

‘How can they like doing that?’ The ambivalent definition of legitimate work in sports journalism

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Abstract

This paper investigates the opposing definitions of legitimate journalism between female and male sports reporters in the Swiss daily press, observable through the tensions in the division of work, task hierarchies, and contradictory definitions of what is perceived as distasteful or undesirable. It aims to adopt an inclusive approach that avoids being judgemental towards male perspectives or adopting a cynical view of female journalists, to better understand both male and female journalists' experiences of interaction of work and professional recognition, and identify obstacles to greater gender equality in sports journalism. The analysis relies on the notion of 'dirty work' developed by Hughes and Bourdieu's theory of field and habitus that offers a new way to investigate the links between tasks, roles, moral divisions, and power relations. Our detailed observations and 25 semi-structured interviews conducted with female and male sports journalists revealed the co-existence of two opposed professional styles. Overall, the men control the prestigious tasks and the doxa of this speciality. The women interviewed spoke of resisting, adapting, and finding satisfaction with the work that their male colleagues consider distasteful, as while their work is recognized by their superiors and non-sports colleagues as noble in general journalistic norms.

Keywords: sports journalism, Swiss daily press, gender, legitimate work, meaning of work, taste

Introduction

Sports journalism has faced two main criticisms in sociological literature. First, it is viewed as a discredited journalistic speciality within the media field (Rowe, 2007; Boyle et al., 2010), and second, as male territory that reflects the hegemonic masculinity of sports and promotes masculine ideals (Schmidt, 2015; Organista & Mazur, 2019). These views on sports journalism are indeed necessary and relevant, but they can be criticised for two reasons.

First, sports journalism studies give the impression that it is a kind of ‘dirty work’ (Hughes, 1958) because it is perceived as a socially or morally tainted speciality within journalism. The common critiques within sociological studies often stem from sociologists’ idealistic views of journalism that centre on critical and sociologically-inspired writing (Weedon et al., 2018). Furthermore, a critical body of knowledge assembled by sociologists of sport has examined ‘bad’ journalistic practices, denouncing for example sports journalists’ non-compliance with common ethical rules of journalism or the non-objective and complicit coverage of sport. This literature has largely ignored the topic of excellence in sports journalism (Weedon et al., 2018). Second, the arrival of female reporters in these male-dominated newsrooms has led scholars to focus their attention on women’s working experiences, often by adopting empathetic points of view. The experiences of male journalists in this context of change have received little attention, despite the fact one cannot fully understand the changes in sports journalism and their effects on work experiences without focusing on both sexes.

To avoid these two pitfalls and fill the present gaps in the literature, this study examines both female and male reporters’ interactions and interdependencies, and questions how legitimate work is defined and expressed. It aims to grasp the hierarchy between different tasks in the sports newsrooms—from what is, according to the dominant norms of this journalistic

speciality, defined as the most valuable to the most distasteful, which journalists try to delegate to others—and understand how this hierarchy is constructed, shared, or challenged among journalists. The Swiss case, analysed in this paper, is particularly interesting because it explores gender dynamics within sports newsrooms and the important role that Editors-in-Chief can play in the allocation and meaning-making of the tasks through their management of workplace teams and the gender typing of skills, which seems very similar to other countries. This study provides insights to better understand both male and female journalists' experiences of work, professional recognition, and careers, and identify the obstacles to greater gender equality in sports newsrooms. Although using 'dirty work' to refer to the least valued tasks in journalism is certainly contentious, research on 'dirty work' presents a basis that can help us understand how journalists struggle with the definition of legitimate and valuable work, and how it affects their work experiences.

Literature review

The burden of a discredited journalistic speciality

Scholars have highlighted the long-standing reputation of sports journalism as the 'toy department' of newsrooms (Rowe, 2007). This is at least partially attributed to the fact that major drawbacks have characterised the field: boosterism (Hardin, 2005); the unequal treatment between genders, races, and people with disabilities (van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2012); the lack of distinction between information, opinion, and public-service missions, and the low quality and low variety of sources (Hardin et al., 2009; Oates & Pauly, 2007; Rowe, 2007). Despite these numerous issues, scholars' main critique of sports journalism is certainly

its lack of rigour and ethical standards. Sports journalists have been criticised for lacking autonomy with regards to their sources (Hardin, 2005) and lacking independence, which aligns with the locker-room mentality that seems to pervade many sports departments (Oates & Pauly, 2007). They have to deal with particular emotional constraints, as they often cover emotional and affective themes, which lead to a problematic relationship with journalistic norms and principles (Horky & Stelzner, 2012).

Furthermore, scholars have criticised sports journalism for its professional failure, referring to the intertwined cooperation between sport and business, making it appear as the ‘world’s best advertising agency’ (Schultz-Jorgensen, 2005). Accordingly, the commercial forces in the newspaper industry have led to professional sports’ dominance in news coverage (Lowes, 1999). Scholars have also highlighted sports journalism’s heavy reliance on results, summaries, and previews, and denounced the lack of critical or inquisitorial approaches that involve politically, economically, or socially informed reporting (Schultz-Jorgensen, 2005; Rowe, 2007). Thus, sports journalism has been described as entertainment and celebrity journalism that supports the sports star system (Andrews & Jackson, 2001).

Changes in work practices and professional standards

Recent literature has highlighted the emerging changes in sports journalism’s professional standards. First, scholars have observed the adoption of professional performance guidelines, some of them including general newsroom codes of ethics (Garrison & Salwen, 1994), that could partially be because sports reporters are more now educated than in the past (Weaver et al., 2007). Sports journalism, as a discredited profession, is contested by sports journalists themselves, who often feel frustrated with their lack of occupational prestige (Rowe, 1999; Boyle et al., 2010).

Second, the quest for ‘new journalists’ to add fresh and sophisticated storytelling strategies has changed the perceptions of sport, making it a cultural activity worthy of serious examination (Oates & Pauly, 2007) and more than ever, a key cultural subject in the media since 2000 (Rowe, 2007). A more reflexive form of sports journalism, in which sport is interrelated with wider political, economic, and cultural factors and influences (Boyle, 2006), emerged in small doses in broadsheet newspapers. For example, sports journalists from the French broadsheet press seek to be recognised as ‘journalists like any other’, and tend to use the same professional norms and criteria as their non-sport counterparts, treating sports news as ‘other news’ (Dargelos & Marchetti, 2000). This could explain why they feel some improvements have been made to their professional recognition, similar to the journalists from the UK (Rowe, 1999) and the German (Hackforth & Fischer, 1994) broadsheet press, who revealed that their reputation had significantly improved since the 1980s.

Sports journalism has undergone many changes in recent years due to several fundamental shifts (Boyle, 2017) and a willingness to move closer towards what is perceived as ‘good’ journalism. However, this certainly cannot be generalised. The overall ‘positive’ evolution of sports journalism’s recognition must be moderated, while the inclusion of ‘the “toy department” analogy to the pages of journalism history’ should be tempered (Boyle, 2006, p. 183).

Female sports journalists: Access, working conditions, and careers

One key change in sports journalism has been staff renewal, particularly with the arrival of female reporters (Boyle, 2017). In many countries, women have accessed the sports newsroom, historically a male bastion. For example, they represent 12% and 10% of the newspaper sports reporters in the USA (Lapchick, 2013) and Australia, respectively (Nicholson et al., 2011). In

the francophone Swiss press, this study's focus, women started entering the field of sports journalism from 2000 onwards, which is later than in other developed countries, such as the USA (Creedon & Cramer, 2007). They currently represent 11% of the workforce within sports departments.

Scholars have analysed female reporters' difficult experiences in sports newsrooms including (1) their obligations to constantly fight for recognition and to keep their jobs in what remains a 'men's environment' (Organista & Mazur, 2019), and (2) the resulting tensions in their identities and challenges in their personal lives (Whiteside & Hardin, 2010; Organista & Mazur, 2019). This makes it harder for women to access this journalistic domain (Laucella et al., 2017) and may discourage them from participating in sports news (Schmidt, 2015). Further, women sports journalists claim less overall job satisfaction (Whiteside & Hardin, 2010), potentially because they occupy lower positions within the organisational hierarchies and have greater difficulties claiming editorial responsibilities in sports departments than in the general newsroom (Lapchick, 2013). All these elements combined could simultaneously contribute to explaining why women often ultimately leave sports journalism (Hardin et al., 2008; Hardin & Whiteside, 2009; Strong, 2007). Scholars often adopt an empathetic point of view when studying female reporters' working experiences of the difficulties they encounter when facing the hegemonic masculinity of sport in sports newsrooms that promote masculine ideals (Schmidt, 2015).

Scholars have further highlighted the gendered division of news that favours men. Women feel pigeonholed into covering what is considered low-status news in sports journalism (Miloch et al., 2005; Schmidt, 2018). They face difficulties in obtaining opportunities to cover prestigious sports, championships, and highly regarded sports events (Chambers et al., 2004; Ricchiardi, 2005). They also more frequently report on less known sports, women's sport, and sports for people with disabilities (Organista & Mazur, 2019). Scholars have further questioned

the horizontal segregation at a micro-level, namely the gendered division in the types of stories reporters are assigned in relation to the gender stereotyping of skills. Some have observed that female sports reporters see themselves as uniquely qualified, because of their gender, as bringing an ‘extra special touch’ (Hardin & Shain, 2006; Hardin & Whiteside, 2012). Swiss female sports reporters make themselves seen to encourage the exchange of information they consider to be sincere, authentic, and private with their source in order to write deeper and more ‘human’ articles (Author, 2013). These findings echo Schmidt’s research (2018) that shows that women journalists write human interest articles more frequently than male journalists. ‘Doing femininity’ in the workplace can however be a ‘friendliness trap’ because perceived ‘natural’ feminine qualities that invite women to see themselves as naturally strong communicators are negatively recoded when women are evaluated for leadership positions (Hardin & Whiteside, 2012). This explains how sport workplaces remain organizational inequality regimes (Sherwood et al., 2018).

Against this backdrop, some scholars have argued that the mere presence of women in journalism does not automatically lead to a feminisation of journalistic practices and content because of the ‘token’ status of women sports journalists (Lauccella et al., 2017; Steiner, 2012). While some female sports reporters actively position their gender as an advantage (Hardin & Whiteside, 2009; Whiteside & Hardin, 2013), others adopt practices of identification with the dominant masculinity, with a strong resemblance observable between the writing of male and female authors in sports sections (Tamir et al., 2017).

Research question and theoretical framework

As this paper will demonstrate, the journalists that entered the Swiss daily press over the last approximately 15 years often have a different profile than those who were already working in sports newsrooms. Due to editorial decisions, we can observe a renewal of the sports

journalist's profile, with some new journalists, mainly the female reporters, adopting more mainstream journalistic styles. Against this backdrop, this study aims to examine how legitimate work is defined within sports journalism. It particularly analyses (1) how the value given to the different tasks (sports, types of stories) is constructed, shared and/or contested by male and female reporters; and (2) the gendered processes of allocation of these tasks within sports newsrooms. Our hypothesis is that the arrival of new journalists has led to the co-existence of two opposing professional styles within sports newsrooms that reflects the tensions between the meaning of work as constructed by the sporting field (for most male reporters) and the media field (for the newly appointed female reporters). Gender, age, and class/culture differences are expressed in the differing ways of defining the legitimate form of the journalistic capital. Journalistic capital, as a form of specific cultural capital of the journalistic field (Hellmueller et al., 2013), comprises a journalist's training, professional experience, networks, values, and the quality of their writing (Bourdieu, 1992). However, in the subfield of sports journalism, sport capital—as a form of specific cultural capital of the sport field—can also be considered as an important resource to gain recognition (Marchetti, 2005). It can be acquired through sporting experience, especially in the form of medals won in national and international contests. The comprehensive sports culture, that is, a knowledge of main events that have shaped local or national collective sporting identities, the capacity to remember facts, or the understanding of specialist jargon can also be constituting elements of the sport capital (Marchetti, 2005). Consequently, we argue that in sports journalism, which is at the intersection between the fields of sport and of journalism, the specific capital traditionally possessed by sports journalists is rather a hybrid journalistic/sport capital.

Accordingly, although the 'journalistic capital is a stabilizing force in the field' (Vos et al., 2019), the new entrants in this journalistic speciality may destabilise the definition of the legitimate form of capital (Benson & Neveu, 2005) and cause disagreements. We argue that

the arrival of female journalists, in the context of threats to the economy of journalism, is subverting the divisions of work, the task hierarchies, and the definition of what is seen as distasteful or undesirable. Analysing and adopting the concept of ‘dirty work’ (Hughes, 1958) usually reserved for occupational activities that are physically disgusting and/or perceived as counter to morality or socially tainted (Simpson et al., 2014), is instructive, because it concerns the divisions and hierarchies of work. Some occupations and tasks are considered to be socially prestigious, while others that may be linked to garbage, danger, or noxiousness are judged to be distasteful or undesirable (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). However, this distinction can be applied to task divisions within one particular occupation that is not necessarily ‘tainted’ (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Every occupation has its “dirty work,” referring to tasks that are devalued or undesirable and that individuals often attempt to delegate (Hughes, 1958). In sports journalism, we attempt to show that the definition of dirty vs. valuable work is not consensually shared by all journalists, but depends on how the journalists define the legitimate form of journalistic capital. Investigating the obstacles to this cultural cohesion invites the analysis of both female and male reporters’ conceptions of legitimate work, as well as how they are shaped through their interactions and interdependencies. One cannot study and understand the work of some without analysing the work of others (Hughes, 1958).

Hughes’ interactionist perspective is salient, because what is judged as desirable work depends on the local symbolic order. In our observations, journalism, with its hierarchies between and within specialities, also functions ‘according to the specific logic of symbolic systems, that of differential gap or distance, retranslates economic differences into distinctive marks, signs of distinction, or social stigmata’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013, p. 297). The dynamic fields of possibility partially structure the process of defining what is desirable or not in (sports) journalism and imposing this definition. A ‘field’ is defined as a ‘field of forces’ that is partially autonomous and features symbolic struggles (Bourdieu, 1980). Thus, the media

landscape would represent a field and journalistic specialities would be subfields that operate as microcosms (Marchetti, 2005). These microcosms are connected with each other and with the social spaces they represent. This is particularly true for sports journalism, which has long been criticised for its close cooperation with sports and business (Schultz-Jorgensen, 2005). As in other cases, the dominant social group imposes a specific 'doxa' that involves a set of social beliefs or practices that encompass a shared understanding, often seen as being beyond criticism (Bourdieu, 1984). In the journalistic field, the doxa corresponds to the 'explicit orthodox/heterodox news values which are part of the sphere of journalistic judgement, and the implicit, silent doxic news values which are part of the sphere of journalistic doxa' (Schultz, 2007, p. 15). The struggles over journalistic styles and products that are judged as tasteful and desirable can be seen as a reflection of the journalists' positions in the field of sport journalism, depending on their gender and cultural backgrounds. The morphological transformations of the journalistic field may help explain these struggles within the sport speciality. For the purpose of our study, we argue that individuals' struggles with the legitimate form of journalistic capital are not solely apparent through the interactions and power relations embedded in the local context of Swiss journalism. In fact, sports journalists' backgrounds, their habitus representing a system of embodied and 'lasting disposable dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1980), impact on the nature of their work experiences. Habitus can explain an individual's natural behavioural adjustments to adapt to most situations; as in many cases, one 'naturally' chooses what one does. The arrival of a 'new' generation of journalists, often female, that has different social properties and writing styles, explains the campaign of legitimisation waged by these journalists trying to get closer to their non-sport colleagues and the general journalism doxa.

Swiss context and methods

Our study focuses on the French-speaking Swiss daily press, where most of the newspapers adopt a local or regional editorial line and no fixed political positioning. We collected qualitative data by observing our participants in the sports sections and conducting semi-structured interviews. We focused on the sports section of two dailies: *24 Heures* (the regional newspaper with the largest circulation) and *Le Temps*, a broadsheet newspaper. We spent one full week with each newspaper, and observed sports journalists working, followed them in the field, took part in editorial briefings, etc. We conducted these observations to study how sports journalists work and interact with each other, and with their non-sport colleagues and superiors. While the data collected through these observations were valuable, particularly in terms of helping us to familiarise ourselves with this occupational group and capture its gender dynamics, we present them solely as a background for our analyses.

Then, we conducted 25 interviews with sports journalists (12 women and 13 men), a sample that corresponds to roughly 40% of the research population. We interviewed all the women sports journalists and almost all the heads of the sports sections, who are all male (one declined to meet with us). Lasting on average 80 minutes, we recorded and transcribed the interviews with the consent of the interviewees. We chose the semi-structured interview format to better elicit participants' experiences. The meaning journalists attribute to their work (conception of the work, professional style, value given to different tasks and subjects, etc.) was one of the issues raised in the interviews. Other issues included sports socialisation, family and educational background, professional trajectory and expectations, views of sports journalism as a profession (work schedules, sports journalists' recognition and autonomy, etc.), and the situation of women in (sports) journalism. A thematic analysis with the following topics framing the interview grid was conducted. We removed all identifying names of the individuals, organisations, and places when presenting the interview data to preserve anonymity.

Results and discussion

Diversifying the ways of treating sports news as an editorial strategy

Sports journalists' professional roles are a set of tasks, assumed at a given time, that depend on the skills among the journalists and their work conditions. Therefore, they rely on the media field's configurations and are affected by its changes. As is typically the case in media around the world, especially in mature markets (Noam, 2016), the current Swiss media's diversity has been threatened by a process of concentration that has accelerated since the 1990s. This concentration process has gained power and momentum over the past two decades with the rise of digital competitors, both in terms of news production and announcers. It has caused closures, takeovers, mergers, and/or the creation of digital-only editions for some newspapers.

Hence, the Swiss press is facing a fragile economic context that has prompted newspapers to rethink their content and their relationships with their readership (Amez-Droz, 2015). Editors-in-Chief have adopted different editorial strategies, and in sport, a willingness to redefine the content of their columns and promote an approach to sports news that differs from the traditional methods. Most of them encourage their sports reporters to distance themselves from sports articles, focusing only on facts and technical analyses that essentially preview and describe sporting events, a style that has overwhelmingly dominated the sports pages of Swiss newspapers (Horky & Nieland, 2013; Author). Accordingly, a female sports journalist working in a regional newspaper described her superior's request:

The Editor-in-Chief did intervene several times and asked us to be more open. He wants us to distance ourselves from sport events, from the sporting calendar, and find something other than just ‘Thursday night, the club of Lausanne met, blah blah blah.’

The reporters we met reported frequent Editors-in-Chief interventions that were aimed at encouraging them to explore the sociological, economic, political, and psychological dimensions of sport in order to attract a wider readership, not one solely made up of sports fans. A male reporter working as a sport section’s lead in a regional newspaper observed that:

The paper uses sport more as an information vector and to capture the reader’s attention. There was a time when it was said that there was a ‘sports reader’ who read the sports section and nothing else. Today, we imagine that the reader is not just interested in the actual sports activities, but also in the connections sport has with daily news.

These changes emerged with the sports newsroom’s loss of autonomy. While almost all the interviewees depicted their department as ‘a state within a state’ (an expression used by three quarters of the interviewed journalists) to describe its great autonomy, their testimonies, nevertheless, confirmed that sports newsrooms are not ‘splendidly isolated’ anymore (Rowe, 1999). All the journalists we met reported a lessening of their autonomy in relation to their superiors in the selection and treatment of sports news, indicating that this speciality tends to be more permeable to the general doxa. This change was well expressed by a male senior journalist, who entered the profession in the early 1970s:

Historically, because the sports desk manages itself, is a state within a state, it has been left to cook up its own little pot for a long time [...] Until recently, we had

complete autonomy. Now that sport has broken through its barriers somewhat and has become more of a global subject, Editors-in-Chief are taking a greater interest in it, because they think it is something that can sell papers.

This testimony highlights a change in the editorial strategy, consisting in diversifying the way journalists treat sports news, in order to change readership, and particularly attract readers less familiar with sport, which includes women. With this change emerged several new tasks in sports newsrooms that can be redistributed among the journalists. It is social prestige (understood in terms of recognition within this sub-field), and each task's desirability that contribute to the division on a scale that is not based on technique or skills, but on the value of the work.

Nevertheless, despite Editors-in-Chief's greater intentions, sports columns are overall poorly regarded within general newsrooms. One female sports reporter noted that many journalists in her field felt that their colleagues from other sections still perceived the sports section as 'sub-journalism'. Overall, the interviewees in our study believed that most of their colleagues and superiors still viewed their position as the 'toy department' of their newspaper. For example, a male reporter declared that: 'Sport is a game and a game is not serious. It is not serious. Politics, economics, those are serious things. The rest is entertainment.' Such testimonies were abundant during the interviews. This poor reputation of sports departments affects the interviewees themselves, because they have the feeling that their colleagues consider them to be both less competent and less professionally well-trained. Regarding their competence, a male reporter stated: 'In short, the director of the centre for journalistic training told us on the very first day that sports journalists know five hundred words and no more. I heard her say that, I could not believe it!' Although each of the journalists in our study made

similar observations regarding their negative reputation, their methods of coping with these critiques differed, as did the ways they appropriated meanings to their work.

Later, this paper will mainly focus on the dominant configurations to show an overall opposition between female- and male-driven journalism. However, we argue that the situation is nuanced and not binary, which we will outline with examples of some journalists who escape this opposition, due to their backgrounds, training, professional experiences, or their newspaper's editorial line.

Divisions of labour and legitimate styles, as defined by male sports reporters

Highly specialised journalists

Every profession has a 'noble heart' that represents the definition of its proper practice, a norm that is constructed in each particular configuration. In our study on Swiss sports journalism, male reporters largely defended the traditional ways of doing their job, which rely on their interests in sport. The male interviewees tended to present a similar professional profile, viewing themselves as specialist sports journalists. Two main reasons can explain this profile. First, as sports enthusiasts, they were very keen to become sports journalists. As one male reporter stated, 'I am passionate about sports. It is a logical continuation: I practised a lot of sports, I watched a lot of sports, I went to University to study journalism.' These individuals expressed an interest in not only sport and participating in sport, but also following sports news, as the main medium associated with their work. The thirteen men interviewed stated that they always wanted to work in sports journalism and they invoked their passion for sport to justify their choice. 'I was passionate about sport', 'I was a big football fan', and 'I was crazy about sport' were all sentences the men continuously used during the interviews. The men's passion

for sport was strongly linked to their experiences as fans and their participation in sport with their peers. Because of these sport experiences, obtained through socialisation, the male journalists we interviewed generally had an excellent knowledge of the field (rules, history of the clubs, careers of the coaches and players, past championship results, etc.) and had mastered the technical aspects of the main sports.

Second, the male interviewees' profiles as specialist sports journalists were also a result of their professional training. They entered the profession as freelancers within the area of sport, and, with the exception of one of them, were trained solely in sports journalism. Consequently, the male interviewees' careers indicate a reliance on a hybrid journalistic capital closely related to the sporting field. They actually define the possession of this form of capital as the normal 'price for entry' (Bourdieu, 1984) into this journalistic speciality. As a male reporter explained, 'You have to be passionate. I believe you cannot possibly write a match report if you are not crazy about a sport.' This way of defining the doxa contradicts the expectation of neutrality usually required to gain journalistic capital (Hellmueller et al., 2013) and is likely to support passionate male reporters' control over this sub-field, their capacity to exclude potential candidates who are perceived as being more neutral, and their power over the definition of the legitimate form of journalistic capital in sports journalism.

Task hierarchy within sports newsrooms

Football and ice hockey are the most popular sports in Switzerland, and the written content on these sports is commonly considered the most widely read in the sports pages. All of the male sports journalists interviewed viewed the coverage of these two sports as the most prestigious task, as highlighted by one female interviewee: 'For my colleagues, they're really the two "king sports."' They want to cover them more than anything!' This journalist refers to male journalists who reign over the territory of sports newsrooms by controlling the most prestigious subjects,

which she depicts as being necessarily male sports. The male interviewees also unanimously regarded men's sport as being of greater value than women's sport. Echoing Schmidt's study (2018), they perceived that the current level of women's sport coverage is appropriate and in line with the readers' perceived expectations. For example, one male reporter said:

Yeah, but we need to be honest. For the moment, women's sport is still very far behind men's sport. The level is still really much lower compared to men's sport so I think that women's coverage is fair. It is not macho to say that, it is simply the truth!

The male journalists in our study tended to impose 'their' hierarchy in relation to women's and men's sport in the newsrooms, and it is nearly impossible for female reporters to contest it. As one female reported noted:

When there was the Swiss Football Cup final, the women's final was scheduled before the men's match. I said it would be nice to do something on the women's final. My colleagues said 'Oh, fuck that!' Of course it's still a bit macho.

Thus, the male interviewees regarded and defined football and ice hockey, as well as men's sport in general, as the 'noble' part of the work. As they claimed to possess the legitimate combination of journalistic capital, the male reporters in our study accessed and monopolised these tasks, leaving what they thought to be the 'dirty jobs' ('secondary' sports and women's sport) to female reporters. This delegation of devalued tasks gives female reporters a peripheral position within their sports departments, while allowing male reporters to gain symbolic benefits in the sport section and among the public. Just one of the female interviewees escaped this assignation, as she was in charge of the ice hockey coverage. She is a pioneer in Swiss sports journalism, in which she started to work in the 1980s. She is a former elite ice hockey

player and has been socialised specifically in the sub-field of sports journalism, the specific culture of which she shares. She acts as ‘one of the boys’ (van Zoonen, 1998) within her sports newsroom, and her profile (conception of work, type of career, etc.) set itself apart from the other female reporters we interviewed.

Poor reputation within sports journalism and valorisation strategies

Despite the control of the male reporters’ in our study over the division of work in sports journalism and their prestige in the field of sport, their low status in journalism remains. To address this low recognition, most of the male interviewees had firstly developed an idealistic professional rhetoric that allowed them to present their position as one that was much-envied by the public. They describe their job as a great opportunity to access popular athletes and teams and prestigious sporting events, thus, projecting a flattering image of their activities and of themselves. One male reporter particularly exemplified this idealistic professional rhetoric:

When you think that your job is to be paid to go and attend the finals of the World Cup, that none of your friends can even get tickets for [...] and you, you are paid to go there, it’s amazing, yes, it’s crazy [...] I have a fabulous job!

Male reporters who were interviewed have continuously highlighted the great prestige of their job in the eyes of the public, often mentioning that, although many are called to this profession, only few are chosen. Relying on the audiences to emphasise their strong external reputation allows them to use this form of journalistic capital (Vos et al., 2019) to construct a positive professional image and to cope with their poor legitimacy within the journalistic field.

Second, they develop strategies aimed at staging their expert status in sport, projecting a self-image that is shared among male reporters and intimately defines their identities as

journalists. They produce a representation of their job that portrays them as professional experts in sports news. This *mise-en-scène* requires them to demonstrate their expertise within their articles. Therefore, according to the male reporters who were interviewed, a good article has to comment on the event, meaning that its author has to take a position, and evaluate and judge the performance. One male reporter explained:

We work for a paper which states it has no bias. This is always difficult in the sports section, because when you see a match and you write about it in detail in your article, you have to take a position; you cannot get out of it.

To ensure the recognition and esteem of their audiences, the interviewees in our study declared that they display their expertise in sport and their strong passion for sport in their output, and they define this way of treating sport news as the ‘right’ one. According to them, passion is considered a job requirement because it guarantees that the journalist is well-versed in sport and is able to write articles that reflect the emotions on the field. Lastly, according to the professional rules as defined by most of the male journalists interviewed in this study, a sports article gains value when the journalist communicates that s/he was on location. This distinguishes their production, and constitutes a reminder of this positive and envied part of the job.

A match report is the type of article that allows the greatest use of these principles. This is why the male journalists we interviewed consider the match report to be the most valuable sports ‘story’. These articles focus on the technical aspects of sports coverage as well as dealing with timely stories. They are therefore associated with ‘hard’ news, all the more so if they focus on the most prestigious subjects (popular male sports generally). They are opposed to what is referred to in Switzerland as ‘magazine-type’ articles, articles with ‘soft’ angles that offer a

treatment of information that is similar to that of magazines, covering topics not necessarily related to current news stories. The male interviewees tended to consider these soft-angle articles as secondary. Speaking about one of his female colleagues, a male reporter declared ‘Yeah, but it is not the same for her. She mainly does magazine articles.’ He denies his colleague’s work and journalistic capital by implying that she does not partake in real sports journalism. The role associated with the new non-stick-to-sports trend, as imposed by the Editors-in-Chief, is incompatible with male interviewees’ sporting culture and way of doing the work. It further threatens their control of the specific doxa of sports journalism and tends to be rejected by them, becoming the undesirable work of this journalistic speciality.

This conception of the work might, however, not be shared by every male sports reporter, nor in every newsroom. For example, the two sports journalists (both male) from *Le Temps* declared to adopt a writing style that does not focus on technical match reports or passionate sports expressions, but more on original and ‘soft’ angles that are quite similar to the style our interviewed female journalists claimed to use, as will be shown in the next section of this article. The treatment of sports news that they put forward when we met them gives much weight to biographies, investigations, and ‘society’ news. This broadsheet newspaper hardly ever provides a match report. This treatment of sports news has been largely defined by the Editor-in-Chief who arrived in 2015. He reinstated the sports column that had been suspended for a couple of years, which allowed him to strongly orientate its specific editorial line. Sports journalists from *Le Temps* also expressed feeling more respected within their newsrooms than their colleagues in the regional dailies. They had neither superior training nor a particularly prestigious career that could justify a better reputation. One can assume that the treatment of sports news they provide relies on a mainstream journalistic capital that brings them closer to non-sports journalists and allows them to gain greater recognition within their paper.

Changes in sports journalism's definition that fit female journalists' styles

A profile of multiskilled journalists

The female interviewees' experiences of economic constraints and sports journalism's negative reputation have a very different meaning, since their professional trajectories, their positions in the newspapers, and how they define their work are all very different from that of their male counterparts. Women began to climb the ranks in sports newsrooms in the 2000s. This increasing feminisation is due to different rationales: marketing (promoting the 'right image' for the paper) and ethics (encouraging the presence of women). Regardless, female testimonies indicate that it is Editors-in-Chief's expectations of a diversification in the treatment of sports news that has largely motivated their recruitment. Half of the women know that their hiring was facilitated because they were women, and perceive it as the result of positive discrimination. According to them, the Editor-in-Chief's decision to hire them is most likely based on the assumption that they would bring a different outlook on sport compared to men. A female reporter explained:

In fact, what they wanted for their sport desk was a woman, because it is good for the image of the newspaper and the other thing, probably more important, I was going to bring a new outlook on sport. A different take on sport.

Such recruitment of women for the purpose of allegedly 'feminine' writing in sports journalism is not unique to Switzerland; it has also been observed in the US and UK (Chambers et al., 2004). The female reporters we met, who have worked in Swiss sports journalism since

2000, have a completely different profile to their male counterparts and the previous figure of the single female pioneer. They report a poor level of socialisation with regards to sport fandom and do not present themselves as being particularly passionate about sport. These women were committed to becoming journalists, although not in sport (only two of the women interviewed pursued this). They were trained in other journalistic specialities before entering sports journalism and one-third of them were recruited to a sports desk 'without having ever written a single line on sport' (a female reporter). The tight labour market in Swiss journalism has encouraged them to accept jobs even if they do not completely match their initial ambitions. One female reporter described her situation:

I always wanted to be a journalist, always, but not really in sport. Not at first. I wanted to work in politics more than sport actually. I never thought I would work in sport. It is due to circumstances.

At the time of their recruitment, the female journalists we interviewed adhered to general journalistic norms and codes, and half of them admitted that they were not necessarily very knowledgeable about sport. A female reporter said: 'As for me, I am very bad in sport!' They considered themselves to be generalist journalists who happened to be able to cover sport as well as other types of news:

Maybe I do not have the same culture in sport as my male colleagues. They know every story and statistic! But in our work, I think that when you know how to do it, it does not matter what subject you are covering. You need to get information, interview people anyway, regardless of your expertise in the subject [...] It's true, sometimes I lack

specific knowledge, but well, I can easily compensate with my ability to get information and establish contacts. (Female reporter)

Hiring these multiskilled generalist journalists seems like an effective way for Editors-in-Chief to achieve a diversification in the way sports news is treated in the sport column. Overall, it challenges the specific culture of their sports desk and fosters diversity in topic treatments. Editors-in-Chief's expectations of a more 'feminine' approach to sports news were clearly expressed at the time of their recruitment: 'The editors wanted this diversity, to have a man and a woman. [...] They are really happy, because they think that a woman brings a different kind of sensibility, that the perspective is a bit different' (a female reporter). They also receive positive feedback on a daily basis about articles with a human or offbeat perspective, closer to the mainstream journalistic capital, or the distribution of subjects to cover, which probably influence how the female reporters define their work.

Women in charge of the 'dirty job' they enjoy

In some cases, people agree on the hierarchy of tasks, identifying those that are devalued and refused, because they are perceived as dirty by 'nature'. Workers take these jobs because they have to, but they rarely gain any value from them. In sports journalism, we need to adopt a more relative view of undesirable work, as there is no consensus within the profession on the definition of the most legitimate work. What most of the male interviewees, who follow the traditional doxa of sports journalism, perceive and define as dirty work is actually appreciated and a source of value for a majority of the female interviewees, who rather possess a mainstream journalistic capital and reflect the general norms of journalism.

With the exception of the female pioneer, the women journalists we met did not overall appreciate the professional values and conventions of their male sports journalists' colleagues. Due to their professional training outside of sport, they do not appreciate writing that focuses on facts, technical analyses, and sports emotions. For example, one female reporter criticised the factual approach of one of her male colleagues: 'But when he wrote, he did it in this many meters and then blah blah blah. Hyper technical and only descriptive.' In fact, the women journalists we interviewed saw soft news in sport as a desirable part of their work. Speaking about what she appreciated in her job, a female reporter described, 'It means talking about my meeting with the athlete outside the sporting event, at his home, or like that. Anything you can do around the sport, but that is not directly related to the competition itself.' Female interviewees like developing a human perspective that allows them to investigate the 'person behind the shirt' (a female reporter).

Due to their low level of socialisation with regards to sport fandom, most of the female interviewees did not share the male reporters' perceptions of work as an opportunity to be in touch with famous athletes and experience prestigious events (such as Olympic Games and Football World Cups). While four female interviewees acknowledged the importance of this part of the job and expressed some disappointment for being excluded from it, none of the female interviewees defined these experiences as the most gratifying part of their work. In other words, the men's desirable work was not of value to the women. This was also true for the subjects they covered as, with the exception of two of them, they were not particularly keen to cover football or ice hockey. One female reporter explained 'No, but I'm really less competent in football and ice hockey than my colleagues. They know everything! [...] And I'm less interested in it anyway.' They said they would rather cover secondary sports, as a technical approach is not expected and they have more freedom to treat sports news as simply another type of news.

The rejection of sports journalism as a professional identity

The division of labour in sports newsrooms tends to produce female reporters that are devalued according to the sporting doxa. As they are aware of this, the women journalists we interviewed try to compensate for this denigrated professional identity by obtaining a strong professional recognition within the journalistic field—from their superiors and non-sport colleagues with whom they share journalistic norms and values. This helps them to positively experience their work. In this respect, most of the female interviewees, who prefer not to be identified as sports journalists, but rather as simply journalists, foster their peripheral position within their sports department. Although this approach is detrimental to their recognition by their sports colleagues, as it strengthens their positions as outsiders, it positively impacts how they are perceived by their non-sports colleagues and superiors. Following this same logic, half of the female journalists regularly contribute to other columns to avoid being characterised as solely sports journalists. One female journalist exemplified this position:

It is precisely when you are a sports journalist that you are really put into a box super quick. You really become that person, the one who only knows how to talk footy, think footy, and might wear a footy pyjama in bed. Then, you are quickly considered a moron. I have no wish to be pigeonholed already right from the start. That is why I regularly write for other columns.

The female interviewees seemed quite aware that if a sporting habitus works as an asset in sports journalism, it is, however, regarded with suspicion by mainstream journalism (Dargelos & Marchetti, 2000). Furthermore, the concept of sports journalism they defend also protects them from this stigma. Their professional style that follows general journalistic

conventions contributes to forging a positive professional identity. Developing soft stories is a way for them to legitimise their place by showing that they can bring something of value to their section. With this objective, most of them claim to have a female perspective on sports news and try to highlight the gendered nature of their writing, as can be seen in the following comment: 'It's clear that women have a different sensibility and write different papers' (a female reporter). They use the feminine as something that did not have a place in the sports pages before their arrival. They mobilise their gender as an emblem of journalistic innovation, thereby developing a feeling of usefulness. Thus, in our study, although covering secondary sports and soft news is perceived as undesirable work by their male colleagues, women redefine it as a legitimate professional style.

Conclusions

Our attempt to analyse the division and differing attributed values of work encouraged us to avoid being judgemental towards male perspectives or adopt a cynical view of female journalists. Thus, we aimed to take an inclusive approach that combined their respectively ambivalent situations and their competing definitions of legitimate and desirable work. This study shows that employing Bourdieu's sociology of tastes to analyse the division and meaning of work (what is desirable or not) is a significant approach that allows us to determine the legitimacy of journalists' professionalism. Regarding sports journalism, taste or interest is highly influenced by the particular sports and strong gender divisions, which may explain the difficulties Editors-in-Chief face when attempting to change the division of work within sports newsrooms.

Thus, gendered dispositions explain journalists' constructions of their work's meaning. As shown in this paper, some reporters with a different background or position within the media

field escape the opposition between female- and male-driven journalism that this paper has highlighted. Nevertheless, overall, the male journalists interviewed valued the emotions sport made them feel. They keep for themselves what they believe to be the more valuable tasks, such as covering the most prestigious men's sports, and leave what they view as unattractive work, such as reporting on less popular sports. Their idealised vision of their work, strongly interiorised, constitutes a self-justification and an auto-conviction. They value their work in the sport field and are often recognised for it by sports actors and the public, which helps them accept their low recognition within the profession. With the exception of one pioneer, the female journalists we interviewed also cultivated a professional style that fit their tastes by valuing a more generalist style that corresponded to their journalistic backgrounds. However, their lack of specific sport capital made them appear less legitimate within sports newsrooms and tended to exclude them from the most 'prestigious' tasks. They resisted, adapted, and were satisfied with work that, relying on a classical journalistic capital, is considered noble in general journalistic norms, and provided them with the feeling of higher recognition from their superiors and non-sports colleagues.

However, the male and female complementary tastes for journalism in our study do not lead to the acceptance of diversity and balanced power relations. Male reporters' power remains in the sports newsrooms, as they still control the doxa of this specialism, keep the prestigious tasks for themselves, and contribute to the symbolic violence that excludes women from internal recognition. This hierarchy of tasks echoes these differences in tastes that prevent women from gaining the form of symbolic capital that could help them escape their subordinated positions and access higher responsibilities in the newsroom.

Finally, our study indicates that most male and female journalists are assigned a certain journalistic style that is difficult to escape. Both seemed to internalise the organisational logics, contributing to the dominant definition of masculine and feminine journalistic values and

practices, to the reinforcement of the boundaries between men and women, and to the maintenance of the existing gender order in sports journalism. Editors-in-Chief seem to play a key role in this process, notably through their recruitment procedures and gendered expectations towards journalists. Our study therefore shows that the gender typing of skills, which has been identified in other contexts (Lofgren-Nilsson, 2010), can have strong negative impacts not only on women's careers but also on their experience of work. Furthermore, although we are unable to provide data on a long period of time, their symbolic rather than tangible support of the careers of female individuals also seems to obstruct gender equality in sports newsrooms.

This paper is not without limitations. First, our results are situated in a certain period of time and context and are not universally true nor stable across time. The situation outlined in this paper is specific to the Swiss daily press. It is strongly linked to the particular process of recruitment of women sports journalists, underpinned by the vulnerable economic situation in which the Swiss press finds itself. However, how gender and sport culture impact the hierarchy of occupations/practices and the definition of the sport journalistic doxa does not seem to be specific to this context. Furthermore, there is a risk in 'freezing' journalists' relations at a particular point in time. This study certainly simplifies the role of interactions between the new female entrants and the male journalists in the difficult economic context of journalism, and its potential in the disruption of professional styles recognised as legitimate within this journalistic subfield. Finally, this research appears to support a strong deterministic view of the divisions of work in which external factors play a key role. The specific Swiss context highlights a division of occupations, in which positions fit with gender, that plays a key role in the diverging conceptions of the legitimate journalistic capital of sport sections. However, distinguishing the respective effect of gender and of taste on non-sport journalism is difficult with the collected data.

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