

Women appear in only five percent of sports newsprint

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This is a match Atletico-Rayo. Credit: clubatleticodemadrid.com

Women are the subject of news in sports papers in only 5.11% of the cases, sometimes alone (2.18%) and others accompanied by men (2.93%). On the other hand, men are the focus of this kind of information in 92.2% of the cases, according to a study presented recently by UC3M professor Clara Sainz de Baranda at the II International Conference on Gender and Communication. "The remaining 5% is neutral information, which is why, in these kinds of topics, like soccer balls, fields, field houses and goals, men appear more

often than women," notes this professor from the university's Department of Journalism and Audiovisual Communication.

This situation has not improved significantly over the years. The results of the analysis of the four main Spanish sports papers performed by this researcher vary by province. In newspapers from Madrid, one can observe a reversal in the news focused on [women](#) in recent decades. In *Marca*, it went from 5.6% in 1979 to 4.22% in 2010. In Catalan papers, however, it increases. In *Sport*, it went from 2.63% in 1979 to 3.3% in 2010, and in *Mundo Deportivo*, it increased from 2.5% in 1979 to 5.05% in 2010.

These differences are even greater if one considers that not all of the women who appear in articles run by these specialized papers pertain to the world of sports. In fact, a recent study published in *Cuadernos de psicología del deporte* differentiates between two profiles of women: those who pertain to the world of sports (athletes, coaches) and others it calls "guests," who in general are partners, relatives, celebrities or fans. "In terms of quantity, the first group has a larger presence (86.8%), but on a qualitative level, the guests have a much greater presence because of the size of the article, photographs, types of pages that they occupy, etc.," the researcher explains. Moreover, in this type of image, the most promoted stereotype is the one related to feminine attributes, so it normally presents women as a decorative archetype or an object of desire.

This inequality is evident in other journalistic elements, as well. Female names appear in only 2% of headlines and in only 0.81% of references are quotes from women included. "In almost 50% of the cases, the achievements of female athletes are relegated to a short news item, the most humble genre of journalism, which entails a reductionism in the treatment of this news," observes Sainz de Baranda, who published her doctoral thesis on this subject.

Soccer and tennis, king and queen

The numbers reveal that, if soccer is the "king" of sports (65.71%), the "queen" is tennis (29.35%). In the case of "mixed" news, the most common sport is track and field (23.29%). Likewise, soccer is the most recurring story in "neutral" [news](#) (20.4%), with much of it focused on the condition of the turf, soccer stadiums, sports equipment, etc. "All aspects related to the world of soccer appear in the media. Their number increases over time and they contribute to exacerbating the old problem of disinformation and information imbalance," the professor comments. With the exception of soccer, achievements in most sports are not constantly covered in the pages of these papers; they are mentioned, but only for specific things. "And as women triumph in sports with less coverage and their presence is smaller, their invisibility increases," she emphasizes.

Noteworthy among the obstacles that women must overcome to earn a living as professional athletes are the persistence of certain stereotypes, the scarcity of public aid destined to fostering women's sports and the inexistence of economic incentives for companies to invest in these competitions because of the "supposed" inferior spectacle that they represent.

Another reason for this situation is that women soccer players cannot be professional. "There is a royal decree (Royal Decree 1835/1991, from 20 December, regarding Spanish [sports](#) federations) that allows federations—football federations in particular, not to professionalize women players under the same conditions as men," the researcher reports. "They argue that, economically, it is not profitable for a woman to play as a professional. Actually, it is not a problem of profitability, but fundamental labor rights," she declares.

More information: Thesis: Mujeres y deporte en los medios de

comunicación: estudio de la prensa deportiva española (1979-2010).

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