

Misogynistic attitudes towards women's sport among male football fans

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Openly misogynistic attitudes towards women's sport may be common amongst male football fans, according to new research involving online message boards.

The Durham University-led study, based on a survey of 1,950 male football fans on UK football fan message boards, found openly misogynistic attitudes towards [women](#)'s sport among those surveyed, regardless of their age.

Progressive attitudes amongst men were also strongly represented but were not as common as hostile and sexist attitudes.

This is set in the context of increased visibility of women's sport in recent years, especially since the 2012 London Olympic Games and the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup.

The researchers suggest these dominant misogynistic attitudes show a backlash against advances in gender equality. They call for more coverage of women's sport to drive more gender equality and promote [social justice](#).

The survey was completed by 1,950 male football fans who responded to a call for participants on 150 UK football fan message boards.

The study, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), is published in the academic journal *Sociology* and was led by

Durham University with researchers at the University of Leicester and University of South Australia.

Lead author, Dr. Stacey Pope from Durham University's Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences, said: "This is the first study to examine UK men football fans' attitudes to women's sport in an era in which women's sport has experienced a significantly increased media profile.

"Our research showed that attitudes towards women in sport are, to some extent, changing, with more progressive attitudes. However, the findings are also reflective of a patriarchal society in which misogyny is rife. There were numerous examples of men from across all generations exhibiting highly sexist and misogynistic attitudes."

Based on answers to the open-ended questions in the survey, the fans could broadly be split into three groups who either showed progressive masculinities, overt misogynistic masculinities or covert misogynistic masculinities.

Men with progressive attitudes showed strong support for equality in media coverage of women's sport with many saying that the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup had been a positive turning point in terms of representation of women's sport. Increased exposure of women's sport was seen as a way to change attitudes for the better, inspire girls at grassroot levels and challenge assumptions about women's alleged inferiority in sport. Media was seen as having a responsibility to promote women's sport more.

The fans who held openly misogynistic attitudes towards women's sport saw it as inferior to men's sport, in particular in relation to football, with some suggesting women should not participate in sport at all, or if they did, it should be 'feminine' sports, such as athletics. There was also extreme hostility towards increasing media coverage of women's sport,

which was seen as 'positive discrimination' or 'PC nonsense'.

The final group of fans, who were in the minority, would express progressive attitudes in public but in more private moments reveal misogynistic views of women's sport, adapting what they said depending on the social situation or who they were with.

Co-author, John Williams from the University of Leicester, commented: "The increase in media coverage of women's sport on both the BBC and subscription channels was openly supported by some men. But it also clearly represents, for others, a visible threat, an attack on [football](#) as an arena for 'doing' masculinity. This is at a time when there are more widespread anxieties circulating among men about how to establish and perform satisfying masculine identities. For men like these, there was a pronounced anti-feminist backlash towards the women's game."

Although the study looked at the specific area of sport, the researchers say it may also help to understand men's varying responses to women in other settings such as the workplace, education or creative industries.

Football has largely been a male domain throughout much of the sport's history and has arguably continued to be one of the 'last bastions' of male domination.

Although women's sport still takes up less than 10 per cent of annual print and TV coverage, there has been a new age of coverage of women's sport in the UK. Developments include the launch of the professional FA Women's Super League, the success of GB women athletes at the London 2012 Olympic Games and Sport England's *This Girl Can* campaign.

More information: Stacey Pope et al, Men's Football Fandom and the Performance of Progressive and Misogynistic Masculinities in a 'New

Age' of UK Women's Sport, *Sociology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/00380385211063359](https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385211063359)

Provided by Durham University

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