

## Research: Male, female reporters cover sports differently

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Male and female reporters differ in the way they cover sports, especially in regard to the athleticism of female athletes, according to a recent study.

Analysis of stories about men's and women's basketball by researchers in the John Curley Center for [Sports](#) Journalism at Penn State and the Sport Leadership Program at the University of Central Florida found that male writers — who dominate the sportswriting ranks — were less likely to present women's sports in positive terms than were female writers.

The study, co-authored by Marie Hardin, an associate professor in the College of Communications at Penn State and the associate director of the Curley Center, and Edward (Ted) Kian, an assistant professor in the College of Education at the University of Central Florida, is published in the latest issue of the International Journal of Sport Communication. More than 500 print and online articles focusing on NCAA basketball games were analyzed as part of the study.

Most stories analyzed, 86 percent, were written by men, which mirrors industry demographics. More than 60 percent of stories about women's games were covered by men. When male reporters covered women's games, they were less likely than female reporters to present student-athletes as athletically skilled.

The reverse was also true — women covering men's games were less likely to focus on the players' athleticism and instead mentioned the

athletes' family relationships and attractiveness. Women wrote only six percent of all stories about men's games, however.

The bottom line: The way athletes were presented — as athletically gifted or in other terms relating to appearance, for instance — was related to the gender of the reporter covering them. And, because of lopsided industry demographics, coverage of women's [basketball](#) still differs from men's in ways that might reinforce stereotypes, said Hardin.

"The research shows how the lack of female sportswriters can make a real difference in the ways athletes are presented in coverage," she said. "Men have always dominated sports departments, and that has clearly shaped the ways sports are covered."

The study is part of a growing body of research pointing to differences in the ways men and women cover sports, said Hardin. Previous Curley Center studies have documented differences in the ways reporters use sources and frame Title IX and women's sports. Specifically, women are more likely to use female sources and to present Title IX in more positive terms than are men.

The differences in the ways men and women cover sports are important, said Hardin. She pointed to a 2005 study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, which suggested that sports coverage, in general, is not very innovative and focuses on just a handful of sports.

"As more women move into sports journalism careers, we could see more diversity in sports coverage," Hardin said. "More diversity in types of stories, in sourcing and in the way stories are framed might draw new fans and allow for a wider array of sports and athletes to get visibility."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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