



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

PORTRAYAL GUIDELINES FOR GENDER BALANCED REPRESENTATION

2018



IT'S ABOUT
MORE
THAN JUST
WORDS
AND IMAGES



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Introduction

Sports is one of the most powerful platforms for promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls, and sports coverage is very influential in shaping norms and stereotypes of women/girls and men/boys.

At the International Olympic Committee (IOC), we know that the Olympic Games are an incredible spotlight. Those two weeks of Olympic coverage are a rare time when sustained coverage of women's sports makes the headlines. But, outside that period, the opportunity and the quality of that coverage remain limited.

As leaders and communicators within the sports movement, we can set the tone as to how women and girls in sports, and athletes – globally – can and should be pictured, described, talked about, represented, i.e. portrayed, across all forms of media and communication channels.

Challenging stereotypes and clichés

Avoiding prejudice and stereotypes in the portrayal (i.e. representation) of women and men is a crucial step on the path towards gender equality, in all areas of life. Gender biased attitudes and behaviours can be conscious or unconscious. Changing behaviour to put an end to this prejudice based on gender can only be achieved by raising awareness of what constitutes such bias so that efforts can be made to avoid and overcome it.

The following Guidelines are intended to raise awareness of what constitutes gender bias in the area of portrayal (i.e. how women and men are presented and described). They provide examples and good practice within the sporting context of how this bias can be overcome – notably in the areas of print, digital and broadcast – to achieve gender neutral language and equal representation.

They are a direct result of Recommendation 12 of the [2018 IOC Gender Equality Review Project](#) – Balanced Media Portrayal of Both Genders – which calls on the IOC administration “*to establish principles and guidelines for fair and balanced portrayal in all its forms of communication*” and encourages “*all Olympic Movement stakeholders to adopt*” and adapt these Guidelines.



London 2012



[Link to the article](#)

Outrage as Barstool Radio host calls 17-year-old Olympic gold medalist Chloe Kim a 'little hot piece of a**' after she became youngest woman to win at the Winter Games

- Barstool Radio's Patrick Connor made the sexual remarks about teen American snowboarder Chloe Kim on Tuesday
- Connor was talking about Kim's gold medal win in South Korea
- He said he was counting down the days until the snowboarder's 18th birthday
- Connor added that if she was 18, he wouldn't be ashamed to say that 'she's a little hot piece of a**'
- Californian teen became the youngest woman to win a gold medal on snow at the Winter Games after dominating the women's halfpipe

[Link to the article](#)

Fox News debates whether female athletes should wear more makeup at the Olympics



Ali Krieger US footballer CREDIT: ANDREW YANCKOUS/REX

[Link to the article](#)

Content and editorial



All content needs to be based on editorial merit.

Clearly, it is not possible to anticipate gender representation in news and current events – you can't give an account of something that hasn't happened. However, it is possible – and necessary – to be **sensitive to gender in the way in which the content is packaged and presented.**

When packaging editorial content, careful attention to gender portrayal should be factored into tone, style, language and imagery.

Coverage and airtime

The IOC believes that all sporting events are of equal importance.

Women's and men's events are of equal importance and this should be reflected in their treatment.

- In broadcast activities – coverage of events, interviews, athlete profiles, commentaries, etc. – ensure as much as possible that **equal airtime and coverage is devoted to women's and men's events.**
- When preparing articles and publications, both print and digital, as far as possible **women and men should be given equal exposure to ensure that the reporting is balanced** between the different genders. Avoid excessive focus on only one gender.

Imagery

Equality also needs to be factored into the use of imagery.

- Conscious efforts should be made to ensure that there are **not significantly more images of one gender in relation to the other.**
- On a web or social media platform publishing articles or profiles of athletes, **ensure gender balance in the number of articles and profiles published.**

Particular attention should be paid to the **respectful use of imagery.** Avoid using objectifying or sexualised imagery of female or male athletes, their entourage, or of fans and spectators.

- ✗ If an athlete, female or male, suffers a **wardrobe malfunction/unfortunate incident around clothing** (item of clothing that splits or tears or inadvertently reveals more of the body than intended), **do not use these images.**
- ✗ If the incident occurs during a live broadcast, **move the focus away** as rapidly as possible, provided that doing so does not detract from the sporting activity.
- ✗ In video coverage, tight facial framing or the ‘reveal’ shot from foot to head used to depict aesthetics rather than athleticism should be avoided.
- ✗ **Do not focus on crotch shots** – common in gymnastics, beach volleyball and figure skating.

- With moving images, directors and camera operators can sometimes focus too much on the same athletes within a team of competition. This is fine if the decision is about sport, but not if it’s based on looks.
- Images of hair, fingernails, make-up or competition kit are fine **only if they relate to performance.**



It is important to **balance illustrating women’s sports which demonstrate strength, power and speed** (e.g. boxing, judo, rugby) **with those depicting gracefulness, fluidity or elegance** (e.g. diving, rhythmic gymnastics or horseriding).



Language and terminology

Special attention should be paid to the use of language (expressions and communication) and terminology (vocabulary) in commentaries, headlines or articles in print or digital.

→ Use **bias-free language** and avoid gender stereotypes, expressions or words that compare women to men and/or imply superiority of one gender over the other. For example:

✗ She swam **like a man/beast** to win that race.

✓ She swam **with determination** to win that race.

→ If the gender by which the subject identifies is known, then **it is legitimate to refer to that individual's gender** (e.g. she/he, him/her).

→ If the gender is not known or the subject is a mixed gender group, then gender-specific terminology should be substituted for **gender-neutral descriptions**.

For example:

- his/her → **their**
- her/him → **them**
- camerawomen/cameraman → **camera operator/camera crew**

Below is a list, by no means exhaustive, of some other general principles:

When referring to people

→ Always use *'female/male'*, **women/men** and not **girls/boys**, unless referring to children.

✓ **Ladies** is appropriate when used with the term **Gentlemen**, e.g. in a speech: *"Ladies and Gentlemen"*; or when it is an official title, e.g. *"Sir John and Lady Smith"*.

✗ The use of *'ladies'* is inappropriate when *'men'* is being used. The term should be **women**.

Pronouns

→ Unless the gender of the person is known, avoid using gender-specific pronouns (she/he, him/her), but rather in such cases the plural (their/them) is acceptable. For example:

✗ **Each athlete** must have his accreditation on **him** at all times.

✓ **All athletes** are required to have their accreditation on **them** at all times. Similarly, when referring to a mixed gender group, the neutral plural should be used.

Nouns and proper names

→ Where possible, use gender-neutral terms, for example:

- Sportsman → **Sportsperson; athlete**
(or sportsman/sportswoman when referring to a specific individual)
- Sportsmanship → **Sporting spirit**
- Spokesman → **Spokesperson**
- Cameraman → **Camera operator**
- Cameramen → **Camera crew**
- Anchorman → **Anchor, News anchor**
- Chairman → **Chair, chairperson**
- Manmade → **Artificial, synthetic**

Adjectives

→ Avoid making evaluative comments on an individual's appearance. When describing an athlete's performance, use adjectives that apply to both women and men. For instance:

✓ use words such as: **beautiful, powerful, strong, graceful, athletic, determined,**

✗ vs gendered or sexist descriptions e.g. **sexy, girly, manly, like a man'**, etc.



Interviews and commentaries

→ When conducting interviews, with athletes or their entourage, or making commentaries on the field of play, avoid gender-biased questions and statements.

For example: when interviewing a female athlete on the field of play, avoid asking about her husband/partner/children, unless she volunteers the information herself. Interviewers seldom ask male athletes whether their wives/girlfriends/partners are proud of them, for example.

✗ **DON'T** – Attribute success for a female athlete’s achievement to her coach/entourage (e.g. “here’s the man who made it all possible”). Credit for a male athlete’s success is seldom attributed to the coach/entourage.

✓ **DO** – Recognise that it is a team effort.



Chicago Tribune @chicagotribune

Wife of a Bears' lineman wins a bronze medal today in Rio Olympics trib.in/2asmvvr

11:33 PM - Aug 7, 2016

2,757 likes 3,588 people are talking about this

✗ **DON'T** – Identify an athlete in relation to her spouse/partner.

[Link to the article](#)

Note: this website is currently not available in Europe.

Gender-specific issues and experiences

→ If a female athlete has recently returned to training/competition after taking time out for pregnancy, avoid focusing on this unless the athlete volunteers the information herself. For example:

✗ **DON'T** –
“Bjorgen has had a baby since the last Winter Olympics in Sochi four years ago.”

✓ **DO** – “Marit Bjorgen is now the most decorated Winter Olympian of all time with a total of 15 medals garnered over five editions of the Games.”

Ideally, the focus should be on this first and foremost, rather than on the fact that she has had a baby.



Bjorgen has had a baby since the last Winter Olympics in Sochi four years ago

[Link to the article](#)

Spokespeople

Women can speak for themselves. Research reveals that while men are often interviewed directly, there is a tendency for coaches or an entourage person to speak on behalf of female athletes. Unless someone has expressly indicated that they do not wish to be interviewed or has delegated a third party to speak on their behalf, put the questions to them directly.



Conclusion

Some of this guidance is clearly dependent on context.

These guidelines are first and foremost intended to address good practice in the sporting context (field of play, event-related coverage, etc.) where the intention is **to see sportspeople as athletes**. They are intended to raise awareness of an issue that permeates many sectors of life, not simply the sports world.

Gender portrayal is a small though incremental step on the path to gender equality. Raising awareness of the importance of gender portrayal is the first step in influencing behaviour.

We would welcome your feedback on these guidelines and are interested in learning how you are adopting and adapting them to your context. Please send your comments to publications@olympic.org.

Additional resources

IOC Gender Equality Review Project Report

https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/News/2018/03/IOC-Gender-Equality-Report-March-2018.pdf#_ga=2.176036834.1316924322.1530536825-1584169185.1502791100

UNESCO gender-sensitive indicators for media

Framework of indicators to gauge gender sensitivity in media operations and content

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002178/217831e.pdf>
<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/gender-sensitive-indicators-for-media-framework-of-indicators-to-gauge-gender-sensitivity-in-media-operations-and-content/>

Gender Equality and sports media

Her Headline: a Chrome extension to highlight sexist language in sports media

<http://herheadline.com>