

England's Summer of Sport 2017

The summer of 2017 heralded an interesting layering of English elite women's sports events as major competitions were held in cricket, football, rugby and hockey. Uniquely this was the first occasion when these competitions were held during the same summer period and England was the only team to participate in all four events. This presents an opportunity to examine British print media coverage of elite English women, across a range of sports tournaments during a confined season. A qualitative analysis of British print media was undertaken for each of the four tournaments. Eighty nine articles from four national newspapers were analysed and results demonstrate emergent themes of International success, Performance and Role Models. These themes are discussed in the context of an accumulation of successful coverage, third wave feminism and the framing of the achievements resulted in the portrayal of the sports women as authentic athletes.

Keywords: print media; women; cricket; rugby; football; hockey

Introduction

England's Summer of Sport 2017, mid-July through August, heralded an interesting layering of elite women's sports as major competitions were held in cricket, football, rugby and hockey at World and European level. In some events (such as the Olympics) the home countries compete collectively as Great Britain (or Great Britain and Northern Ireland) whereas in other competitions, like these, they compete individually as England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Progress within all the tournaments extended to the latter stages with England gaining a third place for hockey and football, a defeat in the final for rugby and winning the Cricket World Cup.

The uniqueness in this combination came from the fact that this was the first time in their history that these four major competitions were held during the same summer period and secondly; England was the only team to appear in all four competitions. The cricket World cup was the 11th event and had previously been hosted by England in 1973 and 1993 during which England won the tournament (ICC 2018). The football Euros was the 12th event series and although England had been finalists in the first competition we had only hosted the event once in 2005 and had never been winners (UEFA 2018). The rugby World cup was the 8th tournament and the home nations had hosted this on three previous occasions with England being the winners at the previous event in 2014 (RWC 2018). The hockey Euros was the oldest event and 2017 was the 13th championship. England had a history of hosting it on three previous occasions and had been winners in 1991 and 2015 (Eurohockey 2018). Table 1 presents an overview of the competitions featured in this print media analysis and the final position of the English teams.

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The context of these competitions meant that apart from football, England was entering an event in which there had been previous history of winning the tournament. In rugby and hockey they were the defending champions and in cricket when England had previously hosted the event they had always been successful at winning the tournament. Football was the only event that did not have this success in the tournament history but England had finished third in the World Cup in 2015 highlighting a potentially upwards trajectory. The opportunity to review the print media's reception of anticipated success in a context of historical success, along with accumulated success across a series of events, was therefore uniquely provided by England's Summer of Sport 2017. The print media coverage was not exclusive to reporting only England's progress, for example Australia as the defending champions in the cricket cup were a source of media interest, but the British press has a tendency to cover all home nations in major sporting competitions.

Print Media Trends

Print media research has traditionally examined quantitative or qualitative coverage or a combination of both. General quantitative trends have indicated that the amount of coverage devoted to female athletes is considerably less than that of their male counterparts with figures ranging from 3.6% - 41.6% (Godoy-Pressland, 2013; Crossman, *et al.*, 2007) with

more recent figures indicating a decline from 13.0% in 1984 to 6.2% in 2014 (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). This has continued to demonstrate unfair coverage through the absence or diminutive representation of female athletes and coupled with qualitative practices of sexist language, trivialisation and a focus on appearance which has reinforced notions of traditional gender roles associated with sport. Examination of qualitative data has demonstrated some of the more positive changes within the empirical studies with Crossman *et al* (2007) and Bernstein (2002) noting changing times and victory laps the wider literature notes that qualitative data indicates more nuanced contradictory messages. Table 2 gives an overview of some of the previous research in this area where there is a focus on gender. The entries only review print media reporting of quantitative and or qualitative data and do not review photographic coverage, alternative media types such as television (Cooky *et al.*, 2015) or online media (Jones, 2012, Litchfield and Kavanagh, 2019).

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An overview of the quantitative data demonstrates that more coverage is given to female athletes when participating in “gender appropriate” sports (Vincent, *et al.*, 2002) such as tennis (particularly Wimbledon)(Vincent, 2004; Crossman *et al.*, 2007) and that women’s participation is acknowledged less during the weekend (Godoy-Pressland, 2013). Framing of female athletes as “other” rather than athlete (Harris and Clayton, 2002) has been undertaken traditionally through print media representation through a number of strategies. These include a focus on the alternative roles held in society by female athletes (e.g. wife, daughter) and the use of non-parallel language. Non-parallel language includes the use of titles for females (Miss or Mrs) but not males or inserting “women(s)” as a pre-fix to any female event or tournament. Recent evidence, however, suggests that these approaches are shifting with the dropping of female titles but with a continuation of the women(s) prefix (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). The commentary from qualitative data indicates some general improvements but evidence of framing which presents female athletes less favourably than male athletes (Eagleman, 2013). The assumption that “history of success + anticipated success + successful outcome = positive reporting” is logical but we were also interested as to whether this results in a framing of sports women as authentic athletes (Krane *et al.*, 2011) and whether there was any cumulative effect across the summer. For the purpose of this study, representation of the female athlete as authentic is characterised by a focus on and celebration of athletic competence and accomplishment (Kane, Lavoie and Fink, 2013). It is also defined by the distancing from the objectification and sexualisation female athletes have frequently been subjected to in mainstream western media (Krane *et al.* 2011).

Print Media Analysis

Since the mid-1980s print media analysis in sport sociology has had a long and valued history and remains a popular research topic because of the opportunity to use this tool to illuminate wider social contexts and practices. Much of the previous research compares and contrasts the difference in reporting between male and female athletes. This study extends the literature because it adds to the developing work on event or tournament reporting, adds rugby and hockey to the range of sports analysed but the uniqueness that it offers an

opportunity to review cumulative reporting because of the unique positioning of these four events in short period of time all with reasonable levels of success. There has been no attempt to explore a comparative position between men and women because we wanted to explore women's sporting success across a summer period. Analysing four British¹ (national newspapers (two tabloid and two broadsheet) for the duration of each tournament this paper aims to address the following research questions: "did the prevalence of English women's sport coverage in the summer of 2017 influence positively on trends in representation?" and "did the relative success of English women's teams in the summer of 2017 result in the players being framed as authentic athletics?". This work is influenced by liberal feminist frameworks of third wave feminism in that we are driven to review the media, question their framing and explore the complexities of this situation.

Methods

Four British national newspapers were selected for the study (*Daily Telegraph*; *The Times*; *Daily Mail*; *Daily Mirror*). These papers were chosen as a representative sample of broadsheet and tabloid newspapers available with the largest circulation figures in those categories (Newsworks 2018). To identify the articles Proquest Newspapers (UK Newstand) data base was used initially to search for the following key terms:

- Cricket (England/World Cup/cricket/women);
- Football (England/Euros/football/women/Lionesses²);
- Rugby (England/World Cup/rugby union/women);
- Hockey (England/Euros/hockey/women);

The date range was from one day before the tournament started until the date after the tournament ended. Print media research has traditionally used hard copy versions of the newspaper but more recent research has engaged with database collections (Biscomb and Griggs, 2011; Novak and Billings, 2012; Biscomb and Matheson 2019). This trawl produced the following raw data:

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The aim of this paper is to report qualitative data but the inclusion of the number of articles enables the reader to gain an understanding of the scale and trends of reporting. It is clear from the raw data that the event with the most successful outcome gained the most coverage (cricket) and as noted above on the previous occasion that England had hosted the event they had been tournament winners and this event was being played in the traditional summer season whereas the other sports are traditionally winter sports. It is also apparent that broadsheets gained more coverage than tabloid newspapers and that hockey did not receive the same proportional coverage in comparison to the other sports which may be due to the minority status of hockey in England at this time (Sport England 2016).

¹ British national press is not distinctive from the English national press

² Official nickname of the England's woman's football team

All articles were retrieved, downloaded and converted to a word document and then uploaded into NVivo 1010. Nvivo is a software package used to assist coding and analysis of qualitative data and is used by some researchers as an alternative to manual paper based methods of coding. Once uploaded each report was coded for the base data such as type of newspaper and sport. They were then initially analysed deductively and then inductively for any new emerging themes. The initial deductive analysis involved a coding structure which emerged from the literature such as sexualisation, trivialisation, performance, non-parallel language. After this stage the inductive coding reviewed the articles for anything new which had not previously featured within the literature. Once all the reports were coded in this way each individual code was then examined further to explore the breadth and depth to identify the prevalent themes. This approach is loosely based on Cresswell's (2009) six steps of data analysis and representation. In this the first and second steps are to manage and become familiar with the data and undertake reading. The coding is the third step and as part of the fourth step the data are linked to literature. Steps three and four were repeated for both deductive and inductive coding. The fifth step is to expand the themes by combing both inductive and deductive coding and the final step involved interpreting the data in relation to the research questions and literature. One advantage that Nvivo provides over traditional manual systems is the speed of retrieval from codes or the opportunity to examine data across multiple codes. Coding was undertaken by one author and the emergent themes were then sense checked with the second author. The following themes emerged: International success, Performance and Role Modelling and these are now presented.

Discussion of Results

The primary focus of this paper was to identify trends in the reporting of female athletes during the summer of sport 2017 when English teams from cricket, hockey, football and rugby were in action in international tournaments in close succession. Using third wave feminism as an analytical framework, the analysis sought to examine the often ambivalent nature of reporting on women's professional sport where frequently women's sport is simultaneously celebrated and devalued (Lichfield and Kavanagh, 2019). The shift towards such ambivalence in reporting style recognises that reporting on women's sport does not necessarily fit within the confines of straight forward derogatory reporting noted in earlier academic work. The acknowledgement of the ambivalent nature of reporting also allows for the exploration and consideration of sport media as a site where gendered ideologies are reinforced and contested in often complex and contradictory ways (Biscomb and Griggs, 2011). In summary the main themes presented were: International success, Performance and Role modelling.

International Success

There was widespread recognition within media reports that overall the summer of 2017 had been a successful period for women's International sport, with all teams progressing to either the semi- finals or final of their respective competitions. Reports drew on the cumulative successes of the teams in order to clearly illustrate this point':

'This summer is shaping up to be the greatest ever for women's sport in England. The cricketers won their World Cup, the rugby players go into this month's World Cup as holders, and the footballers go into tonight's Euros semi-finals as tournament favourites' (*Mirror*, 3rd August, 2017).

The celebratory nature of successes of national teams is not a new observation. Quin *et al* referred to a 'contextual effect' that consists of the combination of the context of a major tournament, the medal effect (how far a team progressed) and a national effect (playing for the national team) (2010:112). It was suggested when the combination of these factors come together, journalists focus on 'their' athletes more than anything else, especially when teams

are successful. In contrast to coverage that feminises and sexualises female athletes, the contextual effect allows for females to be treated as legitimate athletes.

In order to further legitimize the success of the women's teams, reports included reference to other significant years for English and British sport that provided clearly understandable benchmarks of success to be interpreted by the audience: 'First it was 1966, then 2012, and now a golden 2017'. (*Times*, 27th August, 2017). England's 1966 Football World Cup Victory and the successful hosting of the London 2012 Olympic Games are two events strongly associated with national pride. Situating performances that occurred during the summer of sport alongside these events might therefore be considered significant for promoting and celebrating women's sport.

It is widely acknowledged that women's sport has faced significant challenges in terms of gaining media coverage, a fundamental factor for raising the profile and standard of professional sport (Cooky et al. 2015; Litchfield and Osborne 2015). Similar to observations made by Biscomb and Griggs (2011), the style of media reporting appeared on a number of occasions to demonstrate a level of self-awareness regarding their own role in promoting women's sport. This shift in framing is important when considering the media's role in producing, representing and circulating ideological images (Jackson, Scherer and Martyn, 2007). References to tournaments that were 'bigger and better' than any that have gone before served to show just how far women's professional sport has come. A particular emphasis within newspaper coverage was 'sold out' games, the numbers of spectators in attendance at live venues and media viewing figures. This focus was used to illustrate that there is in fact an appetite for women's sport, an argument that has often been levied by media corporations and sponsors to justify a lack of coverage and investment in women's sport (Commission for the Future of Women in Sport, 2010).

Comparison with men's sport has often been used within media reporting as a way of trivialising women's achievements (Kian, Vincent and Mondello, 2008). It was evident however in the summer of sport that comparisons with men's sport was often used to identify shortcomings of the men's game particularly in terms of the level of International success male teams have achieved. An article in the *Times* for instance pointed out the victory for the cricketers was the fourth in a World Cup, whilst their male counterparts have yet to win the competition after 11 attempts (*Times*, 24th July, 2017).

The focus on women's success in comparison to their male counterparts perhaps encouraged the audience to question why male sport continues to be held in such high regard despite a comparative lack of success (Williams, 2006). Williams (2006) work which focused on the England men's football team predicted that the audience would start to become disillusioned with men's professional sport where players he suggested are seemingly more concerned with large salaries and celebrity lifestyles than they are performing well on the pitch. Although less direct in its tone, a similar point was made in the coverage of the women's Cricket World Cup where it was suggested that the combined success and wider qualities of the women's game including a 'younger' 'family orientated' and 'multi-cultural crowd' are what the ECB should be promoting.

Despite the suggestion in the media that it should perhaps be the women's game that the cricket governing body should be focusing on, especially given their success, one particular

article picked up on the lack of support for women's cricket from MCC members who had opted not to attend the final. Their seemingly collective decision not to attend perhaps reinforces deep seated beliefs that men's cricket is the only version worth watching. More importantly it also serves as a reminder that support for women's sport still has a long way to go before it is considered on a par with men's sport (Crossman, Vincent and Speed, 2007)

Other articles also picked up on issues that continue to plague female athletes despite achieving high levels of International success. This aspect of reporting tended to focus on player contracts and salaries. Particular criticism was levelled at the Rugby Football Union for their announcement that they were withdrawing player contracts at the end of the World Cup. The announcement that players who had just led England to the semi-final of the World Cup would be forced to 'return to the amateur ranks' provided a stark reminder of the precarious realities of women's professional sport (Times, 9th August, 2017). There are clear implications of this decision. Most notably, the decision to withdraw contracts is highly likely to have negative implications for the standard of the sport and the ability to retain quality players.

Discussion in the media regarding player salaries has been highlighted previously as another topic of reporting that draws attention to the ambivalent nature of women's sport coverage (Lichfield and Kavanagh, 2019). Similarly, in the reporting of the summer of sport, the focus on player salaries and contracts against the backdrop of success highlighted the contradiction between the short term high profile celebration of International Success of the teams and the hidden reality that suggests there is unwillingness at an institutional level to invest in women's sport with International players receiving 'barely enough to live on, let alone retire from' (*Daily Telegraph*, 19th August, 2017).

Although overwhelmingly the tone of articles about the standard of women's sport was positive or critical of the lack of support, there was a notable exception in the *Mail*. This article reverted to more a more derogatory tone, criticising celebratory accounts of the women's achievements over the summer. The women's cricket team was specifically targeted in the report, however the criticism seemed to be levelled at the reporting on women's sport by other newspapers in what the *Mail* referred to as propaganda:

'Propaganda takes many forms. But one of the more unusual must be the way in which we are being told by broadcasters and much of the Press that women's sport is the same as men's. The space given to the England women's cricket World Cup victory eight days ago was extraordinary in this respect. Not only were there acres of coverage in the sports pages, but a *Times* leader, no less, described it as 'one of the best games of recent times'. It concluded by suggesting that our women's triumph was of no less sporting

significance than if it had been achieved by the English men in the ICC Cricket World Cup that billions watch across the globe' (*Mail*, 31st July, 2017).

In ridiculing the comparisons of the women's game with the men's there is an attempt to protect cricket as a male preserve. The article adopted a skeptical tone to challenge the very idea that the women's victory could be considered comparable with the men's game which attracts 'an audience of billions across the globe' (*Mail*, 31st July, 2017). Specific reference to the viewing audience for the men's game is used to legitimize the accusations of propaganda. Although this article is clearly overtly derogatory in the way it criticizes women's cricket, it is important to recognise that this was one of only a few reports that adopted this viewpoint.

Performance

Across the coverage of all four sports, there were numerous examples of females players being celebrated for individual outstanding sporting performances. With a focus on their performance rather than their appearance or other commentary about their personal lives, it appeared that the players were being treated as first and foremost as athletes. This is similar to other research which has noted the shift towards representation of performance in contrast to narratives that play down female athletes' athleticism, skills and sporting accomplishments (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). The work of Lichfield and Kavanagh (2019) identified a theme they called 'serious athletes' in their work. This theme they suggested reflected a trend portray female performers as 'legitimately striving for athletic success' rather than having their achievements trivialised (p.367)

Direct quotes from other players or coaches were often used to highlight the performances of particular players from an 'insider' perspective. In one particular example, England Football Coach Mark Sampson spoke about how his team could 'make history and spend the rest of their lives as champions' indicating clearly to the audience that he believed his team had the ability to go all the way in the tournament (*Times*, 19th July, 2017). Consistent with trends in social media sport reporting, an insider perspective is often considered particularly valued because it is perceived to be unfiltered and informed (Gibbs, Riley and Brunette, 2014). A similar trend was observed in an earlier study by Biscomb and Griggs (2011) where it was suggested that the shift to an insider perspective was different to earlier styles of reporting. Lichfield and Kavanagh (2019) refer to the increased presence of first-hand accounts from female athletes as 'our voice' and a trend that is indicative of increasing influence and power to shape media coverage. Throughout the summer of sport,

female athletes were regularly quoted commenting on the positive performances of their team mates and overall team performances. In the sports media industry that has been dominated by male journalists, the inclusion of female athletes' voices can be considered significant in that it is another indication that female athletes are being taken seriously and considered a legitimate authority on their sport.

Journalists were also overwhelmingly positive about the performances they witnessed across the tournaments. Jodie Taylor, England's top goal scorer of the tournament was singled out for particular attention in several reports for consistently clinical performances and her goal scoring ability (*Mail*, 20th July, 2017; *Times*, 31st July, 2017). The focus on goal, try or run scoring players was also a key feature of the coverage of hockey, rugby and cricket respectively. The praise was extended to how performances were executed with references to dominating displays.

The trend of positive reporting was also observed in the coverage of the wider attributes of particular players: "Jordan Nobbs was described as 'a fantastic footballer, a future captain of the national team and the creative spark that has ignited England at the European Championship'" (*Telegraph*, 31st July, 2017). Similarly, in rugby, Amy Cokayne was heralded as a future star for the England's team. The focus on the potential that is still to be realised is a positive message about the future of these teams. Cokayne's commitment to rugby both on and off the pitch earned her the status of 'real rugby player' by coach Simon Middleton. Although in previous studies scholars have suggested that female athletes are often expected to play down their sporting identity off the pitch as a form of apologetic, the comment from the coach perhaps implies an increased acceptance and celebration of players who embrace their athletic identity (Davis-Delano, Pollock & Ellworth Vose, 2009; Mean and Kassing, 2008).

There was also reference made to the psychological qualities of particular players. In cricket for instance, 'Jenny Gunn used her *'nerves of steel'* to see England into a Lord's World Cup Final with just two balls to spare against South Africa in Bristol' (*Mirror*, 19th July, 2017).

With previous research highlighting how female athletes are frequently framed as emotionally weak or emotionally unstable, traits not consistent with elite sport performance (Kian and Hardin, 2009; Kinnick, 2010; Mackay and Dallaire, 2009), the focus on emotional strength could be considered a significant in the way female athletes were reported upon during the summer of sport.

Emotional resilience was also a reoccurring theme in reporting, with the success of the teams often being attributed to this trait. The mental strength and (resilience) ability to handle the pressure was noted with praise as a contributory factor to the teams' success. In the Football

Euros the players were described as typifying the ‘English spirit of dogged determination; a sheer stubborn refusal to be beaten’ (*Telegraph*, 23rd July, 2017). England rugby coach Simon Middleton also commented on his team’s mental toughness and in particular their ability to ‘*step up*’ when it is required. The captain of England’s cricket team also praised her team’s ability to ‘hold their nerve under pressure’(*Mail*, 12th July, 2017).

In the past, the lack of media attention given to women’s sport has been justified along the lines of it not being as fast paced and entertaining as the men’s game (Christopherson, Janning and McConnell, 2002). There was recognition within reporting of the enduring nature of these deeply entrenched ideas, however, a number of articles challenged this assumption by embracing the fact that the women’s game is different but no less entertaining than the men’s. Indeed the slower pace rather than being criticised was highlighted as beneficial for ‘improving the spectator experience’ (*Times*, 24th July)

There were a few reports however that were critical of the standard of female players. Characteristically, in these reports the performances of particular players were compared unfavourably to the men’s game. Significantly though, comparisons were not made with the men’s professional game, but rather men’s country cricket and a recreational pub cricket, a clear attempt to belittle female players and trivialize their achievements.

‘The star of the England team's final victory at Lord's was Anya Shrubsole, described in one newspaper account as 'a fiery fast bowler'. I did watch the highlights of that game, and Shrubsole has a beautiful bowling action. But fast? Only by the standards of women's cricket. Her peak speed is around 70 mph. Now, this is the pace which would count as a cunningly disguised slower ball, if delivered by a county standard male opening bowler’ (*Mail*, 31st July, 2017).

Although not all the coverage of performance, either team or individual was positive, the greatest emphasis within the narratives was of a celebratory nature of athletic achievement. The limited examples of negative portrayal lend support to the previous acknowledgement of contradictory messages in print media about female athletes (Vincent et al., 2007). Negative messages focused on familiar themes such as trivialisation of women’s achievements and comparison to men’s sport as a way of protecting sport as a male preserve. However, overall this research demonstrates that the key messages in reporting were more

aligned the portrayal of women as athletes with the media not only championing female professional sport but also criticising organisational structures for the inequality that currently exists (MacKay and Dallarie, 2009).

Role models

For the purpose of this study a role model is considered to be an exemplary and worthy individual who someone wants to imitate or to be like (Vescio, Wilde and Crosswhite, 2005). Sporting role models have long been considered inspirational figures for young people to emulate, although with the mediated sporting landscape being traditionally dominated by men's sport, girls have had a lack of high profile female athletes to draw inspiration from (Lines, 2002; Vescio, Wilde and Crosswhite, 2005; Meier, 2015). The disparity in the visibility of professional female athletes is reflected in the role models that are selected by young people with studies consistently highlighting that boys are more likely than girls to select an athletic role model (Biskup and Pfister, 1999; Knight and Giuliano, 2001). Journalists reporting on events in the summer suggested however this was something that was about to change:

Young girls have seen what cricket has to offer and, thanks to the likes of Shrubsole, Sciver and Knight they've got role models to emulate' (*Mail*, 24th July, 2017).

Female athletes from across all of the sports were discussed positively in terms of the traits they displayed both on and off the pitch making them ideal role models for young people. ‘

Consistent with suggestions in the role modeling literature, the visibility of female athletes is seen as crucial to positioning them as role models (Lines, 2001). With women's sport receiving less mainstream media coverage than men's sport, being successful in major tournaments might be seen as an opportunity to showcase not only the sport as a whole, but also make individual athletes household names (Peeters and Elling, 2015). As cricket captain Heather Knight reflected, ‘If we win trophies we're a lot more visible’ (*Telegraph*, 24th June, 2017). Players were conscious of their position and responsibility as an International athlete and actively embraced the idea of being a role model, particularly to encourage participation in sport. Every time you put on this shirt you want to inspire," Natasha Hunt, the England scrum half, said. "I'm from a PE teaching background. I want to try to get more people involved in the game (*Times*, 26th August, 2017).

Reporters discussed the inspirational effect of the tournaments on their own daughters, in particular the idea that it had opened their eyes to the possibility of a ‘cool’ career in professional sport (*Mail*, 24th July, 2017). Crucially, the desire to become a professional athlete was explained by the reporters as being linked to having the opportunity to perform at the top level in front of large crowds. Through being exposed to coverage of women's sport where skill and athleticism is celebrated, young girls are aspiring to be like the female

athletes they see on television. Of significance here is the idea that players are being looked up to because of what they do rather than what they look like (Fink, Krane and Lavoie, 2014).

Conclusion

The results demonstrate that the spread of reporting of English women's sport during the summer of 2017 influenced a number of trends in representation. To have greater coverage over a wider number of sports and during a limited time period seemed to result in an overall more positive representation in the media than has been reported previously. The tournaments being played in close succession, as well as the success of the teams, allowed for momentum to be gained with the audience having a more prolonged exposure to women's sport than is typical. Although reporting did focus on individual tournaments, references were frequently made to the other tournaments in order to raise awareness of the wider picture of success England women had experienced over the summer. The celebration of success of the teams on an international stage, a celebration of the teams and athletes' performances and their contribution to positive role model development were identified as clear trends within the reporting. The cumulative impact of these trends during this period, as well as the focus on nation, we suggest, framed the athletes as authentic within media representation.

For the most part, traditional belittling strategies were neglected in favour of approaches which celebrated and recognised athletic achievement. The athletes were framed as authentic in that their success and blunt athletic achievement was celebrated without dilution or diversion. Players and teams were praised for outstanding and convincing performances against tough opposition and clear reference was made to sell-out crowds and impressive media audiences to demonstrate the appetite for women's sport. Another, perhaps more subtle measure of success was found in the framing of female players as role models particularly for young girls. This is significant given that previous literature has consistently cited that there is a shortage of athletic female role models for girls to draw upon. Crucially players were seen as role models for their athletic ability and performances in international competition rather than their looks. Becoming more visible was recognised by the players as an important part of raising awareness and growing the popularity of the sport. Whilst previous strategies of popularising women's sport have relied on the feminisation and sexualisation of players, in the summer of sport this was not a trend that was evident.

The media adopted a self-conscious and reflective style of reporting and therefore consciously or not, played an important role in questioning and challenging the divide that exists between men and women's sport. Notably they were critical of previous media coverage as well as structural inequalities in the sports in terms of player contracts, wages and support from governing body members.

The celebration of the standard and quality of sport was noted with the exception of the cricket reporting in the *Mail* which reverted to a more derogatory style in order to belittle the players and trivialise their achievements. Bruce (2014) comments that despite 30 years of activism little has changed in terms of print media reporting. In this paper we don't disagree that negative reporting is still evident, it is however less frequent in a world where there is arguably less tolerance of blatant forms of sexism.

In line with third wave feminist perspectives, the ambivalence and contradictions within reporting were clear to see. Even aspects of coverage that we considered positive raised serious concerns about the direction of travel of women's sport. A clear example of such ambivalence can be found in the celebration of the success of England women's rugby team finishing runners up in the Rugby World Cup whilst behind the scenes players faced losing their contracts after the tournament, a move which would likely have detrimental effects on the future performances of the team. Men's rugby was to receive no such cuts again bringing into question the commitment of governing bodies to develop women's sport.

Interestingly and again illustrating ambivalence in reporting, comparisons with men's sport were drawn upon to both celebrate and berate women's sport. The framing of these perspectives drew upon different aspects of men's sport in order to make their point. In celebrating women's sport reporters compared the successes of the men's and women's teams in major tournaments noting that the success of women's teams surpassed their male counterparts. Conversely, when scrutinising women's sport, criticism was levelled on the basis that men's sport has a global appeal and therefore must be inherently better. This perspective however ignores the fact that men's sport has benefited from vast investment in terms of finance and media coverage that women's sport has been systematically cut off from. Women's sport is therefore playing catch up having not benefited from professionalization until relatively recently which in turn attracts media coverage and sponsorship.

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Table 1: Competitions Included in the Summer of Sport 2017

| Competition | Dates | Venue | Final Position |
|--|--|-------------------|--|
| International Cricket Council Women's World Cup 2017 | 24 th June – 23 rd July | England and Wales | Final (winners) England v India England won by 9 runs |
| Union of European Football Associations Women's Euros 2017 | 16 th July – 6 th August | Netherlands | Semi final (third) Netherlands 3 England 0 |
| Rugby World Cup Women's 2017 | 9 th Aug – 26 th August | Ireland | Final (losers) New Zealand 41 England 32 |
| Women's Eurohockey Nations Championship 2017 | 18 th – 26 th August | Netherlands | Third and Fourth place playoff (third) Germany 0 England 2 |

Table 2: Key Literature Findings

| Author | Data Type | Media Output | Sport/Event | Commentary |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---|---|--|
| George <i>et al</i> 2001 | Quantitative and qualitative | Sun (UK) Mirror (UK) Mail (UK) Independent (UK) Telegraph (UK) Guardian (UK) | 1995 World Championships | Female coverage 28% Male coverage 72% Little coverage of female achievement, sexist language |
| Bernstein 2002 | Qualitative | Multiple | Athletics/tennis | Specifically Marion Jones and Anna Kournikova Women's coverage is improving |
| Harris and Clayton 2002 | Qualitative | Sun (UK) Mirror (UK) | Euros – men Wimbledon – women and men | Female coverage 5.9% Physical appearance is more important than nationality (female) Non active roles (female) Feminine appropriate sports (female) Task relevance Kournikova |
| Vincent <i>et al</i> 2002 | Qualitative and quantitative | Globe and Mail (Ca) Toronto Star (Ca) New York Times (US) USA Today (US) Times (UK) Daily Mail (UK) Cross nation comparison | Gender appropriate (swimming, gymnastics, tennis and diving) vs gender inappropriate (soccer, softball, field hockey, volleyball) 1996 Olympic Games | Gender appropriate sports accounted for 63.7% of coverage and gender inappropriate sports accounted for 33.6% of coverage The selected newspapers' coverage focussed on gymnastics and swimming |
| Vincent 2004 | Quantitative and qualitative | Times (UK) Daily Mail (UK) Sun (UK) | 2000 Wimbledon Championships | 41% female coverage 50% male coverage Emphasis on appearance Male journalists devalued the achievements of female players |
| Capranica <i>et al.</i> , 2005 | Quantitative | Papers from Belgium, France, Denmark and Italy Cross cultural analysis | 2000 Olympic Games | 29.3% coverage on women 51.8% coverage on men 18.9% coverage was described as mixed |

| Author | Data Type | Media Output | Sport/Event | Commentary |
|-------------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Crolley and Teso (2007) | Quantitative and qualitative | Marca El Pais (Spain) | 2004 Olympic Games | Average ratio of 5:1 – 9:1 in favour of male reporting Asymmetrical gender marking Gender marking of sports Different vocabulary Focussing on non-sport related aspects of the athletes Infantilisation or trivialisation |
| Crossman <i>et al.</i> , 2007 | Quantitative | Times (UK) New York Times (US) Globe and Mail (Ca) Cross nation comparison | Tennis - Wimbledon | Average size of coverage = 32.2 sq in (men) / 32.6 sq in (women) Total size of coverage = 5247.41 sq in (men) (58.3%) / 3746.60 sq in (women) (41.6%) Relative equitable amount of coverage In general quantity given to women is improving but not equitable Female appropriate sport more likely to see positive coverage |
| Ashish <i>et al</i> 2011 | Quantitative | Anandabazar Patrika (Bengal) | Commonwealth Games 2010 | 3131.15 cm ² coverage for women (11.6%) 23658.11 cm ² coverage for men (88.3%) |
| Eagleman 2013 | Qualitative data on both sexes in a female appropriate sport | US – newspapers. Key word search using Lexis Nexis | Gymnastics – Olympic games | Themes were common across male and female reporting but the framing differed. Descriptions of gymnastics skills Reasons for success Reasons for failure Physical descriptions of gymnasts Comparisons to other gymnasts Expectations for athletes Athletes personal lives |
| Godoy Pressland 2013 | Quantitative and qualitative | Sunday Times (UK) Sunday Telegraph (UK) Observer (UK) Mail on Sunday (UK) | Weekend review rather than specific event or sport collected during one month | 3.6% of coverage – women 93.8% of coverage – men Sportswomen as sexualised Sportsmen set the standard Other women in sports news The weekend |

| Author | Data Type | Media Output | Sport/Event | Commentary |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| | | Sunday Express (UK) | | |
| Biscomb and Griggs 2013 | Qualitative | UK – newspapers. Key word search using Pro Quest Newspaper | Cricket World Cup | Themes were: description of play, performance, celebration, media coverage and women’s sport. |
| Biscomb and Matheson 2019 | Quantitative and qualitative | Guardian (UK) Daily Telegraph (UK) Independent (UK) Daily Mail (UK) Daily Mirror (UK) Daily Express (UK) | 2 week period in the summer season to correspond with the Wimbledon tournament Data sets from 1984, 1994, 2004 and 2014 | Coverage of women’s sport had declined over the time period in comparison to men from 13.0% to 6.2% (80.7% - 89.9% for men) Emphasis on the reporting of appearance had diminished and greater emphasis on reporting of performance |

Table 3: Articles Retrieved from the Database Search

| | <i>Daily Telegraph</i> | <i>The Times</i> | <i>Daily Mail</i> | <i>Daily Mirror</i> | Total |
|--|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------|
| International Cricket Council Women's World Cup 2017 | 11 | 9 | 9 | 4 | 33 |
| Union of European Football Associations Women's Euros 2017 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 3 | 28 |
| Rugby World Cup Women's 2017 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 22 |
| Women's Eurohockey Nations Championship 2017 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Total | 28 | 29 | 21 | 11 | |