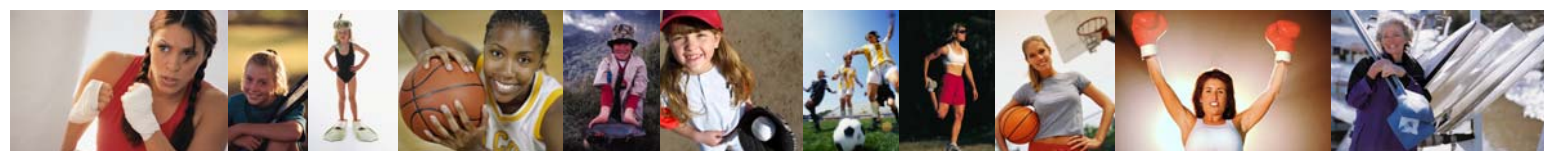




The Increasing Invisibility of Women In Irish Sport

Images of Sports Women in
Irish Newspapers .
(April 2007).





The Facts In 2007

The Dublin Sports & Recreation Council has repeated, for the fifth time, the research exercise we first carried out in the Spring of 2002.

This year the project counted the number of photographs of sportsmen and sportswomen in 6 principle Irish National Newspapers over a 15 day period.

This year we increased the sample time span from 10 days to fifteen days and increased the number of newspapers from 5 to 6.

The Newspapers were;

- ❑ **The Irish Times**
- ❑ **The Irish Examiner**
- ❑ **The Irish independent**
- ❑ **The Irish Star**
- ❑ **The Irish Sun**
- ❑ **The Irish Mirror**

The 2007 poll was carried out on the following days.

26th, 27th, 28th, 29th & 30th March
 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, & 7th of April
 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th & 13th of April.



NewsPaper	Total Photos	Photos of Men	Photos of Women	%
Irish Times	308	299	9	2.9
Irish Examiner	728	702	26	3.6
Irish Independent	571	553	18	3.15
Irish Star	1906	1890	16	0.84
Irish Sun	1426	1418	8	0.56
Irish Mirror	1564	1563	1	0.06
All Papers	6503	6425	78	1.2

Sadly, the 2007 are significantly worse than other years.

In 2002: 2.78% of the photos were of women.

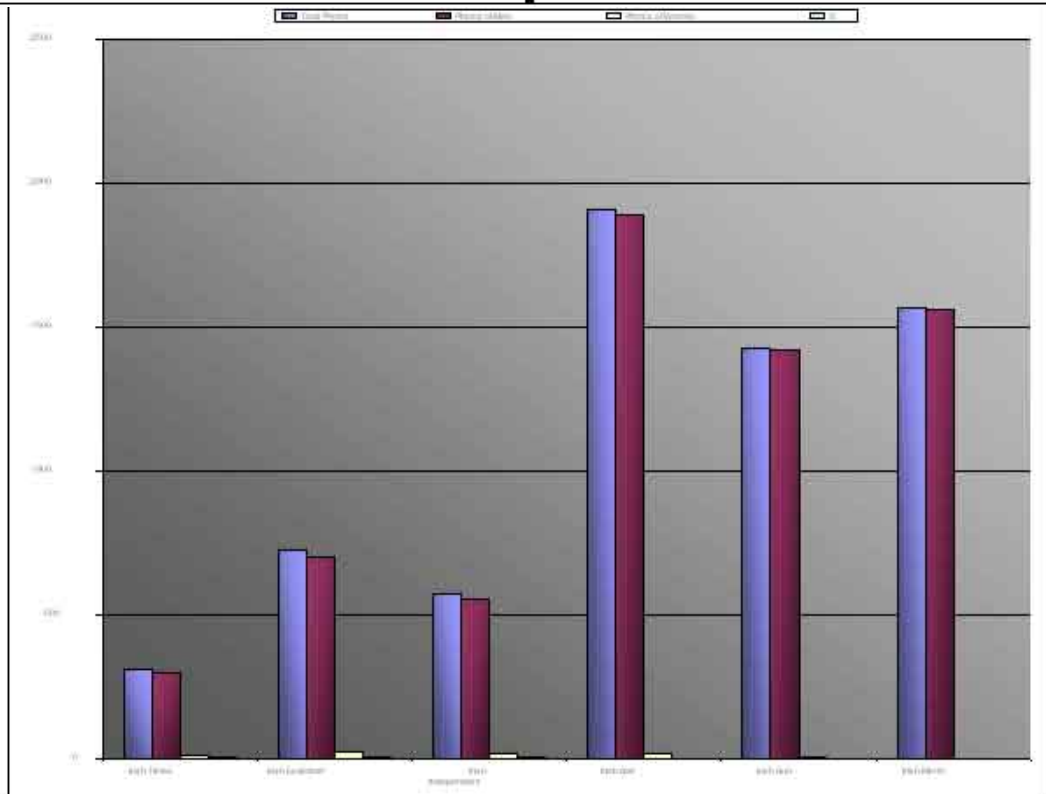
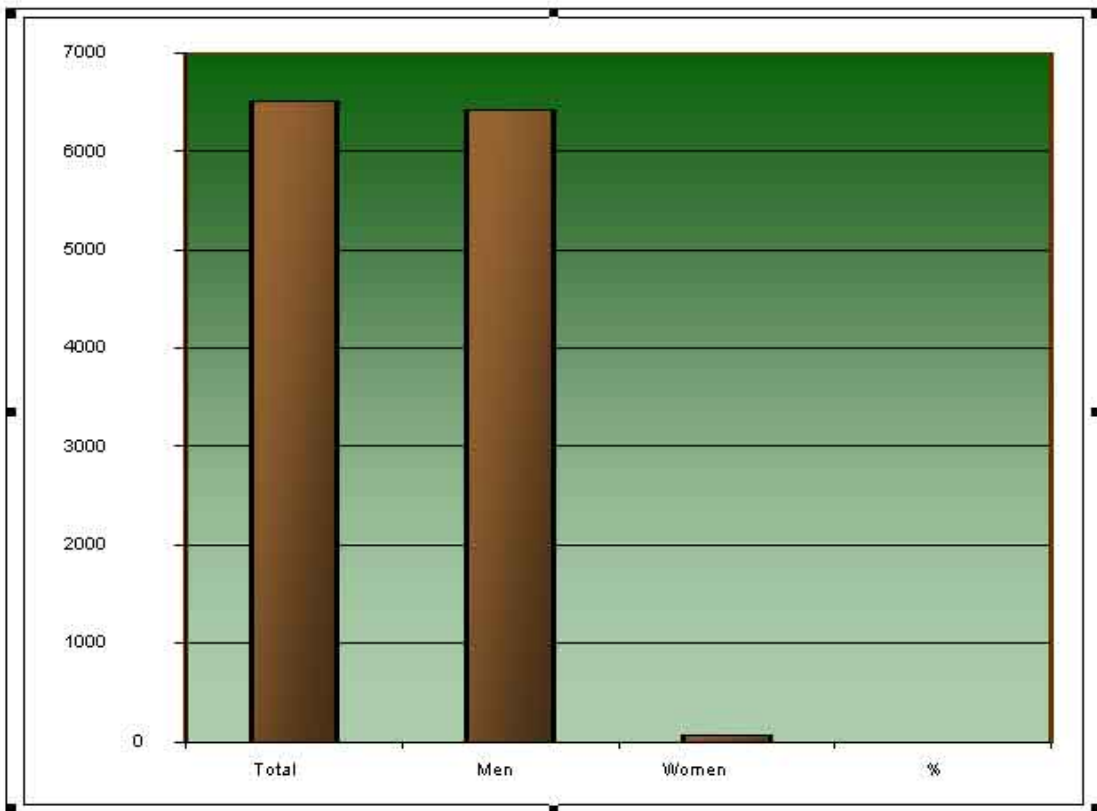
In 2003: 2.56% of the photos were of women.

In 2004: 2.89% of the photos were of women.

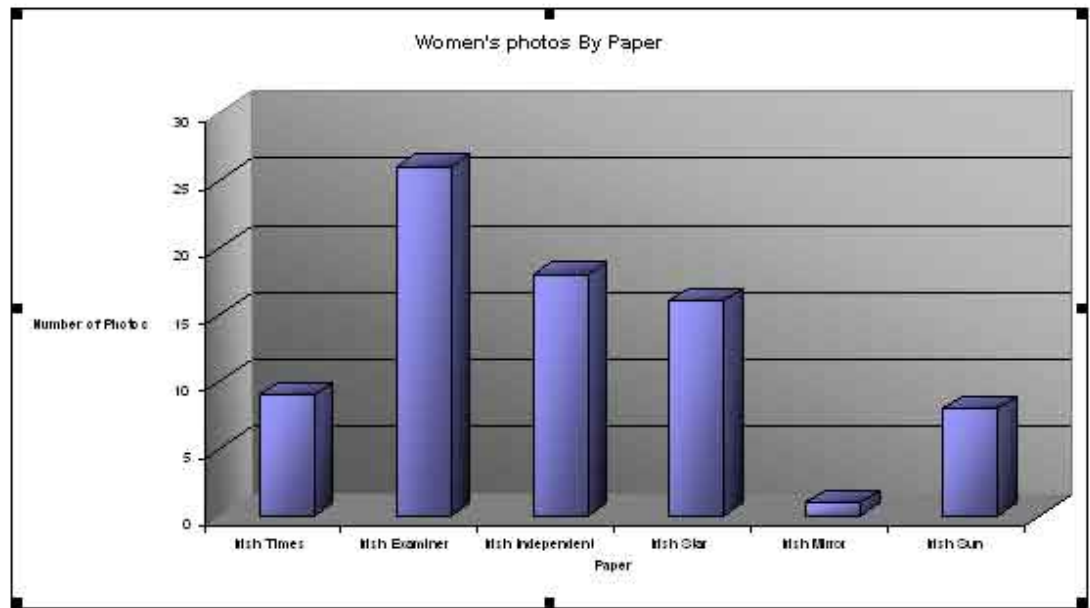
In 2005: 3.3% of the photos were of women.

In 2007: 1.2% of the photos were of women.

A photograph was considered to be a Team shot (1 photo) if it contained more than 4 people of the same gender. Officials were counted -members of the public were not.



Distribution of the 78 Photos of women across the 6 National Papers during the 2007 test period.



Photos by Newspaper compared to previous years



	02	03	04	05	07
Irish Times			10	11	9
Irish Examiner			26	20	26
Irish Independent			18	10	18
Irish Star			25	45	16
Irish Mirror			6	3	1
Irish Sun					8

In Jan 2002 over 10 days: of 1979 photos 1924 were of men and 55 were of women. 2.78% of the photos were of women.

Nov 2003, over 10 days: of 2687 photos, 2628 were of men and 69 were of women. (2.56%)

In Nov 2004, over 10 days: of 2946 photos, 2861 were of men & 85 were of women (2.89).

In Oct/ Nov 2005 , over 10 days: of 2753 photos, 2662 were of men & 91 were of women (3.3%).

In March/ April 2007, (over a three week period) of 6503 images 6425 of these were of men and 78 were of women (1.2%)

The Invisible Women In Irish Sport



We in the Dublin Sports & Recreation Council have no doubt that these figures are not at all representative of the numbers of women involved in sport at all levels from recreational to elite. On the basis of last year's figures the Dublin Sports & Recreation Council carried out a Post Card campaign aimed at encouraging the National News Papers to give women athletes the level of coverage they deserve.

So, why is it that women are so badly represented in the sports pages of our national Newspapers? The most common explanation offered is that it is men who read the sports pages and, therefore, the material is tailored to suit their tastes in sport. Yet, if we stick with that logic – nothing will change because women won't be interested in the sports pages as long as there is nothing there of interest to them – and the vicious circle continues.



The Dublin Sports & Recreation Council call on all Journalist and Newspapers, both Local and National, to become proactive on the representation of Female Athletes and Players in the reporting of Sports in all Irish Newspapers .

There are lots of women & men in Ireland both active and interested in women's sport. Give us more cover age and they will start to give you their custom. It can be a win/win all round.



As part of an extensive consultation carried out by the Dublin Sports & Recreation Council in 2002, the following points were noted on women and the media.

Stereotyping of women in all communication systems, especially in the media.

Our initial research on the number of girls and women featuring in the photographs in all of the Sports sections of all the Irish Daily Newspapers on a series of randomly chosen days, shows the absolute predominance of male imagery and male activities in the presentation, and therefore perception, of Sport in our national newspapers. The media presentation of Sport & Recreation is a key player in the vicious circle within which men read sports pages because men appear in sports pages because.....

Our research indicated that, over ten days, 1979 individuals featured in the sports pages of 5 Irish National Newspapers. 1924 (97.22%) of these photographs were of men and 55 (2.78) were of women.

We would suggest that this is an appropriate indicator and that we should be aspiring to an increase to 15% women within five years.

Our discussions explored the general phenomena of newspaper reading - and in particular the reading of sports pages. It was accepted as a current fact that mainly men read the sports sections of newspapers - therefore, as long as men are the newspaper's main client base, it is not surprising that primarily men are featured in these pages. Whilst this may be the case - it was felt that it still does not in any way justify a 97/3 ratio.

An interesting, but inconclusive, debate took place exploring why women do not read the sports sections of newspapers. There was however agreement that part of the truth lay in the traditional roles allocated to men and women in our society.

Should we encourage more women to read the sports sections or should we lobby the newspaper industry to make these pages (and indeed many other pages) more relevant to women ?

Should women make the effort to play the media game and to promote themselves and their achievements more assertively ?

Is the media reflecting, or creating, the gender reality in which it operates ?

It was noted that at least one Women's Sports magazine had been attempted in Ireland and had failed to remain commercially viable. This raised many questions;

Was it that women are not interested in such a publication?

Did the advertisers support the womens' sports magazine in the same way as they do men's sport ?



In 2004 Kevin Myers, writing in the Irish Times argued that women are simply not good to justify more coverage...

An Irishman's Diary

It's good to see that sleepless scrutineer of sexism, Jimmy Deenihan TD, complaining about the way the Irish media cover women in sport. The worthy deputy was part of an Oireachtas committee which recently produced a report on the subject. "I was very disturbed by the skewed nature of sports coverage in newspapers. A lot of the time you would be hard-pressed to find a female face in the sports pages and the statistics bear this out."

Well, you could equally say you would be hard-pressed to find a male model's photograph in our fashion sections, but I don't think that Oireachtas committees are likely to bother their pretty little heads on such a such subject. Our political class was long ago won over to the feminist agenda, which is why its members find it so easy to spout nonsense about the way journalists cover sport.

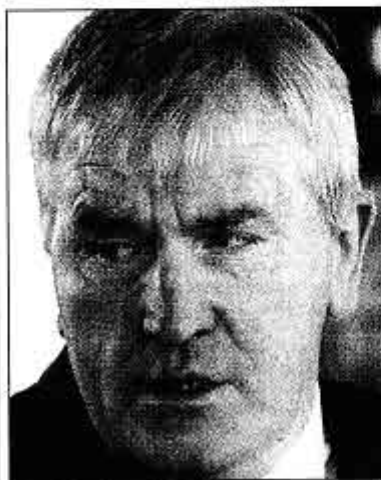
There isn't a more admired athlete in Ireland than Sonia O'Sullivan. There isn't a more admired athlete in Britain than Paula Radcliffe. Running her close second is Jenny McArthur — and only a fairly witless and hysterical chauvinism about England winning the rugby world cup prevented her from winning the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Award. If you remember, she was leading the round-the-world yacht competition when a wave snapped off both her masts, and her rudder, and she had to finish the final 5,000 miles in 100-foot waves and a force-18 hurricane, using a hand-held face-cloth as a sail, and steering with her foot. She finished second.

But what have yachting and running got in common? This. Neither is a regular weekend, mass-spectator sport. Perhaps Jimmy Deenihan wants us to have daily news reports on Sonia O'Sullivan's training sessions, but the poor journalists given that duty might find themselves running short of inspiration after the fifth month of Sonia's daily 15k jog. What our sports reports cover are sporting events which people really want to watch. On the same principle, our political reporters spend little effort — the lazy hounds! — following the careers of candidates who lose elections.

The women's senior football final last Sunday was watched by either 20,706 people or 27,000. The GAA doesn't know. When people don't count the spectators accurately, you can be sure the interest isn't really

Kevin Myers

there. It certainly wasn't in the terraces — the men's all-Ireland attracted not merely 80,000 spectators, but could have filled a stadium three times the size of Croke Park. Even relatively unimportant county matches



Jimmy Deenihan, TD: wants to see more pictures of women on sports pages

between men would effortlessly match the crowd watching the highlight of the women's footballing year.

There are no sporting events in Ireland played by women which attract large crowds. Or medium crowds. Or even small crowds. The only sporting events in the world involving women which draw large crowds are those held in conjunction with men's events — athletics and tennis. Maybe an all-female Wimbledon and all female-athletics meet would prove a larger draw than all-male events. Who can say? The heart of sporting coverage occurs every weekend. Yes, our sports journalists have been wantonly indifferent to the Miltown Malbay Ladies Darts Gala every Sunday, and also scandalously negligent of the women's weekly badminton challenge in Birr — but then we are not alone in that. You can count the spectators for both events on one hand, and even that's after the accident with the chainsaw.

We don't want to watch women playing sports because, generally speaking, they're not very good. They're small and they're weak and they're slow, and watching an average woman throw an object is a deeply moving tragedy.

Moreover, most (obviously, not all) schoolgirls detest physical team contests — which brings us to the Oireachtas committee's proposal to introduce special sports awards to encourage women to be more athletically active.

Young men play football because they love it, not

because they're bribed to play it: indeed for the most part, they'd pay for the privilege. Go to Phoenix Park on a Saturday or a Sunday, and you'll find hundreds of young men playing Gaelic and soccer.

Which is why the official Irish Sports Council figures that show that 50 per cent fewer women than men play sport seem a little dubious: there is no female equivalent of the rugby clubs and their myriad of male teams down to the fourteenth XV, so where are all these women athletes performing, and what are they doing?

Shopping doesn't count. Nor does using the mobile phone while you're parking.

To be sure, obesity is a growing problem among teenage girls — but a sporting bribe is not going to lure these teen-tubbies to the running track or the camogie pitch. In all truth, the requisite social engineering to attack this problem is not possible in a democracy. Why, our laws are so wretchedly inadequate that we can't even prevent corpulent teenage girls from wearing those curious boob-tubes which reveal a vast, bare hillside of abdominal lard in public.

The kind of sporting gender-journalism which Jimmy Deenihan and his committee want is one which pictorially celebrates plucky failure and gallant inadequacy, provided the athletes concerned have ovaries. Yet both men and women prefer to see pictures of women in newspapers. That's why, given a choice, and all other things being equal, a picture desk will always opt for a picture of a woman over a man. So sports pages, which show men's pictures rather than women's, go against the journalistic grain.

They don't do it because they want to. They do it because it's the truth.



The Dublin Sports & Recreation responded to Myres with the following open letter - published several days later.

Dear Editor,

Generally speaking women are not very good at sport..” according to Kevin Myres (IT Fri Oct 8th) that’s why we don’t see many pictures of sports women in the papers. He also proceeds to enlighten us to the fact that “all other things being equal, a picture desk will always opt for a picture of a women over a man.”

No body seems to have told his own newspaper’s picture desk about this ‘fact’.

In the same newspaper, on the same day, (excluding images of columnists and advertisements) there were 19 male, to 5 female images, relating to Political stories.

“All things being equal” as Kevin says - women must not be very good at Politics.

There were 13 male, to 5 female, images relating to Art/Media stories.

“All things being equal” - women must not be very good at the Arts.

There were 7 male to 0 female images relating to crime stories.

“All things being equal” as Kevin says...

16 male and 4 female images in the business section.

18 males and 0 female in the sports section.

Only in fashion did women thrive 7 / 0 – (all modelling material by male designers).

Throughout the paper there were 73 male , as against 21 female, images.

“All things being equal” as Kevin says - Women must not be very good at Life, or the papers would be full of all those images of women the picture-desk is so eager to print.

We in the Dublin Sports and Recreation Council carried out a piece of research quoted by the Oireachtas report on ‘Women in Sport’ regarding media coverage. We counted all sports images in Irish newspapers over a 10 day period and found that there were 2,687 images of which only 69 were of women.

The imagery in our national newspapers is not a passive reflection of reality – it is a powerful subconscious influence on the shaping of the readers perception of reality and, in turn, on the shaping of reality itself. Many people within the sports world are working hard to overcome a long tradition of male domination in sports. For example, how many readers are aware that women’s soccer was a thriving sport in the early 30’s in England until the FA banned the use of all its grounds by women. Positive change takes time and until the white males journalists of this world stretch their minds enough to explore the life experience and perceptions of those who are not born with their supremacist privilege - “All else will never be equal” – regardless of what Kevin says,

Sincerely

Brendan Dowling

Chairperson, Dublin Sports & Recreation Council



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