Women Sports Journalists in Switzerland: Between Assignment and Negotiation of Roles

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In this paper, we analyze working experiences of female sports journalists in the French-speaking Swiss daily press. We draw on Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and field to examine how structures of power shape these journalists’ lives. Based on 27 semi-structured interviews and observations in the field, we found that women journalists’ work experiences depend on the relationship between their position in the field and their ethos and hexis. We identified three main strategies through which the women journalists negotiated their experiences: (1) conforming to the dominant male ethos (2) threatening the orthodoxy (3) resisting while hijacking the assigned role.

The purpose of this paper is to examine women sports journalists’ working experiences in the Swiss daily press context. We analyze their work in both the newsroom and the sports field within a context of a sports information system that is predominantly produced by men, for men and is about male athletes (Rowe, 1999). We draw upon Bourdieu’s model as a heuristic device to reveal forms of domination and resistance in the organization of work, the nature of working experience, and the structures of power. Our goal is to gain better understanding of gender relations at work in this specific subfield of sports journalism and to observe how these work-based relations maintain or challenge the established gender norms and roles within sports journalism.

We will first explain how our conceptual and theoretical framework offers an innovative contribution to the research on female sports journalists by shedding
new light on the work experience of women within the Swiss context. In the second part of the paper, we discuss how women challenge the sports field and how they can succeed by taking some advantage of being a female. We particularly want to highlight the diversity of their experiences and also the various ways they define and negotiate their work. Before presenting our results we locate our research within the previous literature on women’s sports journalism and particularly the Swiss context of sports journalism.

Background

The number of women in journalism has risen dramatically over the past three decades in many countries around the world (Chambers, Steiner & Fleming, 2004; Gallagher, 2001; Neveu, 2000; Van Zoonen, 1994). However, the number of women who have entered sports journalism, a traditionally male domain, is lower and it largely remains a male-dominated specialty in the United States (Hardin & Shain, 2005; Salwen & Garrison, 1998), France (Dargelos & Marchetti, 2000), and the Netherlands (Deuze, 2001; Knoppers & Elling, 2001).

The situation is similar but changing in Switzerland¹, the focus of this study, where the last ten years have witnessed a significant increase in the number of women in journalism, also in the sports section². Marr, Wyss, Blum and Bonfadelli (2001) found that women constitute 32% of those working in Swiss media and 27% of those at daily newspapers. The Swiss data from the Global Media Monitoring Project showed that the number of daily articles written by women in Switzerland has increased from 15% to 27% between 1982 and 2009; nevertheless the number of women has stabilized since the mid-1990s, with important differences between newspapers (Carvalho & Durrer, 2010). A survey made by the University of Zurich (Bonnafelli, Marr, Wyss & Keel, in press) showed that of 50 journalists working in sports journalism in the Swiss Romande daily press there are only 6 women (12%)³.

The increase of women in journalism since 1980 in Switzerland can be partly attributed to the overall increase of the number of women entering work over the past three decades. It is not due to a collective mobilization, nor to political requirements⁴. The participation of women in the labor force has increased, as has the proportion of women in several traditionally male professions (Chaze, Bilger & Schlesser, 2005). The increasing number of females sports journalists seems to be due, as we will show, to a marketing reorientation of the stance of Swiss media companies. The situation is totally different from some other countries such as New Zealand where Strong (2007) observed that women are subtly discouraged to go in this discipline by the editors who do not value women in that domain.

Nevertheless, the representation of women at high levels in the field of journalism is still low in Switzerland (Bonnafelli, Marr, Wyss & Keel, in press) and in the USA (Lapchick, Little, Matthew & Zahn, 2008; Staurowsky & DiManno, 2002). This could be particularly the case for women sports journalists. For example, Claringbould, Knoppers and Elling (2004) observed that women and minorities are excluded in Dutch sports journalism. In the US, Miloch, Smucker and Whisenant (2005) demonstrated that women sports journalists have fewer career opportunities. Hardin and Shain (2005, p. 817) revealed further evidence of the male bias in sport: “The position of female sports journalists and female athletes is the same: both are not male, and, as such, are not valued within the sport/media complex.
because they do not and can never meet the masculine standard on which it is built.” Researchers observed symbolical denigrations and belittling that expressed “gender as an asymmetrical category of perception” (McCall, 1992, p. 846). For example, one way to contest women’s professional identity was to minimize their working skills while explaining their success at work by their supposed seduction skills or homosexuality (Hardin & Shain, 2006). In Switzerland, similar to Hardin and Shain’s observations in the USA, female journalists are usually at the bottom of the professional hierarchy and have few promotion opportunities: there is only one woman Chief Editor of a newspaper in Switzerland and while women constitute 21% of the section heads of newspapers (Marr, Wyss, Blum & Bonfadelli, 2001) none are chiefs of a sports section 5.

Observing Female Sports Journalists’ Working Experiences

Previous research on female sports journalists’ working experiences addressed two main topics: (1) the analysis of the working situations and (2) the question of the female coverage, gender bias, and women’s agency. We now discuss each one of these in more detail.

Most of the previous studies on female sports journalists demonstrated harassment, difficulties in the locker room, tensions on identity, and challenge to personal life. Women sportswriters in the US reported that they were sexually harassed and had been threatened physically (Eberhard & Myers, 1988). They felt insignificant to their colleagues when having to accept menial assignments and being targets of sexist language. Nevertheless, they were “generally satisfied with their career choice” (Hardin & Shain, 2005, p. 814) and their work (Miller & Miller, 1995). The American journalist practice of interviewing (male) athletes in the locker room has received attention of some sport scholars. For example, Bruce (2002) interviewed 33 female American sportswriters who felt that the locker room was an important place for sports journalism and even a “turning point” experience for a female journalist. In Switzerland sports journalists do not have access to the locker rooms and thus, entering this space is not a part of the Swiss sports journalists’ experiences.

From a feminist cultural studies perspective, Van Zoonen (1994, 1998) showed how Dutch female journalists needed to adjust themselves to the culture of the newsroom which was defined as male culture. She claimed that negotiating contradictions between the social definition of femininity and the criteria for professionalism contributed to female journalists fragmented and contradictory identities. Van Zoonen found that women journalists develop two main strategies to gain respect and recognition from their colleagues, supervisors, and management: adjusting themselves to the expectations of a male environment (“being one of the boys”) or adopting the traditional cultural expectations of women (“being one of the girls”). In the US context, Smith (2000) discovered that the difficulty of combining travel, the constant deadlines, the unpredictable hours, and the workplace demands challenged the woman journalist’s personal life. As an African-American woman, she nevertheless experienced a greater degree of cooperation from the black male athletes. Based on these studies, the binary opposition between male and female is structuring the work experience but other variables (class or race) can also play a key role in the work place.
Some previous research focused on female coverage, gender bias, and women’s agency in sports journalism. For example, Knoppers and Elling (2004) analyzed discursive strategies that sports journalists use to defend their choice of information. They found that male and female journalists claim to choose their subjects based on giving “the readers/viewers what they want” (Knoppers & Elling, 2004, p. 63). Therefore, journalists believed that coverage was objective and unbiased. Claringbould, Knoppers and Elling (2004), using Acker’s (1990, 1992) theory on gender and organization, focused on how “the organization and their members give[ing] meaning to gender” (p. 711) in sports journalism. They did not discuss the context in which the organizations were embedded or the role of journalists’ social background. In their study of women sports journalists in US, Hardin and Shain (2006) further assumed that “increased media visibility leads to greater power and access for women” (p. 322) and that female journalists’ “resistance provides encouraging evidence of cracks in the hegemonic notion” (p. 323). They observed how these women engaged in identity work to negotiate tensions between the traditional values in sport and journalism. While they demonstrated that women sports journalists’ identity is mainly constructed by gendered interactions at work, they did not show how females experience their work in their specific position within the particular contexts of work.

In summary, most of the feminist works on female journalists have focused on how inequalities construct categories that naturalize the gender order or division of labor. Despite the quality and diversity of this research, none analyzed the individual journalists’ experiences against structural dimensions of their work environment. For example, Hardin and Shain’s (2006) findings are useful to understand conflicting identities and the experiences of women sports journalists, but do not highlight the diversity of their behaviors to deeply explore how domination is established, maintained, and challenged within sports journalism. Despite their interesting observations, Knoppers and Elling (2004) did not explore the heterogeneity of gender when they observed the outputs of sports journalist work and the biased female coverage in newspaper. We, thus, plan to include women sports journalists’ social backgrounds in our study to explore further how male domination might be maintained through the diverse working experiences of female sports journalists. To engage in such an analysis, we employ Bourdieu’s theoretical perspective.

### Using Bourdieu to Understand Women’s Sports Journalism

To analyze the influence of structural dimensions of sports journalism on women journalists’ experiences, we use four of Bourdieu’s main concepts: the field, doxa, capital, and habitus.

### Structures of Domination: Journalism Field and its Doxa

Bourdieu’s (1980) concept of field will help us to conceptualize the journalists’ experiences beyond gender within specific organizations. Bourdieu conceived the field as a partially autonomous universe, a “field of forces” featuring symbolic struggles. In each field, the dominant social group imposes a specific doxa: a set of social beliefs or practices, of shared understandings seen as being outside of criticism. The doxa...
defines the core values and the undisputed beliefs that bonds agents of a field. It is the adherence to a social order, which is accepted as self-evident, taken for granted, and naturalized (Bourdieu 1979; Bourdieu, 1980b). Sports journalism is a part of the journalism field and it can be analyzed as a subfield that has its autonomy and a specific doxa (Marchetti, 2005). To have access to a field, one must pay specific entrance fees (Bourdieu, 1980b). In the subfield of sports journalism these dues consist of the belief that sports journalism and sports contests are important, the knowledge of how they work, what are the most important sport events, celebrities, and aspects. As in other fields, to understand the symbolic order of journalism one must identify the doxa of the field, because of the “explicit orthodox/heterodox news values which are part of the sphere of journalistic judgment, and the implicit, silent doxic news values which are part of the sphere of journalistic doxa” (Schultz, 2007, p. 15). Furthermore, fields transform social struggles between agents into symbolic and meaningful relations and naturalize domination, especially the male one. As a consequence, female sports journalists’ fight for acceptance and credibility (Miller & Miller, 1995; Smith, 2000) can be seen as a symbolic struggle within the subfield. It is quite difficult to change the interactions at work because staying at a specific place in sports journalism requires the right properties. As a consequence, as sports journalism is a male territory related to male behavior and aimed at male readers, we could expect that females have to pay high entrance fees and that their working conditions could be more difficult, at least symbolically.

Analyzing the field of sports journalism will allow us to locate women’s personal experiences in their specific contexts. Using Bourdieu’s theory, we can also demonstrate that Swiss female sports journalists—even if they adhere to the journalist doxa—might remain kind of “outsiders” and the real “insiders” are those adhering to the male sports journalism doxa. Controlling the doxa is at the base of the symbolic violence that excludes women from the higher ranks of the profession.

Strategies of Domination: Capital within the Field of Sports Journalism

Bourdieu’s (1979) concept of capital can help explain women’s underrepresentation and the persistence of gender hierarchies in the media field. In the media field, positions are at stake and are determined by the allocation of a specific form of capital. The journalists with the highest specific capital are able to control the doxa of the newspaper, select the papers or the subjects, have power over the access to important positions and are able to valorize or to belittle colleagues’ work. In journalism “linguistic utterances or expressions are always produced in particular contexts and markets, and the properties of these markets endow linguistic products with a certain ‘value’” (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 18). Gender can work as an important form of capital in the sports journalism subfield as well as in the journalism field (Djerf-Pierre, 2005) but it is not capital per se. It has to be situated within the diverse resources that are used as capital and in the singularities of each situation. In the previous literature on female sports journalism (Claringbould, Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Eberhard & Myers, 1988; Hardin & Shain, 2006; Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Van Zoonen, 1994, 1998) gender was the main focus. However, sport culture can also be considered a type of capital within the sports journalism subfield (Marchetti, 2005) and it can deeply shape women’s experiences of work. There is an embodied cultural capital related
to the sporting field. It is structured by gendered dispositions that are expressed by specific male styles, behaviors, interests, language, tastes, and sporting experiences, especially medals in national and international contests. There is also a specific capital related to the sports journalism subfield gained through a memory of the main events that shape the local or national collective identities, the capacity to remember facts, interview athletes, write “good” stories about sports, or share the specialized, often technical language. Thus, it is important to analyze the way female journalists possess, try to gain, or ignore this specific form of capital. It is notable that while sporting experience works as capital in the field of sports journalism, it is also regarded with suspicion in the main journalism field (Dargelos & Marchetti, 2000).

The Relationship Between the Structure and Individual Interactions: the Role of Habitus

Bourdieu (1979) defined habitus as a set of basic, deeply internalized master-patterns which may govern and regulate mental processes without being consciously apprehended and controlled. Two components of the habitus can be identified: the ethos and the hexis. The “ethos” explains the agents’ fundamental values: it designates “an objectively systematic set of dispositions with an ethical dimension, a set of practical principles...” (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 86). It means that one may be capable of responding in practice to situation in which ethical dimensions are at stake without being immediately able to respond to ethical problems: “by asking questions, interrogating, one forces people to move from ethos to ethic” (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 86). Therefore “the strength of the ethos is that it is a morality made flesh” (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 86) that guides the “the logic of practice” (Bourdieu, 1980a). Bourdieu referred to the “hexis” as the embodiment of the habitus. It means that gestures, gait, posture, walking, speaking, and all the various ways of using the body and carrying oneself are the expression of the body hexis (Bourdieu, 1979). Habitus can explain the “natural adjustment” of behaviors to most of the situations and in many cases, one chooses “naturally” what one does.

Following Bourdieu (1994, pp. 153–167) we will argue that the journalists “interest” has to be understood within the articulation between habitus and the doxa of the field. This intersection shapes their “interests” and explains the way journalists choose and treat news (Bourdieu, 1980a). The background of women sports journalists, their dispositions, impacts on the nature of their work experiences. Bourdieu’s model of field explains how power is established, inherited, and maintained, and how the power structure is at the base of the discrimination and the symbolic violence that many female journalists face in day-to-day interactions at work. This means that we have to understand relations between journalists’ social background, experiences, and their working condition. As we will see, the female journalists need to shape their work according to male doxa: follow, resist, reject, or adjust their behavior to it.

Methods

This study is based on 27 semistructured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005) on journalists’ biographies and their experiences of work (12 females, 15 males), conducted by the first author6. Eleven took place from January to March 2008 with
Women Sports Journalists’ Experiences

The male journalists interviewed often and spontaneously referred to their passion for sport which is a key attribute of their work at the daily paper. For example, Romain, clearly revealed that the sports journalism doxa is heterodox to the main doxa of the journalism field:

I think maybe that to be a sports journalist, you have to be a sports fan. The other journalists can be enthusiastic about journalism. But for us, we are more enthusiastic about sports than about journalism.

Male passion for sport defined the professional ethos that constitutes the legitimate model for belonging to the profession. This was not the case for women journalists who, outside of one fan, and even if most of them have practiced sport, claimed a vocation for journalism: “Loving to read, to write and having a sense of contact is really at the core of the profession” (Sandrine). They entered the profession as freelancers for the periodic press, the daily press, or community radio. They worked
for various departments (e.g., local and regional departments, society pages) and specialized in sports news because an opportunity presented itself, especially the possibility to obtain one of the rare internship positions.

The difficult economic context forces media companies to develop marketing strategies. One of them, as suggested by Neveu (2000), is to increase the number of women in the journalistic field. Neveu observed that in the French context women were supposed to be more emotional and sensitive than men which was to be reflected in their writing style. Editors hoped to give a greater role to a so-called “female writing style” assuming that female journalists will choose different news items than male journalists, approaching and treating them in an original way. French editors seem to assume that this will respond to the public’s, particularly the female public’s, imagined expectations. There was a valorization of know-how associated with what females were supposed to do, and this, according to Neveu, explained the general increase of woman of the French journalistic field. Our study revealed similar pattern in Swiss women’s entry into the male bastion of sports journalism. Sports journalism now seems to be to targeting female readership since the daily press—and particularly sports media coverage—remains mostly read by men (Debras, 2003). As one sports section chief explained: “The editor-in-chief didn’t want gender parity. But he wanted a woman; at least one woman in the sports section. It was really a wish, in order to develop a different journalistic view” (Guillaume). Contrary to Strong’s (2007) findings in New Zealand, the Swiss editors clearly wanted to hire women and thus, we observed that women faced no difficulty in moving into sports departments. The entrance fees into this subfield of journalism were lower for women because mainstream journalists were more distant to the subfield’s male dominated entrance. All the women journalists we interviewed benefited from rapid entry into the profession although openings for journalists were rare in the current context of the daily press. Five of our interviewees knew that they were the object of positive discrimination when getting an internship positions and being hired in the sports section for which they are now working.

Contrary to the male sports journalists, the majority of women of our sample did not expect to work in this journalistic specialty (only three did), even if they had sporting experiences. Three key elements of the educational and socialization process can explain significant differences in their ethos and hexis that drive these journalistic tastes. First, there were differences in access to the job: many male sports journalists entered the profession by starting out as freelancers. This was rarely the case for women sports journalists who were not socialized into the sports journalism subfield. Second, male passion for sport was related to their fan experiences and their peers’ socialization into sport. Finally, male career relied on a specific capital (related to the sporting field) that followed the doxa of the sports journalism subfield. Female sports journalists, on the other hand, tended to be in a more heterodox position using tools recognized in the main journalism field (such as cultural capital) and often had to pay a high price to stay in the subfield of sports journalism.

The women journalists we interviewed entered the male-dominated world of sport at the request of the editors who hired women to offer alternative styles of news to attract a larger readership. The professional ethos that their male colleagues define as the vocation, along with a certain “masculine” writing style, seemed
to have been imposed on the women in the process of practicing the profession. This constituted the doxa of the field (Bourdieu, 1979) that required an ethos and a body hexis that most of the male journalists shared. Male respondents defined sports journalism as work requiring an intense investment and sacrifices, and used the rhetoric of the passion to legitimate it:

In my opinion, you cannot do this profession if you’re not passionate about it. Me, I’m married, I’ve got three little ones, I want to say that there are parts of my private life that are affected by my job, but my job is my passion, so… (Michel).

As a result, this means very close relations with those involved in the world of sport. Sports journalists usually spoke informally to these people sharing emotions which seemed an absolute requirement for doing the job well:

You have to smell the grilled sausage from the sausage stand. You have to smell the grass. […] You have to see the smoke of the torches, you have to understand. It’s all part of the package (Nicolas).

The participants appreciated an energetic, “muscular,” firm and assertive style associated to masculinity:

I find that they ask journalists to have very masculine characteristics. They ask them to have a lot of nerve, to dare to impose themselves, they don’t want you to be nice. […] They want you to be a pitbull […] In short, these are all rather masculine qualities. This is also why it’s easier for the men! (Fanny).

Similar to Hardin and Shain (2006), we observed a gender division in the internal sports hierarchy: readers in Switzerland consider the noblest and most interesting male-dominated sports of soccer and ice hockey (only 9% and 1%, respectively, of practitioners are female, Lamprecht, Fisher & Stamm, 2008).

This legitimate definition of the profession attests an imposition of gender standards. Similar to journalism in the US (Hardin & Shain, 2006), the common perception of women sports journalists as objects of seduction seemed to construct a double constraint: they are expected to demonstrate femininity, yet to be seen as “real” sports journalists, they must demonstrate that they fit in the male-dominated doxa. Thus, by adopting male-dominated journalistic practices they risked being stigmatized for a lack of femininity while employing other approaches they risked being judged as less professional. Consequently, when during an interview with a male journalist we mentioned the fact that one Swiss newspaper has two women in its sports section, the journalist answered sarcastically: “Yes, there are two ladies there. Yeah, well ladies… Cheers!” The journalist denigrated the two women journalists suggesting they were not “real female” because they do not suit to his stereotypical definition of femininity. From Bourdieu’s (2001) perspective, the double constraint experienced by the female sports journalists could be considered a form of symbolic violence that limits their professional role (Guillaume & Pochic, 2007). To create a place for themselves in these departments, women sports journalists adopted three main strategies: conforming to the dominant male ethos, threatening the orthodoxy, and resisting while hijacking the assigned role.
Maintaining the Orthodoxy of the Field: Conforming to the Ethos

Anna was the only one of our interviewees who conformed to the male dominant ethos of the profession. She was responsible for covering ice hockey for a Swiss daily newspaper. As a former ice hockey player socialized into playing a “masculine” sport, she was atypical. Speaking of her, Mireille (a sports journalist for another daily) explained:

My male colleagues always say ‘Yeah, but her, she’s a man!’ because she is not very feminine. […] My colleagues really consider her a man!

Anna seemed to adopt the practices of male journalists and had not much difficulty being accepted and acquiring legitimacy in the eyes of her colleagues:

The head of the department found it a bit strange to give this major specialty, really the most important one, to an intern. […] And they told me that they were going to try it out and they tested it. But, since I have a certain sense of the organization and all that, it worked out well from the start and I had the responsibility for ice hockey from the start and I still have it today (Anna).

Or the athletes:

Certain players knew me because certain players were used to seeing me on the ice or even coaching the young ones; therefore they knew that I knew how to skate (Anna).

Her social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) within the field of sport gave her legitimacy inside the field of journalism. Her colleagues knew that she had a network in the sporting field and that she was recognized within it. This reinforced her internal legitimacy in sports journalism. Furthermore, she conducted herself in a manner identified as “male” and also gained her legitimacy due to her intimate personal knowledge of the “male” ice hockey sports culture. She showed due respect to the dominant culture and practiced sports journalism like the majority of her male colleagues. In this way, she felt really close to her male colleagues:

I really hit it off with my colleagues, but I’m not sure that I would support another woman in the sports department. […]I have the feeling that I am really good with my colleagues. We are really a great team. And I think that a woman has a different character and works maybe a little in a different way, with a different sensibility. And I think that I’m better with male colleagues than with female colleagues. I’m sure.

According to Van Zoonen (1998), she was “one of the boys” and adjusted herself to the male environment to be accepted as equal by their male colleagues. Anna’s dress code, attitudes, language, and her professional career aligned with the previously existing male career norms (Le Feuvre, 1999). Through these norms women distance themselves from domestic responsibilities as opposed to a “feminitude” equality model (Le Feuvre, 1999) where women elaborate specific “female” career patterns. Our respondents seemed to be reluctant to speak about Anna and her “nonconformity” as if they did not want to denigrate her. We only managed to
collect data on this subject when the microphone was off, or during informal interviews. As Anna already had the specific capital, conforming to the male ethos was not difficult: her ethos and hexis were very close to a sports journalist’s position due to her socialization and her past experiences of playing ice hockey often with men. In fact, she did not find the dominant sports journalism culture problematic because she already conformed to the doxa of the subfield. Thus, contrary to Van Zoonen (1998) findings, Anna’s case demonstrated that socialization into “male” sport provided specific properties that were recognized as forms of capital. Practical experiences of sport, especially competitive success, increased the journalist’s legitimacy both in the sporting field and among sports journalists. As an “insider” socialized into this dominant sporting culture, Anna’s work was lived as unproblematic without overt reflexivity.

The Orthodoxy Under Threat: Occupying Male Territory Through Maintaining its Journalistic Style

Kathy, another journalist we interviewed, fought, especially at the beginning, to be considered equal to her male colleagues. But, unlike Anna, she only adopted some of the established codes of sports journalism. Relatively young, she agreed to put her career first, at least at the outset, to the detriment of her married life and family:

My job gives me so much satisfaction that it’s my first priority. But with my husband we would like to have children. We got married for that. But I have negotiated with my husband that we will try only after the Beijing Olympic Games. After the Games I’ll stop my pill. And after I’ll reduce my working hours. But I love so much my job that I think it will be hard for me. My work is going to miss me when I have children.

Kathy had significant cultural capital: she had an international high-school diploma and a bachelor degree in journalism and she spoke four languages. She was very knowledgeable about sport and she liked to discuss the latest sports results with her colleagues to show her awareness of the material and her desire to be integrated into the heart of the sports department. Refusing to cover only female sports, Kathy fought to be able to regularly write articles on sports such as soccer: “there was no question that I would do this job and only cover rhythmic gymnastics, and figure skating, all that babe stuff.”

She partially adopted the ethos that matches the subfield doxa, but not all the characteristics of the male dominated hexis of the profession. She insisted that “one can be a girl and like sports without… looking like a guy, and burping every ten minutes. One can remain feminine.” She also declared that she has adopted a different style from that of colleagues and an original conception of sports journalism: “one of the things I’ve always wanted to do was to write about sports for non-specialists, in other words to speak about the human being under the bathing suit, to speak about the person.” Therefore, this journalist, who confided that “you have to have a big mouth to be able to cope” as a woman in sports journalism, fought to be considered a good journalist according to the profession’s codes. She was successful as she obtained a very prestigious journalism prize.

Her success, based both on her cultural capital and on the specific journalism capital recognized in the mainstream journalism, constituted a real threat to the
definition of sports journalism and, as a consequence, to its doxa. Her secondary socialization into the field gives a more flexible view of the ethos. Thus, she also constituted a threat to certain colleagues, and she did refer to the difficult relationships she had with some of them. For example, when Kathy was assigned by the editor-in-chief to cover the Olympic Games, her success was tarnished by her male colleague who discredited her:

He told everyone: ‘Yeah, but she slept her way to the job!’ Of necessity, if you score some points, your male colleague is jealous that it wasn’t him and then it’s because you slept with someone that you made it. […] You almost pay a price for not weighing half a ton, and being ugly!

Therefore, Kathy paid a major price for her refusal of the stereotypical assignment, both personally and in her relations at work. She was also affected by power relations inside the organization: the sports section is perceived as a part of the newspaper; the sports journalism subfield has a doxa that does not always fit with the mainstream doxa of the field. The celebration of sport and champions are more related to the specific sports journalism ethos and is often perceived as heterodox. Thus, Kathy increased the power of the editor-in-chief when she changed the dominant profile of sports journalists. She could occupy this position since the autonomy of the sporting subfield was limited and seemed to have diminished because of the wish of the newspaper’s management to include more females. As a consequence the male sports journalists had less control of access to the profession. Furthermore, the external recognition by professional organizations reinforced Kathy’s position.

**Hijacking of the Assigned Role and Resistance**

Unlike Anna and Kathy, who wanted to be considered equals to their departmental colleagues, most of our respondents agreed to play a secondary role to that of their male counterparts. They chose not to encroach on their colleagues’ turf and instead, developed a “feminitude perspective” (Le Feuvre, 1999). Thus, they voluntarily gave up covering the “noble” sports, especially soccer and ice hockey, to avoid tensions with their colleagues:

I didn’t want to anymore, I just forgot that, and I’ve moved and I blossomed into a number of other sports. […] I tell myself ‘leave that to the men.’ It’s a sort of renunciation. There, I’m a bit like the men who say: ‘it’s more a guy thing and not for women,’ but. […] it is so difficult to make a place for yourself there!(Claire).

They were also afraid of male public criticism and preferred not to fight certain stereotypes: “The men still think that the female brain is not capable of understanding the rules for when a ball is out of play!” (Camille). They often specialized in so-called female sports and/or “neutral” sports, where being a woman journalist did not create problems. They contributed to the media coverage of sports which did not receive much coverage in the daily press and adopted original analytical perspectives in their writing. This was their way of resisting without facing any male journalists’ criticism: they minimized the symbolic price they had to pay for being in a male dominated subfield.
Women sports journalists found it difficult to handle the time constraints between their careers and their private and family lives (Acker, 1990). This also explained why they stayed in the background of their departments. The organization of work had different consequences for women and men sports journalists for two reasons. The first reason was related to differences in male and female dispositions. For male journalists, late hours, weekends, and travel was a reminder of male sociability associated with past experiences in sports and as fans, and was a part of their taste for sport. These dominant norms explained why male journalists had difficulties adopting a reflexive journalist style which would have meant a double negation of their sporting ethos that was very focused on results, facts, and performance and their male ethos that would have involved a renunciation of their male journalists’ habitus. The second reason was linked to a woman’s role in the family. Thus, when trying to balance their family lives with demanding careers, women experienced more difficulties. Women journalists who had children, frequent and often lengthy trips required difficult family negotiations. Male journalists we interviewed were single or most of the time had a wife who was partially or totally in charge of domestic and family life. A print journalist’s work seems to be designed for those who have few or no parental responsibilities (Lowes, 1999). Women, thus, do not want these positions designed by and for men. It is not so much the entrance fees (Bourdieu, 1980a, p. 115) but “maintenance” fees to this specific area of the field that are too high. Without appropriate ethos and hexis, it is difficult for women journalists to achieve higher editorial positions.

The female journalists clearly distinguished their journalistic style from their male colleagues’ style. They explained that far from limiting their interviews to technical aspects of athletic interactions, as do most of their male colleagues, they examined the emotional texture of athletes’ lives (e.g., what was going on off the playing field or the ice):

The male journalists I met like giving statistics, years, names, and so on. […] They give a lot of statistics and concrete data but nothing about emotional experiences. […] What interests me is the microcosm of the sport, a somewhat ethnological view. (Mireille).

Mireille’s “sense of the game” emerged from the combination of her position within the field and her habitus (Bourdieu, 1980a, pp. 103–104). Preferring to avoid any rivalry with her male colleagues, these journalists acquired legitimacy by demonstrating what they can contribute as women to their respective sports departments. They did not embrace the dominant ethos of this subfield, but instead adopted an “original” approach to sports journalism. While they were interested in what was beyond the superficial in sports, because a lack of specific capital, they generally felt that they were not experts in all the sports they cover and did not always have the required skills: “Especially when I am not competent! There are not a lot of sports that I’m an expert in” (Emilie). Male sports journalists had embodied the doxa and shared the “illusio”—one’s belief that the game is worth to be played (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 78)—which, according to Bourdieu, produced a type of a “social libido.” For these males “behaviors can be guided by goals without being consciously guided by these goals” (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 20). Women questioned their own behavior and had to be strategic to cope with the discrepancy between their positions and their dispositions.
Some women journalists referred to minor tensions related to their recruitment that was generally imposed by editors in chief. However, they seemed to quickly learn how to deal with the male hegemony inside the sports departments which often created a type of locker-room mentality that marginalizes female journalists in the US (Eichenberger, 2004). They positioned themselves side by side with their male colleagues to show that they did not pose a threat. As Emilie explained: “they know that I am not coming to invade their turf […]. It is not going to cost them their jobs.” They were able to, for the most part, easily integrate into the sports departments.

Thus, our respondents did not have a unique way of doing their work. Nonetheless, they operated differently from their male sports journalist colleagues yet quite similarly to journalists in other departments. Restricted to the subspecialties allocated to lower-ranking reporters, most female sports journalists were in a subservient position within sports journalism which had dramatic consequences for their careers. These female sports journalists seemed to internalize the organization’s operational standards and consequently adapted to the dominant male ethos: they appeared to conform to a “female logic” (Acker, 1990). If women sports journalists do not declare a specific inclination for this journalistic specialty and encounter difficulties, indeed discrimination, one could expect them to consider changing in their journalistic specialization. However, similar to Hardin and Shain’s (2005) study our analysis revealed that on the whole, most women sports journalists claimed to be satisfied with their profession. Hardin and Shain (2005) showed that the two main reasons for US women leaving sports media careers were the lack of advancement and the negative consequences for their personal lives. Like the American journalists (Hertz, 2000), our respondents also complained about the lack of quality of life due to their working hours. As a consequence, with the exception of Anna and Kathy, they did not look for responsibilities that required longer hours or could have led to tensions with their male colleagues with whom they wanted to cooperate. The lack of advancement in their careers did not seem to be a real problem for the Swiss female sports journalists. While the main negative aspect of their work was the impact on their personal lives, the opportunities it offered surpassed these problems.

**Challenging the Field**

The experiences of our interviewees varied considerably depending on the sports covered, the level of the sport, or even the type of article produced. Indeed, women sports journalists seemed, above all, to encounter problems of legitimacy in the male bastions of soccer and ice hockey. The main media generally covers these sports. But while male journalists can also experience a lack of respect (Salwen & Garrison, 1998), it is to a lesser degree than experienced by their female counterparts (Claringbould, Knoppers & Elling, 2004). Similar to the US (Miloch, Smucker and Whisenant, 2005), the Swiss women sports journalists had to cope every day with many pressures. Many felt that they must work harder that their male colleagues to avoid criticism:

We have to prove ourselves twice as much as the men do, and above all we cannot make a mistake. […] In addition, since there are few of us, we are easy
to monitor and keep track of. If we make a mistake once, one error, some little thing in one paper, it is three times more likely to be held against us. We are really under the gun at all times. (Kathy).

This account seemed particularly relevant in the Swiss context. Switzerland is the one hundred and thirty second ranked country in the world in terms of size, and the Swiss Romande is around 1.7% of the size of Texas. The Swiss French media field is a narrow space in which all journalists and athletes know each other. It is not simple for women to enter this male territory, particularly with preconceived negative notions of women journalists. Being distant to the subfield doxa created an uncertainty about their identity at work. The male domination reinforced the belief that women did not have the properties, the skills, and the values required in this field. The doxa and the domination of the traditional “virility” were reinforced. While Anna shared the “illusio” of the subfield, Kathy experienced more difficulties: “Everyone believes that I am there to ogle calves, look at the athletes running and then go ‘ah’ like that”.

In our study, none of our female journalists experienced incidents such as verbal abuse, physical contact, or sexual harassment, but some women journalists did experience the more subtle feeling, both with athletes and colleagues, that they are not in the right place. To adequately interact in the field, it was a crucial advantage to share the “male” sporting ethos. While the men seemed to possess “natural” confidence to speak, move, and behave, the women sports journalists often felt out of the game. This was, nevertheless, only the case at the elite level of the “main” and most conservative sports, soccer and ice hockey. Because the regional daily press has a monopoly over the distribution of media coverage on local sporting events, legitimacy as a sports journalist was less important.

The type of article, the interview questions, and the writing style also influenced the relations women journalists had with their sources. The athletes might not have appreciated being judged by a woman (Miloch, Smucker, & Whisenant, 2005) and female journalists appeared to encounter more difficulties when they talk about techniques and tactics. A female journalist, on the other hand, might not be a threat when talking to low level athletes or about “minor” sports. Most of the female journalists we interviewed were engaged with athletes participating in sports that receive so little media attention that they welcomed any journalist: “people are already so happy that you’re talking about them” (Emilie). Women journalists covering the less valued sports also received less pressure in terms of quality and had more autonomy in their work. Therefore, although most of the female journalists were in a subservient position within the sports journalism field, they could have positive experiences in their work.

Similar to journalists in Hardin and Shain’s (2005) study, being a woman was not a disadvantage in terms of an access to sports actors because a woman sports journalist, as more unusual than the male sports journalist, might be perceived positively. The journalists we interviewed took advantage of this position. For example, Lorraine played the role of “a good female friend” and felt that “it is the advantage of being a girl: since there are few of us, they recognize us easily; they remember us” (Lorraine). Being a woman might have helped obtain contacts, establish relationships with the athletes and engage in interactions perceived as more sincere as male journalists’ techniques. According to our interviewees, the
athletes tended to be more communicative and express themselves more clearly with a women journalist: “They open up more; they leave their ‘virility’ aside” (Aurélie). Furthermore, as Fanny revealed: “Frequently, male athletes are a bit condescending, they think ‘ah, the small lady who is running after me, ok, I will be nice with her’”. Therefore, the male athletes talked more easily with female journalists than with male journalists.

Most female sports journalists profited from being a woman in a man’s world (Lachover, 2005). For example, Kathy regularly used her power to deliberately create sexual tension to get a special relationship with actors in the sports world: “I like acting like a floozy with athletes”. This strategy helped her obtain the story first. Others, like Fanny, declared that they had “a tendency to simper with the athletes.” A number of those interviewed indicated that, especially at the beginning of their careers, they presented themselves discreetly and, having little knowledge on the subject that they had to cover, used their interviewees to obtain considerable amount of information.

These strategies seemed to provide effective resistance to the male domination in sports journalism. As for snowboarders (Thorpe, 2009), for some of the female sports journalists being a woman is a property that works as a capital. The “disalignment” between their position and their habitus incited them to be more reflexive and more strategic in their professional interactions. Their habitus was “destabilized habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division, generating suffering” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 160). Like the women sports journalists, most people experience different contexts of action, develop diverse dispositions, and embody various competencies and thus, a habitus “clivé” (divided) (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 127) is quite common (Lahire, 2004). Most of the women sports journalists learned how to manage the dissonances and aligned their ethos and hexis more with the mainstream journalism.

**Conclusion**

In this study, we used Bourdieu’s model to understand women sports journalists’ working experiences against the journalists’ social backgrounds, their working conditions and the larger structures of domination within the sports journalism field. We found that the structure of the field has to be understood in relation to the specific Swiss context, the newspapers’ economy, and their organization. These external and structural changes reduce the autonomy of the subfield: the male editors have less power to recruit male journalists who still dominate this social space and impose the traditional doxa as the standard for quality work. At the same time, the diversity of female journalists’ social background and experiences is expressed through a diversity of attitudes toward the dominant doxa. Therefore, the increased number of female journalists and their work strategies are slowly changing the field of sports journalism in Switzerland. We have used Bourdieu’s theory to detect more nuanced aspects of empowerment within a social and historical condition that limit the resistance to domination. Bourdieu’s theory that is sensitive to reflexivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) enabled us to analyze female journalists’ resistance and thus, offered a broad scope to examine gender in a work place.
Notes

1. Our study is only based on Swiss Romande, the French-speaking part of Switzerland. Thus when referring to Swiss, it is the part of Switzerland we studied.

2. The Swiss-French daily press is diverse with fifteen user-pays and/or free daily papers and a Sunday paper, all of which have a sports section. There is no exclusive ‘sports’ newspaper. With only two exceptions, all the newspapers are regional and adopt a local editorial line and no precise political positioning; most of them cannot be strictly classified as cultural or as popular, compared with what we observe in other nearby countries (Marchetti, 2005); so there is no strict hierarchy between Swiss French newspapers. The current diversity of press media is now being threatened by a process of concentration that entails the closing of some papers (La Suisse in 1994), mergers (the establishment of Le Temps in 1998 resulting from the merger of the Journal de Genève and the Nouveau Quotidien), takeovers (in 1991, La Tribune de Genève was bought out by the group Edipresse) and collaborations between newspapers. The takeover in 2009 of the great Swiss Romande publishing company Edipresse by the Swiss German Tamedia only served to reinforce this tendency. Despite a decline in the average number of newspapers read every day, the media consumption of the Swiss remains high. With 16 daily papers for about a million habitants, Switzerland has one of the highest newspaper-person ratios in the world. Journalists working at Swiss Romande must serve a two-year internship, including nine weeks of theoretical training at a type of journalism school. Upon completion, which may be waived based on two years of previous journalism experience, candidates join the official register, making them professional journalists. In effect, Swiss journalists are essentially trained by practical experiences in the field. Compared with other professions, recruitment in journalism depends more on competences and experiences than on formal qualifications and diplomas. Nevertheless, there has been a rise in the level of higher education of sports journalists and today it is highly recommended to have a university diploma to obtain an internship.

3. It is important to note that very little research has analyzed the consequence of the changes in the gender balance of journalism in the Switzerland, (Durrer, Jufer & Pahud, 2009) that none has focused on specifically on sports journalism, and that no recent and precise data on the subject exists.

4. The Swiss legislation does not include a similar law to the U.S.A.’s Title IX. Therefore, women’s increasing participation in the Swiss’s labor force is not due to political requirements. The idea of gender or minority quotas at work does not exist although a federal equality-oriented article was added to the Swiss’ constitution in 1981, and the country is making a lot of progress in different domains, especially in political empowerment.

5. Switzerland is behind some of its neighboring countries regarding gender equality at work according to the Gender Gap index released by the World Economic Forum which ranked Switzerland at 34th in 2005 and 13th in 2009 but it lags behind on economic participation and opportunity where it ranked 48th in 2009. While there has been attention to questions of discrimination in Switzerland over the past decade, the change is slow.

6. All the journalists gave their consent at the beginning of the interview to record the interview and to use the data for publication. Given the small number of women sports journalists—half of the fifteen Swiss dailies having exclusively male sports staff and, with the exception of two departments, sports sections having no more than one female journalist,—it could be possible for someone of the journalistic field to identify those journalists who agreed to an interview. That is why all the information is not given in this paper and especially private or embarrassing elements are not mentioned.

7. While our sample is small the findings are quite striking given that they reveal that (a) the number of women in daily newspaper sports journalism has increased (during the 1990s, only three of the sports journalists at daily newspapers were women, and two of them stopped after a few years) because editors actively recruit female journalists; (b) compared with many other
nations, women have few difficulties in moving into sports departments; and, (c) editors clearly entice women journalists into sport often by luring them away from other jobs. For example, consider the comments of one of our participants, Mireille: “Another daily paper contacted me two years ago. They wanted to hire me. They contacted me and offered me a job. They told me that they wanted a woman in the sports department.”

8. In Switzerland, women’s activity rate has progressively increased during the last decade stabilizing at around 60% (62% in 2009); but, it remains lower than men’s (75% in 2009) (Office Fédéral de la statistique, 2009). The activity rate gap between women and men is widest during the family formation phase (30-44 years). This is attributable to the fact that a large number of women of this age (temporarily) leave the labor market to devote themselves to raising their children. In Switzerland women devote much more time to the domestic and family life than men (Branger, 2008).

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