

# Women under-represented and sexualised in weekend sports reporting

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Sunday newspapers promote the weekend as a male domain centred around their activities and interests, according to new research by an academic from the University of East Anglia.

The study found that the representation of sportswomen and men is different in weekend newspaper reporting, with women under-represented and unfairly represented in sports coverage and photographs.

Over two years, five UK national Sunday newspapers dedicated just 826 (3.6%) articles to sportswomen, compared to the 21,531 (93.8%) devoted to sportsmen. There was also a stark difference in the number of photographs of sportsmen and women published - of the 25,717 photographs that appeared, 1,780 (6.9%) were of women. At times, sportswomen were not allocated a single article or photograph.

The research, published today in the journal *Leisure Studies*, was conducted by Dr Amy Godoy-Pressland from UEA's School of Education and Lifelong Learning. It is the first study to look at how sports reporting and gender differs at the weekend, and particularly on Sundays, from weekday reporting. It is also the first to look at sports reporting over a long period – one which was particularly successful for sportswomen in Great Britain, especially in male-dominated sports such as football, cricket and rugby, and included the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

The treatment of sportswomen has come under increased scrutiny

following derogatory remarks made by some male sports commentators. Most recently John Inverdale was criticised for his comments about Wimbledon Champion Marion Bartoli, as was Colin Murray for remarks about Olympic gold medal winner Jessica Ennis-Hill.

Dr Godoy-Pressland, a lecturer in education, said the focus on Sunday newspapers provided new insights into how sports media function on a day traditionally associated with leisure, family and 'down time'.

"This study highlights issues and debates that are on-going," she said. "The coverage during the London 2012 Olympic Games was very gender equal and the media should be congratulated for that. However, despite the success of female athletes, the number of stories decreased again after the games and we have gone back to how it used to be. Recent remarks by male sports commentators also suggest that sexism is not seen to be on the same level as other forms of discrimination, such as racism."

Dr Godoy-Pressland said: "There are assumptions that women's sport is not as interesting as men's. Sportswomen are disproportionately under-represented and the sheer quantity and quality of news items on sportsmen demonstrates how male athletes are represented as dominant and superior to females.

"It is clear from this analysis that the representation of sportsmen and women in the media is very particular in weekend reporting, and that Sunday newspapers promote the weekend as predominantly a male entity, which revolves around viewing sports with other men and male sporting activities.

"During the week there are more articles on sportswomen, fewer news items on decorative women not related to sport and less male jokey banter. But at the weekend normal reporting rules do not apply. The

weekend is promoted as a male preserve, not only in the level of coverage devoted to sportsmen and women, but by the language and images used and the choice of stories."

The study involved analysing the sports sections of the Sunday Times, Sunday Telegraph, Observer, Mail on Sunday and Sunday Express from January 2008 to December 2009. Of 22,954 articles published, the five papers averaged 35 stories a month on sportswomen, compared to 897 on sportsmen. The Sunday Times published the most photographs – 7956 - of which 761 (9.5%) were of women. The Mail on Sunday produced the least, with 3895, but comparatively the highest percentage (10.2%) of women. The Sunday Telegraph published the fewest photographs of women, 198 (4.5%) out of 4427.

There was also a tendency for the papers to print images and stories of women not connected to sport, even when photographic coverage of sportswomen became more prominent, such as during the Beijing Olympics. Of the 761 female photographs in the Sunday Times and 396 in the Mail on Sunday, 31% and 22% respectively were non-sports related. Overall, up to a third of photographs of women were non-sports related, were often of wives and girlfriends of sportsmen and highlighted female body parts and sexual activity.

Women's bodies were also sexualised in photographic and written coverage. There were many photographs of sportswomen nude, semi-nude or in revealing clothes, but for men, sports performance took precedence over stories or photographs which highlighted their bodies in a sexual manner. Linguistically sportswomen were also sexualised, for example with insinuations about their desire to appear sexy and strip off for men's magazines.

"The sexualisation of sportswomen in Sunday reporting is commonplace and aimed at the mostly male readership," said Dr Godoy-Pressland. "It

promotes the idea of female aesthetics over achievements, while the coverage of women not directly involved in sport misrepresents the place of women in sport and inferiorizes real sportswomen's achievements. Female athletes who demonstrate extraordinary ability have also been subject to questions about their sexuality and, in some cases, about their gender, suggesting that weekend sports reporting favours women whose display of femininity is prominent."

Dr Godoy-Pressland said that while there has been a rise in the number of female sports reporters, the vast majority of sports journalists, commentators and editors are male. She suggested further research was needed on the role of sports editors, journalists and newsroom culture in order to better understand how and why [women](#) are unfairly represented in sports reporting.

The study 'The weekend as a male entity: How Sunday newspaper [sports](#) reporting centre around male activities, interests and language' is published in *Leisure Studies* on September 13.

Provided by University of East Anglia

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