

## 7

# Communication



► **How can sports organisations and the media work towards gender-sensitive communication?**



- Break the cycle of the invisibility of women's sports and sportswomen in the media and in communication material.
- Portray women and men in an appropriate way without perpetuating gender stereotypes.
- Deconstruct and fight against gender stereotypes in the world of sport.



Even if some improvement has been achieved in high-level sporting events, sportswomen are still a lot less visible than men and their performances are still undervalued in the media. There is also an unbalanced portrayal of women and men in the media, which often contributes to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes (for example, often asking women athletes about their families or focusing on their looks). This sends a strong message that female sports and athletes are secondary to male sports, a message that must be rectified at every opportunity.

## ON YOUR MARKS

### Understand the issue

#### Female under-representation

- Women are under-represented in sports media at all levels (as journalists, reporters, commentators, editors, etc.)
- Lack of coverage of women's sporting events (types and numbers of events covered, time slots, etc.)
- Women and men are more likely to be covered if they perform in "appropriate" sports (for example, girls and women doing gymnastics or men boxing)
- Women's sport is more likely to be commented on with "matter-of-fact" language, and attracts less footage and fewer interviews

#### Female performance undervalued

- The approach to women's sports emphasises physical appearance and shifts the focus from skills to looks (for example, "sexy" poses in magazines)
- Emphasis on heterosexual femininity (for example, negatively represents lesbian identities and "masculine-looking" bodies)
- Still a high level of attention to women's personal lives and families reaffirming traditional roles (for example, male athletes seldom asked about their spouse or their spouses being presented as trophies)
- Female athletes are less interviewed directly (tendency to interview coaches or entourage who speak on their behalf)
- Men's sport is often considered the norm, while women's sport is given a qualifier (for example, "basketball" = male team; "women's basketball" = female team), setting it apart

## TAKE ACTION

**The aim is to accurately reflect the reality and diversity of sporting experiences and participation among men and women.**

### Strategic level

■ Raise awareness of what constitutes gender bias and stereotyping. For example, develop education and training for sports organisations' board members on how to counter negative stereotypes in sport, draft codes of conduct and set up effective procedures to handle complaints.

■ Develop education and training of athletes and coaches on how to communicate with the media and, more broadly, control the rights of an ethical and appropriate use of their names and images.

■ Develop educational material on gender stereotypes in sport for the media and for journalism schools.

■ Make sure that all marketing and advertising at sporting events stay clear of gender stereotypes and the sexualisation of athletes (for example, avoid women in miniskirts handing out prizes or all-female cheerleading during half-times, distribute the IOC Portrayal Guidelines (2018) to all sponsors, advertisers and marketing stakeholders).

■ Assign responsibility within the organisation to improve media coverage of the under-represented gender. For example, request your press officer to define a communications strategy aimed at raising the profile of female athletes in your sport.

■ Develop contacts with the media and supply them with feature stories, images, statistics related to women's sport.

■ Develop a proactive strategy to promote the representation of the under-represented sex in your sport (for example, advertise the nomination of candidates for awards).

■ Promote reports of girls and women in newspapers and magazines.

■ Promote (female and male) role models in your sport (for example, via social media).

### Operational level

#### ■ Coverage

- ▶ As much as possible, ensure that both male and female athletes/sports/events are represented in a balanced way in all communication (comments, stories, images, websites, social media, etc.). For example, promote the broadcasting of female or girls' events using your bargaining power when negotiating broadcasting rights for male events to include female competitions).
- ▶ Bring equal passion to the coverage of both women and men.

#### ■ Images

- ▶ Focus on performance: do NOT focus on clothing, hair, etc.
- ▶ Avoid sexualised images of female and male athletes.
- ▶ Develop images of active girls, also highlighting strength, power and speed (for example, in judo or rugby) and of graceful and supple boys (for example, diving).

#### ■ Language

- ▶ Avoid gender stereotypes or comparison between genders (for example, "she ran like a female Bolt").
- ▶ Use gender-sensitive language in all policies, rulebooks, reports, etc. to move away from the notion that males are the dominant gender when it comes to sport (for example, instead of "the athlete will place his personal items in the locker", use "athletes will place their personal items in the lockers").
- ▶ Avoid gender qualifying women's sport and female athletes (for example, "golfer" instead of "female golfer").
- ▶ Use adjectives that apply to both men and women (for example, strong, beautiful, determined). Avoid gendered or sexist descriptions (for example, girly, sexy, like a man).
- ▶ Avoid gender-biased questions in interviews (for example, asking women about partner/children unless she volunteers that type of information).

#### ■ Interviews

- ▶ Unless someone has clearly refused to be interviewed, put questions directly to them (and not to their entourage or coach).

## EXAMPLES

### PORTRAYAL GUIDELINES FOR GENDER-BALANCED REPRESENTATION

**Organisation responsible:** International Olympic Committee

As leaders and communicators within the sports movement, the IOC can set the tone as to how women and girls in sport, and athletes globally, can and should be pictured, described, talked about and represented – that is, portrayed - across all forms of media and communication channels.

The IOC Guidelines are intended to raise awareness of what constitutes gender bias in the area of portrayal (how women and men are presented and described). They provide examples and good practice within the sporting context of how this bias can be overcome – notably in the areas of print, digital and broadcast media – to achieve gender-neutral language and equal representation.

**Available at:**

[https://library.olympic.org/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/177154/portrayal-guidelines-for-gender-balanced-representation-international-olympic-committee?\\_lg=en-GB](https://library.olympic.org/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/177154/portrayal-guidelines-for-gender-balanced-representation-international-olympic-committee?_lg=en-GB)

### AWARENESS CAMPAIGN “WOMEN, ATHLETES LIKE ANY OTHER” [“LES FEMMES, DES SPORTIFS COMME LES AUTRES?”]

**Organisation responsible:** Les femmes prévoyantes socialistes

**Country:** Belgium

This campaign focuses on portraying female sporting champions whose paths defy the idea that certain sport disciplines are reserved for men. On the other hand, it highlights the persistent inequalities and barriers to regular physical activity for women.

**Available at:**

[www.femmesprevoyantes.be/campagnes/campagne-2016-les-femmes-des-sportifs-comme-les-autres/](http://www.femmesprevoyantes.be/campagnes/campagne-2016-les-femmes-des-sportifs-comme-les-autres/)

<https://parolesdechampionnes.tumblr.com/>  
[www.parolesdechampionnes.be/](http://www.parolesdechampionnes.be/)



For more information on these examples and to find out about other practices and resources, take a look at the ALL IN online library.<sup>1</sup>



**Factsheet 10** – Sports events

<sup>1</sup> <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/gender-equality-in-sport/online-library>

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**ALL IN: Towards gender balance in sport (Erasmus +)**

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