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CAMPUS NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF VARSITY SPORTS

Getting Closer to Equitable and Sports-related Representations of Female Athletes?

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Abstract This study examined the coverage of women's and men's varsity sport teams in the English- and French-language student newspapers at the University of Ottawa, Canada, during three academic years from 2004 to 2007. The analysis revealed unique findings, considering that previous research on campus print media had shown an enduring disparity of coverage featuring female athletes. In contrast, our descriptive statistics exposed few differences in the number or length of published articles and photographs of male and female athletes. In fact, female athletes tended to receive more coverage. Men's sports, however, were featured more often on the front page of the newspapers. A textual analysis of the coverage shows that sportswomen were not sexualized and were rarely trivialized. In general, rather than representing sportswomen as gendered subjects, the student-run newspapers discursively constructed them as 'just athletes'.

Key words • gendered coverage • print media • qualitative analysis • quantitative analysis • varsity sports

Studies of mainstream media sports coverage have shown persisting trivialization and underrepresentation of female athletes over the past two decades (Donnelly et al., 2008; Wensing and Bruce, 2003), with some exceptions in the print coverage of major international events such as Wimbledon and the Olympic Games (see Capricana et al., 2005; Crossman et al., 2007; Hardin et al., 2002; King, 2007; Vincent et al., 2002). Conversely, examinations of college campus media, such as intercollegiate media guides (Kane and Buysse, 2005), the NCAA News (Cunningham et al., 2004) and university sponsored Internet websites (Cunningham and Sagas, 2002), uncovered a shift towards portrayals of women as serious athletes and found fewer gender differences in media representations. However, research on campus print media has demonstrated that gender inequities persist, albeit to a lesser extent than in mainstream media sources (Huffman et al., 2004; Melvin, 1996; Oliver, 2002; Wann et al., 1998). While studies confirm that the sidelining of female athletes is reproduced in campus newspapers, no systematic examination of the textual or photographic content of women's varsity sports coverage has been conducted to determine whether sportswomen are represented as gendered bodies or as athletes. Yet both the

quantity and the quality of coverage contribute to legitimize or trivialize female varsity sports. Proportional or not, campus coverage should be examined to uncover the complex and contradictory discursive strategies in media representations that undermine varsity sportswomen's accomplishments.

In spite of mainstream and campus newspaper findings, our own readings of the weekly varsity sports reporting in the *University of Ottawa's Fulcrum* and *La Rotonde: Journal francophone de l'Université d'Ottawa*, the English- and French-language student publications at the University of Ottawa in Canada, struck us not only as quantitatively gender equitable but also as exclusively sport-related. We therefore decided to undertake a systematic investigation to verify whether University of Ottawa athletes, both female and male, were indeed equitably represented and portrayed as 'just athletes' rather than in stereotypical feminine and hegemonic masculine terms.

Setting the Context

Drawing on Foucault's discourse theory (1969, 1971) and the insights it provides into sports studies (see Cole, 1993; Markula and Pringle, 2006) and, more specifically into sports media analysis (see Pirinen, 1997; Wright and Clarke, 1999), we understand the effects of campus journalistic practices in confirming or nullifying the legitimacy of women's sporting performance and in producing statements that may or may not ascribe femininity to sportswomen in a way that sexualizes and trivializes their accomplishments. Discourse links the exercise of power to the acceptance of certain truths about sportswomen (and sportsmen) as gendered bodies. The repetition of particular statements about female and male athletes establishes truths about who and what they are, in the same way that the absence of discursive recognition of women in sports makes them invisible. The aim of our quantitative analysis was to determine the proportion of coverage devoted to women's sports as compared to men's sports, while the textual analysis examined whether student reporters employed discursive techniques found in mainstream media to frame varsity sportswomen as gendered athletes (see Wensing and Bruce, 2003) and whether similar strategies were used in descriptions of male athletes. A quantitative and qualitative analysis of campus newspaper coverage adds substance to this research. That the coverage of all varsity sports teams in all weekly editions of both newspapers over a three-year period was included further sets this study apart from other media studies. Other campus newspaper studies examined sample editions or one season/school year of daily newspapers, with the exception of Oliver's (2002) study of print coverage of men's and women's basketball over 14 seasons.

In addition to our wide-ranging data, we investigated sports coverage at a Canadian institution, the University of Ottawa, where there is no legislation mirroring Title IX¹ but where the number of female athletes and male athletes is almost equivalent (with more female sports teams balancing out the large football roster), where female teams play more regular season games (239) than male teams (166) and where both male and female teams achieve comparable athletic success. Such factors may facilitate greater coverage of female athletes in the

campus newspaper sports pages than in contexts where male athletes outnumber female athletes and male teams outnumber female teams (e.g. in Melvin, 1996; Wann et al., 1998) or where male athletes and teams are more successful than female athletes and teams or benefit from greater brand equity (Cunningham and Sagas, 2002).

The University of Ottawa is a bilingual (French and English), research-intensive, non-denominational, international university. In 2006–07, 70 percent of the total 36,400 students were enrolled in English-language programs with the other 30 percent studying in French (University of Ottawa, 2007). Varsity sports play a role in campus life as these teams receive funding from Sports Services to represent the University of Ottawa in Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) championships.² Yet, they are not the most important contributor to the school's identity and culture. Instead, the University of Ottawa's two official languages set it apart from other Canadian universities as illustrated by persisting deliberations regarding its mission to promote bilingualism and French culture in Ontario. The existence of publications in both English and French demonstrates the influence of bilingualism on campus life. The *Fulcrum* and *La Rotonde* are non-profit publications distributed free-of-charge. Both student-run newspapers are independent of university administration; they share neither offices nor editorial committees. Being produced separately, they offer divergent reporting (i.e. they do not always cover the same sporting events) and sometimes conflicting opinions. No set policies govern coverage, nor do any gender equity policies regulate reporting at either publication. While the newspapers do generate revenue from advertisements, they are mainly financed by a student levy and serve to inform the student population rather than earn profits. Furthermore, the journalists and photographers are students, most with no previous experience in journalism. They are trained on the job by the editors, who are also students, with one or more years of experience at the newspaper. Both publications are produced by young people typically between 18 and 22 years old, born in the mid-1980s and raised in a world where both men and women play a variety of sports; this combination of factors may facilitate equitable, athleticism-focused coverage.

The fairly recent attainment of equivalent varsity sports opportunities for female and male athletes at the University of Ottawa likely facilitates the proportional representation of sportswomen as well. In 1994, student-athlete complaints triggered the establishment of a committee to study the status of women in relation to all programs and activities in the Sports Services Department. An increase in the number of female varsity athletes was one outcome of the Committee on Gender Equity's (1995) initiatives: during the 1994–5 season, 34 percent of varsity athletes were women, while this proportion increased to 48 percent for the 2004–05, 2005–06 and 2006–07 seasons analyzed in this study. During these three seasons, there were 12 Gee-Gee³ teams: three men's teams (basketball, football and hockey), five women's teams (basketball, hockey, rugby, soccer and volleyball) and two mixed teams (cross-country and swimming).

Methods

We examined issues of both newspapers over three full academic years, which totaled 142 weekly print edition tabloid-style papers: 72 issues of the *Fulcrum*⁴ and 70 issues of *La Rotonde*.⁵ All news articles, feature articles and briefs featuring Gee-Gee teams or athletes were included in the analysis. We also examined the front pages of the newspapers. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze written and photographic varsity sports coverage in the *Fulcrum* and *La Rotonde* while a textual analysis verified whether reporters frequently reproduced discursive techniques predominant in mainstream media sports coverage that marginalize female athletes.

Quantity of Coverage

Discursive media practices such as deciding to cover varsity women at all or employing specific means to do so (through prominent types of news stories like feature articles rather than succinct reports of game results) provide legitimacy to women's sports by increasing the circulation of statements establishing women as 'athletes'. The descriptive quantitative analysis aimed to provide an overall picture of the prevalence of such discursive practices in campus publications. The researchers and two trained graduate students completed a data sheet for the 'sports' section of each newspaper edition. The numbers of news articles (full-length articles that mention scores, game previews and game recaps), feature articles (articles that discuss elements of varsity athletics other than competitions), brief articles (round-up columns that consist of game recaps, game previews, etc.) and words in each of these were recorded. In addition, we counted the number of photos featuring female, male and both female and male varsity athletes and the number of front covers on which male and female athletes appeared.

Quality of Coverage

By identifying statements that named, compared, described and evaluated female athletes and their performance and comparing them to those applied to male athletes, the textual analysis offered an overall sense of whether reporters portrayed Gee-Gee women in ways that marginalized their athletic achievements. Did the sports coverage normalize sportswomen as sexual and feminine subjects and trivialize their sporting achievements? All articles describing sportswomen and/or sportsmen were coded to determine whether they included statements that fell within five categories of discursive techniques, all exposed through qualitative analyses of Western mass media coverage. Drawing on Wensing and Bruce's (2003) identification of unwritten 'old rules' that frame sportswomen as feminine subjects, the following categories were used in this analysis: gender marking, establishing heterosexuality, emphasizing appropriate femininity, infantilizing and mentioning non-sport-related characteristics. Donnelly et al. (2008) proposed a sixth category that involves the unfavorable comparison of women's performances to men's; this category was also used in this analysis. Additionally, Wensing and Bruce's (2003) 'new rule' of ambivalence, illustrated by juxtaposed

Table 1 Descriptions of Common Discursive Strategies Used in Media Coverage of Sportswomen that Focus on Gender as a Framing Device

| Discursive strategy | Description |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Gender marking | Identifying the gender of female athletes, teams and sports without indicating gender for male athletes, teams and sports; |
| Establishing heterosexuality | Describing female (and male) athletes as objects of heterosexual attraction and referring to female athletes as 'girlfriends' of men; |
| Emphasizing female stereotypes | Mentioning physical and emotional characteristics or behaviours stereotypically associated to femininity; |
| Infantilizing women | Describing female athletes as 'girls' or using their first name rather than their last name or whole name without referring to similar-age male athletes as 'boys' or using their first name; |
| Non-sports related aspects | Mentioning the athletes' family relationships and personal life; |
| Comparisons with men's performance | Comparing female teams' success or losses to male team's success or losses; |
| Ambivalence | Juxtaposition of positive descriptions and images with others that undermine or trivialize women's efforts and successes. |

Note: Compiled from descriptions provided in Wensing and Bruce (2003) and Donnelly et al. (2008).

representations of female athleticism with commentary or photos that undermine their performance, was used to code statements from the articles examined. Table 1 provides the definition for each of these discursive strategies. Since these types of statements could arguably emerge in descriptions of male athletes as well, the same categories were used to analyze articles about sportsmen (by adapting the third category to emphasis on masculinity).

Photographs were categorized as 'action' (with athletes in uniform, on the playing field and participating in the game) or 'non-action' (with athletes out of uniform, off the playing field and not participating in the game or a combination thereof). We used the same categories to analyze front page photos. The analysis of articles and photographs was completed collectively, and when questions surfaced regarding the fit of a statement in a discursive category or the coding of a photograph, the problem was discussed and consensus reached. Intercoder reliability was determined through an assessment by one of the researchers of a subset of articles and accompanying photos analyzed by the other three coders. We verified a total of 53 articles and accompanying photographs (10 percent of all articles and photographs analyzed), including 32 in the *Fulcrum* and 21 in *La Rotonde*. The reliability level for the coding of the type of article, the gender of authors, the gender of photographers and the photo description was 96 percent.

There was also a slight difference (98 percent agreement) in the results regarding the number of words per article, calculated by multiplying the number of words per line by the number of total lines for each article. The reliability levels for the textual analysis were also quite high: 87 percent agreement for gender marking, 100 percent for establishing heterosexuality, 100 percent for emphasizing appropriate femininity/masculinity, 98 percent for infantilizing, 100 percent for mentioning non-sport-related characteristics and 98 percent for comparing women's performances to men's. The high level of intercoder reliability is not surprising in light of the straightforward definitions for each category and because, apart from the gender marking category, very few of the discursive techniques previously found in media coverage of female athletes actually emerged in the University of Ottawa student-run print media.

Relative Gender Symmetry in Sports Reporting

In sharp contrast to the earlier studies of campus newspapers, our results show that Gee-Gee women generally received more textual and photographic coverage than Gee-Gee men in the sports sections of both newspapers (see Tables 2 and 3). However, some male-dominated practices prevail; for instance, sportsmen appeared more often on the front page (see Table 3). Even so, in both newspapers, sportswomen were featured in news articles, briefs and photographs more often than sportsmen, and male athletics had only one more representative profiled in the *Fulcrum* feature article category than did female athletics. Predictably, in the *Fulcrum* the total number of words written about varsity female athletes was higher than those devoted to male athletes. Surprisingly, more words were allocated to male varsity athletes in *La Rotonde* despite the fact that, clearly, there were more articles about sportswomen. In addition, comparing the two sports that feature both men's and women's teams also revealed contradictory findings: the male basketball team received more coverage than the female basketball team in both newspapers. However, the women's hockey team appeared more often in the *Fulcrum* than did the men's team, while the opposite occurred in *La Rotonde* (see Table 4). To our knowledge, only King (2007) has found similar results showing greater textual coverage for sportswomen, although his analysis of 2004 Olympic British newspapers focused on track and field athletes only, not all Olympic sport competitors.

Both newspapers published mostly whole body action shots of both female and male athletes. Exceptions to this were photographs of uniformed athletes in passive poses (i.e. on the bench, waiting for the game to start), teams at end-of-year banquets and portrait-style photographs accompanying feature articles. Sportswomen and sportsmen were photographed in a comparable manner in similar contexts, a finding consistent with the results of Kane and Buysse's (2005) study of intercollegiate media guides. Eight percent of all photos of women were non-action shots compared to seven percent of photos of men, most of which were portrait-style shots complementing the profiles of individual athletes. However, similar to the overall findings regarding text coverage, there was more photographic coverage of female athletes than male athletes. These results

Table 2 Number and Percentage of News Articles, Feature Articles and Briefs Featuring Male and Female Athletes (or Sports Teams) in the *Fulcrum* and *La Rotonde*

| Type | Male | | Female | | Male and female | | Total # |
|-------------------|--------|----|--------|----|-----------------|----|------------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | |
| <i>Fulcrum</i> | | | | | | | |
| News articles | 79 | 39 | 102 | 50 | 22 | 11 | 203 |
| Feature articles | 21 | 44 | 20 | 42 | 7 | 14 | 48 |
| Briefs | 31 | 37 | 44 | 52 | 9 | 11 | 84 |
| Total text | 131 | 39 | 166 | 50 | 38 | 11 | 335 |
| Total words | 70,874 | 42 | 74,302 | 44 | 23,342 | 14 | 168,518 |
| <i>La Rotonde</i> | | | | | | | |
| News articles | 59 | 45 | 63 | 48 | 9 | 7 | 131 |
| Feature articles | 5 | 39 | 6 | 46 | 2 | 15 | 13 |
| Briefs | 20 | 34 | 34 | 58 | 5 | 8 | 59 |
| Total text | 84 | 41 | 103 | 51 | 16 | 8 | 203 |
| Total words | 47,641 | 47 | 46,135 | 45 | 7,731 | 8 | 101,507 |

Table 3 Number and Percentage of Action and Non-action Photos (Not Including Covers) and Covers Featuring Male and Female Athletes (or Sports Teams) in the *Fulcrum* and *La Rotonde*

| Type | Male | | Female | | Male and female | | Total # |
|-------------------|------|----|--------|----|-----------------|----|------------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | |
| <i>Fulcrum</i> | | | | | | | |
| Action photos | 78 | 38 | 108 | 54 | 16 | 8 | 202 |
| Non-action photos | 6 | 22 | 10 | 37 | 11 | 41 | 27 |
| Total photos | 84 | 37 | 118 | 51 | 27 | 12 | 229 |
| Covers (action) | 11 | 79 | 3 | 21 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| <i>La Rotonde</i> | | | | | | | |
| Action photos | 79 | 46 | 88 | 51 | 6 | 3 | 173 |
| Non-action photos | 5 | 50 | 3 | 30 | 2 | 20 | 10 |
| Total photos | 84 | 46 | 91 | 50 | 8 | 4 | 183 |
| Covers (action) | 7 | 87 | 1 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 8 |

reveal that University of Ottawa student-run publications exceed the equivalent Olympic newspaper photo coverage found in Hardin et al. (2002). They actually publish more photos of female athletes in their sports sections than the number found in King's (2007) analysis.

However, both newspapers published far more covers featuring male athletes (see Table 3). In all cases, teams experiencing athletic success were featured on the front pages of the newspapers and all photographs were action shots. Only one of the women's teams, the soccer team, made it to the cover of both news-

Table 4 Number of *Fulcrum* Articles, *La Rotonde* Articles and Competitive Season of Each Gee-Gee Varsity Team

| Team | # of articles (<i>Fulcrum</i>) | # of articles (<i>La Rotonde</i>) | Competitive season |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Men's teams | | | |
| Basketball | 41 | 29 | Fall/Winter |
| Hockey | 48 | 31 | Fall/Winter |
| Football | 49 | 24 | Fall |
| Women's teams | | | |
| Basketball | 30 | 24 | Fall/Winter |
| Hockey | 43 | 26 | Fall/Winter |
| Rugby | 20 | 8 | Fall |
| Soccer | 35 | 21 | Fall |
| Volleyball | 38 | 24 | Fall/Winter |
| Mixed teams | | | |
| Cross-country | 11 | 1 | Fall |
| Swimming | 11 | 2 | Winter |
| Men's and women's teams | | | |
| Basketball | 8 | 9 | Fall/Winter |
| Hockey | 1 | 2 | Fall/Winter |
| All teams | 7 | 1 | Fall/Winter |

papers. In contrast, all men's sports were variously featured on the front page of both publications (basketball with a total of seven covers, football with six and hockey with five). Such findings are disconcerting in light of the fact that women played more games in a higher number of varsity teams and that the women's and men's teams had comparable win/loss records both in the regular season and in the playoffs (though the women's teams participated in more CIS championships) over the three years examined. The findings are also disturbing because of the less frequent front-page coverage of women's varsity sports by the publications. Female athletes may have earned their fair share of space in the sports section, but they were not showcased on the front page as often as male athletes, which demonstrates that other factors including game day attendance and perceived popularity of the sports on campus may have come into play.

Men or Women: They're Just Athletes

Both the *Fulcrum* and *La Rotonde* generally focused on sport-related attributes to report on female athletes. In fact, reporters used the same vocabulary to capture both women's and men's athleticism, skill and effort, referring to both as 'Gee-Gees' or 'Garnet and Grey' ('Gris et Grenat'). For example, the women's basketball players were characterized in the following terms '... Moyle can knock down the big shot, Trowell will do the dirty work for a clutch basket and Rodrigue will clean up under the hoop' (*Fulcrum*, 4 November 2004, p. 31). A

Table 5 Number of Fulcrum Articles and La Rotonde Articles Using Discursive Strategies that Frame Gee-Gee Women as Gendered Athletes

| Team | Gender marking | | Infantilizing | | Non-sports | | Comparing | |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| | <i>Fulc.</i> | <i>Roton.</i> | <i>Fulc.</i> | <i>Roton.</i> | <i>Fulc.</i> | <i>Roton.</i> | <i>Fulc.</i> | <i>Roton.</i> |
| Women's | | | | | | | | |
| Basketball | 29 | 24 | | 8 | 1 | | 1 ^{-a} | 2 ⁺ , 2 ⁻ |
| Hockey | 32 | 22 | 1 | 9 | | 1 | | |
| Rugby | 17 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | | |
| Soccer | 29 | 21 | 1 | 7 | | 1 | | 1 ⁺ |
| Volleyball | 29 | 16 | 1 | 2 | 1 | | | |
| Total | 136 | 91 | 5 | 27 | 3 | 2 | 1 ⁻ | 3 ⁺ , 2 ⁻ |
| Men's | | | | | | | | |
| Basketball | 36 | 29 | | | 2 | 1 | | 3 ⁺ |
| Hockey | 46 | 30 | | 1 | 3 | | | |
| Football | 10 | 2 | | 2 | 4 | | | |
| Total | 92 | 62 | | 3 | 9 | 1 | | 3 ⁺ |
| Mixed | | | | | | | | |
| Cross-country | 10 | 1 | 1M | | | | | 1 ⁺ |
| Swimming | 6 | 1 | | 1W | | | | |
| Total | 16 | 2 | 1M | 1W | 1 | | | 1 ⁺ |

^a A minus sign indicates that the comparison was in favour of the men's team.

^b A plus sign indicates that the comparison was in favour of the women's team or of both teams.

victory for the men's football team was illustrated as 'Lindell's first touchdown gave the Gee-Gees the lead they would never relinquish and added a second score as icing on the cake' (*Fulcrum*, 13 November 2006, p. 13), and in an equally gender-neutral idiom the newspaper reported a win for the women's hockey team: 'Gee-Gee centre Kim Blain put the final nail in the coffin with a goal 1:29 seconds into the third period' (*Fulcrum*, 17 November 2005, p. 19). Moreover, the performance of a female volleyball player was described as 'la qualité des passes d'Ellen Barwise a eu un effet dévastateur en début de deuxième manche . . .'⁶ (*La Rotonde*, 15 November 2004, p. 24) while it was noted of her team that 'les Gee-gees n'ont fait qu'une bouchée de leurs rivales et les ont dévorées en trois sets éclairs de 25-12, 25-14 et 15-13'⁷ (p. 23).

Admittedly, discursive techniques commonly used in media coverage to establish gender as the dominant frame for differentiating sportswomen from sportsmen did emerge in the analyzed articles. They did not, however, typify the three years of campus newspaper coverage examined (see Table 5). For instance, identifying the gender of sports and players was common not just for female teams, but for male teams as well, albeit not as frequently. The gender of women's Gee-Gee teams was identified in 85 percent of articles about sportswomen compared to a rate of 72 percent for articles covering men's sports, with the infrequent gendering of the football team (20 percent in the *Fulcrum* and 8

percent in *La Rotonde*) mainly explaining this gap. The men's and women's basketball teams were equally identified by gender at a rate of three quarters of all articles in both newspapers whereas the men's hockey team was gender-marked in a greater proportion than the women's team (92 percent compared to 75 percent). Evidently, the practice of gendering the women's team was not asymmetrically higher on a consistent basis.

Comparisons between men's and women's performances were rare but did occur, mostly in reference to the two basketball teams. Yet these comparisons largely benefited the female team. For instance, *La Rotonde* declared 'Week-end parfait pour les filles'⁸ as the title of the article reporting on the women's basketball weekend performances, while on the next page it maintained 'Week-end nul pour les gars'⁹ followed by a subheading contrasting the men's losses to the women's wins (29 November 2004, pp. 22–3). While these headings reveal symmetry in the use of 'girls' and 'boys' to describe female and male athletes, female athletes were infantilized more often than male athletes, but this occurred in only 10 percent of all articles featuring sportswomen. That female athletes were infantilized five times more frequently in *La Rotonde* than in the *Fulcrum* raises the question of whether language characteristics explain this difference or whether different practices are at play in the French-language newsroom. This certainly merits more research as we found no literature that could shed some light on the issue. Journalists for both newspapers rarely wrote about Gee-Gee athletes' lives outside the sporting arena, but did so more often for sportsmen than sportswomen, mostly in athlete profiles.

Finally, not one article emphasized heterosexuality for either female or male athletes, while only one feature story out of a total of 323 articles covering sportswomen alluded to physical appearance. To our knowledge, only one study (King, 2007) has found no evidence of denigration, marginalization or sexualization of female athletes, but the textual analysis involved was limited to an examination of headlines and sub-headlines, and the definitions or categories used in qualitative analysis were not specified.

The single article that alluded to a female athlete's stereotypical feminine appearance emerged in a profile of soccer player Maude Filion in *La Rotonde* (7 November 2005, p. 22), subtitled 'Avec sa chevelure blonde et ses yeux bleus, la jeune femme de 21 ans semble tout droit sortie des romans *Quatre filles et un jean*'.¹⁰ A portrait-style photograph – one of the rare images not depicting an athlete in action – accompanies this description. Yet, a similar type of picture also accompanied articles profiling male athletes. Although those feature articles did refer to non-sports related aspects of their lives (namely, school, family, career aspirations and hometown), none described their typical masculine physical appearance nor did they refer to their love interests. In contrast, the article about Filion mentions that soccer leaves her little time for 'histoires d'amour',¹¹ and although she is involved in a romantic relationship, her focus is on the upcoming semi-finals. It was unclear whether this romance involved a heterosexual or lesbian relationship. Therefore, the article was not categorized as emphasizing heterosexuality. The reference to Filion's blonde hair and blue eyes is all the more noteworthy in its unusualness when contrasted with the feature article on rookie soccer player Ramata Coulibaly; no mention was made of this athlete's

experience as a runway model. Rather than report on her life outside of sports, or her pursuits associated with feminine beauty, the male reporter focused strictly on her soccer experience with various local club teams before joining the Gee-Gees (*Fulcrum*, 23 September 2004, p. 23).

A second problematic case was a caption and photo accompanying an article about a women's regular season hockey game. While the story did not use any discursive techniques that framed the athletes as 'women,' it was matched with a photograph of the players standing next to the bench removing their helmets for the national anthem with a caption that read, 'Gee-Gees let their hair loose after a hard day's work'. This photo and caption are exceptional, as they are the only image and description in three years of photographic coverage that highlight sportswomen's appearance (in this case, long hair). Following this portrayal, the women's hockey coach called the *Fulcrum* editor to request that only action shots of female athletes be used. In addition, one of the players wrote to the editor to complain about the photo, though this letter was not published (Coolidge, Women's Hockey Coach, personal communication, 4 July 2007). These two examples illustrate the discursive mechanism of ambivalence identified by Wensing and Bruce (2003) as the 'new rule'. Christopherson et al. (2002), Lippe (2002) and Wright and Clarke (1999) elaborated on these contradictions: though the skills, competitiveness and physical toughness of women are acknowledged, these are presented with descriptions containing stereotypical heterosexual and feminine qualities. But this new discursive mechanism emerged only twice in the three years of print media examined for this study. In short, neither the old nor new rules governed the representation of Gee-Gee sportswomen. Instead, they were discursively portrayed as legitimate and serious athletes.

Gender Equity: Accidental or Intentional?

This study provides more than a snap-shot of the media representation of female varsity athletes; it consists of an extensive comparative analysis of all varsity sports over three years. Since there was consistent turnover in both campus newspapers' sports coverage staffing over the three years, with a new editor and at least half the team of reporters changing every year, our findings are representative of reporting practices more generally, rather than illustrative of a particular cohort of student reporters. Our results reveal that gender equity in the coverage of Gee-Gee sportswomen is nearly an established practice. This descriptive analysis was a first step in demonstrating that fair and sports-related reporting of sportswomen exists at the University of Ottawa. However, the type of data gathered for this quantitative and textual analysis does not elucidate why such coverage prevails. We can, however, reflect on some of the factors that merit further investigation.

One of these factors is the work of the Committee on Gender Equity, which made a strong impact on campus and brought about profound changes within Sports Services. That the University of Ottawa reached equivalence in the number of female and male varsity athletes, and that it maintained this balance, indicates an institutional commitment to offering gender equitable, interuniversity sporting

opportunities. Though this certainly has affected the coverage reported above, what is currently unclear is the extent to which this influence has been direct.

An additional consideration that merits more study is whether the focus on the athleticism of Gee-Gee women can be explained by their participation in sports such as hockey, rugby, soccer, basketball and volleyball. These sports, particularly hockey and rugby, are not discursively constructed as feminine, but considered physically aggressive and linked to hegemonic masculinity (Christopherson et al., 2002; Mennesson, 2005; Theberge, 2000). It is perhaps easier for student reporters to write about the physical strength, forcefulness and determination of female hockey and rugby players.

Yet, the meaning that today's student journalists and editors ascribe to sports and gender remains unclear. The vocabulary they use to depict Gee-Gee men and women in the *Fulcrum* and *La Rotonde* has historically been associated with the reproduction of masculinity, which can lead to an interpretation that their descriptions of athleticism 'masculinize' female varsity athletes (Christopherson et al., 2002). But this interpretation seems to stem more from the meaning that we, as researchers, ascribe to sports discourses, and less from how student reporters perceive the relationship between gender and sports, or how they may deliberately refrain from portraying sportswomen in a sexualized manner. As Duncan (1993) has argued, the study of gender representation in sports media should extend beyond an analysis of text. For us, this study has been a necessary first step towards identifying an empirical site where women's sports are adequately covered in a positive way, thus establishing a context worthy of further exploration.

A textual analysis does not allow us to determine whether student reporters are consciously refraining from portraying sportswomen as gendered bodies. Though Pirinen (1997) and Wright and Clarke (1999) have shown the insights to be gained from an analysis of media text that uncovers the process of normalization of sportswomen as feminine and heterosexual, gender and sport discourses are not static, and definitions of the female subject are not permanent (Weedon, 1997). It is possible that today's university students have redefined the language of athleticism as a 'sports vocabulary' rather than a 'gendered sports vocabulary', despite the historically dominant discourse linking sports performance and masculinity. More research is needed to uncover whether students are merely reproducing a new gender equity discourse or are consciously resisting historical gender constructions in sport. Ethnographic research, including field work in the newsroom (see Greenberg et al., 2005; Lowes, 1999; Theberge and Cronk, 1994) and at sport competitions, in addition to extensive interviews with editors, reporters and photographers (see Hardin and Shain, 2006; Knoppers and Elling, 2004), would allow for a more extensive analysis of these discursive practices. This would generate a clearer understanding of what discourses they draw on, and how they reinvent or combine them in their sports coverage.

While we have speculated on what sets the University of Ottawa student newspapers apart from mainstream and other campus media, the data gathered for this quantitative and textual analysis do not offer a full and final explanation of the conditions that allow for this nearly exemplary print media coverage. These preliminary, yet unusual, findings elicit more research questions about the context of campus reporting. First, the historical context of sports coverage at the

Fulcrum and *La Rotonde* needs to be explored to determine when sports coverage began to reflect the gender balance in the athlete population, and whether the work of the Committee on Gender Equity had an impact on Gee-Gee reporting. Second, ethnographic research would allow for an analysis of what takes place inside and outside the newsroom, and how it influences the discursive construction of the coverage. How do the student reporters and editors perceive gender in athletics, and how does this influence their sports coverage? Did gender policing in the form of complaints from varsity teams or the student population lead to the kind of sports coverage that exists today? Third, Coakley and Donnelly (2004) claim that undergraduate student projects examining the University of Toronto student newspaper found inequities in the quantity of coverage as well as trivialization of women's sports. However, there are no published studies of campus media coverage of Canadian university athletics. Thus, a comparison with other Canadian university student-run newspapers would also be valuable to determine whether sports coverage on this campus is characteristic of all Canadian student-run media or unique.

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Notes

1. Title IX is an American federal law aimed to ensure equal treatment, benefits and financial assistance for both male and female students. In Canada, there is no federal law requiring schools of any level to provide equal sport opportunities to men and women. In 2002, the Canadian Association of the Advancement of Women in Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS), an advocacy group dedicated to improving opportunities for girls and women, suggested a similar approach to the House of Commons Subcommittee on Sport but, in the end, no such legislation was proposed (CAAWS, 2002).
2. Different competitive sports clubs are also recognized by the University of Ottawa Sports Services, but they do not compete in CIS championships and receive less funding than varsity teams.
3. 'Gee-Gee' is the name of all women's and men's varsity teams and signifies both the double letter 'G' for the school colors (garnet and grey), and the horse which serves as the school mascot (a Gee-Gee being defined as the first racehorse out of the stable).
4. Volume 65 (academic year 2004–05), issues 1–14, 17–19, 22–23; volume 66 (academic year 2005–06), issues 1–10, 12, 14–22, 24–26, 28–30; volume 67 (academic year 2006–07), issues 1–27. Eight of the 80 published issues during the three years examined were not available at the University of Ottawa Archives or at the office of the *Fulcrum*.
5. Volume 72 (academic year 2004–05), issues 1–25; volume 73 (academic year 2005–06), issues 1–6, 8–10, 13–26; volume 74 (academic year 2006–07), issues 1–12, 14–18, 20–24. Five of the 75 issues published during the three years examined were not available at the University of Ottawa Archives or at the office of the *La Rotonde*.
6. Translation: 'the quality of Ellen Barwise's passes had a devastating effect at the beginning of the second match . . .'

7. Translation: 'the Gee-Gees took one bite of their rivals and devoured them in three speedy sets 25-12, 25-14 and 15-13.'
8. Translation: 'Perfect weekend for the girls.'
9. Translation: 'Hopeless weekend for the boys.'
10. Translation: 'With her blond hair and her blue eyes, the 21-year-old young woman seems to have come right out of the novels *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*.'
11. Translation: 'romantic relationships'.

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