence read “*In the Rip Curl Women’s Pro, East Londoner Roseanne Hodge was also dispatched to the loser’s rounds but bounced back in round two and is now matched with Hawaiian Megan Abubo in round three.*” Words such as “talented”, “fearless”, “champion” and “top seed” are used to describe the junior male surfers in this article however “dispatched”, “loser’s” and “bounced back” were used to provide information of the female surfers’ race. These negative words imply and further reinforce reporters’ negative and stereotypical attitude of sport played by women.

Language used in sport reporting also often downplays women’s sporting ability. This is evident in an article headlined “*Giant killer Safina breaks Serena’s unbeaten run*” (10 May 2008; pg 23). The article focused on Safina’s victory over Serena Williams and Justine Henin and was accompanied by a photograph of Dinara Safina in her tennis gear. However the article used words such as ‘*tense*’, ‘*series of mistakes*’ and ‘*held her nerve*’ – words that downplay the sporting ability of the tennis players. In this edition men in sport have been described with phrases such as ‘specialist,’ ‘champion,’ ‘fierce,’ ‘quality and stability,’ and ‘powerful.’ This confirms *Independent Newspapers’* editor Oosthuizen’s (2009) statement that language used when reporting men’s sport is more denoting power and robustness as compared to women in sport. This further authenticates that

language used in sport differs from gender to gender. However sport journalist at *Independent Newspapers* Mervyn Naidoo (2009) states that he believes that the language used in sport reporting does not differ from gender to gender. Naidoo (2009:2) states “I personally like to use lots of colourful terms – bring in nice imagery just to depict or to paint a picture kind of thing – so I wouldn’t hold back.”

In an article headlined “*Mcgregor in pole position for the fifth Berg River victory*” (July 12 2008; pg 31) the reporter provides coverage on a canoeing event. Nine lines of the thirty-one line article focused on the women’s race. The article states “*The defending champion in the women’s race, Abbey Miedema, maintained her 10- minute lead over Epworth schoolgirl Abie Adie at the end of day three. Lindi-May Harmsen, who was lying in third place, was forced to pull out of the race after Moravia suffering from a sore shoulder, injured when she hit a tree on day two.*” By the use of language the reporter places more emphasis on the injury of Harmsen rather than providing coverage of the outstanding performance of Miedema. In comparison, when describing the men’s race the reporter makes reference to how the male participants enjoyed the “*wide and fast flowing Berg river*” and used phrases such as “*raced himself to pole position.*”

In an article headlined “*Lipstick smiles mask underwater ordeal*” (26 Jul 2008; pg 14) coverage was provided on a synchronized swimming championship. This article was accompanied by a large, colour, action shot of swimmers Andrea Fuentes and Gemma Mengual of Spain at the European Championships for swimming, diving and synchronised swimming in Netherlands. The article states “*Behind the lipstick, hair gel, fixed smiles and sequinned swimsuits lurks a lung-bursting test of athleticism, artistry and technical skill.*” The detailed coverage and photograph of this sporting event affirms that when female sport players receive coverage it is generally in ‘feminine’ sports such as synchronized swimming or gymnastics and language used confirms that emphasis is always placed on their physical

appearance. Synchronized swimming is a hybrid form of swimming and dance, consisting of swimmers performing a synchronised routine of elaborate moves in the water, accompanied by music. This sport demands advanced water skills, and requires great strength, endurance and flexibility as exceptional breath control when upside down underwater. However, the reporter in his coverage focused on the women's appearance rather than their sporting abilities.

Language plays an important role in shaping and developing what people perceive as reality and media professionals have an obligation to ensure that the language used in sport reporting does not differ from gender to gender.

#### **4.3.3 Visual Imagery that are presented to readers**

In an article headlined *"Ivanovic clinches top spot for first time"* (7 June 2008; pg 25) the reporter provides coverage on tennis. The article featuring Ana Ivanovic was accompanied by a large, colour, action shot of the tennis player in her tennis gear.

The caption of the photograph read: *"Cheeky Winner: Serbia's Ana Ivanovic will take over the number one ranking irrespective of what happens in today's women's final against Dinara Safina at Roland Garros."* The caption in this article is derisive in that the photograph exposes Ivanovic's buttocks. Further the image presented places emphasis on her physique rather than her sporting performance.



**Figure 4.7: Cheeky Winner**



***Caption:*** Serbia's Ana Ivanovic will take over the number one ranking irrespective of what happens in today's women's final against Dinara Safina at Roland Garros. ***Source:*** *The Independent* on Saturday (7 June 2008; pg 25)

Meanwhile an article on the Cape Argus Pick 'n Pay Cycle Tour and the invention of the bicycle appeared in the "*Behind the News*" section of the newspaper (15 Mar 2008; pg 7). The article headlined "*Competitors battle severe conditions at lifesaving champs*" mentions the winner of the women's event in six lines of the seventy-eight line article. This article was also accompanied by a colour, action photograph of the men's race. The article focussed predominantly on the accomplishments of the male cyclists.

Despite the fact that the event was open to men and women participants majority of the coverage and visual imagery was on the male participants. This is further reinforced in an article headlined "*Elite core of paddlers back in Durbs*" (14 June 2008; pg 23) that featured women surf ski participants.

Seven lines of the thirty-eight line article were dedicated to reporting on the women's results. This article however was accompanied by an action, colour shot of only male competitors. This reinforces that visual imagery of female sport players are virtually absent in the print media.

Images that do appear in the sport pages place emphasis on women's sexual attractiveness. This has been confirmed by Chetty (2009) who suggested that when women's sport is covered, emphasis is placed on their sexual attractiveness as opposed to their sporting performance. Chetty (2009:2) explains "During the Olympics a lot of the male reporters reported on and covered women's volleyball because women were in skimpy outfits - there were attractive women with good physiques – so that got a lot of coverage."

Chetty (2009) further added that *Independent Newspapers* features many photographs of Anna Kornikova in tennis coverage. Chetty (2009:2) explains "Although she wasn't that a good a player she was very attractive and got a lot of coverage – she wasn't winning anything and you might have a situation where the winner or a favourite or the number one seed was not getting in the newspaper but Anna Kornikova was."

Sport journalist at *Independent Newspapers* Mervyn Naidoo (2009:2) added "Newspaper sport editors often use pictures of Sharapova and 'milk that for what it's worth' because the layout guys and even the editors want something good looking 'not necessarily the person must be good looking' but something that is standing out and if someone is good looking it adds to the value."

**Figure 4.8: Maria Sharapova and Ana Ivanovic**



***Source: The Independent on Saturday (24 May 2008; Pg 25)***

An article headlined “*Women’s tennis powerbrokers looking at a Sharapova-Ivanovic final*” (24 May 2008; pg 25) provides coverage of women’s tennis. The article was accompanied by two still photographs. The above image highlights that women in sport are often portrayed in ‘passive’ rather than ‘active’ poses. Further to this the language used has been discussed under the section ‘language used in sport coverage’ as it completely annihilates the sporting ability of women in sport. This article reinforces that when women do appear in the sport section emphasis is placed on the physical appearance.

It is also transparent that when women in sport do appear in the sport pages they are often overshadowed by men in sport. In an article headlined “*Booked for Beijing*” (5 April 2008; pg 3) coverage is provided on female swimmer record breakers. The article was also accompanied by two colour

photographs of KZN's Mellissa Corfe who set her third national record of the Telkom SA Championship in the women's 200 metre freestyle and Lize-Marie Retief who set a new national best in the women's 200 metre butterfly. However the article also featured male swimmers William Diering, Neil Versfeld, Roland Schoeman and Ryk Neethling. This page was dominated by a large, colour, action photograph of male swimmers William Diering and Neil Versfeld in the 200 metre breaststroke final Kings Park in Durban. This emphasises that reporters by the use of visual imagery often underplay women's sporting achievements.

An article headlined "*Surfers flock to Durban*" (5 April 2008; pg 27) included women in the coverage. Twenty-six of the one-hundred line article focused on female surfers and their sporting performance. This article was accompanied by a large, colour, action shot of a male surfer that dominated the sports page. This reinforces that the sport pages of *The Independent on Saturday* is dominated by photographs of men.

In an article headlined "*SA aim for the top*" (24 May 2008; pg 27) that focused on junior surfers the inclusion of female surfers was evident. This article was accompanied by a large colour action shot of Durban surfer Sarah Baum in her bikini. However, only ten lines of the ninety-five line article were dedicated to female surfers. The image of Baum in her bikini was the main feature of this page and this once again reinforces that when women in sport are given coverage, emphasis is placed on their sexual attractiveness.

This is further evident in an article headlined "*Wave Riders Descend*" (14 June 2008; pg 23) coverage is provided on the ninth annual Mr Price Pro Surfing Competition. Majority of the article focused on the male contenders, however, the article is accompanied by a colour, action shot of female surfer Tammy Lee Smith who is seen in her bikini top and surf shorts. Only thirty-one lines of the one-hundred and four line article were dedicated to female

surfers. This affirms Schell's (1999) assertion that in written texts and visual images women in sport are often portrayed as sexual objects available for male consumption rather than as competitive athletes.

Surfer Sarah Baum also featured in an article headlined "*Juniors rip up Durban Surf*" (28 Jun 2008; pg 23). The article on South Africa's junior surfing talents was accompanied by a large, action, colour photograph of Durban's Sarah Baum however the coverage focused on the male surfers. The photograph was accompanied by another photograph featuring male junior trialists and was the main feature of this page.

Oosthuizen (2009) maintains that photographs that make it into newspapers are the really powerful action shots. Oosthuizen states (2009:2) "I think there's nothing to beat a really wonderful action shot but there will always be the distraction of a bit of or too much leg or cleavage showing to sway the arguments somewhere or the other – true old sexism." This statement reaffirms that women are often typically used as sexual objects and are portrayed stereotypically in newspapers. However, Tarr (2009) explains that a photograph is selected if "it's a great shot....a stroke played by Venus - a very upstage action shot - the picture that sums up the story of the match, somebody crying; somebody gesticulating; somebody smiling; doing a cartwheel - men or women – it is a picture that captures what the reporter has said."

An article headlined "*Tour de Force is HoP's aim*" (3 May 2008; pg 27) is accompanied by a photograph of a female sport player. The image shows South African Triathlon participant Kate Robberts who is seen together with a young male participant. The caption reads "*SA Triathlon star Kate Roberts was on hand to fasten the helmet strap for a triathlete of the future at a duathlon event at the Dube Tribal Authority area, near Richards Bay.*" The black and white photograph and caption reinforces women's stereotypical role as 'mother,' "feminine role-model" or 'caregiver.' This image further

highlights the fact that women athletes are often portrayed in 'passive' rather than 'active' poses in the media.

***Figure 4.9: SA Triathlon star Kate Roberts***



**Caption:** “SA Triathlon star Kate Roberts was on hand to fasten the helmet strap for a triathlete of the future at a duathlon event at the Dube Tribal Authority area, near Richards Bay.”

**Source:** *The Independent on Saturday* (3 May 2008; pg 27)

Under-representation and stereotypical portrayals of sportswomen in newspapers may instill in its news audiences the belief that women’s sports are less powerful, less interesting and thus separate and different from men’s sports. Images are powerful tools that shape and reflect attitudes and values and therefore media professionals need to provide an accurate and equitable portrayal of women in sport.

## **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter analysed sport articles from *The Independent on Saturday* for the period February 2008 to July 2008 (6 months). It further presented the qualitative findings of the thematic content analysis of newspaper texts from *The Independent on Saturday* and the interviews conducted with media professionals.

Articles were analysed and interpreted using various themes and sub-themes. Based on the analysis and interpretations, conclusions and recommendations will be made in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Conclusions

The previous chapter analysed and interpreted sport articles from *The Independent on Saturday*. The conclusions and recommendations presented in this chapter are related to the findings in the previous chapter.

This study has explored the influence of the print media in portraying women in sport by reviewing how public opinion is formed regarding women in sport; analysing textual and image representation of women in sport in the print media; and exploring how the representation of women in the print media shapes public opinion with a view to offering guidelines for objective reporting of women in sport.

It is evident from the findings that there is no equity in the print media in terms of coverage of women in sport. Articles on women in sport are often placed at the bottom of pages or towards the end of the sport section. The language used in articles often differs from gender to gender. Men are generally described in terms of their athletic attributes, with words such as 'dynamic' and 'powerful.' Women on the other hand are generally described with words that downplay their sporting ability or with emphasis on their physical appearance such as 'blonde,' 'cheeky' and 'hot.' It is also evident that women in sport are infantilised and portrayed in emotive terms. If women and girls' sport are ignored or trivialized, what sort of message is this sending?

When women athletes are the subject of sport reports and commentary, they are often referred to in words that treat them differently than men, often in ways, which downplay or trivialise their achievements. Stereotypical, dismissive and confining representations of women and femininity abound in



mass media content. This study has shown that men dominate the sport pages of *The Independent on Saturday* and the researcher believes that women's experiences from marginalisation and invisibility needs to be addressed and rescued.

The researcher has found that women's sport is extraordinarily under-reported and believes that this situation is wrong and must change. Sport writers and editors have a professional obligation to report the facts as journalists. The reality is that there is an entire world of women's sport that is excluded from the sport pages which were analysed.

If there are significantly more men's stories than women's, it is because of the decisions made by sport editors. Further to this, newspapers consistently provide detailed coverage of men's sport as compared to women and this can be largely attributed to male dominated newsrooms. There are several relevant questions that should be addressed and among them is: How, if at all, do editors' personal attitudes toward women and women's sport affect the coverage which appears in their sport section as well as the question of gender imbalances in newsrooms?

Women are often made invisible, trivialised, marginalized, and reduced to sex objects in the print media. The language used in the print media is a powerful tool in the reinforcement of gender distinctions. South Africa for one has now entered a new social and political dispensation characterised by democracy, non-racialism and non-sexism. These values must be entrenched in our sport and likewise – the coverage of sport.

Media has a powerful influence on girls' and young women's socialisation into sport. For this reason, it is imperative that we observe and challenge those media representations that perpetuate the notion that only white, young, physically attractive, non-disabled women can, and do engage in sport. Constantly promoting this 'ideal look' greatly restricts the availability of

role models and representations that depict a wider range of women involved with sport, and may discourage young girls from engaging in those sports deemed 'unfeminine'. Creating and sustaining change must involve challenging media to not only increase the amount of coverage for women's sports, but to also extend the range of diversity to include coverage of racial and ethnic minorities, larger women, women with disabilities, and older women. Television, radio and the print media play a central role in informing our knowledge, opinions and attitudes about women and sport. This is achieved through both the amount of coverage and the images and language used. The media can and should play an important role in raising the public profile of women's sport.

The reality is that newspapers today are concerned with shrinking readerships. The researcher believes that they should recognize the potential in the growing number of females as sport section readers. Furthermore it is probable that young readers will not be motivated to seek out information in the newspaper when they cannot read about the accomplishments of their female role models. Newspaper editors need to understand that it could be this younger audience that newspapers are failing to reach.

Given the well-documented under-reporting of women's sports, the confirmation of previous reports by this study, and the fact that there are many women's events and athletes that could be reported, the obvious question is: Why aren't more stories written about women's sport? To answer this question researchers must move beyond the kinds of quantitative and qualitative studies of the print media which, to date have characterised research in the area. One key to the answer must be the attitudes, opinions and practices of newspaper sport editors. Sport editors are, after all, the arbiters of what gets reported and how it gets reported.

The media has a key role in the development of public opinion, and revives the question of how the agenda of the media and the general public are linked. People often talk about things they see or hear in the media. It is now generally accepted that issues, which are given priority treatment by the media, are the ones, which will be given attention by the public. However, to influence the development of opinion it is not sufficient for the media to influence the public's own emphasis on current issues to ensure convergence with the emphasis of the media.

Media's agenda may primarily influence public debate through people talking about issues featured in the media and about the aspects given preferred treatment. In doing so, the media propagates issues of concern to individuals, groups and organisations. The issues featured in the news for example are thus guaranteed in forums and situations where the issue at hand will be discussed in relation to the everyday experiences of the people. The under-reporting of women in sport is a tragic undervaluing of the sacrifices, dedication and extraordinary talent of South Africa's exceptional sportswomen.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Newspaper reporters should cease the sexist practice of focusing on females as the 'weaker sex'. Reporters need to guard against referring to sportswomen as 'girls.' Women athletes should be referred to as 'women' as sportsmen are referred to as 'men' and not 'boys'. It is important for reporters to reduce the use of descriptors implying weakness in women's sport. Newspapers and media institutions as a whole should provide more coverage of existing women's sport.

The researcher has noted that newspaper editors generally pay less attention to the sport section. The sport section is an important one in that

the same set of editorial standards for accuracy, distinguishing fact from opinion, competence and editing should be applied consistently as they are applied to all other sections of the newspaper.

Women's sport needs more exposure, much more. The stereotype of the frail female has not been dislodged. This inequity is unfair, it is wrong – it can be changed and must be changed. Merely increasing the number of women in sport journalism will not itself eliminate sexism in sport news. Sexism in the sport media is not primarily a function of the prejudices of individual journalists – male or female. It is a bias woven into journalists' beliefs about the make-up of news and the practices they follow to uncover the news. Efforts to change should therefore be mounted on several fronts. No doubt, increasing the number of journalists who appreciate the problem of sexism in the media and are committed to improving the situation will help.

Journalists need to guard against using photographs that sexualise women athletes and detract attention away from their sporting performance. They should portray sportswomen as active rather than passive and focus on sporting ability rather than sexual attractiveness or stereotypical roles of women. Reporters have a duty not to place undue attention on factors like clothing or personal relationships that are irrelevant to sporting performances. They should not use terms like, 'cute', 'movie-star good looks', 'glamour girls,' 'curvaceous,' 'hot' and 'caress' that are irrelevant to sporting ability and performance. They have a journalistic obligation not to use gendered terms like 'sportsman', 'sportsmanship,' which exclude women. Reporters must not trivialise women's sport or ignore women's sporting events. Equal space and status should be allocated to women's sport. Inroads must be made to eliminate negative stereotypes of women and women in sport. Those responsible for reporting sport should ensure that the quantity and the quality of coverage of women's sport are equitable compared with that of men.

Coverage of women's sport in newspapers should roughly be equivalent to the coverage of men's sports. The researcher believes that a socially responsible press should ideally offer balanced coverage of women in sport. We must support those media who do not objectify women athletes or trivialise their athletic endeavours, but do provide positive role models and celebrate the accomplishments of women from various backgrounds. It is essential to encourage young girls and women to become educated consumers who will have the power to resist biased media images and incite change at the local, national and international levels.

Women athletes are no different than men athletes in the skill, dedication and courage they bring to their sports. Sports commentary and reporting, like the use of the English language in general, should therefore reflect the fundamental equity of women and men, both on and off the field.

Descriptions, which place too much emphasis on physical appearances or skills not related to athletic performance, should be avoided. Men athletes are generally described in terms of their athletic attributes, with words such as 'dynamic,' 'powerful,' 'strong,' and 'swift' in common usage. Women athletes should be described in similar terms.

Women's sports are discriminated against based on their gender by the media. A balanced and realistic view is absent in the media. Young girls and women from all ages, races, and social class backgrounds are breaking down historical barriers to their participation in sport in South Africa and throughout the world. The media ought to reflect and perpetuate that reality - not the homophobia or stereotypes of individual reporters. Sportswomen must receive the admiration, dignity and respect they deserve, the same admiration, dignity and respect afforded to male athletes. Why should men be receiving more of the sports coverage in an era during which South Africa and other countries are making great strides towards gender equity?

There are undoubtedly serious imbalances in the coverage of women's sport and they need to be addressed and resolved. Since women have been involved in sport they have been depicted in the media in ways that reinforce the prevailing community attitudes and stereotypes about them. They have battled criticism about the harmful effects of involvement on the female mind and body.

Women's sport is clearly under-reported and coverage that does exist is inferior to that afforded to men's sport. Women's sport is often regarded as soft news or that which is of little importance. Media output fails to represent the actual numbers of women in the world (51%). Their experience should be reported and reported accurately. Those media institutions that fail to do so, fail in their professional responsibility.

It is the researcher's expectation that further quantitative and qualitative investigations of women's sports coverage will be conducted. Such studies are valuable because they will serve as a catalyst to chart change or the lack of change. Further research could be explored at Doctorate level. The researcher would like to explore the topic in new and creative ways that not only will define the scope and content of media coverage, but also will yield a better understanding of why women's sports remain under-reported. This could include an analysis of the broadcast media with regards to coverage of women's sport. Furthermore, a survey could be carried out with print and broadcast sports editors, journalists and the public to analyse the extent of media influence of public opinion.

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## **Appendix A – Covering letter for interviews**

Consent to conduct interviews at Independent Newspapers was required to complete the study. Although the unit of analysis for this research was *The Independent on Saturday*, consent was obtained from the sport editor of the Daily News, Michael Tarr. This is because *The Independent on Saturday*, the Daily News and various other publications all use sport journalists from a common pool of writers. Both *The Independent on Saturday* and the Daily News are published by Independent Newspapers.

## **Appendix A – Covering letter for interviews**

## Appendix B – Interview Schedule

1. South Africa has entered a new political and social dispensation characterized by democracy, non-racialism and non-sexism. It is important for these values to be entrenched in our sport. As a sport journalist do you think that there is gender equity in the print media's coverage of sport? Elaborate.

YES

NO

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2. Would you say that male journalists dominate sport reporting?

YES

NO

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3. Do you think the domination of male journalists in newsrooms affect coverage of women's sporting achievements? How?

YES

NO

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4. Do you think increasing the amount of women journalists will increase the amount of coverage of women in sport?

YES

NO

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5. A certain amount of selection criteria is necessary in allocating sport coverage in newspapers because of space constraints.

- a. Who makes these decisions?
- b. What are they based on?

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6. Would you say that when women's sport is covered, emphasis is placed on their sexual attractiveness as opposed to the sporting performance?

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7. Images are powerful tools that shape and reflect attitudes and values. Is there a particular criteria used when selecting photographs of women in sport?

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8. Do you believe that journalists can contribute towards eliminating negative stereotypes of women in sport? If so, how?

YES

NO

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9. As a sport journalist your principle task is to distribute information in a fair, objective and honest way. Do you believe that print media provide a true, unbiased reflection of the abilities of women in sport? Explain.

YES

NO

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10. Do you believe that the language used in sport reporting differs from gender to gender? Explain.

YES

NO

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11. Newspaper decision makers are often concerned about shrinking readerships. Do you think they recognise the potential in the growing number of women as sport section readers? Explain.

YES

NO

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