

GENDER EQUALITY IN SPORT AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA¹



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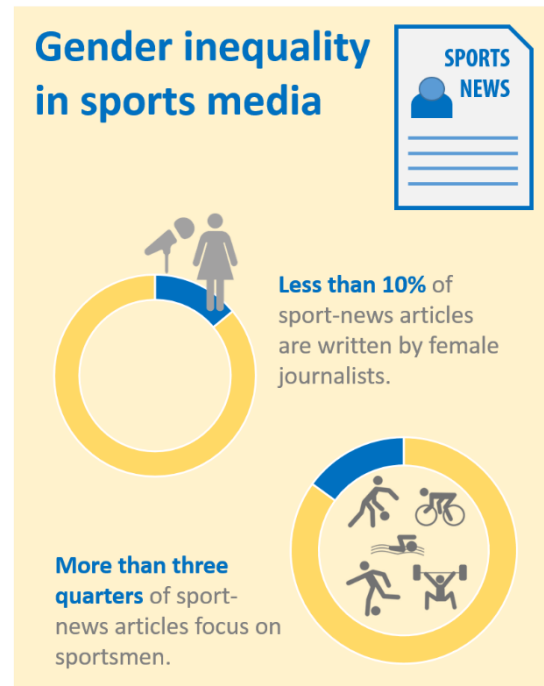


Implemented
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Sports media is a male-dominated setting around the globe giving more visibility to sports traditionally practised by men (e.g. football) and reporting massively about male athletes and their performance.

The International Sports Press Survey 2011² concluded that more than 90% of the articles were written by male journalists and more than 85% of the articles focused on sportsmen. To be more precise, only 8% of the analysed sport articles were written by named female journalists³.

As in other fields, horizontal and vertical segregation can be observed in media, meaning that women tend to be alienated from sports media at all levels. Not only are women underrepresented in media leadership positions, the topics that female journalists cover tend to be stereotypically associated with women's roles. For instance, as reported in the 2015 Women's Media Center report⁴, female journalists in the United States of America mainly covered topics like education (54,6%), lifestyle (49,6%), religion (49,6%) and health (49,3%), whereas only 10,2% produced news on sports. Although some trends remain unchanged, the WMC report noticed a decrease in the number of sports-news covered by women compared to the previous report. This trend has also been evidenced in recent research⁵ which highlights that progress about more female journalists covering sports-news cannot be taken for granted.



At international level and across time, the realities of women's sport performance have not been accurately represented in media images of sportswomen⁶. There is a solid body of research analysing the representation of sportswomen in different media channels, covering distinct periods of time, in multiple countries. In general, female athletes are far less represented in sports media than male. Moreover, sportswomen tend to be portrayed in stereotypical, comical, sexualised and sexist ways. Their physical appearance, femininity and/or sexuality are more often referred to than their athletic ability.

The media and sports use gender stereotypes to perpetuate gender inequality and accentuating gender differences⁷. Women are not seen as 'real athletes' because media, on the one hand, objectifies women and highlights aspects of their bodies and, on the other hand, media are contributing to the reproduction of sport's hegemonic masculinity⁸. Media gender-biased portrayals of sportswomen have an impact on female participation in sport and coaching, as well as on leadership positions in sport.

¹ This factsheet was compiled in November 2016 by Yellow Window.

² The International Sports Press Survey collected and analysed 17.777 articles about sport from 80 newspapers in 22 different countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Greece, Malaysia, Nepal, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Scotland, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Switzerland and USA.

³ Source: Horky, T. and J-U. Nieland (2011). ISPS 2011 – First results of the International Sports Press Survey 2011. Presentation available at: http://www.playthegame.org/fileadmin/image/PTG2011/Presentation/PTG_Nieland-Horky_ISPS_2011_3.10.2011_final.pdf

⁴ Source: *Women's Media Center (2015). The Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2015.*

⁵ Source: Franks, S. and D. O'Neill (2016). *Women reporting sport: Still a man's game?. Journalism, 17(4), pp. 474-492.*

⁶ Source: Sherry, E., A. Osborne and M. Nicholson (2016). *Sex Roles, 74, Issue 7, pp. 299-309*

⁷ Source: Trolan, E. J. (2013). *The impact of the media on gender inequality within sport. Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 91, pp. 215-227*

⁸ Source: Ibidem.



The University of Cambridge⁹ researched the use of language to refer to women and men in sport through multi-billion word databases of written and spoken English from a vast range of media sources¹⁰. Men tend to be mentioned almost three times more often than women in relation to sport. The same online article highlights that, in comparison with men, women are disproportionately referred to regarding their appearance, clothes and personal lives and that women’s aesthetics are largely emphasised over their athletic performance. The most common words associated or combined for women in sport (but not men) are ‘aged’, ‘older’, ‘pregnant’ and ‘married’ or ‘unmarried’. Conversely, the words most chosen to describe men in sport are ‘fastest’, ‘strong’, ‘big’, ‘real’ and ‘great’. The choice of verbs also differs for sportswomen and sportsmen. Whereas the words ‘woman’ or ‘women’ are usually associated with verbs as ‘compete’, ‘participate’ and ‘strive’, the words ‘man’ or ‘men’ are commonly combined with ‘beat’, ‘win’, ‘dominate’ and ‘battle’.

Although some positive changes have been noticed in the last 25 years¹¹, media coverage of women’s sports on TV is still expected to remain rather unchanged as indicated by a longitudinal study¹². On the other hand, evidence from research¹³ suggests that, when compared to traditional media, sport-news websites seem to be playing an important role in setting an agenda of inclusiveness for sport-media coverage (particularly for the Olympic Games) with regard to gender, nationality and different sports.

The Council of Europe invites the governments of Member States to draw the attention of the media, bearing in mind their editorial independence, to the need to adopt measures for:

- conveying a non-stereotyped image, role and invisibility of women and men in sport and of women’s sport, by not reproducing sexist portrayals and eliminating sexist content and language which could lead to gender-based incitement to hatred, violence and discrimination, by reflecting the progress of gender equality in sport;
- ensuring a balanced participation of women and men in the through the employment of female sport journalists and through support for their careers among editorial personnel;
- raising the awareness and strengthening the capacities of sport media professionals and students by offering regular education and vocational training programmes geared to the acquisition of in-depth knowledge of gender equality and its crucial role in a democratic society.

The detailed set of measures can be found [here](#).

In 2013, the Council of Europe issued important [policy recommendations in relation to gender equality and media](#). A [Handbook](#) to support the implementation of these recommendations is available since 2015 and is highly recommended to promote gender equality in sports media.

EXAMPLE 1. SPORTS, MEDIA AND STEREOTYPES – WOMEN AND MEN IN SPORTS AND MEDIA (SMS)

Promoter: Centre for Gender Equality in Iceland

Implemented from 2004 to 2006

The consortium of this EU-funded project included partner organisations from Austria, Lithuania, Norway, Italy and Iceland. The SMS project aimed at: 1) contributing to the knowledge of representation of women and men in sports media in Europe; 2) promoting change in the stereotypes presented of both genders in this field; and 3) at generally increasing gender awareness. A [comparative study](#) was carried out within this project.

⁹ See: <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/aesthetics-over-athletics-when-it-comes-to-women-in-sport>

¹⁰ More information about the Cambridge English Corpus and the Sports Corpus can be found at: <http://www.cambridge.org/gb/about-us/what-we-do/cambridge-english-corpus>

¹¹ Source: Cooky, C., M. A. Messner and M. Musto (2015). *Communication & Sport*, Vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 261-287

¹² Source: Cooky, C., M. A. Messner and R. H. Hextrum (2013). *Women Play Sport, But Not on TV: A Longitudinal Study of Televised News Media*. *Communication & Sport*, Vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 203-230.

¹³ Source: Eagleman, A., L. M. Burch and R. Vooris (2014). *A Unified Version of London 2012: New-Media Coverage of Gender, Nationality and Sport for Olympics Consumers in Six Countries*. *Journal of Sport Management*, 28, pp. 457-470