

The development of an adolescent sporting gendered habitus: Young people's interpretation of UK sports-media coverage of Rio 2016 Olympic Games

Sarah Metcalfe

sarah.n.metcalfe@durham.ac.uk

Orcid ID= <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1292-4310>

Department of Sport & Exercise Sciences, Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom

The development of an adolescent sporting gendered habitus: Young people's interpretation of UK sports-media coverage of Rio 2016 Olympic Games

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice explains how institutions – specifically for this paper, sports media – influence the taken-for-granted assumptions of one's habitus. Sportswomen receive less media coverage than sportsmen, yet the influence that this has on young people is under-researched. Using a mixed method approach, combining the results of a content and narrative analysis of 2514 articles and 2051 photographs from four UK online media outlets (BBC Sport, *The Guardian*, Sky Sports News, Twitter Moments) with interviews with 70 young people (33 males and 37 females; aged 15-16 years) from three schools in North East England, this paper explores how sports-media messages are interpreted within the framework of a gendered habitus. Two empirical themes emerged: firstly, young people expect female athletes to be underrepresented and sexualised in sports-media, affecting how sport is constructed as unimportant for females for the accrual of social capital. Secondly, media messages that promote female attractiveness are internalised within young people's habitus. The adolescent gendered habitus is influenced by media messages: the prioritisation of sportsmen leads to young women viewing sport as 'not for them'. The role of sport within a gendered habitus reflects hegemonic masculinity, promoting sport for men and stereotypical femininity for women.

Key words: Olympics; media; gender; habitus; youth

Introduction

Extensive research has explored how male and female athletes are depicted in sports media, typically finding that female athletes receive significantly less coverage than males, and the quality of this coverage often trivialises or sexualises their achievements (Billings, Angelini, MacArthur, Bissell, & Smith, 2014; Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004; Eastman & Billings, 1999; Godoy-Pressland, 2014; Godoy-Pressland & Griggs, 2014; Harris & Clayton, 2002; Knight & Giuliano, 2001; Wensing & Bruce, 2003; Yip, 2016). Media coverage of the Olympic Games; however, offers the most equal form of media coverage between sportsmen and women (Billings & Eastman, 2002; King, 2007), providing an anomaly to the overall gendered media coverage of sport. Furthermore, some progress has been made in recent years, reflecting the proliferation

of internet news and social media challenging traditional representations, moving towards depicting sportswomen as serious athletes and model citizens which challenge the taken-for-granted association of masculinity with sport (Bruce, 2016). Less is known about how media coverage which prioritises male athletes is interpreted, understood, and acted upon, by audiences (Lines, 2000). Lines argued that set in the context of low physical activity levels, more research within an interpretative paradigm needs to be done to explore the links between media and young people. Furthermore, in providing support for the justification of this article, '[c]ontent analysis may identify amplification or omissions in representation, which are not explicitly recognised by an audience' (Lines, 2000, p. 670). This paper addresses this gap by exploring how gendered media messages concerning sportsmen and women are interpreted by an adolescent audience, drawing comparisons between data obtained during a content analysis with semi-structured interviews with young people. This paper therefore explores how young people interpret sports-media messages, considering whether sport is internalised as a possible or valued behaviour within one's gendered habitus.

Informed by Bourdieusian principles of habitus, field, capital and doxa (Bourdieu, 1984, 1989, 1990, 2001), the central aim of this paper is to explore how media messages can become inculcated within the gendered habitus of young people, forming taken-for-granted knowledge concerning the social construction of sport as a gendered activity. Young people possess a gendered habitus (McLeod, 2005; McNay, 1999), which represents the tastes, dispositions and actions that are influenced by gendered norms and beliefs. The gendered habitus operates across all social fields (Chambers, 2005), thus it is important to explore the interconnection between the gendered habitus and sporting participation to consider how sport is (or is not) integral to the expression of a gendered habitus. The mixed methods approach compares a

content and narrative analysis of online media texts with qualitative interviews with young people. According to Cicourel (1993), the perspective and understanding of the child is missing in Bourdieu's work, hence this paper addresses this by exploring how the development of an adolescent sporting and gendered habitus is influenced by media outlets which reinforce taken-for-granted assumptions about sport and gender. This paper draws conclusions about the influence of sports media in replicating historical ideas about masculinity and femininity, and how these categories of sporting bodies affect how young people view sport as 'natural' to a male identity. Discrepancies between media messages and the assumptions young people have about male and female sport are discussed in relation to a delay between one's gendered habitus 'catching up' with new gender discourses which are evident in online media representations of male and female athletes.

Application of Bourdieu's habitus, field, capital and doxa to this research

The habitus, as 'a system of schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 40) demonstrates the potential relationship between habitus and behaviour. Historically, sports media privileges men, and through a Bourdieusian framework which is 'sensitive to history, pre-existing social structures and the discursive manifestation of discourse' (Dillabough, 2004, p. 495), the latent messages of media texts function as existing discourse which influences the formation of a gendered habitus. In *Masculine Domination* (2001), Bourdieu discusses the role of the family, church and education on reproducing taken-for-granted assumptions regarding gender. Media establishments, such as television, newspapers and social media, also represent institutions which promote a 'set of shared assumptions and beliefs' (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 47). The consistency in which media messages have subordinated women (Bruce, 2016) illustrates how the sports media can represent a

social institution which reinforces gender norms through displaying gender assumptions regarding male and female athletes. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) highlight that the historical subordination of women and the hegemonic position of men represents the paradigmatic form of symbolic violence. Through media messages which regularly and repeatedly demonstrate a prioritisation of sportsmen (King, 2007), symbolic violence is conceptualised in this article through the taken-for-granted and ‘natural’ position assumed for sportsmen within the field of sports media. To this extent, the association between the sports media and one’s habitus is suggested by Bourdieu (1984, p. 473), whereby ‘the social order is progressively inscribed in people’s minds’: the historical underrepresentation of female athletes can be viewed as a ‘social order’ in the sense that this is reproduced and normalised in sports-media texts.

The mass media has been identified as having an agenda-setting capacity, shaping reality and influencing audience’s attitudes towards a particular issue (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Importantly, agenda setting as a media concept, can be extended and explored through a Bourdieusian framework. Agenda setting acknowledges that ‘for each object on the agenda, there is an agenda of attributes that influences our understanding of the object’ (McCombs, 2005, p. 546), linking to the development of one’s habitus as a set of dispositions or ‘schemes of thought’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 40) in relation to a specific field. For instance, in considering sports-media coverage, Frederick, Burch, and Blaszk (2015) suggest that increased coverage of male athletes may lead to audiences perceiving an increased importance of male sport compared to female sport, emphasising the way in which consistent media messages around women in sport can influence how sport is socially constructed as a valued ‘male’ activity.

Using Bourdieu's field theory, each field represents a site of struggle for legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1985). Sports media constitutes a field, and, in similarity to the identification of televised media as a field (Bourdieu, 1999), a struggle over the legitimacy of athlete representation occurs, for 'the system of the institutions and agents whose interests are bound up with sport tend to function as a field' (Bourdieu, 1978, p. 821). Developments in the representation of female athletes, which challenge traditional sexist and derogatory representations, by presenting the female athlete as both athletic and model citizens (Bruce, 2016), demonstrate a struggle for the preferred and dominant 'new' representation of sportswomen. In considering the interpretation of sports-media messages and text, an individual gendered habitus operates within, and across, fields (Krais, 2006). The translation of dominant media representations of male and female athletes into capital within an individual's social field dictates the extent to which sporting participation and behaviours are viewed as legitimate.

Within the field of sports media, those athletes who meet dominant representations of the 'idealised' gendered body can accrue capital; through media exposure, sponsorship contracts, endorsements etc. (Braunstein & Zhang, 2005; Thorpe, Toffoletti, & Bruce, 2017). Legitimate sporting bodies are reinforced through the allocation of capital: Postone, LiPuma, and Calhoun (1993) identify that capital functions to naturalise social position and reinforce a social hierarchy. Within the field of sports media, the historical prioritisation of male athletes (King, 2007) indicates the social hierarchy that positions male athletes as superior, reflected in the potential economic benefits of male sporting excellence. Bridges' (2009) concept of gender capital and Shilling's (1991) consideration of physical capital emphasise the ways in which a physically athletic body can be socially rewarded. The reinforcement of dominant forms of athleticism through media representation emphasises how one's

habitus can be influenced by the sports-media doxa, leading to gendered norms being considered taken-for-granted.

As previous sports-media research has consistently demonstrated, media messages which prioritise sportsmen over sportswomen have proved difficult to challenge (Fink, 2015; King, 2007). Critiques of Bourdieu's habitus typically refer to its determinism and resistance to change (Jenkins, 1982); hence, the gendered assumptions within sports-media productions are also resistant to change, producing media messages which are akin to clichés reflecting common ideas (Bourdieu, 1999). Moreover, individual habitus are also reproductive, with change only occurring when a discrepancy is highlighted between one's habitus and field. This change is slow, and I argue that a delay is caused by the habitus slowly catching up with changes to media representations of male and female athletes, reflecting McNay's (1999, p. 103) argument that 'men and women have deep-seated, often unconscious investments in conventional images of masculinity and femininity which cannot easily be reshaped'.

This research

The data reported were generated through a wider study exploring the way young people construct their gendered identities through sport. For this paper, two complementary research phases are discussed. The first phase relates to a media analysis of online articles and photos produced by four British media platforms (BBC Sport, *The Guardian*, Sky Sports News, and Twitter Moments) during Rio 2016 Olympic Games; and the second phase, follow-up qualitative interviews with 70 young people (aged 15–16) at three schools in North East England. Phase 1 provided the context and knowledge to inform the discussions with young people, whereas phase 2

provided insight to reflect on the significance of such media coverage on the lived experience of young people.

The media analysis involved an examination of four British online media outlets for the duration of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, over 18 consecutive days between 5-22 August 2016. The four media outlets – BBC Sport, *The Guardian*, Sky Sports News, and Twitter Moments – were chosen based on the results of a small-scale pilot study with 30 young people aged 14–18. Participants were asked where they would regularly go to online for news and sport stories. BBC Sport, Sky Sports News and Twitter were the three most commonly cited sites; and *The Guardian*, as a free-to-view online newspaper was included as a 'traditional' news outlet consistent with those used in previously published media analyses of major sporting events (e.g. Godoy-Pressland and Griggs, 2014, King, 2007).

In total, 2514 articles and 2051 photos were analysed, of which 1081 articles were written exclusively about male and female sport at Rio 2016. The purpose of this phase of research was to assess the current UK sports-media situation, providing data to inform qualitative media interpretation questions with young people. Articles and photos were analysed for content, differentiating between those featuring men or women. Photos were categorised depending on the type of photo (Kane, LaVoi, & Fink, 2013); for instance, whether the athlete was pictured in action, non-action, in celebration, posed (such as in a photo-shoot) or sexualised (e.g. visible flesh beyond what is required to perform/pouting; Buysse & Embser-Herbert (2004)). Due to the importance of sexualised images on the development and 'delay' within the gendered habitus, there is only the possibility to discuss the prevalence of sexualised photographs in this paper. A narrative analysis of the descriptions and attributions within articles was also conducted to differentiate between *how* male and female athletes appear in written

narrative. Every description of an athlete was collated and analysed thematically to explore the underpinning messages of the media coverage of male and female athletes. The empirical theme relating to athlete aesthetic appearance is referred to in this discussion.

Following the collection of media-analysis data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 70 young people across three demographically different schools. Young people interviewed differed on their participation levels in sport and/or physical activity, and not all interviewees reported being avid followers of media sport. By including non-sports fans in this qualitative study, the pervasiveness of media messages to influence the development of a collective habitus can be discussed. Interviews were conducted either individually or with a friend, leading to 26 interviews with young men and 25 with young women. Interviews covered a range of topics including the construction of gender, gender norms, perceptions of sport and physical education, and, directly relevant to this paper, media messages and how these influence young people's views about sport. In considering the influence of media messages on a gendered habitus, young people were asked to predict how much coverage they believed was allocated to men versus women during Rio 2016, before discussing their reasons for their opinion. Young people were also asked to reflect on whether mediated messages have influenced their own lives. These questions were included to gauge the extent to which young people have internalised and consumed historical and stereotypical representations of male and female athletes. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher, and all names used are pseudonyms.

Interview transcripts were thematically analysed, and for this paper, the broad theme of media interpretation included sub-themes of 'expected male domination', 'emphasis on female attractiveness', and 'role models'. Within the following discussion

section, instances of congruence or discord between dominant media messages and the internalised dispositions and beliefs within an adolescent's gendered habitus are highlighted. Two key themes emerged: Theme 1 reflects the prioritisation of the male athlete and the symbolic violence which female athletes face; and theme 2 considers young people's expectation of attractiveness of female athletes. The words and experiences of young people are prioritised in this paper to explore the lived experience of the gendered habitus. This paper concludes with a discussion of potential consequences for young people given the internalisation of mediated gendered norms within the habitus.

Theme 1: 'Women's sport isn't that important to the wider community in the way that men's sports are'

The primary theme identified during both the media analysis and discussion with young people is the continued underrepresentation of sportswomen. This section will briefly outline the quantitative media coverage before emphasising data exploring how young people internalise these media messages within their gendered habitus. Male athletes received 56 percent of 1081 articles (solely written about Rio 2016) compared to female athletes who received 33 percent, showing a continued underrepresentation of women¹ (Billings et al., 2014; Bruce, 2016; Eastman & Billings, 1999; Godoy-Pressland, 2014; Godoy-Pressland & Griggs, 2014; Knight & Giuliano, 2001; Wensing & Bruce, 2003). In comparing Rio 2016 to non-Olympic coverage, 96.5 percent of female coverage was of Rio 2016, leaving only 3.5 percent covering non-Olympic sport. For men, 37 percent

¹ UK media coverage of sportsmen (56%) in this study is largely in line with the 55.8% (n=202) male athletes that the British Olympic Association sent to Rio 2016. In contrast, the 33% coverage of female athletes is below the 44.8% (n=164) who represented Team GB (Team GB, 2016). The International Olympic Association (2016) estimated that women would constitute 45% of all athletes in Rio.

was written about Rio 2016, thus 63 percent was of non-Olympic sport (predominantly football). This indicates there was 18 times more general media coverage of men's sport than women's; once major sporting events conclude, an improvement in the media coverage of sportswomen outside major sporting events is unlikely.

Across all interviewees (n=70), all but one young person identified that they expected male athletes to receive more sports-media coverage than female athletes. When discussing Rio 2016 coverage, interviewees were asked what percentage of coverage they thought had been written about female athletes compared to males, the revealed results of the media analysis were then used as a starting point for a discussion about whether discrepancies in media coverage is 'right'. A consensus across the interviews was that male dominance of media coverage 'has been like that for a long time, like the history' (Hayley) because 'in the media, men's things are seen as more important' (Jenny). Worryingly, the 'naturalness' of the way in which male athletes dominate media messages was expressed as a universal idea: 'everyone views sport as being more male orientated... there's a kind of focus on males' (Sol), and 'women's sport isn't that important to the wider community in the way that men's sports are' (Kiera). The perceived dominance of male sport was frequently expressed by these young people, demonstrating the power of media messages to inculcate ideas and beliefs in one's habitus. In terms of the symbolic violence through which Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) identify gender as the paradigmatic form, the experiences of these young people indicate a support for Kraus' (1993, 2006) work which suggests that through symbolic violence, differences between males and females are naturalised. An unquestioned acceptance of the symbolic violence leads to many young people viewing media messages which position male sport as superior as taken-for-granted: 'I don't think you really notice it [differences in media coverage of sportsmen and women] until

it's pointed out, because it's so normal' (Chloe). This supports the use of habitus and symbolic violence in exploring how young people view and understand gender relations in sport. A non-conscious acceptance of media messages fails to challenge the hegemony of male sporting dominance, thus media-generated gender norms appear to operate at a doxic level for many young people.

Not only were female athletes underrepresented in numerical terms, but the quality of coverage also indicates differential treatment of male and female athletes. This qualitative difference in coverage becomes reproduced within one's habitus to influence how young people view male or female sport as sex-appropriate (or not). Billings and Eastman (2002, p. 368) used this argument in the case of televised media, whereby 'the identity stereotypes embedded within the television coverage can readily become this young audience's perception of reality, setting expectations about gender': and this is also true of written media in this study. Female athletes are often compared to male athletes which reinforces the naturalness of the male athletic body, and simultaneously emphasises non-sporting abilities and an enhancement of one's appearance for female athletes.

Media texts which compare female athletes to male athletes constructs male sport as 'natural' and superior. Female Olympic champions were compared to male athletes, and often not even those in the same sport/event: about Nicola Adams (GB boxer), *The Guardian* wrote 'she's rugged, determined, she's very brave. She has all the qualities that the men have' (12/8/16); and that Charlotte Dujardin (GB Equestrian) 'confirmed her own progression from novice champion in 2012 to the sport's outstanding star, the Usain Bolt of dressage' (*The Guardian*, 16/8/16); and BBC Sport writing about Laura Trott (GB Cyclist) stating 'she reminds me of [former England rugby union player] Jonny Wilkinson' (16/8/16). The one-directional comparison of female-to-male athletes

(and not the reverse) undermines the achievements of female athletes, positioning female sport as different, and often inferior to the male equivalent (Bruce, 2016). The status of male sport as superior is reinforced through female sport being measured against the standard of men's achievements. Higgs, Weiller and Martin (2003) demonstrated the negative consequences of gender marking on the social construction of sport. Female-to-male comparisons draw a symbolic line between male and female sport, and this was identified by these young people: men's and women's football (soccer) were viewed as two different sports, characterised by a different set of skills and tactics which positions the male equivalent as superior, and consequently warranting more media coverage:

...when you hear about women's football, there's always a comment like 'why would you watch that? It's a man's sport', [women are] just not as good; people don't watch it and don't talk about it which is why men's football is everywhere.
(Carly)

Men's sport, and particularly media coverage of football, is therefore viewed as dominant in the gendered habitus of these young people. Through the position of football as hegemonic in the development of sporting norms, the superiority of men's sport is reinforced, continuing to marginalise sportswomen from being considered 'legitimate' athletes.

Dovetailed with the comparison of female athletes to males is the way in which the male athletic body is celebrated and normalised within one's gendered habitus. Across the four media outlets for Olympic coverage, over twice as many statements were made which referred to male athletes being constructed as talented or heroic, than for female athletes; and a further five statements were negative in describing a female athlete's *lack* of talent (68 percent of talent statements described males compared to 32

percent for females; which differs from overall coverage of 56 compared with 33 percent). For instance, 'Brazil's new national hero, as he is now' (*The Guardian* about Brazilian pole vaulter Thiago Braz, 16/8/16); 'the sight of an ultra-elite human trotting among mere mortals is particularly striking' (*The Guardian* about Kenyan runner David Rudisha, 12/8/16); 'Flawless and untouchable, the triple triple sealed his legend' (BBC Sport on Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt, 20/8/16); and 'Bolt made history and cemented his GOAT [greatest of all time] status' (Twitter Moments about Usain Bolt, 19/8/16). These statements indicate the celebration of the 'superhuman' male athletic body within the field of sport, an image which is consequently normalised. Through emphasising male sporting achievements as based on 'natural' ability and a predisposition to succeed, the taken-for-granted assumption within one's habitus that sport equals masculinity is reinforced. In contrast to the celebration of the male athletic body, the female athlete is constructed as inferior, lacking the 'natural' talent which explains male athletic success: *The Guardian* referred to GB tennis player Johanna Konta's 'persistence and nerve' (9/8/16), and Sky Sports News suggested that Cindy Ofili (GB Hurdler) needed luck to obtain a medal (18/8/16). These examples ignore the athleticness of sportswoman, subtly positioning sportsmen as dominant and 'natural' in a way which was reflected in how young people justified their interpretation of sports-media coverage. For the young people interviewed, the 'naturalness' of male athletes was explained through characteristics associated with sport and through reference to media editorial choices:

The media coverage is more favoured towards men, because in their eyes...they want to portray them as heroes, they find it easier to depict the man as a hero than a woman...people are going to respond more to a male role model than a female one.
(Luke)

This indicates how the hero narrative is absorbed by young people and used to justify why male athletes are prioritised by the sports media. Interestingly these young people were aware of the way in which media messages are chosen by editors and those in power, considering economic forces as an explanation of the prioritisation of male athletes:

...from a media point of view, you have to produce content that people are going to look at. So, if the majority of people interested in sport are male, or if the majority of sports watched are played by males, then the coverage is going to be male, and that's just how the media works. (Craig)

The position of female athletes as a dominated group in sports-media coverage is acknowledged by these young people. Given that (nearly) all interviewees predicted greater media coverage of male athletes, their assumption that this is 'natural' ensures that the inequality of media messages remains unchallenged. By accepting 'that's how the media works' (Craig, above) and not questioning the processes through which female sport is marginalised, these young people are contributing to the stabilisation of the dominant narrative which positions male sport as superior, reinforcing the view in which male sport is realised as 'a lot more higher profile' (Danny).

Using Bourdieu's concept of capital, the media allocates capital to certain bodies, legitimising some sporting bodies and identities. In terms of economic sporting capital – the ability of an athlete to accumulate financial benefit from their achievements – the underrepresentation of sportswomen contributes to a perceived lack of opportunity for females. Because male athletes receive more media coverage than female athletes, the potential accrual of sponsorship, investment and financial rewards are higher for men who have a visible (global) platform (Braunstein & Zhang, 2005). In purely economic terms, the media 'send out the message that men should do sport because they're going

to get more representation and more wealth and fame from it' (Mia). Thus, the consequence of unequal media coverage is young people acknowledging the construction of sport as a 'worthwhile' career for men (and not women):

There's a massive industry for male athletes to go into, there's thousands and thousands of male footballers our age who are getting paid, but that's not the same for women...so it's more difficult for women to get involved in sport. (Howard)

These young people consequently view male sport as superior because of the greater financial investment and rewards for athletes (Walsh & Giulianotti, 2006). The perception of financial opportunities available for men's sport (and consequently unavailable for women's sport), influences the construction of sport as 'naturally' male within one's habitus, legitimising male participation and success. The underrepresentation of sportswomen, by functioning as symbolic violence, means that young women face a battle to overcome the doxic knowledge of the habitus in which a sporting identity is not congruent with a valued female identity. Dovetailed with the lack of visibility of female athletes is the simultaneous requirement that when female athletes are given media exposure, attractiveness is expected. This media coverage, as will now be argued, places a double requirement on the gendered habitus of young women; concurrent with sport not being viewed as a valued option within the habitus, attractiveness aligned with normative understandings of the female identity must be emphasised.

Theme 2: 'Women are more about appearance, it is more valued, and [their] appearance is valued over their ability to actually do the sport'

Previous research has described a sexualisation of female athletes within sports media, suggesting that presenting females in sexualised images/positions robs women of their athletic legitimacy (Bernstein, 2002; Bruce, 2016; Daniels, 2012). However, little

evidence of sexualisation was found in this analysis – only seven photos (out of 2051 photos of both Olympic and non-Olympic sport; 0.003%) featured elements of sexualisation, and four of these photos were of males. Whilst this can be interpreted as progress being made in the representation of female athletes, qualitative interview findings indicate that young people still *expect* female athletes to be sexualised and for emphasis to be placed on their attractiveness. Despite Bourdieu's concept of the habitus being heavily criticised for its reproductive nature preventing social change (Adams, 2006; Garnham & Williams, 1980), this research agrees with the conclusions of Thorpe (2009) who suggests that the entrenched and dominant views of embodied gender which permeate sport and society reinforce the domination of masculinity. This occurs through the way in which the (entrenched) media messages have become taken-for-granted knowledge for media-sport audiences, and these dominant views remain resistant to change.

Across all interviews, an awareness of expected female attractiveness and heterosexuality was mentioned as a precursor to media coverage: 'I feel like they only care about the sport if she is looking attractive doing it' (Mia). This emphasis on female athlete attractiveness reflects traditional expectations of femininity (Bordo, 2003), but simultaneously indicates a fission between sporting achievement and heterosexual appearance maintenance:

Women are more about appearance, it is more valued, and [their] appearance is valued over their ability to actually do the sport... [in the media] the way women are literally shown to do sport, they're shown towards their appearance rather than their actual abilities, whereas for men, they ignore 'them' and just focus on their sport, so females are more under pressure. (Sol)

This quote highlights the pressures that female athletes face, and suggests a lack of agency in the choice of identity that female athletes can present. The pressures

exacerbated by media norms which focus on female appearance suggest sportswomen learn media 'rules' which encourage the exaggeration of feminine characteristics to comply with socially constructed norms. A discussion of agency is further emphasised by William who suggests sport media 'wanna show off the girls, the men don't want to be shown like that, [the media] want the females to act like they get, like sexualised...they get forced to show off more'. By suggesting that 'men don't want to be shown like that', William is implying sportsmen can control their projected image and appearance to a greater level than sportswomen, for whom greater pressure to conform to broader social gender norms exists. Interestingly, in discussing the perceived benefits or costs for females emphasising their attractiveness through sport, Pippa suggested:

...you might get more coverage if you're pretty, I guess it depends on how good you are. Like if you're not at the top-top, then it might help if you're more attractive, but if you're really good and you're the best, it shouldn't matter.

In bringing talent and ability into the discussion of the requirement for female athletes to be attractive, this quote suggests a belief that female capital is primarily accrued through stereotypical attractiveness, and secondarily through sporting achievement. Pippa's quote links to the conclusions of Harris and Clayton (2002) that media coverage of Anna Kournikova's attractiveness did not challenge the male hegemony of sport, thus the sports media 'emits a message that female sexuality is of greater importance than athletic ability' (*ibid.*, p. 408).

Despite evidence that these young people are aware of media 'rules' which position female attractiveness and heterosexual allure as important in gaining media coverage, many young people perceived these rules as negative and detrimental to the way in which male and female sport is viewed. Patrick suggests that the media coverage

‘...is kind of emphasising that they’re different [male and female sport]. It’s sort of patronising really... women aren’t being valued for the same thing even though they’re doing the same sport’. Patrick’s understanding of the consequences of varying media coverage as emphasising difference demonstrates that young people do have an awareness to unpick media messages, reflecting an ability to critically consume mediated ideas (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2006). The ‘difference’ which Patrick talks about manifests in a hierarchy where male sport is viewed as superior because athletes are respected solely for their performances rather than their appearance. This criticality demonstrated by some interviewees in relation to the required need for female attractiveness indicates a possibility of hope for how media messages may be ‘used’ by young people. These instances of criticality further support the conclusions of Daniels (2012; Daniels & Wartena, 2011) in exploring the tensions associated with young people’s thoughts about media representations of male and female athletes. Therefore, despite some young people acknowledging the dominant media trend which encourages attractiveness, these norms may not be fully integrated within their own habitus, actions and consequent world-view.

As Bourdieu (2001) writes, society reproduces the domination of masculinity that occurs through institutions. A central argument of this paper is that sports media as an institution has the potential to demonstrate ideological power through presenting particular interests as universal (Bourdieu, 1979). One potentially dangerous ideology that young people drew upon was the expectation of female attractiveness as taken-for-granted. Despite Bruce (2016, p. 361; original emphasis) outlining the development of the ‘pretty *and* powerful’ discourse, young people did not refer to this concept during their interviews. Consequently, the prevalence of attractiveness having been adopted became apparent through interview questions discussing whether dominant media

themes are experienced by these young people in their lives. The translation of media messages into the lives of young people represents an empirical expression of the way a gendered habitus operates across fields. Media messages operating within the field of sport remain consistent and are reflected in how young people present their own gendered identities in their own social settings. Through viewing the mediated messages that position female athletes as inferior to males through an expectation of attractiveness rather than athletic prowess, this 'familiar' world becomes taken-for-granted as it seeps into adolescent lives (Bourdieu, 1989). As Alicia suggests, 'I think men get more credit than what females do, like for everything', demonstrating the way in which the media dominance of, and by, men has influenced broader understandings of a gender hierarchy, such that across all fields (and not just sport), male hegemony is reinforced.

The reflection of the impact of media messages emphasising attractiveness in young people's lives links to the perceived opportunities for sportsmen and women to accrue capital. As Shaun discusses:

Men are judged more on their ability to do certain tasks and women are judged more on their physical appearance... that happens for me too, like a boy won't be judged on what he looks like, but he'll be judged on his ability to perform in his sport, but a girl would want to be more beautiful than a good hockey player.

This quote demonstrates the appropriateness of the use of Bourdieu's habitus and capital to explain the way media messages influence how young people view, and act in accordance with gendered norms. Capital is field-specific, and for young women, the internalisation of media messages suggests that aesthetic appearance is rewarded to the detriment of athletic performance. Shaun identifies that for females there is more pressure to look attractive, mirroring the mediated messages whereby young people have come to expect female athletes to look good: 'the [popular] media, where women

have a lot of pressure to look a certain way...that reflects back into how women are expected to look in sports' (Jojo). Pressure to look a certain way was identified as influencing specific adolescent behaviours:

...[media emphasis on attractiveness] can apply to us, like our uniform, our PE kit, the girls are like 'oh I hate these, it's so baggy, I need to tuck it in', and I'm like 'just play sport, it's about sport, not what you look like'. (Alice)

By conforming to ideas around sporting attractiveness that are emphasised through mediated messages, females who look 'good' can accrue capital. This idea of media messages influencing the lived experiences of adolescents demonstrates the ideological power of sports media to permeate adolescent understandings of gender. Horkheimer and Adorno (2006, p. 45) state that with cinematic production, 'life is to be made indistinguishable'. In applying this concept to mediated sports messages, if the written media mirrors society, mediated messages are more easily absorbed and can become inculcated within one's habitus. The position of sportswomen, as a dominated group within sports media, consequently becomes recognised as universal. This is an example of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1979): because men's sport has ideological power, the subordination of the female athlete is unchallenged and taken-for-granted.

Despite these young people perceiving female attractiveness as a dominant ideology through the sports media, twice as many statements addressing the aesthetic emphasis and appearance of male athletes were found compared to female athletes. These statements were often irrelevant to performance and mirrored the stereotypical expectation of attractiveness that female athletes have historically been judged against. For instance, *The Guardian* described US hurdler Devon Allen 'with his hair immaculately coiffed and twin diamond studs glimmering in the camera lights' (17/8/16); BBC Sport about GB Formula 1 driver Lewis Hamilton, 'F1 and fashion – a

perfect marriage for him' (18/8/16); and Sky Sports News about Manchester United's Paul Pogba, '[he] shows off his new Manchester United themed hair cut' (16/8/16).

These quotes highlight elements usually attributed to maximising emphasised femininity, including references to hair, jewellery and fashion (Bordo, 2003). In a subversion of traditional emphasis on male sporting prowess and hyper-masculinisation, a potential softening of the male sporting image is demonstrated through these quotes, reflecting Johns and Johns' (2000) conclusion that interest in the male body has increased in parallel with the commodification of sport.

Previous research has shown that only female athletes have historically been undermined and subjected to criticism regarding their appearance, resulting in pressure to conform to socially constructed norms of attractiveness (Bruce, 2016; Harris & Clayton, 2002; Knight & Giuliano, 2001). The objectification of female athletes and their bodies has been inculcated into the habitus of young people, influencing the way they view 'appropriate' sporting bodies. As Bourdieu (1978) discusses, sport represents a struggle over the body, and can contribute to what is viewed as legitimate. Therefore, the historical objectification of the female body by the sports media can have a lasting effect on one's habitus. These young people fully expected female attractiveness, and overlooked the increasing requirement for males in sport to present the 'correct' image of attractiveness and virility. The difference between the media messages analysed and young people's comments and reflections on the objectification of female bodies indicates the consistency of the habitus in positioning female athletes as inferior.

In considering the possibility for change within a habitus, change is often identified as being a slow process requiring slippages in a doxa (Harker, 1984), where an individual's habitus must 'catch up' with societal dominant norms. The representation of male athletes as being subjects of objectification represents an

example of doxic slippage and disruption to the dominant habitus. Over time, and involving regular repetition, this ‘new’ representation may lead to more equal judgement of sportsmen and women by these young people. However, the question must be asked whether increasing aesthetic emphasis on male athletes and their bodies represents a step forward for media messages, given that this would align with how women have historically been depicted; or should equality instead focus on value-free and neutral reporting in which the ability of both male and female sporting bodies are valued beyond its aesthetic appearance?

Consequences of media coverage: ‘I think that men dominate more in sport, [men’s] sports might be better...men are stronger and maybe they’re able to do sport better’

This paper has highlighted the way mediated messages around the construction of male and female sport have become ingrained in the habitus, affecting young people’s perceptions of sport and the body. This section considers the consequences of dominant media messages being translated into the lived experiences of some young people, indicating how gender norms can increase pressure to reproduce dominant media messages they encounter.

A sense of being pressured by media messages that promote male sport as superior and the expectation of female attractiveness, was identified during interviews with these young people. Given that one’s habitus refers to a ‘system of acquired, permanent and generative dispositions’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 290), the influence of the media on one’s habitus can mean that individuals feel ‘trapped’ by these dispositions that influence their thoughts, actions and beliefs. The habitus determines what is possible or not in one’s life, and ambitions and aspirations are developed accordingly

(Dumais, 2002). Thus, gendered sports-media messages regarding male and female athletes can create or limit sporting ambitions which are both gendered and classed. On reflecting on the messages that the sports media present to young people, Stevie identified that 'it's showing girls that because they don't see it [female sport] as often, it's not like they would think "I can do that"'. This quote indicates that the 'normal' behaviour and beliefs within a habitus are that sport is constructed as a predominantly male activity, limiting opportunities for young women to participate or excel. This is supported by Hayley's view that 'especially for women, hearing and seeing all the stuff written about men's sport, they'd think that "we shouldn't be doing sport"'. Young people can therefore feel pressured to replicate gendered norms around sporting participation and excellence **that normalises male sport and positions the athletic female** as Other. The potential link between media messages, the development of a gendered habitus, and behaviour is concerning, particularly in the context of gendered differences in physical activity participation rates in the UK: Sport England (2018) report that more boys (20%) are active every day than girls (14%). As Reay (2004, p. 433) states, 'the dispositions which make up the habitus...[are] the products of opportunities and constraints framing the individual's earlier life experiences', indicating a limited range of practices are possible for an individual. The messages within sports-media's representation of male and female athletes can be considered indicators of opportunities or constraints for young people. Thus, through the habitus, young people are increasingly led to conform to stereotypical representations of an acceptable sporting gendered identity.

Conclusion: 'You associate sport with men because of their dominance in the media'

This paper has shown through a mixed method analysis of Rio 2016 media messages combined with semi-structured interviews with young people, sports-media messages can contribute to the development of a gendered habitus whereby ‘the social order is progressively inscribed in people’s minds’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 473). The underrepresentation of female athletes denotes a paradigmatic example of symbolic violence, and the structure of the field of sports media, perpetuates ‘durable relations of domination’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 130) that are realised by young people. The successful male sporting identity continues to be constructed as ‘natural’ in comparison to the female athlete, whose visibility is perceived as conditional on being attractive and meeting broader societal expectations. This ideology of difference leads to the role of sport in the reproduction of gender norms being perpetuated for males and symbolically ignored for females. The unequal coverage of male and female athletes by the sports media represents symbolic violence because of the unfaltering expectation of this by young people, such that this paper agrees with Chambers (2005, p. 320, original emphasis): ‘[g]ender inequality is *symbolic* violence because women (and men) comply willingly, with no need for coercion, and because its effect is to create symbolic normative images of the ideal gendered behaviour.’ As these interviews have shown, mediated messages that position the male athlete as superior have been translated into young people’s understandings of gender. By addressing media interpretation as an under-explored area of sports-media research, this paper demonstrates the negative consequences of the underrepresentation of female athletes for young people. Furthermore, this paper argues that an improved equality of media coverage may be slow to reflect in how young people understand sport and gender through the delay of the habitus in matching the dominant messages of the media. Future research may wish to quantitatively explore whether the trends and experiences documented in this paper

are causally linked to media coverage of major events. Thus, this paper provides a valuable starting point to inform such future research.

The purpose of this paper has been to explore the ways young people interpret and internalise media messages that construct male and female sport as different, contributing to an under-explored area of sports-media research (Lines, 2000). Through exceptionally low numbers of sexualised images and an increased number of media-messages promoting male attractiveness, this paper demonstrates how emerging media narratives have the potential to challenge stereotypical representations of sportsmen and women. However, despite these instances of more equal representation of male and female athletes, young people continue to interpret media coverage as normalising male athletes through an understanding that male sport is superior. The role that the media has in inculcating gendered beliefs and dispositions within the habitus, demonstrates that, for many young people, media messages reproduce gendered differences across many different fields, including sport. As Lucy summarises, ‘because of male dominance in the sport world, when you think of sport, you naturally think, men obviously are quite dominant, so you associate sport with men because of their dominance in the media’. Thus, young people’s awareness of the inequalities in media representation of male and female athletes is worrying due to the impact that this can have on perceived available sporting opportunities within a gendered habitus.

References:

- Adams, M. (2006). Hybridizing habitus and reflexivity. *Sociology*, 40(3), 511–528.
- Bernstein, A. (2002). Is it time for a victory lap?: Changes in the media coverage of women in sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 37(3-4), 415–428.

- Billings, A. C., Angelini, J. R., MacArthur, P. J., Bissell, K., & Smith, L. R. (2014). (Re)Calling London: The gender frame agenda within NBC's primetime broadcast of the 2012 Olympiad. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *91*(1), 38–58.
- Billings, A. C., & Eastman, S. T. (2002). Selective representation of gender, ethnicity, and nationality in American television coverage of the 2000 Summer Olympics. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *37*(3-4), 351–370.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Bordo, S. (2003). *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (10th Anniversary Edition). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1978). Sport and social class. *Social Science Information*, *17*(6), 819–840.
- Bourdieu, P. (1979). Symbolic power. *Critique of Anthropology*, *4*(13–14), 77–85.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1985). The social space and the genesis of groups. *Theory and Society*, *14*(6), 723–744.
- Bourdieu, P. (1989). Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory*, *7*(1), 14–25.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1999). *On Television*. New York: New York University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine Domination*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (1990). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (2nd Edition). London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago press.

- Braunstein, J. R., & Zhang, J. J. (2005). Dimensions of athletic star power associated with Generation Y sports consumption. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 6(4), 37–62.
- Bridges, T. S. (2009). Gender capital and male bodybuilders. *Body & Society*, 15(1), 83–107.
- Bruce, T. (2016). New rules for new times: Sportswomen and media representation in the third wave. *Sex Roles*, 74(7-8), 361–376.
- Buysse, J. A. M., & Embser-Herbert, M. S. (2004). Constructions of gender in sport: An analysis of intercollegiate media guide cover photographs. *Gender and Society*, 18(1), 66–81.
- Chambers, C. (2005). Masculine domination, radical feminism and change. *Feminist Theory*, 6(3), 325–346.
- Cicourel, A. V. (1993). *Aspects of Structural and Processual Theories of Knowledge*. In C. J. Calhoun, E. LiPuma, & M. Postone (Eds.), *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives* (pp. 89–115). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Daniels, E. A. (2012). Sexy versus strong: What girls and women think of female athletes. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 33(2), 79–90.
- Daniels, E. A., & Wartena, H. (2011). Athlete or sex symbol: What boys think of media representations of female athletes. *Sex Roles*, 65(7-8), 566–579.
- Dillabough, J.-A. (2004). Class, culture and the ‘predicaments of Masculine Domination’: Encountering Pierre Bourdieu. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(4), 489–506.
- Dumais, S. A. (2002). Cultural capital, gender, and school success: The role of habitus. *Sociology of Education*, 75(1), 44–68.
- Eastman, S. T., & Billings, A. C. (1999). Gender parity in the Olympics: Hying women athletes, favouring men athletes. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 23(2), 140–170.

- Fink, J. S. (2015). Female athletes, women's sport, and the sport media commercial complex: Have we really 'come a long way, baby'? *Sport Management Review*, 18(3), 331–342.
- Frederick, E., L., Burch, L. M., & Blaszk, M. (2015). A shift in set: Examining the presence of agenda setting on Twitter during the 2012 London Olympics. *Communication & Sport*, 3(3), 312–333.
- Garnham, N., & Williams, R. (1980). Pierre Bourdieu and the sociology of culture: An introduction. *Media, Culture & Society*, 2(3), 209–223.
- Godoy-Pressland, A. (2014). 'Nothing to report': A semi-longitudinal investigation of the print media coverage of sportswomen in British Sunday newspapers. *Media, Culture & Society*, 36(5), 595–609.
- Godoy-Pressland, A., & Griggs, G. (2014). The photographic representation of female athletes in the British print media during the London 2012 Olympic Games. *Sport in Society*, 17(6), 808–823.
- Harker, R. K. (1984). On reproduction, habitus and education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 5(2), 117–127.
- Harris, J., & Clayton, B. (2002). Femininity, masculinity, physicality and the English tabloid press: The case of Anna Kournikova. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 37(3-4), 397–413.
- Higgs, C. T., Weiller, K. H., & Martin, S. B. (2003). Gender bias in the 1996 Olympic Games: A comparative analysis. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 27(1), 52–64.
- Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W. (2006). *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*. In M. Durham & D. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (pp. 41–73). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- International Olympic Committee (2016). *Women in the Olympic Movement*. Retrieved from https://stillmed.olympic.org/Documents/Reference_documents_Factsheets/Women_in_Olympic_Movement.pdf

- Jenkins, R. (1982). Pierre Bourdieu and the reproduction of determinism. *Sociology*, 16(2), 270–281.
- Johns, D. P., & Johns, J. S. (2000). Surveillance, subjectivism and technologies of power: An analysis of the discursive practice of high-performance sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 35(2), 219–234.
- Kane, M. J., LaVoi, N. M., & Fink, J. S. (2013). Exploring elite female athletes' interpretations of sport media images: A window into the construction of social identity and 'selling sex' in women's sports. *Communication & Sport*, 1(3), 269–298.
- King, C. (2007). Media portrayals of male and female athletes: A text and picture analysis of British national newspaper coverage of the Olympic Games since 1948. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 42(2), 187–199.
- Knight, J. L., & Giuliano, T. A. (2001). He's a Laker; She's a 'Looker': The consequences of gender-stereotypical portrayals of male and female athletes by the print media. *Sex Roles*, 45(3), 217–229.
- Krais, B. (1993). *Gender and Symbolic Violence: Female Oppression in the Light of Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Practice*. In C. J. Calhoun, E. LiPuma, & M. Postone (Eds.), *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives* (pp. 156–177). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Krais, B. (2006). Gender, sociological theory and Bourdieu's Sociology of Practice. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23(6), 119–134.
- Lines, G. (2000). Media sport audiences – young people and the Summer of Sport '96: Revisiting frameworks for analysis. *Media, Culture & Society*, 22(5), 669–680.
- McCombs, M. E. (2005). A Look at Agenda-setting: past, present and future. *Journalism Studies*, 6(4), 543–557.
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176.

- McLeod, J. (2005). Feminists re-reading Bourdieu: Old debates and new questions about gender habitus and gender change. *Theory and Research in Education*, 3(1), 11–30.
- McNay, L. (1999). Gender, habitus and the field: Pierre Bourdieu and the limits of reflexivity. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16(1), 95–117.
- Postone, M., LiPuma, E., & Calhoun, C. J. (1993). *Introduction: Bourdieu and Social Theory*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Reay, D. (2004). ‘It’s all becoming a Habitus’: Beyond the habitual use of Habitus in educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(4), 431–444.
- Shilling, C. (1991). Educating the body: Physical capital and the production of social inequalities. *Sociology*, 25(4), 653–672.
- Sport England. (2018). *Active Lives: Children and Young People’s Survey 2017-2018*. Sport England. Retrieved from <https://www.sportengland.org/media/13698/active-lives-children-survey-academic-year-17-18.pdf>
- Team GB (2016). *Team GB line up for Rio 2016 complete*. Retrieved from <https://www.teamgb.com/news/team-gb-lineup-for-rio-2016-complete>
- Thorpe, H. (2009). Bourdieu, feminism and female physical culture: Gender reflexivity and the habitus-field complex. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 26(4), 491–516.
- Thorpe, H., Toffoletti, K., & Bruce, T. (2017). Sportswomen and social media: Bringing third-wave feminism, postfeminism, and neoliberal feminism into conversation. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 41(5), 359–383.
- Walsh, A., & Giulianotti, R. (2006). *Ethics, Money and Sport: This Sporting Mammon*. London: Routledge.
- Wensing, E. H., & Bruce, T. (2003). Bending the rules: Media representations of gender during an international sporting event. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 38(4), 387–396.

Yip, A. (2016). Deuce or advantage? Examining gender bias in online coverage of professional tennis. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, Online First*, 1–16.