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A doctoral thesis examining  
(re)presentations of women's team  
sports in the English National Press  
and public policy documentation  
2010-2018.

Scott Williams

A thesis submitted in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements of the  
University of Northumbria at  
Newcastle for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy

## Abstract

There has long been academic interest in the gendered representations of women's sport (George, Hartley and Paris, 2001; Fink, 2015; Bruce, 2016). This study seeks to add to this burgeoning field and its findings are drawn from a qualitative process, comprising critical discourse analysis on 8 years of coverage from seven English national newspapers: *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Star* and *The Telegraph* (n=4281) and governmental and governing body policy and strategy documentation (n=102). Four sports make up the sampling frame: Netball, Association Football, Rugby Union and Cricket. Team sports were chosen in order to minimise the 'celebrity' effects on coverage (Smart, 2005) and these selections are all considered 'traditional' sports in the English context. The main research aim is to explore the discursive repertoires around women's sport, while also exploring any shared or divergent discursive repertoires between the textual types of press coverage and policy outputs. A further sub-aim of the research is to explore the utility of Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' in sports scholarship.

The media analysis focuses on three central themes of the research. Firstly, reportage emphasised the importance of *national* teams, with some ephemeral presentations of successful international players as national heroes, whereas little domestic level coverage was offered. Coverage also frequently invoked stereotypical tropes of 'Englishness' when discussing the football national team. Secondly, men were framed as the rightful leaders and gatekeepers to sport, and this is weighed against the emerging role of women as ambassadors of all of women's sport homogeneously. This corresponds with recent research around the changing narratives of women's sport in the mass media, building on the work of Toni Bruce (2016). Finally, credence was given to the establishment and reestablishment of *history*, with emerging examples of discussion on the shared history of men's and women's sports. However, this was frequently used to ridicule their male counterparts rather than being indicative of less gendered coverage. Overall, I argue that there is a multiplicity of identities and discursive positioning's, ranging from older tropes of coverage focusing on heterosexualisation and motherhood to relatively new narratives of female athletes as national heroes.

The policy analysis centres again on three generated themes from the texts. Firstly, elite level female athletes were given responsibility for the successful implementation of both domestic level and English soft power strategies. This is partially a product of the increasingly wide ranging aims of central sports policy such as social wellbeing and the sport for health agenda. Secondly, building on this responsibility, elite level were depicted as ambassadors for all of women's sport, but also wider public health through their ability to 'inspire', adding a new dimension to the representations evident in the media analysis. Importantly, there were many examples of governing bodies seeking to leverage their elite athletes to uplift their sports through a period of increasing professionalisation. Thirdly, women's sport occupied a liminal space within English sports policy, with policy confusion evident. One area of this was in the women's specific strategies, which broadly focussed on the social elements and other benefits of participation while simultaneously downplaying the potential significance of competition, sometimes describing this as a barrier to participation for women specifically.

Finally, a discussion is offered which synthesises the discursive repertoires of the two different datasets, with comparisons drawn between the generated themes and how they are articulated across the two text types. Crucially, even though the expression of these narratives were different in the two datasets, the language used contributes to 'common sense' understandings of women in sport (Hall, 2009), shaping what is thought about when we think about women's sport.

## **Acknowledgments**

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Finally, my gratitude to my friends and colleagues, who so often made an intensely challenging undertaking wonderfully rewarding.

## **Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others. Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on 07/08/2018. I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 87,262 words

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## Introduction

Sport has long occupied a rarefied sociocultural space within English life. From folk games in the fourteenth century (Dunning and Sheard, 2005) to the modern mediasport complex (Wenner, 1998; Boyle and Haynes, 2002; Hutchins and Rowe, 2009), sport plays a key role in England's cultural scape. There have long been arguments that sport is a broadly masculine domain, codified and played by men (Theberge, 1981; Dunning, 1986; Hekma, 1998; Lindner, 2012). Women have had a role to play, albeit this is frequently subject to oversight or erasure in many accounts (Osborne and Skillen, 2011; Dunn, 2014). For example, the famous Dick, Kerr Ladies Football Club was formed from munitions factory workers who played football in order to raise money for wounded soldiers from 1917 (Newsham, 1997). The team played in front of an estimated 53,000 spectators at Everton Football Club's Goodison Park on Boxing Day 1920, before the Football Association - perturbed by the unexpected popularity and potential for the team to detract from followers of the men's game - banned women from playing at any FA associated ground in 1921 (Williams, 2003; Dunn and Welford, 2015) on the grounds that football was medically 'unsuitable' for women (Williams and Hess, 2015). Other governing body reticence around women's sport persist, with shorter fixtures for women in sports such as boxing (Lowe, 2003; Association of Boxing Commissions and Combative Sports, 2021) and blue riband tennis tournaments (Krumer, Rosenboim and Shapir, 2016) still evident.

Recently, there has been evidence of a (tentative) push towards the formalisation and professionalisation of women's sport in England, evidencing a significant shift away from previous quasi-medicalised discourses arguing women should not participate in sport or rigorous physical activity (Vertinsky, 1987; Taylor and Gregg, 2019). The establishment of marketised domestic competitions such as the Women's Super League in football or the Netball Superleague offers a dawning opportunity for talented women to pursue a sporting career as a relatively viable, albeit challenging, economic option. However, these ostensible gains should be considered against the lived reality of precarity as a female athlete in burgeoning professional and semi-professional sports (Clarkson *et al.*, 2020; Culvin, 2021), with these impacts likely to be worsened in the medium term by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Clarkson *et al.*, 2020; Bowes *et al.*, 2021).

This increase in opportunities for women has taken place against a broader background of increasing public funding available for sport and physical activity, most obviously in the successful bid for the 2012 London Olympic Games. The increase in available funding for sport, on the face of it, perhaps surprising given the extended period of austerity measures in UK public spending. Blyth (2013, p.2; in Parnell, Spracklen and Millward, 2017) defines austerity as 'a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices, and public spending to restore competitiveness which is [supposedly] best achieved by cutting the state's budget, debts, and deficits'. This was ostensibly driven by the financial crisis of 2008, with successive Coalition and Conservative governments arguing that this was a necessary step due to perceived excessive levels of national debt. While some sports have not been victim to the fiscal restrictions that befell other areas of public life, it has not

escaped the auspices of an increase in control by funding bodies such as UK Sport and Sport England, with evidence of greater expectations as to how sport can influence a wider range of policy areas, such as sport for health agendas by Public Health England.

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The critical importance of sport and physical activity being an equitable space at the Supranational level is demonstrated by the International Working Group for Women and Sport's 'Brighton Declaration' in 1994, sponsored by the British Sports Council and supported by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).<sup>2</sup> Aligned with the development goals of the United Nations, the working group seeks to redress the imbalances that women can face in the sporting sphere. Importantly, physical activity is considered a fundamental right *for all* by UNESCO.<sup>3</sup>

Allied to an increasing political salience, sport has also long been pivotal to the commercial viability of many media outlets, which now devote vast numbers of column inches and television hours to events both on and off the pitch, with sports coverage being described as a 'lifeblood' by some (Domeneghetti, 2021). This has mirrored the boom in private capital available to some (predominantly men's) sports, with The Office of Communications (Ofcom)<sup>4</sup> cementing certain events as required free-to-air viewing. The critical role of other events is perhaps best evidenced by the broadcasting arms race between major broadcasters in the case of men's English Premier League (EPL) football, which has seen lucrative broadcasting deals being

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<sup>1</sup> See *Health Matters: Getting every adult active every day* for an example of this (2016)

<sup>2</sup> This was updated to become the Brighton and Helsinki declaration in 2014

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) is a specialist branch of the United Nations and seeks to promote peace and security agendas in a range of issues.

<sup>4</sup> Ofcom is the Government approved regulatory and competition authority principally responsible for the telecommunications and broadcasting industries.

struck for rights to televise fixtures (David and Millward, 2014). With this increase in funds, however, has come an increasing level of influence from broadcasters on competition, most obviously in the scheduling of fixtures by the league to make them more commercially desirable. In the case of men's EPL football, this has faced opposition from some fans who travel to fixtures (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2012). The governance and organisation of many sports has moved beyond merely setting fixtures and rulesets, with many sports now needing to consider the desires of an increasing array of stakeholders, such as different media organisations. It is within this increasingly complex, multi-level network that this current research study takes place (García, 2008).

On top of an increasingly challenging operating environment of declining circulations and struggles for advertising revenues, perpetuated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Domeneghetti, 2021), the British national press has been subject to a major governmental inquiry. The Leveson Inquiry was led by Lord Justice Sir Brian Henry Leveson PC between 2011 and 2012. This was the seventh inquiry into the press; however, this was the most impactful. The inquiry examined the culture, ethics and practices of the press rather broadly, and was called in the wake of 'hackgate', in which News International employees were accused of hacking personal communications from mobile telephones. This broad scope allowed for wide ranging inquisition, leading to the relationship between political figures and media members and the relationships that can be fostered being discussed in a public forum.

Given the multidisciplinary nature of this study, it is pertinent here to briefly explore some of the links between public policy and the print media. This is in order to

demonstrate the utility of examining both in the same study, which is the novel approach that this thesis is taking. From the debate in this area, two key themes emerge; the symbiotic relationship that exists between a variety of media outlets and government, and the ability of ‘the media’ to frame debates and influence the political agenda. These are frequently interrelated and overlap. There is a wealth of political science texts on the rise and importance of media management and ‘spin’ (Dinan, Miller and Schlesinger, 2001; Gewirtz, Dickson and Power, 2004; Moore, 2006; Macnamara, 2014), however, there has been a lack of scholarship on the role (if any) of media in formulating and shaping sport policy. Given the growing importance of sports policy in both political and public spheres, this is an important, and relatively sparse avenue for academic inquiry.

One school of thought on the linkages between policy making and mass media argues that a mutually beneficial relationship exists between media outlets and policy makers. This is referred to as a ‘Faustian bargain’ by Philo (1999; p.xi), in a discussion around the relationship between British politicians and media tycoon Rupert Murdoch.<sup>5</sup> This highlights the mutual relationship between policy writers and media members, but these relationships have not been described precisely. This is outside of the scope of this study, however by highlighting some shared or divergent discursive repertoires between sports policy and press outputs, shared understandings of women’s sport can be explored and interrogated.

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<sup>5</sup> A Faustian Bargain draws on the German folktale of Faust, who makes a deal with the Devil. The term Faustian Bargain usually refers to a deal that sacrifices morality for material gain.

Blackmore and Thorpe (2003) argue that there are four key functions in which governments may attempt to use mass media:

1. To launch policy
2. To control or voice discontent
3. To define accountability and responsibility
4. Shape 'expectations' about policy areas

Blackmore and Thorpe (2003) argue that the relationship between the Government and the media is reciprocal, highlighting the increasing use of the media by government in the construction of policy problems, and the promotion of policy solutions, much in the way that policy entrepreneurs (Parsons, 1995) have gone about their work. They draw on Fairclough's (2000) argument around the mediatisation of government, which holds that the media has an increasingly important role in modern governance. This reciprocity is a key rationale for the analysis of both public policy texts and media outputs as textual datasets.

This doctoral project examines the representations of women's team sports within both national print media and public policy documentation from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010 until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018. This period captures an interesting period of English sport, as it includes both the build-up and aftermath of the London 2012 Olympiad, hailed in some corners as the 'Year of the Woman' (Fink, 2015), due to some major delegations sending more women than men to represent their countries and the prominence of some British female athletes in the marketing of the Olympiad.

It is important here to define some of the key terms that will be used throughout the study. The research is achieved through conducting a critical discourse analysis of both a cross section of the national print media and public policy documentation. In this instance, 'sport' defined by the World Health Organisation as "all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental wellbeing, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels" (2011, p.12). This study will include physical activity within it's scope. Physical activity involves people moving, acting and performing within culturally specific spaces and contexts, and influenced by a unique array of interests, emotions, ideas, instructions and relationships (Piggin, 2020). Perhaps the fundamental differences in the context of this study of the two definitions are the elements of formal organisation and the competitive nature of sport as opposed to physical activity.

*National print media* refers to the textual outputs of English, nationally circulated daily newspaper outlets. In this study, this excludes other iterations of nationally circulated newspapers, such as the editions in Scotland or Ireland, and local newspapers such as the *Evening Chronicle* or *Manchester Evening News*. There has been some excellent work in the area of regional reportage of women's sport, such as Adams *et al.* (2014). However, the focus and scope of this thesis is around exploring and interrogating discursive repertoires and common-sense understandings around women's sport at a more structural, national level.

A *sports policy document* is defined as a written document which meaningfully mentions sport or physical activity, which has been endorsed, including statements and

decisions defining goals, priorities and main directions for attaining these goals. It may also include an action plan on implementation. This is adapted from the World Health Organisation definition (2011, p.12) to include meaningful mention of sport and physical activity. This is to capture the increasingly broad scope of politicisation of the sports policy space in the English context.

A neat example highlighting the interplay between the fields of study is in the recent floating, and short-term failure of the ‘Super League’ in football. The ‘Super League’ comprised of twelve major men’s European football clubs organising a breakaway competition outside of the auspices of their domestic league regulations, causing a great deal of controversy and outrage among the English participants fanbases and the wider English footballing community. The national press was pivotal in the dissemination and discussion of the story, with many articles and opinion pieces dedicated to the subject. That this was so high on the agenda left major politicians feeling compelled to comment on a sporting matter, although the commercial implications were also substantial. Of perhaps greater pertinence to this study however, was the statement announcing the details of the competition itself, wherein women’s football was clearly an afterthought, with these clubs being referenced in one sentence in the joint announcement:

‘As soon as practicable after the start of the men’s competition, a corresponding women’s league will also be launched, helping to advance the and develop the women’s game’ (The Super League, 2021)

Two key issues arise from this sentence; the role of women’s football as subordinate, in this instance through being considered an appendix to the ‘superior’ men’s game, and the requirement for women’s football to advance on the same trajectory as the



hypercommodified men's game. These are fundamental issues to narratives around women's sport, and it is areas such as these that this thesis will explore. Crucially, this thesis *is not* an examination of representations of female athletes, (although this has been a fruitful and important area of debate as will be explored fully in the subsequent chapter) but women's sport more holistically, of which female athletes are a part.

## **Research Aims**

This study has one primary research aim: *to explore the (re)presentations of women's team sports in the British national press and sport policy documents*

The following sub-questions and aims have also been identified:

- To explore the discursive repertoires around women's team sports in sport policy documents and the national press
- Are there any shared discursive repertoires around women's team sports in sport policy documents and the press?
- Can Foucault's 'governmentality' be used successfully in scholarship around sport policy and the sports media?

In addressing these aims and questions, three developments will be made. Firstly, this research seeks to better understand the representations of women's sport in England, in an era of unprecedented focus on sport and physical activity. Given the sums of public funding that sport has amassed and the vaunted 'trickle down' effect on participation rates post elite level success, the outcomes of the Olympic legacy post-London 2012 may well be considered disappointing (Coalter, 2013a). Given the political narrative focus towards rhetoric of public accountability and 'value for money', potential causes

of this should be interrogated, in this instance through an examination of the language used in sports policy documentation.

Secondly, this thesis aids understanding around the shared narratives between public policy and the national print media. It has been argued, partly due to networks of power in the political arena, these two fields are intertwined. This has been an under researched area, as will be explored in the following literature review, however this thesis attempts to explore some of the shared narratives in order to better understand any discursive linkages or disparities. It should be highlighted that this study will make no claim to concrete findings in the minutiae of how newsrooms work in practice, however this has been explored by others in significant detail (see the works of Liesbet van Zoonen and Karen Ross). Instead, this thesis offers a more tentative discussion based upon findings around discursive repertoires and notions of power.

This study is situated within and between multiple emerging fields of study; the sports media, sport and gender and sports policy. It offers a unique contribution to knowledge, as the combination of sport, gender, the print media and sports policy has not been explored in a critically discursive synthesis across this timeframe. There have been calls throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century for sports centric research to employ Foucault's governmentality as a key theoretical tool (Houlihan and Green, 2006), with some successful attempts (García and Herraiz, 2013, Bretherton, Piggin and Bodet, 2016). This is a burgeoning tactic in the field, and this thesis seeks to explicitly explore the utility of governmentality to understand language in sport between the megastructural institutions of the national print media and sports policy.

The examination of the language used in the context of sport is an emerging area of inquiry. This has frequently focussed on a variety of mass media outlets, inclusive of both televised and printed coverage as I will demonstrate in Chapter Two. Many studies from other national contexts have argued the presence of sexualised discourses surrounding women's sport, however some others have developed this further, arguing that the effect is the subordination of women's sport and female athletes. The debate will be summarised in Chapter Two.

It is critical to point out that this study is not overtly feminist in its scope. Payne and Payne (2011) define feminist research as:

an approach to social research which uses a specific sub-set of methods, and/or makes a particular selection of topics, with the goal of challenging methodologies developed by men, and enhancing the position of women in society. (p.89)

While the definition of what constitutes feminist research and who can perform it has been hotly contested (Smith, 1987; Robbins, 1996; McHugh, 2014; Wiggington and Lafrance, 2019), some feminists (particularly of the second wave) hold that men cannot perform feminist research as regardless of their sympathies, they cannot relate to the feminist project in the same way as a woman can. Lyons (2006) describes perceptions of men within this space as akin to 'wolves among sheep' (p.305); however others have refuted this (Henderson, 1994). In this instance feminist epistemologies and the aims of benefitting the feminist movement do not influence the research sufficiently for the study to be considered feminist. Clearly, the researcher's positionality matters (Richardson, 2015) and not nominating the research as feminist does not mean that it does not seek to explore (and hopefully impact) gender equality in English sport.

The writing up of this study occurs against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has brought into sharp focus the shifting role of sport and physical activity for health agenda, most obviously through the publication of a governmental obesity strategy.<sup>6</sup> The policy window (Kingdon, 2003) for this was the discussion on poor overall health as being a causal factor in outcomes related to COVID-19, punctuated by Prime Minister Boris Johnson MP falling ill. Exercise was included in the package of proposed measures aimed at preventing infirmity and outdoor exercise was an exemption from governmental restrictions on the movement of citizens, showing an acknowledgement for the importance of exercise and physical activity in the health agenda.

## **Chapter Overview**

### **Chapter One**

Chapter One comprises of a review of the literature drawn upon in the study. This is split into two sub sections. Firstly, I offer a history of sports policy in Britain from 1960 to the modern day. 1960 was selected as a starting point as the 1960s has broadly been considered to be the first decade where sport and physical activity became a political concern (Bloyce and Smith, 2010). This section is organised into decades and maps the shifts in policy thinking and the political salience of sport over time, allowing us to better understand policy narratives in the modern day. Overall, I argue that while there have undoubtedly been vast shifts in the sport and physical activity policy space, that

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<sup>6</sup> There had historically been a range of childhood obesity strategies such as in 2017, which led to the imposition of the soft drinks industry levy.

there are still tensions within the contested policy terrain, amplified by the increasing policy spaces that sport and physical activity now occupies.

Secondly, I examine the various roles of women within the sporting social space. This section looks at different facets of women within both men and women's sport, as coaches and leaders, as fans, as media producers and finally as athletes. The use of this faceted approach allows for a fuller consideration of sport as a gendered space. Throughout the different facets, it is clear that while gains have been made, there is still a gulf whereby women need to 'prove themselves' within this space, either by adopting more 'masculine' approaches or by needing to prove their authenticity, particularly as fans of men's sport.

## **Chapter Two**

In Chapter Two, I lay out the methodological considerations of the investigation. This begins with the two key theoretical components that combined form the overall theoretical framework of the study: Connell's theory on gender relations and Foucault's governmentality. This is grounded in the notion that theory is part of the researcher's toolkit and should be adapted and adopted to best fulfil the research aims, rather than asserting that one theoretical framework is 'best' in a more dogmatic rather than pragmatic approach to social research. In this instance, the research is not merely interested in presentations of gender - as has already been addressed by strong work within the field - but takes the next step in exploring how these discursive patterns can shape taken for granted assumptions and knowledges regarding women's sport across multiple megastructural organisations.

After this, I set out the qualitative research design for the study, beginning with a discussion on the epistemological and ontological underpinnings to the research. The chapter then moves on to describe how the study was undertaken, exploring the data collection, sampling and analytical approach, offering worked examples of how this functioned in practice. It then explores some of the different approaches to discourse analysis which were available, before offering a rationale as to why critical discourse analysis was ultimately selected.

### **Chapter Three**

Chapter Three is the first of three analysis chapters. This one focuses on the print media corpus. I offer exploration of three themes generated from the dataset: the representation of national representative female athletes as nationally important figures, their associated presentation as emissaries for women's sport as one entity particularly positioned against the unquestioned role of men as the rightful leaders and gatekeepers of sport, and finally the discussion of the history of women's sport by the national press. Overall, I argue that many of these representations, and the increasing expectations on elite female athletes in a period of burgeoning mainstream interest and professionalisation, can be read as a logical extension on traditional gender roles, with a requirement of elite athletes 'nurturing' their sport as a new dimension to social expectations around women performing 'caring' roles.

### **Chapter Four**

Chapter Four is the second analysis chapter, which focusses on the policy document corpus. The chapter offers three generated themes beginning with the discursive narrative of elite athletes being important national figures in the achievement of policy

goals, both domestically and abroad. The chapter then pays attention to discursive repertoires around the growth of women's sport, with this discussion split into elite level and participation foci, where narratives were of growth, but this was measured in different terms. Finally, the liminality of women's sport and physical activity as a policy space is explored, with discussion offered around discursive patterns in women specific sports policy and strategies.

## **Chapter Five**

Chapter Five is the final of the three analysis chapters, centring on the shared and disparate discourses and discursive repertoires seen across the media and policy datasets. The chapter offers two cases of how discursive formations across the two textual types related to one another in practice, one given as sport specific for netball and one across all four sampled sports. The first focusses on the overlapping and aligning narratives of growth within the netball context across both elements of the sample, with this then contextualised against strategic decision making and broader organisational behaviour. The second repertoire examined is that of the national importance of female athletes, where the disparities between public policy discourses and print media outputs are considered. This second repertoire is opened to all four of the sampled sports, this strategy of one 'macro' and one 'micro' case was chosen in order to offer both breadth and depth to the examination of these discourses.

## **Chapter Six**

This chapter concludes the study. Here, the overall aims and findings of the study are reiterated, with discussion given to how the study has achieved its research aims and

addressed the research questions. I then position the research within the field, offering comments on the uniqueness of the studies contribution to knowledge in contemporary debates in the field. The chapter then offers comment on the limitations and shortcomings of the research and finally identifying potential areas for further academic study and exploration.



# Chapter 1: Literature Review

## **A Brief History of Sport Policy in the UK**

In order to understand modern sports policy in Britain, it is necessary to reflect on its history. This allows contextualisation of the strands of thought and narratives that hold sway through the modern day, many of which have been in vogue at different points over the last 60 years, around when sports policy first became a legitimate political consideration in the 1960s (Bloyce and Smith, 2010). What follows will focus on the actions of the British Government; however, the role of sports governing bodies (SGBs) has also changed over time, with increasing formalisation and professionalisation demanded by government in the face of sports governance scandals (Katwala, 2000; Geeraert, 2013; Bayle, 2015). For reasons of brevity, what follows is by no means an exhaustive discussion of every sports policy, programme or initiative that has been put forward. Instead, it is intended to guide and frame the discussion of sports policy throughout this thesis by highlighting critical interventions. These can broadly be categorised into four key policy foci; the sport for all and school sport agenda, elite performance, the concerns around the administration of sport, and the shifting salience of the sport agenda politically. Overall, I argue that while there have undoubtedly been vast shifts in the sport and physical activity (PA) policy space, there are still tensions within a contested policy terrain, amplified by the increasing policy spaces that sport and physical activity occupies. For example, sport now crosses over into a far greater spectrum of policy areas, firmly ensconced within health and social welfare agendas. This was historically a more intangible relationship, with claims made around physical

activity providing health benefits dating back to the 1960s, however the mechanisms for locating sport within wider health agendas are far more sophisticated in the current day. A factor in this is the success of policy entrepreneurs such as Baroness Sue Campbell, who tirelessly espoused the cross-cutting benefits of sport and physical activity to give sport a foothold in the political agenda (Thorburn, 2009). Also, it is clear that throughout the policy thinking around sport and physical activity there are two persistent, and sometimes conflicting, policy schemas within the four foci: a focus on elite level performance, and participatory physical activity. Finding the balance between these has historically led to tensions within and between governing bodies, particularly in instances where governmental change led to substantial shifts in approach, as I will explore in depth in short order. The following discussion is structured sequentially by decade to map the changes and movements in policy focuses over time, beginning with the 1960s however the discussion within each decade will not be necessarily chronological, and will instead focus on key policy issues within that decade. After this discussion, I will then focus on some women's sport and physical activity specific interventions, highlighting that while there has been an increasing acceptance and understanding that women are also part of the sports policy space, there has not always been specificity and clarity in these interventions.

### **1960s: The Genesis of Sports Policy**

The 1960s were a transformative period for British cultural life, with social shifts towards liberalisation giving rise to different forms of leisure and entertainment (Curran, 2010). To this end, this period was one in which new policy areas, such as sport and the arts, gained a foothold in the political sphere after a germination period in the mid to late 1950s. 1960 saw the release of the Wolfenden Report (Central Council

for Physical Recreation, 1960) on behalf of the recently created Central Council for Physical Recreation (CCPR). This was the first governmental report explicitly dealing in the area of sport, though the Albermarle Report (HM Stationary Office, 1960) had previously highlighted the potential for the use of sport and physical activity to quell social disorder and delinquency. The Wolfenden report focussed on young people, the availability and viability of sports facilities, and the quality of sports coaching in Britain at that time. The report showed that government had moved away from previously held axioms around youth physical activity (PA) as a tool to develop physical fitness for combat or as a tool for discipline. These ideations had been an underpinning of ‘muscular Christianity’<sup>7</sup> (Coalter, 2007; Tomlinson and Young, 2010) and the organisation of public-school sport prior to the Great War. The report was the first of its kind in highlighting the state’s role within sport, as it was Wolfenden’s view that the state had a responsibility to broaden the quality and diversity of sports facilities and opportunities. The report was particularly concerned by the drop off in participation rates when young people leave the education system.<sup>8</sup> This ‘Wolfenden Gap’ remains a contemporary issue (Houlihan and White, 2002; Bloyce *et al.*, 2008), and the Wolfenden report opened a policy window for many sports policy issues in the long term, as the problems highlighted in the report are partly responsible for sport becoming increasingly salient in political discourse.

One tangible example of the impact of the Wolfenden report is in the creation of the Advisory Sports Council (ASC) in 1964, led by then Minister for Sport, Dennis Howell,

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<sup>7</sup> Muscular Christianity is a philosophical belief in the role that physical literacy plays in religiosity, alongside associated notions of duty and masculinity. One of the earliest recordings of the phrase in print was in Thomas Hughes’ 1856 novel, *Tom Brown’s School Days*

<sup>8</sup> The school leaving age until 1964 was 14, this increased to 16 after 1964.

following a recommendation for such a body in the report. Importantly, Wolfenden suggested an executive rather than advisory body, however the Government felt that the creation of an advisory body would allow greater speed and agility in addressing sporting issues. The role of the Council was laid out in a statement in the House of Commons by Howell, who stated:

*Particular subjects which it is intended that the Council should advise on are: Standards of provision of sports facilities for the community; collation of information about the position in other countries; surveys of resources and regional planning; co-ordination of the use of community resources; research; development of training and coaching; likely capital expenditure; participation in sporting events overseas by British amateur teams; and priorities in sports development. (Hansard, Column 1082, 1965 )<sup>9</sup>*

The statement makes clear that the newly elected Labour government at the time agreed with Wolfenden's argument that state funding for sports provision was a governmental responsibility, and it was the role of the ASC to oversee and facilitate this.<sup>10</sup> This reflected a broader acceptance that policies around sport and leisure were linked to the welfare state, due to the impact of PA on overall wellbeing. The Advisory Sports Council established 11 Regional Sports Councils (Jefferys, 2016), who were granted oversight for their specific geographical areas, beginning an on-going trend toward the divestment of the responsibility for sports policy implementation away from central government.<sup>11</sup> Further to this, it was expected that the Advisory Sports Council would be able to boost elite level performance through a more formalised approach to governance, which until this time had remained largely amateurish in its organisation, in keeping with the roots of British sport as an amateur pursuit (Porter and Wagg, 2008).

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<sup>9</sup> All quotations from speeches or statements will be italicised throughout this thesis in order to differentiate them from written quotations.

<sup>10</sup> Harold Wilson's Labour party won the 1964 General Election.

<sup>11</sup> Of these 9 were in England, with one each in Scotland and Wales.

Initially, Sports Governing Bodies (SGBs) were simply required to codify the game, organise fixtures and events, and ensure that there was a stream of participants (Katwala, 2000). To this end, many SGBs were ad hoc in their structure and approach. Generally, board members were volunteers with a passion for their sport, and influential members within these boards shaped decision-making. This was later to change due to the rapid commercialisation and commodification of sport (Slack, 2004), as well as its growing political importance (Grix and Lee, 2013). I will explore this change further subsequently in this chapter.

In summation, the 1960s can be described as the beginning of substantial governmental interest or intervention in sport and was the genesis of a number of on-going sports policy issues. Perhaps the pivotal turn in this movement was the role of the Wolfenden report, which led to sporting concerns becoming politically salient, paving the way for future prominence changes. Crucially, this report argued for a linkage between sport, physical activity and wider social and health considerations, and these remain conceptually linked in modern political thinking. Another example of recurring and persistent strands of thought is evident in the friction between an elite centric approach to policy and a 'Sport for All' focus, with emphases on social order as well as international success (Bloyce and Smith, 2010). One of the key responsibilities of the ASC was to better organise and allocate resources for sport to achieve these twin aims, which has been a consistent element of some political scepticism around sport which I explore below. Building on Wolfenden and Albermarle's recommendations, the role of sport as a tool to improve social order in disadvantaged areas was soon to pick up further speed.

## **1970s: The Beginnings of Politicisation**

The 1970 General Election saw a victory for Edward Heath's Conservative party, and this brought many changes for the political framing of sports policy. It was the view of the Government that sport should be at 'arm's length' from government and to this end, they set out to create a Sports Council operating independently from government. Royal Charters were awarded to the Advisory Sports Council (which became the Great British Sports Council, overseeing England), the Scottish Sports Council and the Welsh Sports Council in order to give them executive powers, reducing the role of government in sport, particularly through allowing these national councils to autonomously select spending priorities (Jeffreys, 2016). While the executive powers were intended to allow for distance from Ministers this did not transpire, and an era of more intervention and political influence of sport followed their establishment. This led to an exacerbation of existing tensions between sports bodies (Bloyce and Smith, 2010), which frequently found themselves in charge of increasingly overlapping functions. This occurred against the backdrop of a movement away from the 'voluntarist' approaches to administration seen before this, where administrators would broadly be drafted from those with passion for their sports, who had professional skillsets and were willing to perform governance functions in their spare time (Green, 2004). This persisted in smaller sports, however the expectations on governing body functions were to change in the coming decades.

In 1975 the first White Paper on sport, *Sport and Recreation* (Department of the Environment, 1975) was written, signalling a further governmental change in tack. Neil Macfarlane, MP stated in 1976 that:

*The White Paper is a far-reaching document, which talks about principles of policy, a programme of action, the Sports Council, the Countryside Commission, the tourist boards, the Forestry Commission, the water authorities, the British Waterways Board, ancient monuments, historic buildings, the Nature Conservancy Council, local authority co-ordination, the resources of recreation, management and the youth sports programme. (Column 1450, 1976)*

A shift away from centralised responsibility for sport was particularly evident in *Sport and Recreation's* argument that local authorities had no statutory duty to provide adequate sporting facilities to their constituents. This was in direct contrast to the arguments made before *Sport and Recreation*, particularly by the Wolfenden Report (CCPR, 1960) which argued in favour of government intervention. The question of who bore responsibility for sport in the community became particularly difficult considering the same White Paper indicated that central government would not be responsible for participatory level provision and was driven by the perilous economic climate of the time. These issues were raised by Neil MacFarlane MP who stated that:

*There can be no argument between the Opposition and the Government about the importance of sport and recreation in our society. The stresses and strains of life in the 1970s, and the problems of unemployment among the young people leaving school are key factors which make it essential that the Government and the sports bodies should undertake a thorough and urgent reappraisal of taxation and the way in which our resources are currently being spent on sport and recreation. (Column 1450, 1976)*

Here, we can see an appreciation for the role that sport and recreation plays in society, with this speech coming shortly after the MP argued for funding for sport (around

£10m) to be increased in line with the Arts (around £26m), due to the popularity and importance of sport and physical activity to everyday life.

Further to this, there was a growing governmental desire to build on some of the recommendations of Wolfenden's report, with a want to enable provision through access to high quality facilities for all. This was a crucial building block of the 'Sport For All' agenda and its linkages to the welfare system, with affordable access to facilities being considered a gateway to long-term participation, and for this participation to serve society by benefitting health through social citizenship (Houlihan and White, 2002). This is emblematic of the philosophy of the welfare state at the time as relatively interventionist, which had been the order of the day since post-war reconstruction. This was to change from the late 1970s through the 1980s, as will be expanded upon in due course.

Further analysis of the White Paper shows it draws a clear distinction between sport and recreation, asserting that sport was played at the elite level and recreation at the participatory level. The paper went on to highlight the need for a 'tightening up' of sports bodies in order to prevent the aforementioned overlapping of duties (Department of the Environment, 1975, p.2). This was an early attempt at further professionalisation in sports bodies, signalling a growing governing desire for efficiency and effectiveness, in keeping with changes to wider public sector provision. This was to be a key and on-going feature of subsequent governmental evaluations on British sports governance, as will become clear as this chapter progresses.



Perhaps most influentially, the 1975 White Paper made claims around the use of sport to cure other social ills, which has been a consistent refrain ever since. Of particular interest was the claim that reducing boredom and frustration would lead to a reduction of hooligan activity and ‘delinquency’ (Department of the Environment, 1975; in Polley, 1998). Hooliganism was a particularly pertinent issue at this time - even referred to as the ‘English Disease’ (Domeneghetti, 2020) - and this, among other forms of sports deviances, is a well-worn area of sports sociology (see Taylor, 1971a, 1971b, 1976, 1987; Murphy, Dunning and Williams, 1988; Giulianotti and Armstrong, 2002; Spaaj and Viñas, 2005; Testa and Armstrong, 2010 for a range of discussions on hooliganism in different national contexts). Most relevant to the current study is to highlight that this is the first White Paper on sport explicit in its intention to use sport to achieve political goals outside of the realm of sport, physical activity and health agendas, in this instance around social cohesion and social order. This has carried through to the modern day and was particularly emphasised in the 1980s as will be explored presently.

Overall, the 1970s saw sport become a far more politicised area both at home and abroad, with perhaps the best example internationally being the global movement against competing with Apartheid-era South Africa. The omission of South Africa from sporting competition began in 1964, with South Africa expelled from the Tokyo Olympic Games. This expulsion from sport was extended to the Olympic movement in 1970, which coincided with a planned tour of the South Africa men’s cricket team in England. After substantial pressure from the Anti-Apartheid movement the tour was cancelled at the request of Prime Minister Harold Wilson (Murray, 2002). This was a precursor to the 1977 *Gleneagles Agreement*, signed by leaders from the

Commonwealth nations, which agreed to limit competition with South Africa on the grounds that:

They were conscious that sport is an important means of developing and fostering understanding between the people, and especially between the young people, of all countries. But, they were also aware that, quite apart from other factors, sporting contacts between their nationals and the nationals of countries practising apartheid in sport tend to encourage the belief (however unwarranted) that they are prepared to condone this abhorrent policy or are less than totally committed to the Principles embodied in their Singapore Declaration. (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1977)

The emphasis here on the role that sport can play in diplomacy builds on the ‘ping pong diplomacy’ earlier in the decade, which saw the United States of America and China alleviate diplomatic tensions during the Cold War through the use of sport as a non-traditional international relations solution (Kobierecki, 2016). The two countries competed in table tennis, allowing an improvement in relations, and leading to the first visit by a USA president to the People’s Republic of China after 22 years of diplomatic discord. This tour preceded the lifting of a US trade embargo on China and other visa and currency restrictions, demonstrating the power of sport as a gateway to improving diplomatic relations (Kobierecki, 2016).

In 1979, Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative party won the general election and with it brought a change in approach to the role of public services, heavily impacting sports provision. Thatcher’s broad political principles were similar to those of neoliberalism, insofar as the market is understood as the best way to solve public issues (Hay, 2004). Perhaps the key trend was the shift towards the notion of new public management (NPM) and new managerialism during Thatcher’s premiership. NPM was

broadly a move toward decentralised governance, whereby the state was ‘hollowed’ (Rhodes, 1994), allowing for private entities to fulfil duties that had historically been filled by the public sector. In a NPM approach, there is a greater emphasis on the notions of value for money and accountability of those receiving and managing public funds (De Araujo, 2001). Thatcher was one of the main proponents of this shift towards a NPM model (Terry, 2005) and harnessed a rhetoric of crisis in the abilities of state (Terry, 2005), thereby positioning a shift towards an increasingly marketised strategy of provision as logical and proper. The opportunity for Thatcher and her government to promote this new approach to public management was granted by the perceived failure of the Keynesian economic approach taken by Labour, after the previous government had borrowed £2.3bn from the International Monetary Fund (Houlihan and White, 2002). This neo-liberal, market driven philosophy driving NPM – allied with a shift toward monetarism – led to the privatisation of many public services in what can be referred to as the ‘hollowing of the state’ (Rhodes, 1994). This term, coined by Milward, Provan and Else (1993) and popularised by Rhodes (1994), refers to the increasing shift towards the third-party provision of public services (Milward and Provan, 2000; Milward, 2014). This presents governments with a paradox. As their capacity for harnessing technologies for social benefit is hypothetically strong through high levels of knowledge and management resources, their ability to control these outcomes reduces due to macro-level influences such as globalisation, influencing the state-societal relationship (Howlett, 2000).

Another element of the NPM approach that impacted the sports policy area was the permeation of managerialism and ‘new managerial methods’, with the privileging of ‘managerial’ private enterprise approaches gaining greater foothold in the management

of public services. This caused numerous challenges and led to the increase of target setting in public services, where it is often difficult to quantify and assess performance in the same way a private, profit driven private business could (Hood, 1991). This was certainly the case in a sporting context, where ‘success’ has continued to prove elusive to accurately define in the subsequent decades, with frequent shifts in policy emphasis and a lack of clarity and precision in measurable target setting influencing this difficulty of definition. This was to become a contentious issue in the coming years, where it became increasingly clear that the days of ‘sport for sports sake’ were drawing to a close.

### **1980s- Sports Policy in the Echoes of Discontent**

The 1980s saw a new challenge to the status quo of sports policy as sport’s previous place within broader social welfare policy was about to come under an ‘abrupt and sustained challenge’ (Houlihan and White, 2002, p.27). Thatcher’s government had a complex relationship with sport. On the one hand, sport had given her government cause for embarrassment, most obviously in the case of hooliganism (Rehling, 2011) both domestically and abroad, which led to the creation of the Football Spectators Act of 1989. However, echoing the sentiments of the 1975 White Paper, Thatcher also felt that sport could be used to pacify the disenfranchised (King, 1989). Perhaps the best evidence of the mistrust and lack of sympathy that sport held politically at the time is the in the range of ‘ineffective politicians who held the post of Minister for Sport and for whom the post was the high point of their political career’ (Houlihan and White, 2002, p.28).

Even with the issues that sport caused Thatcher's governments, they also felt that sport could be a quick fix to social dissonance. To this end, the 1982 creation of the 'Action Sport Programme' (ASP) was a key development in this area. This dissonance between Thatcher's distrust of football fandom and the recognition that sport can be an important social and political factor is emblematic of the complex relationship that Thatcher had with sport as a policy area. The ASP was orchestrated by the Sports Council and National Manpower Commission, which aimed to engage inner city individuals in sport (Bloyce and Smith, 2010). ASP targeted the inner cities due to the difficult economic climate of the time, contributing to the riots that had taken place in Leeds, Liverpool, Birmingham and London, and the fact that many low participatory groups reside in inner-city areas (Widdop *et al.*, 2017). The ASP programme was part of a broader recognition of sports' role in social wellbeing, and the programme provided Birmingham and London £1m per year to develop low cost, accessible programmes to engage with these 'hard to reach' groups. This formed a key cog in part of a commitment to sport in the community, through an early effort at the use of sports development officers to perform outreach work in these communities (Adams, Harris and Lindsey, 2018).

Furthermore, the introduction of National Demonstration Projects (NDPs) furthered a community sport emphasis, with a focus on participation. Bloyce and Smith (2010, p.39) assert that NDPs had three major objectives:

1. To improve participation through outreach development in the community.
2. To enhance opportunities for target groups such as women and disabled people to participate in sport.
3. To develop school sport, in partnership with the education authorities.

The second focus, of enhancing opportunities for particular target groups, was in keeping with the aims of the ASP project and the emphasis on women's sport particularly is compelling to this study. The ASP programme was one of the first real recognitions and attempts to address the gendered participatory imbalance, and this has again been a consistent theme in policy interventions. The two foci of enhancing opportunities in a targeted way and an emphasis on school sport need to be considered against the reformulation of the welfare state and against the occasionally challenging relationship between sports policy and welfare provision during much of the 1970s (Houlihan and White, 2002). The ASP was a leap forward in the sport for development agenda, with the burgeoning relationship between the Sports Council and the Manpower Services Commission proving fruitful for all, with the Sports Councils happy to receive extra funding in exchange for a focus on participation in the inner cities (Houlihan and White, 2002).<sup>12</sup> This took place against the backdrop of increasing interest in sport from other governmental departments who had previously been sceptical of any involvement with sport as a policy area.<sup>13</sup>

The stated focus on school sport was unsurprising, even considering the relative political weakness of Physical Education (P.E.) teachers at the time, due to the lack of respect that their subject was afforded by the educational system at large (Houlihan, 2000) and given Thatcher's refocussing of the education system on economic needs, shifting the public towards the private (Houlihan, 2000; Exley and Ball, 2013). The role

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<sup>12</sup> The Manpower Services Commission was established in 1974 to oversee employment and training services nationwide (Bloyce and Smith, 2010)

<sup>13</sup> Such as the Department for the Environment which had begun funding the provision of facilities

of physical activity in educational reform was described by Evans (1990) as occurring due to the symbolism of physical activity as a signifier of all that had gone wrong with state school provision. An element to this criticism was the decline in school competitive sport, which was cited as responsible for the declining success of Great Britain on the international sporting stage (Kirk, 1992). One of the key reforms was the establishment of P.E. as a foundational subject on the national curriculum after a successful lobbying effort (Houlihan and White, 2002). It is crucial to contextualise these transitions against the vast changes to the conceptualisation and machineries of government, in which education saw alterations in both curriculum and system (Houlihan and White, 2002).

Much of the focus on school sport harkened back to previous suggestions made by the Albemarle Report around the use of sport to reduce social disorder in the young (HM Stationary Office, 1960). A pertinent example of the combination of sporting, educational and economic concerns was in Thatcher's controversial Regulation 909, which gave educational authorities autonomy to sell facilities deemed surplus to requirements (Williams, Wiltshire and Gibson, 2021). In uncertain economic times, this led to the selling of school playing fields, symbolising the comparatively low level of esteem in which school sports and physical activity was held at the time by the educational authorities. However, this arguably undid much of the focus of the 1970s on facility provision in favour of an emphasis on participation (Sports Council, 1983). Furthermore, the national Compulsory Competitive Tendering processes were extended to sport and physical activity provision (Aitchison, 1997). This formed a key part of the sweeping reorganisation of public services around the notion of 'best value'. This makes certain assumptions around what is considered value for public funding in

sporting terms, and the increased focus on accountability for public funding irrevocably politicised British sport, particularly at the elite level.

The 1980s saw great shifts in the way that public services were funded and conceptualised, with a far more neo-liberal, market-driven focus taking precedence, with the professionalisation of public services enthusiastically supported after the publication of the Yates Report in 1984 before waning shortly after (Houlihan, 2001). This led to a greater emphasis on the efficiency of public services in keeping with the managerialism and general shift towards a closer mirroring to the behaviours of private enterprise as previously noted. In the sporting world, this led to vast changes in the ways that publicly funded sports bodies were structured. The ‘streamlining’ of public services made policy planning, writing and implementation challenging, partially due to the conflict between elite sport and participatory sport policy aims, as well as the difficult relationships between sports bodies. Green and Houlihan (2005) highlight this as a key challenge to successful policy work, arguing that the reorganisation of national governing bodies was ‘hardly conducive to policy stability’ (p.52). The 1980s once again saw changes to many of the policy approaches that had been implemented throughout the 1970s, most obviously the shift away from an emphasis on facility provision. However, further transformative changes were to occur in the coming decade.

### **1990-1997- Major Changes**



In 1990, following the resignation of Margaret Thatcher, John Major took office as British Prime Minister. This was a catalyst for many changes in British sport, as in Major there was a key political decision maker with considerable personal interest in sport, as both an avid player and spectator. This was a marked change from the Thatcher era. With Major, there was also a shift away from local authority centred provision - as seen through the 1960s-1980s - towards a more centralised approach. This was perhaps best demonstrated by the creation of the Department for National Heritage (DNH) - formed after the Conservatives success in the 1992 General Election - which took direct responsibility for sporting matters. Following the creation of DNH, a proposal was made to reconsider and reconfigure the role of the Sports Council to a purely participation focus, with the creation of a Sports Commission to oversee elite level sport (Bloyce and Smith, 2010).

The tabled restructuring proposed that all regional Sports Councils would be responsible for participatory levels of sport in their respective nations, overseen by a UK Sports Commission whose main focus was on the elite levels of competition. A divested approach would, theoretically, allow for greater specialisation and efficiency in achieving more specific goals. This continued the move towards a NPM approach (Hood, 1991), with a focus on efficiently achieving specific policy goals with increasingly scarce public resources. In the National Governing Body (NGB) context, there had already been so many policy paradigm changes in British sport that further change was generally treated with suspicion (Green and Houlihan, 2005). Further to this, NGBs would have to compete in the medium to long-term for funding, which, given the increased politicisation of sport meant that in order to access funding, certain policy goals must be agreed to, reducing autonomy and favouring certain sports. The

proposals were temporarily scrapped due to concerns over bureaucracy - in line with wider public sector trends towards streamlining services - however this was merely a delay in the reconfiguration of the administration of British sport.

Building on the work of the ASPs and NDPs, the Sports Council announced new *Frameworks for Action* (Sports Council, 1993), with a far greater focus on sports equity, as opposed to the previously utilised targeting system. The Sports Council defined sports equity as being ‘about fairness in sport, equality of access... whatever their age, race, gender or level of ability’ (Sports Council 1993, p.4). This equity-centred approach demonstrated a change in tack from the Government’s more targeted philosophy that could be seen during the 1980s. Furthermore, there was a clear shift in the responsibility given explicitly to local authorities and governing bodies (Bloyce and Smith, 2010). This led the Sports Council to more clearly consider how equity can be spread throughout all elements of sports provision, with clear attempts to address inequalities and constraints to participation. This would prove important in the medium to long-term future direction of British sport policy (Houlihan and White, 2002).

The National Lottery began in November 1994 and quickly became pivotal to the funding of sport in England and how this funding was distributed. However, this increase in funding did come with increased governmental oversight and intervention into sport as a policy area (Houlihan and White, 2002). One element of government involvement was the increasingly formalised nature of these arrangements (Bloyce and Smith, 2010), in keeping with shifts towards the accountability, modernisation and professionalisation of bureaucratic processes that were popular at the time. Given that sport achieved ‘good cause’ status (Moore, 1997) - in part through the effective

lobbying work over the previous decades - the Sports Council became responsible for allocating 83% of sports funding (Bloyce and Smith, 2010, p.46). The overall impact of National Lottery funding has been transformative, with many strides taken in sports development due to the increased funding for both facilities and people (Moore, 1997). However, the increasingly salient area of sports policy drew a second White Paper in 1995, titled *Sport: Raising the Game*, which I will address presently.

A further key development in 1994 was the establishment of the Youth Sports Trust (YST). The YST is a charitable foundation that provides opportunities for young people through sport, with its target audience being those between 18 months and 18 years of age.<sup>14</sup> This was part of a broader reinvention of youth sport in Britain. The YST has access to governmental funding for a range of generally access level initiatives with a focus on the 'hard to reach' groups, such as the economically disadvantaged (Widdop *et al.*, 2017). One of its flagship successes was The Olympic Programme (TOPs), which blended teaching with coaching and was administered in primary schools, whose teachers frequently are not Physical Education practitioners (Houlihan and White, 2002). Crucially, the YST had a highly successful policy adviser in Baroness Sue Campbell, whose strong advocacy for sport in policy was to become increasingly fruitful in the forthcoming decade. The YST also provides opportunities to volunteer in sport for young people, in yet another attempt to harness the social potential of sport. Overall, the Trust has become enormously important in the youth sport policy agenda

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<sup>14</sup> The Youth Sport Trust is still operational, receiving public funding through Sport England among other sources of funding. The Sport England funding amounted to £5,173,416 out of a total of £11,270,429 to 'improve young people's lives through sport and play in 2019/2020'.

(Bloyce and Smith, 2010), adapting well to many policy windows and shifting political trends towards social participation (Kay and Bradbury, 2009).

In addition to these developments, *Sport: Raising the Game* (Department of National Heritage, 1995) changed the landscape of school sport. Perhaps most importantly, this is the policy document that outlined the requirement for schools to continue to provide Physical Education lessons as a compulsory part of teaching (Green, 2009). This was a far cry from the political weakness that Physical Education teachers had historically experienced (Houlihan, 2000). Sport as a policy area had made status gains due to effective lobbying and societal support, but was still viewed as symbolic to previous failings in state education (Evans, 1990). This overall determination that sport ‘should be back at the heart of weekly life in every school’ (*Sport: Raising the Game*, Department for National Heritage, 1995, p.2) describes much of the sports policy of John Major’s government, which can broadly be understood as encompassing two key areas: *school sport* and *elite level success*, with little reference made to mass participation (Bloyce and Smith, 2010). In the White Paper foreword, Major highlighted the role for the traditional team sports at the heart of British sport. This was a divergence from many other major European countries, whom had moved towards a more holistic understanding of a PA driven model, focussing on activities such as walking for health and enjoyment rather than team sports (European Commission, 2008). The importance of this traditionalism is deeply imbued into understandings of English sport and shapes the way that many policy thinkers continue to consider British sports policy. *Sport: Raising the Game* also proposed a streamlining approach to the organisation of British sport, with both the splitting of duties from the Sports Council and the emphasis of duties for participatory provision falling on local rather than central

government. Crucially, the White Paper proposed the creation of a British Academy of Sport, responsible for developing elite level sport. This, allied with proposals that NGBs should develop more formalised links with scholastic sport in order to identify talented individuals, demonstrated the shifting of sports policy along the lines of competitive school sport and elite level performance.

The Sports Council followed the White Paper by releasing their sporting strategy in 1996 titled *The Sporting Nation* (English Sports Council, 1997). This is a critical moment in modern sports policy, as their strategy was a clear refocusing of sports authority strategy to explicitly align with the aims of government (Bloyce and Smith, 2010). Perhaps the most obvious example of this was the establishment of the UK Sports Council (UKSC) and the English Sports Council (ESC).<sup>15</sup> The UKSC was given responsibility for the elite levels of sport, most obviously in facilitating excellent performance at world championships and Olympic Games. The ESC however was to oversee English sport ‘from foundation through to excellence’ (Houlihan and White, 2002, p.70), with funding targeted at mass participation. Houlihan and White (2002) refer to this as the ‘bifurcation’ of sport (p.70) and was a pivotal moment in the history of English sport, which was about to undertake further transformation in New Labour’s ‘third way’ of doing government (Muschamp, Jamieson and Lauder, 1999).

### **1997-2010- London Calling, From Local Matter to the World Stage**

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<sup>15</sup> The councils of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland remained unchanged

Given his much-publicised statement of a focus on ‘education, education, education’,<sup>16</sup> it was little surprise that in the run up to an ultimately successful 1997 General Election, Tony Blair’s ‘New Labour’ released a manifesto which promised much for youth sport. It focussed on the participatory levels and the improvement of facilities, as well as preventing the selling of school playing fields (Labour Party Manifesto, 1997). Early upon taking office, Blair created the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), replacing the Department of National Heritage in 1997. This was the first reference to sport made in the title of a governmental department, offering a tangible example of the increasing political salience that sport and physical activity as a policy agenda held. Prior to this, sport had been a policy issue that had been nomadic in nature, being within the remits of departments as wide ranging as the Department of the Environment, to the Department of National Heritage. This was symptomatic of prior governments that understood that sport was to be an important political issue but did not perhaps understand the scope and scale of its potential importance in the future, aided by a boom in the business of sport. Sport’s increasing political interest and commitment was demonstrated with increases of grant in aid funding from 1992 to 1996 of 18% (Banks, Column 517, 1998).<sup>17</sup>

In 1997 the restructuring of the Sports Council was completed, dividing its duties into the rebranded Sport England and UK Sport. This was the culmination of decades of parliamentary mistrust towards sports governing bodies about the ways in which British sport was organised, with criticisms about efficacy and efficiency rife (Houlihan and

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<sup>16</sup> At the 1996 Labour Party Conference, when asked for his top three priorities upon winning office, Blair responded ‘education, education, education’

<sup>17</sup> These figures were ascertained from Hansard written answers by then Minister for Sport Tony Banks MP

Green, 2009). Sport England was to be responsible for the participatory elements of English sport, whereas UK Sport was responsible for elite performance and anti-doping measures, building on *The Sporting Nation* in an era of modernisation of public services, which I will explore further imminently. The turn of the millennium brought a new political paradigm after the conservatism evident throughout the 1980s and much of the 1990s. Tony Blair's 'New Labour' was hailed as the 'Third Way' of government, which was a composite approach to what had previously been politics 'of the old Left and new Right' (Driver and Martell, 2006, p.4). The sports policy during this period can be broken down into three key thematic areas; the use of sport for social good and inclusion, the restructuring of school sport and finally, policy related to sports mega events. Critically, New Labour were seeking to break with perceptions of the traditions of the Labour party, pushing a modernisation agenda of 'joined up policy thinking' and evidence-based policy writing (Houlihan and Green, 2006; Cairney, 2011).

There have been critiques of this period of the public service modernisation agenda, with Finlayson (2003) arguing that 'modernisation is an up word that makes things sound exciting, progressive and positive' (p.63), as opposed to delivering any real or lasting change. Another criticism is that the NPM and modernisation agenda had 'hollowed out' the state (Rhodes, 1994), in the long run making the state far less able to effectively control public services.

Against this backdrop of changing approaches to governance, and in spite of some salience gains, sport was perhaps not a key policy priority, with the first DCMS strategy of New Labour coming three years into their leadership with the release of *A Sporting Future for All* (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2000). *A Sporting Future for*

*All* refocussed sports provision to the local authority level, arguing that they were crucial for sports delivery. King (2009) asserts that *A Sporting Future for All* highlighted the four key uses for sport that the Government had identified. These were:

1. A method to improve social inclusion
2. To promote healthier life values
3. To boost national identity and pride, particularly at the elite sporting level
4. The use of sport for economic gain, particularly around sports tourism

This was an important moment for sports policy in Britain, given the explicit reference that was made to the consequences of failing to achieve government targets for NGBs, stating that ‘the success or failure in achieving milestone targets in performance plans will be an important factor in deciding future levels of funding’ (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2000, p.44). This sets the tone for the future of sports funding from public sources and raises debate around the measurements of success for NGBs and the ideal role for sport in Britain.

These targets made by *A Sporting Future for All* were the first by a governmental sports strategy to make any explicit claims about the potential that sport has as an inclusionary social force, even though many other policies and programmes had attempted to harness this, such as the previously discussed NDP. This was the manifestation of the overall, and persistent, sentiment that sport had an important role to play in society. The fairly broad description and definition of what constitutes inclusion is somewhat unsurprising, given that up to this point government had not really grasped the exact role sport could play, and given the prevailing conceptualisation of sport as an axiomatic societal benefit that had been peddled by politicians and sportspeople alike, this was a perhaps overly optimistic aim on the macro level.



In keeping with a broader emphasis on the education system, in 2002 Labour decided to make Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) a priority. In the sporting context, this consisted of a full restructuring of the way that school sports were organised and delivered. It was spearheaded by the creation of the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) programme (Flintoff, 2003, 2008). The PESSCL programme broke the delivery of PESS into nine key strands, these were (From Phillpots and Grix, 2014):

1. Sports Colleges
2. School Sports Partnerships
3. School to Club Links
4. Gifted and Talented Programme
5. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority P.E and School Sport Investigation
6. Step Into Sport
7. Swimming
8. Sporting Playgrounds
9. Professional Development

In this system, NGBs were responsible for cultivating links to schools, which offered both major opportunities and challenges. This is discussed by Phillpots and Grix (2014) in the athletics and golfing contexts, finding that the short-term nature of the funding arrangements created difficult situations for NGBs, particularly those with complex governance arrangements. This restructuring was part of the broader governmental focus on modernisation and professionalisation of public bodies, heavily influencing the organisational behaviour of NGBs (Houlihan and Green, 2009). This agenda led to a great deal of reform in the way that British sport was structured. As explored earlier, the policy document *A Sporting Future For All* (Department for Culture, Media and

Sport, 2000) argued that the structure of British sport was hampering its success at both the elite and participatory levels. This had long been a suspicion in parliament and led to the aforementioned split of the Sports Council into Sport England and UK Sport.

PESSCL lasted until 2008, where it was replaced by the Physical Education Sport Strategy for Young People (PESSYP). Ward (2014) argues that both of these strategies were ‘monolithic’ (p.571), driven by ‘quick win’ quantitative measures, with very little lasting impact on the lives on the children they were designed to help. This issue speaks to broader issues around modern policy writing and the focus on ‘quick wins’ (Carter, 2012) against longer lasting, deeper-rooted policy interventions. Ward (2014) goes on to argue that the focus on competitive sport highlights the fragility of school sport as a ‘miracle cure’ (p.572) to a range of other social issues.

The school sports agenda does not always directly relate to women and girls specifically, but it is one of the few occasions where women and girls have historically been properly considered in English sports policy, beyond merely highlighting them as a ‘hard to reach group’. Given the compulsory nature of Physical Education in school, and the potential impacts on future participation behaviour, school sport agendas are influential. Furthermore, as the discussion in this chapter so far has highlighted, school sport was one of the areas which had historically cut through in terms of political salience, most likely due to its attachment to education agendas, popularly conceived as a key area of governance.

## **Mega Events**

Clearly, in the context of British sport the shift towards hosting mega events, most obviously in the hosting of the 2012 London Olympic Games, changed the face of British sports policy. In the 2002 DCMS strategy document *Game Plan*, which outlines the sports strategy of the British Government between 2002-2008, the Government asserted that the hosting of sports mega events was ‘not an effective, value for money, method of achieving a sustained increase in mass participation’ (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2002, p.75). This was not deemed to be the case three years later in 2005, when the bid for the 2012 Olympics was launched and the overall legacy goals for the bid were created. While there was governmental support for the bidding and hosting of mega events, there is a limited amount of research-based evidence that success at mega events increases the demand for sport at the participatory level, which was highlighted as a key legacy area by the Government. For example, in a study around German football, Mutter and Pawlowski (2014) found that this had a relatively weak positive impact, and those most likely to be influenced were already participants. De Bosscher, Sotiriadou and van Bottenburg (2013) further this, arguing that the evidence to support any governmental claims around the causality of elite success and participation is tenuous, and only likely to occur in specific contexts.

It can be argued that the rationale for a country hosting a sports mega event extends beyond an increase in participation. Indeed, Houlihan and Grix (2014), argue that the enhancement of soft power (Nye, 1990) is a far more likely reason to expend the kinds of public investment required to successfully host a sports mega event such as the Olympics, or football World Cup. Houlihan and Grix (2014) explore the use of The Olympic Games and the football World Cup by Great Britain and Germany respectively in enhancing their soft power and changing the narratives around their countries. Grix

and Lee (2013) also highlight a list of potential political benefits in hosting world mega events, such as the development of national pride, the enhancing of national prestige and increased trading opportunities. As previously stated, this use of sporting mega events for political gain is not a uniquely British phenomenon, and indeed, it can be argued that Russia, China, Qatar and Brazil have also engaged in hosting mega events in a bid to increase their soft power and reputational standing (Manzenreiter, 2010; Grix and Lee, 2013; Alekseyeva, 2014; Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2015; Grix, Brannagan and Houlihan, 2015).

The crux of London's successful bid was the ambitious legacy that the bidding committee had put together (Girginov and Hills, 2008), to be ensured by £950m of public funding between 2008-2017 (Harris and Houlihan, 2016). This was a key element in the awarding of the games to London given the recent aftermaths of games such as Athens (Kissoudi, 2008) and, to a lesser extent Sydney (Toohey, 2008). The four areas that the Government highlighted (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2010) were:

1. Boost participation and PA levels in both children and adults <sup>18</sup>
2. Use the games to boost economic growth
3. Promote community engagement across all groups
4. Use the Olympic Park to generate regeneration efforts in East London

These were ambitious goals, and in the short term they were largely unfulfilled, particularly that of the increased participation by one million people (Coalter, 2013). This legacy shaped wider sports policy in this period. One example of this was in the

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<sup>18</sup> This was later quantified to one million added participants

strategy document *Playing to Win* (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2008). *Playing to Win* again saw the twin emphasis on elite excellence and boosting participatory rates. However, Sports Minister Andy Burnham's foreword made explicit the requirement for governing bodies to fulfil the will of the Government and their arm's length funding bodies, with the consequence of a failure to achieve these goals being a removal of public funding. Burnham was also clear around the expectations that governing bodies vary their offerings to make them as inclusive as possible:

But with that new power comes responsibility – to throw out old fashioned distinctions between 'girls' sports' and 'boys' sports. All young people should get a range of opportunities. Developing the girls' and women's game - and disability sport - is not an optional extra, but a vital part of what governing bodies will be required to do. If any sport does not wish to accept this challenge, funding will be switched to those that do. (*Playing to Win*, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2008, p.2)

From this, it is clear that government were looking to seize the opportunity that sport and hosting the Olympic games presented. In this vein they also fully expected governing bodies to 'accept this challenge' and work towards these governmental aims. Crucial in the context of this study is the acknowledgments made around traditional understandings of 'girls' and 'boys' sports, and the responsibility of developing women and girl's games within their broader sport. It is clearly the view of Burnham that until this point these traditional views on gender appropriate sports, and the importance of women's sport to their overall sporting offering, had permeated governing bodies. It is also clear, that with the greater 'power' comes the greater 'responsibility' for high quality sports governance. I will therefore now turn to a discussion on the growing importance of sports governance in policy thinking and increasingly writing in the 2000s.

## Sports Governance

Sports governance is a fairly unique area of governing in a ‘modernised’ (Finlayson, 2003; Grix, 2009) political landscape, as British sports governance exists within a much more ‘top down’ (Sabatier, 1986) system. Green (2007) explores this dynamic, finding that there can be the perception of the ‘illusion of agency’ (p.59) for national governing bodies, often under a guise of autonomy. Green and Houlihan (2006) highlight this paradox, arguing that the British Government felt a need to autonomise and modernise NGBs, while also imposing centralised targets and sanctions for failing to achieve these targets. This neoliberalisation occurred within sport (Houlihan and Green, 2006), where there was the acceptance and adoption of many business practices, in keeping with the commodification and commercialisation of sport, and indeed sports governance, holistically (Slack, 2004; Clausen *et al.*, 2018). This may have led to an overall weakening of NGBs, who in the vast majority of instances are dependent on public funding to continue operation. This is exploited by government, perhaps most overtly in the 2008 DCMS strategy document, *Playing to Win*. In the aforementioned foreword on the previous page, Andy Burnham states that if any sports do not want to ‘accept the challenge’ (p.2) of adapting to governmental focus on elite level success, then funding would be reallocated to more amenable governing bodies. *Playing to Win* goes on to express the view of the DCMS that the major investment in UK Sport had paid off, while also alluding to a wider role of government in sports governance moving forward.

Clearly there have been many areas in which sports development has transformed from being a fringe concern, to a legitimate and cross cutting policy area. This has not

happened independent of major developments within sport, most obviously in the increasing commercialism, which has ensured changes in the ways that sport is administered. It is crucial to consider these changes - and infamous failings - when we consider the intervention of the Government into the sporting sphere, and how the Government relate to sporting bodies. This became an increasingly important factor between 1997 and 2010.

Sport has transformed from being a public good – important culturally to those which follow with sports teams – to being a private enterprise with a growing shift towards neoliberal tendencies even in the sports which are not as commercially lucrative. The growing financial rewards of elite level success have changed many of the challenges that governing bodies face with the issues of match fixing and doping in sport offering challenges to the integrity of sport and the legitimacy of sporting bodies (García, 2011). Katwala (2000) highlights these issues in his critical text *Democratising Global Sport*, in which he makes the argument that a more professional approach to sports governance is necessary in the wake of scandals around the Tour de France and the International Olympic Committee. More recently, the scale of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) governance scandals (Pielke, 2013; Bayle, 2015) alongside the recent systemic bullying allegations throughout British elite sport (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2017), perhaps brought on by the UK Sport ‘No Compromise’ funding policy (Ingle, 2017), has again raised the critical importance of the effective operations of SGBs. Now, in many cases since the early 2000s (Grix and Harris, 2016) governments have stepped into the sports governance realm with predominantly normative solutions.

With this in mind, it is apparent that NGBs exist in a peculiar domestic political space, as sport is a rare example of a policy area in Britain that is granted the ‘illusion of agency’ (Green, 2007, p.59). However, with the vast sums of public funding available for sport, particularly around London 2012, there are clear expectations on the behaviours and focusses of NGBs. This becomes especially difficult in the instances of smaller sports, who may have far greater knowledge than funding bodies on how best to grow and develop their sport, but they cannot continue to operate without accessing the public funding that is on offer to those sports who fulfil the wishes of their funding bodies. Furthermore, NGBs also exist within a sphere where they cannot meaningfully impact any policy writing or policy focuses. This has historically been the case, however some NGBs have been proactive in influencing the delivery of the national curriculum in Physical Education (Houlihan, 2000; Reid, 2003). This generally took the form of the creation and dissemination of template lesson plans around their sport and can be considered an example of one of the few areas of control that many NGBs have enjoyed in the delivery of their sport.

Overall, it can be argued that from 1960 to the modern day, that four key areas emerged in policy consideration: the school sport and sport for good agenda, the transformation of elite sport, the professionalisation of sports governance and the overall increasing salience of sport as a legitimate policy concern. Clearly there are significant overlaps between these areas, and this characterises the sports policy space as full of tensions and frequent changes, alongside fluctuations in political salience.

One of the key sports policy considerations in the context of this thesis is the growing contemporary importance of women in the sporting setting, with women’s participation



and excellence in sport and physical activity becoming more mainstream. I now move on to discuss some policy interventions in this area both domestically and abroad.

### **Women's Specific Sports Policy**

Women's sport policy is a more recent phenomenon than overall sports policy in Britain, with the first standalone policy regarding women's sport published in 1993, with the Sports Council's *Women and Sport- Policy and Frameworks for Action*. However, position statements had been made during the 1980s by the Sports Council, showing some consideration for women's position in British sport and physical activity during this period. In *Women and Sport - Policy and Frameworks for Action* (Sports Council, 1993), the notion of 'Sport for All' was pushed, citing the *European Sport for All* charter (Council of Europe, 1980). This was a contrast to the overall governmental strategy of pushing primarily competitive sport at the time. A key stakeholder identified in the document was the media, which led to a joint Sports Council and Women's Sport Foundation (1993) document on how sportswomen should approach different media types, sponsorship, and funding. *Women and Sport- Policy and Frameworks for Action* (Sports Council, 1993), gave mention to participatory sport, as well as the elite levels. However, focus was not given to lifestyle activities such as walking or weight training. Lifestyle activities have seen some governmental attention – particularly in the 1970s and 1980s - however the British Government have divested from the European focus on PA. Even in the face of a changing methodology to Sport England's Active Lives Survey (Sport England, 2017), to include walking, these activities are not within DCMS' purview. For example, walking, which is one of the more accessible forms of PA, is considered within the remit of the Department for Transport (Department for Transport, 2016).

Competitive women's sport has however seen support from a growing range of governing bodies, such as the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) (Adams, 2016) - who offered financial incentives to its member associations for the development of women's football - and some governments, who have introduced legislation supporting the rights of female sportspeople. One example of this is Canada, who subject to legal challenge from young sportswomen, have allowed girls to try out for and play for boy's teams in schools and minor leagues (Adams, 2016). This enthusiasm should perhaps be tempered with the fact that there still exist huge inequalities within sport, to the extent that some Olympic sports have historically had gender specific rules (Donnelly and Donnelly, 2013), and indeed the winter Olympic events Ski Jumping and Nordic Combined had only recently allowed women to compete (Olympic, 2018).

Perhaps most famous of all legislation in this area is that of Title IX in America, brought about in 1972 to ensure that for any college which receives federal funding, there can be no discrepancy of opportunity to anyone on the basis of sex. This had far reaching consequences in the world of collegiate sport, as university sports teams had to offer equitable opportunities to men and women alike. Cooky (2017) argues that Title IX has improved women's sports participation, however, there have been critiques of some of the success of Title IX. For example, Carter-Francique and Richardson (2016) argue that Title IX has failed to improve opportunities for black women in the same way that it has improved opportunities for white women, mirroring the discussions in feminism brought about by bell hooks that feminism as a project needed to be more inclusive of

‘women of colour’ within a broader sisterhood in order to facilitate change (1984).<sup>19</sup> Adams (2016) has argued, outside of the context of Title IX, that the expansion of women’s sport has benefitted some women, primarily white, Western women, unequally. Furthermore, Cooky (in Contexts, 2017) has argued that Title IX does not legislate for coaching positions and key leadership and administrative positions. Given that much power within sport is in the hands of these key gatekeepers, this remains a potential factor in the subjugation of women in sport. In the face of this changing sporting landscape as outlined previously in this chapter, it is also clear that sport is playing an increasingly important role in making sense of conceptualisations of nation. This becomes more important given the increasingly significant role of sport as an element of soft power strategies. It is to this relationship between sport and nation that I now turn.

## **Sport and Nation**

The above discussion highlighted the changing role of sport as a soft power strategy, it is clear that sport has become increasingly and inextricably tied to issues of nationality, nationhood and statecraft. I am now going to explore this issue, beginning with an overall discussion on the field of sport and nation, before offering two specific examples of sports utility in independence arguments and the linkages between sport and nationalism.

Sport and nation have long been subject to sustained academic interest and have represented a broad church, with studies seeking to explore the role that Gaelic games play in aiding understanding of Irish political nationalism (Bairner, 1996; Cronin, 1999)

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<sup>19</sup> hooks uses the term women of colour in this essay.

to the impact of the hosting of mega events in national building efforts in South Africa (Labuschagne, 2008).<sup>20</sup> One reason for this has been interest in the co-existence of nation-state representation in mega events and national governing bodies, such as the relationship between the UK and its devolved nations and the case of Cataluña and Spain. This interest has led scholars to suggest that the field of play is one of the few arenas in which a 'nation' can tangibly exist (Robinson, 2008), with Giulianotti (1999) asserting that when at play, national teams embody 'the modern nation often literally wrapping itself in the national flag' (p.4). This imagery gets to the heart of many of the factors at play when thinking about nations and sport, lending itself to the notion of '90-minute nationalism' (Jarvie and Walker, 1994), understood as a key intervention in the field, wherein nationalistic dispositions are heightened through international sporting competitions. This is partly due to the spirit of competition between nations that these tournaments represent.

The notion of nation has seen a variety of different conceptualisations. One of the more frequently used definitions asserts a nation can be defined as 'a definite social space [and] a fairly well demarcated and bounded territory, with which the members identify and to which they feel they belong' (Smith, 1991, p.9). This is a popular definition perhaps due to the range of areas that it touches upon. A nation is not merely a geographical space, but also conjures images and senses of community, which sport can play a major role in crafting (Hobsbawm, 1990).

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<sup>20</sup> There is an important distinction to be made between cultural (around the stability and generation of national community) and political nationalisms (state seeking behaviours). John Hutchinson for example, argues that nationalism is a popular movement, which both cultural and political senses of nationalism feed into.

One of the most influential works in this area is Norbert Elias' figurational sociological approach, which places emphasis on issues such as symbolism and 'memory' in his broader approach to understanding society as a 'structure of mutually oriented and dependent people' (Elias, 1978, p.261). Fundamentally, Elias was critical of conventional sociological premises that silo individuals, arguing that individuals and society at large should not be understood as independent, but rather relational and negotiated. Elias' concept of 'habitus codes' (Elias, 1991) - a set of guiding principles shaped by unconscious memories and invented traditions - form part of the composition of a national identity (Maguire and Poulton, 1999). Importantly however, Elias argues that there are geographical levels to these configurations, with differences evident at regional, local and national levels, with what Elias terms the 'I/we' identities (Elias, 1996).

Furthermore, and building on Eliasian approaches, many scholars have engaged with the work of Benedict Anderson on 'imagined communities' (2006). Anderson argues that nations are imagined communities, as even in the smallest of nations, citizens will never know the majority of their counterparts, yet 'in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson, 2006; p.6). Anderson's thesis proved hugely influential in the field of nationalism, with his more globalised approach to analysis offering useful and original contribution to the debate, with Vincent *et al.* (2019) going on to highlight and reiterate the critical role of the national press in cementing this notional collective experience.

Anderson's (2006) concept of 'national indifference' being reduced in certain social and cultural contexts means that it is ripe for analysis in the sporting context, where the

influence of sport in understandings and demonstrations of nationhood has proven axiomatic. As with Elias' approach, it must be considered that Anderson's concept need not be understood as a unidirectional approach, and his analysis allows for sub-cultures and smaller movements within the national 'imagined community' unit. Smith's analysis on nations and nationalism (1991) has also proven useful in, with his early influential attempts arguing that a nation can be understood as a tangible social space wherein the members have a sense of identity and belonging (Smith, 1991, p.9).

Jackson's (1994) work on sport and Canadian identity has also been important this area. Jackson explored the 'Americanisation' of Canadian identity. He argues that the media play a role in expressing cultural, political and economic events in order to create a 'crisis' of Canadian identity, in this case through discourse of the Americanisation of Canadian society. To explore this, he uses the case study of Ice Hockey star Wayne Gretsky. Jackson asserts that:

The debates surrounding the issue of Americanization have tended to focus on its cultural imperialist effects or on its relationship to wider, more global, economic and cultural processes. However, the hegemonic use of the concept to symbolically construct crises and other politically based discourses should not be ignored. (p.443)

In light of this, there have been shifts towards understanding the relationship between nation and sport through how national identities are represented through mass media coverage. One of the major texts in this area is the work of Vincent *et al.* (2010). They examine representations and constructions of English national identity through the national press in the 2006 men's football World Cup. They find that much of the media narrative centred on imageries of warfare and uncritical presentation of England's empirical past, mythologising notions of Englishness. Vincent went on to build on

many of these ideas in 2011 with Hill and 2014 with Harris in examinations of the 2010 men's World Cup and 2012 men's European Football Championships respectively. Domeneghetti (2018c) furthers this crucial work in an analysis of England's three most popular national newspapers coverage of the men's national football team at the 2016 men's European football championship. He finds that many familiar tropes of coverage were evident, particularly those around England's militaristic and empiric past, however there were increasing negotiations and difficulties with the communication of English national identity, particularly with how this interplayed with British national identity in a time of public wrangling with these concepts due to the political landscape of the time.

This aligns with the work of Wodak *et al.* (2009), who argue that in the construction of national identities, the invocation of 'threatened national characteristics' by mass media outlets is a key emphasis. Wodak *et al.* (2009) argues that one method of creating a sense of national identity is through constructive discourses, emphasising a sense of unity, collectivism and group identity. Oftentimes this involves the discussion and praise by media outlets for what they term 'nationally threatened' characteristics, often drawing on mythologised notions of national history.

One example of how national identity can be mythologised is through the performances of athletes on the world stage, due to sports' role in contesting and constructing understandings of national identity, particularly in the cases of Scottish independence and Basque independence from Spain. For instance, Whigham and May (2017) explore the use of sport in the campaign for Scottish independence, performing a critical discourse analysis on the Scottish 'sport for yes' outputs. They find that while sport and

sportspeople formed part of the discourse around the independence debate, the athletes involved were broadly less prestigious due to the controversial and emotional nature of the debate. They echo Jarvie's argument (2016) that sport in that instance held no real political sway in the debate. This challenges previous debates and allows for a greater depth of understanding on the role sport politically. While sport is undoubtedly becoming increasingly politically salient in a range of nations (Tosa, 2015), it is not always omnipotent, guaranteeing cut through in every area of public life even if in the English context it is an increasingly broad policy area. Pertinent however, is the use of athletes and sport politically, with governmental (and other political group) interest meeting an increase in potential for athlete activism through increased access to controlling their message through new media types.

The crucial role athletes play in allowing a nation to understand and form an identity is highlighted by Hobsbawm (1990) who argued that 'the imagined country of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people' (p.143). At the time, Hobsbawm inevitably had men in mind, however in an era of success and increasing professionalisation of (some) women's sport in England (Culvin, 2021) there have been some early analysis which explore the role of top-level women athletes and the interplay of gender and nationalism within sport, both from an outsider perspective and how athletes live and understand this experience (Bowes and Bairner, 2018).

Further to this, there have been more attempts recently to engage with other concepts from within the sociological field of national identity and nationalism, which had been lacking in some scholarship in this area (Bairner, 2015). Perhaps the prime example of this is Bowes and Bairner's (2019) use of Michael Billig's concept of banal/ hot



nationalism (1995) and Edensor's 'nationalism of everyday life' (2002) to explore the symbolisms evident in the everyday lived experience of international female athletes. The use of Billig's work here cements the importance of national identity, shifting it away from the extraordinary to the everyday. Ednesor (2002) argues that one of the most influential crucibles of national performance is in sport, whose 'everyday and spectacular contexts provide one of the most popular ways in which national identity is grounded' (p.78). This speaks again to the different scopes of understanding national identity, as this captures both the extraordinary and ordinary articulations of the ways in which nationalism can be understood as an everyday ubiquity.

In Bowes and Bairner's (2019) work, this emphasis on the mundanity as opposed to just the 'hot' forms of nationalism evident at international sporting tournaments allowed for an innovative and inclusive examination which included elite level female athletes, when they had broadly been excluded from consideration. This phenomenon was aptly articulated by Harris and Clayton (2007), who argue that male national sporting figures communicate a symbolic form of nationalism that is grounded in conceptualisations of masculinity and masculinised national identity(ies). Bowes and Bairner's analysis persuasively argue that due to sport's critical role in performing Englishness, representative women athletes can also experience being the embodiment of 'Englishness'. From this brief discussion, we can see that ideas of nationhood and nationality have always been important, while an emerging discussion abounds around the role that female athletes can play in this in an era of increasing professionalisation and visibility. This builds on debates which explored the role and place of women in sport, to which I now turn.

## **Women in Sport**

There have long been assertions that sport is primarily a masculine and masculinised space, with scholars frequently invoking Dunning's (1986) refrain that sport is a 'masculine domain', and a key site of social construction of gender and gender order in a patriarchal society (Connell, 1987). Dunning (1986) perhaps best sums up this configuration when he states that the relations between 'men and women are best conceptualised...in terms of the balance of power between the parties involved' (p.80), whereby sport is part of the cementing of the articulation of culture in a masculine image, with attempts to 'pinkify' sport and apparel options (Toffoletti, 2017) resisted in some quarters, and indeed by other female fans on the grounds of a lack of 'authenticity' (Sveinson, Hoeber and Toffoletti, 2019).<sup>21</sup> With this in mind, this section seeks to explore the literature around women in sport. In order to achieve this, this chapter section will begin by focussing on some of the issues around female participation in sport as both players and in coaching situations, before moving 'outside of the bubble' towards exploring female fandom in the sporting world. This will also give mention to the (minimised) role of women in sporting leadership positions. A subsection will then be devoted to discussing the role of women as media producers given the relationship between English sport and the national press, in both sporting and non-sporting contexts, before concluding with a discussion on the representation of women athletes in the print media.

## **Women in Coaching and Leadership Positions**

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<sup>21</sup> Pinkification refers to changes to equipment and uniforms to pink to bring attention to issues such as domestic violence and breast cancer

Firstly, there has been a wealth of scholarship examining the lack of women in leadership and key administrative roles in a range of sporting spheres (Shaw and Penney, 2003; Claringbould and Knoppers, 2008; Welford, 2011; Burton, 2015; Adriaanse, 2016; Evans and Pfister, 2021). For example, two of the largest governing bodies in the UK, the Football Association and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) both have, at time of writing, board-level women's representation at or below 33% (ECB, 2021; Football Association, 2021). The argument could be made that many sports are unbalanced in order to maintain the status quo, which does not threaten a broadly masculine, middle class, white group of administrators (Claringbould and Knoppers, 2008; Bradbury, 2013). Claringbould and Knoppers (2008) found this, with one participant on an imbalanced board explicitly arguing that:

recruitment of women is bullshit; [the current] skewness has to do with the kind [male dominated] of sport. A focus on women restricts and limits you. If they are not there, they are not there. (p.84)

Given the meritocracy that sport claims to represent (Hylton, 2015) - and the scholarship that strongly suggests that both sporting and non-sporting boards that are more gender diverse make better decisions (Claringbould and Knoppers, 2008; Terjesen, Sealy and Singh, 2009) - this raises questions around the values that drive the assessments of appointing and hiring key decision makers in sports organisations. In Britain there have been recent attempts at intervention, particularly the Sport England and UK Sport Sports Governance Code (Sport England and UK Sport, 2016), aiming to change the relatively low levels of diversity that can be seen in British SGB boards by mandating a minimum gender representation of 30%, regulated through the threat of removal of public funding for governing bodies who do not adhere to the measures (Sport England and UK Sport, 2016, p.26). At the governing body level, the Football

Association have produced a raft of policies and strategies around anti-discrimination and inclusion, however these presume that by standardising opportunity and access that women will gain entry (Shaw, 2013). Many of these efforts have been undercut by former Chairman Greg Clarke referring to institutional racism as ‘fluff’ in a hearing after the Eniola Aluko scandal in 2017 and claiming in a parliamentary committee that women did not participate as they did not want to be hit by footballs.<sup>22</sup> It could be argued that this offers an example of a lack of meaningful commitment to and understanding of diversity in action at the top of the governing body. Overall, it is clear that patriarchal practices of both selection and culture continue (Chen and Henry, 2012; Evans and Pfister, 2021; Scelles and Pfister, 2021).

In other forms of leadership position, such as that of coach or manager, there are also challenges of opportunity and acceptance for women in predominantly heterosexually masculinised spaces. In the footballing world, Welford (2011) aimed to discover which non-playing roles were gendered, finding that many interviewees discussed ‘women’s work’ while simultaneously inferiorising their own work, which could be considered somewhat surprising due to the highly influential roles that many of the interviewees held, however other scholarship in the field has found the discursive reproduction of a lack of confidence in women coaches (Fielding-Lloyd and Mean, 2011). Furthermore, it was discovered that masculine behaviours were generally rewarded on coaching courses, alluding to naturalised and normalised differences in the ways that male and female coaches were perceived.<sup>23</sup> Welford goes on to make a strong point regarding

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<sup>22</sup> This came in a DDCMS committee (10<sup>th</sup> November 2020) and led to his resignation after a series of other comments in the committee

<sup>23</sup> Football coaching courses in England are administered through the FA’s educational arm FA Learning.

naturalised difference, attesting that reframing (physical) disadvantages as (technical) advantages would threaten the superiority of the masculine in sports and sports coaching. Overall, it was argued that the culture of football makes it very difficult for women to channel their experience and expertise for the benefit of others. Fielding-Lloyd and Mean (2016) also find that this was the case, arguing that:

the membership of women in the category of football and the entitlement to knowledge about football that is often simply “given” to men – by both men and women (p.13)

Clearly, this evidences an overall masculinist discourse pervading association football (Fielding-Lloyd and Mean, 2008), as one of an array of discursive elements influencing social constructions of gender and access to social spaces.

Combat sports were highlighted by Dunning (1986) as a foundation of masculine hegemonies in sport, and while progress has been made in the equality of combat sports since the 1980s, some persistent elements of inequality remain. For example, Mierzwinski, Velija and Malcolm (2014) found that in instances where women coached men, the knowledge of the women was problematised, which is surprising given that many Mixed Martial Arts gyms allow gender mixed sparring (Velija, Fortune and Mierzwinski, 2012). Crucially, many martial arts emphasise technique and control over notional athleticism and do not offer different belting or grading systems of competence between genders.<sup>24</sup> That the coaching knowledge of women in these spaces was problematised is largely emblematic of broader social taken-for-granted understandings

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<sup>24</sup> For example, Judo translates as ‘gentle way’ and Jiu-Jitsu translates as ‘gentle art’ (both from Japanese).

about gender and violence, with women's entrance into this space having the potential to be read as radical and subversive (Channon *et al.*, 2018). Hovden and Tjønndal (2019) explore the understandings of gender and violence in the context of Norwegian boxing, finding that male coaches are given more respect than their female counterparts, however participants also articulated that they could have more supportive relationships with female coaches, offering support to the argument that coaching is also gendered and subjected to 'cultural codes' (Hovden and Tjønndal, 2019, p.241).

As presently constructed there are clearly a range of restrictive practices - many discursive - that influence the access of women into a variety of leadership positions within sport and wider society. Although many governing bodies and governmental policies accept and ostensibly seem to try to address inequalities of access to sport (Scelles and Pfister, 2021), until equality is meaningfully embraced at decision-maker level success is likely to be limited. I will now move on to scholarship on the representations of women sports fans, offering another facet of exploration on women's role(s) within sport.

### **Female Sports Fandom**

While the playing and administration of sport has long been associated with masculinity, the watching of sport has not escaped these gendered social codings. Fundamentally, sports fandom is often a key element of a fan's sense of identity (Stone, 2007; Crawford, 2009). Interest in sport itself has long been considered a masculine endeavour (Crawford in Toffoletti and Mewett, 2012), even if historically women have been present in sport, frequently in diminished capacities (Giulianotti, 2005).

Unsurprisingly, given the hypercommodification and commercialisation inherent in many neo-liberally regulated sports (Slack, 2004), there has been recent economic interest for sports and sports teams to attract and retain increasing spectatorship and custom from women. One example of a sport effectively achieving this is the (hyper)masculine world of American Football (Welch, 1997), for which NFL viewership is around 47% women (Tainsky and Xu, 2019), with a 26% increase between 2009-2013 (AthleticBusiness, 2017). There has been a surge in academic interest in gender and fandom in a range of sports and geographies, which I will now turn to.

Firstly, while some gains have been made regarding the acceptance of women within sporting spaces, there are lingering suspicions around women fans in many sports, either that they are not 'real' fans (Gantz and Wenner, 1995) or their interest in (predominantly men's) sport is due to the sexualisation of male players or through being 'taken' by an accompanying male partner, rather than any meaningful attachment to the game or a specific club. The demarcations of 'male' and 'female' fandom are not merely drawn by men in a hegemonic cultural display, but have also been internalised and discussed by (some) female fans, speaking to the need for a broader interrogation and investigation of female sporting fandom (Pope, 2010; Dunn, 2014).

One element of the aforementioned suspicion is around a lack of knowledge that is usually taken for granted for male fans, who frequently get their fandom of specific clubs 'passed down' from men in the family (Coddington, 1997) in a way that is seemingly not expected among women but does occur (Dunn, 2014). This lack of assumed or inherited fandom leads to the need for female fans to 'prove' their fandom

(Esmonde, Cooky and Andrews, 2015), which Coddington (1999) refers to as women fans being 'on trial', needing to prove their knowledge and virtuous interest in the game to predominantly male fans. Much of this suspicion in the footballing world comes alongside broader anxieties about the 'gentrification' of football stadia and attached feminisation of fandom (Pope, 2010), with assertions made around female fans in football stadia being a 'civilising' force (Williams *et al.*, 1984). This has been a feature of football discourse since the 1990 Taylor report, which was concerned with the safety of sports stadia after disasters such as Hillsborough, Heysel and Valley Parade.<sup>25</sup> This however does not take into account the increasing commodification of the game brought about by the far greater influence of broadcasting partners in the financing of the top level of football.

There have also long been accusations of feminine interest in sport being less virtuous in spirit, with women being drawn to fandom due to being 'slags or girlies who just go to look at the footballer's legs' (Crolley, 1999, p.62 in Pope, 2012). The sexualisation of male athletes by female spectators has unsurprisingly drawn some academic attention due to its potential as a subversion of gender and sexuality norms. For example, Obel (2012) considers voyeurism as an element of pleasure for female fans of New Zealand male Rugby Union, finding that fans were more likely to draw upon discourses of mothering and care to detach themselves from 'silly, silly girls' (p.128), while mocking some of their own fan behaviours - such as asking a player for a photograph - as 'groupie' behaviour. The demeaning of female fans' voyeurism is pronounced further in sports such as ice hockey and rodeo, where these women are

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<sup>25</sup> The fire at Bradford City FC's ground led to the Popplewell Inquiry after 56 deaths and 265 injuries



referred to as ‘puck bunnies’ (Crawford and Gosling, 2004) and ‘buckle bunnies’ (Thompson and Forsyth, 2012) respectively. This links to the notion of the ‘groupie’, fans looking to have sex with celebrities (Elson, 1991). Thompson and Forsyth (2012) define a ‘buckle bunny’ as a ‘subculture catchall phrase for women participating in sex for pleasure... this label... situates the buckle bunny as a deviant social type’ (p.75). Clearly here can be seen the denigration of the buckle bunny as a legitimate fan of the sport and a simultaneous ‘form of social control of women inside the subculture of rodeo’ (p.75). One element to this was a suspicion from female fans with different relationships with rodeo and cowboys, demonstrating how deep rooted and self-policing these societal norms are in this culture. This mediation of ‘authenticity’ from within the female fan strata cuts across a range of different sporting contexts (Dunn, 2014; Sveinson, Hoeber and Toffoletti, 2019).

A different reading however, discursively repositions the ‘sexy fan’ (Toffoletti, 2017) as an empowered and desirable figure within men’s sport, yet ultimately ‘sexy images of sport fans constitute a new form of sexism in sport media that reinscribe gender hierarchies in fan culture by masking sport sexism via narratives of women’s choice and agency in performing a sexualised self.’ (Toffoletti, 2017 p.459). Toffoletti here highlights that while women can be allowed to be a part of the sporting spectator experience, ultimately they can still be considered gendered as the value of their contribution can still be considered mediated by a heterosexual male gaze.<sup>26</sup> Fundamentally, this protects the ‘authentic’ position of the male fan within these spaces

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<sup>26</sup> The term ‘male gaze’ conveys a range of meanings but is generally accepted to draw upon Sartre’s notion of ‘the gaze’. The male gaze was popularised by Mulvey (1989), who drew on a psychoanalytic approach to understand sexual difference through the presentation of film images.

and perpetuates the neo-liberal, capitalist values that drive much of the sporting commodity in the modern day (Toffoletti, 2017). A useful recent example to demonstrate this was the Dutch Bavaria Breweries ambush marketing at the 2010 men's football World Cup, which saw a group of 36 women in orange dresses removed from the stadium during the Netherlands vs Denmark group stage fixture and legal proceedings taken against the organiser (Ottosen, Hyde-Clarke and Miller, 2012). Clearly from this example, it could be argued simultaneously that these women were taking advantage of their desirability and using it for economic advantage (in the third wave feminist viewpoint) or that they were fundamentally being exploited by a neo-liberal, capitalist system that ultimately subjugates these women as nothing more than their appearance in order to satisfy the 'male gaze'.

Musicology scholarship has explored notions of inhibition-free fandom as a signifier and tool in the sexual liberation of women, most notably through fandom during the 1960s of The Beatles. For example, Cura (2009) states:

The Beatles provided the opportunity for women to break free from expected gender norms through a movement that the press called "Beatlemania," a new kind of fanaticism that seized the 1960s with unprecedented ferocity (p.104).

The contention here is that in gaining a sense of collective belonging, acceptance within a group of similarly minded individuals, that fandom can offer an escape from and a challenge to gender norms, in this instance leaving behind much of the conservatism of the 1950s. Kapurch (2016) develops this concept further, expanding on the role of 'melodrama' as a gendered manifestation of fandom, but one that can allow a spirit of freedom and belonging:

Second, girl fans own melodramatic discourse unites girls separated by decades since the Beatles are still vehicles for girls to react to gendered social limitations relevant to distinct historical moments (pp. 200-201)

Here, we can see the attraction of a form of fandom that allows fans to experience a less inhibited, less civilised and restricted experience of fandom through music. Sexualisation of female fans however is accepted within a neo-liberal, capitalist paradigm, with an increasing trend towards using them as ‘eye candy’ in broadcasting of major tournaments and ambush marketing (Nufer, 2013).

The experience of female sports fans is an area that has not received as much attention as scholarship on (male) fan experiences and identities (Pope, 2012; Dunn, 2014). For example, in the mediation and negotiation of their fandom behaviours and identities (Pope, 2010) in a study of Rugby Union and football fandoms. Pope argues that barriers exist within a variety of sporting contexts, most notably in terms of playing and spectating, however the analysis places sport as a changing cultural product into sharp focus.

While there are contemporary examples of a greater level of acceptance towards female fans of men’s sports, these must be placed against historical resistances to women in male topophilic spaces such as sports stadia (Bale, 2005), which can be considered ‘sacred’ crucial cultural sites of regional heritage (Bale, 1996), fostering a sense of togetherness that belies the exclusion that some can feel in those spaces. For example, there have been persistent examples of ‘women’s spaces’, i.e., acceptable seating or standing areas for women, usually in family sections and outside of historic stands. One

recent example of this was at Società Sportiva Lazio, a major football club in Italy. In 2018, a major supporters group known as the Irreducibili distributed pamphlets stating that women should stay out of a section of the Curva Nord of around ten rows.<sup>27</sup> The pamphlet urged women to avoid that section and that ‘Those who choose the stadium as an alternative to the carefree and romantic day at the Villa Borghese [a Roman historic house and park], should go to other parts’ (BBC, 2018). This may be a response to an overall resistance against commercialised, mediatised and commodified top-level football and the long-held assumptions around the ‘civility’ that women have been considered to bring to social spaces (Dunning, Murphy and Williams, 1986), however the attempt to police spaces within stadia by male fans clearly positions male fans as ‘authentic’, othering female fans in these spaces. This is not to suggest that women cannot be ‘ultras’ by their own merits, not just due to having male partners who are prevalent within a group, and indeed frequently fulfil key roles within the choreography of stands (see Cere, 2012), showing the duplicitous and contested status women hold within fandom of male sports.

The role of male figures as a catalyst for female fandom and attendance at sporting fixtures has been considered important in debates in this field. For example, Dunn (2014) argues that many female children are also influenced by key male figures in their lives (such as fathers) into following specific (men’s) football teams, but crucially that this is not the only path into fandom, with peers also acting as gatekeepers to football fandom. Importantly, transgressions (such as changing club allegiances due to the influence of a romantic partner) were similarly deemed unacceptable by other

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<sup>27</sup> Curva’s are sections of a stadium, named due to their curved shape. In Italian football, certain Curvas are considered particularly important and are generally populated by particularly exuberant supporters.

female fans (Dunn, 2014) as they would be for male fans. Importantly, some issues of fandom were gendered, such as access to stadia while pregnant or pressures of motherhood influencing decisions to attend fixtures (and secure ‘authentic fan status’). While this thesis does not look specifically at female fan experience or identities, the relevance is the broader point around the authenticity of women in a variety of sporting spheres. To this end, what can be seen in the literature focussing on female sports fandom is that similarly to women in sporting leadership positions, expertise is not assumed and must be proven and mediated, not just to men but also to other women, who position themselves as ‘authentic’ in their fandom. I will now move onto a third facet of women in sport, the media(ted) representations of female athletes.

### **Female Athlete’s (Re)presentations in the Sports Media Nexus**

Now that I have explored the examples of leadership and fandom in sport, the chapter will now move onto the representations of female athletes in the mass media, which has seen a rich vein of scholarly enquiry. This section will include scholarship from both print and broadcast media in order to draw from different viewpoints within the mass media spectrum. I will focus on two key motifs to emerge from the scholarship: the presentation of female athletes as women first, and the presentation of women’s sport and female athletes as lesser ‘others’. Within these two schemata are recurrent and overlapping themes, in the case of ‘women first’, there is the sexualisation and linked infantilisation of female athletes, reportage which focusses on their personal lives and roles as wives, mothers, children etc. and finally a newer presentation as ‘model citizens’ (Bruce, 2016). In the example of the diminishment of women’s sport the areas that will be explored are the overall demeaning of women’s sport as a serious pursuit, (negative) persistent comparisons to men’s sport and an overall lack of coverage. In

both schemata there are examples of some of these narratives changing over the last decade particularly, and I will address some of these while summarising a key text within the area at the conclusion of the following section.

### **More Than a Woman?**

Firstly, throughout the scholarship centred on the coverage of women's sport, it has been clear that there has been a prevalence of 'extra-curricular coverage', understood here as coverage which focusses on non-sporting matters. There have been instances of this being courted by administrators and decision makers, such as the examples of maximum uniform sizes in Beach Volleyball (Sailors, Teetzel and Weaving, 2012) or the hypersexualisation of athletes in 'lingerie leagues' (Heath, 2012; Weaving, 2014; Knapp, 2015). Eoin Trolan (2013) explores the depiction of female athletes in a range of geographical contexts, arguing that in the reportage of women's sport, sportswomen are considered women before they are professional athletes. He sums this up by focussing on the sexualisation of top-level female athletes, arguing that:

While women have gained ground in the non-sporting realm, within the confines of the court or field, they are still viewed as women first and athletes second, while, their male counterparts have no such concerns. (pp.215-216)

This is not typically the case for sportsmen, where the majority of coverage focusses on their sporting lives (Bowes and Bairner, 2018). Frequently, this leads to a discussion around sportswomen's private lives and a framing of them as (heterosexual) homebuilders and carers, both of their partners and of children (Fink, 2015). This framing crossed different elements of the mediasport complex (Wenner, 1998) as

evidenced by Cooky, Messner and Hextrum (2013) in a study focussed on local news coverage of sport in Los Angeles and national news coverage from ESPN's *SportsCenter*. They found that women were referred to in traditional heterosexual roles, predominantly as wives, girlfriends or mothers. Additionally, they found that any success for a female athlete was foregrounded by their (heterosexual) role. In one example of coverage, an Olympic gold medallist was framed as the partner of a male American Football player, again revisiting the familiar narrative of the woman as the partner of a male athlete. This discursive attachment to a male athlete reframes this Olympic gold medallist as partner to a male athlete rather than a highly successful athlete in her own right.

Linked to this framing of 'athlete as woman first' is the sexualisation of sportswomen, in keeping with similarly pitched images of non-athlete women, as has been highlighted above. For example, Bernstein (2002) argued that even though developments had been made in the reporting of women's sport, sexualised narratives and images still dogged coverage. She went on to argue that a sexualised discourse detracts from a discussion on the performance of female athletes, which Kian (2007) also asserted would diminish knowledge of achievement to a point where the general populace would not actually be aware of the achievement of various sportswomen. This 'symbolic annihilation' (Tuchman, 1978) further embeds perception that women's sport is of a lower quality to their male counterparts, naturalising this gender difference (Cahn, 1995), thereby shifting focus away from women's sport as a legitimate endeavour to a subordinate, fringe activity.

Bernstein's study was not isolated in finding different modes of sexualisation to be rife. Cooky, Messner and Hextrum (2013), found that while overtly sexualised coverage had reduced in American broadcast sport, there was an issue of both regional and national news stories including sexualised gags, which actively trivialises women's sport. Furthermore, they attested that this reduction in sexualised coverage might be due to the overall paucity of coverage of women's sport, finding that women's sport garnered 1.6% of sports coverage in their sample in 2009. These combined factors, they argue, contribute to the building of men's sport as an apex of what sport is, all the while reducing women's sport down to the role of sideshow, especially in its reporting of deviance such as serious foul play in women's sport, wherein aggressive play is seen as surprising (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017). This is a key process in the 'othering' of women's sport, as aggression is generally a celebrated quality in men's contact sports, tied into discourses of domination and a 'will to win'.

Both Bernstein's and Cooky, Messner and Hextrum's studies focussed on televised coverage however, there have been studies which find that sexualisation also occurs in print media. For example, George, Hartley and Paris (2001) explored visual and textual media in British newspapers using a mixed methods approach, finding that women garnered a substantially lower level of attention than men's sport and when women's sport was given attention, the coverage was highly sexualised, again framing women's sport as a sideshow and less significant than men's sport. They argue that:

The public image of female athletes is defined to a large degree by the media. It appears that in order to gain coverage a woman must fit the accepted female persona. Female athletes have come to realise that they must emphasise their femininity, especially if they wish to gain sponsorship. Women who do not conform to these unwritten rules



are often ridiculed and both their gender and their sexual orientation may be questioned (p.99)

Pfister (2010) asserts that in recent times the increasing sexualisation of female athletes has gained prevalence, perhaps in light of a third wave turn of feminism (Bruce, 2016; Toffoletti, 2017). However, Pfister goes on to argue that both male and female athletes are ultimately responsible for much of their images, through their presentations of themselves both within and outside of their sporting endeavours. This perhaps conflicts with much of the debate around the relationship between the sexualisation of athletes and their relative role in that sexualisation (Domeneghetti, 2018b). Pfister (2010) later goes on to argue that sexualisation of the athletic body (of both males and females) is a price that must be paid for the long-term dissolution of naturalised differences between men and women, and there has been some discussion on the role of the internet and new media types in achieving this (Bruce, 2016; Toffoletti, 2017).

It is important to note that this sexualised coverage can have substantial real-world impact. For example, Daniels (2009) explored the impact of media images on the positive body concept among females. The study looked at issues around self-objectification, where women were shown images of performance athletes, sexualised athletes, sexualised models, and non-sexualised models in order to ascertain self-objectification effects. Daniels found that images of performance athletes in non-sexual poses positively influenced the subject's self-images, whereas images of sexualised athletes were problematic and negatively impacted the subject's self-image. After seeing images of sexualised athletes, women were more likely to negatively report on their self-image, while also focussing any descriptions of self on physical, as opposed to non-physical descriptors. This clearly asks important questions of sexualised

coverage of female athletes, which broadly takes place within the male gaze, affirming heterosexualised ideals. It is to this I now turn.

### **Heterosexualisation**

A related theme to emerge from the academic debate is that of the 'heterosexualisation' of sportswomen. This occurs through two key mechanisms, the representation of sportswomen as 'women first' and the representation of sportswomen as heterosexual sex objects.

As previously discussed, the sexualisation of women athletes is another important tool in ensuring that women athletes are perceived as 'women first'. This mechanism ensures that women's sport can be seen as an unusual or socially 'deviant' act (Cahn, 2010) again actively embedding the role of men's sport as the 'real' thing, othering women's sport. There has been a wealth of scholarship on the sexualisation of female athletes (George, Hartley and Paris, 2001; Bernstein, 2002; Cooky, Messner and Hextrum, 2013; Fink, 2015) however this section will focus specifically on how the mechanisms of sexualising women's sport feature in a broader heterosexualisation of female athletes, ensuring that they continue to be considered women first. This is achieved by redirecting the narrative away from athletic achievement, and back towards their role as a (hetero)sexual sex object.

The focus on traditional femininity and heterosexuality may be a response to what has been perceived as the historic 'fear' and denial of lesbianism that can be seen in a range of sporting contexts (Hall, 1988; Wright and Clarke, 1999; Hargreaves, 2000; Cahn,

2010). Hargreaves (2000) documents this, and partially attributes this to the perception of heterosexuality as natural, and any other form of sexuality as unnatural. This manifests itself in a sporting culture for women that normalises western, white, 'feminine' athletes while othering athletes who do not conform to this (Trolan, 2013). There has been a wealth of scholarship in this area, particularly focussing on tennis and the Williams sisters (see Douglas, 2005, 2012; Spencer, 2004; Schultz, 2005; McKay and Johnson, 2008). These instances of othering play a stark contrast to the perceived overachievement financially - particularly in terms of endorsements - which could be seen in the case of Anna Kournikova, who did comply with the aforementioned ideals (see Bernstein, 2002; Harris and Clayton, 2002; Schultz, 2005). This is just one example of the active role that societal stereotypes and taken for granted understandings of social, as well as biological, constructs can have on the lives of athletes who do not conform to these ideals. It is perhaps best described by Hargreaves (2002), who documents the early struggles of non-western female athletes, and the suspicions and allegations that impressive performance generated. These suspicions were garnered by both governing bodies and athletes from western backgrounds, who categorised the excellence of non-western competitors as unnatural, due to their different somatic makeup. This suspicion was broadly formed from a narrow conceptualisation of femininity and draws into sharp focus the difficulties that many female athletes from non-western backgrounds can face in being accepted, particularly those who do not conform to emphasised notions of femininity (Domeneghetti, 2018b).

Sport may well be behind the times compared to other social milieux. For example, Gill (2009) finds that in non-sport specific marketing, the sexualisation of the body is not conducted in a homogenous way, and that heterosexuality and homosexuality can be

represented in unique ways. Gill argues that the ‘hot lesbian’ is an increasingly common image in advertising, stemming from the notion that lesbian sexuality is increasingly ‘hot’ (Garrity, 2001). Garrity argues that the ‘hot lesbian’ is striking in her feminine, attractive appearance; however, it can be argued that this framing of lesbianism packaged within male heterosexual notions of ‘attractiveness’. The apparent divergence in the open discussion of homosexuality is offset by its engagement with a heterosexual notion of attractive homosexuality. As this example is not from a sporting arena, its usefulness in this context can be critiqued, as sporting endorsement usually requires some level of athletic performance (Ravel and Gareau, 2016). However, the increasing exposure of some lesbianism in marketing images and messages form an intriguing context for an increasingly commercialised sport to operate within and negotiate.

In this section, the argument has been made that that the ‘heterosexualisation’ of female athletes occurs in two stanzas. Firstly, female athletes are discussed as ‘women first’, denying them the role of serious athlete. This serves to privilege the role and status of men’s sport, in which male athletes are not described as ‘men first’ but are purely considered athletes, without any consideration for their ‘real lives’, perhaps emboldening the acceptability of insults and verbal abuse which are prevalent both in person and online in a range of geographies (Rudd, 2017; Kilvington and Price, 2019). Secondly, female athletes are then positioned as heterosexual sex objects, again trivialising their status as elite athletes. Both mechanisms cement the hegemonic status of traditional masculinity within sport, and this is also manifested in the lack of coverage and the demeaning coverage that is afforded to women’s sport.

### **Talking ‘bout my Girl- Infantilisation of Female Athletes**

Linked to this sexualisation is the consistent infantilisation of many female athletes in coverage (Davis, 1997; Fink, 2015; Dashper, 2018). Infantilisation relates to ‘the process of referring to female athletes as ‘girls’ or ‘young ladies’ (Fink 2015: 334), framing them as vulnerable or weak. Laurel Davis (1997) links infantilisation to the sexualisation of women in ‘Sports Illustrated’, most obviously through the infamous swimsuit edition. This is not exclusive to sport however, with Poulin (2009) finding that infantilisation of women is a key trend in modern pornography, which Turton-Turner (2013) asserting that:

‘Infantilization implies that a woman is a disempowered child. It consigns her role in the narrative, in both literal and figurative terms, to a subordinate position. At the same time, infantilization reinforces disquieting cultural trends that validate pornified images of sexualized children’ (p.17)

Infantilisation has historically been a consistent feature of women’s sport coverage (Bruce, 2016), with the overall impact of it being a demeaning of female athletes as weak, thereby framing women’s sport as insignificant. There have been many examples of this manifesting in different ways. For example, the historical presentation of female athletes as ‘cute little girls’ (Barnett, 2013) and a focus on the femininity of female athletes over their sporting prowess (Smith, 2012), reframing them away from physical skill and repositioning them as less capable, again positioning women’s sport and female athletes as inferior.

For example, Ravel and Gareau (2016) find that infantilisation was key to the reportage and marketing of the French Women’s National football team, arguing that:

‘Using condescending and infantilizing words to describe the women or their play or referring to them by their first names, a practice that is typically reserved to a more infantile population, was used in this context to once again subordinate women to men’ (p.839)

In this quote the authors highlight two different mechanisms to infantilisation: infantilising terms (such as ‘girl’ or ‘young lady’ to refer to athletes) and referring to players by their first names, creating a faux familiarity with the players. It has been frequently argued that the use of first names is a key pillar to infantilisation (Fink, 2015). Ravel and Gareau (2016) go on to highlight another key element to infantilisation, the positioning of female athletes as their male managers or coaches’ possessions:

Related to the use of the term ‘girls’, it is important to note that it was often used in reference to ‘Bini’s girls’. The possessive implication of the players belonging to the coach or the idea that the players were subservient to their coach demonstrated a blatant establishment of heterosexuality by playing into a patriarchal hierarchy. (p.839)

Ravel and Gareau clearly articulate the impact of not just the infantilisation of ‘Bini’s girls’, but also the discursive impact of the possessive, positioning the team as owned and controlled by their (male) manager, redirecting responsibility for the team’s success to a male leader. This was also highlighted by Black and Fielding-Lloyd (2017), who found that women’s success in football was frequently linked to the coaching and leadership of specific male figures. Infantilising terms have also been found in English (George, Hartley and Parris, 2001) and Spanish (Crolley and Teso, 2007) reporting of women’s football. There is not unanimity towards this view in the modern day however, with Bruce (2016) finding that instances of infantilisation as a standard feature of reporting are declining, arguing instead that coverage focuses on the athleticism of

female athletes and their role as ‘model citizens’ for instance. I will explore Bruce’s crucial intervention in full later in the chapter.

Now, the chapter will address the second schema highlighted at the start of this section, the diminishment of the physical achievement of female athletes in coverage. I will begin by exploring the historic lack of coverage of women’s sport, before coming on to two related features of coverage, comparisons to men’s sport and the discursive diminishment of women’s sport as a legitimate, authentic and important athletic pursuit.

### **‘Can’t be what you can’t see’- Women’s Sport Coverage (or the lack thereof)**

Many scholars have argued that there is a disparity between the amount of coverage afforded to women’s football when compared to men’s, with a near universal tendency toward significantly less coverage. These trends have been identified across a range of different media types. For example, in a four-decade longitudinal analysis of British national print media articles, Biscomb and Matheson (2017) found significant under-representation of women’s sport across the four decades, with a decline in real term representation evident. It should be noted that their data collection consisted of sampling the same six national newspapers over the same two-week summer period, which may not encapsulate a broad enough spectrum of sporting events due to the seasonal nature of many sports. Packer *et al.* (2014) found that in 2013, national news coverage of women’s sport was 2.9% of news stories on sport. This was down from 4.5% in 2012, a home Olympic year. Godoy-Pressland (2014) found that in Sunday editions of British national newspapers, 3.6% of coverage for sports was focussed on women’s sports.

In another British newspaper example, in this case from a regional perspective, Adams *et al.* (2014) finds that even though coverage of sport in the media broadly has increased exponentially, that only 5.63% of coverage in a regional newspaper was given to women's sports. One of their journalist respondents also asserted that coverage in general was dependent on success and demand. Another journalist respondent argued that there simply is not the demand for women's sport. That this is offered as a rationale by a media producer is an important consideration, particularly given the agenda setting power of the print media (Blackmore and Thorpe, 2003; McCombs, 2014). The authors go on to offer an excellent discussion around the notion of demand driving coverage, in highlighting that many Women's Super League (WSL) football clubs draw in much higher attendances than men's non-league football clubs do. However, there is a far greater amount of local media coverage on the successes and failures of these non-league clubs than would be afforded their female counterparts, offering a contradiction to long held arguments around women's sport receiving less coverage due to a lack of interest (Cooky, Messner and Hextrum, 2013). This is not a geographically contained trend, with similar findings discovered in South Africa (Goslin, 2008; Adams, 2016) and North America (Cooky, Messner and Hextrum, 2013; Kane, 2013; Fink, 2015; Cooky, 2017).

There have been some more optimistic studies finding that, while there is a clear disparity in coverage, that this gap is decreasing. For example, Coche and Tuggle (2016), in a study examining NBC's coverage of the 2012 Olympic Games, found that in team sports, women's teams were covered more than their male counterparts, comprising 54% of coverage. This is perhaps due to the nation-centric nature of reportage around Olympic Games (Billings, Brown and Brown, 2013). It must be



highlighted that this study focussed on televised coverage of the Olympic Games, which has been argued is the most gender egalitarian major sporting event in terms of media reportage (O'Neill and Mulready, 2015; Ravel and Gareau, 2016; Woodward, 2017). This may well be due to the fact that men's and women's medals are weighted the same in the Olympics leaderboard, giving rise to the phenomenon of the woman as a sporting 'proxy warrior' (Bowes and Bairner, 2018).

A further element that arguably impacts the coverage of women's sports both qualitatively and quantitatively is the gender(ed) 'acceptability' of sports, with women that play sports which more closely adhere to an emphasised understanding of femininity more likely to be covered, for example aesthetic sports or non-contact sports such as tennis (Crossman, Vincent and Gee, 2010). Indeed, Sherry *et al.* (2015) found that women who participate in teams' sports were less likely to receive media coverage year-round than other female athletes who participated in more 'gender appropriate' individual sports. Metheny (1965) offered perhaps the first academic exploration of this, in *Connotations of Movement in Sport and Dance*. In this, Metheny offered a typology of sports, which were deemed appropriate for men and women. This was based on how much a female athlete would have to subscribe to, or resist against, traditional notions of femininity. Hannon *et al.* (2009) argue that Metheny was among the first to identify the role of gender stereotyping in sporting acceptability. Metheny's typology asserts that individual, aesthetic sports were acceptable for women, whereas unacceptable sports for women tended to place a premium on domination and aggression. Many studies since have argued that this typology still holds in societal perceptions of sports (see Kane and Snyder, 1989; Hardin and Greer, 2009; Godoy-Pressland, 2014; Biscomb and Matheson, 2017). This would hold for both genders, with

men choosing to participate in more traditionally masculine sporting pursuits (Wiley, Shaw and Havitz, 2000), which again may further embed the notion of hegemonic masculinity in the sporting world due to the domineering nature of many contact sports, particularly when practiced competitively. <sup>28</sup> Adams (2016) explores this issue, arguing that not all men are seen as equal by their peers. Adams highlights his previous research around men choosing to avoid, or feeling particularly uncomfortable in, aesthetic sports as a lens through which to view masculine participation in more traditionally masculine sports (Adams, 2011).

Of the sports that are deemed socially acceptable for women, which are predominantly non-contact sports such as tennis, equestrian and gymnastics (Koivula, 1995), there tends to be barriers to entry for participation, usually in the form of a financial outlay or a time outlay, which can be exclusionary. Furthermore, the lack of opportunity to subvert gender norms in this context further embeds a hegemonic, oppressive role for masculinity within this setting, creating and following precedent around the restriction of the agency of women.

Throughout the literature in the field, it is clear that there are frequent negative comparisons to men's sport and an inherent expectation that men's sport is the 'gold standard' (Mean in Toffoletti and Mewett, 2012), again positioning women's sport as the 'outsider' (Velija and Malcolm, 2009; Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017). The discursive connection between men's and women's sport is explored by Black and Fielding-Lloyd (2017), who persuasively argue that:

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<sup>28</sup> Philosophers of sport have argued that the nature of invasion games embed logics of dominance, with invasion games representing a symbolic sexual penetration (Pronger, 1999)

The above examples serve to highlight how the England team were discursively positioned in contrast to male footballers and in accordance with traditional conceptions of femininity. Sometimes this outsider status was repositioned as an advantage. Yet, in the majority of cases such accounts invariably positioned the women's team as distinctly different, and inferior, to the men's (p.288)

Clearly, much of this discursive positioning embeds both a gender order and a notion of naturalised difference, subordinating women's sport. These taken for granted ideations of supreme masculine physicality is again a feature which subordinates women's sport, presenting it as a less legitimate pursuit. Inextricably tied to this is the notion of 'gender marking', understood here as an asymmetric distinction between (men's) sport and women's sport. Classification is not unusual in sport, for example weight categories in pugilistic sports, however the asymmetric usage of 'women's' when 'men's' is rarely a prefix discursively positions men's in a position of authenticity and women's sport as an imitation. I will build more on the overarching theme of women's sport and women in men's sport as inauthentic subsequently.

### **The 'Rules' of Coverage**

One of the key recent interventions in the area of gendered representation within mass media is Toni Bruce's work (2016). In this, Bruce persuasively and succinctly details both historical and contemporary trends in the coverage of women's sports, arguing that there are fifteen 'rules' of coverage, building on her previous work with Wensing in 2003. I lay out the rules in their categories in tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 below.<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>29</sup> These Tables are the authors creation to highlight Bruce's work succinctly, for reasons of brevity.

different tables relate to a different grouping of rules, the *old* rules, the *persistent* rules, the *current* rules and the *new* rules. I begin with the old rules.

**Table 1- The older rules**

<b>5 older rules</b>	<b>Working definition</b>
<b>Comparisons to men's sport</b>	Frequently, comparisons to men's sports stars were ostensibly intended to praise top level female athletes, however Bruce argues that this merely reinforces the superiority of male athletes and men's sport in general.
<b>Gender marking</b>	This rule describes the frequent asymmetric usage of 'women's' to demark women's sport, when the term 'men's' was not used to signify men's sport. Gender markings are not in and of themselves a problem given the categorisation of sport and the different rule sets in sports such as boxing, however the asymmetric application positions women as the 'other' in sport.
<b>Non-sport related coverage</b>	This rule highlights the extra-curricular coverage that women in sport receive, which tends to focus on their personal lives, physical appearance and family situations.
<b>Lower production values</b>	This rule relates to broadcast coverage, where significantly lower production

	values for women's sport communicate to the audience that women's sport is of less value.
<b>Infantilisation</b>	This is the process of referring to adult female athletes by their first name or as girls or young ladies.

Here, we can see that these older rules relate directly to the old tropes of women's sports coverage, where overtly disrespectful and demeaning coverage was par for the course. Crucially, although recent scholarship has argued that many of these features of coverage are disappearing, there are linkages with more contemporary and enduring themes of coverage, which I will come on to highlight imminently. Issues such as gender marking, and comparisons to men's sport have been found in more contemporary scholarship (Fink, 2015; Ravel and Gareau, 2016).

**Table 2- Persistent rules**

<b>4 persistent rules</b>	<b>Working definition</b>
<b>Sportswomen do not matter</b>	Here, Bruce draws on Tuchman's 'symbolic annihilation' (1978) to explore and seek to understand the overwhelming lack of coverage of women's sport. Importantly, Bruce highlights that this marginalisation of men's sports is possible if they are a 'minority sport' (p.366).
<b>Sexualisation</b>	This relates to coverage that focuses on factors that are not related to athletes

	<p>sporting abilities, but rather around the potential of female athletic bodies as sexual objects.</p>
<p><b>Ambivalence</b></p>	<p>Bruce argues that ambivalent coverage is perhaps the most consistent form of coverage in the persistent rules. Ambivalent coverage positions sportswomen's physical skill and hyper-competency against notions of femininity and a supposed lack of quality of women's sport. Much of this is achieved by drawing on some of the other 'rules' highlighted, particularly sexualisation, infantilisation and narratives of women's sport as inconsequential.</p>
<p><b>Compulsory heterosexuality and emphasised femininity</b></p>	<p>Bruce takes a new approach in grouping these two overlapping issues rather than separate themes, which had broadly been considered separately before this study. Bruce argues that the focus on the heterosexuality of athletes obfuscates lesbian relationships, feeding into long held 'fears' of lesbianism highlighted earlier in this chapter. This links with the ideals of emphasised femininity, which broadly valorise white, middle class features. This emphasis is philosophically incompatible with the representation of athletic feminine</p>

	bodies, as femininity and physical strength are considered antithetical.
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Here we see a far greater integration and grouping of themes that had broadly been ‘siloes’ in scholarship. This reimagining of overlapping and relationality of forms of coverage is a crucial turn within conceptualisations of narratives of women’s sports coverage and allows for a deeper exploration of the overall discourse of women’s sport which this study seeks to build upon by examining consonant and dissonant discursive repertoires. The ‘persistent rules’ overall can be understood as covering much of the bulk of earlier scholarship in this area, wherein many scholars drew on Tuchman’s ‘symbolic annihilation’ (1978) to make sense of the reduced coverage for women’s sport, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

**Table 3-Current rules**

<b>4 current rules</b>	<b>Working definition</b>
<b>Athletes in action</b>	Bruce argues that more contemporary images of both female and male athletes in similar ways, as athletes in action. Crucially, Bruce highlights that there appears to be a difference in the ‘seriousness’ of coverage given to participants in international sporting competition.
<b>Serious athletes</b>	Bruce argues that more recent coverage and scholarship shows that women athletes are now being considered legitimate athletes. Crucially, this is achieved through women athletes existing within the dominant

	discourses of sport, not the discourses of sport adjusting to the existence of top-level female athletes.
<b>Model citizens</b>	This relates to the ‘serious athletes’ narrative, wherein athletes who are successful on the international stage are often depicted as national ‘model citizens’ rather than female athletes. To this end, the narratives that would usually accompany women’s sport are adjusted, with very little sexualisation. Instead in coverage from the 2004 Olympics (Bruce, 2009), athletes were shown to have notional national characteristics and personalities.
<b>Us and them</b>	Linking to the previous model citizens rule, it is argued that these ostensibly positive depictions moving away from old tropes of sexualisation were not extended to athletes representing other nations, who were frequently sexualised and demeaned.

In this set of rules, Bruce argues that contemporary coverage was shifting away from the older tropes described above, although some were persistent. Instead, it was much more common for domestic, international representative athletes to be shown positively, not only as legitimate athletes but as successful national figures. This however did not transpose over to athletes from other nations, for which the older tropes such as sexualised and demeaning coverage were still apparent.

**Table 4- New rules**



<b>2 new rules</b>	<b>Working definition</b>
<b>Our voices</b>	<p>This rule relates to the new found control over messaging that female athletes can exercise. This is due to the rising usage of social medias and new opportunities to ‘tell their story’.</p> <p>Furthermore, the increasing engagement of traditional media types with athlete’s social media presence and outputs offers yet more possibilities for athlete’s voices to be heard, both more loudly and more broadly.</p>
<b>Pretty and powerful</b>	<p>This rule argues for a broad shift away from purely sexualised narratives of female athletes towards narratives that value the athletes body as an aesthetic entity while simultaneously celebrating physical strength and capacity. Much of this ‘rule’ draws on third wave feminist notions, as explored prior to this table.</p>

Finally, Bruce posits two ‘new’ rules of women’s sports coverage. Crucially, these two new rules are reliant upon modern communication technology developments, particularly social media access, which changes the channels of communication for athletes and allows for a far greater level of autonomy than could previously be enjoyed. These arguments are made through a third wave feminist lens, which highlights the crucial role of theoretical and philosophical lenses in understanding readings of coverage and narratives, highlighting the polysemic potentials of narrative and discourse analyses.

Bruce's work offers many advancements for the field. Firstly, it highlights the distance that coverage of women's sports has travelled, with the majority of contemporary coverage shifting away from older tropes of sexualisation or overt diminishment of women's athletic achievements. Instead, many of the features of coverage overlap and interplay, which had not been a strong feature of the debate to this point. Secondly, Bruce's work highlights that in the social media age, athletes have a far greater level of control over their lines of communication, allowing for far greater agency over the discourse that surrounds them, their 'brand'. Furthermore, the interjection that social narratives around female embodiment have shifted in the West is a critical contextual point that is largely ignored by the field. This again highlights the critical importance of discursive scholarship attempting to understand competing, consonant and dissonant discourses in the societal and political context they exist within.

### **Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing Baby- Gender and 'Authenticity' in Sport**

Overall, it is clear that in a variety of ways women in sport are generally positioned as lesser or inauthentic. The three elements of sport that have been examined above; leadership, fandom and performance, have all shown examples of women being considered outsiders or 'others' in these spaces. Firstly, in the case of leadership, there is evidence of views from within that aiming for gender balance on sporting boards is 'bullshit' (Claringbould and Knoppers, 2008, p.84), with a need for women in leadership positions to 'prove' their knowledge and skills, whereby this would be simply assumed with men (Fielding-Lloyd and Meân, 2016). This assumption of a lack of knowledge also spreads to views on female fandom. Importantly some of this suspicion was self-regulated by other female fans, who would highlight the distinction

from themselves on the grounds that they have genuine interest and knowledge, rather than being a ‘buckle bunny’ or similar and seeking sexual gratification or titillation from the (predominantly male) athletes. The alleged lack of authenticity changes from the intellectual to the physical for athletes, who are frequently considered less athletic or powerful due to taken for granted assumptions of biological inferiority (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017), positioning men’s sport as the ‘gold standard’ (Meân, 2013).

In conclusion, this chapter has explored a variety of issues that develop understanding around the study. Firstly, the chapter explored the history of UK sports policy, before examining more contemporary issues facing sports policy in the UK, giving focus to the development of sport as a soft power tool. I argued that while sport has increased in political salience, and indeed in the sophistication with which sport is expected to achieve an ever-expanding array of objectives in a broad portfolio of policy areas, that the sports policy space is full of unresolved tensions and complexities.

The chapter then went on to explore some of the key issues facing women in a variety of sporting contexts, with reciprocities among different facets of the sporting world about the lack of authenticity given to women in the sporting social space. This presents differently in different instances, from a lack of respect given to the knowledge base of female coaches to suspicions around the motivations of female fans of male teams. After this, the debate around mass media representations of female athletes was examined. The study now turns on to the methodological considerations of the study, beginning with a discussion on the theoretical frameworks that inform the research.

## Chapter 2- Methodological Considerations

This chapter will focus on the methodological considerations that guide this research study. It begins by discussing the key frameworks that are used in the research, principally Connell's thesis on gender relations and Foucault's concept of *governmentality*. Connell's concepts of *hegemonic masculinity* and *emphasised femininity* will be examined, with the overall rationale behind using these being that Connell's work allows for a high level of nuance to be applied regarding intersectional factors that impact on notions of masculinity and femininity. This was deemed most appropriate due to the critical influence that social and political context plays in the analysis of this study. Foucault's *governmentality* is then considered and critiques of Foucault's works from a range of feminist perspectives are considered. While these criticisms are valid, due to the fact that (as explained in the introduction to the study) I do not consider this research to be feminist in its scope and in using the sophisticated approach to power and institutions that *governmentality* offers, I argue that the blend of *governmentality* and Connell's gender relations theory as a combined framework was useful in achieving the aims of this study.

### **Frameworks**

The following section will explore two of the key conceptual underpinnings to the study. The first of these relates to the understanding of gender relations within society. This focusses on the works of R.W Connell, specifically her related concepts of

*hegemonic masculinity* and *emphasised femininity*. As Connell's work here utilises a neo-Gramscian approach to the understanding of gender relations, this section begins with a brief overview of Gramsci's concept of hegemony, upon which Connell's understandings of gender relations are built. Importantly, the account given below will examine her works longitudinally and will map where appropriate reformulations made. When approaching Gramsci's work, it should always be noted that his concepts are open to a greater deal of interpretation than many other influential scholars as he was writing as a political prisoner, and therefore had to adapt and reword much of his writings to avoid censorship or punishment by prison workers.

The second of the theoretical approaches to be discussed is Michel Foucault's governmentality. It will be argued that governmentality allows for a nuanced view on the discursive repertoires around women in sport and the values that drive these. The overlapping theme of both of these concepts is the role of externalities influencing social behaviours, in which structural factors (such as the influence imparted by social expectations or the shaping of desired behaviours by major institutions), influence individual agency. I will then explore how the two frameworks drawn from Connell and Foucault work together to inform this research.

### **Hegemony**

One of the key tenets in understanding gender relations within society - hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) - has its foundations in Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony.<sup>30</sup> Hegemony can be understood as the process of, rather than total,

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<sup>30</sup> Antonio Gramsci was an Italian Neo-Marxist philosopher, politician and sociological thinker. He was a founding member of Italy's communist party and was imprisoned by Mussolini's Fascist regime in 1926. While in prison, Gramsci wrote his treatise on the nature of power and society. These were known as his *Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell Smith, 1971).

dominance that one strata of a population of a state enjoys over another (Bridges, 2009). Gramsci viewed states as comprising both a civil and political society, which together mediate civilian behaviours. The political society consists of megastructural institutions such as government, which wield power through their ability to formally regulate behaviours, most obviously through the creation and imposition of laws. Civil society is conceptualised as internal to communities, who through the self-regulation of moral conduct, consent to behaving within certain boundaries. At the civil level, this is orchestrated by the political party, which Gramsci understood as the mechanism(s) which carries out in civil society what the state carries out in political society, in most instances through the shaping of behavioural norms (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell Smith, 1971).

Gramsci argues that dominant groups exercise control through a plethora of mechanisms such as legislation and hegemonic power, through to the fostering of cultural and civil hegemonies. The combination of these shape 'common sense' understandings, precluding and excluding certain patterns of behaviour or thought (Gramsci, 2005), which is perhaps the fundamental utility of Gramscian and Neo-Gramscian approaches in examining the relationship between women and sport in the United Kingdom, where the shaping of cultural norms is of paramount importance. However, it is important to note that hegemony is not purely brought about through imposition and coercion, instead the role of consent and acceptance is critical (Fontana, 2008). Common-sense social understandings can also be cemented through passive revolutions, which can be understood as a social transformation without mass participation, taking place below the surface of society (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell Smith, 1971). This draws into sharp focus that hegemony is not a static concept, the

dominant at one time will not always remain that way. Instead, hegemony is better understood as a constant battleground of reformulation and reconstruction, dependent on the context of the time. It is this fluidity that makes hegemony such a powerful concept (Bridges, 2009). It would hold that historically dominant strata of society would be at an advantage to best exploit any societal changes due to their access to regulatory power and the ability to organise quickly (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell Smith, 1971). The understanding of hegemony as a site of struggle is crucial in its usefulness in examining gender within sport, as I will come to discuss further presently.

The sporting site of enquiry raises important questions around the role of cultural hegemony given the historically contested relationship between women and sport as a masculine domain (Dunning, 1986) which has been well explored in scholarship such as in exploring issues of the ‘appropriateness’ of different sports for women (Godoy-Pressland, 2014). Other work has examined the role of forms of media in influencing these socialisations (Hardin and Greer, 2009). In a contemporary setting, the emerging status of women in pugilistic sports may well be considered a site of hegemonic struggle due to the dissonance that is created by females participating and excelling in combat sports, which have traditionally been a masculine space (Linder, 2012; Mierzwinski, Velija and Malcolm, 2014). Some scholarship has focussed on women in traditionally hypermasculinised spaces such as combat sports or competitive bodybuilding, examining their experiences and tensions within the spaces given to and taken by women (Martin and Gavey, 1996; Wesely, 2001; Boyle, 2005; Malcolm, 2012). For example, Lex Boyle (2005) explores the world of competitive female bodybuilding, focussing on the experiences of female bodybuilders in their negotiation of issues such as race, gender and class in muscular feminine embodiment. This is framed against the

changing context of female bodybuilding at the time, which due to moral panic around female size and muscularity within the sport, formalised 'femininity' as a criterion for judging within these competitions. The change of criterion occurred due to issues of marketing, the premise being that more 'extreme' female muscular physiques were proving difficult to market (p.134). This embeds values within the bodybuilding community on the desired physicality of women, as the governing body shifted away from rewarding more muscular physiques towards more 'feminine' ones through their codifying practices, whereas a similar approach was not undertaken in men's competitive bodybuilding. These adaptations were in line with broader social expectations around acceptable embodiments of women, with extreme muscularity being broadly read as masculine.

These cultural hegemonies around acceptable muscularities, physical literacies and embodiment in the context of gender impact the realm of sport and physical activity for a number of reasons. Firstly, any norms which restrict the access of women or girls to sports or physical activities are an issue due to the health benefits that can be derived from participation on social, emotional and physical health planes. To limit any of these behaviours based upon notions of cultural acceptance is to detract from the overall health of a society. Furthermore - as previously alluded to - some 'common sense' (Gramsci, 2005) understandings within sport ground certain acceptable embodiments for men and women. This is a key feature of Connell's theory of gender order, to which I now turn.

### **Connell's Theory of Gender Order**



Issues of gender and power have long been a major area of sociological inquiry. R.W Connell is a major voice in this debate, based upon her totemic *Gender and Power* (1987). Raewyn Connell is an Australian sociologist who has been one of the most influential figures in the academic field of gender, particularly masculinity(ies).<sup>31</sup> Her early work focussed on class dynamics within society before moving on to interrogations of class and power. Her most influential work has been on the topic of gender order and power, of which hegemonic masculinity has been a popularly utilised concept by scholars in a range of fields.

Connell in her influential work *Gender and Power* (1987) examines gender relations within society, exploring how these manifest into taken for granted assumptions and dynamics of power. In this, she highlights the notion of scales of masculinity and femininity, illuminating the subjugation of both men and women that this can impart. Importantly, Connell argues that ‘femininity and masculinity need not be treated as polar opposites... each may be treated as a separate scale, and the same person may get high scores on both’ (1987, p.281). The emphasis throughout is that gender is a relational concept, both within and between masculinity and femininity.

Connell (1987) argues that the relationship between masculinity and femininity is based on the ‘global dominance of men over women’ (p.187), with the power imbalance between masculinity and femininity then becoming rooted into societies more broadly. She argues that ‘the levers of state power are still in men’s hands’ (p.16). This links to

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<sup>31</sup> Connell was previously known as Robert W Connell however is now legally and civilly Raewyn Connell. She prefers to be referred to, even in past tense, as a woman (Wedgwood, 2009, p.338).

the previous discussion on the dominance of hegemonically powerful groups, emblemising Connell's neo-Gramscian approach. Connell goes on to argue that men are also oppressed by hegemonic masculinity, as not all men are dominant in this system as there are different forms of masculinity or masculine behaviours that have relations of their own (Connell, 2005, p.37). This is particularly the case for men that demonstrate more traditionally feminine traits, with Connell exploring the case of state oppression of homosexual men (1987) and later developing categories of masculinity: hegemony, subordination complicity and marginalisation (Connell, 2005 in Gómez, 2007). This strand of thought runs throughout Connell's work, where among other reasons for men's advocacy of gender equality, she argues that men are not homogenous, and many are oppressed within a patriarchal system. This is addressed most pointedly when she asserts that 'heterosexual men are not all the same or all united and many do suffer injury from the present system. The oppression of gays, for instance, has a back-wash damaging to effeminate or unassertive heterosexuals' (1987, p.17).

Connell's gender relation theory is a socially constructed system of being and understanding that privileges the position and status of traditionally 'masculine' men, defined by features such as being able-bodied, competitiveness, social confidence and heterosexuality (Connell, 1987; Donaldson, 1993). Her examples of archetypes for this include movie characters played by actors Sylvester Stallone and John Wayne, as well as athletes such as Muhammad Ali (Connell, 1987, p.185). Emphasised femininity on the other hand, is characterised by issues of passivity, sexual receptivity (to men), whiteness and subservience (Connell, 1987; Domeneghetti, 2018b). Crucially, the role of acceptance and tacit legitimisation given to the social structures which scaffold this

should not be ignored (de Boise, 2015), with men playing a role in its reproduction (Wedgwood, 2009).

Connell would later argue (1996) that hegemonic masculinity is an expression of the power and authority that masculinity has over femininity collectively. Other scholars have also argued for a continua of masculinity and masculine capital within broadly masculine sites. For example, Bridges (2009) finds that in the world of male bodybuilding, hegemonic masculinity creates a form of cultural capital based in muscular, masculine embodiments. However, Bridges found that outside of the bodybuilding environment, the bodybuilders embodiment of hegemonic masculinity could be read differently, instead leading to ridicule from figures in the powerlifting community, who consider the aesthetic elements of the bodybuilding discipline to be feminine. This speaks to the incredibly complex potential readings of gender and embodiment, serving to highlight the importance of setting to the conceptualisation of cultural capital and hegemonic spheres. Furthermore, this highlights the aforementioned utility of scales of masculinity in understanding relational gender order in society.

Overall, it is important to address the question of how these understandings come to be and how they can become rooted in everyday understandings. Connell (1996) explores some of the ways in which hegemonic masculinity can embed itself into society through institutional settings. She argues that schools are pivotal institutions in the understanding of masculinities through the creation and reinforcement of ‘gender regimes’ (p.213). Connell explains that schools understand ‘gender regimes’ as a

function of the culture of the school generated from the children themselves instead of being a function of the institutional acceptance and reinforcement of behaviour. This occurs through four key mechanisms: the establishment of power relations; most notably through masculine dominance of spaces, division of labour, establishing acceptable patterns of emotion and finally through symbolisation, for example through the gendering of uniforms. These four mechanisms combine to teach boys and girls 'how to be' boys and girls. Critical to the usefulness in this study is the role of institutional truth(s) (Foucault, 2017) being disseminated by social institutions which underpin and underwrite behavioural and cultural norms (de Boise, 2015).

This extends to the gendering of subject preferences for boys and girls based on teacher recommendations and the allocation of sport as both tool and site of gender order maintenance. Connell also explores the prominent role of sexuality as a conversation topic among adolescents, who in turn learn about gender and sexuality through their peers. This can become damaging if sexuality-based insults are used, as this reinforces sexuality and gender hierarchies, further strengthening the grip of hegemonic masculinity. The use of gendered insults and their impact in sport has been explored by Rowe (2013), who argued that the masculinist nature of gender-based insults aids the reproduction of the dominance of the masculine within sport. Weaving (2009) similarly explored the gendered nature of insults towards players within sport, arguing that both men and women refer to weak, risk averse players as 'pussies'. Weaving goes on to assert that the use of this term 'degrades women and insults their sexuality, since their genitalia are conceived as weak or useless, suggesting in turn that women are weak and useless in sport' (p.89). The use of the term by women also demonstrates the ubiquity of gender-based insults in the sporting sphere.

While sport is not the key thrust of Connell's research, she identifies sport as a key crucible through which masculinities and femininities are moulded and promoted due to the cultural weight given to sport in Western societies (Connell, 2005, 2007, 2008). Connell argues that the skill and physicality involved in excelling in sports can be considered a marker of masculinity, particularly among young men (Connell, 1986). The relevance here to gender relations is around physical literacy and associated athletic embodiment becoming coded as masculine, leading these embodiments to be an element of the dominance over both other types of men and women. This is pivotal to the 'naturalisation' of gender order (Connell, 1986, p.150). This naturalisation is also transmitted via marketing, where 'corporations will frequently use the exemplary bodies of elite sportsmen as a marketing tool... and indirectly as a means of legitimisation for the entire gender order' (Connell, 2000, p.52).

In later work, Connell argues that sport and physical activity are key to constructions of gender, particularly in the scholastic setting where children 'learn gender' (Connell, 2008). Physical education takes a pivotal role in this disciplining process, with certain sports characterised as 'for' boys or girls:

In physical education there is a long tradition of practice-based non-academic pedagogy, going back to military training and 'Swedish drill' as well as competitive sports. This is an area where gender divisions have been strong, since particular physical performances and particular games were culturally defined as masculine or feminine. Physical education in schools is part of the regulation and disciplining of bodies. Indeed, these physical performances have often come to be seen as emblematic of gender itself. Thus, sports that involve a certain level of physical confrontation and (legal) violence are seen as tests of manhood (Connell, 2008, p.140)

Connell goes beyond this in explaining how some elements of this socialisation process work in practice, highlighting that while physical education teachers have historically not enjoyed a high status within the wider profession, they perform an important function as a *local* disseminator of masculinity. Later in this section, the notion of ‘local level’ conceptualisations will be explained in full, for now however it is important to consider gatekeepers to physical education, and indeed physical literacy, as potential gatekeepers to gender order.

Hegemonic masculinity has long enjoyed a wide range of utilisation in the academic world, in a broad array of topic areas (see Davis, 1997; Anderson, 2002; Schippers, 2007; Chess and Shaw, 2015). Chess and Shaw (2015) examine the overwhelmingly masculinised space of video gaming, mapping their interactions with male video gamers and were accused of being part of a conspiracy to dismantle the world of video games due to their feminist research. Video gaming has long been a predominantly masculine domain at every level from consumer to producer, and feminist scholars in the area have faced extreme hostility (Chess and Shaw, 2015, p.209). In this instance, Chess and Shaw became entangled in the GamerGate controversy through the discussion of hegemonic masculinity in gaming culture at an academic conference.<sup>32</sup> In their article, hegemonic masculinity is less used as a framework for analysis and more as a central underpinning to the topic area they are discussing due to its ubiquity within their field. For Laurel Davis (1997), hegemonic masculinity is the central concept for making sense of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit editions in *The Swimsuit*

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<sup>32</sup> GamerGate was an anti-progressive online campaign by a group of videogame enthusiasts which predominantly targeted women speaking out about sexism within videogame culture.

*Issue and Sport, Hegemonic Masculinity in Sports Illustrated*. Davis uses hegemonic masculinity in order to examine the discourse of the swimsuit edition of *Sports Illustrated*, arguing that the purpose of the annual issue is the promotion and affirmation of (male) heterosexuality, through the sexualisation of female athletes, positioning them as sex objects rather than legitimate athletes in their own right. The use of hegemonic masculinity in examining discourse here allows for deeper analysis of the discursive elements included in the study, not merely the images or texts within the issues but also contributions from readers in a form of audience study, demonstrating the flexibility of hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical framework. These two vastly different examples help demonstrate the different scopes and depths of analysis that hegemonic masculinity has offered. However, for all of its utilisation, hegemonic masculinity has not escaped criticism (Martin, 1998; Demetriou, 2001; Holter, 2003; Hearn, 2004), leading to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) reformulating and updating the concept. This chapter will now examine some of the most pertinent elements of this subsequent discussion.

One of the key critiques that were levelled at the concept of hegemonic masculinity was the inconsistent and ambiguous way that it had been applied (Martin, 1998). This is due to a lack of specificity in the definition and explanation of how hegemonic masculinity would manifest itself in 'real life' environments (Wetherell and Edley, 1999). In light of this, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argued that 'it is desirable to eliminate any usage of hegemonic masculinity as a fixed, transhistorical model' (p.838). This highlights the danger of the reification (Elias, 1998) of theoretical concepts. In the act of writing about concepts such as hegemony and hegemonic masculinity, it is difficult not to reify (Bridges, 2009). However, Williams (1977, in Bridges, 2009) argues that it

is possible providing that the research explores what is hegemonic and how this comes to be, as opposed to falling into the previously highlighted trap of discussing hegemony as a static, ubiquitous construction. The context that this takes place in also matters, as will be outlined in due course.

Perhaps the strongest critique of hegemonic masculinity is offered by Michael Moller in his 2007 article 'Exploiting Patterns: A Critique of Hegemonic Masculinity'. Moller begins by arguing that Connell affords a preferred reading of masculinity; one that lends itself to an overwhelmingly political, formulaic and prosaic understanding of masculinity as opposed to allowing for a 'micro-level' account. He goes on to argue that Connell particularly offers an overly hierarchical account of masculinity, citing developments from post structural feminist critiques of the time such as that of Judith Butler (2004). Moller's most compelling argument however comes when he states that the use of hegemonic masculinity 'facilitates a disavowal of power and privilege on the part of the researcher/writer' (p.265). In other words, Moller feels that researchers utilising concepts such as hegemonic masculinity rarely stop to identify and explore the benefits that they may have enjoyed through such social systems. This is a powerful argument, as in many instances researchers fail to situate themselves fully within their research. Moller's central premise is the conflation of power and domination that he feels hegemonic masculinity lends itself to. This is explicit when he states that "masculinity studies informed by Connell's work tend to thematise power in a very specific way, equating 'power' with 'domination'" (p.266). This critique appears to be less of hegemonic masculinity as a concept, more of the broad contexts it has been used in. Indeed, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) emphasise that hegemonic masculinity should not be understood as a 'pattern of simple domination based on force' (p.846).



In Connell and Messerschmidt's reformulation, they also argue that while the core components of the concept hold, that some areas required revision. Their four reformulations are:

- Taking into account geographical differences in masculinities
- Specific focus of the role of embodiments in contexts of power and privilege
- Stronger emphasis on dynamics of, and within, hegemonic masculinity
- A more complex model of gender hierarchy

I will now look briefly into these in turn. Connell and Messerschmidt argue that there are three levels to the 'geography of masculinities'. Firstly, there is the local level. This constitutes face-to-face interaction with families and surrounding communities. Then comes the regional level. These constructions occur at the cultural or national level. The final stage is the global level. These constructions arise in areas such as global politics or international business. These levels function within and between each other, meaning that there can be overlap and mutual influences. For example, while a global conceptualisation of masculinity may exert influence over regional or local frameworks, the local formulation of masculinity may influence the regional level.

Connell and Messerschmidt's approach to embodiment(s) allows for a more sophisticated and flexible starting point for analysing sport and physical activity (Wellard, 2016). This is particularly pertinent in the sporting context due to the debate around the contentious issue of sex testing in sport (Pieper, 2014). Connell and Messerschmidt argue that 'to understand embodiment and hegemony, we need to understand that bodies are both objects of social practice and agents in social practice' (p.851). Sport is particularly powerful in the embedding of masculine embodiments,

given the role of physical proficiency in the construction of masculine identities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 2008). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) go on to illuminate the complexities inherent to the construction and understanding of masculinities, again highlighting the importance of considering the interplay between masculinities (Gómez, 2007; Jewkes *et al.*, 2015). They argue that masculinity is composed of layers and internal contradictions. Key to this is the evolution of masculinities over time, and the acknowledgement that masculinities are not the same in every culture (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). This reading allows for a deeper, more nuanced reading of masculinity that resists the temptation to understand masculinity as a static, reified concept.

Finally, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that hegemonic masculinity should be reformulated in order to better express the complex nature of the gender hierarchy. This begins with accepting the complexity of the relationships among different constructions of masculinity. This relates to the interplay between the different levels of the geography of masculinity previously discussed. This reformulation is driven by a need to include subordinated groups in conceptualising gender order, such as the roles and importance of non-hegemonic modes of masculinity, described by Messerschmidt and Messner (2018) as ‘new masculinities’, focussing more on a hybridised approach to incorporate ‘of subordinated styles and displays... into privileged men’s identities’ (p.48). While these less rigid understandings of masculinity are non-hegemonic, they are still relevant and demonstrate shifts in neo-liberal western cultural attitudes to masculinity. For example, the role of male grooming in maintaining and enhancing positions of privilege (Barber, 2016), must be taken into account in any discussion on gender regime and order. To this end, Connell and Messerschmidt argue that ‘gender

is always relational' (p.848), highlighting that 'hegemonic masculinity was originally formulated in tandem with a concept of hegemonic femininity, soon renamed 'emphasised femininity' to acknowledge the asymmetrical position of masculinities and femininities in a patriarchal order' (p.848). It is to the concept of emphasised femininity that this chapter will now turn.

### **Emphasised Femininity**

Apposite to Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinities lies *emphasised femininity*.

Connell (1987) coins the term emphasised femininity to understand femininity's position of subservience to hegemonic masculinity, in which femininity is defined around accommodating the interests and desires of men, shifting away from displays of competence or aggression towards fragility and compliance. Connell goes on to assert that emphasised femininity is performed to men, while arguing that there is no such position as hegemonic femininity (although early iterations of her thinking used this as a shorthand), as there is 'no femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that the dominant form of masculinity is dominant amongst men' (p.183). This happens in two stanzas, firstly the concentration of social power in men and secondly in the lack of hegemonic dominance from the organisation of femininity, instead any failure to adhere to or attempts to subvert the tenets of emphasised femininity are punished through social marginalisation and sometimes forms of violence (Connell, 2002), similar to the scaffolding and maintenance of hegemonic forms of masculinity. Emphasised femininity is perhaps the key concept drawn from Connell's work underpinning this thesis, given its focus on women in sport.

Emphasised femininity is but one form of femininity, and Connell argues (1987) that it is the 'global subordination of women to men that provides an essential basis for

differentiation' (p.183). Critically, these femininities are not static and evolve. For example, sexual receptivity in younger women being replaced by motifs of maternity or 'motherliness' and caring in older women. The cultural messages scaffolding this gender order are delivered through both mass media and interpersonal means, strongly displaying the cultural permeations and ubiquity of these gender(ed) norms. Socially acceptable femininities are those which privilege whiteness, a lack of physical strength and subordination to hegemonic masculinity. Domeneghetti (2018b) succinctly summates the core associations of emphasised femininity as 'white, heterosexual, socially elite, feminine women' (p.2).

Emphasised femininity can also be understood as a form of femininity that accepts subordination to patriarchy, and offers no meaningful resistance to this system, instead adhering to it in order to avoid marginalisation. Further to this, emphasised femininity can also be understood as a response to fear of marginalisation, or indeed violence, by men towards women. Connell (1987) argues that women are much less likely to be marginalised if they adhere to the tenets of emphasised femininity, particularly around accepting a subordinate position and not challenging the dominant nature of masculinity.

The concept has been fruitful in some recent studies on sport, gender and the national press. For example, Domeneghetti (2018b) uses emphasised femininity to examine gendered representations within the context of tennis. His use of this framework allowed him to analyse coverage of star players Serena and Venus Williams, intersectionally, leading him to argue that:

‘The newspapers reinforced the notion of emphasised femininity through the discourse constructed around femininities that do not conform to its ideals, in this case the black, muscular physiques of Serena Williams and her older sister Venus’ (p.160).

This reading of Connell’s theory on gender relations demonstrates the utility of this theoretical toolkit, as it is flexible enough to allow for broader analyses to take place that also consider intersectional impacts. In his analysis of press coverage of the 2016 Wimbledon tennis Championships Domeneghetti (2018b) asserts that:

It must be acknowledged that the women who appear in the feature are willing participants, exploiting the dominant gendered discourse for pecuniary gain and increased publicity (p.157)

He goes on to argue that while the tennis players who partake in off court photoshoots consent to photographs being taken, they often have no control over the sexualised narrative that can accompany them. This is an important consideration in light of recent studies around femininity and sexual agency within sport. The issue of agency for women in sport Toffoletti’s (2017) work on the presence of women sports fans, who argues that women sports fans drawing the gaze upon themselves and behaving in a ‘sexy’ manner can be read as acts of agency and empowerment. Conversely, it can be argued that this expression of agency is both allowed by, and is due to, a patriarchal society that ensures that women remain sexually subordinated objects, as opposed to sexually free equals (Vincent, 2004). As highlighted in the previous chapter, female sports fans have also become increasingly targeted by forces of commodified consumption (Nufer, 2013; Toffoletti, 2017) much of which attempts to emphasise femininity, for example through the ‘pinkification’ of merchandise. This lends greater

credence to the argument that sexualisation of female fandom is not necessarily solely empowering.

Emphasised femininity has also been used to examine women within the media coverage of male sports, with Domeneghetti (2018a) using the concept to explore tabloid representations of femininity at the 2016 men's European Football Championships. This built upon the work of Clayton and Harris (2004) and Vincent *et al.* (2011) in formulating a typology of coverages, with one of these being the 'domesticated mother figure' typology. In this, the wives and partners of players were depicted as carrying out traditional gendered duties, particularly around motherhood, with coverage reinforcing traditional gendered divisions within footballing families. This showed evidence of a resistance to shift away from gendered tropes of women in men's sport, as had been found in much of the previous research in the area (Harris, 1999).

Despite an overall lack of scholarship conceptualising different forms of femininities (Schippers, 2007; Paechter, 2018), with Connell's emphasised femininity (and broader theory of gender relations) being a particularly popular approach (Paechter, 2018; Messerschmidt, 2020), there have been critiques of the concept, in part due to its relationship with hegemonic masculinity. Within this related concept femininity can be understood as 'other' to masculinity, and therefore there is some criticism that this understanding of gender posits it as an isolated 'system of domination', with emphasised femininity offering a reproduction of gender hierarchy through passive compliance (Hamilton *et al.*, 2019). Paechter (2018) strongly opposes Connell's understanding of gender relations, arguing that instead a more purely Gramscian

approach to gender order should be undertaken, as this would remove the ‘othered’ position of women in Connell’s approach, who are only understood against hegemonic apparitions of masculinity. A further criticism of Connell’s understanding of gender order in society is the overwhelming focus of her work on masculinity, with Paechter (2018) arguing that:

In contrast to Connell’s nuanced and context-bound understanding of hegemonic masculinity, emphasised femininity is conceived in strongly essentialist and stereotypical terms, leaving no possibility of the local variation that she consistently insists on for hegemonic masculinity (p.122)

This is a powerful criticism that builds on the critique offered by Schippers (2007), who instead suggests a reformulation towards a hegemonic form of femininity. This requires a reformulation of hegemonic masculinity as being about ‘manly’ characteristics that still has a dominant relationship over hegemonic femininity, defined as ‘womanly’ characteristics that still legitimise and cement hegemonic masculinities domination, but that these are co-constructed forms. This viewpoint has been strongly contested by Messerschmidt (2020), who argues that more Gramscian reconfigurations of Connell’s work on femininity misunderstand Connell’s concept, with focus particularly given to Paetchter (2018) and Hamilton *et al.* (2019). Messerschmidt argues that both Paetchter and Hamilton *et al.* misunderstand and misapply Connell’s work, highlighting the critical element of relationality that these scholars fail to fully consider.

This chapter section has focussed on the second base element of Connell’s theory on gender relations, emphasised femininity. To summarise, emphasised femininity can be understood as a form of femininity that is based around submission to hegemonic forms

of masculinity, thereby attempting to circumvent social ostracism, or occasionally forms of violence which can form part of shaping and policing cultural norms (Connell, 1987, p.184). It is one of a number of forms of femininity that privileges whiteness, heterosexuality and subservience to hegemonic forms of masculinity. The chapter will now move on to a discussion of the next key theoretical framework used in the study, Foucault's governmentality.

### **Governmentality**

This thesis utilises the lens of Michel Foucault's concept of *governmentality*.<sup>33</sup>

Foucault was a French philosopher most commonly associated with structuralist and post-structuralist thought (Megill, 1979). His early work centred around psychology and madness, before he developed an 'archeological' technique - akin to a historiography - which seeks to situate knowledge against the context in which it is created. He later went on to adopt a genealogical approach to the study of power and notions of truth, beginning with a series of works on sexuality before his death in 1984.

While not generally considered one of Foucault's flagship concepts, governmentality is very useful in understanding his other works, particularly *biopower* (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000)<sup>34</sup> and there have been calls for more exploration in its usage in understanding sports policy (Houlihan and Green, 2006). Governmentality is chiefly concerned with the 'conduct of conduct' (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991, p.2), which means that influence is imparted on bodies by a governing stratum that seeks to

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<sup>33</sup> Many of Foucault's works are difficult to access as a non-French speaker and so the discussion here necessarily requires the use of translated works or other scholars discussing his work.

<sup>34</sup> Biopower can be understood as one form of political power that centres around the influence of populations rather than individuals (Foucault, 2003; Anderson, 2012).



shape behaviour through the imposition of norms and structures, rather than ruling by suppression, oppression or repression (Foucault, 1988, 1990). Governmentality therefore allows for a move beyond overly simplistic understandings of state power (Joseph, 2010) and is a key concept in understanding Foucauldian views on the structure of society, as it is in keeping with his broader view of power as a diffused, negotiated, contested and ubiquitous phenomenon. For example, he argues that:

‘Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. ... Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.’ (Foucault, 1990).

Marxist writers have criticised Foucault’s work on power for his lack of focus on the role of the state (Smart, 1983) and thus it is important here to highlight the differences between ‘government’ and ‘governing’. ‘Government’ relates to the formalised structure that sets policy for which Foucault generally preferred a broader definition to include the direction of conduct (Foucault, 2002), whereas ‘governing’ can be understood as a ‘set of techniques or tactics that can be performed or resisted by multiple entities’ (Bretherton, Piggin and Bodet, 2016, p.613). The gap here is the formalisation of these processes and how they are manifest, as well as the ways in which transgressions would be punished.

Foucault’s ‘problematic of government’ begins around the sixteenth century, where he considers the interplay between ‘sovereignty’ (the on-going concern of a territory or state through law) and ‘government’. These concepts seem similar at first glance, however Smart (1988) helpfully points out that the key distinction between these is in the focus on preservation of state that sovereignty holds, whereas ‘government’ focuses

on human relationships. It is useful to draw the link between formations of 'government' and the mirroring of typical familial roles, in which the Government seeks to survey and protect the wellbeing of its subjects (Smart, 2002). Foucault's conceptualisation of family roles and its linkage to government here are grounded in traditional notions of masculinity and the male leader of a family. Explicitly, these centre around the protection of a government's people, taking financial decisions paternalistically and the provision of certain basic needs.

For Danaher, Schirato and Webb (2000) there are two models of governmentality: the *social contract* model and the *social warfare* model. The social contract model argues that governments were borne from a need for populations to seek synergy and safety in cooperation. With this model, some individual liberties are forsaken in order to secure this (with the tacit consent of the population) however the aim is that of mutual benefit. In the *social warfare* model, groups 'seize power, establish themselves as dominant in a society and set up the state in terms of their own ideas, values and self-interest' (Danaher Schirato and Webb, 2000, p.86). It has been argued that there are overlaps here with the underpinnings of Marxism (Danaher Schirato and Webb, 2000; Olssen, 2004), however while Foucault agrees that historically governments sometimes repress (Foucault 1990), he does not argue that governments are in conflict with their populace. This is due to his conceptualisation of power as diffused and flowing rather than forwarding a view of power as being something that can be 'held' by groups or institutions who then oppress (Foucault, 1990). Foucault does not argue that either of these models are the truth, rather that they are 'stories produced by different historical circumstances' (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000: p.88), linking to the notion of veridictions, expressed as 'the set of rules enabling one to establish which statements

in a given discourse can be described as true or false' (Foucault, Davison and Burchell, 2008, p.35). Instead of a reified approach (Elias, 1998), Foucault considers historical developments to governing and the subjective truths therein shaped (Foucault, 2017), for example, the diminishing role of the church in many nations. Historically, religiosity oversaw much of the regulation of behaviours of a population through fear of divine intervention, and the church would be the main source of pastoral care such as basic education and the teaching of a moral code (Foucault, 1975). These roles began to fall more within the remit of governments, and it is cultural shifts such as this that Foucault privileges in his analysis. Key here is Foucault's notion of an 'archaeological approach' (Foucault, 1970, 1972) wherein he attempts to understand events in the context of the period they occurred within, both socially and politically. In keeping with this tradition, the analysis chapters of this study will attempt to couch the analytical account against the political and social context in which the dataset occurred.

As with many of his ideas, Foucault uses the word 'governmentality' in numerous ways, perhaps most succinctly when he states that governmentality is the 'ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow this power to be exercised as its form of political economy and the apparatuses of security' (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991: p.102). This definition gives credence to the role of institutions and is of particular importance to this study which explores the structural factors at play that impact language, discourse and discursive repertoires, shaping what is accepted and acceptable to say and consider on a topic (Hall, 2006). Furthermore, Gordon (in Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991) argues that Foucault presented society as a 'network of omnipresent relations of

subjugating power' (p.4), and it is with this relational view of power in mind that a study of gender, discourse and discursive repertoires becomes important.

As with much of Foucault's work, there have been many applications of governmentality in fields as wide ranging as nursing (Holmes and Gastaldo, 2002) to understanding (im)migration (Bigo, 2002; Walters, 2015) via its use as a tool for understanding epistemology (Ettlinger, 2011). The breadth of these applications was one of the attractions, and ultimately rationales, in using the framework in this study. The study of discursive repertoires through this lens allows a more sophisticated view of power relations than has previously been afforded in sports scholarship (Bretherton, Piggin and Bodet, 2016). Green and Houlihan (2006) highlight this in a call for sports policy scholarship to develop beyond overly simplistic arguments around the realpolitik that emerges between funding bodies and National Governing Bodies (NGBs). Bretherton, Piggin and Bodet (2016) further this, arguing that the distinction drawn between government (a formalised structure that sets policy) and governmentality in Foucault's work aid in exploring an increasingly politicised area. This makes sport a prime site for its use. Bretherton, Piggin and Bodet, for example, focus on sports participation policy and the Olympic legacy left behind by the 2012 games, highlighting the feasibility and efficacy of using governmentality to analyse contemporary sports policy in Britain.

In the field of British sports policy and sports governance, recent research has seemed to move away from efforts to interrogate English domestic sports policy and instead trended towards sports mega events such as World Championships or Olympiads (see

Grix, 2014; Grix and Houlihan, 2014; Grix, Brannagan and Houlihan, 2015; Lenskyj, 2015; Brannagan and Rookwood, 2016; Wenner and Billings, 2017 for a selection of contemporary examples) and global level sports governance, generally in response to recent sports governance crises (see Chappelet and Mrkonjic, 2013; Bayle, 2015; Geeraert, 2015, 2016; Forster, 2016; Shilbury, O'Boyle and Ferkins, 2016). This has left a gap in the exploration of domestic level sports policy, which has seen only some research around physical activity for health agendas, with some strong research examining implementation of safeguarding policies in the wake of athlete welfare scandals (Scott-Bell, Wharton and Potrac, 2020).

In the sporting context, the language of sport and the impacts of this language and the power it can wield, has been subject to scholarly inquiry. For example, Segrave, McDowell and King (2006) argue that the language of sport can lead to cultural devaluation in media representations of women's sport, which is frequently presented as the 'other' to the masculine generic. This sits alongside a wealth of other scholarship in this area. This work - as explored in a previous chapter - broadly argues that the language used to describe women's sport is devaluing, privileging the role of men within sport while silencing and 'othering' women within sport and denying or limiting access to this social field. It is key then, to explore the discourse around the representations of women's team sports and their participants, particularly given that two institutions to be explored are the Governmental bodies and national press, understood as an 'institution' made up of a broad spectrum of multiple actors. To this end, it is useful to examine the use of governmentality within the discipline of media studies. This was a popular area of study during the 1990s and at the turn of the millennium in Australia, with Foucault's work being commonly used in order to move

towards an understanding of the relationship between cultural institutions and citizenship (Flew, 1997). For example, Nolan (2006) uses governmentality to explore and understand public service broadcasting and its impact on citizenship as a performative function of behaviours. Nolan examines the Australian Broadcasting Corporations coverage of the Iraq War, finding that the coverage could be considered as shaping citizenship through its coverage, thereby granting mass media an influential role in influencing not only the public agenda, but shaping the narrative around political issues. Nolan goes on to argue that governmental criticisms of the broadcaster's coverage could be understood as an attempt to influence broadcasting, thereby influencing knowledges within the polity. There have long been concerns in the British context around the relationship between government and major media types, as described in the introductory chapter.

The use of Foucauldian concepts in sports scholarship is neither a new nor uncontentious proposition (Rail and Harvey, 1995; Maguire, 2002). However, it is felt that given the focus on structural factors and the power that discourse setting allows institutions, this analytical framework offers the best option to critically and robustly explore these areas. This is not to suggest that there are not drawbacks to the concept. I will now offer a summary of the debates around the use of Foucauldian concepts in a variety of areas of gender studies.

In a critique of the use of Foucauldian thought in the context of gender studies, Hartsock (1990) argues that Foucault himself does not seek to change the world, but instead seeks to rearticulate the way that the world works from a position of relative power in society. While this is perhaps an overstated argument - making presumptions about the

ambitions and aims of fellow researchers - these issues and criticisms are important to this thesis, particularly in the understanding of the role of myself as the researcher in this study. Moya Lloyd (1993) dissents with Hartsock's viewpoint, arguing instead that the use of Foucauldian concepts in feminist perspectives does not undermine feminism and political action. Instead she asserts that Foucauldian thought allows for a reformulation of the understandings of feminist political action due to the nuanced conceptualisation of 'power, truth norms and politics' (p 456) that feminist political thought had, in her opinion, lacked to that point.

Further to this, Guthrie and Castelnovo (2001) argue that given the gender blind nature of Foucault's work, the relation between the sexes cannot be properly assessed. This mirrors much of the critique of Foucault's work from feminist perspectives. For example, this argument has been furthered by Julia Twigg (2004) in her work on embodiment and aging from a feminist perspective. Twigg argues that 'one of the classic critiques of Foucault is that he robs human subjectivity of its agency' (p.66). In other words, one of the popular arguments against the use of Foucauldian concepts within studies looking at embodiment is that his work focuses on *bodies* rather than people, giving a rather clinical account. This offers a useful angle for analysis within sport, given the increasingly overlapping nature of physical activity for health policy agendas that have been popular since the 1990s that continues to the modern day (Weed, 2016). While there has been a passionate criticism of Foucault's work among feminist researchers, this has been by no means universal. For example, Macleod and Durrheim (2002) strongly advocate for the use of governmentality in feminist study. They argue that in using governmentality, Foucauldian feminists are 'afforded a theoretical tool with which to analyse the complexity of oppressive relations of power

that may take on diverse forms in modern society' (p.16). Macleod and Durrheim here highlight the utility of governmentality in exploring gender relations in different social spaces, which in the context of this study will be sport.

Cooky (2006), in a study assessing *Sports Illustrated for Women*, discusses how, given the inextricable link between sport and the gendered body, Foucauldian frameworks can offer effective analysis of power relations. Markula (2003) furthered this in an exploration of 'technologies of the self' (taken from Foucault, 1988) and women's sport, arguing that the self and the body are fundamentally positioned within societal power structures. From a coaching perspective, Taylor, Piper and Garratt (2016) have used governmentality as a theoretical tool for examining coach-athlete relationships, finding that many relations have changed from discourses of trust and mutual benefit towards discourses of 'sterile delivery'. They note how coaching procedures have shifted towards the circumvention of suspicion of misconduct in light of welfare and safeguarding scandals within the coaching community. From reviewing this small selection of studies, it is clear that governmentality has been used successfully in sporting scholarship looking at a variety of facets of sport. However, the use of Foucauldian concepts concerning gender remains a contested area.

Given these critiques it is important to reiterate the rationale for using governmentality in this study. The primary reasoning, as previously discussed, is that governmentality allows for a more sophisticated assessment of sports discourse given the increased salience of sport in England (Houlihan and Green, 2006; Bretherton, Piggitt and Bodet, 2016). While the use of Foucauldian concepts in gender studies informed by feminism



has proven controversial, using governmentality in this context is an appropriate option, particularly as this research is not explicitly feminist in its scope as explained in the introductory chapter. Furthermore, its usefulness in considering the linkages of power between multiples sites of cultural influence is pivotal to exploring the discursive repertoires between public policy and print media outputs.

### **Analytic Bricolage**

In the above section, the histories, premises, benefits and drawbacks of the two key theoretical tools have been explored. Together, they combine to form the overarching theoretical framework which informs this study. This section will now explain briefly the rationale behind undertaking this approach and how this works in practice. In short, I argue that the use of multiple theoretical approaches within the same study in a bricolage approach is useful in appropriate situations as it can be used to creatively mitigate the oversights and shortcomings of individual frameworks, while maximising some of their strengths. In the context of this study, the blended approach of using two theories in tandem allows for a deeper analysis than could be garnered otherwise, given the social institutions and socialisations that are being explored.

The use of multiple theoretical frameworks informing the same piece of analysis is not a new approach in and of itself. Indeed, this is known as an analytic bricolage approach (Levi-Strauss, 1996). Bricolage relates to something that is formed of multiple discrete 'things', placed together to create something new and distinct. The 'bricoleur' (as in someone who undertakes bricolage), is understood as 'someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of the craftsman' (Levi-Strauss, 1996 pp. 16-17). This lends itself to a creative approach, whereby the 'tools' to the hand of

the bricoleur are chosen based upon their potential utility in achieving a goal (Carstensen, 2015). In the context of social research, the ‘tools’ to hand are theoretical understandings, which can be utilised to try to articulate and understand phenomena in the social world. This lends itself to a *pragmatic* research paradigm, where the emphasis is on achieving research goals in the best way possible in the research context (Biesta, 2010). In the context of this study - and with the aim of exploring gendered representations across two different socio-political institutions - the analysis will draw upon the two different theoretical frameworks described above. The choice of these two was rooted in the relative potential strengths in exploring gender(ed) representations, and the combination of both are an attempt to draw upon these strengths while attempting to minimise the respective weaknesses, identified above each individual approach.

For example, the combination of Foucault and Connell’s work in tandem can be used to ‘hide’ blind spots identified in critiques, which can be a drawback of an approach that draws on a specific theoretical framework (Domeneghetti, 2018b). In this instance, Foucault’s lack of attention paid to gender in conceptualisations of power and Connell’s relative lack of discussion of the changing dynamics evident within different contexts are problems which a strength of the other theory, with Foucault’s work privileging the ‘archaeological’ and temporal context and Connell’s work being focussed on gender relations and how this manifests itself as power in society. While this was partly addressed by Connell and Messerschmidt’s work in 2005, as previously addressed these criticisms have persisted (Messerschmidt, 2020). In this study, the blend between these two frameworks has allowed for an approach that closely examines gender and gendered representations within two different socio-structural institutions, examined

and explored against the social and political context the texts exist within. This allows for a deeper understanding, one that not only seeks to explore power through discourse and discursive repertoires but goes further by considering the social and sporting context in the longitudinal study.

Furthermore, the two approaches' conceptualisations of power are both relational, and this logical overlapping allows for analytic 'mesh points', as they conceptualise power relations in a broadly similar way even though they apply them to different contexts. This has been held as a critique of Connell's gender theory, as previously discussed. Additionally, both concepts are interested in the examination of *discourse* as a means through which power is articulated, impacting upon accepted forms of knowledge and therefore influencing social behaviours. In this instance, it has also been argued that:

A theory of gender structure must pay attention both 'to how structure shapes individual choice and social interaction and how human agency creates, sustains, and modifies current structure' (Risman, 2004, p.433, in Budgeon, 2014, p.319).

This is pivotal to the use of the combination of governmentality with Connell's gender thesis to this study, as it offers a useful lens for examining both the structural and the agentic.

This chapter section has highlighted some of the key theoretical underpinnings to this research study, firstly in a discussion around conceptualisations of gender before moving on to exploring Foucault's governmentality. The works of Connell are influential to the discussion of gender order. The analysis chapters will lean heavily on the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity. Connell's theory

on gender relations has been chosen due to the complexity of social constructions of masculinity and femininity that it is possible to consider, and the key role that sport, physical activity and physicality plays within these. This chapter then went on to conceptualise, critique and defend the use of Foucault's governmentality within the context of this study, ultimately arguing that in the context of examining sports policy and its linkages to power, that governmentality allows for the most sophisticated possible analysis to be formulated.

## Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach. As with a quantitative approach, there is no one generally accepted definition or method, it is instead better understood as an umbrella term to a variety of approaches to social research (Sparkes and Smith, 2013). Lincoln (2010) perhaps best encapsulates this, arguing that:

We are interpretivists, postmodernists, poststructuralists; we are phenomenological, feminist, critical. We choose lenses that are border, racial, ethnic, hybrid, queer, differently abled, indigenous, margin, center, Other. Fortunately, qualitative research – with or without the signifiers – has been porous, permeable, and highly assimilative. Its practitioners, adherents, and theorists have come from multiple disciplines and have brought to the project of qualitative invention the literatures, philosophies, disciplinary stances, and professional commitments of the social sciences, medicine, nursing, communication studies, social welfare, fisheries, wildlife, tourism, and a dozen other academic specialities. Consequently, we have acquired richness and elaboration that has both added to our confusion and at the same time, been broad and pliant enough to encompass a variety of claimants' (p.8)

Given that qualitative research encompasses such a broad church of approaches and fields, it is difficult to be overly prescriptive, with some approaches instead focussing on grouping together broad similarities in those who undertake qualitative research (Sparkes and Smith, 2013). This is a marked turn from historical approaches which have broadly pitted qualitative and quantitative approaches against one another on the grounds of incompatibility and a lack of commonality, such as the 'paradigm wars' (Gage, 1989; Wilding, 2019). Overall, qualitative enquiry presupposes doubts that 'any discourse has a privileged place, any method or theory a universal and general claim to authoritative knowledge' (Richardson, 1991, p.173).

In keeping with this, I have chosen to fundamentally reject notions of ‘best’ methodologies or theoretical lenses to, and instead understand each methodological approach as a ‘tool in the research belt’, with certain tools being better for certain jobs than others. This pragmatic research approach protects the research from theoretical dogmatism. Instead, the key is taking the approach that best fulfils the research aims, which is a crucial underpinning to ethical research. This is not to simply suggest that the research aims and questions drive the approach of the researcher, as this is always likely to be guided (to some extent) by personal biases and preferences of approach. Rather, social research requires a level of reflexivity by the researcher to acknowledge these preferences and how they could shape the research trajectory, as opposed to a disavowal of any influence or role in the research, as would be seen in a quantitative approach whereby the researcher adopts the role of ‘disinterested scientist’ (Sparkes and Smith, 2013, p.10). Given the importance of these philosophies in shaping research, I will now turn to explaining the epistemological and ontological values that drive this piece of research.

### **Interpretivism, Constructivism and Relativism**

The beginnings of interpretivism as an approach can be traced back to the nineteenth century (Hammersley, 2013). The basic thesis of interpretivism is that social beings act in a relational way and it is possible to understand these interactions. For instance, a piece of research informed by an interpretivist viewpoint will consider issues of emotionality or culture, which arguably offers deeper exploration of phenomena than is offered within a positivist lens (Hammersley, 2013). An interpretivist exploration differs from a positivist account as it considers the ways individuals make sense of their social world, as opposed to attempting to draw more generalisable but perhaps less

nuanced conclusions. For example, in the context of this study, a positivist approach may simply have counted the number of articles published on women's sport in the sampling frame, compared it to the equivalent amount of coverage for men's sport and analysed on that basis. However, as Fink (2015) persuasively asserts, researchers should consider documenting any changing coverage of women's sport qualitatively as well as quantitatively where possible in order to best capture not only *amounts* of coverage, but the meanings conferred around women's sport. This seems particularly important in an era of increasing formalisation and professionalisation within the English context.

To this end, interpretivist assessments must take into account the sociocultural and historical context of the phenomena they explore. Later in this chapter I will argue in more depth for the usefulness of a pragmatic research paradigm (Biesta, 2010). However, I will take this opportunity to clarify that pragmatism is understood as an approach to conducting research as opposed to a lens through which I perceive knowledge, as pragmatism is sometimes understood (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). My perceptions of knowledge, and therefore what forms of knowledge are included or precluded, are informed by both interpretivist and constructivist positions, the latter of which I will now turn to.

The constructivist position holds that social phenomena and their attached meanings are being continuously created and recreated by social actors (Bryman, 2016). Constructivism is part of the interpretivist tradition (Guzzini, 2013), conceptualising power as a diffused and relational proposition (Guzzini, 2013). Constructivism can also be understood as a rejection of the tenets of positivism, particularly the assumptions

that it makes around the 'gods eye', monadic nature of an ascertainable truth. Constructivism instead operates under the assumption that meanings change over time (Guzzini, 2013). This is one reason why constructivism is broadly associated with studies that undertake discourse analysis, where meanings and context are seams ripe for analysis. This conceptual fluidity is perhaps most articulately expressed by Potter (1996), who - in a chapter exploring discourse and the construction of reality and society - argues that the world 'is constituted in one way or another as people talk it, write it and argue it' (p.98). This is a critical underpinning to this study, which holds the Foucauldian view that the discursive repertoires of powerful institutions can shape the behaviours and realities of the societies they exert influence over. I will go on to explore this influence and how it helps shape the study later in the chapter. Both interpretivism and constructivism privilege the 'richness' of data collected, generally focussing on drawing conclusions on the micro level as opposed to attempting to uncover any universal truths. This 'richness' is the aim of the qualitative elements of the forthcoming analysis, as the chapter will come on to address.

Positivist thinkers have argued that interpretivist thought includes an element of bias and subjectivity (Henderson, 2011); however, this is not necessarily a weakness. For example, without some level of prior interest research would not and could not commence as the researcher would have no basis for a starting point (Wolcott, 1995). In order for the study to avoid being overly value-laden, researcher values were addressed throughout the conduction of the study (Hammersley and Gomm, 1997; Dalal and Priya, 2016). One way in which this was achieved was through the use of 'critical friends' (Costa and Kallick, 1993; Handal, 1999). The practice of 'critical friends' emerged from the field of education, and occur when a trusted figure with



knowledge and expertise in an area offers feedback to a researcher to offer support and ultimately aid the development of the researcher's knowledge and skill. In the context of a doctoral thesis a research supervision team usually spearheads this, as was the case in this instance, alongside other colleagues in the University, most notably internal subject specialists on key milestone panels.<sup>35</sup> Costa and Kallick (1993) describe the critical friends process as following the pattern of:

1. The learner describing a practice or thought and requesting feedback
2. The critical friend asks probing questions
3. The learner considers desired outcomes of the conversation
4. The critical friend offers feedback
5. The critical friend offers thoughts and critiques
6. Both participants reflect on the conversation

In practice, the critical friend process may not flow in the rather discrete way that Costa and Kallick describe, however it is a useful guide to aid reflection and evaluation. This process of reflective practice was pivotal in helping understanding and the location of the role of myself as a researcher within the research, which has been critical in ensuring that my personal biases did not unduly shape the thesis. Many of the requests for *probing questions* centred on researcher values and ensuring ethical research through fair representation of the data. This offered many benefits and allowed for challenging my approaches to the construction of knowledge (Cowan and Taylor, 2016), offering a lived example of the benefit to interdisciplinary research teams. Smith and McGannon (2018) explore the usefulness of critical friends in developing rigor within qualitative research, finding that the challenges to knowledge construction are not about an attempt to reach agreement or consensus, but rather aim to aid reflection and exploration on theoretical issues that may have multiple interpretations. This has been crucial in the

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<sup>35</sup> At Northumbria University, there are three key progression panels for doctoral projects, the timings of which depend on mode of study. They are an opportunity to receive feedback and criticism from a subject specialist outside of the supervision team and must be passed in order to progress the project.

generating and conceptualising of thematic concepts within this study, many of which form the basic blocks on which the analysis is built.

The important role of critical friends extended beyond the supervision team. For example, within the faculty postgraduate community we organised informal 'study buddies'; peers from a range of disciplines with whom we would all discuss our research, sometimes by presenting and defending work. In this case, positionality was frequently highlighted as a consideration within the thesis and these discussions with scholars with a range of disciplines and viewpoints were beneficial when exploring concepts that developed into thematic arguments within the analysis chapters.

Ontologically, this research is further informed by relativism. Baghramian (2015) defines relativism as taking the view that 'truth and falsity, right and wrong, standards of reasoning, and procedures of justification are products of differing conventions and frameworks of assessment and that their authority is confined to the context giving rise to them' (p.1). In short, relativism takes the stance that realities take place and are influenced inextricably by the contexts within which they exist. This means that it is impossible to examine phenomena without also considering the contexts that they occur within. For example, in this study it would be insufficient to examine the media articles and policy documents in isolation without considering their political and social contexts as this would offer a limited, rather than rich account. As set out in the introduction, the social and political backdrop that these are produced against is highly consequential in the analysis of these pieces. The relativistic approach is generally associated with qualitative social research, as it rejects the notions of ascertainable, absolute truth that realist ontology would posit. Within this study, this ontological position is influential in the research design as well as the analysis. As previously stated, the political and social contexts of the study are pivotal to the analysis undertaken, the process of which I will discuss later in the chapter.

This study also draws on elements of the research tradition of pragmatism. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) conceptualise the pragmatic maxim as an attempt to mark a ‘middle ground between philosophical dogmatism and scepticism and to find a workable solution (sometimes including outright rejection) to many longstanding philosophical dualisms about which agreement has not been historically forthcoming’ (p.18). The outcome of this approach is a divorce from any philosophical dualisms, instead exploring the ‘grey’ between these. The driving principle of the pragmatic approach is that the research design and methodological choices of the researcher should solely aim to maximise the social and epistemological benefit of the research. While this could be considered a ‘common sense’ approach (Greene and Caracelli, 2003), the ‘hard’ and social sciences have historically been much more obstinate in their approaches, most aptly demonstrated in the aforementioned paradigm wars (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This is not to argue that a ‘silencing’ approach is unique to any specific fields, and indeed the humanities and arts have had similar debates. Barker, Mathijs and Trobia (2008) summate this debate beautifully in a study on audience reception of the Lord of the Rings in their colourful analogy of crossing the ‘Qualiquant river’, whereby the two tribes ‘Qualis’ and ‘Quanters’ are trying to sail a cargo up the Qualiquant river but continuous disagreements between the tribes as to how to ‘tow the boat’ of audience research make the endeavour increasingly difficult, whereas ‘if only they could be got to work together large volumes of cargo could be handled much more easily’ (p.219).

For all the benefits of a pragmatic approach to research, it- like any approach to social research- has been subject to criticism. For instance, it has been argued that some pragmatic researchers have undertaken pragmatic research as a way of circumventing sufficient consideration of epistemology and ethics (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Clearly, ethical considerations are of the utmost importance in all forms of social research, and research decisions informed by pragmatism can ensure that research is as useful as it can be, fulfilling its ethical responsibility.

## **Sampling**

The study will consider a sample of materials from the English print editions of English national newspapers and governmental and governing body, policy and strategy documentation. The sampling frame includes documents published between the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010 and the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018. This timeframe was selected for multiple reasons. Firstly, while the Olympics is not in any way the crux of this study, this sampling timescale offers examples from the run up to London 2012 to a substantial time scale afterwards, offering a longitudinal view on reportage. While the Olympiad is not specifically analysed within this thesis, it was undeniably an important sporting moment for England, given the position of the Olympics as perhaps the premier sporting mega-event (Roche, 2008). Furthermore, this time scale offers a sufficient period of time where all of the analysed sports can have major events at both domestic and international level, allowing for further potential planes for analysis. This is a tactic that has been utilised in previous studies in this area such as Boykoff and Yasuoka's exploration of media coverage at the London 2012 Olympic Games (2015) and Biscomb and Matheson's four-decade longitudinal analysis (2017). The rationale for

this has been to harness the increase in media interest that can be seen around major, particularly mega multi-sport events. Finally, the notion of the legacy of 2012 is - and has been - an inextricable influence on domestic sports policy. This is not least due to the huge public finance expended around the event, but also the linked desire for leveraging the games 'soft power' potential (Nye, 1990). This makes this timeframe particularly important to the making sense of both contemporary and future sports policy directions.

A sample was taken from a range of the English, print editions of English national newspapers and their sister Sunday editions in order to capture a broader range of genres and readerships. Table 6 below offers an overview of these. The sample encompasses the three main categories of newspaper in England, the broadsheet, the tabloid and the middle market tabloids (which straddle the line between broadsheet and tabloid). *The Guardian* is categorised as a broadsheet here, as even though it officially changed to a tabloid printing format in late 2018, for the vast majority of the sample it was a broadsheet. The national focus was chosen in order to circumvent any potential regional differences in reporting that may be seen if the sample included regional newspapers. However, it is worth noting some promising research in this area has been conducted (see Adams *et al.*, 2014).

**Table 5- Circulations, ownerships and readership demographics of sampled newspapers**

	<b>Monthly Circulation in 2018</b> (Sourced from the Audit Bureau for Circulations in Press Gazette, 2019)	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Readership Demographic Groups</b> (Sourced from Ofcom, 2018)
<b>Broadsheet</b>			
<i>The Guardian</i>	152,714	Scott Trust	ABC1
<i>The Times</i>	440,558	News UK	ABC1
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	385,346	Press Holdings	ABC1
<b>Middle Market Tabloid</b>			
<i>Daily Mail</i>	1,343,142	Daily Mail and General Trust plc	ABC1
<i>Daily Express</i>	364,721	Reach plc	C2DE
<b>Tabloid</b>			
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	583,192	Reach plc	C2DE
<i>Daily Star</i>	391,988	Reach plc	C2DE

The sampling frame includes all reportage and sports policy documents regarding the selected sports from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010 until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 (n=4281). This offers the study a longitudinal aspect to analysis, and a more complete picture of reportage over this time. All documents were selected on the basis of *mentioning* women’s sport or athletes within the four sampled sports as a topic. This allowed for a broad range of different policy areas and article styles to be considered. For example, the newspaper

corpus ranged as broadly as articles that provide profiles of athletes, to betting pages, to match reports. Given the limitations of the Nexis database for the newspaper sample corpus, images are not included as part of the discourse in this study. It can be argued that images form a key part of discourse (Weber and Carini, 2013), given some have argued that due to the increasingly ‘soft’ nature of news that images are playing an increasingly important role in the reception of gender within sports news articles (Daniels, 2009; Hardin and Greer, 2009). However, in this instance, finding all photographs within all articles was not feasible due to the time restraints involved in completing a doctoral programme in a timely manner. Though it was possible to access all photographs for the policy documentation sample, image analysis was not conducted on the policy corpus to allow for more direct comparisons between the two textual datasets. Given the aforementioned sexualisation of female athletes and the female athletic body (Mierzwinski, Velija and Malcolm, 2014; Bruce, 2016), including images in the analysis would have offered an opportunity for richer, more nuanced exploration of the discourse surrounding women’s sport in the English context. However, the Nexis database does not collate images and collecting these for the full sample separately and then allocating them to the relevant article would have been inefficient to the point of unfeasibility. The article counts by paper and year can be seen tabulated below.

### **Broadsheet**

<b>Guardian</b>		<b>Times</b>		<b>Telegraph</b>	
2010	63	2010	51	2010	50
2011	85	2011	46	2011	50
2012	70	2012	91	2012	70
2013	99	2013	57	2013	99
2014	106	2014	62	2014	113
2015	148	2015	85	2015	128
2016	44	2016	71	2016	101
2017	60	2017	201	2017	168

2018	79
<b>Total</b>	<b>754</b>

2018	162
<b>Total</b>	<b>826</b>

2018	193
<b>Total</b>	<b>972</b>

### Middle Market

<b>Express</b>	
2010	12
2011	34
2012	24
2013	33
2014	24
2015	50
2016	21
2017	70
2018	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>308</b>

<b>Mail</b>	
2010	23
2011	45
2012	30
2013	55
2014	46
2015	68
2016	20
2017	132
2018	97
<b>Total</b>	<b>516</b>

### Tabloid

<b>Mirror</b>	
2010	41
2011	46
2012	24
2013	51
2014	46
2015	45
2016	17
2017	38
2018	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>346</b>

<b>Daily Star</b>	
2010	10
2011	17
2012	19
2013	29
2014	35
2015	61
2016	19
2017	87
2018	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>347</b>

The sampling method used here has been a common method for other contemporary studies on media content, such as Godoy-Pressland (2014), Packer *et al.* (2014), Patterson *et al.* (2015) and Petty and Pope (2019). It takes into account the broad spectrum of British news outlets with a range of political leanings (Brandenburg, 2006),



readerships and ownerships, as is expanded upon in Table 6. Each of the news outlets selected dedicates a significant level of coverage to sport.

While there would certainly be value in exploring other media types, particularly broadcast media, including these within the scope of this study would risk the study becoming too broad to adequately achieve its aims within the bounds of a doctoral research project. Important work in the exploration of different media types has already been completed by Janet Fink (2015), Cooky, Messner and Hextrum (2013) and Davis and Tuggle (2012), who - as discussed in Chapter Two - all excellently examined gendered representations in sports broadcast media. However, as Turner (1997, in Domeneghetti, 2018a, p.4) argues, 'media texts offer especially rich opportunities to observe the cultural construction of meaning' (Turner, 1997, p.326), and it is this 'richness' that this study will attempt to harness. Furthermore, Mautner (in Wodak and Kryżanowski, 2008) argues for the strengths of print media research. She contends that given the ubiquitous nature of print texts alongside their permanence and ease of collection, print media research can be a fertile area. Philo (2007) furthers this claim, arguing that text-based analysis of media can show the origins of discursive understandings and the impacts of these texts on different segments of its audience. Both of these are pertinent to the research aims of this study. Again, critical to the understanding of this research is the treatment of print media and sports policy outputs as textual data, with the role of the researcher being to account for the contexts of all data within these datasets through the analysis.

Further to this, policy and strategy documentation by the Government and the NGBs of the sampled sports is assessed (n=102). These comprise official government

departmental policy regarding sport, governing body documentary outputs and ‘arms length’ funding body outputs.<sup>36</sup> The policy corpus comprised of 102 policy documents from a wide range of different national sports bodies and governmental departments. This included governing body annual reports and strategy documents and physical activity strategies from Public Health England. Documents were selected by way of the same criteria as the media documents, meaning those that had made reference to women’s sport within text. In the ‘government documents’ category all government departments were eligible, however inevitably the DCMS was responsible for 41% of these (n=9).<sup>37</sup> Table 7 below offers a breakdown of these into the three categories explained in the sampling section of the research design in Chapter Three, demonstrating the range of types of bodies that the sports policy agenda now influences.

**Table 6- Breakdown of policy sample**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number</b>
Governing Body Document	53
Funding Body Document	27
Government Documents	22

The aim was to examine and compare the prevalent discourses within and between these texts and textual types. Given that policy documentation by their nature help shape policy implementation at the public-facing level (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983; Sabatier, 1986; Long and Franklin, 2004), they are of vital importance to this study, and give a useful counterpoint for analysis with national press articles. The sampling

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<sup>36</sup> This relates to the two main sports funding bodies in England, Sport England and UK Sport

<sup>37</sup> The acronym DCMS rather than DDCMS will be used in this thesis. Both are used interchangeably by government however the department refers to itself as the DCMS on the website (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-digital-culture-media-sport>).

frame includes all government or governing body documentation on sport that gives mention to women's sport. While there are clear differences between government and governing body documentation, given the oversight that the governmental funding bodies have on NGB strategies, particularly through the administration of Whole Sport Plans, it is fair to assume that NGB strategies are at least somewhat in line with the governance strategies put forward by the aforementioned SE and UK Sport *Sports Governance Code* (Sport England and UK Sport, 2017).

The synthesis of both English sport policy documentation and national press articles within this timeframe is novel, in so far as to this point this has been a gap in research undertaking this. As previously highlighted, there is an appreciation that the national press and public policy has a complex, interrelated relationship, as well as the increasingly synergetic relationship that both the media in its broadest sense and the government plays with sport, through the sport media nexus (Nicholson, 2007) and sport as a soft power tool (Grix and Lee, 2013; Grix and Houlihan, 2014) respectively. However, this mix of institutions is yet to be examined together in the way that this study does.

Team sports have been selected in order to minimise the 'celebrity' impact on the discourse around individual athletes, as discussed by Smart (2005), Schultz (2005), Wenner (2014) and Sailors and Weaving (2017). Smart (2005) highlights the potential impacts of celebrity on media interest, arguing that key figures in sport can be both 'the beneficiaries and victims' of media exposure (p.74). Focussing on team sports allows the study to explore the nuance of the discourse around women's sport with fewer altering factors, such as the 'charisma' of athletes being at play (Smart, 2005).

Crucially, this means that elements of the analysis focus more on the discursive *representation of women's sports* (with reference to the representations of athletes within this sphere). The study is attempting to explore *'what is talked about when we talk about women's sport'*, rather than offering specific case studies on individual athletes.

The representations of four team sports have been selected for analysis: *Rugby Union, Association Football, Cricket* and *Netball*. These have been selected due to the range of professionalisation that can be seen across these sports, as well as the traditionally popular nature of these sports in Britain, with the government policy document *Sport: Raising the Game* (Department for National Heritage, 1995) naming all of these sports as traditional British sporting pursuits. Furthermore, and perhaps due to their description as traditional team sports, these sports are widely taught as part of the Physical Education national curriculum (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001). Table 8 offers a brief discussion of the current context of each sport.

**Table 8- Context of each sampled sport.**

Sport	Context
<b>Rugby Union</b>	Women's Rugby Union is undergoing a period of increasing professionalisation, with the Super 15s women's league having begun in the 2017/2018 season. This is a marked improvement for women's rugby, given the controversy around the World Cup final side of 2017 not having secure professional contracts due to the strategic decisions of the Rugby Football Union (RFU). This was later addressed by the RFU. Rugby Union has historically been considered a particularly masculine domain in a variety of national contexts

	<p>(Harris and Clayton, 2007), with some arguing that in many contexts Rugby Union could be considered a hyper masculinised space (Kirk, 2000; Pringle, 2001). These considerations make Rugby Union a useful sport to analyse. It is important to note that Rugby League has not been included. Furthermore, Rugby Sevens is not included in the sampling frame. This is because - as with Rugby League - the game has a different rule set, most obviously due to the game involving fewer players.</p> <p>The RFU are a very powerful institution within the global governance of Rugby Union and hold considerable sway within the decision making of world Rugby. The impact therein is that the RFU influence policy and policy agendas at both the domestic and international levels.</p> <p>As previously stated, women’s Rugby Union in England is also undergoing a period of burgeoning professionalisation in the midst of a relatively successful period on the international stage at World Cups and Six Nations events. Domestically, the RFU now oversees a semi-professional top division, the Premier 15s. The teams to make up this league were decided via a bidding and licensing process, with no relegation in the first two seasons.</p>
<p><b>Association Football</b></p>	<p>Women’s Association Football has had a slightly longer, but fragmented, history of professionalisation in Britain. This is in spite of the 50-year ban on organised women’s football between 1921 and 1971 (as outlined in the introductory chapter). Women’s football came under the auspices of the Football Association in 1993, with the goal to improve participation rates and the success of the national team (White,</p>

1993 in Petty and Pope, 2019). Historically, leading British footballers have had to emigrate in order to participate in fully professional leagues. However, the FA have announced dramatic and controversial changes to the structure of English Women's football, in a bid to speed up the development of women's football in England (Football Association, 2017). This has been resisted by many clubs within the game who have seen their status decreased on the basis of their suitability to newly implemented licensing criteria, as opposed to the traditional system of relegation.

In the wake of a 'watershed' moment in 2005, The Football Association announced plans for a new 'Women's Super League' (WSL) to begin in 2009, however this was delayed until 2011, with the establishment of a summer league and central contracts for England international players (Bell, 2019). Since this establishment, the system has developed into a multiple league structure, with three leagues within the structure: the WSL, FA Women's Championship and FA Women's National League. The schedule now more closely follows the men's footballing calendar in England, with games through the Winter months.

Football has unsurprisingly been the sport that has seen the greatest level of academic attention across the four sampled sports, with it being a growing academic space (Valenti, Morrow and Scelles, 2018). This has recently extended to women's football and the experiences of both playing (Scraton, Fasting, Pfister, and Bunuel, 2018; Culvin, 2021) and fandom (Toffoletti, 2017) in an era of burgeoning professionalisation.

<p><b>Cricket</b></p>	<p>Women’s Cricket is a sport in which only the elite performers are contracted professionally in Britain. This has not prevented elite level success however, as the England Women’s cricket team won the 2017 Cricket World Cup. A semi-professional one-day league has been founded, and will continue to operate; however, there are currently only six competing teams. For the first time in 2018, the Wisden Cricket Almanack featured a cover image of a female cricketer, England’s Anya Shrubsole.</p> <p>Cricket has seen an overall decrease in participation rates in England by 12% between 2015-2016 (Sport England, 2017). One reason for this was the England and Wales Cricket Boards (ECBs) campaign to get home test matches onto OFCOM Group B, meaning that rather than home test matches being broadcast on free to air television, that rights can be bid for a broader range of broadcasters. It has been argued that while this has generated broadcasting income for the ECB, it has also reduced the opportunity for potential players to be ‘inspired’ to play the game.</p> <p>Women’s cricket in England came under the auspices of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) in 1998, after a merger between the ECB and Women’s cricket Association (Velija, Ratna and Flintoff, 2014). Currently, although the National team has been generally successful in major tournaments and since 2014 have been awarded centralised contracts, the lower stages of the pyramid have not kept pace, with semi-professional leagues and few fixtures on the calendar. The establishment of The Women’s Cricket Super League in 2016 has attracted international stars to the one-day match tournament, with some fixtures broadcast on Sky Sports.</p>
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<p><b>Netball</b></p>	<p>Netball is an invasion game played predominantly with seven players with varying rule sets and formats. The game can be played on both indoor and outdoor courts. Netball is the only sport in the sampling frame that is played almost exclusively by women. Netball is currently receiving a greater level of television airtime, perhaps due to the success of the English national team in international tournaments, and the repackaging of the game to attract a television audience.</p> <p>Domestically, 2018 saw the founding of a domestic Netball league, the Netball Super League. This league currently consists of 11 teams and fixtures have been and continue to be televised on Sky Sports, which is the league’s broadcast partner. Below this are Premier Leagues 1, 2 and 3.</p> <p>Netball in England is in a period of increased (semi) professionalisation. The sport has a long tradition in England, beginning in 1926 (England Netball, 2021), and is popularly taught in scholastic settings as part of the national curriculum. The current top level domestic tournament is the Netball Superleague, which carries both a title sponsor and a major broadcasting partner. At the international level, England’s national team is broadly successful, medalling at successive World Championships before winning Gold at the 2018 Commonwealth Games.</p> <p>Netball is governed domestically by England Netball, who oversee 92,000 members and roughly one million participants per week (England Netball, 2018). England Netball has recently focussed participation efforts on women who have fallen into the ‘Wolfenden gap’ outlined in Chapter Two, and</p>



	<p>no longer participate in Netball post-16. These efforts have focussed on the health and social elements to sport and have generally moved away from competitive notions of sport, such as through the highly successful Back to Netball programme. This will be expanded upon in Chapter Five.</p>
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## **Data Collection and Analysis**

The media dataset was collected through key word searches of the Nexis database. The Nexis database is an online database of regional, national and international newspaper articles. Tailored searches were made into the database, focussing on keywords such as ‘women’, ‘sport’ and the names of the sampled sports. The data collection was performed by the use of broad search terms in every newspaper by year and then reading through every article that appeared to decide on their relevance. This builds in dependence on researcher decision-making, as I decided which articles were relevant, however this was systematised. Any article which either focussed on or mentioned women’s physical activity or sport (relevant to the sampled sports) was considered eligible. This led to a range of forms of coverage being included, occasionally from different newspaper sections as I will explore in the subsequent chapter.

The Nexis database was selected due to the relative simplicity of data collection that it offers given its reasonably comprehensive nature. The sample gathered in this study is not exhaustive, however given the sample size and systematic approach, the approach offers a high level of rigour. This relative ease of data collection through the Nexis database forms part of the efforts to follow the research principles of pragmatism, as without the use of this tool the scope of the study could not be as broad. While the use of Nexis offers many benefits, there were also some drawbacks to the use of the

database. Firstly, while Nexis is comprehensive in terms of the articles added on a daily basis, I cannot claim that no mistakes or omissions had been made as I am reliant on the efficiency of the database. Furthermore, the Nexis database does not always include the by-lines attributable to every article, which would have been beneficial in adding an extra layer of contextual analysis.

The policy document data collection was completed through the use of the same keyword searches of the government website for central government policy, the Sport England and UK Sport websites for their strategy documents, and finally the relevant governing body websites. All of the relevant strategy and policy documentation is publicly available online; this is broadly considered a critical tenet of good sports governance due to the transparency that this offers (Chappelet and Mrkonjic, 2013). In all cases, policy documentation was selected based on their relevance to the study. This relevance was established in the same way as the newspaper articles from the Nexis database: an initial reading for mentions of the relevant women's sport. While the amount of policy that mentions 'sport' but makes no specific reference to 'women's sport' is an interesting avenue to explore, it was considered outside of the scope of this particular study.

## **Coding**

As is the starting point of many forms of qualitative data analysis, coding was key to the analytical process. These codes form much of the basis of theoretical frameworks and themes that the qualitative work advances. In this instance, the same coding approach was utilised with both the media reports and the policy documents. Clearly,

these are two different data sources; however, using the same approach to coding allows the two sources to be compared more rigorously, in a bid to explore any similarities or differences in discourse. In both instances, the gathered data texts were read twice, to aid immersion in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). From this, a two-stage coding process took place. Firstly, line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2012) was undertaken in order to identify prevailing narratives within the texts themselves. This involved creating a code for every line of data within the texts. This offered a rigorous, systematic approach to the creation of initial codes, and was an attempt to ensure that my personal biases (Wolcott, 2005) did not colour the way that I addressed the data in an undue fashion. While time consuming, this offered a solid foundation for the findings to be built upon.

The second phase of the coding strategy utilised a focussed coding process. The aim of this phase was to identify prevailing or conflicting narratives within the texts. A focussed coding process is conceptualised by Charmaz (1996) as referring to ‘taking earlier codes that continually reappear in your initial coding and using those codes to sift through large amounts of data’ (p.40). This stage attempts to find recurring codes and themes throughout the data, with these broader identified themes forming the basis of an analytical framework (Charmaz, 1996). This phase is not linear and requires multiple attempts to establish solid categorical themes (Charmaz, 1996).

After the coding process was completed within each data set, the two data sets were compared to examine any shared discursive repertoires and narratives. In keeping with the tradition of Foucauldian Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as outlined by Sparkes and Smith (2013), codes and themes were then linked to ideologies and power. This

requires a level of ‘sociological imagination’ (Mills, 1959), again reinforcing the role of the researcher within this research.

After codes had been created manually, they were then inputted into the NVivo data analysis software package. This approach was taken for a few different reasons. Firstly, the manual coding followed by inputting these codes into NVivo allowed for a deep engagement and immersion within the data. Secondly, having the coded data in multiple formats allowed for the data to be securely backed up in multiple sites. This proved particularly useful given that some of the writing up process took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, where access to University campuses was not always possible. Finally, this approach allowed the use of NVivo’s powerful analytical tools, which allowed for the use of features such as collocations, word counts and word frequencies. These contextually scaffold the analysis chapters but the tools themselves are not rigorous enough for any firm quantitative findings to be drawn. Tied to this is again the spirit of pragmatism, as this combination of traditional and innovative approaches was initially time consuming but allowed for a more varied and fulsome analysis of the texts.

While coding is a popular tool within qualitative research, it is not without its problems. Alan Bryman (2016) highlights one of these: the issue of losing the context of what is said. Firstly, Bryman points out that drawing sections of text from a dataset can open the possibility that the contexts of the text is lost. Clearly, in this study this is a risk due to the importance of the political and social contexts to the analysis. To this end, steps

have been taken to minimise this, with the contexts explained as part of the thematic discussion.

Furthermore, rigour and accuracy within coding has been highlighted as a potential pitfall. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) address this in the context of social phenomenology, where they argue that a bricolage approach utilising both inductive and deductive thematic analysis offers a greater level of rigour. They draw upon the works of Boyatzis (1998) and Crabtree and Miller (1999) to guide their strategies on the inductive and deductive coding respectively. Their strategy relied heavily on the creation of a codebook, which can be drawn up after a first reading of the texts. This was operationalised in this study, as there have been some codes written into a codebook beforehand that capture themes based upon both initial familiarisation and engagement with the academic literature within the sports media field, for example the ubiquity of gender markers. This has been seen in other recent studies in the area, such as Petty and Pope (2019) and their study on the press coverage of the English national Women's football team at the 2015 World Cup. The use of this strategy allows the research to move beyond merely parroting generally accepted themes from similar scholarship, allowing the study to examine these in a more nuanced way in an attempt to examine the minutiae of these themes. In this case, gender markers formed part of the data collection process, as the term 'women's' was part of the queries into the Nexis database. While this certainly builds the theme of gender markers into the corpus, the use of gender markers within the codebook is in keeping with the gender segregation of sport and with the overwhelming majority of the academic literature to date. The utility in this regard is again in keeping with the spirit of pragmatism, as without this the data collection process would have involved reading every sport-related article

published by the sampled newspapers over the chosen period, which would have been extremely inefficient.

In order to best demonstrate some of the coding concerns that I have highlighted, I will offer a step-by-step example of the coding process using a 'live' example from the dataset. Below I present a worked example from an article in the *Daily Star*. The line by line coding process and the themes generated are signified and summed up after '- ' and all themes identified through the focussed coding process are signified next to the key word or phrase emboldened in parenthesis. Where a term or phrase falls into two analytical themes, they are marked with '//'.

**EU GO GIRLS (NATIONAL); SERIOUSLY** football WOMEN'S EURO CHAMPIONSHIP Carney says Lionesses can land the big prize

BYLINE: TONY LEIGHTON

SECTION: SPORT; Pg. 48

LENGTH: 442 words

*KAREN CARNEY insists England Lionesses can **end their hunt** (VIOLENCE//PRIMAL) for a major trophy in Holland. There have been close calls, **with defeats in the 1984 and 2009 Euro finals and third place at the 2015 World Cup.** (TEAM HISTORY) – Expectation of success*

*But 129-time capped Carney, who has a silver medal from 2009 and bronze from 2015 (INDIVIDUAL HISTORY), says England can strike gold at this year's European Championship. –Ambition*

*The squad arrived at their Utrecht base on Thursday evening after a reception at Kensington Palace hosted by the FA president, Prince William. "It was a lovely send-off," said Carney. "But it's down to business now and I wouldn't be here if I didn't believe we can win the tournament. (COMPETITION) "This is my seventh major tournament as an England player and we've never been better prepared, more close-knit as a group and ready for the challenge." (MENTALITY) – Professionalism and expectation of success.*

*Favourites*

The first challenge facing England is a group game against Scotland. Meetings with Spain and Portugal follow in a group that England will be expected to ease through (NATIONAL EXPECTATION) to reach the quarter-finals of a 16-team tournament that kicks off tomorrow with the host nation facing Norway. -Expectation.

Mark Sampson's side (MAN AS LEADER) are favourites to win Wednesday's all-British battle in Utrecht, despite a defeat and a draw in their last two meetings with Scotland which followed a run of 17 straight England wins (TEAM HISTORY).- Dominance

The Scots will be without several key players through injury but Carney, 29, said: "They will still be really difficult opponents, as they always are for England. "We'll give them total respect, as we will every team. We've not met Portugal for a while, but we beat Spain in a friendly last October and we'll be aiming for the same result again." Victory over Spain would avenge (NATIONAL//CONFLICT) the defeat they handed a hapless England (FAILURE) at Euro 2013. Then, a dreadful performance saw them dumped out at the group stage and manager Hope Powell sacked (WOMAN AS LEADER).- Retribution

England have been revived under Sampson (MAN AS LEADER) and Carney added: "We let the country down (NATIONAL EXPECTATION) in 2013, but we bounced back with a brilliant World Cup." A first-ever win against Germany brought England their World Cup bronze. But the Germans - eight-time European champions - will be the favourites in Holland with France also ahead of Sampson's team (MALE OWNERSHIP) in the betting. England are Europe's third-best team, according to FIFA rankings, but Carney is determined (MENTALITY) to defy the bookies and the statisticians. "Quite a few of us in the squad have got silver and bronze medals," she said. "And we won't be happy until we've got gold, and this can be our year." -Narratives of expecting success

From the above example, the following codebook would be generated:

Codes	Description	Overall Thematic Group
Violence	Narratives that emphasise physical violence or invoke violent images	Conflict
Primal	Lexical fields of primacy	Conflict
Team History	Focus on previous achievements of a team	History
Individual History	Focus on previous achievements of an individual	History
Competition	Emphasis on competitive elements	Mentality
Mentality	Focus on the cerebral ability of an individual or team	Mentality

National Expectation	Description of pressure from the English public	National
Man as Leader	Emphasis on the importance of a man as leader of a group	Man as Leader
Woman as Leader	Emphasis on the importance of a woman as leader of a group	Woman as Leader
Conflict	Lexical fields of physical opposition or warfare	Conflict
Male Ownership	'His team'	Man as Leader

The final codebook also included examples of each code in action. To aid the comparison of narratives between the two different datasets, the juxtaposition of the two separate codebooks were an invaluable guide, particularly given the different ways in which similar themes were expressed given the different writing registers and audiences of the two datasets.

Importantly, the research design and methodological approach was piloted in a separate yet parallel research study, which examined the media representations of the England women's national football team at the 2017 European Championships (Williams, 2019). This allowed an opportunity to 'trial run' and fix potential issues with the research design. For example, it was during the data collection for the pilot research that the coding process was fully tested, with adaptations being made from an open and axial approach to a more structured, iterative approach described above.



I will now move on to explore the next step of analysis which involved the use of Critical Discourse Analysis. This discussion will begin with an overall overview of discourse analysis, its traditions and aims. This will highlight a variety of approaches within the tradition and scope of discourse analysis that could have legitimately been taken in order to achieve the research aims, before finally explaining why Critical Discourse Analysis was selected as the best of the available approaches.

### **Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis is an increasingly prevalent methodology in the social sciences and in the field of gender representations in sport (Mueller, 2016), however there are a number of differing definitions as to what discourse and discourse analysis are. For example, there are broadly agreements that discourse analysis focuses on language, however there are very few systematic definitions of what discourse actually is (Wodak in Wodak and Krzyżanowski, 2008), with spirited debate as to the influence that it holds. What is clear however, is that there are many different varieties of discourse analysis, all with different assumptions about the nature of discourse so I will explore some of the forms that could have been utilised in this study before coming on to offer some background and rationale as to the method that was selected, critical discourse analysis. This discussion draws upon the wide range of understandings of discourse and how it functions. For example, Wodak conceptualises discourse as implying ‘patterns and commonalities of knowledge and structures’ (Wodak in Wodak and Krzyżanowski, 2008, p.6) and discourse analysis as a method to provide ‘a general framework to problem oriented social research’ (Wodak in Wodak and Krzyżanowski, 2008, p.2).

Foucault however, conceptualises discourse in a multitude of ways throughout his work, most pertinent to this study being that discourse is a function of discursive formations, which can be understood as a set of congruous statements on a subject (Smart, 1991). It is therefore, in his view, the objective of discourse analysis to ‘deal with a group of verbal performances at the level of the statements and of the form of positivity that characterises them; or more briefly, to define the type of positivity of a discourse’ (Foucault, 1977, p.125). In other words, the goal of discourse analysis is to explore the presence of a set of discursive understandings on a subject, giving focus to the contextual environment of the time. The power of the use of language to examine these issues is perhaps best summated by Stuart Hall, who argues that ‘representations through language are therefore central to the processes by which meaning is produced’ (Hall, 1997, p.1). He goes on to argue that language is a critical medium for meaning making and exchange. It therefore becomes clear that a text-based, language-focussed approach to understanding meaning and how these are shared is an important tool in the exploration of these meanings.

Philosophically, discourse analysis-based studies tend to follow the interpretivist position wherein there is the possibility for multiple lived realities and there are significant dangers to discursive studies that are overly definitive and approach *their* reading as *the* reading. This logical fallacy is explored by Henry *et al.* (2005), who argue that ‘if discourse systems reflect different realities none of which may be logically privileged over another, then arguing in favour of one interpretation over another is problematic’ (p.17). In other words, it is crucial that discourse studies make clear their assumptions, approaches and readings to ensure clarity due to the various usages of discourse analysis.

## **Foucauldian Discourse Analysis**

One viable avenue would have been the use of *Foucauldian discourse analysis*. Liao and Markula (in Markula, 2009) argue that Foucauldian discourse analysis (henceforth FDA) focusses on how power is used through discourses, instead of who ‘possesses’ power, with Sparkes and Smith (2013) asserting that power is not a possession of one source, but it is relational and circulating. Therefore, analysis aims to explore how discourse is used within power relations rather than assessing whether or not it is oppressive. Liao and Markula (2009) concur with this, arguing that in FDA, discourses and narratives are not being assessed for whether they are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ discourses. This is pivotal to this piece of research, which throughout the study is not interested in establishing what is a ‘good’ nor a ‘bad’ discourse, rather the study seeks to ascertain what the discursive repertoires around women’s sports are. In other words, the study seeks to explore *what people talk about when they talk about women’s sport*.

FDA conceptualises discourse as a group of practices, objects and subjects that construct the objects of which they speak and their behaviour (Sparkes and Smith, 2013). This ensures that the speaker is positioned both by and within the discourse that they contribute to. Sparkes and Smith (2013) go on to argue that Foucauldian discourse analysis is conducted by putting the text into the broader context that it exists within. From there, FDA seeks to examine how the text relates to social processes of power. This is similar to Critical Discourse Analysis (or CDA) with a different approach to understanding power through a Foucauldian lens. The key difference between FDA and CDA is the different understandings on power (Liao and Markula, 2009), whereas CDA seeks to explore how ideologies are expressed through language, FDA does this with

the assumption that all actors within the discourse have some level (even if it is minimal) of control or influence over the discursive formations and repertoires (Liao and Markula, 2009). While there will certainly be congruous elements within this study, CDA was considered more flexible and appropriate in the attempt to achieve the research aims.

There has been use of FDA in sports specific studies. For example, in a study around female Judokas within Greek society Kavoura, Ryba and Chroni (2015) perform FDA on ten semi-structured interviews.<sup>38</sup> This followed Willig's (2008) six stages: (1) discursive constructions, (2) discourses, (3) action orientation, (4) positioning, (5) practice and (6) subjectivity. This method allows for a systematic and broad reaching analysis to be undertaken, successfully allowing Kavoura, Ryba and Chroni to draw out prevailing discourses and attempting an explanation of how these discourses impacted the behaviour of the Judokas. Kavoura, Ryba and Chroni draw on FDA to allow for a feminist analysis, uncovering the multiple identities of the Judokas, shifting from the aforementioned criticisms of Foucault's works within the feminist movement. The analysis within this study draws on Foucauldian concepts - primarily governmentality - so there is certainly an element of this built into the analysis. However, while Foucault's works inform the research, by no means is this analysis purely Foucauldian. In the spirit of the pragmatic research paradigm and the 'bricolage' approach (Sparkes and Smith, 2013), I will draw on some elements of both FDA and Political Discourse Analysis (or PDA) in guiding my CDA strategy, which the chapter now turns to.

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<sup>38</sup> A Judoka is a Judo practitioner

## **Political Discourse Analysis**

Political discourse analysis (PDA) is a method that attempts to take into account the peculiarities of political speech (Hay, 2013). Fairclough and Fairclough (2013) argue that political utterances are made to persuade rather than inform, and therefore they should be analysed using a slightly different toolkit. Similarly, in his treatise on analysing political rhetoric, Reisigl (in Wodak and Krzyżanowski, 2008) furthers this, asserting that it is the role of analysis of political utterances to examine politicians 'rhetorical means of persuasion' (p.97). This positions the researcher as needing to unpack the intentions and goals of the speaker, with discourse therefore being understood as an instrument of power. While Reisigl does not specifically reference PDA, he does posit a politico-linguistic approach to analysis which combines studies on rhetoric, political science and linguistics. He also conceptualises discourse as a group of 'semiotic social practices' around a topic that involves social actors who participate within this discourse (p. 118). This view of discourse offers a link between his argument and PDA, which is a broader umbrella under which I include Reisigl's method to analyse political rhetoric.

Reisigl goes on to argue that analysing political rhetoric takes three general forms: the examination of politicians' narratives, interrogating the frameworks of politics, and exploring politico-linguistics in fields of political action. Reisigl goes on to argue that there are eight political fields to be analysed (pp.98-99):

- 1- Law making procedure
- 2- Formation of public attitudes, opinions and will
- 3- Party internal formations of attitudes, opinions and will
- 4- Inter party formation of attitudes, opinions and will
- 5- Organisation of international and interstate relations

- 6- Political advertising
- 7- Political administration
- 8- Political control

From this, we can see that there is a very broad range of utilities and multidisciplinary possibilities available for this method. This is one of the main benefits of a PDA process. However, this broad scope does not allow for sufficient specificity between these fairly disparate fields. PDA is flexible enough for adaption whereby it could be successfully performed on this range of fields, however this would require a high level of skill and judgement on the part of the researcher.

Reisigl argues that ideally, there is a thorough eight-step approach as to how to perform a political discourse analysis (pp. 100-101):

- 1- Awareness of a social and political problem that possesses linguistic aspects
- 2- Triangulatory collection and 'creation' of discursive data for analysis- data collection focuses on selection of specific discourses
- 3- Preparation and selection of data
- 4- Specification of research question and the formulation of hypothesis
- 5- Qualitative pilot analysis
- 6- Detailed case studies at micro, macro and meso levels, as well as on the levels of context
- 7- Formulation of a critique that seeks to reveal problematic discursive strategies, to solve problems of institutional communication etc.
- 8- Application of detailed analytical results on the basis of accurate critique

This is a systematic approach to research, which offers a high level of rigour while linking language to power in an innovative manner. However, it is also reliant on a high level of skill on the part of the researcher and is a time intensive process. Colin Hay (2013) argues that the distinction of the political from other forms of discourse is overly

limiting and focuses too much on the argumentative elements of political discourse. This skill is based on the potential difficulty in fully grasping the political context of the time. This may extend beyond the skillset of the researcher into broader issues of access to all of the relevant information. Depending upon the issue being examined, it is possible that commercial sensitivity may reduce access to information that would help shape the analysis. As I will go on to explore with CDA, there is also a need for a critical view on the role of researcher, as it is plausible that the researcher's views and understandings may well colour analysis, linking back to the previous discussion in this chapter on the role of the researcher within research.

While PDA would offer insight into the political policy element of this study, the analysis draws more upon CDA due to the desire to utilise the same approach in analysing both policy and print media outlets, and the argument of Hay (2013) that PDA is too limited in its scope is convincing considering the multidisciplinary approach required in this study. This is not to say that elements of PDA are not influential in the analysis. For example, the critical importance of considering specific policy problems and outcomes while analysing a piece of policy underpins the research, and the policy analysis chapter forms a broad policy analysis on the two major governmental sports policies from the sample, integrated alongside a CDA approach. Patricia Dunmire (2012) argues that 'the critical study of political discourse closely aligns with the discourse analytic approach of CDA' (p.738). This emphasis on the critical nature of political analysis runs through the analysis within this study, and it is to Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodological tool that I now turn.

## Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was undertaken of both the policy and media documents. CDA is conceptualised by Sparkes and Smith (2013) as having a focus on power and what grants access to power. Richardson (2006) argues that a critical approach must also examine what is *not* present as much as what *is* present. The aim here is to understand the key role of institutions in setting and controlling discourse, which a critical discourse analysis approach allows for (Sparkes and Smith, 2013).

For Fairclough (1995) a social institution is ‘an apparatus of verbal discourse, or an ‘order of discourse’... in this perspective, we may regard an institution as a sort of speech community’ (p.38). This is not to suggest that these understandings are static or monolithic, and indeed Fairclough argues instead for analysis which draws out pluralities of meaning and the construction of behavioural norms. In this spirit, Fairclough goes on to assert that ‘It is... necessary to see the institution as simultaneously facilitating and constraining the social action... it provides them with a frame for action, without which they could not act, but it thereby constrains them to act within that frame’ (p.38). In the context of this study it is exactly this interaction between frames of understanding and what can and cannot be acceptably socially enacted that drives the use of CDA, drawing on what Fairclough and Wodak (1997) would term a co-constructed understanding of language as social practice. The relationship between sport, gender and institutional ways of understanding who can or cannot exist within the sporting space ‘legitimately’ (and indeed what roles they can play within this space) is to be interrogated in later chapters.

Formulaically, the analysis was conducted by following Sparkes and Smith’s (2013, pp.138-139) suggested steps:

1. *Describe the context of the text.* This involves examining the ‘what’s’- what is included, excluded and emphasised. As Richardson (2006) argues, what is not



included is just as important as what is, and this is key in the context of this study, as will be explored fully in the analysis chapters.

2. *Engage in an intertextual analysis.* This aims to understand how people use and consume the text. An examination of which themes or discourses are generated is then undertaken. In this study, consumers are not interviewed in order to understand their consumption and the meanings that they draw from the study; this study instead focuses more on the discursive formations (Hall, 2006) and discursive repertoires that surround women's sport.
3. *Connect findings to ideology and power.* Firstly, the aim is to reveal how texts are used for ideological purposes by linking each theme to an ideology. Then the researcher must connect the ideological structure to power relations. In this case, I then compared the findings from the print media and public policy datasets to try and establish discursive repertoires and formations.

Critical discourse analysis is an approach that begins with the assumption that discourse has a relationship with power and aims to link language to broader social analysis. CDA practitioners' range in their attitudes to power. For instance, two of the key figures in this field; Norman Fairclough and Michel Foucault have different understandings on the nature of power and how it manifests itself through language, with Fairclough opting for a more functionalistic, Hallidayian approach whereby power could be maintained in the dominant classes.<sup>39</sup> When undertaking CDA, researchers must be specific and transparent in their assumptions to these issues. This choice of framework brings into sharp focus a key concept in conducting CDA, which is the importance of understanding the role of the researcher in research (Sparkes and Smith, 2013). Foucauldian CDA is not the only compatible framework. The use of Gramscian

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Halliday (1978) argued for a social semiotics approach to understanding language, where it functions as a vessel for understanding social order.

concepts in CDA of political works has been explored by Donoghue (2018) who argues that Gramscian concepts around society and power are compatible with CDA, partially due to its flexibility. Given Gramsci's aforementioned influence on Connell's theories on gender relations in society, it would be incorrect to suggest that there is no Gramscian element to the CDA in this study, as a key feature of the analysis is examining notions of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity and how these are expressed in both print media coverage and through the language used in public policy documentation. However, it is important to again emphasise that these theoretical underpinnings are not necessarily individual key drivers and guides to the research. Rather, as explored above in the frameworks section, I am taking an analytical bricolage (Sparkes and Smith, 2013) approach, which appreciates that in order to fully explore a multitude of complex social phenomena, it is fruitful to draw on the works of multiple theorists and multiple theories in concert rather than taking an overly theoretically dogmatic approach that privileges one theory as 'the best'.

The use of CDA within sports scholarship is becoming more popular (see Meân and Kassing, 2008; Lavelle, 2010; Fielding-Lloyd and Meân, 2011; Powis and Velija, 2020 for a range of examples), as more sport scholars become interested in the contemporary relationship between sport and political power, mirroring the changing scope of modern sport and its growing role in nations' soft power strategies as outlined within Chapter One. As with any data analysis method, there are both advantages and disadvantages to the use of CDA, and some of the major strengths and criticisms within the context of this study will now be addressed.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of the use of CDA in this context is the flexibility that this tool affords the researcher and the research (Manchin and Mayr, 2012). For example, both newspaper and policy documentation have been analysed using the same data analysis method. The use of CDA has allowed for a more rigorous, comparative examination of both texts. This would not be possible with a multitude of other data analysis methods. This notional flexibility extends beyond this when the interdisciplinary possibilities are considered. This study alone includes the fields of sport, gender, public policy and media studies. CDA allows these to be explored together, in a more comparative, rigorous fashion. Given the increasing trend in the academy towards interdisciplinary working, and the interrelatedness of public policy and the print media (Blackmore and Thorpe, 2003), this study contributes to a burgeoning methodological field.

Furthermore, the use of CDA in this context can be considered to offer a useful interrogation of the taken for granted assumptions that can guide day-to-day lives, in this instance through exploring some of the socially accepted (and acceptable) means of talking about women's performance level sport. This is particularly beneficial in the context of this study. Governmentality then becomes a useful theoretical underpinning, as aiming to shape the behaviours of self-regulation to make them more palatable with state ideals or subjective truths (Foucault, 2017) is a key premise within governmentality (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991). In this context, an opportunity to interrogate power through language presents itself, through an examination of the shared understandings and power relations between the national print media and public policy writers.

In critique of CDA, the argument has been made that CDA can be an exercise in interpretation as opposed to analysis (Manchin and Mayr, 2012). This claim raises an important question around the separation of the researcher and their research, which has been strongly argued against by many within the social sciences. Furthermore, this raises a useful point around subjectivity. In contrast to this criticism, Choulitoraki and Fairclough (1999) argue that CDA takes the view that any text can be understood in many ways, and part of the process of conducting CDA is the analysis of understandings. Further to this, they argue that CDA does not advocate a particular understanding but may advocate a possible explanation. However, as Domeneghetti (2017) asserts, the use of specific frameworks to analyse a dataset may well lead to the oversight of other relevant narratives or discourses. Given the use of frameworks in this study, this is also a possible limitation.

As previously discussed, there are weaknesses to conducting CDA, particularly in the general inability of this approach to assess audience reception (Sparkes and Smith, 2013). In this instance - given my positionality - it would be difficult to explore the audience reception of media and policy outputs. However, it is crucial that a potential weakness of CDA, namely the general reluctance of the researcher to be critical of their theories and themselves while conducting CDA (Sparkes and Smith, 2013), is addressed, in this instance through following the reflective process highlighted at the beginning of this chapter.

Overall, CDA was chosen as the most appropriate approach to discourse analysis, as it is a flexible approach that was suitable for analysing both datasets. Furthermore, given the overall interest in power and the shaping of acceptable understandings of women's

sport, and by extension, women in society (Hall, 2006) a CDA approach allows the study to explore these issues of power discursively. I will now go on to describe one of the processes within the strategy for CDA, thematic analysis. CDA was also selected as the study not only seeks to understand the content of the texts themselves, but to link this content to the contexts of the time and relevant power relations and how these are shaped by institution. Fundamentally, the study seeks to explore the texts holistically as opposed to merely the content of the texts in a standalone fashion (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Crucially, the key here is the synthesis of the two textual types, treating both as discursively formulated text types and analyzing them using the same approach allows for an analysis that looks at the discourses formed and seeks to link to ideological underpinnings that form basis of these themes. Fundamentally, the analysis does not seek to do more than this. I am making no judgments around if they are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ discourses. Rather, the ‘critical’ element to the research is about drawing lines of cogency to ‘power’, broadly understood here by drawing upon Foucauldian understandings as the ability to influence through ‘shaping’ behaviours rather than through formalised coercion.

### **Thematic Analysis**

During the process of conducting CDA, a parallel thematic analysis was conducted in order to achieve phase two of Sparkes and Smith’s (2013) process of conducting CDA, which was engaging in an *intertextual analysis*. Thematic analysis is a very frequently used tool in the social sciences; however it is not always explicitly expressed as such (Braun and Clarke, 2006), or is frequently under-theorised (Braun and Clarke, 2019). For example, Ho, Chiang and Leung (2017) have discussed the usefulness of thematic analysis within a hermeneutic framework in the field of nursing. They argue that

thematic analysis can be useful to researchers in minimising their own taken-for-granted understandings, in order to better understand the lived experience of participants. This broad usage speaks to the flexibility of the approach, which will presently be discussed.

While popular, a definitive definition of thematic analysis proves relatively elusive. Braun and Clarke (2006) define a thematic analysis as ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’ (p.79). The lack of demarcation and the relative paucity of robust and proven strategies for the successful completion of thematic analysis is perhaps the key drawback to the method. There have been historical criticisms around the lack of structure that many thematic analyses have employed (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, more contemporary writings in the area have attempted to address this. For example, Roberts, Dowell and Nie (2019) focus on the role of the codebook in establishing rigour and replicability in thematic analysis, arguing that while the establishment of a codebook is time consuming - and not always considered essential to data analysis - that it can demonstrate and facilitate added rigour in thematic analysis.

The goal of thematic analysis is to generate themes within a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2012). This repositions the researcher as crucial to the research, rejecting notions of themes ‘emerging’ from the data, which would logically hold that the researcher is a passive actor within the research process, with themes residing within the data waiting to be discovered by any social researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This position would oppose theme generation being a function of the researcher’s epistemological leanings or biases (Wolcott, 1995). To clarify, bias is not referred to here with any

negative connotations, and indeed it is argued that bias must exist for a researcher to conduct research (Wolcott, 1995). A researcher with no pre-existing understandings of a topic would be very unlikely to garner any useful findings from a piece of research that they had no awareness or passion for (Biesta, 2010). Instead, I argue that *I as a researcher* am a key component to the understandings imparted from it. It is through my philosophical and intellectual lens that the data is analysed, and to this end it is entirely plausible that another researcher would generate different themes from the same dataset. Overall, this methodology rejects notions of research as ‘discovery’ of data, rather, I would argue that research is an active process that is shaped by the researcher themselves and therefore the analysis must be read in this light. As foregrounded in an earlier section of this chapter, any arguments and understandings within this research are coloured by my epistemological and ontological assumptions, and therefore cannot claim to convey any universality of truth.

Perhaps the key benefit to the use of a thematic analysis is the flexibility that it provides the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this instance, the use of a thematic analysis falls within the framework of conducting CDA, as the themes identified through the data are identified before any linkages to power - or power structures - can be made. The possibility to ‘blend’ thematic analysis with other approaches offers dangers if proper reflexivity is not exercised (Braun and Clarke, 2019), however the flexibility and emphasis of the researchers proper application can also be a major strength to the approach when undertaken with the proper epistemological considerations.

The approach to thematic analysis used within this study follows the path posited by Braun and Clarke (2006). Their approach – which this study adopted - takes on six phases.

1. *Familiarisation*- this involved immersion within the texts gathered, with each text being read multiple times. This was beneficial in understanding the individual texts themselves as well as starting to piece together their place within the overall corpus.
2. *Generating initial codes*- this followed the coding process outlined in the earlier section of this chapter.
3. *Searching for themes*- to achieve this I grouped the initial codes into preliminary discursive groups to try and identify any patterns or subtle differences.
4. *Reviewing themes*- this involved ensuring that the codebook had clear and precise definitions as to what each generated theme was, as well as an understanding as to the nuances and contradictions involved in these themes.
5. *Defining and naming themes*- This step was the collation and grouping of these initial themes generated in step four. This was an iterative process that required multiple attempts to solidify.
6. *Report production*- this was the writing up process. During this process themes were revisited and rearticulated as immersion within the writing process allowed for advancement in the understandings of the generated themes.

Braun and Clarke’s method was chosen due to its rarity as a method that demarks a precise process to follow, as well as its popularity across a broad spectrum of academic



fields. The steps are clear and simple and allow a systematic approach to be taken. Key here, is the appreciation that themes do not ‘emerge’ from data, rather they are generated by a researcher, who through their analytical lens, develops themes rather than ‘discover them’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes generated are not latent and hidden within the data waiting to be ‘found’ by a researcher, which would suggest a form of ascertainable truth discoverable by the positivist researcher. It is, therefore, important to note that even when following a strategy such as Braun and Clarke’s (2006), that research is both a reflexive and iterative process (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006), and it must be recognised that this research was not conducted in a purely linear fashion. The importance of reflexive practice and the centrality of the researcher -as opposed to a ‘recipe’ style approach (Willig, 2008) to analysis which dogmatically follows the given procedure- is critical to doing ‘good’ thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Generated themes were revisited and revised multiple times throughout the analytical and report production process.

### **Fail Again, Fail Better- Methodological Adaptation and Reflexivity**

As with many pieces of social research, challenges arose which necessitated and invited adaptations and innovations to the research process. As alluded to earlier, this piece of research was a highly labour intensive, iterative process. Key to working out many of the kinks and flaws in the research method was the operationalisation of a piece of research conducted as a ‘pilot’ and published as a stand-alone piece of research (Williams, 2019). This paper offered an opportunity to trial run the data collection and analysis processes and was beneficial in refining the approach undertaken in this thesis. For example, the paper used the Nexis database in the data collection scheme, and this

allowed for refining the process undertaken in this thesis, particularly around key word searching and effective selection of useful articles within the database search returns.

Furthermore, this piece of research was initially much larger in its scope in the initial planning process. The study in the proposal stage was originally intended to take into account a longer timeframe, use other media types (including transcribing broadcasts) and all coverage of women's sport. Clearly, this study would have been too broad in its aims to offer sufficient depth or indeed feasibility in the context of completion within a doctoral programme. The parsing out of many of these research elements allowed for a much more targeted and in-depth approach to analysis, improving the possibility for the piece to successfully achieve its focused research aims.

Finally, until the writing up stages of this study, a mixed methodological approach was used which included a content analysis of all documents within both data corpuses. This allowed for a broad level of analysis. However, the dataset and analytical outputs became unwieldy, so the quantitative elements were removed so that the research could be focussed enough to properly fulfil its aims. This meant the removal of a quantitative content analysis, which focussed on word frequencies and some elements of collocation which while interesting were predominantly contextual and their removal allowed for the qualitative element- which was the focus of the analytic chapters- to offer more depth. One of the reasons for this change in approach was the COVID-19 pandemic occurring during the writing up phase of the research. The disruption caused by this meant that certain parts of the dataset were not available to myself as they were stored at the University facility, which I was unable to access for a period of time, and so the

convergent mixed methodological approach which was planned became unusable within the context of timely completion of a doctoral thesis.

To sum up, this research seeks to examine ‘what is talked about’ when we talk about women’s sport within the context of press coverage and public policy documentation. In order to achieve this, a qualitative, Critical Discourse Analysis approach is undertaken which borrows elements from Foucauldian discourse analysis, in the spirit of the pragmatic research tradition. This is also why two theoretical frameworks are used, sometimes together and sometimes separately, in the following analysis chapters. Fundamentally, all research decisions have been taken with the fulfilment of the research aims as paramount. In the context of decisions around the choices of analytic tool and frameworks, this allows for a less dogmatic approach. What follows is the first of three analysis chapters, examining the print media corpus.

## Chapter 3- Read all about it? Print Media Analysis

I now move onto a discussion on the analysis of the print media sample. It will begin by reiterating that it is not the goal of this analysis to dictate what can be considered ‘good’ or ‘bad’ reportage, such value judgements are outside of the remit of the study. Instead, the analysis is concerned with the discursive repertoires that coverage conveys to society through the focus and language within reporting, before drawing some conclusions to any discursive similarities with government outputs in a subsequent chapter. As previously discussed, the two datasets have different writing registers and have different target audiences, but the shared discursive repertoires that may or may not be evident are critical in understanding culturally accepted conceptualisations of women’s sport and women within sport. Furthermore, the analysis will not comment on the issue of comparative amounts of articles on women’s sport and men’s sports as the sample does not include any coverage of men’s sport as a comparative point. However, contemporary research has put this at around 6% for print media coverage (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019) and 7% of all sport media coverage (Women in Sport, 2015). There will, however, be a discussion the amount of coverage given to women’s sports in gender mixed articles.

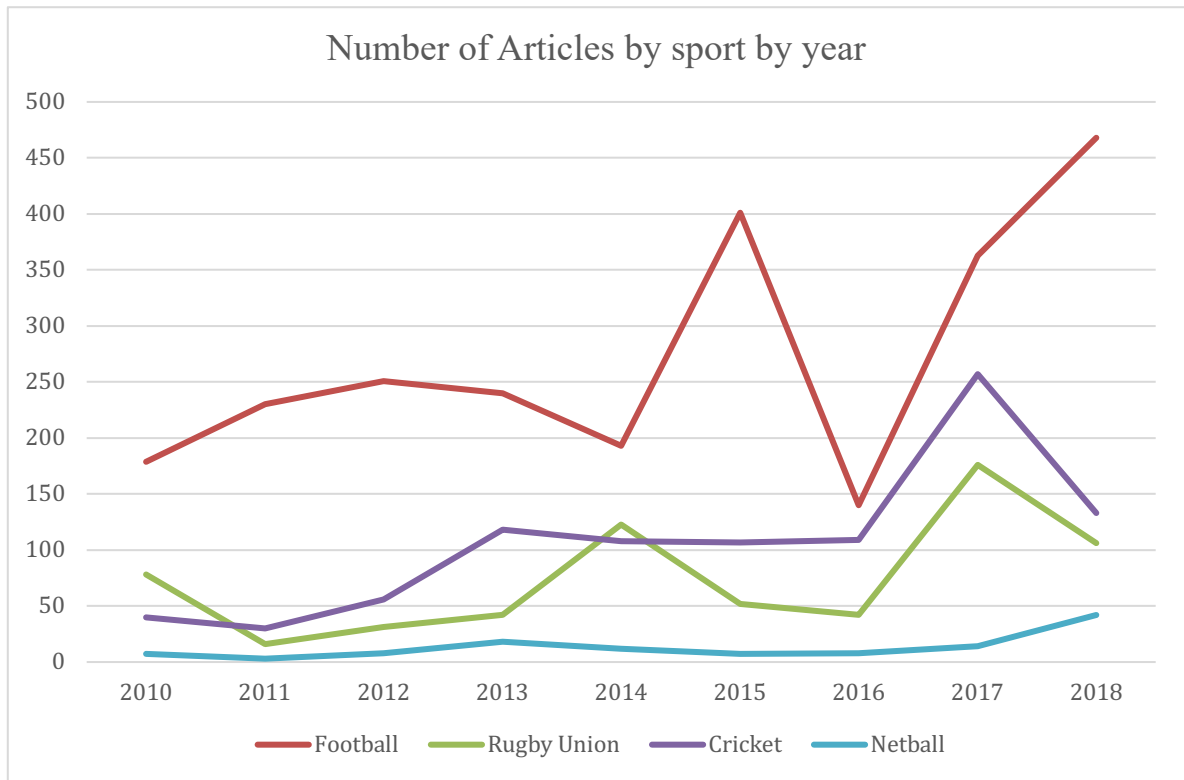
To offer some context to the analysis, in Table 7 and Figures 1 and 2, the numeric contexts of the range of coverage in the corpus can be seen. A few points are of particular note. It should also be noted that the amounts and genres of coverage shaped the selection of quotations throughout the analysis chapters, and while they will not be

perfectly representative, effort has been made to take into consideration the coverage types and relative coverage of the four sports. Crucially, throughout the analysis chapters, sections will be devoted to the individual sports in turn in order to offer a sufficient level of depth of examination.

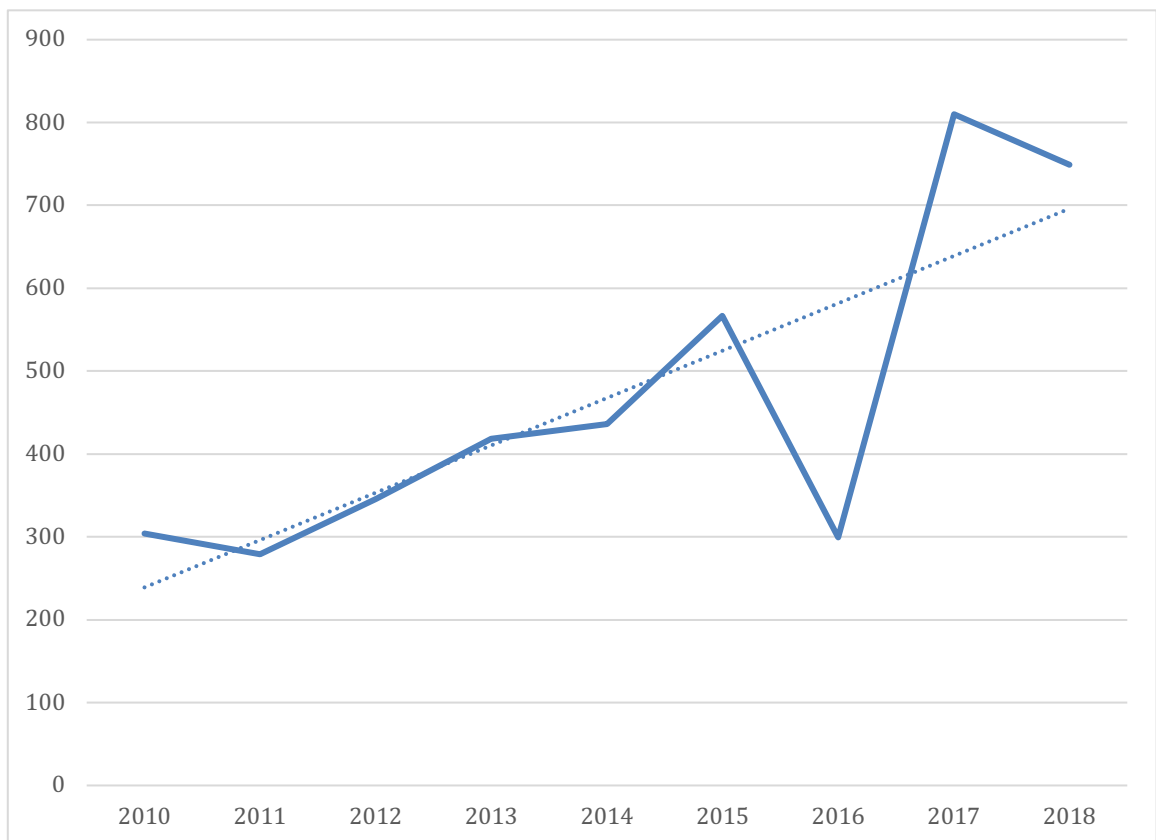
**Table 7- Breakdown of National Press Sample**

	<b>Tabloid</b>		<b>Middle Market</b>		<b>Broadsheet</b>		<b>Combined</b>	
<b>Football</b>	599	78%	507	62%	1359	52%	2465	59%
<b>Rugby Union</b>	56	7%	101	12%	509	19%	666	16%
<b>Cricket</b>	102	13%	195	24%	661	25%	958	23%
<b>Netball</b>	8	1%	21	3%	90	3%	119	3%
<b>Combined</b>	765		824		2619		4208	

In figures x and y, the number of articles for the four sports by year, and by sport are shown for reference. A few observations can be made. For example, in raw quantitative terms, all four sports had a higher level of coverage in 2018 than they did 2010. On the face of it, this could be seen as progress however this would not take into account changes in the coverage of sports as a whole, which may have accelerated beyond this pace. A deeper exploration of this is beyond the aims of this study.



**Figure 1- Number of National Press Articles by Sport and Year**



**Figure 2- Number of Total Articles by Year**

The appreciation of discourse as a mechanism of power through the formulation of knowledge and understanding is key to the strength of discursive studies of print media. The ways a subject is talked about impacts how we will talk about it, thereby shaping these accepted and acceptable understandings and conceptualisations on topics, in this case women's sport. This begets a socially formed theory of knowledge, wherein knowledge can only be gained and transmitted through social interaction (Chua, 2002; Stivers, Mondada and Steensig, 2011). However, the impacts in this case run deeper; the way we understand sport relates to a maelstrom of different understandings; of gender and gender equality, what it means to be a given nationality and understandings of 'race' and morality. A Foucauldian analysis is a useful lens for inquiry here, particularly his notions of 'parrhesia' and understanding of discourse as one tool in the establishment of 'veridictions' (Foucault, 2011), i.e., socially accepted truths based upon the subjectivities and desired shaping of truthfulness (Foucault, Davison and Burchell, 2008; Foucault, 2017). The argument holds that these veridictions play a role in the governance of the self on a broader scale than merely the individual, in this case through establishing social norms in lines with these truths. What can be seen throughout the sample is a shift away from many of the older tropes around women's sport being unimportant or an unworthy endeavour towards discourses of national importance, both to the immediate and long-term futures of their sports and beyond. This reframed representation, alongside greater amounts of coverage and the formalisation of leagues is likely to adjust the veridictions over time towards women's sport becoming more accepted and valorised within mainstream consciousness. Tied to this, modern national print media can be understood as a key institution through which

acceptable understandings and behaviours can be shaped and regulated (Louw, 2001). We have plurality of media ownership in England, however there are clear overlaps in editorial lines between many newspapers.

Sport has long been considered a useful lens for viewing many social phenomena (Ridinger and Funk, 2006), and the print media informs much of the discussions and meaning making that goes on in this area. The use of governmentality as a means for understanding how this power impacts knowledge discourses across the press and through public policy will be explored in a subsequent chapter, however for now it is useful to highlight the role of institutions outside of the state (such as the press or educational institutions) to perform ‘microphysics of power’ in establishing social norms and accepted practices (Vintges, 2012).

Overall, this chapter will argue that elite level female athletes are expected to perform many roles and inhabit multiple discursive identities. They are mothers, they are athletes, they are daughters and, if they are successful on the international stage, they are national heroes (for a period of time). This is encapsulated perfectly by the Football Association, who from the @england Twitter account, tweeted ‘Our #Lionesses go back to being mothers, partners and daughters today, but they have taken on another title – heroes’ (*Guardian*, 6 July, 2015) after the team finished third at the 2015 Women’s World Cup.<sup>40</sup> I will now offer a discussion on the key themes described above, beginning with an exploration of the importance of nationality in coverage, both in terms of which sports and teams are covered, before building into a discussion on

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<sup>40</sup> This tweet was highly controversial and led to staunch criticism. The FA later deleted the tweet.



the emerging discursive positioning of (successful) female athletes as figures of national importance. Unless stated otherwise, the selected quotations in this chapter are intended to be indicative of broader meanings generated from the sample, rather than offering an exhaustive of all relevant articles that displayed these discursive repertoires or devices.

### **En-girl-and: The Nexus of Nationality and Femininity**

International games across all four of the sampled sports received markedly different, more in depth and fulsome amount and tone of press coverage than domestic fixtures. In the context of football, this represents an inversion to men's football, whereby in-season international fixture periods are referred to in the English press as the international 'break', discursively positioning domestic men's English Premier League (EPL) action as more important than men's international level football. This is not the case around major international tournaments however, where in the period just prior to the tournament, the team are given almost frenzied coverage (Vincent *et al.*, 2010). Key to this reversal in women's football is the lack of coverage given to domestic level women's football in the sampling frame. However, there was evidence of increasing levels of coverage towards the latter stages of the sample, particularly after the establishment of the WSL.<sup>41</sup> This becomes particularly pertinent when nationally successful players (briefly) become 'national heroes', a theme discussed presently. Crucially however, there were frequent examples of Women's Super League coverage on individuals from the national teams that lacked the detail given to men's top-level football, with much coverage coming in the form of bulletins comprising of one or two

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<sup>41</sup> As a brief reminder, this study focusses on the period of 2010-2018 inclusively.

sentences attached to men's lower league football. This shows in the ephemerality and compartmentalisation of this hero status, which did not continue outside of major tournament play. This lack of in-depth coverage was a reoccurring feature throughout the sample and the positioning of women's sports as an appendix to reports on men's sports will be examined in detail later in the chapter.

There was evidence of increasing use of the word 'England' during the sampling frame and a national focus of reporting in the tabloids within the sample, where the weighted percentage increased to 1.44%.<sup>42</sup> Previous scholarship has found tabloids have a greater propensity to focus on notions of English identity and nationalistic sentiments (Garland and Rowe, 1999), however it is important to consider this reportage in the social and political context. The referendum on membership of the European Union in 2016 (colloquially known as Brexit) had ensured that much of the public discourse explored notions of nationhood, sovereignty and the future of England and the devolved nations that make up the United Kingdom (Hazel and Renwick, 2016). The impact of an overall focus on English nationality in the sample conveys the critical importance of national team success to the on-going coverage - fulsome or otherwise - of women's sport in the English press. This was also mentioned explicitly by athletes themselves in newspaper interviews, as will be discussed more fully later in this chapter.

A clear spike can be discerned in the use of the proper noun 'England' in coverage post 2015, with England appearing an average of 3.3 times per article across the full sample pre-2016, and 4.5 times per article post 2016. There are a few factors that may have influenced this. For example, the increasing professionalisation of national

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<sup>42</sup> Figure taken from NVivo 12 software

representative teams and the various successes of the teams through the sample. Alongside the increasing professionalisation of women's sport, it could be argued that the 'Brexit' referendum itself was key in the emphasis on 'England' in the sample. The referendum was the culmination of a decade's long public negotiation of 'English' identity - and what it means to be 'British' and 'English' - and whether these identities could rightly overlap (Kumar, 2003). These notions were multiplicitous throughout the sample, mirroring much of the contested public discourse on the subject of these tensions. This was particularly evident in fixtures between the home nations, such as Scotland vs. England at Euro 2017 for example: <sup>43</sup>

*Scotland actually began brightly against England and look the type of outfit to **respond well to adversity** (Star, July 22 2017) <sup>44</sup>*

*Scotland were in optimistic mood heading into their debut on the big stage, having beaten then drawn with the **Auld Enemy** in the last two outings. (Express, July 20 2017)*

Here in both quotes Scotland was positioned as inferior as a nation, partly due to a heavy defeat on the football pitch. In the first of the two quotations, Scotland is positioned as a 'plucky underdog' who can 'respond well to adversity' (Star, 2017) after being dominated by a stronger England team. Given that sport is one of the few areas in which national identity exists in a tangible sense (Robinson, 2008), the frictions and frustrations that led to Scotland requesting and being granted a referendum on

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<sup>43</sup> This fixture took place on 19/7/2017 and the final score was a 6-0 victory for England

<sup>44</sup> Throughout the three analysis chapters, emboldening in quotations is by the author for emphasis

independence could be played out symbolically in a small way on the pitch.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the second selected quotation refers to both the newness of the Scottish team to the 'big stage' and positions Scotland as the 'Auld Enemy', which is the name given to Scotland and England by each other in the sporting rivalry. This is explored by Whigham and Gibbons (2018), who find that mass media reportage is key to the establishment and solidification of divides between these two sets of fans. This is based upon highly nationalised coverage, which exceeds the depth of feeling that either set of fans holds towards their opposite number. The coverage here is a clear example of these sentiments transposing into the women's game, positioning the players as key defenders of the honour of their respective nations.

The issue of sport and discourses around national teams touches on much of the literature exploring the relationship between a nation's history and modern conceptualisations of national identity, which have broadly accepted these as features to the building of national identity without a sufficiently deep examination. For example, Levinger and Lythle (2001) argue that:

The invocation of history lends gravity and legitimacy to the nationalist cause. Yet, from the standpoint of rhetorical strategy, references to the nation's glorious past also serve a further function that scholars have often overlooked: these mythic portrayals delineate specific sets of virtues that the nation must recapture in order to emulate its original greatness. (p.179)

We can see here that notions of glory and nationally shared sets of virtues are considered important and this will be built upon in the subsequent section, where I will

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<sup>45</sup> A referendum took place on Scottish independence on September 18<sup>th</sup> 2014. The country voted to reject independence from the United Kingdom.

explore the emerging role of women athletes as figures of national importance, most obviously through narratives around successful teams being sporting national heroes.

### **We can be Heroes (Just for One Day)- Sporting Hero(ine)ism and Ephemerality**

Throughout the sample, there was a clear negotiation and formulation of English identity and how women athletes and figures in women's sport can be included or excluded from these formulations. In many cases English national identities were bound up and represented in fairly traditional ways, mostly relying on assumed and 'threatened' (Wodak *et al.*, 2009) national characteristics such as *determination* (Vincent and Harris, 2014). This offered the largely successful national teams during the sample the opportunity to access this pantheon. It is key here to highlight the multiplicity of identities that can make up an 'English' identity (Polley in Smith and Porter, 2004), with many factors such as social class, region and gender being important factors in different formulations, conceptualisations and understandings of 'Englishness' (Kumar, 2003).

Throughout the sample, it was clear that notions of Englishness in a sporting sense are no longer simply the domain of male sporting figures, and when successful or demonstrating certain qualities such as 'a bulldog spirit' (Vincent and Harris, 2014), women too can be paragons of English virtue. This is even the case in defeat, where high effort and demonstrations of these 'threatened characteristics' (Wodak *et al.*, 2009) can make defeat acceptable (Vincent and Harris, 2014). This builds on the previously highlighted findings of Bowes and Bairner (2018), who found that there was an increasing acceptance of women in the 'sporting proxy warrior' role. In the sample,

it was also reflected that the athletes themselves have accepted this mantle. For example, England football Captain Stephanie Houghton said that:

We've just got to enjoy the moment, make sure **we wear the shirt with pride** and show what we're about (*Star*, April 4 2017)

From the above quote we can see elements of performative nationalism (Bowes and Bairner, 2018), with Houghton making reference to the importance of representing her country, embodying the success of England on the global stage in a period of contested understandings of what it means to be 'English'. This frequently invoked lexical fields of 'enduring', drawing on a historical intimation of a 'blitz spirit'. This can be understood as a key constructive strategy of creating a national identity through discourse (Wodak *et al.*, 2009), as this is a clear attempt to 'construct and to establish a certain national identity by promoting unification, identification and solidarity' (Wodak *et al.*, 2009). In this instance it is through drawing clear parallels and homogeneity of 'nationally threatened' characteristics (Wodak *et al.*, 2009). Pivotal to conceptualisations of England are the history of the British Empire and its military history and given the changing scope of global power away from 'hard' powers towards 'soft' power (Nye, 1990). Sport is a key mechanism in this process (Grix, 2014), triggering a reformulation of English identity by some of the national press which still includes some of the classical tropes of 'English characteristics' such as resilience and bravery.

England **dug in** to win (*Sunday Mirror*, April 3 2011)

ENGLAND'S **brave football Lionesses** were knocked out of Euro 2017 last night - but their run to the semi-finals was hailed as a massive boost to women's sport. (*Star*, August 4 2017)

As we can see from these above quotes, the mentality of the players was broadly praised, with notional ‘mental toughness’ and fighting spirit cementing their role as valid representatives of England. This was an important development when taken alongside frequent references to the ‘heroism’ of female athletes representing the country. This is an extension of much of the veneration of male international athletes in England and is indicative of discursive shifts relating to the role of women within English sport. This heroism was a regular feature of reportage on successful national teams:

**Her heroics** [*relating to cricketer Anya Shrubshole*] came just two days after her father Ian posted a snap of his then nine-year-old daughter gazing across Lord's in 2001 on Twitter, along with the caption: "What a place! I'd like to play here... for England... in a World Cup final." (*Star*, July 25 2017) <sup>46</sup>

Whilst the above quote refers to the role of successful female athletes as national heroes (through her performance of ‘heroics’ on the international stage), it is important to consider that the quote relates to a male figure in her father, with the apparent discursive linkage made between Shrubshole’s father’s playing career (wherein he played at Lord’s ground and took his daughter), social media activities and her success in a World Cup Final. The article continued to discursively attach the success of female athletes to men, going on to denigrate the men’s national team performance with a negative comparison to the women’s team, wherein that article labels the men’s team ‘flops’ (*Star*, July 25 2017). I will come on to explore in more depth the role given to men in the sporting achievements of women, as well as further examples of women’s sport

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<sup>46</sup> Parenthesis added by author for clarity

being positioned as superior to men's sport later in this chapter. Key for now however, is the critical importance of success in garnering coverage and positive conceptualisations of the teams, with 'valiant efforts' and 'bravery' being highly praised, even in defeat (Vincent and Harris, 2014).

The point to note here is the collective nature of this heroism, as opposed to the more individualistic coverage offered to many male national sporting 'heroes' (Giulianotti and Gerrard, 2001). This is likely to be due to these traits being considered positive parts of English national identity by the national print media (Wodak *et al.*, 2009), who in turn perpetuate this ideal through a 'constructive strategy' designed to glorify, naturalising these traits to English citizens. This 'constructive strategy' (Wodak *et al.*, 2009) is a bid to differentiate English identity from other nations. Similar strategies were found by Vincent and Harris (2014), who found that during the men's 2012 European football Championships, the national press frequently invoked narratives of 'ye olde England', a view of England grounded in its militaristic and imperial history and emphasising 'quintessential English characteristics and qualities' (p.232) such as bravery and determination. This further strengthens the assertion that female international athletes can now be considered eligible national sporting heroes, but they must be both successful and demonstrate privileged 'English' characteristics. Furthermore, the quotation draws on the role of cricketer Anya Shrubsole's family, the report praises her as a world champion, but she is still positioned as a daughter first, emphasising her femininity (Connell, 1986). This is an excellent example of the multitude of identities given to woman athletes, as even though the article this quotation appeared within was about Shrubsole's performance in a successful World Cup final, she was also positioned as both a child and a young girl in the article, again emphasising



her femininity in her representation (Connell, 1986). This was a transposition from the discussion of her elite athletic achievement, as well as her part in a national sporting accomplishment.

Importantly, the acceptance and discourse around women athletes being national heroes was ephemeral, with the vast majority of press praise being fleeting in nature before the athletes were again positioned as mothers, daughters and partners as well as elite athletes, confirming the work of Trolan who argues that this feature of coverage remains persistent (2014). This re-equilibration of framing may be indicative of a discomfort in the acceptance of women athletes as national heroes due to this being a fundamental feature in conceptualisations of masculinity (Connell, 1986, 2005). This will be discussed in depth subsequently. Crucially, any discussion on female athletes as heroes is rooted in the team as opposed to the exploits of individual players, which may well be a reason for the temporary nature of this 'heroism' as there is a lack of iconography of the ilk that key male figures are granted. There are some examples towards the end of the sample timeframe with some focus on female individuals such as footballer Lucy Bronze and Rugby Union player Margaret Alphonsi, which will later be discussed.

The discursive (re)formulation that includes women athletes as viable national heroes is indicative of a shift in discursive formation. Hall (2009) conceptualises a discursive formation as defining:

‘what is and is not appropriate in our formulation of [...] a subject, what knowledge is considered... true in that context and what sort of persons or subjects embody it's characteristics’ (p.6)

The key feature here is the shift towards allowing women elite level athletes to become acceptable embodiments of the characteristics of ‘Englishness’, as long as they are relatively successful and are *determined* in defeat. Importantly, these teams can be presented through language as national heroes who embody these nationally transcendent characteristics, therefore this meaning and common-sense understanding is produced and reproduced, with notional truths and knowledges shaped - and shaped by this - discursive formation (Foucault, 2017).

### **There’s no ‘I’ in team- Collective and Representative Heroism**

The discussion of national heroism is nearly always centred around the team as a whole rather than individual, with just one notable exception of a man within the women’s game: Mark Sampson. This frequently led into coverage focussing on the roles of the team as national *heroes*, rather than valorising individual performances within the team effort.

Yet there were no cash prizes for the **victors who will have to content themselves with the pride** at winning their first title in two decades. (*Express*, August 18 2014)

Crushed lioness earns **the pride of her nation** (*Telegraph*, July 3 2015)

Both of these quotes invoke a sense of pride, either for the nation who share in the players’ success, or for the players themselves as representatives of their national team, in lieu of actual financial reward for their successes as would be seen in men’s international Rugby Union. These two quotes show the different kinds of pride that were discussed: the pride of women athletes, and the pride of the nation that they

represent when the team were successful. This idea of generating pride and the selflessness involved are both fundamental to the positioning and framing of successful female athletes as English national heroes, due to the privileging of these traits in the discursive formation of ideational Englishness (Vincent and Harris, 2014).

Specific men within women's sport were more likely to be described as a 'hero', and this was particularly evident in the case of Mark Sampson. Sampson is the best example of this phenomenon, as prior to his leadership of the England national team, he did not have any kind of playing career or fame that could unduly impact or influence his coverage in the national press. Furthermore, Mark Sampson is Welsh and would therefore generally not be considered eligible to be an 'English national hero'. However, this did not stop some coverage depicting him as such:

For now Sampson is focused on taking the England Lionesses (below) to the finals of the 2017 European Championship, which is being held in Holland. "We need to get our heads back down for qualifying," he said. "We are excited. The intent is to go there and go one step further than the World Cup and win it. "We are willing to put the hard yards in." **Spoken like a true sporting hero** (*Mirror*, September 5 2015)

The above quotation was in an article about the *Daily Mirror's* 'Pride of Sport Awards', which aims to highlight the exploits of sporting heroes at the voluntary and participatory levels. The narrative here is that Sampson himself is an English national sporting hero, as he was chosen as a representative of the awards. His nationality was not generally considered relevant to coverage until he was embroiled in a number of scandals.

The allegations involved female players when the 34-year-old **Welshman** was manager of Bristol Academy, now renamed Bristol City Women. (*Star*, September 21 2017)

It has emerged that allegations around inappropriate relationships with female players were made against Sampson in 2014 while he was in charge at Bristol. An independent report concluded a year later that **the Welshman** posed no risk to those working in the game. (*Star*, September 21 2017)

The discussion of Sampson's nationality, which was not a feature of coverage during his successful tenure of the national team shows a clear disavowal from his role as an *English* national 'sporting hero' and becomes part of a long history of 'foreign' national team managers in England receiving unflattering coverage from the press following either failure or scandal (Vincent and Harris, 2014). In this instance, after the emergence of scandal, Sampson reverted from an *English* sporting hero back to being Welsh again. This revocation of hero status and the fragility of this framing appears to be different to the enduring standing of hero status that is granted to many figures within men's, such as former footballer Paul Gascoigne, or cricketer Andrew Flintoff who was granted a solidified status as a national icon even through personal scandal (Giulianotti and Gerrard, 2001; Malcolm, 2012). An important difference to consider however is the English nationality of some of these figures and their status as performers rather than football managers, who do not always receive favourable coverage from elements of the English press, particularly if non-English (Griggs and Gibbons, 2012).

### **'Midfield Battle'**

An important feature of the narrative around the linkages between women athletes and them being eligible and viable representatives of 'Englishness' is the frequent use of

lexical fields of violence and warfare commonly found in sports reportage. As demonstrated here:

SIOBHAN CHAMBERLAIN is ready to answer her country's semi-final **call to arms**.  
(*Star*, August 1 2017)

She claimed her third wicket in the next over before Shrubsole took her **fourth scalp** in the 37th over. (*Express*, February 6 2013)

England are certainly unfazed about the looming challenge, even if in India they are building this series up as a **battle between** the best batting line-up in the world (their own) and the **most potent bowling attack** (*Telegraph*, July 20 2011)

As we can see from all three of the above quotes, the violent imagery commonly associated with men's sports reportage, (Crolley, Hand and Jeutter, 1998) is not toned down in coverage of women's sport. This was particularly the case for the only purely non-contact sport in the sample: cricket. This quote invokes the most graphic of terminologies, that of 'taking scalps'. The phrase is generally used to refer to a defeated opponent - frequently of relative strength - and draws upon a practice of taking the scalp of a fallen opponent in battle as a trophy.

Lexical fields of violence and warfare are embedded in traditional, hegemonic forms of masculinities. Connell (1987) even traces this as a trope of traditional forms of heroism, arguing that 'it is no accident that the classic hero is usually an expert in violence' (p.393). This explicit linkage between heroism and violence does offer an explanation of sports reportage reliance on such imagery, as it is broadly concerned with building heroes and villains in order to add interest to coverage, which is even more effective when the villain is a rival nation that the country can unite 'against' in support of

English national teams (Vincent *et al.*, 2010). Connell (1987) also persuasively highlights the linkages between masculinity and violence therefore it is important to consider that this reportage has begun to transfer into the reportage of women's sports, even non-contact sports such as cricket. This may be partly due to the increasing prevalence of journalists experienced in covering men's sports beginning to cover women's sports.

Reportage of this nature lends weight to the notion that female athletes can be depicted as national heroes, but they will be expected to 'play the role' regarding how this can be bestowed, and that their status will be less enduring, partially due to the lack of long-term coverage ingraining these national icons in the public consciousness. This discursive presence within such a traditionally masculine lexical field demonstrates a shift in reportage away from these (successful) athletes being presented as frail or weak in any way and is indicative of one of the multitude of new identities that successful, elite level female athletes are now bestowed with.

Overall, throughout the sample, there was increasing evidence of female athletes being depicted as 'heroes' due to their success while representing the country in *international* tournaments. However, this did not translate to coverage while playing for their domestic teams across all of the sampled sports. This is a useful development which contrasts with the more enduring and culturally transcendent semiotics of sporting heroism (Duret and Wolff, 1994). One explanation for this 'heroic' depiction is the increasing commercialisation and marketisation of women's sport in England (Fielding-Lloyd, Woodhouse and Sequerra, 2020), mirroring the development of many men's sports. Gammon (2014) explores the commercialisation potential of 'sports

heroes’, however he acknowledges that this almost always ‘refers to the great achievements and accomplishments of men’ (p.246). This thesis, alongside other contemporary developments in the field demonstrates that it is not only men that can be represented as sporting heroes, but there is also a role for (successful) women at this pantheon.

Critical to the analysis of the focus on nation in the sample is the interplay between the overlapping discourses around gender, sport and nationality. The key consideration relevant to this sample is the plurality and frictions between notional ‘English’ and ‘British’ identities and how they manifest themselves in the English reportage on English international athletes. Perhaps the pivotal contextual consideration here, as already alluded to, is the fluidity and complex dynamics of and between these understandings of national identity, with the European Union and Scottish Independence referenda both taking place within the time period of this study. The Scottish referendum particularly highlighted the fractious relationship between national identities within the devolved nations and their relationship to a common identity (or lack thereof) within the United Kingdom. Perhaps crucially, sport is one of the few areas in which a tangible notion of nationality can be played out (Robinson, 2008), with Hobsbawm (1990) asserting that ‘the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people’ (p.143). This builds on the notion of nations as ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 2006), and the use of sport as a framework of understanding these negotiations of national identity is particularly useful here. What was evident is that the role of women as a ‘useful’ member of a nation has evolved beyond a simply reproductive and nurturing role to now include roles as embodiments of modern English identity, offering examples of more nuanced and multi-dimensional

visions of femininity than had been available historically, shifting away from narratives overly emphasising femininity as the core component of a female athlete, which would more traditionally be saved for male athletes (Connell, 2005). This parallels the findings of Bowes and Bairner (2018), who assert that ‘those who represent the nation, and who are the embodiments, heroes and proxy warriors of England, need not always be men’ (p.15). This study builds upon their work on the way that international athletes perceive their own place within an ‘English’ identity, finding that this is no longer merely a self-designated or performative role, and is now bestowed on them by external institutions such as the national press.

Clearly, national identity is important to the coverage of women’s sport, however this is likely to be for a plethora of reasons. For example, it seems plausible that this kind of narrative is employed in order to legitimise the women’s game as a viable site of national contestation, and therefore their successes are the successes of England more broadly, in line with the reportage of men’s sport. This argument would be strengthened in the consideration of the lexical fields of warfare that are regularly employed within sport (Garland and Rowe, 1999), however it is entirely possible that this discursive shift is much more to do with the state of flux that English identities were undergoing at the time, as a culmination of the Euroscepticism that has long been borne out in the national press (Garland and Rowe, 1999). However, the focus on national teams is intriguing, as many of the reports were included in an initial report on men’s sport, where the performance of the women’s national team was added almost as an appendix onto the end of the report.



## Ladies Last- Women's Sports and Bulletins

Throughout the sample, much of the coverage of cricket was placed onto the end of an article about the performance of the men's national cricket team. As these two examples of 'additions' show:

England women's disappointment at surrendering the World Cup was eased a little in India as captain Charlotte Edwards hit an unbeaten 106 as they chased down New Zealand's total of 220. (*Express*, February 16 2013)

England's women kept alive their slim hopes of reaching the final of the World Cup when they trounced South Africa in Cuttack yesterday by seven wickets. But England are still behind New Zealand and West Indies on net run rate. Charlotte Edwards's side need to beat New Zealand in Mumbai on Wednesday and rely on a complicated sequence of results amongst their rivals. (*Express*, February 11 2013)

Both of the above quotations were taken from articles that focussed heavily on the fate of the men's national cricket team, before providing a bulletin like update on the women's teams which were touring at the same time. Both quotations constitute the entirety of the coverage of the women's game in the article. In the two articles quoted above, the coverage of the men's team dominated with 87% of the wordcount, whereas the coverage of the women's success averaged at 13% of the word count of the articles. The success of the teams was not a factor in coverage, as both men's and women's teams had been dominant against strong opposition. Ultimately, this phenomenon could convey a range of potential meanings and may have begun due to an attempt to increase the frequency of coverage of women's cricket. Given that the two teams tour many nations at the same time, this was one method of increasing this visibility. However, there is a fundamental gap between not only the volume of coverage given to women's cricket in these articles, but the detail therein, which could be argued to constitute a

‘symbolic annihilation’ (Tuchman, 2000). There was however some evidence of this becoming less prevalent post-2015, particularly in the broadsheets, where full articles were offered reporting exclusively on the women’s national team. Similar reports on domestic level women’s cricket competitions were less frequent however.

This phenomenon extended beyond cricket, with football also offering a prime example of this mechanism of ‘appendix’ coverage. For example, in the coverage of the FIFA awards ceremony - where the best players and coaches in the world are honoured - the vast majority of coverage was given to men’s football, even when English players and coaches were in contention for, and won, top awards:

REAL MADRID and Croatia midfielder Luka Modric was last night named FIFA player of the year at an awards ceremony in London. Modric picked up the men's award to cap a superb 12 months in which he played an integral role in Real's third straight Champions League win before leading Croatia to a first World Cup final. He said: "It is a great honour and a beautiful feeling to stand here with this amazing trophy. I would just like to mention my idol and former 1998 Croatia captain [Zvonimir Boban]. He was my big inspiration and that team gave us belief we could create something in Russia." Liverpool star Mo Salah's strike in last season's Merseyside derby against Everton at Anfield won him the Puskas Award for goal of the season. The Egyptian's effort, for which he span past two players before Trophy curling a shot into the far corner, gained 38 per cent of the more than 500,000 votes cast. **Brazil forward Marta was named women's player of the year.** (*Express*, September 25 2018)

N'GOLO KANTE was last night named the Professional Footballers' Association Player of the Year. The midfielder is on course for a double with Premier League leaders Chelsea after helping them reach the FA Cup Final, beating Tottenham 4-2 on Saturday. The French star (right), who was instrumental in helping Leicester win a miracle Premier League title last season, held off Harry Kane, Romelu Lukaku, Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Alexis Sanchez to win the award. Tottenham and England midfielder Dele Alli, 21, picked up the young player prize for the second successive season.

**Manchester City's Lucy Bronze was named women's player of the year for the second time.** (*Star*, April 24 2017)

As can be seen here, a full write up of the success of the men's winners was offered, without a reciprocal detail of coverage of the women's winners. In some instances, the women's winners were also compared to key figures within the men's game, which can be seen as embedding the normalisation of men within sport and the associated taken-for-granted conceptualisations of gender roles within football. In the second example, although England's Lucy Bronze was the winner of the best player award, the nationality of the winner did not warrant extended coverage in the same way that coverage of a male (foreign) star did. To this end, it can be argued that even a 'national hero' (in the wake of an exceptional personal World Cup campaign), was not as important as a key male figure in men's football. This serves to highlight the ephemeral nature of national heroism with female athletes in England, evidenced in this case by both the positioning and lack of detail of the success of the female athletes in question. This form of coverage was not evident within either the Rugby Union or the Netball samples; wherein Rugby Union coverage was gender divided and netball did not have a men's alternative to be 'appended' to.

Related to this less prestigious placement of coverage, the coverage of women athletes as nationally important figures did not carry over into the reportage on domestic leagues or lead to a meaningful rise in the volume of coverage given to these leagues across all sports. This was particularly the case in the case of the Rugby Union in the wake of the establishment of the Premier 15s league. There was clear sympathy with the economic imbalance within the RFU and English Rugby Union more broadly, with much of the coverage of the women's game being couched against the backdrop of the RFU's

decision (which was reversed) to move funding away from Women's 15s to Rugby Sevens. This led to threats of industrial action from players, and under considerable public pressure the RFU introduced full time central contracts, in line with many other English national teams whose international players have central contracts. This case did however highlight an increased interest and discussion in the growth of women's sport both in terms of performance and economics:

ENGLAND women, who play the first of three Tests against Canada tomorrow, **will earn match fees for the first time this autumn**. Red Rose players who feature in every match and squad session will be paid about £5,000. (*Express*, November 16 2017)

England's women rugby players will be **offered the chance to turn professional** for the first time next month. The RFU will issue 20 central contracts to form a fully professional England women's sevens squad for the forthcoming season, building up to the short-format discipline's Olympic debut at Rio 2016. (*Guardian*, August 26 2014)

**Now this England squad will splinter**. The Rugby Football Union are switching their emphasis, and professional deals, to sevens, meaning half the squad will **return to sporting amateurism** by the end of the week. (*Mail*, August 28 2017)

We can see here a range of different approaches by newspapers to coverage of similar issues. The second quotation chose to frame the lack of central contracts as a change of opportunity for women athletes, rather than highlighting the lack of access that key (male) leadership figures had offered to women pursuing a professional career within Rugby Union in the same way that men had since 1995. As highlighted in Chapter 2, Rugby Union has a short history of professionalisation, with the men's game only becoming fully professional at the top level in 1995. The third quotation focuses more on the negative impacts of the RFU strategy around only offering professional contracts

to female players in the Sevens programme, arguing that the successful national team will now ‘splinter’ due to the strategic decisions and access to professional contracts that the shift of players to Rugby Sevens (which had just been announced as an Olympic sport) signifies. Clearly, the use of ‘splinter’ to mark the splitting up of a successful team displays a negative view on this economic reality, without the article delving into this in any meaningful detail.

In tabloid coverage another formulation of this kind of coverage was offered, wherein coverage of (predominantly domestic league) women’s football was frequently located within short form bulletins of one or two sentences, alongside lower-level men’s football, transfer news and non-league updates. As demonstrated by this example:

MANCHESTER CITY’S FA Cup replay against Huddersfield has been rescheduled for next Wednesday and will be on BBC One.

BRISTOL CITY goal machine Tammy Abraham has been ruled out for up to three weeks with a thigh injury.

MILLWALL captain Tony Craig has triggered a 12-month contract extension to keep him at The Den until June 2018.

FORMER Chelsea star Alexei Smertin is the Russian Football Union’s new antiracism and discrimination inspector.

**ENGLAND women boss Mark Sampson has recalled former captain Casey Stoney and goalkeeper Karen Bardsley in his 23-strong squad for next month’s She Believes Cup, a round-robin tournament with France, Germany and hosts the USA. (Star, February 22 2017)**

This form of coverage demonstrates a move beyond ‘ghettoisation’ (Dworkin and Messner, 2002) of coverage, as now women’s football can be seen alongside men’s coverage. This was a pivot away from the general lack of coverage seen earlier in the sampling frame, particularly for domestic fixtures. While this seems a positive shift,

the gulf of detail and description in much of this reportage may well be read by the audience as communicating a lower level of importance and excitement. The appearance of women's football news alongside non-elite level men's football may well signify that in the eyes of editorial staff, women's sport does not warrant more fulsome coverage, or is of a lower standard than men's football, therefore discursively diminishing professional women's football and thereby cementing common sense notions around women's football (Foucault, 1990, 2017). This study does not explore the dynamics of media production so cannot draw solid conclusions as to how this process works in practice, however it is worth bearing in mind the strong interest in non-league football in England, with many smaller publications and local coverage devoted to the subject.

There were examples of some WSL coverage appearing alongside men's Premier League match reports, however again there was a disparity in terms of the word counts of these articles. While placing this coverage alongside articles on a popular topic seems like it would draw more attention to the WSL than would perhaps be attracted without the presence of men's coverage, this method inexorably ties women's football and men's football together. This arguably diminishes the status of women's football by positioning it as inferior to men's football when it would perhaps be beneficial to allow women's sports to be covered independent of men's coverage (Williams, 2019). However, this is not necessarily the case for every sport, and for example would not be applicable in the case of one of the other sports in the sample: netball.

This symbiotic reportage also extended into discussions on historical elements of sport. For example, there were cases of the synthesis of a shared history of women and men's

teams across the sample, with previous achievements in these instances being gender neutral. This is in keeping with the previously discussed shifts in the tone of coverage. However, it is entirely possible that this has occurred more due to the relative lack of success that the men's national football team had experienced in recent history, which was frequently referred to throughout the sample:<sup>47</sup>

*(England striker Jodie Taylor was)*<sup>48</sup> One of only **three English footballers** to have scored a hat-trick in a major tournament, alongside Gary Lineker and Geoff Hurst (*Star*, August 3 2017).

Never before have the **England men's and women's sides** simultaneously held the Ashes. The closest they came was in the Thirties, when the England men won the Bodyline series in 1932-33 and the women won in Australia in 1934-35. But, by the time the women started their tour, the men had already ceded the Ashes on home soil. (*Mail on Sunday*, December 26 2010)

The notion of *shared* histories is an important development. On the one hand, this may signal a more egalitarian approach to reportage, giving women (international) athletes the same esteem as their male counterparts or alternatively offering a contextualisation of female players to an audience that would otherwise have no point of reference for the skillsets of players. However, it also positions women's sport against men's sport, tying and comparing the two together rather than allowing them to be discrete entities. This secondary reading becomes contextually stronger when we consider the previous discussion around the instances in which women's sporting success was deemed

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<sup>47</sup> This may change moving forward after the Men's team run to the semi-final of the Russia World Cup in 2018, however this this cannot draw any conclusions to this as the tournament happened late in the sampling frame.

<sup>48</sup> Authors addition for context

superior to men's. This was generally done to poke fun at the lack of successes of male teams, rather than authentic praise for women athletes or their teams. One area in which this shared esteem was not expressed was when leadership within sport was discussed. This was seen throughout the sample, but was most obvious in the footballing sample. To unpack this trend in more detail, a case study on the reportage of football manager Mark Sampson during the 2017 European Championships is particularly useful.

### **'Man Management'**

Central to the reportage of the women's national football team was the pivotal role of Mark Sampson, the head coach. Sampson was referred to by name more frequently (n=1161, weighted percentage= 0.10%) than any player or any other coach and any other player from any of the sampled sports. It is not uncommon for football reporting to focus on head coaches, however the positioning of Sampson as a masculine presence leading *his* team is important. Sampson cut a controversial figure throughout his tenure, engaging in press conference disputes with opposing managers, most notably both Spain and France's head coaches at the 2017 European Championships. This explains some of the attention paid to him. Sampson - and his decisions - were frequently described as a catalyst for the team's success. For example:

Sampson **lifted the shackles** and later got rid of senior players who he felt were too individual for **his team** (*Times*, 1 August 2017).

Here, Sampson is given the central role in the recent success of the team, mirroring closely the nature of coverage of reportage on the men's English Premier League, wherein managers and head coaches are frequently characterized as the catalyst to a



team's success or failure. This is unsurprising given that the journalist involved here generally covers the men's game. In this instance however, Sampson was also suggested to have been pivotal in persuading the governing body to invest in high quality facilities for the team during the 2017 European Championships, rather than this being the responsibility of a governing body attempting to maximise the chances of success for a representative team at an international tournament:

A disciple of the "devil in the detail" school of coaching, the former semi-professional defender has **persuaded the FA** to fund the installation of **a costly gym** at England's Utrecht base as well as the **expensive rental** of a restorative cryotherapy chamber. (*Guardian*, July 31 2017)

This positioning of *man as gatekeeper* to opportunity within sport extended outside of the elite level to the grassroots level, with some articles focusing on the role of formative (male) figures that granted access to the game. This reporting cements the role of male figures as gatekeepers of sport, re-embedding the established gender order within the footballing discursive space (Connell, 1986) while simultaneously serving to support this as a common sense understanding within the social space (Foucault, 1990). Black and Fielding-Lloyd (2017) explore this 'outsidering' of the women's national team at the 2015 World Cup, finding that 'the success of the women's team was frequently attributed to the tactical and managerial abilities of specific 'men'' (p. 8). This has also been found within this study, with the impact being that the privileged status of men within sport has remained discursively intact and rarely questioned. There have been alternative accounts on this area of coverage that argued for less of a male-centric reportage (Petty and Pope, 2019), however the privileged status of male leadership within sport was a consistent feature of coverage in this sample. For

example:

BOSS Mark Sampson wants **his** England women's football team to prove their worth ahead of Euro 2017. (*Star*, July 1 2017)

Current England head coach Mark Sampson, who oversaw **his team** finishing third at the 2015 World Cup in Canada, also welcomed the new plans. (*Guardian*, March 13 2017)

As can be seen, the emphasis of all of the above quotes is on the leadership role of Mark Sampson. This in itself is not gendered and a focus on managers in men's Premier League particularly is prevalent in reportage. However, there are crucial differences in the way that Sampson was presented against press coverage of the England men's national football team, Gareth Southgate, who was broadly reported on as a facilitator rather than key driver of the men's national team's progression to the semi-final of the 2018 men's World Cup (Clavane and Long, 2020). Key to this difference is the representation of Sampson as 'the boss' (*Star*, July 1, 2017), frequently emphasising the decisions that Sampson made in ensuring the success of the team, rather than the quality of the team itself. A key feature of this is in the consistent use of the possessive 'his', which again privileges the position of specific men within women's sport (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017). This is not to suggest that terms such as 'her team' are not used in the cases of female managers, however it was clear that possessives were used less when it came to domestic female football managers, most notably Chelsea manager Emma Hayes, who was mentioned 123 times, for a weighted percentage of 0.01%. Hayes was far less frequently framed as the reason for her team's success, partially due to the less detailed, shorter coverage that was given to domestic football throughout the sample.

One explanation for a focus on Sampson's leadership was the increase in journalists who generally cover men's football covering women's major tournaments, which do not coincide with their male counterparts. The emphasis on leadership was especially stark in reportage around former England football manager Sampson, where his decision-making and motivational skills were also occasionally contrasted against the previous incumbent Hope Powell. This is another frequent fixture of men's football press coverage.

The players have responded, trusting him and adapting well to the different demands placed on them game by game to create a more flexible team framework than was the case with Sampson's **predecessor Hope Powell**. (*Express*, June 29 2015)

If Sampson, who choreographed England to third place in the World Cup in Canada in 2015, can conjure two more victories, **his Lionesses** will become the first senior England football team to win a major tournament since Ramsey's World Cup class of 1966. (*Guardian*, July 31 2017)

Here, Sampson is assigned the key role in the improvement of the team's performances rather than other contextual factors such as professionalisation and increased funding availability, for which Sampson was given partial credit in the article (*Guardian*, July 31, 2017). This was a consistent narrative and is evidenced in the fact that Sampson was named more than any other manager/coach and any individual athlete.<sup>49</sup> His successor, Phillip Neville also received a high level of coverage, even though he was only in his post for a small fraction of the sampling frame.<sup>50</sup> There are many potential reasons for this, such as the increased interest in the success of the women's national

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<sup>49</sup> These figures were gained from the word frequency analysis of the NVivo 12 computer program.

<sup>50</sup> Neville was appointed to the role of Head Coach in January 2018

football team, his successful footballing career as a player and the controversy attached to his appointment. Importantly, it was clear in the case of Sampson that the team was always *his*; therefore, all successes therein were due to his leadership. Again, the role of leadership as a focus of reportage is not an uncommon phenomenon in men's football and may reflect the increase in men's football journalists writing about the women's team, however the coverage of Sampson as the key reason for the success of the team was profoundly different from coverage that could be seen for England men's manager Gareth Southgate at a major tournament and high-profile Chelsea FC Women's manager Emma Hayes. In the case of Hayes, articles would occasionally refer to Chelsea as 'her' team but would generally not offer comment as to the quality of her management being a reason for her team's successes. As we can see from this short case study, the role of men within sports leadership is still largely unquestioned, in this instance through coverage which privileges the role of Sampson as a coach and as an individual over the success of the team, arguing that the success is causally linked to his decision making and skillset rather than focussing on the quality of the team.

These features from the specific example of Sampson occurred within a broader reportage that focussed on the key role of men within women's sport, with much of this focussing on narratives of strength and discipline from certain male leaders. Similar narratives were not seen in the limited examples where the qualities of female coaches were discussed, particularly in the case of aforementioned Chelsea manager Emma Hayes, who is arguably the most high-profile WSL manager. However, this should be considered against a backdrop of few women in these leadership positions in coaching and in governing bodies (Burton, 2015), although there were some examples of women as leaders outside of formal coaching positions. For example, captains and key players

were perhaps inevitably invoked as leaders within their group. This was not a frequent occurrence and happened nearly exclusively in the rugby union and cricket samples. Rugby Union and cricket were anomalous, in that individual female captains are given credence, perhaps due to the crucial role of captaincy in both of those sports in their rule sets and the ways that they are played. For example, in cricket the team captain is important tactically, so more emphasis is given to England women's cricket captain than the head coach, who is important but will not likely hold as much influence as the team captain within game. The captaincy was occasionally emphasised:

England skipper Heather Knight, who has recovered from a stress fracture in her left foot, is **backing her side** to add to their successes in 1973, 1993 and 2009. (*Star*, June 24 2017)

England, who have already beaten Scotland and Italy, have left **talismanic** flanker Maggie Alphonsi on the bench following an injury that ruled her out of the opening two games. (*Telegraph*, February 25 2012)

The second of these examples highlights the crucial role that Maggie Alphonsi plays for the England women's rugby team. Here she is depicted as a 'talisman'. Alphonsi is regularly referred to by her nickname 'The Machine'. This is fairly common praise within sporting vernacular and is usually reserved for those who demonstrate feats of extraordinary physical prowess. Alphonsi was the focus of the vast majority of individualised coverage in rugby union due to her world-class ability, which was legitimised by her male counterparts:

Alphonsi, 27, has had her accolades, too, from supposed male bastions, the Rugby Writers' Club bestowing its prestigious Pat Marshall Award on her in January, **the first time in 50 years it has been won by a woman**. (*Telegraph*, December 11 2011)

This legitimisation of a female athlete by her male peers is important to evaluate and can be read in multiple ways. On the one hand, it could be understood as privileging the role of men to ‘accept’ world class women within their sporting space, which in the context of Rugby Union has long been considered hyper-masculinised (Kirk, 2000; Pringle, 2001). There are acknowledgements of this from decision makers and policy writers within the game as I will explore in the subsequent chapter. On the other hand, it could be argued that top level female performance is now garnering greater respect from their male peers, who are then being supportive by nominating a woman for a historically male dominated award. There were also examples of male players praising Alphonsi’s game specifically which would add greater weight to this reading, with some evidence later in the sample - particularly in the broadsheets - wherein praise for women’s Rugby Union and the skillsets and tactics involved were commended.

There were instances of disparities between the lexical fields employed in headlines versus the content of the articles that they are attached to. The following two headlines being apt examples:

Outrage as top **girl** footballer asked to twerk (*Express*, December 5 2018)

FA’S £40,000 TO **GIRL** STRIKER BULLIED OUT OF ENGLAND SQUAD (*Mail*, August 6 2017)

As we can see here, the headlines here draw on infantilisation, referring to the athletes as ‘girls’. However, this was not a feature of the article and it is possible to argue that the term ‘girl’ is not always pejorative or problematic as it is frequently used by athletes to refer to teammates. Crucial instead, is who is using the infantilising term and it is useful to consider the distinction between the use of ‘girl’ in coverage from player

quotes and the use of ‘girl’ from media producers. Women were given a more nuanced positioning than had been argued in the early debates in the field, with some being presented as ambassadors and leaders for their own sport and women’s sports holistically.

### **Follow the Leader- Women Representing Women’s Sport**

The presentation of men as authentic figures within sport can be considered against the representation of top-level female athletes’ role as *sporting emissaries*; talented and appointed people on a ‘diplomatic mission’ to represent and benefit women’s sport holistically. This is perhaps to be expected of key athletes in what can easily be considered a breakthrough time for English women’s sport. However, this framing marks a shift from previous findings around the coverage of women’s sport wherein it was ignored or considered unimportant (Bruce, 2016). A case study of the women’s national football team at the 2017 European Championships is an apt means to demonstrate this before broadening the discussion to the other sampled sports. This case study will build on previous research by the author (Williams, 2019) however it should be reiterated that while this case will look at the same timeframe, the methodology and research approach is different than the author’s previous study.

The women’s national football team are a strong example of the *sporting emissaries* phenomenon in action, as they had enjoyed a period of relative success in international competition and were becoming increasingly well known. I will come on to argue that this coverage is an extension of some of the stereotypically held representations of ‘caring’ responsibilities for women in English society.

The 2017 European Championships took place in the Netherlands between the 16<sup>th</sup> of July and the 6<sup>th</sup> of August. England performed well at the tournament, reaching the semi-final stage of the tournament before being defeated 3-0 by eventual winners The Netherlands. The team built on their burgeoning public popularity, drawing the biggest UK viewing audience for a women's football match in their semi-final defeat.

Throughout the tournament, there appeared to be an implied need for the team to justify FA investment for not only their team, but for women's football holistically. The broadsheets in particular focused on the amounts of funding that had been recently given to women's football:

Were his jibes provoked by the pressure of feeling that he needed to win a trophy to help justify the **FA's substantial investment** in women's football – (at £17.7m this year it is, by some distance, **the highest in Europe**) (*Guardian*, 4 August 2017).

The Football Association has poured considerable **effort, enterprise and cash** into women's football in England over the past few years. Its £17.7m annual spend on the sport is Europe's highest and **a trophy would represent a tangible justification** of such investment (*Guardian*, 31 July, 2017).

There appears to be some expectation that increased funding translates automatically into success, and that this would justify this investment by the governing body, who in 2017/2018 had invested £128m to football holistically from a turnover of £376m.<sup>51</sup> A discussion on the success as a correlation to funding is unusual in English football as it

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<sup>51</sup> Figures ascertained from the Football Association 2017/2018 financial results



exists outside of the auspices of UK Sports funding model. The impact of this focus of reporting is that the economics of the game become increasingly prevalent, again taking away from the athletic performance of the team, parsing any success of the team down to superior opportunity and funding compared to their counterparts. This fundamentally ignores any historical context to the governance of English women's football and the lack of interest that could previously be seen by the governing body. A more economic focus to reportage more closely mirrors reporting in the men's club game, which frequently emphasises the economics due to the commodification of top-level men's football in England. In both of the instances highlighted above, articles were written by journalists who primarily cover men's football, so it is perhaps unsurprising that their women's coverage takes a similar tone.

Building on this expectation of achievement due to governing body funding, there was a prevailing narrative that the success of the team influenced the future accomplishments in the sport at both elite and participatory levels:

ENGLAND manager Mark Sampson wants his players to make history and **change the next 50 years' of women's football** when they kick off their European Championship campaign tonight (*Mail*, 19 July 2017).

Success is important to sustain women's football, already the fourth-largest team sport in England - measured by **participation** – after men's football, rugby and cricket. **Winning can only encourage more girls and women to start playing** (*Guardian*, 2 August 2017).

But their progress means women's football is the winner, with new figures revealing a **surge in the number of girls and young women taking up the sport** (*Star* 4 August 2017).

There is limited evidence that there is a strong relationship between success at major events and long-term take up of sports (Bosscher, Sotiriadou and van Bottenburg, 2013). However, this is not an uncommon position for sports bodies to take, as it was a key underpinning of the ambitious London 2012 Olympic Legacy as explored in Chapter Two. This expectation transcended football with many articles linking success to the promotion of women's sport holistically. For example, the *Guardian* argued that 'it has already been a ground-breaking summer for women's sport' (3 August 2017). That figures from other sports - particularly cricket after their success at the World Cup - were frequently invoked portrays women's sport as one homogenous entity rather than individual sports in their own right, as can generally be seen in men's sport. There are certainly instances where men's sports are discussed together, specifically around Olympiads where different disciplines within swimming or rowing are grouped together, however in those instances, the term 'men's' would be unlikely to be a prefix and is a less frequent and obvious occurrence than could be seen in the case of 'women's sport' being grouped amorously.

The emphasis on female athletes being ambassadors for sport has evolved from the notion of female athletes being 'women first' and can be seen as confirming Bruce's findings over the portrayal of female athletes as 'model citizens' (Bruce, 2016). Previously, female athletes would be portrayed in traditionally feminine roles as mothers, wives or daughters (Connell, 1986; Cooky, Messner and Hextrum, 2013) and there was still evidence of this in the analysed sample. However, these roles appear to have shifted towards that of women as envoys for women's sport. This new representation coalesced with notions of success to honour previous players and key figures in the history of women's sport, with one article stating: 'Scott feels she and her

team-mates are endeavouring to lift the trophy not just for themselves but for those pioneering international predecessors who helped pave the pathway towards these moments in the Netherlands sun' (*Guardian*, July 31 2017). In the context of English women's football, it is unsurprising that there is reference to these trailblazers, again demonstrating the prevalence of the establishment and reestablishment of the *history* of English women's football.

From this short case study certain responsibilities to the national football team were evident. Firstly, the team were described as being required to justify the funding that their governing body had put into not just elite women's football, but also the participatory elements of the sport. This allied with the previously discussed responsibility given to team manager Mark Sampson in ascertaining funding for high quality provision for the team places an expectation of success on the team against less well funded counterparts.

Their success was not only required to justify funding, but also to improve the future health of women's football as a sport, with assertions drawn around the relationship between elite level success and future participation at grassroots level. Finally, some of the coverage displayed the team as nationally important representatives - even in defeat - as they were praised for common sense (Foucault, 1990) and aspirational notions of English identity through discourses of valour and 'grit'. This aptly demonstrates the overlapping and multiplicitous nature of representation in reportage, through the range of identities that are bestowed upon the national team during a major tournament and beyond.

Another element of reportage in the analysed sample was wherein women's sport is framed positively against men's sport. This was not limited to women's football however, with frequent refrains around the success of women's sports teams being important for the current and future health of not just their sports, but women's sports holistically. This was sometimes couched as 'ground-breaking' for women's sport:

Sarah Taylor, the England wicketkeeper, has revealed that she is in talks to play men's second XI county cricket this summer in what would be a **ground-breaking move for women's sport.** (*Guardian*, January 13 2013)

ENGLAND triumphed in the Women's World Cup at Lord's last weekend. A great achievement and one which will **do much for women's sport across the board.** (*Express*, July 29 2017)

Here, we can see two examples from cricket which show this discursive formation operating in two different ways, on the plane of the individual and of the collective. In the first quotation, the opportunity for an (outstanding) woman to be considered good enough to play with professional men is considered to be a ground-breaking moment for women's sport, with her incursion into the men's game signalling an important moment for the legitimacy of women's sport as a serious endeavour. In the second quotation, the success of the team on the world stage was of benefit to women's sport. This is an important distinction to draw, in the presentation of female athletes as *sporting emissaries*, this can be in the realm of the individual or the collective, whereas the earlier discussion on sporting heroism was clear that this was broadly a team endeavour, with little demarcation for individuals within the 'heroic' discursive repertoire.

None of this is to suggest however that figures from within women's sport were not accepting of the mantle of being an ambassador or emissary for women's sport. Multiple quotations from athletes across many sports showed an acceptance of this responsibility:

SKIPPER Charlotte Edwards hopes her England team can **follow in the footsteps of football's Lionesses** as they seek a hat-trick of Ashes crowns. Edwards (above) is confident of retaining the multi-format prize, played over three one-dayers, one Test and three T20s. "Every ball is live on TV, and we want to use the feel-good factor around women's sport," she said. (*Mirror*, July 7 2015)

Lincoln Ladies defender Stoney, who has won 103 England caps, hopes a good Team GB showing will **inspire a new generation** of women to take up the game (*Express*, July 25 2012)

The outcome was not what England's full-back wanted, nor the colour of the medal, but the legacy of a riotous contest of 11 tries may **be significant for the sport in this country** and beyond. "Our goal coming here was to pick up that big trophy and have a gold medal around our necks. It is absolutely gutting that we didn't and it is going to take a long time to get over it **but the other part of our job is to inspire people into the game**," said Scarratt. "Rugby has given me an unbelievable amount over the years and if other **young girls can gain the same confidence and friends by playing** then that is part of our job as well" (*Express*, August 28 2017)

It may well be that this emotionally wrought triumph will provide a truer legacy than any number of supposed Olympic ones. "**All the little girls at home watching, I want them to be inspired by this**," Housby said. "We didn't have this success to look up to when we were growing up, so hopefully it's a catalyst for big things to come". (*Times*, April 16 2018)

Here we can see the persistence of the responsibility for inspiration, particularly of the ‘next generation’, across all four of the sampled sports, throughout the sampling timeframe, and in multiple newspaper categories. The near ubiquity of this sense of responsibility is not necessarily gendered, with male sports figures also frequently considered ‘role models’, even if there was evidence of opinion pieces in the sample railing against this (*Telegraph*, May 29 2015). The discursive positioning of the *sporting emissary* and apparent internalisation of these expectations given that these were repeated by the athletes being interviewed can be read using Connell’s emphasised femininity (Connell, 1987). The repeated choice of the term ‘inspire’ rather than more traditionally masculinised and more assertive terms such as ‘motivating’ or ‘leading’ can be read as a more passive, non-challenging act (Connell, 1987), particularly given the key role of sport in cementing and configuring gender order in society (Connell, 1987, p.84). These emissary expectations will be analysed using Foucault’s governmentality in the subsequent chapter, as expectations around the need for elite athletes to inspire the next generation were also cemented through governmental and governing body policy documentation, in line with the ‘truths’ and desired behaviours of these institutions (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991; Foucault, 2017). Overall, it was clear that there were discursive repertoires related to elite athletes’ *responsibilities*, not just for the future of their own sport, but in some cases for women’s sport as a homogenous entity. This places the athletes in an exalted and important position. In keeping with, but distinct from, this was an increasing prevalence of female athletes - and women’s sport - to be presented as *better* than men’s sport.

## ‘Girls on Top’

There were examples of reportage - predominantly in tabloid coverage earlier in the sampling frame - wherein women’s sport was positioned as both more successful and more Corinthian and purer of spirit than men’s sport.<sup>52</sup> However, this positioning was frequently invoked to diminish the performance of the men’s national teams in the tabloids:

ENGLAND'S cricketers had another lesson yesterday - from their **female counterparts**. (*Star*, January 30 2014)

Commiserations to the Lionesses. **England's women footballers certainly showed the fellas a thing or two**. Not literally, you understand, but in a manner of speaking. The ladies' **grit and resolve** got them to the semi-finals of their World Cup, something the men haven't achieved for a quarter-century. (*Mirror*, July 3 2015)

As we can see, the success of the national women’s cricket and football teams was juxtaposed and framed against the lack of success of their male counterparts, with the comedic mechanism of female excellence actually serving to embed masculine dominance within the sporting space. This draws on notions of inherent gendered abilities within sport (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017), clearly drawing on tropes of seemingly naturalised differences of sporting ability. This discursive repertoire which unquestioningly privileges men’s sport solidifies the reified position of masculinity within English sport (Foucault, 1990). This narrative further embeds the subordinate position of women within sport, with one example from early in the sample timeframe being particularly useful in depicting this:

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<sup>52</sup> Corinthianism is a moral ideal of sport which dates back to the Victorian era. It is grounded in the rejection of professionalism and instead centred around playing for love of the game (Allen, 2013).

THEY'RE the **sexy** England stars ready to take the football world by storm. **And they're women.** After being let down too often by the game's **overpaid male players**, the Daily Star met the ladies who have the talent to bring home the World Cup this summer. (*Star*, April 12 2011)

This quotation is a useful nexus for demonstrating the nuanced and complex nature of the praise for female athletes being positioned against their apparently underperforming male counterparts. Firstly, the article opens up with the description of the team as 'sexy', immediately positioning the team as (heterosexual) sex objects, in this instance diminishing them to the role of sex object rather than athletes. Secondly, the article 'reveals the twist' that the team they are discussing are women, placing the existence of a women's national team as transgressive to the settled gender order and norms of football. Then, the team is presented as a form of antidote to the lack of success of the men's team, implicitly arguing that this team is only worth attention due to the men's lack of recent success. This may be different moving forward both due to the women's teams' successes alongside and men's national football team reaching the men's World Cup semi-final in 2018 and European Championship final in 2021. The team's sporting prowess is then mentioned; however this occurs after they have been presented as objects for sexual gratification and a last resort for English men's national football team fans to be 'proud' of a national team. This would be an unlikely narrative to appear in more recent coverage. As previously mentioned, there have been shifts in the seriousness with which women's sports are considered across all of the newspaper categories during the sample timeframe. In some cases, women's sport - *particularly football* - is shown to be better than men's sport due to a notional traditional 'Corinthian spirit' of fair play and playing for love of the game rather than economic gain. Such



narratives were particularly evident in tabloid and middle market newspapers, which would usually also invoke negative representations of the ethics of men's sports:

MALE footballers take 30 seconds longer to get up from an injury than **women players because they are more likely to be acting**. (*Star*, July 1 2011)

Captain Faye White says: "Our attitude is entirely different to the men's. We're in it for the **love of the game**, not the high salaries (*Star*, April 12 2011)

Whilst our **over-paid, pampered Premier League stars** are frequently slated for diving and rolling around as if they're dying, 26-year-old Chelsea Ladies player Claire **believes the women's game is "more honest"**. (*Mirror*, July 1 2015)

The **fundamental honesty** of women's football - no spitting, no biting, no ganging up on referees, no rolling around feigning injury - will be a blessed relief to those repulsed by Premier League carnivores, thespians and lynch mobs (*Mirror*, March 25 2015)

Fewer Ferraris, more Fiat Puntos - **women players don't earn silly money**. England's are on FA contracts, which were recently raised to £20,000 a year. (*Star*, July 10 2013)

All of these quotations clearly highlight the expectation that women's football is a more ethical alternative to men's football, with the economic and playing behaviours therein often described by the national press in pejorative terms. In the example from the *Mirror*, it is clear that the 'fundamental honesty of women's football' is a key part of the appeal, however there were also some examples across the sample of the increased skill level of women being a reason for superiority, generally couched against common sense notions of physical inferiority:

Forget the sniffy notion that women's rugby is played by **feminists and watched by fetishists**. The kicking out of hand **might be shaky**, the **power of the boot not as omnipotent** when it comes to slotting over penalties, but that all lends itself to a **more fluent** game with fewer stoppages. (*Mail*, September 6 2010)

Here, we can see that the focus of praise is on the mental and tactical abilities of the England Rugby Union team, rather than their physical prowess, as demonstrated by the taken for granted assumption that the ‘power of the boot’ was lessened. This is a marked change from reportage of men’s sport in England, in which physical capability is privileged and glorified around notions of musculature and associated masculinities (Crolley, Hand and Jeutter, 2000). This also demonstrates a shift in the tone around the reporting of female athletes, who have previously been represented as lacking the right mentality (Barnett 2013; Quayle *et al.* 2019). Some coverage emphasised cognitive qualities over athleticism, in the inverse to what can be seen in coverage of men’s sport. This could be read as detracting from the mental acuties of male athletes. To this end, the focus on the mental abilities of the team frames them as less athletic, particularly when women’s sport is compared negatively against men’s football due to assumptions of biological inferiority, cementing discursive repertoires around women’s athleticism (Foucault, 1990). While there were some positive reflections on the physicality of the England team, these were internalised within women’s sport (outside of special cases such as the previously discussed England Rugby captain Maggie Alphonsi). Rather than rejecting the physicality of the athletes, a more nuanced approach to ‘outsidering’ takes place, cementing the superior status of men’s sport. This generally was most evident in articles that ostensibly praised the skill level of players, but this was couched against the lack of physical prowess of the athletes, outside of one or two exceptions (such as Alphonsi, as highlighted above). Black and Fielding-Lloyd (2017) argue that the reportage of women’s football has sought to cement *difference* between the men’s and women’s games through the use of biological inferences. They go on to argue this is key to the continued ‘outsidering’ of the women’s game. I would echo this, arguing

that the privileging of (masculine) embodiments and physicality is prevalent in reportage not just of football as they focused on, but in Rugby Union also.

The emphasis on mental characteristics was also evident in depictions of national identity. As has been previously highlighted in this chapter, stereotypically 'English characteristics' such as determination and 'grit' were real focuses of the coverage of the national teams. This emphasis on the mentality and notions of shared personality traits is a crucial mechanism in the representation of female international athletes as bastions of Englishness, even if this coverage is short-lived.

Furthermore, there were occasional direct comparisons to counterparts in the male equivalents of the sampled sports, but again this was most prominent in football, with some examples in Rugby Union. These comparisons were not only made by journalists - in order to frame and contextualise the achievements of the players - but also by (predominantly male) figures within the women's game; most notably in England women's football manager Mark Sampson's comparison between Fran Kirby and men's football star Lionel Messi, leading to Kirby being referred to by some in the game as 'mini Messi':

Danielle Waterman and Emily Scarratt **scored tries in the final that Jason Robinson and Jeremy Guscott** would have been proud of. (*Telegraph*, December 27 2014)

FRANCESCA KIRBY, 24, Club: Chelsea Hailed a "**mini Messi**" by England manager Mark Sampson thanks to her scoring ability (*Star*, August 3 2017)

Of all the players in the World Cup, it is Brazilian striker Marta who will excite the viewers. She is a fantastically quick and skilful player. She is **equivalent of Lionel Messi** in the men's game. (*Star*, June 25 2011)

In two of the above examples, Messi is used as a comparison due to Kirby and Marta's technical skills. While this is a flattering example due to Messi's status within men's football, the need for comparison between men's and women's football, in this instance to contextualise the skills of Marta and Kirby could be deemed to embed the subordinate role of women's football, through shaping what can be deemed acceptable or truthful to say or think about these female footballers (Foucault, 1990). Male players are here still being held as the socially accepted and understood norm. In the first example, it is a leading male within the women's game that bestows this praise, legitimising the skill of a female player by framing this against the skill of a leading men's figure. The argument can be made that comparisons to figures within men's sports can be useful to contextualise the skillsets of female athletes to an audience that may not be familiar with them, however again this again places male sporting figures as the gold standard further strengthening assertions that it is men that legitimise women's space within sport as a male dominated domain.

It is key here to explore the nature of gender markers and gender marking within sports reportage. As previously highlighted in Chapter One, this is understood as an asymmetric distinction between (men's) sport and women's sport. Categorical differences - such as by sex or weight - are crucial to the organisation of many sports, however these have not always been evenly or skilfully applied (as discussed in Chapter One). There has previously been a wealth of scholarship that has problematised gender marking in reportage (Segrave, McDowell and King in Fuller, 2006; Mackay and

Dallaire, 2009; Fink, 2015; Ravel and Gareau, 2016), broadly finding that the asymmetry of gender marking serves to 'other' women's sport by discursively placing men's sport as the norm.

Throughout the sample, there were examples of gender marking, however many of these were located in the headline of the article, with fewer examples thereafter being in the body of text itself. While this may be read as a shift due to the lack of constant emphasis on the identity of these sportswomen as women, the marking of all athletes by sex is not necessarily a problem as long as it is evenly applied across both men's and women's sports. There was no evidence of this in articles where both men's and women's sport were discussed simultaneously. The one sport where this did not apply was netball, where there is no equivalent men's national team or domestic semi-professional league. Indeed, there were examples where the notion of men playing netball was belittled:

Women's rugby used to be **taken about as seriously as men's netball**. Anyone still of that view should tune in to tomorrow's game. (*Mirror*, September 4 2010)

Clearly, this quote mocks the idea of men playing netball as an object of fun, while simultaneously using this to praise developments within Rugby Union and this discursively embeds netball as a space where this sport can be understood as a site of emphasised femininity (Connell, 1986), effectively socially excluding men from participation for fear of being read as feminine by other men (Connell, 2005). Having this counterpoint to the other sports offers a useful opportunity for some comparative analysis, as prior research in this area has generally not considered the possibility that gender marking can be exclusionary to men in sport due to the overwhelming body of

evidence that analysing women in sport afforded. Importantly however, netball was generally not treated as a serious elite level endeavour by much of the analysed reportage. Also, the use of mockery, puns and humour are considered part of tabloid vernacular, and this may well be responsible for the narrative in the quotation.

### **Sports Stars and Heavenly Bodies - Sexualisation and Athleticism**

There were some examples of coverage across all newspaper formats in the early parts of the sample timeframe that overtly sexualised female athletes, predominantly by highlighting aspects of their appearance that bear no relation to their sporting performance. As is demonstrated in these examples:

Tamara Taylor 28 Second row Darlington

**One of our relatively few blonde forwards** compared to the other teams, she is a brilliant lineout jumper and fine all-round player. (*Guardian*, September 4 2010)

A **willowy brunette**, Casey is more guarded than her shorter, more vivacious blonde partner. (*Mail on Sunday*, September 21 2014)

**Dashing blonde** winger Megan Rapinoe. (*Telegraph*, August 7 2012)

**BEAUTIES WHO BENT IT BEFORE BECKHAM** (*Mail*, August 23 2013)

However, there was a clear reduction in these types of coverage over the course of the sample timeframe. In the final 3 years particularly (2015- 2018), there were very few examples of this angle of approach to coverage in the wake of various national team successes in all of the sampled sports. In fact, the only examples post-2016 of these in the sample were not found in the traditional sports section, and instead appeared in the betting pages of the sports section in tabloids. In keeping with the style of these

sections, coverage was pun heavy throughout the full sample and showed little by way of shifts in the tone of coverage from older tropes, being generally demeaning to the concept of women's sport as a serious and legitimate endeavour. This was communicated through coverage such as this from early in the sample:

Our girls are praying their opponents don't do the Haka before the game, although that fearsome-looking war dance tends to lose its intimidatory powers when **performed around handbags**. (*Mirror*, July 1 2011)

Furthermore, the majority of examples of sexualising and inferiorising women athletes that occurred were also contained within the betting pages. It is important to consider that for practical reasons, as discussed in Chapter Two, this analysis does not include investigation of the images that accompany articles, an acknowledged limitation of the study. Thus, while coverage generally moved away from overt sexualisation - mirroring much of the recent work in the field (Bruce, 2016) - it is possible that the printed coverage was not mirrored by the images that accompany articles, which the journalists writing the articles would be unlikely to have jurisdiction over.

These findings further many of the recent works in the field, most pertinently Bruce's (2016) work on the new 'rules' of covering women's sports. She argues that while there are some persistent examples of the sexualisation of female athletes, more modern coverage focuses on the 'pretty and powerful' narrative. This is made possible by an acceptance that the (physically gifted) bodies of athletes carry a certain level of sexual and commercial capital, which given the exposure granted by increasing coverage has given a progressively larger platform for the athletes to leverage, offering a counter point or subversion to traditional representations and understanding of femininity and

gender roles (Connell, 1986). This embracing of the duality of physicality and femininity marks a real shift in the conceptualisation of such images as empowering as opposed to demeaning their athleticism.

Women's clubs are **marketing geniuses**. In 2011, Russia's FC Rossiyanka announced they would play their next match in bikinis to boost attendance. "Our players are **beautiful**," boasted their coach. "They're great athletes and **determined to win**." (*Star*, July 10 2013)

Now the women are **getting more beautiful**, putting on make-up. They go in the field in an elegant manner," he said. "Women's football used to copy men's football. Even the jersey model, it was more masculine. We used to dress the girls as boys. So the team lacked a spirit of **elegance, femininity**. Now the shorts are a bit shorter, the hair styles are more done up. It's **not a woman dressed as a man** (*Guardian*, June 16 2015)

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In the first quotation we can see that female athletes occupy multiple discursive spaces. Firstly, they are positioned as sex objects through the phrase 'our players are beautiful', however this appears alongside a discussion of their ingenuity of marketing their team through their physical appearance. This demonstrates a real shift in coverage away from overt, one-dimensional sexualisation which detracts from discussion of sporting achievement towards a more multifaceted approach to reportage, advancing Bruce's (2016) 'pretty and powerful' narrative. Bruce's (2016) 'pretty and powerful' narrative is grounded in a third wave feminist approach, giving more focus to how the individual athlete, or small groups of athletes, leverage their gender capital in order to best 'play the game' of patriarchy and capitalism to their personal advantage, in this instance through the generation of commercial interest in their fixtures. An important distinction

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<sup>53</sup> The quotations were provided by Marco Aurelio Cunha the then head of co-ordination for women's football in Brazil.



to be drawn in this instance however, is that the athletes are not participating in photo-shoots or social media releases in the same way that Bruce describes, and in this instance the narrative is furthered by reportage that the athletes themselves do not control. This externalises this process and moves away from the ‘pretty and powerful’ narrative being purely an act of self-empowerment. This may well be a function of the key role that social media accounts of star athletes play in the coverage they receive from the press, as a 24-hour sports news cycle and consumer demand for greater access to the lives of athletes intersect (Cable and Mottershead, 2018).

In the sample, athletes who were *mothers* were not sexualised in the same way as their child-free counterparts, and instead reportage extolled the virtues of them as excellent parents and upstanding members of society (Bruce, 2016), rather than discussing them simply as athletes. This is perhaps indicative of the nexus of the relatively new reality of reporting on elite level female athletes, and the position of motherhood in English society.

Midfielder Katie Chapman, 33 Caps 89 Club Chelsea Ladies **Mum of three** is studying to be a beautician. Famously trained until two weeks before the **birth of her children** and resumed six weeks after. (*Mirror*, June 29 2015)

Here, we see the emphasis of coverage is in Chapman’s motherhood and the notable achievement discussed is related to her lack of maternity leave and her training in the traditionally feminine field of beauty rather than discussing any feature of her achievements within the game (which at the time included winning 89 international caps).<sup>54</sup> This quotation also neatly sums up many other persistent features of coverage;

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<sup>54</sup> This was the same amount that male star Michael Owen retired with.

a focus on factors such as other employment roles that many of the football players had, and their education. In the example of motherhood, it is clear that elite athletes who are also mothers occupy - and are bestowed with - multiple identities; they are female athletes, they are daughters, they are wives, and they are mothers. There is a fairly limited amount of research in the area of elite athletes and motherhood (Pedersen, 2001; Palmer and Leberman, 2009; McGannon *et al.*, 2012), however this multiplicitous depiction of female athletes further evidences a focus on the overall lives of female athletes, and the pressures they face in their private lives being attached to their sporting careers. While this is becoming increasingly the case for (certain) male athletes, the discussion of their parental status is often secondary to 'WAG discourse' (Vincent *et al.*, 2011), which would focus more on the behaviour of their partners at major sporting tournaments, most clearly in the case of men's football.

A further feature of coverage of non-married female athletes was in the linkages to their romantic partners. This was particularly evident in the case of the England national football team, with frequent reportage on romantic links with male football figures being discussed in the build-up to major tournaments. In many cases this was part of team profiles prior to major tournaments, whereas little coverage was given to the achievements and sporting resumes of the team. The focus instead was on features such as the education of the players, their other ('real life') jobs, and their family and personal lives.

Arguably the most high-profile player. Scored three goals for Team GB at the 2012 Olympics and was the first female player to appear on the cover of Shoot magazine. Guilty pleasures are watching reality TV. **Her partner Stephen Darby** plays football for Bolton Wanderers. (*Star*, August 3 2017)

**A law graduate from Brunel University**, Eniola has a professional career beyond football but is keen to continue playing as a semi-pro and help England to reach the 2015 World Cup finals in Canada after their poor showing at Euro 2013, following which the national coach Hope Powell was dismissed. (*Telegraph*, September 23 2013)

As well as a round-the-clock welfare team, the squad can also make use of an education unit. **Many players gave up university plans to make it here** so this lets them study anything from Spanish to cookery (*Mirror*, June 3 2015)

The **(extremely articulate) former Loughborough University Economics graduate**, and Deutsche Bank analyst knows they are not yet even in the same financial universe as the men. (*Mirror*, July 1 2015)

As we can see from these examples - all taken from the same 'getting to know the team' profile types which did not always appear in the dedicated sports section of the newspapers- much of the coverage focuses on extracurricular, non-sporting information. These quotes also serve to show the multifaceted coverage that female athletes receive, as they are shown to be national ambassadors, daughters, mothers and wives just as much - and sometimes more - than they are athletes. This frames the athletes as more holistic entities than can sometimes be seen of male athletes, in which a male athlete's sporting prowess is the overwhelming focus of coverage, with very infrequent mentions of their familial lives or parental status outside of some superstars, particularly those with famous significant others which are highlighted in 'WAG' media parlances (Domeneghetti, 2019).<sup>55</sup> The outcome of this is that female athletes are discursively framed as good citizens as well as good athletes (Bruce, 2016), feeding into previously discussed notions of women's sport as a more Corinthian engagement. This is a divergence from the way that many high-profile men are treated, a

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<sup>55</sup> WAG stands for wives and girlfriends and is commonly used to refer to the partners of male national team footballers. The term became particularly prevalent in the wake of the 2006 men's football World Cup (Bullen, 2014)

phenomenon captured by Tiger Woods and his assertion in a prominent Nike advertising campaign (in the wake of high-profile scandal in his personal life) that ‘winning takes care of everything’ (Lee and Kwak, 2017). Fundamentally, it is not enough for female athletes to be successful; they must do it in a fashion befitting their multiplicitous depictions.

Furthermore, in the last quotation, the education and intelligence of England footballer Claire Rafferty is emphasised, with specific mention given to her being ‘extremely articulate’. The highlighting of the education level of athletes was a key feature of many of the ‘getting to know the team’ articles, which can be read polysemically. On one hand, the emphasis on educational attainment may be giving emphasis to the roundedness of athletes, who in women’s sports generally have a very different path of progression through their sports than men’s football, with fewer pathways in fewer sports culminating in professional sport as a viable career. Alternatively, the emphasis on education (frequently discussed alongside the alternative employment of the athletes when they are not competing) may well be best understood as an effort to refocus attention on the aspects of their lives that are not relevant to their elite level sporting success in order to ‘*re-round*’ the athletes as ‘model citizens’ (Bruce, 2016), educated and integrated in society as a new iteration of the accessible ‘girl next door’ female athlete. This reading is congruous with the previous discussion around the emphasis on the extra-curricular aspects of female athletes’ lives, which as I will come on to argue is a feature of ‘normalising’ women who exist within - and are transgressive to - a traditionally masculine domain.

## ***History?***

Crucial throughout the sample was the linkage between a certain reading of English sociocultural history, and formulations and understandings of modern English national identity. This discussion begins with the ways that reportage established and re-established history, building on the authors work (Williams, 2019). The ways in which these are communicated in this sample were more nuanced and complex than my original premise, as the original debate focussed around coverage in one major tournament rather than the more longitudinal approach this doctoral-length study takes. It is to this that I now turn.

## **Writing History**

A prevailing theme of coverage was that of sporting *history*. This occurred in two forms, the establishment and re-establishment of the history of English women's sport and emerging narratives around the shared history of the various women's and men's national teams. This was not the case for netball and was particularly prevalent in the cases of both cricket and football. The 'establishment' refers to the making of new history by players and teams, whereas the 're-establishment' focuses on discussing previous historical events and achievements in order to offer background information. Firstly, due to the successes of many of the teams during the sample timeframe, there was plentiful discussion around the making of history across all of the sports:

Jodie Taylor became the **first player in 20 years** to hit a hat-trick in the Women's Euro finals as England ran riot (*Star*, 20 July 2017).

The ex-England captain, 36, debuted in 1996 and **made more international appearances than any female cricketer on the planet.** (*Star*, May 16 2016)

England, who **lifted the World Cup in 1994 but have lost the past three finals to New Zealand**, were determined not to let another opportunity go begging and were deserving winners at the Stade Jean Bouin (*Express*, August 18 2014) (Rugby Union)

England beat Australia 41-40 in a thrilling opening match of three. It was **the first time** they have tasted success over their rivals for 29 years and only their third win in 53 meetings. (*Sunday Times*, February 21 2010) (Netball)

In keeping with the overall focus on narratives of the team rather than the individual, discussion of solo achievements tended to focus on record numbers of international caps rather than discussing record scores. In the case of the second quotation referring to cricketer Charlotte Edwards, at the time of her international retirement she had also been ICC women's cricketer of the year, was twice ECB cricketer of the year and had also been one of Wisden's cricketers of the year in 2014. Furthermore, the article made no mention of Edwards' record as the first cricketer to pass 2,500 runs in Twenty20 international fixtures, instead focussing on her role in 'taking women's cricket to the next level' (*Star*, May 16 2016).<sup>56</sup> Again, this focus on her role in being a formative figure for women's cricket is an example of a leading female figure being depicted as an 'ambassador' for the game, whereby their selflessness is a privileged trait rather than reportage focussing on any individual records which would position the individual athlete as elite in their own right.

This coverage of 'making history' took place against a metanarrative of growth, which frequently extended beyond performance into discussions around the new economics

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<sup>56</sup> Twenty20 is a format of cricket established formally at professional level in 2003. It is a shortened version of cricket, with each team having one inning of twenty overs to bat.

of the sports in the sample, some of which were undergoing the relatively early stages of a professionalisation processes.

Higher figures for the women's game is a trend echoed across the continent, with TV viewing figures for the Women's European Championship **up by 34%**, according to organisers UEFA (*Guardian*, August 3 2017).

England's triumph (Netball)<sup>57</sup> was not just a seminal victory but a seismic moment for a sport which is seeing an **unprecedented boom** at grassroots level. (*Express*, April 18 2018)

The narratives that emerge here regularly centre on the growth of the women's game as a commercial entity, in terms of both participation and increasing skill levels of the performers. Crucial here is the focus given in the second quotation not only to the historical importance of the Commonwealth final victory, but the impact that this will have on the future participation rates of netball. Again, this feeds into the overall narrative around the expectation of the success and conduct of female athletes as ambassadors and 'model citizens' (Bruce, 2016) who represent their sport and are responsible for its future. What's more, the article focuses on the participatory levels of netball rather than the success having a tangible impact on the future of the sport at a performance level. This speaks to a broad narrative around netball - more than the other sampled sports - focused on it as a participation level sport rather than being a serious, competitive endeavour. This was not solely a feature of media discourse, as I will come onto in the next chapter.

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<sup>57</sup> Authors addition for context

Clearly, the fact that the relationship between elite level success and the health of the grassroots levels of the sport are so intrinsically linked adds weight to the depiction of these athletes as emissaries for their sport, while simultaneously speaking to assertions around the need for women's teams to be successful for both coverage and validation (Adams *et al.*, 2014). This was succinctly captured in an interview with one football player, Lucy Bronze:

The Manchester City ace, 25, said the successes of other women, such as the World Cup-winning **England cricket team**, provided 'huge motivation for us to keep that going because we've had to work really hard to get this sort of positive coverage' (*Star*, 4 August, 2017).

This quotation succinctly draws on multiple issues within reportage. Firstly, it is clear that there is an appreciation that the women's football team has had to be consistently successful in order to garner the same prestige and weight of coverage that is given to men's national teams. Secondly, it is clear from this quotation that players are conscious of the success of other women's teams, which cements notions of women's sport being considered one homogenous entity due to the lack of interest in individual women's sports as discrete entities. That this has also been internalised by athletes demonstrates the ubiquity and pervasiveness of these views in the world around them and speaks to the power of 'culture setting' and accepted - and *acceptable* - methods of understanding issues (Foucault, 1988, 1990; Hall, 2006).

Tied to this establishment of sporting history was the reestablishment of the history of women's sport, primarily in an English context. Some of this focused on the ban that



the Football Association had implemented on women's football being played at member club's grounds between 1921 and 1971, and the performances of the women's national team in previous tournaments. This establishment of history was also communicated through the emergence of key historical female figures within the women's game being used as figures of authority, where previously these have been exclusively male figures (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017). While the establishment of the history of women's sport may seem a step towards the legitimisation of women's sport, this narrative continues to frame women's football as the 'other' to men's sport, showing the utility of previous research in the area to different sports (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017).

The establishment and reestablishment of history, while seen across all of the sports in the sample, seemed particularly important in the coverage of football and rugby union, rather than cricket and netball. A number of explanations could account for this. Firstly, the importance of sociocultural history is pivotal to conceptualisations of the men's equivalent of both of these sports, due to the importance of place particularly in the early organisations, formations and formulations of both games. This reporting disposition may therefore be a mirroring of the coverage given to the men's games in both sports as a result of the aforementioned men's football writers covering the women's game. Alternatively, the establishment of a history of women's sports may be a move to legitimise the sports in the eyes of readers by dispelling notions that women's sport is a 'new' phenomenon. This therefore provides a starting point that the narratives of 'growth' can begin from. Netball received very little attention regarding the history of the game, with coverage instead choosing to focus on the aforementioned narratives of growth, both economically and in terms of participation rates. It must also be

considered however, that governing bodies also engendered discussions of their sport's history, for example the naming of cricket tournaments by the English Cricket Board after former England players Baroness Rachael Heyhoe Flint and Charlotte Edwards.

This discussion has built upon and advances much of the literature discussing the relationship between a nation's history and modern conceptualisations of national identity, which have broadly accepted these as features to the building of national identity. For example, Levinger and Lythle (2001) argue that:

The invocation of history lends gravity and legitimacy to the nationalist cause. Yet, from the standpoint of rhetorical strategy, references to the nation's glorious past also serve a further function that scholars have often overlooked: these mythic portrayals delineate specific sets of virtues that the nation must recapture in order to emulate its original greatness. (p.179)

We can see here that notions of glory and nationally shared sets of virtues are considered crucial, building on the previous argument in this chapter around the emerging role of women athletes as figures of describable national importance, most obviously through narratives around successful teams being sporting national heroes. This can also be observed through the linkages between national sporting history and national heroism, which has salience given that sport is one of the few arenas in which 'nation' tangibly exists (Robinson, 2008).

## **Conclusions**

To sum up, this chapter argues that women athletes occupy many discursive spaces and are adorned with many different identities. They are daughters, they are mothers, they

are athletes, and they are national heroes. They occupy multiple discursive spaces, are composed of multiple social identities (Hall and King, 2005) and many of these identities are lived simultaneously depending on their success and failure on the field of play. Undercutting all of this though, is their 'acceptable' femininity and expectations around their conduct. Part of this is a normalising of their abilities and achievements, generally achieved through discussion of their personal, family and educational lives outside of their sports, reducing female sports stars from the superhuman to the human. This seems to be the outcome of some dissonance around women's sports coverage. A key discursive difference between women's and men's sports seems to be that women's teams must be successful in order to warrant coverage. Upon achieving this success, the teams can then be given the coverage outlined above, but they must continue to be (relatively) successful in order to remain in the public eye; they are not simply given that space. This is aptly demonstrated by the ephemeral nature of this heroism and this interest, particularly given the different economic realities of many of these central contracts highlighted in coverage.

Firstly, the chapter addressed the nexus of nationality and femininity, discussing the burgeoning presentation of elite female athletes as national heroes. This was broadly an accolade reserved for teams who had been relatively successful in international competition, while presenting 'traditionally English' traits such as determination, even in defeat, offering a new application for interventions in the field such as that of Vincent and Harris (2014), which focussed on coverage of men's sport. Importantly, the national hero status was usually reserved for teams rather than individuals. Furthermore, depictions of heroism were an ephemeral experience for these teams,

demonstrating that there is a long way to go before top-level women's teams can consider themselves sewn into the tapestry of English popular sporting history.

Another overarching argument of the chapter was around the liminality of women's sport in sports coverage, aptly demonstrated by the bulletin style of coverage that the women's national cricket team particularly was afforded, wherein their fixtures were reported on in much less detail at the end of coverage of the men's national outfit. This does however lead to the simultaneous consideration of both men's and women's sport. This may speak to the green shoots of greater legitimacy being leant to women's sport, particularly in cases when the histories of women's and men's national teams were discussed as one entity, building on the work of Williams (2019). This was occasionally used to highlight the lack of success of the men's national teams; however, this does present an important discursive positioning in coverage and warrants more longitudinal examination, particularly in the wake of the men's football team in successive major tournaments.

The chapter then moved on to a related discussion encapsulated as the relative positioning's of men and women within sport. Men were emphasised as the rightful gatekeepers and leaders of sport, through emphasis on coverage of head coaches facilitating the success of women's teams through their tactical or leadership abilities, or the role of pastoral men such as teachers or familial figures who allowed women athletes to participate when children. This finding concurs with similar findings in contemporary research (Black and Fielding Lloyd, 2017). Elements of this coverage were not necessarily gendered and more closely mirrored the tone of coverage seen in domestic men's sports, particularly in the case of football. This may be due to the

prevalence of journalists who predominantly write about men's football crossing over to the women's game, particularly around major tournaments and future research should explore this.

This relatively subordinate positioning transposed against the coverage of elite level female athletes, who were shown to be emissaries of women's sport holistically. This positioning was solidified through articles which frequently referred to women's sport as one homogenous entity, with examples drawing on the success of the national cricket team at the World Cup as a factor in the progression through the tournament of the national football team. This can be understood as a furthering of traditional gendered representations of care in society and builds on the recent intervention of Bruce (2016) on the media representations of elite level women athletes, as well as offering a contemporary utilisation of Connell's theory of gender relations.

Furthermore, in some coverage, women's sport was shown to be superior to men's sport. This was partially due to the lack of success of men's national football team to that point and may be subject to change moving forward, however some of the coverage was about women's football specifically being less commercially driven and more Corinthian in spirit, with the relevant expectations around fair play and accessibility of athletes framing this. This links to coverage which *re-rounds* and normalises elite female athletes, generally with discourses of domesticity, reconfiguring their achievements as one facet of a multidimensional life. There are many potential readings for this that extend beyond the realm of sports towards representations of successful women in industry, and a greater potential in the social media age for sports stars to be accessible (Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b).

Finally, the chapter concludes by looking at the increasing discussion around history in coverage of women's sport, looks at the writing or making of history as well as the establishment of historical narratives to contextualise women's sport in the modern day. The discursive formations apparent in the above discussion draw clear linkages to structures of power and language, for example in the case of embodiment and the discussion around the physical abilities of female athletes. Coverage which offers a lack of discussion in these areas gives rise to naturalised notions of biological inferiority (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017), discursively positioning women's sport as weaker or 'other'. Some of these key themes are replicated in public policy and I now turn to the second analysis chapter, which centres around the public policy document corpus.

## Chapter 4- National Figures, Narratives of Growth and New Agendas- Policy Corpus Analysis

The timeframe for this study captures a tumultuous time for the wider English political space, as well as sports policy. The Coalition government announced further austerity measures in the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review, bringing cuts to public sector spending and a withdrawal of involvement in provision, with government instead seeking to create a 'Big Society' to provide this provision at a grassroots level (Taking Part Big Society Report, HM Government, 2011). Budget cuts to the welfare state and local government impacted many areas of public life, however sport found itself in an unusual position due to the upcoming London Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012. On the one hand, austerity measures ensured a reduction in traditionally local provision of physical activity facilities, particularly given the policy narratives described in Chapter Two which emphasised the shift away from local councils needing to offer provision. However, funding for elite level sport and other Olympic-related interests was available, with £9bn going directly to the costs of hosting the Olympiad (British Broadcasting Company, 2013).

As with the hosting of many mega events, substantial public investment had been committed to, for example, sporting infrastructure being built specifically for the Games. Crucially, the Olympiad was also given as a suitable reason for a regeneration project around East London. In May 2010, Prime Minister, David Cameron gave a clarion call, stating *"let's make sure the Olympics legacy lifts East London from being one of the poorest parts of the country to one that shares fully in the capital's growth and prosperity"* (Plans for the Legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games,

Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2010, p.11). This was a key element to an ambitious set of aims for the Olympic Legacy, with targets around long term job creation and improved infrastructure in the relevant boroughs. In a 2015 HM Government and Mayor of London report, *Inspired by 2012: The Legacy from the Olympic and Paralympic Games— Third Annual Report Summer 2015* it was projected that:

‘Olympicopolis will deliver 3,000 jobs, 1.5 million additional visitors and £2.8 billion of “economic value to Stratford and the surrounding area”. (p.42)

These are ambitious aims, and it remains to be seen whether or not the Olympic Legacy will be fulfilled by the target year of 2022, with broad disparities on the evidence for this depending upon the metric chosen (Henry, 2016). Further aims targeted increasing participation by one million by 2013 (Bullough, 2012), and government made clear this was the responsibility of sports governing bodies, who were expected to align their strategies with government or risk receiving less public funding. This was highlighted by Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Helen Grant, who, in a written statement, argued that:

I am committed to ensuring that Sport England’s investment of over £1 billion into improving grass-roots sport delivers real results. I have recently spoken to underperforming sports and Sport England will focus on programmes specifically targeted at what women, disabled people, people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds or low socio-economic groups need and want. Sports governing bodies have been left in no doubt that public funding to them is a privilege and not a right. (Grant, 5th March, 2015)

Clearly then, government expected that they should receive a ‘return on investment’ from sport, shifting sport well beyond the days of ‘sport for sports sake’ (Collins, 2010)



and the nomadic nature of sport and physical activity as a policy concern outlined in Chapter One.

Further to this, this thesis captures a period of ever increasing professionalisation and commercialisation of women's sport. All four of the sampled sports moved towards more formalised domestic leagues, with the foundation of the football Women's Super League, Rugby Union Premier 15s, Cricket Super League and Vitality Netball Superleague as explained in Chapter Two. Importantly, the sampling frame also coincides with a period of increasingly professional sports governance, with steps taken to prevent more instances of scandal and corruption within the administration of sport which had become ever more prevalent (Katwala, 2000), culminating in the creation of the *Code for Sports Governance* (Sport England and UK Sport, 2016).

This chapter explores three key themes. Firstly, it explores the importance of sport and (successful) sports stars in an English sports policy space that was influencing an increasingly broad set of other policy areas. As sport has become more prominent as an element of soft power strategy, the elite level athletes that make elite sport useful as a soft power tool become more important to the state. This - allied with an increasing professionalisation and prevalence of women's sport in the mainstream - discursively positions elite level female athletes as important to both the growth of their sport, and their nation, on the global stage. This has invariably increased expectations around the conduct of elite female athletes to go above and beyond the normal duties of simply performing at a high level. Crucially, this study focusses on English sports policy, however given sports increasing use in British soft power strategy, both the terms 'English' and 'British' will be used in the analysis, in keeping with the broad scope of

documents included in the sample. It should be reiterated however that sport and physical activity specific policies are devolved powers and are hence 'England' specific.

Secondly, the chapter examines issues around the strength of discourse of the economic viability and sustainability of women's sport in sports policy, by examining the proliferation of these discourses and highlighting the different contexts in which they were used. This is then transposed against related and aligned narratives around the need for women's sports and sports leagues to not only grow, but to do so in a sustainable fashion. The chapter discusses the two areas of elite performance and participation centred strategies separately, arguing that the women's game was seen as an opportunity by governing bodies for growth in grassroots participation, with ambitious targets set by governing body's particularly in boosting participation rates. Some of this strategy sought to address cultural issues within their own sports whereby 'masculinist' discourses which had been prevalent had erected a barrier for women to participate and engage with the sport. This chapter argues that the 'growth' referred to in areas of strategy focussing on elite level performance is used differently, instead referring to spectatorships, broadcaster demand, media coverage, commercial possibilities and long-term improvement in performance, partly due to increasingly formalised and professionalised structures for female athletes. These discourses were couched at both governmental and governing body level in narratives of viability and sustainability, signalling a shift away from the amateurish Corinthianism that women's sport had been applauded for in the previous chapter.

Finally, the chapter explores the ‘liminality’ of women’s sport as a policy area. This discussion is framed around the emergence of women specific sports policy, which broadly focussed on engaging women as a ‘hard to reach’ group, showing an appreciation that different societal groups have different needs and desires when it comes to accessing sport and physical activity provision. Crucially, some of the assumptions within these strategies were overtly gendered and based on stereotypical gender roles around motherhood within a nuclear family setting. Allied to this, much of the policy discourse focussed on the ubiquity of ‘barriers’ to participation, most notably reducing competition within provision and extolling the benefits of sport and physical activity as a vehicle to other benefits - such as weight loss - rather than extolling the virtues of participation as enjoyable in and of itself. This is not to suggest that gendered considerations are not important, but these concerns around motherhood did not appear across the sample in relation to fatherhood.

It is worth reiterating here the value, and *values*, of the choices of language used in public policy. Hall (2009) asserts that discursive narratives ‘define what is and is not appropriate in our formulation of... a subject, what knowledge is considered... true in that context and what sorts of persons or ‘subjects’ embody its characteristics’ (p.6). In other words from a Foucauldian perspective, the way that an issue is *discussed* becomes the ‘common sense’ way that that issue is *understood*, shaping what it is acceptable and ‘true’ to say or think on a topic (Foucault, 1990).

## **Making Impressions - Sport, Nation and Athletes as ‘Agents of Soft Power’**

The first theme to be explored is the prevalence of the relationship between sport and nation and the frequency within the policy documentation corpus that allied the two areas, which framed women’s sport as having a role to play within policy success at home and abroad. This occurs through two mechanisms; through narratives of the importance of sports and sports events to a variety of national benefits, and then through the depiction of athletes as important figures to sport and nation in an evolving geo-political, soft power landscape. Much of both narratives alluded to the London 2012 Olympiad, but extended beyond this to other major international events. This discussion will begin by unpacking the discursive repertoires around the home Olympiad, showing how it (and therefore sport) was used as a vehicle for a broad range of policy objectives, showing the increasing utility of sport as a policy area. After this, I will demonstrate how this related to female athletes as ‘agents of soft power’ specifically. Beyond this, female athletes were also considered to be effective role models, by both government and governing bodies, placing elite athletes as an important cog in the policy outcome wheel, both at home and abroad.

Much of policy written in the sampling timeframe was influenced by the hosting of the London 2012 Olympics, with the national governmental priorities of the proposed Olympic legacy shaping much of the content of sports policy both pre- and post-London 2012. The focuses of the Olympic legacy were particularly varied, offering an ambitious vision for transforming the face of sport and physical participation in England moving forward. Elite level athletes were key to the successful implementation of this legacy, making clear that policy success was predicated against a competitively

successful Olympics. This spoke to governmental thinking around the causal relationship between elite level success and rising participation rates discussed in Chapter Two. Crucially, many areas of the public sector and public funding were in a period of austerity after the 2008 comprehensive spending review. However, on the face of it sport (in a broad sense) was one of the areas where public funding increased. This did not necessarily translate to an increased access to public provision, even though programmes like *Places, People, Play* (Sport England, 2010) focussed on increasing both facility and community provision of sport, most notably through an increased spirit of volunteerism. *Places, People, Play* sought to:

- Upgrade up to a thousand local sports clubs and facilities
- Investing in a number of iconic multi-sport facilities that set the standards for future facilities development
- Protecting and improving hundreds of playing fields across the country, with local communities having a say in which local facilities should benefit, preserving high-quality spaces for local people to play and enjoy sport. (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2010, pp. 3-4)

This policy was brought out while funding to local councils - who had historically been a key centre of public provision - was cut. Not only had local government seen their overall budgets reduced, but sports provision was also not considered to be part of their core requirements, with government arguing that provision should be led by local providers and private entities, in keeping with the previously discussed notion of the 'Big Society' and an increasingly smaller state. The alleged benefits of the sporting 'Big Society' to volunteers was captured by the *Taking Part Big Society Report* (HM Government, 2011) which focussed on sport and culture, arguing that:

It appears then, that those involved in building the Big Society in the cultural and sporting sectors feel more involved in local communities, have the capacity to contribute their time and money, and that they can make a difference to their local environment, and local facilities. (p.16)

It was not just in the 'Big Society' documentation that the importance of volunteering was espoused. Following the 'Singapore promise' made by London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) member Lord Sebastian Coe (Weed, 2012), the importance of volunteers became explicitly prevalent in the policy documents in the sample, with these volunteers described as 'heroic' (p.10) in the governmental strategy document *Sporting Future- A New Strategy for an Active Nation* (HM Government, 2015). Parnell, Millward and Spracklen (2015) explore the apparent policy turn towards volunteerism and the interplay between the coalition government's 'Big Society' and how this approach attempted to offset austere approaches to public funding, finding that in the context of councils such as Liverpool experiencing reduction in public budgets, 'the answers to public problems do not come from the state but from community groups and, potentially, private enterprise groups' (p.3). This creates a policy dynamic of dissonance between the substantial public investment in competitive sport, and austerity measures being placed on local providers negatively impacting provision through a reduction in funding for council led delivery, which had traditionally been important. This becomes important when considered against a backdrop of increasingly professionalised women's sports leagues, where there was political acknowledgement that women's professional sport requires assistance from those in a position of influence over sponsorships and broadcasting due to the economic disparity between women's and men's major sports. While this gap is clear in the case of the applicable sampled sports, the neo-liberalisation and commercialisation of men's professional sport is discursively positioned as the

benchmark approach to operating professional sports, normalising this strategy while simultaneously positioning the economic realities of women's sports as inferior. Examples of this will be analysed fully later in the chapter.

The hosting of the London 2012 Olympic games was also a justification for capital expenditure for the regeneration of East London. The economic importance of international success was made explicit in *Sporting Future- A New Strategy for an Active Nation* (HM Government, 2015), in which economic wellbeing was one of the five key outcomes that government was seeking to achieve within and through sport, showing a longer-term commitment to policy considerations of the relationship between sports and economics:

With sport and physical activity contributing **£39bn to the UK's GDP** and with one million people employed in the sport and physical activity sectors, ensuring that this sector of the economy is effectively supported is crucial for government. (p.58)

This is on top of the direct benefit for the UK of **additional jobs and economic activity**. We also want to look at the role that sport can play in meeting the government's objectives to get more British companies exporting and for the value of those exports to increase. (p.58)

There was a degree of importance placed upon the economic benefits of sport, particularly international sport. The document states that sport contributes £39bn to the national GDP, positioning sport (and therefore athletes) as an important element to the English economy.<sup>58</sup> This was emphasised again in *Leaving the European Union: The Impact on Professional Sport* (House of Lords, 2017), which discussed in some detail

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<sup>58</sup> In comparison, the Arts sector contributed £10.47bn in 2019 according to the *Covid-19 and the Arts and Culture Sectors* report (Woodhouse and Hutton 2021)

the projected economic impacts on sport of leaving the European Union. The White Paper made only one mention of women's sport, in the context of the United Kingdom's cultural capital, highlighting the subordinate nature of women's sport as an economic consideration in the minds of policy makers. The different economic standings and formulas between men's and women's sports perhaps become particularly apparent during turbulent financial times where sponsors can be tempted to reduce spending. This is problematic for women's sport particularly given that some clubs, such as Women's Super League football clubs, rely on sponsorship and commercial activities as a major revenue stream (Clarkson *et al.*, 2020).

Furthermore, the linkage between the international success of representative sport (particularly around the London 2012 Games) and economic prosperity was made explicit in many policy documents, adding a different element to the previously discussed importance of sporting 'national heroes' from the previous chapter. For example, in the strategy document *Sporting Future- A New Strategy for an Active Nation* (Sport England, 2015), the link between elite athlete success and the success of the games for national gain is made explicit:

However, the power of London 2012 would have been far less if we had finished tenth in the medal table rather than third, if Sir Bradley Wiggins had finished eighth in the Time Trial, or if Hannah Cockcroft had finished outside the medals. (Sporting Future- A New Strategy for an Active Nation, HM Government, 2015, p.43)

Clearly then, given the weight given to the success of the Olympiad as an event and the importance of sporting success as part of this, elite athletes were presented as important to national pride, morale as well as impacting national prosperity. Beyond this, given the role of sport in the UK government's soft power strategy, most obviously through



the desire to host mega events such as the Olympic Games, athletes are placed in a position of exalted national importance. This was communicated in the Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence report *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World* (House of Lords, 2014). The report makes clear the stature that sporting excellence holds within the nation's soft power strategy:

We now consider the attractiveness of the UK's commercial, educational, cultural, sporting and media assets, how they work to **forge international links**, and the **soft power and economic benefits** that they bring to the UK and its people. (p.88)

As previously discussed in Chapter Two, sport plays a role in all of the other areas mentioned in that quotation, particularly post-London 2012. However, there has been an overt shift and acceptance within policy making around the status of elite sport, and therefore the importance of the athletes that represent their nations. Importantly however, there were relatively few references to women's sports teams specifically across the sample, with this being limited to successful teams. This links to the previous chapter's arguments that women's teams needed to have some level of success to be considered 'newsworthy'. In this report however, the role of 'sport' as nationally important was emphasised:

Sport has an almost **universal appeal** that crosses language and cultural barriers, which makes it, in the British Council's eyes, "**the most accessible and exportable of the UK's soft power assets**" (p.275)

As was shown in the print media corpus, there were frequent references to notional 'national stars', yet this was framed differently. In the policy sample, rather than representing certain female athletes as patriots at play on the world stage (Vincent and Crossman, 2012). Instead, far more emphasis was placed on the role of successful

sporting endeavours as part of the country's soft power strategy, positioning these athletes as agents of this as they are the mechanisms through which this type of power is generated. This still places successful female athletes in an important position; however, the policy narrative detaches the athletes from any kind of historical context, wherein the historical successes of these teams in the face of gulfs in opportunity and resources are not addressed. This differs significantly from the representation offered in the analysis of the media sample, where (successful) female athletes could be valid representatives of English virtue and personality if they were both successful and displayed certain endangered characteristics such as determination (Wodak *et al.*, 2014), as well as an increasing trend in coverage towards establishing a 'history' for national teams in order to legitimise and contextualise increasing success across a number of sports. This representation of importance for female (and male) athletes moved beyond simply being key cogs in the mechanism of successful domestic policy work, shifting towards also being critical to the implementation of the government's soft power strategy.

Further to the focus on the national importance of sport, and some (successful) athletes in their role as representatives of England, the government's positioning of sport in soft power strategy presents representatives of national teams as 'agents' of English soft power:

International and domestic success is a positive thing in two respects. First, it provides significant **wellbeing, social and economic benefits** to the nation. Put simply, the more our teams win, **the better the nation feels** and alongside that sporting success often sits **economic success** as well, whether that is through tickets sold, subscriptions bought, or tourists attracted. (Sporting Future- A New Strategy for an Active Nation, HM Government, 2015, p.43)

This quotation neatly sums up the broad range of expectations placed upon English athletes, both men and women. Firstly, they are positioned by this Select Committee report as pivotal tools in the achievement of a wide-ranging suite of governmental priorities, including health and economic agendas while simultaneously being causal in the way that the nation ‘feels’. The most obvious attempt to exploit this within the sample was the hosting of the Olympic Games in 2012, where sport and the success of elite level athletes became important to the ‘brand’ of the country (Grix, Branaghan and Lee, 2019), with attempts made to show England specifically as multicultural and progressive (Winter, 2013). This demonstrated a pivotal turn from a historical mistrust of sport by political figures as outlined in Chapter Two. This then positions elite level athletes as the guardians of national ‘pride’, both to the world and the English citizenship, adding a further dimension to the notion of national ‘proxy warriors’ (Bowes and Bairner, 2018). In this case the identity of the ‘proxy warrior’ has been bestowed through governmental policy rather than print media or self-identification, showing institutionally desired presentations and behaviours being manifest in representative athletes. This is an important turn and demonstrates well an increasing importance of female athletes in both governing body and governmental thinking, perhaps showing a slight shift in the ‘common sense’ understandings of the role of top level female athletes moving forward (Foucault, 1990).

Further to this, however, is the clear shift towards the representation of athletes not just as national representatives in a sporting sense, but their role as agents of national soft power. This occurred through two factors, through their role in the successful execution of the government’s soft power strategy by positively representing England both in and

out of competition, and the potential for their success at major sporting events (particularly home mega events) to translate into soft power and economic gains:

We have also had significant success in bidding for and hosting **major sporting events**, positioning the UK as the global home of major events. The continued hosting of these events, where financially viable, is important for a number of reasons: it gives our athletes the opportunity to prepare for major competitions on home soil, it can **generate significant economic impact**, it attracts spectators who get to experience great live sport but are also encouraged to consider taking part themselves and it also acts as an **important soft power tool**, projecting a positive image of the UK around the world (Sporting Future- A New Strategy for an Active Nation, HM Government 2015, p.43)

The soft power benefits originating from sport convince us that now the London Olympic and Paralympic Games have concluded, the UK should work to find a way to **retain the "glow" attached** to British sport institutions (Persuasion and Power in the Modern World, House of Lords, 2014, p.30)

[O]r enjoying the **shared feel-good factor and pride** that comes from domestic and international sporting success. (Sporting Future- A New Strategy for an Active Nation, HM Government, 2015, p.11)

The second quotation above comes from the Select Committee for soft power and the UK's influence report *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World* (House of Lords 2014). Crucially, sport was deemed an important enough consideration in the government's soft power strategy to warrant its own section in this report, however the role of female athletes specifically was mentioned only once, with the other references being only to men's sport:

Elite British sportsmen and women often have huge global followings, according to the British Council, **enhancing the UK's recognition around the world** (p.125)

It is perhaps surprising that a governmental report published post- London 2012 only mentions female athletes explicitly once (alongside sportsmen) given the success of women at the games and the prevalence of certain female athletes in the marketing and imagery of the Olympiad (Allen and Blinder, 2012). This report demonstrates again one of the issues discussed in the first section of the chapter, that women's sport would be asymmetrically gender marked, whereas men's sport was purely 'sport'. In the report, 'sport' is used 23 times, whereas 'women' and stemmed words were used only once, however individual sampled sports are discussed in the report. The report however does discuss the 'glow' attached to British sport after the London Olympiad, demonstrating a commitment to the nebulous notion of 'inspiration', which suggests that elite level success of both men and women triggers participation at grassroots level through 'inspiring' the nation into participating. This, alongside the aforementioned desire for generating volunteer engagement with grassroots sport showed the wide range of expected intangible benefits arising from sporting success, including the success of women's teams in the absence of male success:

They are also hugely important to sports fans across the country and share the ability to **inspire people** to take part or to improve **people's wellbeing**. Whether it is the achievements of the England team at the FIFA Women's World Cup in Canada, success in sports that feature in the Commonwealth Games but not the Olympics or the performance of teams in our major spectator sports, **great performances can inspire the nation and encourage people to take part in sport**. (Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation, HM Government, 2015, p.46)

London 2012 was a triumph for **women's sport**, showcasing **positive role models** such as Jessica Ennis, Nicola Adams and Ellie Simmonds. The success of female Olympians and Paralympians is, however, even more remarkable given the impact gender has, not

just on sports participation but on the sector in general. (A Living Legacy: 2010-15 Sport Policy and Investment, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2015, p.37)

The London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games will captivate the country this summer, and the exploits of our elite athletes will inspire young people, encouraging many to get into sport, **determined to emulate their heroes**. (Creating a Sporting Habit for Life- A New Youth Sports Strategy, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2012, p.3)

Clearly, these quotations communicate the expected relationship between elite level success and future participation rates. There is a communicated responsibility of elite level female athletes to inspire future generations, aptly demonstrated by this being a rare example of a women's team being named specifically, and *first*, in sports policy. The requirement to help the future health of their sports is emblematic of the expectations around elite level female athletes to not only be successful on the field, but to also be model citizens off it (Bruce, 2016). This builds on the discussion in the previous chapter, but in this instance shows a meaningful expectation on female athletes demonstrating 'model behaviours' by government, which was mirrored and furthered by governing bodies, offering an example of desired behaviours filtering through not just to governing bodies, but also to athletes themselves, demonstrating the potential power of language influencing behaviours in this social space (Foucault, 1982, 1988). For example, in the Football Association women's football strategy *Gameplan for Growth- The FA's Strategy for Women's and Girls' Football: 2017-2020* (Football Association, 2017), the importance of both present and past elite performers in influencing positive outcomes at other levels of the game are made explicit:

'The history of sport – any sport – shows that players at the elite level are uniquely positioned to **positively influence the game at every level below them**. They can be

**inspirational role models** – and become spokespeople for the sport they love. Just look at how other sports have developed female participation and a following by ensuring those at the top are **diverse, accessible, friendly and inspirational**. And crucially, how they've remained engaged with the grassroots levels of their sport. (p.24)

Ensure we tap into the experience and profile of former England players, by:

- Creating an England 'legends programme', with defined benefits for former international players.
- Encouraging former players to become **ambassadors** and spokespeople for the game.

(p.25)

This touches on the importance of sporting role models (SRMs), which Meier (2015) argues is particularly valuable in the realm of female sporting role models for peace and development agendas. Importantly, Meier asserts that 'even though more female SRMs at all levels are necessary and possible, role models can never be predetermined or imposed' (p.979). This is absolutely critical to women's football in an era of increasing professionalisation and commercialisation, with the interplay between the wellbeing of players (due to the increased pressure and scrutiny) and their role as ambassadors being a fundamental challenge that needs to be managed by their governing body, with instances of threats to the safety of players on social media being a glaring example of the unmanaged risks of increasing public consciousness. Dunn (2016a) explores the experiences of English elite footballers of being cast as 'role models' in an increasingly public and professionalised sporting context, finding that female players were happy to take on this mantle, particularly in terms of encouraging participation, even if it was not traditionally mirrored with such relish by their male counterparts. It is important then to highlight that for this expectation to be codified and considered part of a sporting strategy shows a meaningful commitment to representing female elite players as role models as praxis from the governing body.

Football was not the only sport which sought to take advantage of their elite athletes' potential stature, as the Rugby Football Union (RFU) emphasised the critical role of their elite performers acting on behalf of the sport in their women's Rugby Union strategy *This is England* (Rugby Football Union, 2014):

Just as the **England men's team** acts as a shop window for the sport, England **women's teams** have the **same potential**. (p.20)

The **best ambassadors** for women's rugby are some 1,000 women playing rugby to a very high level within the talent pathway, which focuses on talented players from U15 to senior level (p.20)

From these quotations we can see two pivotally important discursive strategies. Firstly, in the first of the two, there is an immediate and clear parallel drawn between the men's and women's national teams, however with the caveat that the women's team is behind the men's in terms of 'acting as a shop window' for the sport, presumably in terms of commercial power given the successes of the women's national team in winning multiple Six Nations tournaments and a World Cup during the sampling frame. Secondly, the latter of the two quotes refers to elite level performers in their talent pathway as the 'best ambassadors' for the game. The strategy does not expand on how this is going to or indeed should occur, but it is clear from the examples given from two different governing bodies that the duty to be 'ambassadors' for their sport is a feature of how governing bodies are seeking to achieve their aims, which in the English context are frequently aligned with the aims of government in the area of sport and physical activity.



The RFU strategy document (Rugby Football Union, 2014) also provided profiles on ‘women making a difference’ in rugby, looking at a volunteer - England player Sarah Hunter - and two RFU Council Members. In Hunter’s profile, the RFU draw upon certain narratives to promote her:

**Sarah** began playing rugby league at the age of nine at school in North Tyneside. She took up rugby union five years later. A **BSc in Sport Science and Mathematics at Loughborough University** also saw her win the British Universities Championship at Twickenham with Loughborough’s women’s team. Having captained Lichfield women’s premiership team, as well as the North East U18s and Northumberland U16s, her international successes as player and captain include winning the Six Nations five times and the European Championship, Nations Cup and European Trophy twice each. She was voted players’ player at Novocastrians, Lichfield, Loughborough University and the England Academy. Having just won a gold medal as an England World Cup winner, she is now an RFU University Rugby Development Officer for the South West (p.24)

Here, the profile draws on some of the discursive tools discussed at length in the previous chapter. Firstly, the profile begins with outlining her path into the sport at a young age, however there is no mention in this instance of any male gatekeepers, as was found to be prevalent in press coverage. The excerpt then goes into highlighting her educational achievements *before* her sporting achievements, ‘re-rounding’ this highly successful, world class athlete as a multifaceted member of society rather than purely as a sports star. This can be read as a positive, allowing an athlete to be more than ‘just an athlete’. However, it could also be understood as a mechanism of emphasising femininity (Connell, 1987) through a shift of discursive emphasis away from less hegemonically masculine traits such as physical prowess (Connell, 2005) and toward more traditionally feminine notions of caregiving (Connell, 1987). Finally, the profile ends by highlighting Hunter’s ‘real job’ with the RFU, showing that even in a

period of professionalisation female athletes are not always considered athletes first. Instead in this instance, Hunter is depicted as an ‘emissary’ for women’s Rugby Union.

This representation of *athlete as emissary* links explicitly to the discussion in the previous chapter, however in this case due to the connectivity between governmental aims and governing body behaviour, the weight of expectation on athletes is greater. It extends beyond the sporting realm into fields such as the soft power of the nation internationally and domestic health and physical activity agendas. It was clear that, even in instances where a successful woman was referred to in text, she was regarded as an ambassador rather than a ‘hero’, as we saw in the previous chapter focussing on press coverage. This is most likely due to the different kinds of phrasing and parlances of the two textual types. In the policy setting, the ambassadorial role highlighted the key role the government felt elite level sporting success played in society at large. This demonstrated the crosscutting of sport politically, whilst simultaneously demonstrating the liminality of women’s sport as a policy space, as even though there were some examples of successful teams being referred to in text, this did not generally extend to individuals within a team environment. Fundamentally, it was clear that there were attempts to leverage the increasing public consciousness that women’s sport enjoys, with football specifically being an excellent example of a governing body attempting to maximise the utility of successful international players as emissaries for their increasingly professionalised game.

The policy window of increasing public visibility for women’s football was catalysed by Baroness Sue Campbell and formalised in their *Gameplan for Growth* document (Football Association, 2017). The professionalisation of women’s football happened

suddenly and controversially, with the imposition of new licensing arrangements for clubs to be allowed in the Tier 1 Women's Super League, leading to clubs being relegated for non-scandal related off-the-field matters and arguably impacting the sporting integrity of the English women's footballing pyramid. The FA did not canvass the opinions of the substantial volunteer base that had to this point operated within top-level women's football. Woodhouse, Fielding-Lloyd and Sequerra (2019) explore this issue, finding that 'participants consistently said that the FA's goals and methods of achieving them were arrived at without genuine consultation' (p.6). This shows a broad disparity between the government's stated aims around the 'Big Society' and volunteerism; instead showing at least in the professionalisation of women's sport, speed of taking advantage of a policy window and economic viability took precedent over the integrity of the competition.

Throughout the policy sample, there were examples where there were explicit expectations on elite level female athletes to be role models, and to paint not only their sports - but also women's sports holistically - in a positive light. It is not unusual for elite level athletes in the public eye to be considered role models or ambassadors for their sports, but in this study's sample, it was an explicit expectation in both governmental and governing body strategies. As demonstrated in these selected quotations:

In supporting Olympic and Paralympic athletes, we have developed a cadre of fantastic **ambassadors for the power of sport**, able to **engage people and inspire them**. The Athlete Appearances programme run by UK Sport has provided and supported Team GB and ParalympicsGB athletes in spending more than 15,000 days in schools, colleges and sport clubs **inspiring a new generation**. We want to build on this approach, deepen the impact of the programme and use it to help deliver the outcomes

in this strategy. (Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation , HM Government, 2015, p.46)

They can be **inspirational role models** – and become spokespeople for the sport they love. Just look at how other sports have developed female participation and a following by ensuring **those at the top are diverse, accessible, friendly and inspirational**. (Gameplan for Growth- The FA’s Strategy for Women’s and Girl’s Football 2017-2020, Football Association, 2017 p.24)

Here we can see an example from both national and sport specific policy, that there are clear statements of expectations around top level athletes in terms of public accessibility and their roles in uplifting their sports through positive conduct, echoing the work of Bruce on the depictions of female athletes in press reportage (2016). This is encapsulated by the use of the adjective ‘friendly’ to describe the desired and required behaviours of national team players performing role modelling duties. ‘Friendly’ is an important choice of word, as it moves beyond simple availability or accessibility into docility and reciprocity, both of which are considered elements of emphasised forms of femininity (Connell, 1986). That these expectations of ‘friendliness’ are codified by a governing body is also important as it places an extra burden of responsibility on national team representatives to not only represent their sport, but to be required to be ‘friendly’ while doing so. It is useful here to consider the ‘mentality’ element of Foucault’s governmentality, the element concerned with ‘governing the soul’ (Rose, 1989), in this instance whereby the expectations of the governing body transmit and are internalised by national team players, influencing personal strategies of athletes in line with governmental and governing body desired behaviours (Foucault, 1988; Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991). The responsibility to go beyond simply being accessible and a public ‘face’ of their sport shows a burden of responsibility placed upon national team players, semiotically furthering the traditional caring role of women in society to the

sporting realm. The Football Association went further than this, with the FA's *Gameplan for Growth* (Football Association, 2017) emphasising the critical role of their elite national level representative players:

'Players at elite level are uniquely positioned to be **inspirational role models**' (p.25)

Furthermore, the expectations around the role model behaviours of players were cemented in the code of conduct within the competition rules for WSL and National League players (Football Association, 2018):<sup>59</sup>

The player must at all times **promote favourably Women and Girls Football.**

Players must accept success/failure/victory/defeat with **good grace and without excessive display of emotion.** (p.53)

Here, there are clear demarcations around acceptable behaviour, in this case requiring a removal of emotionality from the sport, and the requirement for 'good grace', clearly embedding emphasised, traditionalised conceptualisations of acceptable behaviour for female athletes (Connell, 1987), as well as discursively reinforcing traditional understandings of acceptable and aspirational 'Englishness', where reserved, conservative behaviour and 'losing well' is valued, as highlighted in the previous chapter on press representations (Vincent and Harris, 2014). Codes of conduct are not an unusual imposition by sporting leagues, however in the context of increasing professionalisation of women's football in England and the *Gameplan for Growth* (Football Association, 2017) strategy, this could be considered an attempt at leveraging

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<sup>59</sup> This code of conduct appeared across multiple years in the appendix to the WSL and National League rules.

the emerging role of female athletes as ambassadors and the development of some performers into more broadly recognisable public figures when considered alongside the increasing prevalence of women's sport as a broadcasted commodity.

The fact that governing bodies - in this case the FA - are privy to this and are considering it a feature of achieving their organisational goals moving forward is important, as it relates to how they manage the 'sped up' professionalisation of women's sport. In the context of football, these ambassadors were clearly part of the strategy to leverage the policy window that appeared in the wake of international successes of the national team in the 2015 World Cup and 2017 European Championships. Building upon Connell's notion of emphasised femininity and Bruce's notions of female athletes being depicted as model citizens (2016) in both instances, this added expectation and responsibility is a logical extension of the caring, ambassadorial role, in this case codified through sports policy. It is novel that these representations have also blended into policy discourse and is but one example of the shared discursive repertoires that can be seen in the two areas that I will explore fully in the subsequent chapter. Bruce (2016) argues that successful female athletes are more likely to be presented in the press as important national citizens, finding that 'gendered and/or racialized media conventions are 'bent' in order to incorporate sportswomen whose performances bring glory to the nation' (p.367). That has also been the case in the policy discourse, with the positioning of elite level female athletes as serious athletes existing on the fringes of sport holistically, but still with an important role to play in both the domestic and foreign political landscape.

These increasing expectations represent a new addition to the debates in the field, and further Williams' (2019) work on the representations of female athletes as ambassadors for women's sport, with this study offering a new dimension to his theoretical discussion. He argues that 'particularly pertinent is the expectation that these athletes represent not only their sport but the wider world of women's sport. This contrasts with the role of men in sport, who are shown to be rightful leaders and gatekeepers (of their sport) (p.10).<sup>60</sup> Williams gathered this reading from a sample limited to newspaper coverage of one international football tournament, however the premise that female athletes were representative of all sports can be extended here. In this case, not only are female athletes responsible for women's sport, but the national wellbeing in an increasingly wide boutique of policy concerns. That the government and governing bodies have recognised and have sought to successfully leverage this is a process that could only be effective in an era of professionalisation and commodification. However, it is clear that top level female athletes are not simply athletes, they are also representatives for a wide range of stakeholders. These stakeholders include the commercial supporters and sponsors of women's sport, and with this in mind I now turn to the second key theme of this chapter: the emerging discourse around economic viability and sustainability of women's sport in an era of increasing professionalisation and commodification.

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<sup>60</sup> Parenthesis added by author for contextualisation

## **‘Can’t Start a Fire Without a Spark’- Discourses of Growth and Sustainability**

The timeframe of this study encapsulated a transformative time for English women’s sport. As previously highlighted, all four of the sampled sports had some success at the world level within this time period, with only the national football team not winning a major tournament. This, alongside the burgeoning professionalisation and formalisation of domestic level women’s sports in England presented opportunities for both government and governing bodies to capitalise on increasing public interest and familiarity with many of the teams, outlined and evidenced in the previous chapter. Governmentally, there was evidence of a desire to close the gender participation gap, with this being seen as a ‘quick win’ towards achieving the Olympic legacy aim of increasing participation by one million people - perhaps fuelling narratives of growth. This was one element to the Olympic Legacy, which aimed to have closed the ‘big gender participation gap’ by 2022 (The long-term vision for the legacy of the London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games, HM Government and Mayor of London, 2014, p.9). With this target came greater investment in projects that aimed to close this gap, with increasing expectations around funding of women’s sport and participation translating into fulfilling the closing of the gender participation gap. For example, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Nigel Huddleston MP stated in the Women’s Rugby, Government Support debate:

*Sponsorship and commercial investment are key to growing elite sport, so I welcome the recent announcement that Allianz Insurance has agreed a sponsorship deal with the Rugby Football Union, which will see funds flow to women’s rugby teams. That partnership means the Premier 15s, which is the top-flight women’s domestic rugby competition in England, will receive a landmark investment to grow women’s and*



*girls' rugby, but I recognise the impact that Covid has had on sport and that women's sport has been hit particularly hard.*

*That is why I met governing bodies, including the RFU, the Rugby Football League and the chief executive officer of the charity Women In Sport, over the summer to explore the challenges Covid has brought and discuss what more can be done. I am happy to say that there was a real shared commitment to protecting **investment in women's sport** and promoting its growth. (Huddleston, 13 October 2020)*

Though outside the sampling timeframe, this statement endorses the notion that government were clear in their viewpoint on supporting women's sport as an 'investment' towards engendering further growth of both participatory and elite level women's sport. Furthermore, the quotation highlights the importance of sponsorship and funding in establishing and protecting the future of women's sport. These consistent narratives of growth and development that were prevalent throughout the sample deserve further exploration.

Overwhelmingly, strategies and policy documents regularly employed discursive narratives of *growth* around women's sport, giving rise to approaches to try and take advantage of this momentum. 53% of the sampled documents (n=54) used either the word 'grow' or a stemmed word such as 'growth' or 'growing'. For example, in 2011 the FA's *Strategic Plan 2011-2015* (Football Association, 2011) made explicit their intention to develop women's football, with one of their key strategic goals being to 'Grow the women's game' (p.6). They stated that:

Football is the nation's number one female team sport and **we want to make sure it continues to thrive**. In 2011 the development of the women's game took a **significant step forward** with the launch of The FA WSL, England's first semi-professional women's football league. (p.6)

This quotation aptly demonstrates a key discursive narrative found throughout the sample, the linkage of the elite and participatory levels throughout both government and governing body understandings of ‘the women’s game’. This linkage was split into two conjunctive areas, the burgeoning formalisation and professionalisation of elite level sport, most obviously with the establishment of increasingly professional domestic leagues, and grassroots participation. Throughout the sample, there was also a clear expectation that this relationship was mutually virtuous, that the establishment of professionalised leagues would benefit participation in the grassroots game, which in turn would produce (through newly established performance pathways) the elite players of the future, while elite athletes also had the duty of ‘inspiring’ participation through their success. Nowhere was this more explicit than the RFU women’s Rugby Union strategy *This is England* (Rugby Football Union, 2014), which stated that:

This strategy focuses on the development of the grassroots of the game. However, there is an **inextricable link between the grassroots and the performance element**. The cycle of sport tells us that International success is key when looking to increase **visibility**. With a major focus on ensuring the women’s game is promoted at the highest levels, increased visibility acts as an important lever to **grow participation**. We will continue to work closely with Performance Rugby, particularly around the talent pathway which is the main point at which the grassroots players become the **talent of the future**. (p.18)

This excerpt encapsulates all of the mechanisms described above. Firstly, the ‘inextricable link’ between elite and participatory levels of the sport are made clear. This was a common narrative across the sample, which is unsurprising given the increasing prevalence of ‘Whole Sport Plans’, long term governing body strategies agreed with Sport England (Nichols and Taylor, 2015), used to access sports body funding, and the desire from government for sport to pursue approaches which both

deliver success on the global stage while simultaneously boost participation rates. Important here however, is the requirement for elite performance to deliver ‘visibility’ to rugby union in order to raise awareness and ‘lever participation’. This is despite the fact that rugby union is a popular sport in physical educational settings, with the RFU providing programmes to assist teachers facilitate Rugby Union provision in schools such as the All Schools programme, launched in 2012 as a legacy programme for the home 2015 men’s World Cup. Finally, the RFU makes clear the utility of their performance pathway in ‘bridging the divide’, between those who participate and show promise to become the elite performers of the future.

At the participatory level, it was clear that governing body strategies targeted women’s sport as a potential growth opportunity for their individual sports. This was made explicit by the Football Association, who in *Gameplan for Growth* (2017) stated that:

Women’s football is the **biggest single opportunity** for us to grow our game. This strategy will ensure we grasp that opportunity. By **doubling the reach** of women’s football, from the grassroots to the elite, we will transform an **emerging sport**, and we will **embed it alongside men’s football** in the heart and mind of our **nation’s** favourite game. (p.4)

From this, we can see a few prevalent discursive repertoires. Firstly, the assertion that women’s football is the biggest opportunity for the football association to ‘grow our game’. Given this was the entire aim of the strategy, it places these narratives of growth and opportunity around women’s sport at a premium. This is amplified by the description of women’s football as an emerging sport in its own right, which should be placed as an equal to men’s football and as a different facet of the national sport. This is a crucial discursive shift made by a major governing body which had historically

been both dismissive and suspicious of women's football, as discussed in Chapter Three. The embracing of women's sport as a site of growth occurred in other women's sports strategies, however different governing bodies also demonstrated cognisance that the culture and perceptions around their sports had historically been a barrier to entry and participation for women. This was particularly pertinent in the context of Rugby Union, where the RFU argued in *This is England* (2014) that:

Rugby in England has developed from a **heavily male dominated sport**, which often informs the **perception** of female rugby players. However, there are wider social and cultural shifts taking place amongst females which have the potential, if utilized correctly, to change the face of fitness and sports participation. (p.15)

This quotation demonstrated some introspection and appreciation of the heavily masculinised perceptions of Rugby Union culture, with one of the four key strategic pillars for achieving the RFU goal of an additional 100,000 women involved in rugby predicated on *making rugby an option for female participants*. They aim to achieve this by reconfiguring perceptions of Rugby Union to be a better option for 'fitness and social interaction and providing a clear pathway into clubs and universities' (p.6). Specific approaches to attracting women into participation will be built upon later in the chapter, however for now it will suffice to state that the strategy focussed on participation, with Helen Grant MP writing in the foreword that 'this strategy focuses on the needs of the grassroots game, while ensuring that the player pathway is clear and connected creating choice and opportunity for all' (p.3). This again makes clear the discursive repertoires around a symbiotic link between the grassroots and elite level sporting ecosystems. It holds that by addressing the gender gap of participation, which the RFU explored (Rugby Football Union, 2014):

Women's sport and physical activity has declined over the past four years, with a significant participation **gender gap**. 41% of men taking part in at least one 30-minute session of sport or physical activity a week, compared with 29% of women. However, 54% of women (almost 12 million) say they would like to do more sport and physical activity. Since this is 51% of the population, it is vital that those delivering sport engage with the **female market** more effectively to drive participation. (p.14)

From this it can be seen that the body has identified the opportunity to address the participation gender gap more broadly. In this instance, the RFU has identified an apparent latent desire to participate. Crucial here is the understanding that encouraging women into the sport requires a different offering than may have been traditionally given by practitioners, in their view partly to the stereotypes of women in the Rugby Union space given the overall masculinised culture of Rugby Union in a range of national contexts (Carle and Nauright, 1999; Clayton and Harris, 2007; Anderson and McGuire, 2010).

Crucial to the success of the strategy however was the realignment of the perception of Rugby Union, with this mentioned in three separate sections of the 2014 *This is England* document. Much of the apparent introspection was undone by the governing body discussing changing social expectations around women in sport, arguing that:

Sweating during exercise, once considered **unfeminine**, is embraced by today's women who see **athleticism as sexy** and regard **strong as the new skinny**. This reflects a cultural shift in types of female role models. The Olympics showcased women excelling in sport, showed athletic women **admired and respected by men**, strong, healthy and powerful women. This is also reflected in the media as highlighted by the tremendous interest in our recent Women's World Cup winning team. (Rugby Football Union, 2014, p.15)

There are many useful elements to analyse in this short excerpt that discursively embed the role of the masculine as dominant within the Rugby Union social field, with the strategy showing multiple divergent narratives simultaneously. Firstly, the excerpt highlights that sweating from physical exertion has broadly been considered ‘unfeminine’ (and therefore masculine) behaviour. However, it asserts that this is changing and that athletic embodiments are now considered by women to be ‘sexy’ and ‘the new skinny’. This clearly reformulates and reconfigures a new mode of acceptable feminine embodiment, reimagining the ‘ideal’ female physical form as athletic. On one hand, this could be considered evidence of a reconfiguration of accepted femininities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), where unathletic femininities that were subordinate to physically superior hegemonically masculine embodiments were privileged within the system of gender relations (Connell, 1987) and could be understood as a shift in the dynamics of gender relations, which would not have been accounted for in Connell’s original gender theory (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). In a contemporary setting however it is important to consider shifting social practices as influencing gender relations. For example, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that:

‘[G]ender hierarchies are also affected by new configurations of women’s identity and practice, especially among younger women— which are increasingly acknowledged by younger men. We consider that research on hegemonic masculinity now needs to give much closer attention to the practices of women and to the historical interplay of femininities and masculinities’ (p.848)

In this instance however, the privileging of increasingly athletic female bodies is couched against sex appeal (Kane, 2011; Bruce, 2013; Channon *et al.*, 2018), centred around the male heterosexual gaze, rather than depicting any meaningful shift in

mentality around the utility of women's bodies as anything other than sex objects. These gendered articulations can be considered important to the discursive repertoires around women's sport relating to rugby and other sports. These utterances can be understood as influencing the 'conduct of conduct' which Foucault discussed in his governmentality concept (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991, p.2). In this instance, what can be seen is a discursive formation that superficially accepts a changing feminine embodiment, but actually shifts female athleticism to being sexually attractive, diminishing the athleticism of women and further embedding the masculine as dominant within sport and the female as subordinate through sexualisation.

Crucially, this was the only usage of the term 'sexy' throughout the full policy sample, as other documents steered clear of discussing appearance in this fashion, instead focussing on personal perception of 'fit' and 'healthy' bodies (which will be explored in due course). The strategy then discusses the function of role model, successful elite athletes as gaining admiration from men. This was an unusual point to emphasise, particularly given the critical role that elite female athletes as role models were given in achieving greater engagement at grassroots level. This again builds upon the depiction of female athletes as model citizens (Bruce, 2016) in this instance through policy documents rather than press coverage. Furthermore, this discursively positions men as the gatekeepers to rugby union, as it is *their* respect and admiration that legitimises elite female rugby players - no matter how successful - in this space. This can be understood as contributing to the culture of competitive sport as a hegemonically masculine space (Connell, 1987, 2000), cementing the role of sport as a vehicle through which hegemonic forms of masculinity can be articulated (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

The issue of men offering women in sport legitimacy expands upon the discussion from both the previous chapter, and previous scholarship, in the area around the importance of men in legitimising women within the sporting space. In this case, a governing body furthered this taken-for-granted knowledge through the strength of discursive narratives in building parameters of thought and acceptable discursive repertoires (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991) while simultaneously arguing for cultural changes that would allow for women to enter rugby union as player or spectator. This shows evidence that governing bodies had identified scope for change but had perhaps been unable to articulate this effectively in policy and strategy outputs. There was evidence that governing bodies - such as the RFU in this case - identified the potential of women's sport within their governance remit but had not fully divorced themselves from the same masculinised sporting culture that they had addressed as an issue.

### **Viability and Sustainability**

Throughout the policy sample - and in response to the growth of women's elite sport - both sports governing bodies and governmental bodies emphasised the need for the ongoing commercial and economic viability and sustainability of the emerging formalised leagues such as the WSL or Premier 15s. Towards the latter stages of the sample timeframe, all four of the major leagues within the sampled sports had attracted a title sponsor for their leagues and broadcasting arrangements with major broadcasters. This marked a major breakthrough for the visibility of women's sport and also showed that there was demand from broadcasters to show women's events.



Both commercial sponsorship and broadcasting deals were highlighted as pivotal to the future of women's sport by the Women in Sport advisory board,<sup>61</sup> with their 2014 report highlighting the disparity between women's and men's leagues in this regard:

Women's sport accounts for just 7% of **total sports media coverage** – for television this figure is 10% and for national newspapers it is 2%. Following a slight increase in the number of sponsorship deals for women's sport around London 2012 to 5.4%, by 2013 the number dropped down to a mere 2%. For the period September 2011 to December 2013, the value of reported sponsorship deals **going to women's sport** was just 0.4%. (Women in Sport Advisory Board Year 1 Report, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2014, p.10)

This quotation draws on a number of different discursive features that have been prevalent throughout this study's analysis. Most pertinently, the last sentence highlights that the sponsorship deals captured by *women's sport* was valued at 0.4%. From this we can see two consistent elements to the representation of women's sport: the growing duality that women's sport is separate while simultaneously being part of 'sport' as a whole and due to this, the discursive position of women's sport as a logical opposite to men's sport (in this instance, demonstrated by the comparison between men's and women's sponsorship deals). This is not to argue that this was inappropriate or a negative framing of women's sport, given that one of the targets of the Advisory Board and this report was to address this gap. However, framing the disparity in this way shows women's sport to be some kind of 'alternative' to men's sports, rather than as either equals or another facet of sport in a broader sense. This discursively positions women's sport as both inferior and 'other' to men's sport. Fundamentally, there was a

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<sup>61</sup> The Women and Sport Advisory Board was set up by the Government in 2013 and was made up of 9 figures from politics, sports coaching, sports administration, broadcasting and commercial enterprises to further the women and sport agenda.

clear narrative that the hyper-commercialised and commodified model of men's sports - most obviously football - was the desired *modus operandi*. Indeed, the report went as far as to suggest that sponsors should consider sponsoring women's sports leagues, teams and events as an element of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) packages:

There is huge disparity between the levels of commercial investment that go into men's sport compared to women's sport. The value of investing in women's sport is still not recognised, despite the opportunities it can provide. Companies looking to strengthen their corporate social responsibility programmes could consider investing in women's sport. (Women in Sport Advisory Board Year 1 Report, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2014, p.15)

This was an intriguing suggestion, as it would remedy any lack of sponsorship, however this also frames women's sport as comparatively 'weaker' than men's sport commercially for which even minority sports have not had any governmental suggestion that sponsorship should be considered as part of a company's CSR approach. There are clearly advantages to investing in women's sport, and these are also highlighted in the report:

Investment can improve the visibility of **positive role models**, and Women in Sport research shows that women athletes are generally seen as more **respectable, more trustworthy**, and **better role models than male athletes**. Women's sports that are in the early stages of development also provide an opportunity for companies to invest in the sport early on and be associated with that sport from the beginning, allowing the company and the sport to **grow the relationship and build the brand** over the long-term. For those sports that are televised there is, of course, the **traditional return on investment through greater exposure** to the brand. (Women in Sport Advisory Board Year 1 Report, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2014, p.15)

A clear suite of benefits to sponsors is offered here, presenting burgeoning women's sport as a clear opportunity to sponsors. Of particular interest is the assertion that companies can build a long-term relationship with a league or a governing body, particularly those sports which have broadcasting arrangements, where sponsors can reasonably expect to reach a broader audience. Crucially, the Advisory Board emphasises the 'newness' factor of women's sports leagues. This is partly true, however erases the history of the leagues in their more germinal, less formalised states, offering a departure from the print media corpus, in which the establishment of history played an increasingly important role.

An example of a governing body that placed increasing commercial and broadcasting considerations at the heart of their women's sporting strategy is the Football Association. In the Football Association's *Strategy for Football 2011-2015* (Football Association, 2011), the body made clear that women's sport was an important element of their governance of football:

Football is the nation's number one female team sport and we want to make sure it continues to thrive. In 2011 the development of the women's game took a significant step forward with the launch of The FA WSL, England's first semi-professional women's football league. We want to continue to grow and promote female participation from all communities and at all levels by: Increasing the number of women's and girls' teams from the 6,600 already in the game. Supporting talented girls in the grassroots game through our player development centres and Centres of Excellence. Developing our best players by introducing an elite performance unit and funding central contracts for England senior players. Using the FA WSL to gain greater exposure for the women's game and **financially sustain** semi-professional women's football in this country (p.6)

The inclusion of women's football as a critical element of the FA's strategy represented a step change in the importance of women's football in the FA's thinking, who as previously discussed had historically been both dismissive and suspicious of women in the game. Importantly, financial sustainability is rarely a consideration in the more economically driven men's game, where multiple clubs within the English Football League and below have gone into administration and in some instances, wound up as an ongoing concern. This short excerpt shows the many different elements that the FA were targeting in the women's game and is useful for contextualising their strategic thinking. However, the latter of these - the desire for greater exposure and commercial growth – is worthy of greater focus. The Football Association were clear in their women's football strategy *Gameplan for Growth* (Football Association, 2017), that the hypercommodified men's game was also the future for the women's game:

Every **successful enterprise** needs a steady income flow – to maintain 'business as usual' and crucially, to **grow**. The women and girls' game in this country is no different. **Financial fuel is key to driving the game forward**. To achieve this, we will create separate commercial programmes for the men's and women's national teams, even though some sponsors may operate across both. Our partnerships with sponsors to girls' and women's football will include **specific marketing support** on both sides to achieve our goals. We will develop concepts and programmes to show women's football as **exciting, skilful and unpredictable** – all the attractions which have made the **men's game the world's dominant team sport**. (Gameplan for Growth, Football Association, 2017, p.28)

Clearly then, the Football Association were aiming to emulate the commerciality of the men's game with the women's game, with an increasing commercial desire key to 'driving the game forward' and nakedly referring to women's football as an 'enterprise'. This marks a shift away from the Corinthian ideals that had made women's football attractive to some fans, and to situating the matchday experience as a

commercialised leisure activity (Fielding-Lloyd, Woodhouse and Sequerra, 2018). This was perhaps an unsurprising tactic to take given the body's approach to introducing professionalisation to the WSL (Woodhouse, Fielding-Lloyd and Sequerra 2019), which fast-tracked professionalisation through a new licensing system, which controversially meant that teams such as Sunderland and Yeovil were relegated as they did not have the financial capacity to satisfy the new licensing requirements. Allied to this increasing commercialisation was the focus on positive relationships with broadcasters and sponsors as one of the key pillars to the *Gameplan for Growth* (Football Association, 2017):

Create innovative broadcast and event propositions, by:

- Working with all broadcasters to introduce new and innovative formats using social media influencers and short-form content to **reach younger audiences** and deliver **commercial value for sponsors**;
- Working with clubs to provide regular and consistent fixtures for the domestic competitions;
- Reviewing the format and timings of competitions and events to **maximise commercial opportunities**.

Create a dedicated women's commercial programme, with separation of men's and women's international rights, by:

- Creating a distinct and separate **brand identity** for the Lionesses;
- Re-engineering the current usage of rights by partners with a view to create new assets and opportunities;
- Evaluating the commercial structure of FA WSL assets to support clubs and deliver **more value** to new and existing partners. (p.29)

Clearly here, we can see the prevalence of commercial and broadcasting partnerships to the future of women's competitive football in the eyes of their governing body. Importantly however, there is the assertion that their package will target a younger audience in order to offer an attractive bundle for sponsors through social media

programmes and through the use of ‘influencers’ to reach this commercially attractive social group.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the final point from the first quotation around the adjustment of competitions and events to best suit broadcasters is an important one, signalling a governing body that is willing to suit the whims of broadcasting partners through their governance. This has long been a criticism of the Football Association since the genesis of the Premier League, which has managed to command lucrative broadcasting deals through a willingness to adjust fixtures to best suit broadcasters, for whom EPL football is key in their offerings to customers (Domeneghetti, 2014). Clearly, the governing body would be willing to pursue a similar strategy with their women’s football offering, with the hopes of securing the future of their competitive, elite level leagues.

From the two brief examples shown above, a number of discursive repertoires are clear. While there was a general fixation on narratives of growth, there were nuanced differences depending on the context in what constituted ‘growth’. It was generally agreed that given the gender participation gap highlighted in myriad government reports, women’s sport offered a significant opportunity for growing participation bases.<sup>63</sup> Crucially, much of this relied on separate strategies for women’s sport as will be addressed in the subsequent chapter section. These strategies however represented incongruities, with women’s sport and athletic feminine embodiments simultaneously positioned as a positive societal shift before the same embodiments were reconstituted in relation to a (hegemonically) masculinised gaze (Connell, 1987).

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<sup>62</sup> An ‘influencer’ is a social media personality with a substantial following that can leverage this following through the promotion and reviewing of products (Brown and Hayes, 2008; Stubb, Nystrom and Colliander, 2019).

<sup>63</sup> This amounts to 258,000 adult participants (Sport England, 2019)

At the elite level, it was clear that due to the relative successes of the women's national teams a policy window was open for increasing professionalisation and commodification. In order to best take advantage of this opportunity, both governmental and governing body documents positioned the men's alternative to the respective sports as offering the roadmap to follow. This discursively positioned men's sport as the more developed, stronger endeavour.

## **At the Edges, Moving In- Liminality and Specificity of Women's Sport**

This chapter section will argue that while there was evidence of increased attention being paid to women's sport as a legitimate endeavour by both governing bodies and government, that there was evidence of a preferred understanding of women's sport along the lines of physical activity, wherein the competitive elements of sport had generally been discursively suppressed in favour of promoting benefits extra-curricular to sport, such as 'stress relief' or 'weight loss'. This is not to argue that these are not important features of individuals' rationales for participation (Downward, Lera-Lopez and Rasciute, 2014), but these were frequently gendered positionings that drew upon traditional gender roles, particularly around motherhood. These representations cut across the full gamut of document typologies, which could be understood as evidence of discursive repertoires being formulated and accepted around women within sport policy.

Overall, throughout the sample there appeared to be a higher level of comfort and familiarity with the notion of women's sport as a *participatory* rather than competitive entity, mirroring some of the discussion on media representation in the prior chapter. However, this was communicated through different discursive narratives. For example, a section around the difficulties in attracting women to sport and physical activity - *Go Where Women Are- Insight on Engaging Women and Girls in Sport and Exercise* (Sport England, 2015) - problematizes competitive sport explicitly, describing negative perceptions of sport for women as being:

- Competitive
- Difficult



- Unfeminine
- Aggressive
- Not aspirational (p.13)

It is then stated that: ‘many women and girls do embrace traditional sports and enjoy its competitive element’ (p.13). This caveat does capture the reality that some women embrace traditional team sports and enjoy the competition that comes alongside this, offering a greater element of nuance than was generally afforded this issue. The overall discursive formation problematising competition could be read as embedding masculine dominance within sport. This is understood as fundamental to the gender relations within society by Connell (1987), who argues that hegemonic masculinity is ‘constructed and promoted most systematically through competitive sport’ (p.84). If competitive sport is not encouraged or promoted discursively within these documents it can be held that instead, some of the tenets of emphasised femininity and the dominance (rather than total domination) of the masculine within sport are being upheld. This is a good example of the utility of a neo-Gramscian approach, whereby essentialised notions of domination can be avoided and more nuanced descriptions can be offered.

In the main, policy documents within the sampling frame centred around - or meaningfully considered - physical activity rather than elite level sport, in line with governmental strategy post- London 2012. However, it was clear that women-focussed policies and strategies are different, with a far greater focus on participation than competition. One example of a policy that was successful while reducing the levels of

competitiveness was the Back to Netball programme.<sup>64</sup> This was highlighted and praised by government in other documents due to its success in getting a ‘hard to reach’ group physically active. It achieved this through its programme design in line with governmental strategies around overcoming the social and cultural barriers to women participating in sport, which will be addressed further later in this chapter.

*Go Where Women Are-- Insight on Engaging Women and Girls in Sport and Exercise* (Sport England, 2015) was a rare example of a document addressing the possibility of women participating due to an enjoyment of competition, against an overall narrative that women did not or could not enjoy competitive sport. This embeds taken for granted feminised notions about the suitability of women to compete in formal organised sport and their place within this traditionally masculine domain (Dunning, 1986; Connell, 1987), again proffering a traditional reading of women’s role within sport. This can be read as fixing emphasised forms of femininity within the sporting social space, with this positioning privileging a ‘weakness’ of women, in that they would not seek to dominate or be competitive in order to continue a general subordination in keeping with hierarchical gender relations (Connell, 1987). This occurs through the embedding of these narratives around women’s place within competitive sport and competition, as they then become the ‘way we talk about’ this particular issue. This can be related to Hall’s notion that ‘language is the privileged medium in which we make sense of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged’ (2009, p.1).

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<sup>64</sup> The Back to Netball programme moved to an optional game situation after the 12 week skill training programme, but participation and skill development was the crux of the programme.

Foucault's governmentality becomes a particularly useful lens for analysis of these narratives, given the role of institutional narratives in shaping common sense understandings shape acceptable behaviours, in this instance regulating access to, and forms of, physical activity for women. For example, it can be argued that the UK Government's concern with sport is relatively paradoxical, with a desire to autonomise the practices of national governing bodies, while simultaneously imposing centralised targets on sports bodies. To this end, rather than take formalised control of sport, regulating practices are instead implemented (Green and Houlihan, 2006), with the values and desires of a political institution then filtering down and permeating other bodies until they become taken for granted norms and knowledges. This has been explored in other European contexts, with Garcia and Herraiz (2013) discussing the role of governmentality in Spanish sports policy, with their analysis highlighting the Spanish sport for health agenda. They argue that the utility of governmentality in that instance was about managing populations through guiding conduct, not by repressing or punishing, but by giving citizens an active role in self-governance.

It can be held then, that communications from government and quasi-governmental bodies that focus on decreasing the role of competition in the sport and physical activity offering to women has the potential to guide conduct through the power that language can wield in shaping common sense understandings (Hall, 1997). This draws on Foucault's technology of the self (Foucault, 1988a), wherein an individual can be both the object and subject of power relations. In this case occurring through the shaping of relations that guide behaviour towards a boutique of government desires (Markula and Pringle, 2006). The issue arising from the inconsistency in policy messaging in this sample however is that government are clearly aiming for a greater level of

participation across the sampled sports from every section of society, but their policy narrative limits the scope of ‘acceptable’ activities for women to participate in, with non-competitive, non-contact sports, or adaptations of sports, privileged. This correlates with and furthers the findings of Godoy-Pressland (2014), who argued that sports media coverage centres around sports which feed into traditional notions of femininity, such as tennis or equestrian activities. In this case, this has transposed into sports policy documentation, perhaps signalling the effectiveness and permeation of these discursive repertoires across a range of important social, cultural and political institutions. In short, messages around reducing competition and physical contact are *‘what we talk about when we talk about’* women’s sport and physical activity.

Perhaps the strongest theme in policy relating to women’s sport and physical activity is the ubiquity of discourse around ‘barriers’ and the ‘hard to reach’ nature of women participants. These barriers were broadly be categorised as either sociocultural or practical. This distinction was made clear in *Go Where Women Are - Insight on Engaging Women and Girls in Sport and Exercise* (Sport England, 2015) a review by Sport England as part of the ‘This Girl Can’ campaign which focussed on increasing stagnant levels of participation by women and girls in sport and physical activity:

‘It is possible to categorise these barriers into two broad types: – Practical/logistical challenges – Personal/emotional reasons’ (p.22)

While this seems a reductive way to view the participation decisions given the multitude of cultural and social factors that play into participation, the document does argue that ‘in reality these are often interlinked and inseparable’ and that there was therefore a need to address both of these simultaneously (p.22). It then goes on to

highlight some of these barriers, giving specific focus to the fear of judgement from others. The report's listing is worth replicating here for clarity:

**Table 8- Personal and practical barriers adapted from Source- *Go Where Women Are- Insight on Engaging Women and Girls in Sport and Exercise* (Sport England, 2015)**

Personal Barriers	Practical Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A fundamental personal concern is the fear of being judged as described earlier; further worries layer on top of this, are often linked.</li> <li>• Many women have worries about appearance, which can be a general unhappiness with having to reveal their body, as well as being put off by what you look like once you do exercise (no make-up, hot, sweaty etc.).</li> <li>• Social confidence is another barrier. Women often are put off by the idea of having to ‘confront’ these activities on their own. They may also have worries that they won’t fit in – ‘it’s not for me’.</li> <li>• Concerns about ability are also an issue, whether just fears or reality (for those with injuries or health conditions). Even women who have been previously very sporty can worry about ability and failure to live up to expectations in terms of performance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time and cost are often given as the main reasons preventing women from taking part in sport and exercise. For some, the additional spend from the household budget is a very practical barrier but for others time and cost become a matter of prioritising sport and exercise.</li> <li>• Women, in particular mothers, feel bad about being away from their family and spending time on themselves.</li> <li>• Going where women are means understanding their constraints, such as staying for children’s bedtimes, family mealtimes and accommodating work schedules.</li> <li>• Lack of information is another significant barrier, particularly compounded by lack of time to find the information.</li> </ul>

From these 'barriers', certain strands of thought can be observed. Firstly, there is a clear gendering of emotional concerns, with issues around self-esteem and the need for social integration emphasised in attempts to engender and sustain female participation in sport, rather than acknowledging that women may want to participate simply because they enjoy sport or physical activity. Secondly, women are specifically positioned as mothers and homemakers, embedding traditional gender roles and cementing the discursive dominance of masculinity in the sporting space (Theberge, 1985; Dunning, 1986). This emphasis of femininity (Connell, 1986), placing women in traditional - and ostensibly subordinate - gendered roles is critical to understanding the discursive repertoires that permeated the sample, where there was evidence of bodies acknowledging the importance of increasing women's participation and access to participation. However, many of the narratives used were overtly gendered, for example in the instances where parenthood as a factor to participation was considered.

For example, in purely numeric terms across the sample, the words 'mother' and 'mum' appeared 70 times, compared to 'father' and 'dad' which appeared 18 times. Of the instances where fatherhood was mentioned, it was in stories and case studies whereby an encouraging father had supported their children - frequently girls - into sport through acting as a gatekeeper. This is not necessarily purely gendered, but in the case of this sample the anecdotes given were predominantly of girls and young women. Finally, there is a clear argument presented that women's sport and physical activity require a specific policy agenda in order to generate participation. While this is not problematic within itself, there was a clear case of confused policy messaging throughout the sample, the differences in which demand highlighting.

Throughout the sample, women's specific policy emphasised the benefits that come through physical activity rather than the pleasure of participation itself:

To engage women and girls, we need to think about what sport can do for them, specifically in relation to what really matters to them:

- A healthy way to spend time **with the family**
- A good way to **catch up with friends** or **meet new people**
- An **energiser before work**, education, going out
- An effective way to **de-stress** after work, education, **looking after the kids**
- An opportunity to **develop new skills** or **discover new places** (outdoors) (Go Where Women Are- Insight on engaging women and girls in sport and exercise, Sport England, 2015, p.14)

'Encouragers' include frequent contact from project staff, social oriented, fun and non-competitive sessions, competent coaches and incentives. These can be used alongside enablers to persuade women to keep attending. (Evaluation of the Active Women Programme, Sport England, 2012, p.8)

As we can see here, all of the benefits highlighted about 'what sport can do for them' have very little to do with enjoying sport itself, but rather using sport as a tool for benefiting other areas of their life. Further to this, there is a clear heterosexualisation of duties and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles. This was most obvious in the frequent discussion on the pressures and barriers facing mothers, when the same duties were never mentioned around fatherhood in sports policy:

Whilst a woman may cite lack of time as the reason she doesn't manage to do any exercise, her real concern may be that (in the case of mums in particular) spending time on exercise will be perceived as self-indulgent and implies she is neglecting her domestic and maternal duties. (Go Where Women Are- Insight on engaging women and girls in sport and exercise, Sport England, 2015, p.21)

Female participation – both on and off field – has been a notable part of All Stars Cricket’s initial success. One in five of the activators in 2017 was female set against a normal coaching ratio of one in a hundred. “We know in this age group that the mum is often the primary decision-maker,” says Dwyer, “so we gave them the message about what cricket can offer your child and also what it can offer the relationship with your child. “We were conscious of removing barriers to parents getting involved. They get a video every week telling them the games their child will be playing so they can get started by playing them in the back yard.” (ECB Annual Review, 2017-2018, England Cricket Board, 2018, p.27).

Clearly, issues of parenthood feature in the ability to participate and it is appropriate for the policy to address this, however such distinctions around parenthood were not mentioned in policy that also addresses men. That such distinctions and acknowledgements of modern domestic gender roles asymmetrically serve to embed traditional, stereotypical gender portrayals not just within sport, but speak to these issues in a wider social context.

Furthermore, emotionality and ‘feelings’ around sport are emphasised in women specific policies. Most pertinent of this was regarding the need for women to feel social fulfilment if they wish to engage in physical activity, rather than communicating that women may want to participate due to enjoyment of the sport itself or a desire for competition. As previously discussed, competition was generally minimised as much as possible in women specific sports policy and reviews into gender specific strategies. The emphasis on emotional needs was not reflected in holistic strategies, and while social and community wellbeing were features of the Government’s targets for their sporting strategy, there was a far greater focus on social elements of participation in the women-focussed policies. The removal of competitive elements from much of the policy thinking around women’s sport could be understood as cementing the hegemonic



position of masculinity in competitive sport, given that ‘prowess of this kind becomes a means of judging one’s degree of masculinity’ (Connell, 1987, p.85). This shift away from competitive sport for women, while simultaneously focussing on competitive sport at the school level and in public funding embeds this common sense understanding around who can and should play competitive sport and engage in physical activity. There were many examples of this throughout the sample, where policy writers seemed much more comfortable with the idea of women’s sport as physical activity rather than as competitive, which moves against much of the Coalition and later Conservative governmental agenda for school sport particularly:

And it also demands a clear programme of activity to increase opportunities to play sport – hence the £135 million support of community sport facilities and activity through Sport England’s Places, People, Play programme, and the creation of a new School Games competition, which will bring the excitement and challenge of structured competitive sport to thousands of schools across the UK. (Creating a Sporting Habit for Life- A New Youth Sport Strategy, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2012, p.15)

This typically meant either making sessions more social, less competitive, and less ‘traditionally sporty’ in the sense of practising skills. For instance, some Back to Netball sessions were tailored to the Asian women attending by being much more relaxed with regards to rules, and more fun-based rather than skills orientated, to take account of the language barrier. (Evaluation of Active Women Programmes Year 1, Sport England, 2012, p.27)

Important here is the overall movement away from encouraging competitive sport for women, which was a shift from overall sports policy orthodoxies towards competition. This served to position women and girls as being primarily concerned with physical activity for health purposes, othering them from approaches frequently taken with boys and men (Devine, 2013, p.263). Policy confusion was sometimes evident, with both

competitive and non-competitive centric approaches floated. This was particularly apparent in the expectation of sport to act as panacea, most aptly demonstrated by the aforementioned broad areas of wellbeing that *Sporting Future- A New Strategy for an Active Nation* (2015) highlighted. As previously mentioned, one of the key mechanisms for sport achieving these wider aims was capitalising on the success of elite level athletes across the four sampled sports. This can be understood as a furthering of the responsibilities of the elite level athlete, in this context as a form of what I term ‘emphasised (post) femininity’.

### **Emphasised (post)femininity**

Emphasised (post)femininity is a furthering of Connell’s thesis, drawing on the field of post-feminism. Post-feminism has been a contested concept, with few concrete attempts to define the term, however across the field it is useful to consider three main ways in which post-feminism is invoked; as a ‘backlash’ against the feminist gains during the 1970s (Faludi, 1991), as a philosophical departure from second and third wave feminisms to a ‘sensibility’ to be analysed (Gill, 2007; Gill and Scharff, 2013) and finally as a theoretical lens in its own right, as a counterpoint to advances made in post-structuralist and post-modernist philosophy (Brooks, 2002). Crucially, Gill and Scharff (2013) persuasively draw the connections between post-feminism and neo-liberalism, arguing that this relationship is apparent at three different levels: through a refocusing on the individual, rather than the system in which the individual finds themselves; through prevailing narratives of agentic expression; and finally through the pervasiveness of gender roles, specifically the requirement of women to exercise considerably more self-discipline than men, most clearly through the acceptance of regulation of conduct. This final observation is of most use to this analysis, as there is

a thread of logic throughout both analytic chapters, which broadly relates to regulation of behaviours in the Foucauldian tradition. In this instance, the additional responsibilities of the elite level athlete as detailed above demonstrate strongly the turn towards the utility of an 'emphasised post-femininity' by combining two of the linkages to neoliberalism, particularly in a sporting context.

Elite female athletes are now expected to conduct themselves in a manner that benefits their sports, through being willing and positive public faces not only to their sport, but women's sport as one entity. This individualises and places substantial responsibility on the athlete to shape their behaviours, acting as a constant ambassador to the values and goals of government and governing bodies. This links to Connell's (1987) description of emphasised femininity, conceptualised in terms of compliance and subordination to accepted/acceptable practices defined by men. However, in this instance this would be an oversimplification. Instead, what we can see is a process of the individualisation of conduct of elite level athletes who then have responsibility for the perception of women's sport holistically, which gives these athletes a far greater level of influence than emphasised femininity would allow for. Post-feminism's potential in understanding sporting gender order and representations has already been considered by Thorpe, Toffoletti and Bruce (2017). They argue that different feminist critiques all offer a different way of making sense of the ways in which discourses are internalised and embodied by 'young (sports)women' (p.3). Murray, Lord and Lorimer (2020) use Gill's post-feminism as sensibility to examine coaching experiences at the grassroots level, arguing for more scholarship to explore post-feminism as a theoretical lens to understand gender relations in sport. This study echoes this call, arguing that while Connell's thesis on gender relations carries substantial utility, a post-feminist

adaptation may offer a more nuanced understanding of the evolving realities of women's place within the increasingly neo-liberal social space of English sport and this should be explored by future scholarship.

The repeated discursive formation that competitive organised sport is not 'for' women is embedded in the policy document sample, through a discourse that minimises the acceptability and compatibility of competitive sport for women while simultaneously privileging the role of elite level athletes in soft power strategies. This can be understood as a discursive repertoire that again utilises traditional, emphasised forms of femininity (Connell, 1986) as a norm, through repeating uncritically held assumptions around the needs of women (as one homogenous group) in an overtly gendered fashion. This places female competition as lesser and subordinate to men's, which is dichotomously positioned as 'authentic'. Similar narratives were not evident in the policy sample for men, for example in the previously explored example of parenthood. That such narratives appeared across the sampling frame from a range of different bodies in a range of different time frames shows the relative success and ubiquity of these assumptions around sport, which are then transmitted through the language within institutional documents. The values desired by governmental bodies (most obviously the two major funding bodies, Sport England and UK Sport) have successfully been cultivated at the governing body level, not necessarily through coercion or imposition - although the threat of the removal of funding for bodies that do not follow the Governmental line should be considered - but by the shaping of cultural values and knowledges within the sports participation administration sphere. Fundamentally, this speaks to a level of policy confusion regarding women's sport,

perpetuating many of the ‘barriers’ that the specific policies regarding women’s sport seek to address.

In the main bodies of the text of many policy documents, women’s sports were nearly always referred to alongside ‘minority’ or smaller sports. For example:

People felt that more coverage should be given, in particular, to smaller sports and women’s sport that struggle for profile. (Sporting Future- a New Strategy for an Active Nation, HM Government, 2015, p.42)

This highlights well the liminality of women’s sport in policy documents. For example, there were no references to women’s sport in the Brexit paper on sport, which broadly focussed on the commercial and sporting impacts of Brexit on domestic and international (men’s) sport. Clearly, this speaks to the broader argument made above about the positioning of women’s sport as less important, in this case due to economic and commercial disparities between men’s and women’s sports, most obviously football as evidenced in the previous section. This can be read polysemically. For example, this may be a reflection on the economic reality of women’s sport, with many of their leagues finding lucrative sponsorship and broadcasting revenues in an era of increasing professionalisation difficult to capture in the eyes of government, as discussed above. Furthermore, the imbalance in gender markers between ‘women’s sports’ and ‘minority sports’ in the text is important, as there is no real rationale for this demarcation in the same way as there was in the press. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, gender markers are not particularly damaging in and of themselves, however the imbalanced used of ‘women’ and the normalisation of men’s sport as ‘sport’ serves to embed orthodoxies of sport and physical activity as a masculine domain and the presence of women as being transgressive or deviant to the norms of

this social field. This is with the exception within this sample of netball, as will be discussed at greater length later in the subsequent case study chapter. That this normalisation of women as ‘other’ within governmental and governing body documents perpetuates this discursive repertoire, legitimising it as an acceptable understanding of the place of women within sport as a social field (Hall, 1988). These discursive understandings then shape societal norms and acceptability of behaviours (Foucault, 1982). The focus here is on the linkages between the lack of clarity of women’s sports policy and the liminality of women’s sport as a policy concern, wherein there is not the same level of policy confusion regarding ‘sport’ more broadly, meaning that which does not focus specifically on women’s sport and physical activity.

This is not to argue that more tailored approaches should not be taken to facilitate different societal groups with different desired outcomes and different propensities - and crucially opportunities - to participate. However, this is not the approach that government took, devolving much of the control for sport and physical activity to local and private providers. The argument is made that many councils have ‘taken the opportunity to integrate physical activity into public health policy as part of a wider shift from a system that treats ill health to one that promotes wellbeing’ (Sporting Future- Strategy for an Active Nation, 2015, HM Government, p.13). As argued throughout this chapter, elite level athletes being considered valid cogs within the mechanisms of implementing governmental strategy and policy priorities is emblematic of a shifting set of expectations for athletes and an updated approach to the public recognisability of internationally successful female athletes.

In this section I have argued that women's sport as a policy concern occupied a contested discursive terrain. On the one hand, there was clearly acknowledgement and acceptance of women as a key demographic, given the potential gains that could conceivably be made, particularly in terms of participation in light of the gender gap of participation many sports report. However, the gains of women's sports politically should be considered against the persistent use of gendered discursive repertoires throughout the policy corpus, showing that while some gains around the seriousness with which women in sport are considered, gendered representations - particularly around motherhood and the perpetuation of traditional, nuclear families and gender roles - firmly persist. Crucially, women are still seen as a fairly homogenous 'hard to reach' group. This lack of nuance in the crafting of policies and strategies bely the apparent epiphanies made by governing bodies around the cultural barriers that many sports as historically masculinised social spaces have erected.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter has touched on three key representations of female athletes in policy documentation within the sample timeframe. Firstly, athletes are occupying an increasingly important space in terms of policy expectations and policy outcomes at both governmental and governing body level. For top level female athletes, this comes at a time of increasing professionalisation and engagement with the general public, where it is simply not enough for them to excel on the field or court, but to also engage with the grassroots of the game to pave the way for the next generation. This concurs with recent scholarship in this area (Dunn, 2016a). Expectation of role modelling behaviour for athletes is not new, with Charles Barkley's 'I am not a role model' Nike advertising campaign rallying against role model expectations in 1993. However, these

expectations are becoming increasingly codified in governing body strategies. The chapter's analysis found that this is an extension of traditional discourses of caring and nurturing roles for women in English society, building on the narratives discussed in Chapter Three and the work of Bruce (2016) around media depictions of female athletes as model citizens. The evidence within this policy sample suggests that this has been taken to a new level of societal expectation, with these narratives now embedded in institutional praxis.

Secondly, the emerging narrative of 'growth' in women's sports discourse was explored, finding that this takes two distinct but interrelated forms. At the elite level, there was a consistent narrative around economic considerations and the requirement for women's sports to 'grow' and be financially self-sustaining, particularly in the context of the emerging professionalisation and formalisation of women's sports leagues. This narrative had pervaded both governmental and governing body documents and became particularly prevalent after the breakout period of national team success post-2015. At the grassroots level, it was clear that governing bodies' targeted growth in participation rates, in line with government aims in this area. This emphasis on a duality of growth is a crucial development in the understanding of women's sport in the English policy space, showing that women's sport and physical is emerging as an increasingly important consideration within a contested policy terrain.

The liminality of women's sport as a policy consideration was examined, demonstrating both the lack of attention paid to women's sport within generic sports policy alongside an emergence of women's specific sports policy from sports bodies such as Sport England and governing bodies. This duality speaks to the recognition that women



belong in a physical activity and sporting space, but they are still sometimes seen as a 'hard to reach' group rather than policy adopting a stance that it is partly the cultural barriers within their sports that cause participation gender gaps. Much of the policy discourse evident in this sample centred around reducing narratives of competition within physical activity and sport provision, embedding certain gendered expectations of women in the sporting social space.

Linked to this, there were examples of strategies which embedded gendered narratives around motherhood. This is not to suggest that motherhood is not a typical barrier to sports participation, but fatherhood was not positioned as a barrier in the same way as motherhood was. There were frequent examples where strategies sought to emphasise how physical activity could benefit women's lives aside from playing for 'love of the game'. Finally, there were emerging discourses whereby governing bodies discussed their role within the cementing of masculinist hegemony, however there were examples that recognised this while simultaneously engaging in discourses which embed masculine orthodoxies. While it is clear that governing bodies have recognised, either through governmental 'nudges' or through organisational introspection that there is a need to reconsider their offering, there is still evidence of discursive 'laggings', whereby governing body thought has not necessarily caught up to a rate of societal and political change.

## Chapter 5- Meetings of Meaning and Discursive Departures- Cases of Shared and Divergent Repertoires

This chapter will put forward two important case studies, in order to demonstrate how some of the discursive formations worked within and between the different elements of the research study's sample. The first section of the chapter will focus predominantly on one thematic area shown to be both prevalent and crucial within the study (with some linkages to others drawn as appropriate): *the influence of elite level success on the overall health of the sport*. It will then look at an example of a thematic area of disparity: *the representation of female athletes as nationally important* - wherein the discursive repertoires were similar, but different in their communication across the two textual types. It is hoped that by offering one single sport and one cross sport case, the depth and breadth of the discursive repertoires captured in this study can be scrutinized. This case study chapter is presented in order to show how this discursive framing was built across both governing body documents and press coverage, with linkages then drawn to the organisational strategic behaviours of England Netball. This aids with the fulfilment two of the research aims: *exploring the discursive repertoires around women's team sports in sport policy documents and the national press* and *examining any shared discursive repertoires around women's team sports in sport policy documents and the press*.

Netball is a useful case study in examining sporting strategy and policy as it is the only one of the sports sampled in this study which does not offer a concurrent ‘men’s’ strategy. There is thus a lack of gender marking within the sport, wherein netball is not referred to as ‘women’s netball’, the female is the *norm*. Semantically, the lack of an ‘othering’ within the sport offers a contrast to the other sports within the research study, where asymmetric gender markers were applied. The focus on women within netball has likely impacted policy decisions about the sport compared to other governing bodies for the sampled sports, some of which have historically had challenging relationships with women’s sport.

The period of the sampling frame was a transformative one for netball in England at the elite level, with the national team winning a Commonwealth Games gold medal as they beat favourites Australia in the closing seconds of their final match in 2018. This victory saw a swell of public awareness for the national team, perhaps building on the latent familiarity of the sport, given that it is popularly administered in the English Physical Education national curriculum. Overall, England Netball were an example of a governing body which adapted well to the changing scope and role of sport in the English political space. They were generally successful in aligning the strategy of the sport with the desires of the overall higher-level sports strategy. Through programs such as Back to Netball, they leveraged a deep understanding of their participant - and potential participant - base into impressive improvements in their participation rates, while simultaneously successfully bidding for a World Cup and establishing excellent results at the elite level.

England Netball were also proactive in engaging and strategising for their volunteer base. England Netball frequently placed volunteers at the heart of their strategies, referring to volunteers as the sport's 'backbone' (England Netball, 2017) or 'stars' (Ibid), and hosting events such as the 'Goalden Globe Awards' to celebrate their volunteer base (England Netball, 2015). While it is not uncommon for governing bodies - and indeed government - to praise volunteers, the fervour with which England Netball discuss their volunteer base in such pivotal discursive terms is significant. The governing body also targeted and recognised different demographics, particularly around *age*, with different offerings. For example, the Pass on Your Passion programme (England Netball, 2015) focussed on the 12-25 demographic. This speaks to a broadly segmented approach that England Netball seemed to take to its organisation of the sport, making the universality of the appeal of their elite performers even more crucial in order to facilitate the governing body's approach.

England Netball highlight four key pillars to their strategy in their organisational mission, *Your Game, Your Way* (2012). These are:

1. Grow participation in the game by 10,000 participants per year
2. Deliver a 1<sup>st</sup> class experience for members and participants
3. England winning the world netball championships
4. Lead effective and progressive infrastructure to benefit all stakeholders

From these goals the organisational alignment with the goals of government, specifically giving credence to elite level success on the global stage with an expectation therein that this success will impact the future participation rates for the sport. In this instance, England Netball targeted success at a home World Championship while simultaneously aiming to grow its participation base. England Netball also

emphasise the critical role of infrastructure, both in terms of premises and networks, building on the emphasis of the government's *Places, People, Play* programme (2011).

The elite level of netball was framed as important by both the print media and public policy corpuses. As exemplified here:

The fact that netball is not an Olympic sport, although it is played at the Commonwealth Games, is telling in itself, **depriving girls of muscular, fiercely competitive role models** to offset a **skinny, sometimes vacuous celebrity culture**. At least investors have noticed the sport's growth. (*Sunday Times*, February 22 2015)

From this quotation two different discursive themes are evident. Firstly, the discursive positioning of netballers as 'muscular, fiercely competitive role models' as a salve to a 'skinny, sometimes vacuous celebrity culture'. This is an excellent example of changing pressures for elite female athletes to be role models and therefore be a positive influence on young women while also representing their sport in a positive light through role model behaviours and changing societal expectations for women. In this case, their competitive nature and muscular physiques were highlighted as admirable features, offering a subversion of traditional, emphasised feminine embodiments centred around themes of physical meekness and subservience (Connell, 1986). Crucially, the former of these two was broadly minimised by much of the women's specific sports policy analysed in the previous chapter, however this may speak to the broader acceptance of female athleticism in coverage, particularly in the second half of the print media corpus.

Secondly, the *Sunday Times* quotation employed a narrative of growth, focusing on the increased interest in investors as a yardstick for this, showing again the importance of economic growth narratives at the performance levels of sport. Netball was an

intriguing case however, with growth at both participatory and elite level being considered hand in glove by the governing body. This was also captured in the media corpus, with Chief Executive Joanna Adams in an interview in the *Guardian* arguing that:

"The success of netball has not happened by chance. This is no accident. We have had a strategy in place for the past five years. We've been really customer-focused and concentrated on what they want to watch. There has been a communications strategy, an events strategy and a broadcast strategy. And on top of that women's sport in general is absolutely on the up. We've done a lot of hard work and now netball is growing and growing. More and more girls are playing and that is being reflected in the growth of our membership. We have more clubs and more leagues and now the sponsors are coming in to make us commercially sustainable." (*Guardian*, January 22 2016)

From Adams' statement we can see certain privileged discursive repertoires. Firstly, this is a relatively uncommon example of governing body strategy in the press reportage. In this instance, the strategic consideration positions participants and supporters as 'customers', giving weight to increasing commerciality of the sport moving forward, in keeping with broader trends around the commercialisation and commodification of sport (Slack, 2004). This is demonstrated through the securing of major sponsorship deals and broadcasting partnerships. Adams then ties in the success of women's sports holistically as a momentum builder for netball specifically, given the predominantly female demographic of the sport. Finally, the two different avenues of growth highlighted in the previous chapter are mentioned, an increase in the economic considerations of sport and an increase in participation base. That these discursive elements were all from a governing body Chief Executive neatly ties together many of the arguments of this research, showing that there is significant work to be done in exploring the discursive overlaps between the press coverage and governing

body working. This becomes particularly important as women's sports become increasingly mainstream, and the language used around women's sport becomes more widely disseminated and received.

Netball did not represent a great deal of the newspaper corpus (n=77), however success at elite level was frequently cited by both the governing body and by journalists as being pivotal to the future health of the sport, demonstrating one of the dimensions to the 'sporting emissaries' discursive narrative. In this instance, there was a clear connection drawn discursively between elite level success at major tournaments and grassroots participation rates, particularly in younger women. For example:

Realistically, the most powerful catalyst will be at home, as the mainstream exposure of the netballers' golden hour promises to **galvanise young women** every bit as strongly as the **hockey players'** breakthrough at Rio 2016 or the **cricketers' coronation** at last summer's World Cup. (*Sunday Telegraph*, April 22 2018)

Those results will be expected to continue now they have raised the bar for the sport in the country, **leading to increased participation, sponsorship and attention**. The next challenge will be July's World Cup, held in Liverpool. "We needed to stay grounded," Agbeze said. "We've done an amazing thing, but it's almost like we haven't. Next year is a home World Cup. We beat Australia on home soil so they're probably gunning for us even more. **The gold medal put the sport on the map in the UK**. If we can double up, now people are looking more, it would be phenomenal for the **future of the sport**." (*Telegraph*, December 5 2018)

During the year we instigated a strategic review of the Vitality Netball Superleague (VNSL). We hope that a stronger VNSL will not only improve the pathway for our elite athletes but **also provide great role models to inspire the next generation**. (England Netball Annual Report 2016-2017, Netball England, 2017, p.5)

Here we can see two different elements to the successful sporting emissary discursive repertoire from both newspaper reportage and governing body documentation. The key difference here is the emerging professionalisation and formalisation of domestic netball leading to an increasing opportunity for elite level performers to be role models and inspire the next generation. This was a departure from the other three sports in the sample, who predominantly focussed on international competitors being successful to be role models and inspire. This perhaps speaks to the different context of netball being a women's only sport at performance level, thereby there is no 'men's alternative' to be attached to, as could be seen in the case of cricket particularly.

The emphasis on a domestic league as a pathway to feed not only the national team with a quality pool of players but also to provide 'great role models' in order to 'inspire' shows the interplay of many of the thematic arguments made throughout the previous two chapters. Not only is it crucial that players in an increasingly professionalised sport and league perform on the court, but they must also consider their behaviours as a representation of their sport holistically. Again, it is worth reiterating that expectations of athletes to be role models is not unique to women in sport - and indeed if this is a mantle that an individual values, they should be free to do so - but the increasing importance of role modelling behaviours to show women's sport positively is an important discursive element to coverage.

Netball in England has moved towards the formalisation of their leagues in keeping with many other women's sports (McLachlan, 2019). This began with the formation of the Netball Super League in 2005, which has undergone a period of formalisation through increased sponsorship and a broadcasting agreement with a major broadcaster



in Sky Sports.<sup>65</sup> Mansfield and Killick (2012) analyse the franchising of the Netball Super League, arguing that its decentralised approach allows for greater diversity and specialisation within franchises. However, they go on to claim that this can lead to greater inconsistencies in managerial practices. At the governing body level, they argue that the changes imposed at the structure of Netball in England involved little consultation with England Netball membership, similar to the Football Association's approach to professionalising women's football described in the previous chapter (Woodhouse, Fielding-Lloyd and Sequerra, 2019). They go on to assert that 'such strategic change is best described as a radical turnaround managed by directive command.' (p.564). This speaks to many issues of sports governance, demonstrating the difficulties and frictions of implementation. On one hand, it could be argued that this is an example of top-down control by decision makers within one National Governing Body, however this analysis is limited. Instead, these restructuring decisions must be understood in the context of policy agendas of government, who demand a better integrated and more professional approach to boosting grassroots sports in order for sports to be eligible for public funding, with punitive action taken against those sports who do not 'deliver' (Sporting Future- A New Strategy for an Active Nation, Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2015).

Netball however has been very successful in aligning the sport's strategy with that of the Government, increasing its eligibility for public funding, managing to accrue £47,461,730 across the sampling frame (Sport England, 2019).<sup>66</sup> However, they were

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<sup>65</sup> The current sponsor is VitalityHealth, a health insurance corporation that 'rewards' clients who make healthy lifestyle choices through a rewards system.

<sup>66</sup> It should be noted that the monetary figure given above refers only to money given directly to the NGB and does not include funding given to community projects directly by Sport England.

also subject to a 34% annual funding cut in 2017 due to Sport England taking a change in funding strategy, leading to a relocation and reduction in staff numbers (England Netball, 2018). To this end, and in this policy environment, a more ‘top down’ approach may have been undertaken to benefit and solidify the position of the sport. This friction, particularly in periods of increasing professionalisation, is a key governance consideration and becomes particularly pertinent in the case of increasingly professionalised and formalised engagement with volunteers, which is also a key pillar of sport to government (Sporting Future- A New Strategy for an Active Nation, Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2015).

The relatively focussed demographic of netball may be a factor in the clarity that can be seen throughout the success of many of its programmes; England Netball is a governing body with a seemingly firm grasp of the needs of its current and potential participation base. One example of this clarity in strategy and initiative implementation is the Back to Netball programme. Back to Netball is a programme that sought to take advantage of netball historically being on the scholastic national curriculum for Physical Education by promoting women to ‘return’ to netball participation through making a return to the sport as accessible as possible. Back to Netball is a 12-week programme that involves coaching from qualified coaches on the basic fundamental skills of the game, before participants can choose whether to join in a more competitive environment or continue to engage with the Back to Netball programme (England Netball, 2016). The governing body designed the programme to most accurately provide for the needs of their participants, in keeping with the stated desires of the Government to attract more participants and attempt to address gender participation gaps.

Back to Netball was an example of a highly successful programme to emerge from a NGB under the auspices of *Sporting Future: A New Strategy For an Active Nation* (HM Government, 2015). It generally had a high retention level of 89% (Whitehead *et al.*, 2016), proving to be a successful vehicle for reengaging a ‘hard to reach’ group that had many social barriers to participation in physical activity (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019). Back to Netball catalysed initial motivation, which began in the extrinsic - particularly around weight loss and cardiovascular health - successfully moving these motivations towards entirely more intrinsic foci such as feelings of sporting competence and socialising with like-minded others (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019).

Back to Netball tackled many of the stated ‘barriers to participation’ frequently highlighted by government. With two of them particularly pertinent to this case study analysis: fears around sporting incompetence, and time restrictions due to motherhood and other caring responsibilities. In order to address the first issue, the programme successfully focuses on skill development, providing specialist coaching from qualified coaches. Furthermore, a focus on the social benefits of participating in a team sport is likely to decrease fears around social embarrassment due to a level of social cohesion that is promoted (Whitehead *et al.*, 2019). This links to the second key area that the programme was successful in, the engagement of mothers in physical activity. Back to Netball was unusually successful in engaging mothers, with 52% of participants identifying as mothers (Walsh *et al.*, 2018). Mothers have been identified as a hard-to-reach group in terms of sport participation due to feelings of guilt and fears around perceptions of not being a ‘good’ mother (Walsh *et al.*, 2018). Walsh *et al.* argue that critical to the success in accessing this group is the potential for ‘relatedness’ on the

basis of motherhood and from this a second related identity could be forged around participating in the sport itself. Crucially, this influence on subjectivity raises the importance of the policy document discursive repertoires in the lived experience of female participants.

Discursively, across the full study there were evidence of both similarities and disparities in discursive motifs and how these are communicated. This is not surprising, given the different aims of the document types, however it was clear that certain discourses are prevalent within the discussion of women's sport, even if the way that message is conveyed is different. The case study of netball has offered one worked example of how a discursive repertoire worked across the two different datasets. This fed into the overall discursive narrative that women's elite level success would be beneficial to their overall sport, with some references given to other sports. In both corpuses, there was a clear expectation that both the conduct and success of elite female athletes would contribute to the future health of both their sports and women's sport as one entity. Crucial here is the codification and ubiquity of these expectations, cementing increasingly professionalised and ambassadorial behaviours as 'common sense' notions (Foucault, 1990), in keeping with broader shifts in the sporting space outlined in Chapter Two.

### **Women's Sport as a National Concern**

I will now explore an example where both the press and policy writers have a broadly similar conceptualisation of women's sport being of national importance, but the narratives and positionings of these endeavours were slightly different in the two textual types. The national press narrative often centred around female athletes as legitimate

national heroes in the ways described in Chapter Three. This departed from the discursive formations of policy documents, which positioned successful female athletes as tools and agents of national soft power. While this narrative positions athletes as nationally significant, it also takes a more instrumental view of successful elite English athletes. As discussed in the previous chapter, narratives of inspiration were prevalent within Olympic legacy documents, however this was attributed to the Games itself rather than individual athletes. This was a divergence between government Olympic documents and governing body documents specifically, where narratives of inspiration were used around the role modelling potential of elite athletes, particularly in influencing long term participation uptake:

As part of the continued Government funding for elite sport to 2016, all funded athletes have been asked to give up to five days a year to inspire children and young people to get involved in sport. UK Sport's most recent survey of this activity, completed in April 2014, revealed that athletes had given more than 7,500 days to community and school sport since London 2012. (Inspired by London 2012 Second Annual Report, HM Government and Mayor of London, 2014, p.21)

Inspire kids through closer links between kids cricket and the professional game (Cricket Unleashed, English Cricket Board, 2016, p 12).

In Chapter Three, I argued that there was a clear negotiation of how women athletes and figures in women sport can be included or excluded from formulations of English national identity. This is not a simple representation, and representations of national identities were often bound up in more traditional formulations which relied on assumed and 'threatened' (Wodack *et al.*, 2009) national characteristics such as determination (Vincent and Harris, 2014). This offered the largely successful national teams across all four sports the opportunity to be considered legitimate patrons of

‘English identity’, as long as they demonstrated these threatened characteristics, such as valour even in defeat. For example:

Despite their loss against New Zealand in the Women's Rugby World Cup final, England's players still return home as sporting heroines, but life will change dramatically for a large proportion of the squad as their contracts will not be renewed. (*Telegraph*, August 28 2017)

A victory over the current holders will mean manager Mark Sampson's heroes face the US or old foe Germany in Sunday's final. England, led by skipper Steph Houghton, were in confident mood despite being the underdogs. (*Mirror*, July 1 2015)

ENGLAND'S brave football Lionesses were knocked out of Euro 2017 last night - but their run to the semi-finals was hailed as a massive boost to women's sport. (*Star*, August 4 2017)

ENGLAND'S women suffered World Cup heartbreak last night despite a monumental defensive effort. For the third successive tournament they lost the final to New Zealand, champions since 1998 and a side only beaten three times. But a pulsating clash will be remembered every bit as much for their unbreakable spirit as for the class of the Black Ferns. (*Mirror*, September 6 2010)

Furthermore, it was clear that notions of Englishness in a sporting sense are no longer solely for male sporting figures, particularly when women's teams were successful or demonstrating certain qualities such as ‘a bulldog spirit’ (Vincent and Harris, 2014). This was also the case in defeat, where high effort and demonstrations of these ‘threatened characteristics’ (Wodack *et al.*, 2009) also allowed the national hero narrative to be bestowed on these teams. This builds on the findings of Bowes and Bairner (2018), who found that there was an increasing acceptance of women in the ‘sporting proxy warrior’ role, as examined in depth in Chapter Three. In the sample, it

was also reflected that the athletes themselves have accepted this mantle. This alludes to a changing role in the public consciousness for national teams.

Key for now however, is the critical importance of success in a team receiving positive coverage, with ‘valiant efforts’ and ‘bravery’ being highly praised, even in defeat (Vincent and Harris, 2014) as well as the collective nature of this heroism, as opposed to the more individualistic coverage offered to many male national sporting ‘heroes’ (Giulianotti and Gerrard, 2001). This is likely to be due to these traits being considered positive parts of English national identity by the national print media (Wodack *et al.*, 2009), who in turn perpetuate this ideal through a ‘constructive strategy’, designed to glorify these traits while simultaneously naturalising these qualities to English citizens specifically in a bid to differentiate English identity from other nations. Similar strategies were found by Vincent and Harris (2014), who found that during the men’s 2012 European Football Championships, the national press frequently invoked narratives of ‘ye olde England’, a view of England grounded in its imperial history and emphasising ‘quintessential English characteristics and qualities’ (p.232) such as bravery and determination. This further strengthens the assertion that women English international performers can now be considered eligible national sporting heroes, but they generally must be both successful and demonstrate privileged ‘English’ characteristics. The differences between this and the narrative in policy documents was nuanced, with both data corpuses’ granting top level female athletes an elevated status of national importance, however the policy documentations took a far more instrumental approach.

For example, the linkage between the international success of representative sport and economic prosperity was made explicit. In this case, not only are they presented as important to national pride and morale, as well as soft power, but also impact on national prosperity. Beyond this, given the role of sport in the Governments soft power strategy - most obviously through the desire to host mega events such as the Olympic Games - athletes are placed in a position of exalted national importance, without being identified as 'heroes', evidencing the complicated representations (and by extension social understandings of) top level female athletes (Foucault, 1990). Further to this, the success of elite athletes and the associated boost to grassroots participation depicts the importance of elite athletes to domestic policy making, as well as international policy.

The soft power benefits originating from sport convince us that now the London Olympic and Paralympic Games have concluded, the UK should work to find a way to retain the "glow" attached to British sport institutions. (Persuasion and Power in the Modern World, House of Lords, 2014, p.18)

However, the power of London 2012 would have been far less if we had finished tenth in the medal table rather than third, if Sir Bradley Wiggins had finished eighth in the Time Trial, or if Hannah Cockroft had finished outside the medals. (Sporting Future- A New Strategy for an Active Nation, HM Government, 2015, p.43)

The second of the two quotations elucidates the often implicit link between athletes success and the ability of other apparatus to glean soft power games from sports mega events and major events. The link is rarely considered overtly by national government policy documentation, which tended to focus more on issues such as tourism benefit and soft power outcome rather than process. This again positions elite athletes (including successful women) as a key cog in the soft power strategy of England, and



indeed the United Kingdom more broadly, but without frequently establishing them explicitly as such.

From the discussion above, an overall divergence in representation can be seen, with the press reportage centring on notional ‘national heroes’, athletes who represent their nation and its aspirational characteristics. Public policy documents, however, took a far more instrumental approach to elite sport. While athletes were not referred to as ‘heroes’ they were given an elevated status of national importance. They were represented as part of the mechanisms of English soft power (as sport becomes an increasingly large cog in the soft power mechanism), as well as being influential actors in the successful implementation of domestic policy, both within their sports’ specific strategies and an increasingly broad range of policy areas. This shift may be due to the differing utilities of sport in these areas. In the press, sport is valorised and dramatic, with a passionate following that ‘storylines’ and narratives of heroism are attractive to, whereas the representation in sports policy documentation was far more about the instrumental use of elite athletes in particular in achieving the broader aims of the state.

Overall, this research has argued that there are both similarities and differences both between and within the discursive repertoires evoked in both public policy and national press datasets. In the first case, the case of netball and narratives of growth were explored, before the themes of national importance across all four sampled sports were interrogated. This study represents an advancement in our understanding of sport, language and the impact on gender order, finding that while there are broad overlaps in the ways that public policy and the national press talk about women’s sport, with examples of shared understandings, the emphases and ways these are expressed can

diverge. In exploring this, the study has fulfilled one of its key research aims '*Are there any shared discursive repertoires around women's team sports in sport policy documents and the press?*'.

## Chapter 6- The Final Furlong- Concluding Thoughts and Reflections

This study has explored – using a Critical Discourse Analysis approach- the national press and public policy documentation representations of women’s sport between 2010-2018. The fundamental aim of this research was to explore and interrogate ‘*what it is when we talk about women’s sport*’, identifying overlapping and diverging discursive repertoires. From the results of this research I will now draw some conclusionary comments. This will begin with a brief overview of some of the key arguments, before shifting on to a restatement of the research aims, with a brief discussion on how these have been achieved. I will then position the research among the field, centring on the original contribution this research makes and the developments in the debate that this research contributes to. I then discuss some of the limitation of the piece before finally offering some thoughts on potential future avenues for research.

### **Summary of Arguments**

#### **Media Analysis**

Firstly, I explored the nexus of nationality and femininity when discussing elite female athletes as national heroes. The analysis argues that this presentation is usually for successful teams (with the exception of those which ‘lose well’) and is broadly ephemeral, not transferring over to coverage of the players in their domestic competitions. This discussion built on a lot of the existing literature on the notion of

top-level female athletes as ‘proxy warriors’ (Bowes and Bairner, 2018) and discussions around the transferring of national identities to sports teams (Vincent and Harris, 2014).

Secondly, the chapter addressed the liminality of women’s sport in coverage, where much of the coverage was in appendix to the end of coverage about the men’s teams, either within reports themselves or in bulletin style articles. This was emblematic of a broader lack of detail given to coverage, with little coverage offering much by way of depth. Converse to this, in some coverage, women’s sport was shown to be a better alternative to men’s sport. Usually this was in articles poking fun at lack of success of men’s national football team to that point, however some of the coverage was about women’s sport being less commercial and more Corinthian in spirit, creating expectations around fair play, with players playing for passion rather than as a legitimate, or indeed lucrative career.

The analysis then focussed on the discursive positioning which emphasises the key role of men in being responsible for the success of women’s teams. This concurs with similar findings in the field (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017) where specific men were given the bulk of the credit for the success of female athletes, minimising the skills of the athletes themselves. The role of head coaches and managers in sport is always emphasised, however in the case of women’s football particularly, both male head coaches in the sampling frame were given responsibility for this success, cementing the presentation as rightful gatekeepers and leaders in sport, building into discussion on positioning of women as ambassadors to women’s sport, both their individual sport and women’s sport as one homogenous entity.

Finally, I explored the increasing discussion around history in coverage of women's sport, examining the writing (making) of history as well as the establishment of historical narratives as a way to contextualise women's sport in the modern day. I argue that this serves the purpose of legitimising women's sport, particularly in football, where sociocultural history is pivotal to coverage and understandings of men's football. Overall, it was clear that female athletes and women's sport more broadly are now discursively positioned in a more nuanced and multidimensional manner than had perhaps previously been afforded them.

### **Policy Analysis**

The policy chapter explores three generated themes: the role of sport and successful sports teams as a tool for national soft power, the role of elite level female athletes as ambassadors in achieving these aims and finally the liminality of women's sport as a policy consideration, much of which were couched in traditional notions of emphasises femininity, where competition was downplayed.

The chapter began by discussing the relationship between national sporting success and national soft power. I argue that the growing importance of elite level athletes (especially in the wake of the Olympics) in sports attempts to achieve and increasingly large spectrum of policy aims from central government. This positions these elite athletes as figures of national importance, but importantly not as 'heroes' as could be seen in the media sample. Rather they are role models and 'agents' of soft power,

especially those who are internationally successful, where sport has become an increasingly important part of the Government's soft power strategy.

The analysis then moved on to a discussion around the representation of elite level female athletes as emissaries for women's sport. This builds on the above discussion, finding that top level female athletes are expected to conduct themselves in a manner which benefits not only their own sport but women's sport holistically as well as the national interest as a representative and agent of soft power. I argue that governing bodies attempted to leverage these newly minted household names in an era of growing professionalisation and growth. This was especially in the case of football where the *Gameplan for Growth* (Football Association, 2017) strategy explicitly discusses how the national team are important to the future health of women's football, where there is a clear expectation that they will be available to develop the grassroots game, as well as helping the sport become more commercially lucrative and self-sustainable. I argue that this is the next stage of the representation of female athletes as 'model citizens' (Bruce, 2016).

Finally, I address the liminality of women's sport as a policy consideration. Throughout the sample there is a considerable amount of confusion, while the virtues of competitive sport are extolled by central government strategy, most strategies focussing on women's sport specifically focussed on competition as a barrier to participation for women. I introduce the idea of emphasised (post)femininity here, which moves beyond Connell's gender thesis in a modern context. Overall, there was evidence of acceptance that women's sport needed a different policy agenda to men's sport, which was

generally just referred to as 'sport'. This discursively positions men's sport as the norm, further marginalising women's role within the sporting and physical activity arena.

Overall, I argue that in both public policy documentation and the national press, elite level female athletes are presented as embodying multiple identities, they are national heroes, they are agents of soft power, they are mothers, they are partners. It is clear that in both public policy and national print media, elite performers cannot simply be athletes, they are required to transcend their athleticism and be at all times multidimensional beings.

**How far, on reflection, do I feel that I have been able to complete the task that I set myself at the outset of this doctoral research project?**

In short, this study has explored all of the research aim areas in substantial detail. Firstly, I have argued that the representations of women's team sports in both data corpuses are nuanced and have developed beyond merely one-dimensional representations reported by previous scholarship in this area. I have argued that there is a multiplicity of identities in both datasets. Top level female athletes specifically were expected to be a range of things to a range of people, they are national representatives, ambassadors for women's sport, they are model citizens when successful or behaving well in defeat, they are mothers, partners and scholars. The discourse was far more nuanced and have broadly moved away from previous arguments in the field around women athletes solely as mothers, wives or sexual objects (Trolan, 2013), with a movement towards an emphasised (post)femininity offering a new theoretical viewpoint for future research. Top level successful female athletes can now be leaders, ambassadors and national icons in their own right, while not necessarily being

individually valorised as male top-level athletes have historically been in the English context (Giulianotti and Gerrard, 2001). There arguably is not the same iconography as can be seen with male athletes in the sampled sports, however this is an important shift in coverage that could be seen. Instead, the catalyst of coverage was success at international events, with domestic level women's sport less prevalent in coverage. A longitudinal study would be useful to examine whether or not the establishment of a professional league and alignment with major broadcaster Sky Sports influences coverage of the domestic netball league.

There were some shared narratives between the two different datasets, however the ways in which these were expressed had nuanced and sometimes-subtle differences in their framing, depending on the goals of describing the theatre of sport vs. the use of sport politically, both domestically and internationally. There were certain prevailing and shared discursive framings and repertoires, for example the importance of elite level female athletes as ambassadors and the shared liminality of women's sport as a public concern.

Finally, I have argued that Foucault's governmentality is a useful theoretical tool in sports scholarship, furthering a burgeoning use of the framework in that context (Garcia and Herraiz, 2013, Bretherton, Pigginn and Bodet, 2016). In this instance, the flexibility of a methodological approach grounded in the philosophy of pragmatism has allowed for a blend of theoretical frameworks (Foucault's governmentality and Connell's theory on gender relations) to explore multiple different data corpuses in an innovative fashion. Governmentality allowed for a discursive approach to understanding power in society, and allowed the research to move beyond one dimensional, out-dated notions



of the sports policy space and sports policy work as realpolitik (Houlihan and Green, 2006). Instead, what the use of this framework has allowed is a closer examination of the common-sense understandings that shape the conceptualisations of women's sport and which understandings are disseminated through these key social institutional outputs (Hall, 1997).

### **How has this study advanced the debate in the field and what are some of the limitations?**

This study advances the knowledge base in the field in a few key areas. Firstly, this study offers a unique use of theoretical frameworks and underpinnings in new contexts, furthering some key arguments within the field, such as Toni Bruce's intervention (2016). Specifically in the case of Bruce's work, I have furthered some conceptualisations, particularly in this study's assertions around the key role of elite level female athletes as ambassadors and national heroes, which offers an expansion of Bruce's 'model citizens' rule of representation (2016). This study sits among much of the recent debate in finding changes in contemporary coverage (Bruce, 2016; Biscomb and Matheson, 2017; Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2017; Petty and Pope, 2019), offering analysis that gives a fresh angle to the field.

Furthermore, this research synthesises different but imbricating fields of research into one study. In this case I have forged an analysis that includes both public policy documentation and print media outputs. There has long been an understanding that politics and the press have a reciprocal relationship, however academic research has not explored how these discourses overlap in the English sporting context. This is achieved through the usage of an innovative methodological approach which combines theoretical underwritings in a bricolage approach (Levi-Strauss, 1996).

Finally, the study utilises a unique blend of theoretical frameworks in the analytical bricolage tradition. As previously highlighted, one of the key strengths of this research is the innovation in the theoretical framework in this context, in this case the use of both Foucauldian approaches to understanding power and how it is manifest in society alongside Connell's understandings on gender relations offer a deeper exploration of the discursive repertoires than would be available using just one theoretical lens, as well as offering new and novel insights through the use of this approach. This is particularly useful in understanding sporting gender relations, given the friction between the agentic and the structural elements that are at play in the decision to participate in sport or physical activity at any level.

As with any piece of research, there are limitations and shortcomings in this thesis. Firstly, the study does not attempt to explore either policy generation or print media production processes, this would have added a further useful dimension to the study. Access to policy writers and the relevant journalists to discuss the formulation and writing processes of the datasets would have allowed the study to make firmer conclusions around not only the content of the two data corpuses, but the considerations that shape the production of these media types and the meanings that are then disseminated through them.

Also, throughout the study I have emphasised that this thesis only uses team sports and should be read in that context. In the findings, I have argued that there are emergent ephemeral examples of elite level athletes being considered national heroes. The inclusion of individual athletes or individual sports may have allowed for interesting

analysis around the celebrification (or otherwise) of individual elite level female athletes, which would be beneficial in an era of increasing commodification and professionalisation.

### **Guidance for Future Research**

The research has unveiled some seemingly fruitful avenues for future research in a variety of fields. Firstly, it appears that there is work to be done around the application of post-feminist framings and adaptations of Connell's thesis on gender relations. In this context, it appeared that an update was required to what was a useful theoretical skeleton. Connell herself has argued that her thesis required updating from its first formulation in the 1980s, making many adaptations alongside James Messerschmidt in 2005. Theoretically, there are also options for the usage of other theoretical underwritings in this area, such as Stuart Hall's work around dominant and preferred meanings, Fairclough's understanding of the relationship between language and power and Guy Debord's concept of 'the spectacle' in the marketing of women's events by governing bodies as they move towards increased marketisation.

Secondly, it is clear that more work is to be done in a range of other media types in a quickly changing operating environment. For example, some preliminary work has been done focussing on reportage in regional papers and given that they may well see different emphases in coverage such as domestic team coverage, they seem to be an important area for enquiry. Online social media types would also seem to be a fruitful avenue and would be in keeping with changing typographies of media consumption. Given the increasingly digital nature of sports reportage (Domeneghetti, 2021), ongoing pressure on circulations and advertising revenue and the impacts of COVID-

19 on the digitisation of sports journalism (Domeneghetti, 2021), future research should also follow this shifting reality, examining press outputs in an increasingly digitised space.

Furthermore, more policy analysis needs to be undertaken on domestic government sports strategy. This has been a paucity of scholarship in this regard, which has tended instead towards Olympics and soft power in the English context. The two current major central sporting strategies have gone under examined by scholars in the field and this would be a useful addition to the debate. Finally, a similar approach to the methodology in this thesis could be undertaken for the devolved nations of the United Kingdom, as this kind of national comparative work would be a real advancement in the debate due to sports role as both a socially critical and devolved power.

### **The Final Whistle**

Two recent examples crystallise the current state of play for women's sport and its socio-cultural reception. Firstly, the fine levied towards the Norwegian beach handball team for their refusal to wear bikini bottom style shorts, instead opting for longer shorts in line with the men's regulations, leading to significant public outcry. It remains to be seen if this will force changes in the uniform rules from the governing body. In the same week, major videogame franchise Football Manager announced that inclusion for women's football to be within the popular game was well underway, at significant financial cost to the developer, who stated:

There's no hiding that there's currently a glass ceiling for women's football and we want to do what we can to help smash through it. We believe in equality for all and we

want to be part of the solution. We want to be a part of the process that puts women's football on an equal footing with the men's game (Football Manager, 2021)

While there can be some hope around the future legitimacy and respect given to women's sport, there is no room for complacency until the final whistle has been blown on gender inequalities in sport.

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## Appendix A- Reflexive Researcher Motivation

As with many doctoral candidates, the research is motivated by a deep personal interest in the subject area. Like many from my socio-economic background, excelling in sport represented the opportunity for life change, with the potential of a lucrative footballing career offering a ‘real’ and tangible opportunity for social mobility. At the very least, frequent participation as a youth would keep me busy, and maybe even earn the opportunity to progress an education through my sport.

I was fortunate enough to witness first-hand world class female athletic achievement throughout the entirety of my formative years, with schoolfriends winning medals at World and European games in their respective sports. While I had some (very) limited success in my own sporting endeavours, they were nowhere near this scale. The lucrative sporting career never manifest, but I was fortunate enough to leverage sport into educational possibilities at Undergraduate level that would otherwise most likely have been out of reach. It was during this time that my interest in gender and sport blossomed from a non-issue to the focus of my thesis.

At University I was fortunate enough to see excellence from women in a variety of sports, however I started to notice that these achievements were not treated with the same social weight than even my far lesser achievements in football garnered. The concept of women’s achievements being lesser became fascinating. Why would it be any different? Would I have gotten the same opportunities through sport had I been a woman? This final question became my sociological albatross, driving this study.

## Appendix B- List of Policy Documents

A CODE FOR SPORTS GOVERNANCE (Sport England AND UK Sport, 2016)

A Living Legacy: 2010-15 SPORT POLICY AND INVESTMENT (Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), 2015)

Adult participation in sport Analysis of the Taking Part Survey (DCMS, 2011)

Alternative methods of measuring participation in culture and sport Analysis of the Taking Part Survey (DCMS, 2010)

ATHLETE VOICE AND REPRESENTATION REVIEW (UK Sport, 2018)

Creating a sporting habit for life A new youth sport strategy (DCMS, 2012)

Crime reduction and community safety (Sport England and UK Sport, 2017)

Culture, Sport and Wellbeing: An analysis of the Taking Part Survey December 2014 (DCMS)

Department for Culture, Media and Sport UK Sport Satellite Account, 2012 – 2016

ECB Cricket Unleashed (2018)

ECB Cricket Unleashed Summary Sheets (2018)

ECB- CHAMPION COUNTIES STRATEGIC PLAN 2014 – 2017

Education and life long learning: summary (Sport England and UK Sport, 2011)

Encouraging involvement in Big Society Cultural and sporting perspective (DCMS, 2011)

England and Wales Cricket Board Annual Report: 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018

England and Wales Cricket Board Anti-Corruption Code (2018)

England and Wales Cricket Board Articles of Association (2018)

England Netball Annual Report: 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018

England Netball Volunteering Strategy 2019-2025 (2018)

Evaluation of the Active Women Programme - Year Two Sport England (2013)

Evaluation of the Active Women Programme - Year One (Sport England 2012)

Evaluation of the Active Women Programme (Sport England,2011)

Final Report of the Government's Women and Sport Advisory Board March 2015 (DCMS)

Football Association Annual Report and Financial Statements: 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018

Football Association Annual Report: 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018

Football Governance: Response to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee Inquiry (HC792-1) (DCMS, 2011)

Fourth annual report – summer 2016 (HM Government and Mayor of London)

Further analysis to value the health and educational benefits of sport and culture (DCMS, 2015)

Go where women are Insight on engaging women and girls in sport and exercise (Sport England, 2015)

The Big Society: Further Report with the Government Response to the Committee's Seventeenth Report of Session 2010–12 (HM Government, 2012)

House of Lords Report: Leaving the European Union: The Impact on Professional Sport (House of Lords, 2017)

HOUSE OF LORDS Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence Report of Session 2013–14 (House of Lords, 2014)

Inspired by 2012: the legacy from the Olympic and Paralympic Games (DCMS, 2012)

Inspired by 2012: The legacy from the Olympic and Paralympic Games First Annual Report (DCMS, 2013)

Inspired by 2012: The legacy from the Olympic and Paralympic Games Second annual report – (DCMS, 2014)

Interim Report of the Government's Women and Sport Advisory Board (DCMS, 2014)

International comparisons of public engagement in culture and sport (DCMS, 2011)

Measuring the value of culture (DCMS 2010)

Models of sporting and cultural activity Analysis of the Taking Part Survey (DCMS, 2010)

Netball England 2017 Financial report

PLANS FOR THE LEGACY FROM THE 2012 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES (DCMS, 2010)

Prime Time: The case for commercial investment in women's sport (Sport England, 2010)

Quantifying and Valuing the Wellbeing Impacts of Culture and Sport (DCMS, 2014)

Quantifying the Social Impacts of Culture and Sport (DCMS, 2014)

Report on the Olympic Truce (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2013)

Social capacity and social cohesion (Sport England and UK Sport, 2011)

Sport England 2015-2016 Annual Report

Sport England Annual Report and Accounts 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18,

Sport England Governance Strategy: On board for better governance (Sport England, 2012)

Towards an Active Nation (2016)

Sporting Future First Annual Report (HM Government, 2016)

Sporting Future Second Annual Report (HM Government, 2017)

Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation (HM Government, 2015)

Taking Part and Active People Surveys: an independent review (Sport England and UK Sport, 2010)

The Art of the Possible Using secondary data to detect social and economic impacts from investments in culture and sport (DCMS and Sport England- 2011)

The FA Group statement of purpose and values (2018)

The FA Group Strategic Plan 2011-2015 (2011)

THE FA Handbook- 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018

The Gameplan for Growth The FA's Strategy For Women's And Girls' Football: 2017-2020 (Football Association, 2017)

The Gameplan For Growth The FA's Strategy For Women's And Girls' Football: 2017-2020 year 1 review and report (Football Association, 2018)

The long term vision for the legacy of the London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games (HM Government and Mayor of London, 2014)

The United Kingdom Sports Council Grant-in-Aid and Lottery Distribution Fund Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2018 (UK Sport, 2018)

London 2012 Third annual report – Summer 2015 (HM Government and Mayor of London, 2015)

This is England Women's Rugby (Rugby Football Union, 2014)

UK Sport Annual Accounts 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018

UK Sport Business Plan 2017-2021(UK Sport, 2017)

Understanding the drivers of volunteering in culture and sport: analysis of the Taking Part Survey (DCMS and Sport England, 2011)

Understanding the drivers, impact and value of engagement in culture and sport (DCMS, 2010)

Understanding the relationship between taste and value in culture and sport (DCMS, 2010)