

## Ads and sports: Stereotypical Scenes

Héas Stéphane, Bodin D., Robène L, Blumrodt J,

European university of Britain, FRANCE.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### Purpose:

The advertisements of sports are far from being able to reflect the changing realities of sports or physical activities in a country such as France. The purpose is to test the proposition that the gender relationships portrayed in specific sport advertisements perpetuate traditional and sexist stereotypes, are far from egalitarian shared social representations, and far from egalitarian social and professional activities<sup>1</sup>.

#### Design/methodology/approach:

There were 700 advertisements of sports in several French magazines analyzed during a twenty-two-year period (1986-2008) constituting the support of content analysis, using specific spreadsheet software (Sphinx®). Specifically, four men's readerships magazines and four women's magazines are strongly represented here because of their large national diffusion. There are 25 encodings used to analyze this corpus, and they distinguish the people displayed, setting of Advertisements (nature, area's sport, and undetermined places), situations of equality or domination between male/female and *vice versa*, domination between male/male, domination between female/female, and the colours used, the appearance of physical movement, skin colour, the presence of hair and hairs, etc.

#### Findings:

In sports advertisements and which use sports, males are over-represented: 57.4% are present, *versus* 18.5% females present. Women in sports are generally in situations of inequality or subordination: face to face, males dominating the females (11.9% of all ads, 28.5% of face to face ads). On the contrary, females rarely dominate the males: these amounts to occur five times less often (2.1% of all advertisements' situations, and 5.2% of face to face ads respectively). Men in sports seem to be more dynamic individuals: males move more often than their female counterparts (50.1% *versus* 36% respectively). Especially, a man's physical movements are more frequent when several men are represented in the magazine ads. Females are represented with fewer activities, often seen as spectators of male sporting events, and even nowadays are over-sexualised. However, on average, sports ads promote the entire female body (48.3% for women *vs* 42.7% for men): this frequency rejects the arguments of militant feminists who think that women are more often "cut" from advertisements. The male characters, strangely, are more often photographed in portrait style (9.2% for men *vs* 5.6% for women). The women are over-sexualized in the ads for sports: their breasts, legs and calves are more frequently seen in the advertisements. These body parts are over-represented more often than that of their male counterparts: 22.4% *vs* 14.2% respectively. These averages confirm stereotypes, and reinforce the previous sociological studies' results (Goffman, 1976; Wolin, 2003; Cortese, 2007; Grau *et al.*, 2007). Gender imbalance is reinforced by such adjuncts such as 1) colour utilisation, for instance, blue (31.3%) *versus* one percent for pink,

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2) outdoor background which reinforces sociological link between males and outside activities, and 3) type of physical activities portrayed (traditional masculine sports in Europe like football-soccer, rugby or motorsports).

By and large, sports ads remain to be created from a classical masculine point of view rather than a gender reversal. Different shocking visuals are easier to remember by the public but are drowned in all ads of sports. On average, the advertisements of sports maintain an andrological point of view.

Research limitations/implications:

Extensions of the present study, and future research, could increase both the breadth and depth of the investigation, and thereby contribute significantly to the wealth of knowledge pertaining to gender in advertising. During some periods of the year, advertisements can be less "gender'stereotypical". For example, in 1996 and 1997, in France there were some ads which had reversed the gender domination (Perret, 2003). In the long term, the ads of sports are always portraying the masculine point of view. Female athletes are often always devaluated.

Practical implications:

There is still some way to go before sports advertisements reflect the real world, *a fortiori* an ideal world where equality is normal, and improves gender's innovations into advertising in the future. For instance, to propose gender egalitarian ads, (without women's degradations into visuals, or through sexist or demeaning slogans- not analysed here), to reinforce advertisement agencies' social responsibility or sports enterprises' social responsibility, to boost egalitarian relations between males and females, all done by extensions between different ethnic, sexual, generational, religious, etc., groups.

Originality/value:

This study examines a widespread social phenomenon in a specific and national context upon a large corpus (seven hundred ads of sports) and not only on provoking ads, nor during a period of time with most egalitarian ads.

Paper type: Research paper

Key Words: Advertising, gender stereotypes, sport and exercise, France magazines, sociology

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sports are a set of cultural practices in their own right ([1] [2] [3]). As Elias and Dunning [4] convincingly argued, sports have steadily added to the understanding of a worldwide social phenomenon. Sporting activities can thus become a lens through which to cast light on more cultural issues and social problems. In our study, we examine gendered relationships in sport-themed advertising campaigns in more than eight French magazines (1986-2008<sup>2</sup>). We do not spill over into a radical critique [5] and we do not develop arguments about different approaches, given the number of different conceptualisations of this phenomenon present [6]. The analysis of advertisements is very important. The analysis and the deconstruction of advertisements “are not trivial activities, especially in the sports world truly "colonized " by them” [7]. Sports are indicative of the dominant values (performance, dynamism, youthful, etc.). Sports are important today, through their economic and symbolic dimensions. The modern sport puts value primarily towards the men. The advertising images are sometimes shocking and they may cause adverse effects to some populations. Our analyses do not concern these offensive advertisements in particular, but all others in magazines, week after week in France. We show that the subordination and the sexualization of women are maintained by ordinary advertising and not only by the most provocative advertisements. The degradation of women "is mobilized by their low participation in sports advertisements, and their cantonment in the roles of inaction, supporters of spectators, in short to second-athletes ” [7].

Advertising functions as a technique of persuasion (or even seduction) in several ways. First, it informs potential consumers about the existence of a product. In developed societies, everyone is exposed to an abundant amount of advertisements, retaining certain images in

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<sup>2</sup> Some Ads have been edited before 1986 (N = 15). They don't take place here into our analyses.

their mind rather than others. Each of us is exposed to ads: some hundreds, even thousands, per day. This daily exposure to ads belongs to contemporary education by the media and new information technologies. The ads are describing and defining a product or service for the sports industry. The images in advertisements succeed in differentiating one offering from another. Further, ads can arouse latent needs, to sell, and possibly to precipitate unpremeditated purchases. In its very complexity, the advertising seems efficient. In fact, it is a complex discourse with the consumer, not just a source of much information. Ads can transmit some powerful semiotic signifiers [8]. Today, ads are furthermore an indicator of main norms and values around us.

*Sport and Exercise*, here, embraces not only the major competitive sports in any society but also the many other forms of personal or collective physical activity that attract less media coverage and are therefore less familiar to society.

Our frame of reference for this study grew out of a gendered standpoint that analyzes the relations between the social sexes, and evaluates the concepts of masculinity and of femininity in today's world as processes. We ask ourselves whether this changing shape of the social representation of men and women is detectable into contemporary sport-themed advertising campaigns. We suspect that ads still perpetuate gender stereotypes that present males as active 'doers' and females as admiring onlookers. These stereotypes reinforce the conflict between the strength and hardness of the masculine world and the beauty and softness of feminine world [9]. These oppositions recall the fundamental's anthropological dichotomies, which are described and decried by Héritier [10], and are based on assumed differences between the male and the female roles. In the process of deconstructing French advertising for sport-related products and services, we were alert to evidence that the clothing of female figures – or, rather, the lack there of – might support assertions of the French

feminist Movement Against Sexist Advertising, for which the woman is still a sex object in advertisements.

Our main research proposition is thus that masculine and feminine roles in advertisements of sports are still containing stereotypes, despite the noticeable evolution of sports themselves and of the societies in which the sport developed [11]. The analysis of advertising campaigns featuring images of sport and exercise can contribute to improve the understanding of such social processes as identification with sportsmen and women, or even the process of mythologization of sportsmen: reinforced by significant media attention [12]. We can assert confidently that the identity of male is shaped by the presence of celebrated male sports on screen and in the press [13], whether in advertising campaigns or during retransmitted live broadcasts. Men's sports seem evidently prized as models for lines of clothing or ranges of toiletries and cosmetics. The lesser frequencies - of female sports personalities in these roles - are unarguable. These trends limit the possibility for women's sports to influence her self-identity, to influence their small place in the real world of sports. Nowadays, in France, the cultural universe and the consumption practices are diverse and dynamic; tastes are now more 'dissonant' than they were before [14]. As 'cultural consumers', we can all accumulate life experiences. It seems in fact that cultural wealth is characterised by the ability to treat different ranges of cultural or "registers of culture" in a positive way [15]. Consumers and media audiences in general do not act and do not think unilaterally. One message can be interpreted differently even by individuals from very similar socio-economic levels, a fact that complicates targeting strategies for marketing professionals [16]. Moreover, studies of the reception of messages have shown that these variations in interpretation are brought about by such mediatization factors, not only because of social class effects but also because of ethnicity and gender [17] [18]. With their own results, surveys cannot explain the complex processes by which a particular signification is allocated to a given message [19].

Undoubtedly, this conceptual complexity and these recurring debates explain the absence of a consensus among the various specialist analysts of advertising as a social process. In fact, like most phenomena closely enmeshed with modern daily life, advertising ignites passions and thereby provides a fertile ground for the flowering of valuable judgments. Beneficial for some and harmful for others, the advertisements have several enthusiasts as well as detractors. Far from being resolved, these arguments draw attention to the complexity of a phenomenon that only continues to be developed, and thereby to confirm the relevance of making a contribution to the debate, however minor.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Sports in Society**

The introduction has noted that the sociology of sport has been seen as a microcosm of general sociology. Violence in sports, for instance, is only one element of social relationships, whether personal and interpersonal, generally directed towards public and private goods. According to researchers [20] [21] [22], analyses are not only in terms of power relationships among social and professional groups, but also between genders.

Such analyses are sometimes critical, and apparently entirely negative. For instance, a book with the strongly explicit title *Sport Against the People* argues that “sport succeeds to fix into the collective psyche only insignificant and empties stereotypes” (p. 47) [23]. Thus, professional sports appear like a distorted mirror. Professional sports reduce sportsmen to collaborators in a system in which profit is the key word [24] [25]. Sports are transforming those who enjoy watching them live or on television without playing the sport themselves, as mass groups which are hypnotized. This process fixed their daily life [26].

## 2.2 Sport as a theme in advertising

The French public is exposed to around “12,000 television spots and tens of thousands of press advertisements and posters in a year”, according to an expert in a study [27]. This heavy saturation has attracted the interest of many researchers in the social sciences over the years, such as Goffman [28], [29], [30], [31], [32]. The formal analysis of advertisements is built into some academic syllabuses in the United Kingdom, in Canada and in Australia, as an aspect of the study of propaganda and persuasion [33]. The courses of Media studies are widespread. They are often incorporated with a strong advertising component. Media studies courses have been popular in France in recent years, according to Grésy [27]. In Canada, the bilingual Media Awareness Network or the Networks Media Education (*Réseau Éducation Médias*) pursues the goal to encourage media and information literacy for young people through a variety of teaching materials and events.

Media advertising has long been recognised as a safeguard against the loss of the independence of the press and freedom of speech. This is done by virtue of the revenue flowing for the media owners [34] and its broader impact on society is often subject to virulent criticism [35] [36]. Advertisements are seen as the vehicle for the potential manipulation of opinions [37] and even the manipulation of minds [38]. New Marxist Frankfurt School, as a critical social theory, had seen advertising as having an alienating effect of the technical-scientific rationalisation, in its creation of false needs [39]. Such other perspectives of political economics have accused advertisements of creating “a standardized social image” [38] and fostering “the American dream” [40].

Recently, those who view advertising messages as a form of interactive symbolic communication, with less far-reaching consequences have called these critiques into question. Our own study is consistent with this conceptual framework, in treating them at once as

creators of added value for products and services, thanks to their adaptability to ideologies, and also to some extent, as symbolic reflections of the social context in which they are transmitted and ‘offered’ to various publics. As Maigret [41] states: “the grand effect of advertising – indirectly – is to make products available in an imaginary world... so that they lend themselves to a game of personal tastes and social distinctions” (p.61).

### **2.3 Gender relationships in advertisements**

The constant flood of information delivered through advertising campaigns reflects the dominant social imagery of today, and very probably reinforces this imagery. Featuring social relationships, the advertisements effectively present a gendered scenario to the audience [28]. Specifically, our study aims for a clearer understanding of the position of the human body in representations of sport and exercise, when humans are both actors in the advertisements and targets for the advertisement in question. Whether or not it is in the context of sports, a lot of information reinforces the presence of male dominance [42], [43], [44], [45], [46], by means of what we call a gendered relationship segmented, as stated by Putrevu [32].

As the twentieth century approached its closing years, [47], [48], [49], different authors have asserted that male identity would be in trouble [50], in the new millennium. Men will encounter difficulties in walks of life progressively infiltrated by women, such as the hitherto male preserves of higher education and the professions. Indeed, there is some evidence that sport and exercise are gradually made more feminine despite many remaining obstacles to female participation.

In the media, however, the male figure remains dominant. Eveno [51] asserts that men monopolise the most valued occupations and the most respected positions, with only rare

exceptions. Publishing, journalism, broadcasting and the new information media are all male dominated worlds. The advertising business in France is scarcely less so, according to the Creative Director of the Paris branch of the multinational agency Young and Rubicam, who told a researcher that “it’s four women to twenty men in our office” [27]. We do not categorically confirm this gender imbalance in the media, but it is reflected in the androcentric content of the magazine advertisements analyzed in detail for this study [52]. It is furthermore the implicit circular rationale for the disproportionate media coverage of male sport and exercise [44], [53].

The sporting exploits of women through sports are almost always reported by the news media in male terms. For example, a French yachtswoman was dubbed “the little *fiancée* of the Atlantic” when she can be seen abandoning the *Rhum’s Road* transatlantic race, but on the day that she won it by the headline in *Le Parisien*: “Flo, you’re a real guy!”. Similarly, Reuters indicated: “Who is this guy?” when Amélie Mauresmo won the Australian Tennis Open in 1999 [54] (p.109). The French first names of star women involved in sports are routinely masculinised: ‘Flo’ for Florence Artaud, the yachtswoman; and ‘Marie Jo’ for Marie José Pérec, the first female runner to win the 200 and 400 metres at the Olympic Games. These contractions of female-given names are frequently seen throughout the English-speaking world. Because this practice is so common, no one ever pauses to think that the shortened versions of the names are the same as those used for men’s given names. Thus Sam is short for Samantha or Samuel, and Chris is short for Christine or Christopher. ‘Jackie’ is short for Jacqueline, and only rarely for John, which is usually shortened to ‘Jack’. These familiarisations are the signals of the intimacy claimed by journalists, financial backers, coaches and, of course, the sport’s public [55], [56]. It can even be seen as a process of trivialisation, which makes the athletes behave like children (process of infantilisation), and

have been since at least the mid 1970s, when Goffman published his classic studies into the Anthropology of Visual Communication. Thus, we have a spectrum of stereotypes: at one pole, the male sporting environment in which strength and performance are valued; and at the other pole, we have the female world, in which the aesthetic and the sensual are emphasised. The analytical studies of these comments have mostly found that such gender distinctions are indeed made [57]. In short, media coverage seems to reinforce the stereotypes rather than oppose them. We ask ourselves if the same process is at work on the case of the magazines and posters advertising, which can be conceived of as alternatives for discourse and imagery.

#### **2.4 Advertising images as a social ‘prescription’.**

The review of literature on advertising is particularly ambivalent when it comes to whether they are more or less stereotypical than in the past times. It also indicates that consumer advertisements always differ in the reactions people may have [58]. The gender is still an essential element to take into account when looking at the marketing strategies of segmentation, for example. For Wolin, gender is readily identifiable. Indeed, the media for men's viewers/readers offer a greater division between gender stereotypes. For many years now, historical and sociological analyses of advertising have regularly underlined its own prescriptive character. This ‘normative order’ (p. 271) [29] is seldom overturned. Today, however, a great interaction and a symbolic *modus operandi* of these implicit behavioural norms are emphasized, rather than constrained or coercive. The commercial referred requires " Without obey the rules, the qualification of the characters draws on the reserve of social stereotypes available and understood by many (...) The statistics predominance of gender roles are still differentiated in some areas of social reality. It also expresses the logic of communication for most advertisers, hoping for a favourable reception of their messages from

the widest possible audience. They are naturally inclined to focus on messages with a smooth image and conventional social relationships " [11] (p. 166).

The representation of sport and physical exercise in magazine advertisements in France presents the audience an imaginary world with immaculate images or personas, far from the realities of physical exertion in the gym or sports clubs [46]. Notably, the rare exceptions to this rule occur in advertisements featuring males in sports, rather than the females in sports. Otherwise, ads are the links to a picture of a civilized, healthy, innocent activity, which is promoted as an ideal image to the world at large. The advertisements thus become the shopping window for a social conformism: to be active physically, sweat-free, stain-free and, above all, odour-free.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Selection of advertisements**

The research sample is comprised of only advertisements which refer to sports and any type of physical activity. A few decades ago, sports were not seen as a valued activity. They were so rare in advertisements that they were not distinguished from other "products" such as cars or products for animals. This encoding would aggregate in sports to be in the same category as "other" [59].

Nowadays, if a magazine does not specialize in sports, the magazine presents very little advertising on sports. This explains why many years, there is, ultimately, little advertising available and made present about sports. Women's magazines had often none of these ads for weeks at a time. On the contrary, the specialized magazines for sports offer many ads about sports in each issue. We choose to work on with both the specialized magazines and

magazines with no specialization. We had 700 advertisements collected from French magazines during the twenty-two-year period from 1996 to 2008, half of the magazines which have a predominantly male subscription (for instance, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *L'Equipe Magazine*, *Science et Vie* and *L'Automobile magazine*) and the other half are read mainly by women (*Elle*, *Notre Temps*, *Santé Magazine*, and *Femme Actuelle*). The magazines with television programs have been added to this gender distribution because they are important in terms of national diffusion in France. In 2003, they occupied the seven first places in rankings of read weekly magazines (from four million to 1.6 million copies). The eighth place was occupied by *Femme Actuelle* with 1.3 million copies, then *Notre Temps* with 1 million copies<sup>3</sup>. The number of sources was large enough to generate a credible database and permit the identification of significant trends, which can be confirmed or refined by re-examination in future's research studies.

The advertisements collected can belong to one campaign extending over several weeks, but we made no attempt to assess the effect of this repetition. Nor did we try to control differences in the advertisers' brand importance (Nike "against" Asics, for instance) or levels of recognition and impact in the marketplace (the retailer Decathlon "against" Go Sport, for example: both are French, but there's a trading respectively in three European countries versus seven or eight around the world). We have not analyzed advertising agencies and the marketing strategies of sponsors.

### **3.2 Data analysis**

Data analysis is done continuously and systematically over the period of data collection. The analytical strategy combines two methods. We first followed the well-established qualitative

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<sup>3</sup> In 2007 : *Le Nouvel Observateur* (509 000 copies), *L'Equipe Magazine* (354 000), *Science et Vie* (278 000), *L'Automobile magazine* (140 000).

interpretative method set by such researchers such as Barthes [60], [61] [29], all of whom were interested in advertising as sociological phenomenon. We then used a more quantitative methodology. The software chosen to implement this second phase of the analysis is the Sphinx Lexica® software, an advanced spreadsheet application. For input, advertisements were formally coded by reference to:

- the presence or absence of human characters in the advertisement;
- the use of recognisable sports figures as implied endorsers of the product or service, or on the contrary, unknown people;
- the proxemics<sup>4</sup> of the relationships into the group (distance between protagonists, stature of participants, superior and inferior positions, foregrounding, posture, body language, etc.);
- the visual setting (a sports field, an urban scene, nature scene (sea, mountain, desert, etc.);
- the product (clothing, accessories, backpacks, equipment, toiletries, cosmetics, services, etc.);
- slogans or headlines.

This coding scheme, by specifying the spatial relations among the persons portrayed in the advertisements, minimizes the scope for subjective or partisan interpretations. The encodings are added gradually to allow for further specific issues such as the visible presence of hair, different skin colours, etc. We have 25 different encodings. Each one is validate into university courses. When a coding collects a near unanimous agreement by the majority of students (4/5), it is considered reliable.

In analysing the relationships between all elements within ads, we were trying to establish whether the people who featured in an advertisement were equivalent or not, and whether the relationship between them was dominant or submissive. For human relations, we adopted

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. E. T. Hall, *The hidden dimension*, 1966.

encoding from Ahlstrand [62]. Imagine an advertisement that depicts cyclists pulling ahead of another cyclist who is having obvious difficulties. If both are male, the situation is coded: ‘male inequality’, the coding is male > male; if it is a female cyclist who has fallen behind a male, the coding is male > female, the arrowhead symbolising the direction of the power relationship. The opposite situation, extremely unlikely even in advertisements in magazines with a female readership, would therefore be coded female > male.

With particular reference to the iconography of gender, we refined the coding scheme as shown above by recording such attributes as colours of clothing, length and style of hair, and so forth. The result was a 25 point coding frame.

The software compares this data as the titles and dates of the magazines in which the advertisements had appeared. It calculates mean values and frequencies, and tests each variable. This process of deconstruction allowed us to maintain an intellectual distance from material that, by definition, had been deliberately designed to excite attention. It permitted us to maintain objectivity with the ads. The outcome presented us with the fundamental building blocks intended (implicitly if not explicitly) to attract readers, and convert them to customers. Our research protocol thus successfully delivers a more objective analysis.

## **4. FINDINGS**

### **4.1 People and objects featured**

This software-driven content analysis indicates that most common advertisements present different inanimate objects, in the foreground or background ([Table 1](#)). Objects are more

prevalent in corpus (25.6% in the foreground, 35% of all ads elements) than anything else. These objects are included regardless of their relation to sports. More often to sell sport, running shoes for instance, ads show no athlete, celebrity one or not. In ads, merchandises are 52% exclusively sports-related and 39.7% include sports along with non sport related objects. For example, one advertisement shows a male tennis player, dressed in sports attire, with his racket, near a car (which is the purpose of the ad). In cases like these, we have classified these advertisements under the item: “tools of sport and others tools”. In this case, there is a sporting character, sports equipment, and sports clothing, but the purpose of advertisement is to sell a non-racing car. Only 11.2% of ads use tools, landscapes, and places that are unrelated to the sport. These objects still play a strong role in their respective sports ads. This finding confirms the importance and relevance of material sports related and non-related objects in sports today.

When humans are shown (for the purposes of statistical analysis we exclude landscapes, animals and objects items in the following tables), men are undeniably the figureheads, far in front of women ([Table 2](#)). Sports advertisements with humans show a single male 34% of the time and male groups 23.2% of the time. Men are featured in more a half (57.2%) of the advertisements with sports as a theme (*versus* 18.3% for the females presence). Single males in the foreground are present in more than a third (38.9%) of the whole sample (*versus* 13.7% to single females). On average, men are omnipresent, three more time than women. Men are often more aged than women, 28.3 years old and 23.1 years respectively. When a man is near a woman, they are all both relatively more aged (29.3 years old). Men are more utilised in ads for traditional male interests: cars (45%), media (59%), technology (62%). Men are also present in advertising for cosmetical products (74% for after shave or cologne). Women tend to be present in health advertisements such as food supplements like magnesium, anti cholesterol oils, or margarine (31%<sup>5</sup>).

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<sup>5</sup> This occurrence is very important.

## 4.2 Gender balance

Almost one out of seventeen advertisements (5.9% of all ads) features males and females together (9.9% in the foreground). This frequency is more important when we analyze ads that exclusively include humans. Males and females are present in 13.5% of ads in the foreground, and constitute 9.5% of all ads with human people. Once every ten times, the ads can be seen as an authentic scenario of gender relations because they are visualized as the explicit model of heterosexual couples. The sportswomen are generally in situations of inequality or subordination: face to face, males dominating females (11.9% of all ads, and 28.5% of face to face ads, [Table 3](#)). In contrast, females rarely dominate males; in fact, four or five times less often (2.1% of all advertisement situations, and 5.2% of face to face ads). In sports where confrontation or struggle against an opponent or an opposing team is a norm, men in sports advertisements are not often presented as dominating other men (3.7% of all ads, 8.9% of face to face ads). Female characters are almost never shown in opposition to each other (0.7%). In the ads, opposition between people is rare, and opposition among women is non-existent.

Differences between males and female are shown by others characteristics (movement<sup>6</sup>, presence of hair, etc.) The sportsmen seem to be more dynamics: males move more often than their female counterparts (50.1% *versus* 36%). Male physical movement is especially more frequent when several men are present in the magazine ads.

Hair seems to both reveal and crystallise differences between males and females in sports advertisement ([Table 4](#)). When the ads present heterosexual couples, females have long hair (38.4%), and male have short hair (60.5%). However, on average, sports ads promote the

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<sup>6</sup> In the visual advertisements studied, the movement is suggested by the use of blurred images, of motor actions (spanning, running, jumping), non-smooth hair, etc.

entire female body (48.3% vs 42.7% for men). This frequency rejects the arguments of feminists who think that women are more often cut in advertisements (Table 5). Males are more often photographed in portrait form (9.2% vs. 5.6%). Women are over-sexualized in sports ads as well: their breasts, legs and calves are shown more frequently. These body parts are over represented in females relative to their male counterparts: 22.4% vs. 14.2%. The ads were sometimes mixed into unusual situations in the real world of sport and exercise. However, in some cases, gender is ambiguous, because of the unclear image (11% of all ads) due to indistinguishable faces or silhouettes (8%). There are many sports that require helmets. For this reason, it is difficult to distinguish the presence of a sportsman or a sportswoman. Sometimes, intuition and experience helps to infer that this is a male. For example, there are no women drivers in Formula 1, thus those individuals must be males.

The situations coded as depicting equality between males – when the protagonists are in competition on a game field – were much more frequent than into situations with women (15% versus 1.9%). The representations of movement and action are more frequent in situations of male domination than female (49.4% versus 33%). The equation between masculinity, the movement and the activity, seems to confirm a form of gender stereotyping. In advertisements of sport, men are expected to be ‘active’.

Indeed our findings support the manly stereotype in ads: equality in mixed-sex situations was not wholly absent (6.7% of the sample), but inequality was the norm. Men dominated women significantly more often than the reverse (11.9% versus 2.1%). Only two advertisements on 700 reveal inequality between female, as against 26 (3.7%) that place men in relatively inferior positions to other men. This gender imbalance is shown in various ways. The emphasis on movement already noted was prominent in advertisements that showed domination of the female by the male (49.4% of cases versus 33.3%). Less predictable,

women's faces, traditionally use to express beauty, are given less frequent than men's faces (9.2% of cases versus 5.6%).

## **4.3 Discussion**

### **4.3.1 Male presence**

The omnipresence of men is confirmed. This result emphasizes what we can name the “innate androcentrism” into advertising campaigns that use sport and physical exercise, to frame both message content and targeting strategy. Sell a product or a service related to sport in France today evidently demands a male presence – without any formal explicit rules, of course. The advertising of sport thus acts as a ‘masculine vector’, a veritable keystone in the structure of adolescent identification with sport and physical exercise. Men are been more utilised in ads for traditional male sectors: cars, Medias, high technologies. Men are also present into cosmetically products (after shaving, toilet water)! Women are present in Advertisements of health (foods complement like magnesium, anti cholesterol oils or margarine, etc.). These differences are still important and maintain gender categorisations. The strong male attraction for sports is therefore unsurprising. These averages confirm stereotypes, and reinforce the previous sociological studies results [7] [13] [28] [58].

According to Perret [11], in television commercials between 1996 and 1999 (N = 425 films), the majority of Advertisements mobilize a gender classical division (3/4 of ads), next alternatives' advertisings with more mixed gender (15%), and a minority is show power by women (10%) "(p. 164). The exchange of roles is therefore almost exclusively to male to female: it is rewarding for a woman to adopt a male attitude, but the reverse is still false. From this point of view, these images reflect the permanence of some symbolic male

domination. In addition, the most common role for men is this one of characters in “ridiculous situations” (p. 164). Perret analyses this trend like a dominant privilege (because otherwise, to mock a woman involves the risk of criticism sexist). This risk is coupled with criticism of the treatment traditional manhood in the years 1996 and 1997 in France, where men are portrayed in advertisements as "heroes in the second degree" (p. 165). In the very large majority of the cases, the advertisements offer the audience a universe of heterosexual normalization, reaffirming the anthropological constant noted by H eritier [10].

Like the more recent researches, men are often more aged than women, respectively 28.3 years old and 23.1 years. As into research of Ahlstrand (p. 26), in France “women are more often portrayed as young, while men are portrayed as middle age”. This can reinforce differences between genders. Men can be seen with more experimental in sport than women, with much power. Others researches indicate this power of the age (*gerontocracy*) into contemporary sports [63] (p. 523). The hair, use of colours, etc., confirm these ads as so much construction between genders. When sportive female are alone, their hairs are more often linked or shorted [64]; as if near man, a woman has to have long hair, symbol of beauty and seduction. These models of body are continuing long since. Side by side, ads permit to confirm this trend<sup>7</sup>. This is a real staging ads with men one side and women on the other side. The sport, as major form of male physical exercise, shows a real historical heritage, and therefore unsurprisingly sets man against man more often than man against woman or woman against woman. Indeed, gender cohabitation is always rare in major sports nowadays into Olympics Games, and in amateur sports [65]. So it’s not surprising to observe this trend in ads of sports too. The comparisons are a good tool. The comparisons of ads, side by side, allow us to reveal the different constructions of advertisements. For the same product, the difference is obvious: the car is presented with a man, dressed in costume-tie. Advertising with a woman

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<sup>7</sup> The Gender Ads Project. Created by Scott A. Lukas, Ph.D.. Created in 2002, South Lake Tahoe, California. <<http://www.genderads.com>>Accessed on: [2008 January].

for the same car shows close his leg with fishnet. Side by side, Advertisements present an ordinary shoe of the man, close to a shoe heel of the woman (woman as a sexual vampire?). The ads for sport's shoes show women as calm persons, and show men in full effort. Another Advertisement for running shoes shows a naked woman from face ("open" to our eyes), and the same advertisement shows only a profile's naked man, etc.

Female equality, rare (N=12), is not related to particular forms of sport or physical exercise. However, third of advertisements analysed is about recreational swimming (4). The conventional sport and exercise places – stadiums, gyms and sports centres – was predominant, with unknown personalities.

Are the small frequencies of gender ambiguous are an indication of the hard-and-fast male-female distinctions made by the advertisers themselves and by the advertising agencies planning and executing the campaigns? This sexual (gender) ambiguity seems to be unacceptable, or at least looks too bad to sell goods or services...

Our findings demonstrate the general sexual and gender conformism of advertising and the token nature of innovations, on the evidence of this large number of advertisements and bearing in mind that we did not deliberately underlined Advertisements with provocative or degrading situations.

#### **4.3.2 The role of iconic figures**

Sports stars and champions are known to be used as "advocats" in sport-related advertising. Yet, in our corpus into magazine advertising, almost 68.3% of the characters featured were 'ordinary', unknown, persons: that is, unidentifiable by the mass audience. The stars represent only 18.8% (17.1% in sports, and 1.7% in others activities). This result is more important yet consistent with similar research. Dyson and Turco found that 11% of the ads feature

celebrities (1998<sup>8</sup>). This would seem to suggest that the stars and celebrities of the sports do not play a significant role in press advertising in magazines, even if they are sought after for sponsorship contracts.

When taking a first glance at all the advertisements in their preliminary phase, however, we thought that celebrities would manage to arouse attention. To achieve this result, building the creative strategy around them would not necessarily be effective or successful, because their image and symbolic value would vary depending on the season of the sport and depending on their current performance in their sport [66]. The elite players of sport are also potentially damaged by personal scandals, usually being due to accusations of doping, a decrease in performance, or an abrupt end of career due of injuries.

These inherent risks are not the only possible explanations for this finding. The sport's superstars are characterized, de facto, by spectacular prowess that verges on a superhuman condition. We suggest that the advertisers of sport-related products or services in our survey chose to base their campaigns on unidentifiable players because it is expected that the target audience with more easily be able to identify themselves with the sport player in the advertisement. The unattainable nature of superstars' exploits can be counterproductive. Inescapably, the sport's player performances can separate prospective customers from their sport heroes.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Gender bias is still a widespread topic when discussing the advertisements of sport and physical exercise in France. The advertisements in magazines reflect this pronounced tendency between men and women. Men are more present, more active people, in the

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<sup>8</sup> The State of Celebrity Endorsement in Sport, *Cyber Journal of sport Marketing*.  
<http://fulltext.ausport.gov.au/fulltext/1998/cjism/v2n1/dyson.htm>.

advertisements for high technologies, cars, etc. Women are less active people in ads; they are presented to sell health products. The innovative and creative strategy is a rarity in France's context. Some sport advertisers are innovative, for example, by emphasizing environmental attention, as in the case of one sportswear and accessories manufacturer in Patagonia, or the involvement in sustainable development. The markets for sports (products or services) slowly attract women. Only few examples are still found without sexual bias or gender bias. For instance, colours used as hooks to attract potential new customers remain largely stereotypical: the pink or pastels are indicators of traditional kinds of colours to make the advertisement more appealing to women. This is the case for alternative's sports and recreations, as Loret [67] has been able to show, with regards into surfing and snowboarding. In our survey, blue was the most common colour (30%) used. This is not surprising, given the focus of sport as a historically male activity. This predominance of male image is evident, and the fact that blue is the favourite colour among Westerners, confirms this trend [68]. The brand imagery in the context of sport and physical exercise is not a trivial activity. A study of the packaging of dairy products, found a transition from blue-and-white to a broader palette containing such symbolic colours as green or even pink.

The commercial imperatives demand more than simple experiments, of course, but the persistence is amazing of such strikingly traditional characteristics in advertisements of sports in France. If sport and physical exercise seem to be a paradigm of progress and innovation, the advertising of sports paradoxically deals with stereotyped representations of society, rather than adopting new and innovative perspectives. Shall we see the beginning of a truly alternative approach to sport-related communication, especially where gender is concerned?

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