

## Women who love sports don't necessarily attend more games

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Even American women who identify as quite passionate sports fans don't watch athletic events much more frequently than women who say they aren't as interested in sports, a new national study finds.

Overall, results of a survey of more than 2,800 women suggested that the average woman rates herself as a moderate sports fan, with 87% saying they watched or followed one or more sports over the past year, and 38% attending one or more [sporting events](#).

The findings highlight that while many women enjoy sports, their passion may not always be evident in terms of watching and attending sports events, said Frances Sutton, lead author of the study and a doctoral student in anthropology at The Ohio State University.

"We can't assume that women sports fans act in the same ways that male fans do and that they can be attracted to sporting events in the same ways," Sutton said.

That means sports teams and leagues need to rethink how they market themselves to women, said Chris Knoester, co-author of the study and associate professor of sociology at Ohio State.

"There's an opportunity for [sports teams](#) and leagues to increase their efforts to satisfy the interests of women who self-identify as rather passionate sports fans, but do not consume a lot of sports," Knoester said.

The study was published online recently in the journal *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.

Survey data came from the National Sports and Society Survey (NSASS), sponsored by Ohio State's Sports and Society Initiative.

The survey was completed by 3,993 adults who volunteered to participate through the American Population Panel, run by Ohio State's Center for Human Resource Research. Participants, who live in

all 50 states, answered the survey online between the fall of 2018 and spring of 2019. This study only included the 2,853 women who completed the survey.

Women in the study rated how much of a sports fan they were on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 4 (very much so). The average woman rated herself as "somewhat" a sports fan (slightly higher than 2 on the scale).

On average, women watched or followed sports for more than six months of the year, with 29% reporting watching or following sports every month and 87% saying they watched or followed sports at least one month of the year.

Overall, women attended about three sporting events over the previous year, with 38% of those surveyed saying they attended at least one and 4% attending 24 or more events.

But there was only a modest link between how much women identified as sports fans and how often they consumed sports.

Sutton said the findings support the work of other scholars of women's sport fandom.

"Sport is commonly assumed to be a masculine activity," she said.

"Women are not always made to feel comfortable or welcome in sporting environments, such as stadiums or sports bars, which may be one reason they are less likely to attend."

In addition, women generally have more family responsibilities and may have less time than men to enjoy sporting activities.

But family responsibilities have interesting effects on sports

consumption and fandom in women, Knoester said.

The study found that women with children living at home participated in higher-than-average sports consumption – presumably, in part, because they were attending their children's sporting events and supporting their children's sports interests – without any impact on their fandom.

"Women don't always consume sports in the context of being fans," Knoester said.

"Women may disproportionately consume sport to build relationships with their family, but not necessarily self-identify as sports fans because of this."

As expected, women who participated in youth sports, whose parents were sports fans, and who had mostly athlete friends growing up were all more likely to attend sporting events.

That suggests that sport organizations should invest in and encourage girls' sports involvement as a way to nurture their sports consumption and fandom into adulthood, Knoester said.

But the fact that many women who already identify as passionate fans aren't going to many sporting events indicates that teams need to learn more about what types of fan experiences would appeal to women, Sutton said.

"A lot of promotions by teams to attract women assume that all women are the same and don't recognize that many are already passionate fans," she said.

The answer should be more listening by [sports](#) organizations, Knoester added.

"It seems wise to start by simply asking women what they want from sport, rather than making assumptions based on gendered stereotypes," he said.

**More information:** Frances S. Sutton et al, U.S. Women's Sport Consumption and Self-Identified Fandom: An Exploration of Social Structural and Sociocultural Antecedents, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/10126902211068272](https://doi.org/10.1177/10126902211068272)

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