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## **Social Responsibility of Sports Journalists in Expressions of Diversity: The Example of The London Olympic Games as Covered in La Voix du Nord**

**Fabien Wille, Sorina Cernaianu**

### **Introduction**

The study of social responsibility (SR) of journalists (SRJ) in the expression of diversity is rightly viewed as a reaffirmation of the role of journalists in modern democracies (Muhlmann, 2004). This issue affects all media actors as it includes questions concerning discrimination on the basis of ethnic and cultural background, sex, gender, sexual orientation and disability.

There is a common understanding that Sport and especially sports entertainment are cornerstones of today's media-oriented society. However, matters related to SR, SRJ and SRM (social responsibility of media), considered as one 'venue for public debate' (Rabatel and Koren, 2008) have not really been explored in relation to sports journalism (SRJ/S). The present chapter is intended to address the dearth of existing research on this theme.

Pre-war media's participation in co-constructing the myth of the 'Black athlete' (Deville-Danthu, 1992), following on the success of African-American participants in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, is a particularly revealing example. More recently, the South African athlete Caster Semenya sparked controversy in the sports community after her victory at the 2009 World Championship in Berlin. Her results, running style, way of dressing and voice were all considered to be masculine. The media had real trouble with this 'story'; this can be seen not only in their difficulty in knowing how to designate her – 'this person' (L'Equipe); 'He, or she, is still quite young' (Libération) – but also in their interviewing of an unusually large number of spokespeople (family members, coaches, doctors, gynaecologists, intersex organizations)

(Montañola and Olivesi, 2012). In France, the metaphors used to describe the performance of athletes of diverse ethnic backgrounds, as opposed to those identifiable as French, bring out (yet again) the colonial stigmatization of the era of the French empire, as well as relations based on the opposition of dominant/dominated. For one instance of the latter, the written press tends to use ‘technological’ metaphors for the dominant figure, the colonizer, and ‘animal’ metaphors for the dominated, colonized person. For example, journalists covering the London Olympic Games described Christophe Lemaître as a ‘meteor’ (Ouest France, 7 August 2012) while Marie-José Pérec, from Guadeloupe, was called a ‘gazelle’, 20 years after winning her first Olympic medal (L’Express, 27 July 2012).

Sports journalism is one place in which diversity (whether ethnic, sexual, gender or disability) seems to be more visible. While diversity can be observed, it does not comprise a category that is generally meaningful among professional sports journalists. It is more something that has not been thought about, whether it generates clichés or, at worst, an involuntary reinforcing of discrimination by naturalizing difference. How have sports journalists and media taken up this issue?

To address this question, this chapter examines the coverage of the 2012 London Olympic Games by La Voix du Nord (VdN)<sup>1</sup>. The 8-page special section published each day during the Games is first analysed quantitatively. Then, in phase two, these results are discussed with the paper’s two special correspondents for the Olympics.<sup>2</sup>

### **Analytic Framework**

This chapter is based on a multidisciplinary approach. The analytic framework brings together themes from media ethics (Pigeat and Huteau, 2000: 419) and the role of journalism in democracies (Muhlman, 2004), along with research on the media representations of diversity and on the social function and media strategies in relation to sports.

## Social Responsibility

This chapter is intended as a contribution to the field of journalism ethics (Wille, 2002). Beyond the different charters and codes of ethics, which serve as ‘[...] standard[s] of professional conduct for journalists engaged in gathering, transmitting, disseminating and commenting on news and information in describing events<sup>1</sup>’, the present authors view the news as an integral part of social activity, of the legitimizing and enforcement of the strategies of social actors and of symbolic struggle, all of which lead us to consider SRJ as a social fact rather than as a phenomenon of language (Véron, 1997; Esquenazi, 2002: 6-8).

Starting with the postulate that the essential function of the media and the role of the journalist consist less in providing information about events than in ‘making sense’ of the world in which we live, Delforce (1996) views journalists as having an individual social responsibility in constructing both the ‘meaning’ of the news and a world view (Tétu, 1999). Journalistic output can thus only support or shake up pre-existing social discourse. ‘Making sense’ implies that the journalist has a responsibility to society to the extent that his or her professional activity requires that he or she take the social effects of media intervention into account. This is why the first step of this study involves a quantitative analysis of the media’s treatment of diversity, which examines this question of meaning.

The ‘Hutchins Commission’, by setting out the basis of journalism ethics in A Free and Responsible Press (1947), was the inspiration for the 1956 publication of Seibert et al.’s (1996) seminal work, Four Theories of the Press, which remains a foundational point of departure in the theoretical conceptualization of the media’s social responsibility. Likewise, McQuail’s (1997) semantic and methodological decision to focus his research not on SR but instead on ‘the accountability of media’ demonstrates the extent to which responsibility must be

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<sup>1</sup> [Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists of the International Federation of Journalists adopted at its 1954 World Congress](#)

conceived of overall; it should be considered both on the level of personal and professional ethics, and should be analysed in a way that takes political reasoning, judicial constraints, the influence of readers and even of pressure groups with economic (shareholders, sponsors and financial partners) and social (community-based lobbies and advocacy groups) concerns. For this reason, phase two of this study involved discussing the phase one results in semi-directive interviews held with the two journalists who had covered the Olympics from London.

### **Media, Sports and Diversity**

There has been much report into this subject (Ward 2006, Blion 2009, Bokova 2009, Lenoble-Bart and Mathien 2011). As comprehensive as they may be, these studies make little reference to media RS and they do not explore the question of SRJ, whether individual or collective. Some studies even demonstrate a tendency to reinforce discrimination through an inappropriate treatment that stigmatizes ethnic diversity with regard to cases of violence (Mattelart, 2007; Frachon and Sassoon, 2008).

For its part, sport is viewed as a significant arena for the construction of cohesiveness, social integration and the expression of diversity (Ragi, 2003; United Nations, 2005; Gasparini and Cometti, 2010) while being a sector of major media industry investment (Jeanrenaud and Késenne, 2006). Media coverage of sport nevertheless does not come close to reflecting social and cultural diversity and guaranteeing equitable representation of everyone involved. Concerning more specifically the place accorded to female journalists in sports editorial staff, the most recent survey from 2011 demonstrates that while there has been some progress in Europe, women occupy a marginal 8% of these roles (Horky and Nieland, 2011). The same study also describes sports journalism in international print media as a hyper-masculinized 'man's world' (85% of articles concern men's sport) and highlights sports journalists' lack of respect for professional ethics, with 26% of articles citing no sources and 41% citing only one source. Further, strategies used to gain readers and arouse interest through media exposure give

rise to an immoderation and symbolic confrontation that tend to stigmatize difference. Several studies of televised sports commentary have also demonstrated their influence on how viewers or members of the audience at sporting events categorize physical, intellectual and social characteristics of athletes of colour (Charlot and Clément, 2007; McCarthy and Jones, 1997; Bruce, 2004). These discourses co-construct social representations of gender identity and reproduce colonial and ethnically discriminatory attitudes and approaches. This is the outcome of several studies of the media in North America (Billings and Eastman, 2003), the Netherlands (Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers, 2004; Van Sterkenburg et al. 2010, 2012), Scotland (Kelly, 2011) and even Slovenia (Ličen, 2011). The metaphors and designations employed highlight journalists' professional and linguistic habits and bring up the question of SJR/S in its entirety, from its construction to its appropriation. This begins in the training and hiring of journalists, including the study of the respect for journalistic standards, but also concerns how the profession is actually practised 'on the ground' and finally the analysis of media output, for the sake of better understanding journalistic responsibility for expressing and representing diversity.

### **Methodology**

Our research concerns the analysis of the 8-page special newspaper section produced by VdN during the two weeks of competition of the London Olympics, from 27 July to 12 August 2012. This section was the product of an editorial choice; its presentation was thought through in advance as concerns the 'sectioning' of the pages, the use of photos, the subjects treated, the relative freshness of the news, the page layouts and so on. This format did not change and occurred every day in all the local editions of the paper.

The first phase consists of an analysis of the media coverage, inspired by the 2011 International Sports Press Survey, which sought to obtain the most exhaustive view possible of the difference in the treatment of men and women; it did so by examining a wide variety of

daily papers (publication country, place of the publication in the overall media offering). We have chosen to focus on one regional daily and, in parallel, we have filled out the collected data by taking other criteria, such as ethnic background, disability and sexual orientation, into account. This distinction was made for actors in the different subjects examined, the photos, the results (i.e. whether a medal was earned) and also for the sources (spokespeople and others who were cited). Together, this represents a group of 348 observation forms, which were filled in by a group of undergraduate students at the Lille 2 University of Health and Law in a research training class.

The questionnaire contained 125 items, grouped according to the following topics:

- A. Identification (11 items, including: issue number, publication date, article length, article source, gender of journalist, name of journalist (European spelling), etc.)
- B. Subjects Treated (4 items, including: main content of the article, number and type of sports discussed, values and social responsibility of the sport);
- C. Actors/People Mentioned in the article (38 items, including: number of actors/people mentioned, majority gender represented, different types of actors such as athletes, coaches, sponsors, press attachés, managers, etc., number and type of medals, gender, ethnic background, disability, sexual orientation, etc., with data recorded for a maximum of four people);
- D. Photographs related to the article (58 items, including: number of actors/people in the photo, majority gender represented, ethnic background, gender, disability, sexual orientation, etc., with data recorded for a maximum of three photographs with a maximum of four actors/people per photograph);
- E. Sources Cited in the article (14 items, including: number of sources, majority gender represented among sources, ethnic background, disability, sexual orientation, with data recorded for a maximum of three sources).

The observation form used fill-in (text, number, date), true-or-false and multiple choice questions. Analysis and statistical treatment of the data were performed with Sphinx Plus<sup>2</sup> and SPSS Statistics software. Each item was coded independently by two coders. We calculated Cohen's kappa to test inter-coder reliability.

Semi-directive interviews were conducted with the two special correspondents (SV and DD), for their reactions on the results we obtained in our quantitative analysis. We have also questioned about their editorial choices, daily portrait, non coverage of the Paralympic Games and an article about an athlete who makes photo for a gay magazine.

## **Results**

### **Phase One: Quantitative Analysis**

Concerning the inter-coder reliability, for the majority of items the Cohen's kappa value was higher than 0.8, which represent almost perfect agreement between the inter-coders. Only for *values and social responsibility of the sport* this coefficient was 0.78, which indicate a substantial agreement.

Initial contextualization indicators showed that 59.2% of the articles in the sample discussed only one sport. These sports included those frequently covered in the French press: basketball, swimming – sprint races (> 10%), followed by judo, handball, athletics – sprint races and jumping, tennis, football (5-10%) and boxing, cycling, fencing (< 5%).

More than 50% of the articles were composed of either retrospective commentary about results (33.6%) or prospective commentary about an upcoming event (23.6%). This suggests that the newspaper's special section offered an alternative approach to the media coverage of the Olympics, drawing attention to other social aspects (social responsibility: 19%; communication and media: 14.4%; organization: 6.3%; spectators: 6%; financial: 2.6%).

In 15.8% of the articles, in particular those under the 'Sidelines' heading (about local tourism), no person (Actor) was identified or represented in the article. Only one actor was



mentioned in 21.8%, and likewise for two actors. Three actors were mentioned in 10.3% and 12.9% for four actors. The slight increase in articles in which more than four actors were mentioned could be explained by the success and interest in relays in Swimming and Athletics events.

Qualitative analysis also showed that the question of discrimination concerned preponderantly how the 'male-female' gender difference was treated by the media. This point will be addressed more fully below.

**Physical Disability.** The question of physical disability was difficult to distinguish because the event was divided into two separate competitions: the Olympics (27 July to 12 August 2012) and the Paralympics (29 August to 9 September 2012); the latter were not examined in this study.

It should nevertheless be noted that there is really no comparison between the resources invested in covering the Paralympics and those used for the Olympics, to which an eight-page section was devoted each day. The Paralympic Games were only accorded limited space (short pieces on the regular sport pages).

**Sexual Orientation.** Sexual orientation was a factor in only 20 cases, and it only emerged in relation to discussions of the significant others of couples who were clearly identified as heterosexual.

**Ethnic Diversity.** There was no evidence that ethnic background was a basis for discrimination; only athletic performance and results mattered. For 78.2% of cases, Actor one was an athlete. For 51.4%, this same actor was not an ethnic minority (No), for 25.3%, he or she was an ethnic minority (Yes), and for 23.3% it was not possible to determine this (Unidentifiable). If the actor discussed in the article was a secondary actor (Actor two), the distribution of background or origins changed as follows: 44.4% No, 22.7% Yes, 32.9% Unidentifiable. For Actors three and four, there were fewer examples, but not so many that the

results can be considered significant.

It should be noted that factors such as the student's way of reading and classifying the articles and the meaning he or she attributed to the question of ethnic diversity could affect the results of the analysis. The data entry process allowed the student to use her or his own judgement concerning this question, and this judgement might be accentuated by a photograph or a name. Otherwise, it seems that for Actors two, three and four, the percentage of 'unidentifiable' varied, which might be accounted for by these actors having less visibility due to their lesser status in the article.

**Real Sex Discrimination.** First, 91.2% of articles with identifiable writers were written by men. This can be fully explained by the fact that the two correspondents reporting from London were male. (They also did not have ethnically diverse backgrounds.)

Detailed analysis in terms of represented actor (Actors one, two, three and four) shows that male athletes were over-represented (note that 'Actor' as a category can include managers and coaches, so is not reducible to 'athlete').

Whether in main or secondary roles, male athletes were clearly over-represented. (Actor one: 78.2 % athletes with 70.3% men; Actor 2: 76.7% athletes with 70.8% men; Actor three: 80.4% athletes with 73.4% men; actor 4: 79.4% athletes with 70.1% men.)

Actors were for the most part athletes. Although differences in levels of athlete representation as Actors one, two, three and four were insufficiently significant to serve as a basis for commentary, it was quite evident that men were over-represented. We note that the decision to cover a men's sport will increase the percentage of men in relation to Actors two, three and four. Similar results were found in the photograph analysis.

**Male and Female Athletes.** In 56.6% of cases, the article was accompanied by a photograph (37.4% without) which generally depicted the article's main Actor (56.8%). For 67.3% of photographs, this Actor was a man (24.5% women). When the photographed person

was not the athlete discussed in the article, this person was also a man in 62.9% of cases (27.1% women). However, 54.8% of the second photographed person were men (33.3% women); 56% of the third person were men (20% women and 24% unidentifiable) and 61.5% of the fourth were men (15.4% women and 23.1% unidentifiable) (see Appendix 1, Figures A1, A2 and A3). The grouping of the sexes together in the Games and the low response rate did not allow the relative position of the person (i.e. first, second, third) to be considered a factor in the photographic over-representation of men.

Cross-tabulation did not reveal any significant trends. However, the over-representation of men is largely explained by the fact that they are the main actors. In other words, it stems from an editorial choice to give men's events a high priority of coverage.

**Ethnic minorities.** Ethnic minorities were under-represented in the photographs studied. Taking only the main photograph into consideration (the other data were not numerous enough to draw conclusions) and regardless of the main actor in the article, ethnic minorities were only depicted in 22.8% of the sample. There was thus a significant percentage of people not from ethnic minorities, along with a high proportion of unidentifiable individuals. The role of subjective judgement and individual assessment on the part of the students who collected the data is difficult to quantify.

If athletic results are a determining factor in the main articles, where ethnic background has no bearing in the reporting, it would be interesting to analyse the secondary articles, where this could have more of an effect. The results obtained in this study do not permit any meaningful conclusions to be drawn as regards this specific question.

**Sources.** The term 'source' refers to any person quoted in the article. In 58.3% of cases, no sources were cited. 25.9% cited two sources, and 10.3% cited three sources. When the article did include sources, 63.4% of them were men and 14.5% women (sex was unidentifiable for the rest). For Sources two and three, men were cited three times more than

women.

Just as with the photographs, ethnic minorities were under-represented, with 17% for Source one (No: 45.5%, Unidentifiable: 37.2%), for a sample size of 145. For Source two, less than 4% (No: 47.1%, Unidentifiable: 49.1%) for a sample size of 53 and for Source three, 11.8% (No: 58.8%, Unidentifiable: 29.4%) for a sample size of 17.

### **Phase One Conclusions**

Editorial choice to promote men's sport appears to confirm the conclusions of existing studies and demonstrates the impact of such choice on coverage as a whole. Over-representing men interferes with how other actors are represented in photographs and as the dominant interlocutors in articles. Other variables such as 'winner of gold, silver or bronze medal' were analysed, in order to look for possible relationships between winning a medal and the nature of media coverage, but the sample size was too small to establish any correlations between this criterion and parameters such as gender or ethnic background.

An examination of how non-athlete actors were represented in connection with the parameters of gender and ethnic origin had also been planned. However, over-representation of athletes again prevented significant conclusions from being drawn (sample size was too limited for the other actors).

We nevertheless were able to perform an analysis differentiating signed articles (bylines of journalists from VdN) from unsigned articles (from press agencies). This allowed us to identify what would or would not be part of a journalistic habitus affecting common and implicit representation of the profession. This indicator would permit us to identify the journalists' power to act on established editorial practices.

### **Towards a Definition of Social Responsibility**

Our first tangible result concerns the equal distribution of signed (52.3%) and unsigned (47.7%) articles. Analysis of these two categories can provide insight into the SRJ of VdN

journalists.

**Table 1. Pivot Table – Article Length x Article Source**

Article Length	Article Source		Signed		Agency + Unsigned		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Main (Longest, high-priority article of the page)	107	75.4	35	24.6	142	100		
Secondary (Shorter article, with lower priority)	57	51.4	54	48.6	111	100		
Sidebar (Short journalistic notes of less than one-half of a column)	17	18.3	76	81.7	93	100		
Total	181	52.3	165	47.7	346	100		

Comparing the category ‘Article Source’ (signed, unsigned) and ‘Article length’ (main, secondary, sidebar) shows that these variables have a significant statistical interdependence ( $\chi^2(2) = 73.44$ ;  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer’s  $V = 0.461$  indicating a relatively strong association).

Cross tabulation reveals that 75.4% of main articles were written by the paper’s special correspondents. In contrast, the secondary articles were generally not signed and came from press agencies. 81.7% of the sidebars were not signed.

This indicates that the newspaper’s journalists were more committed to covering subjects viewed as more newsworthy in the hierarchy of information. Their responsibility in covering these subjects was greater.

In addition, VdN journalists were more inclined to cite sources than were the press agencies.

Data showed that there was no significant statistical interdependence between the gender represented in the article and the article’s source (signed/unsigned) ( $\chi^2(3) = 0.43$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 2. Pivot Table – Majority Gender Represented x Article Source**

Article Source	Signed	Agency + Unsigned	Total
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<b>Gender majority represented in the article</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	107	55.7	85	44.3	192	100
Female	31	58.5	22	41.5	53	100
Equality M/F	16	51.6	15	48.4	31	100
Unidentifiable	9	52.9	8	47.1	17	100
Total	163	55.6	130	44.4	293	100

We thus see that neither VdN journalists nor press agencies departed from existing research. There seems to be a sort of collective blind spot as regards professional standards here. Examining this responsibility requires that the results obtained in quantitative analysis be recontextualized in terms of journalistic practice. We thus sought to complete our study by interviewing the paper's two special correspondents who covered the Olympics from London.

### **Phase Two: Interviews<sup>2</sup>**

In the course of the two hour-long interviews with DD and SV, it became clear that only three of the four aspects of diversity we had identified would be worth pursuing with them. Sex had emerged as the principal factor of discrimination and questions about homosexuality and disability were uncomfortable to broach. Ethnic background, however, did not seem to be a particularly sensitive matter. We could say that diversity of results is what makes for ethnic diversity, that the winner wins because of what he or she does and not because of his or her appearance or phenotype.

The actual distribution of social class and ethnic background in each sport (East Africans in long-distance running, Jamaicans in sprint, the high number of athletes from French overseas departments on the French Olympic team) seemed to elude both reporters. Their points of view on the headlines that appeared in the Olympics special section and the list of what were called 'must-see' events showed no sign of ethnic bias. Indeed, they identified the

two ‘highlights’ of the Games as being the men’s 100-metre and the men’s 50-metre freestyle swimming races, won respectively by Usain Bolt and Florent Manaudou.

**‘Must-See’.** This term came up too often to be ignored. Whether in reference to the coverage of a one-off event like an Olympic Games or to the daily reporting of the news, comments made during the interviews suggested that, when covering sport, there are elements that must be treated, obligations that must be respected and implicit expectations. VdN ‘had to be’ at one place or another; as it happens, that was both just where other media were to be found and also where their readership supposedly wanted them to be. ‘It would be hard not to do anything in VdN the day after the 100-metre race at the Olympics’. This gave the impression that everyone was on the same page and served to reinforce the editorial desire not to step out of line or break the ‘circular circulation’ of the news. If everyone is going to the men’s 100 metres, I’m going there too. An effect of this, which is not specific to the journalists interviewed here, is that unequal representation of the covered field’s active population is reproduced in the reporting.

This examination of journalist and media social responsibility reveals an apparent contradiction between a form of powerlessness to change the course of things and the fact of being the course of things, at least as regards sport. ‘I still believe that media shape public opinion and that if the media were all to decide together to focus on one particular athlete, he or she would get attention and popularity that could be helpful’, DD said. He then added, ‘many of our colleagues tell themselves that, every four years, the Olympics will be a showcase for the smaller sports. It’s like we tell them: “Come on, it’s your time”’.

If the interviewees were realistic about media’s ability to create and promote fundamental trends, they felt unable to influence these trends in their daily work. ‘I think that it would be a pity for us to have an activist approach with “The Women’s Page”’, SV said, and his colleague concurred: ‘That could have led us to write an article on something that wasn’t

worth covering'. There was no reflection about or even definition of this criterion of 'merit': it consisted of assumptions about both what would interest the public and the need to be where the 'must-see' events were happening. The 'must-see' events and moments became so independently of the journalist, who merely stumbled upon them. The example of Céline Dumerc, the point guard of the French national women's basketball team, is illuminating. There had been no plan to do a profile of Dumerc (La Voix reserved a page of each day's special section for an athlete profile), but she shook up that hierarchy both by doing well (the team went to the finals) and by 'spending a lot of time in the mixed zone'. Some male (and female) athletes have to fish for attention to get covered, while others inevitably seem to have the media following in their wake.

This metaphor also applies to DD's experiences on 2 August:

'For the canoeing race, the day Emilie Fer won the gold medal, I wasn't there just for her; I was there for the men's C-2 race, in which the French team had a chance at a medal, but ended up in fourth or fifth place. Some of my colleagues left, but I saw that Emilie Fer had placed well in the first heat so I stayed, and she got the gold. It was a great story and was the big lead of the section. But honestly, when I left in the morning, there was absolutely no plan to cover Emilie Fer'.

By default, men received better coverage, and women had to stand out to get equivalent treatment. The distribution of power between sports journalist and athlete changed in relation to the latter's gender. Emilie Fer and Céline Dumerc prove that it was not that difficult to change the game as regards 'must-see' moments; journalists themselves, however, did not take this initiative.

Other aspects of diversity germane to sport – homophobia and discrimination on the basis of disability – were discussed and seemed to be less evidently pressing concerns, even though the social stakes may be higher in these areas. If these aspects seemed to remain



unexamined, it may be because they are still quite taboo in society. Questions about an athlete's sexual orientation were governed by a sort of ersatz 'DADT': don't ask, don't tell, and if we don't talk about it, we can continue to pretend that it either doesn't exist or, if it does, that it's not worth discussing, at least not in the daily regional press.

The case of the decathlete from Calais, Romain Barras, exemplifies this. In an interview with him, DD had discussed a series of photographs that had appeared in Têtu, a French magazine for gay men. There seemed to be a tone of tacit agreement between them:

'Over there, during our conversation, I talked about the athletes who tease him on his Facebook page because he is seen as a gay icon. At one point, I told him, "Everyone gives you a bit of a hard time. Do you find that amusing or does it bother you?" He told me the whole story, that Têtu magazine had voted him athlete of the month or something like that. He told me that it didn't bother him and that he thought it was funny, that he had a lot of gay friends and had nothing against homosexuality. But then he said, "Anyway, I'm hetero and proud of it. I don't have a problem with homosexuality, but I'm not gay". Since we were doing two pages in La Voix des Sports and two in VdN, I thought that this could be an amusing angle to use. I think he didn't want people thinking he was gay'.

The awkwardness of the journalist's position, which must span the varied concerns and constraints of owners, readership, and sources and the weight of professional convention, is described explicitly by DD in relation to physical disability. 'Doping in disabled sport is also a sensitive subject. Although doctors have told me that athletes with disabilities are ten times more medicated than the able-bodied', he said. In evading the subject – 'while no one is shocked when we do a piece on doping in regular sport' – the journalist respected a series of tacit and explicit contracts: with the source (the ubiquitous 'off the record' comments of doctors), with the public (who are not to be shocked), with the subject of the news (who should

not be shown in an unfavourable light or be made an enemy), all in the service of keeping his job. However, another contract was broken: with the cornerstone of journalism's professional code, the search for truth.

'Strictly speaking, a journalist has a duty to do that kind of piece. But anyone who would open up that can of worms would need to have sources and claims that were bulletproof [...]. I don't know if my editors would back me, and it couldn't be done without their support'.

Fortunately, he concluded, 'in sports journalism, we are lucky not to have to deal with sensitive subjects', even though he had just made the opposite point. If journalistic responsibility seemed to have been internalized, it appeared less important in relation to certain presuppositions about the challenges sport faces. Specifically, responsibility was limited by the cultural and societal illegitimacy of the subject being covered.

It is both paradoxical and understandable that these journalists relied on their freedom to report when we mentioned the possibility that their editorial judgement might take positive discrimination into account. They did not want to discuss something that 'wouldn't be justified'. In taking such a position, they reappropriated the very freedom of choice that they otherwise renounced.

### **Conclusions**

If media treatment of diversity has emerged as a societal challenge that must be taken up, it puts an incontestable burden of responsibility on the media. As regards sport, this responsibility is a blind spot which has not been examined and which sheds light on paradoxes of sports journalism. Journalistic responsibility is worth exploring beyond the presupposed values that are accorded to sport as such. Sport would effectively seem to bring its own notion of responsibility, which would be expressed through reporting on the facts. Now, this responsibility is only meaningful in relation to the way in which media actors make use of such

facts; to construct it would require expertise concerning the discursive action involved.

This chapter suggests that ethnic background does not have a significant influence on media treatment, for it is a factor subordinate to athletic results and performance. The theme of disability could only be addressed in relation to the differentiation of means employed in the separation of the Olympics into two competitions. Sexual orientation was removed from the field because it would require an inclusive positioning. However, our results largely confirm the findings of existing research, which shows that media coverage of sport treats men and women athletes differently, even though there is a balance in male/female participation in international competitions.

If we differentiate between articles provided by press agencies and those written by the paper's special correspondents, we see that the journalists who are employed by the paper are in charge of the editorial decisions as well as the main articles. This only heightens their responsibility. Our results indicate that whatever the origin of the articles (press agencies and Those written by the paper's special correspondents) there are no significant differences in the sexed coverage of sport. In both cases, there is an under-representation of women. This suggests that there is an implicit position that produces a collective blind spot regarding professional standards.

This chapter also highlights the apparent contradiction between a form of powerlessness to change the course of events, when presumed audience expectations, keeping good relations with sources or concerns about readership (the 'must-see' event) dictate and shape the 'search for truth' and the fact of being on top of the story, at least as far as sports journalism is concerned. The notion of journalistic responsibility remains to be constructed. It should not be limited to a simple defence of the supposed values of sport, but instead requires an expert examination of the objective consequences of action in relation to the challenges and constraints that weigh on

professional practice.

Three approaches that interact with each other for analyzing this responsibility, close to the principle of accountability (Mc Quaid 2003)

- Quantitative analysis: Grid Focused on the issue of diversity, which allows for Media Information about treatment of diversity

- Analysis of practices and constraints journalists: semi-structured interviews,

- Study of regulation and process control media (Charters, Mediator, up blogs and social network, informal exchange, training, using of tools ...) to distinguish individual and collective responsibility.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> VdN is a regional, general-interest daily newspaper covering northern France. With a daily circulation of 230,000 and more than one million readers, VdN is a subsidiary of the Belgian media group Rossel, which also owns Le Soir (Brussels).

<sup>2</sup> Interviews were conducted by Fabien Wille, Arnaud Waquet and François Borel and transcribed by François Borel.

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