

2016 01 05 Correspondence with the SCMP

Linda Olson

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To:

Dear Mr. Wang and Ms. Graham,

I am forwarding an e-mail I received from your Sports Editor, Noel Prentice, who saw fit to cc my employer amongst many others about the concern I expressed regarding an [article](#) covering the 2016 Prudential New Year's Day (Rugby) tournament.

Does the SCMP regard as acceptable expressions of concern on the part of a reader being met with intimidation?

At the time the NYD article was published (Friday, 01 January, 2016, 11:49pm) it failed to reflect 50% of the tournament participants (the girls) in its headline, copy or photograph. i.e. the girls were essentially invisible. I also noted at the time that the U12 Girls and Captain were included as the second section of the embedded video. There is no doubt that the article as published was sexist in its gender bias. I asked the reporter to provide more inclusive coverage in future.

As you can see, I updated my comments to identify improvement when the article was updated (Sunday, 03 January, 2016, 10:21pm) while still pointing out that the girls received less coverage proportionally than the boys. I indicated that I would share these with my students as an example of gender bias (for information we study the topics of textual bias as well as language and gender). Contrary to what Mr. Prentice's e-mail suggests, I do not expect coverage of "any sport and all sports". What I do expect is fair gender coverage within the same event.

In fact, I am confused by Mr. Prentice's comment that the SCMP covers what has news value. I understand that the SCMP offers on its Rugby page niche coverage, presumably because it has an agreement with the HKRU. My comments were initially clearly with reference to a specific article. In relation to this, I need to have explained to me why the boys are more newsworthy in a tournament that features an equal number of girls. While we are discussing this, I have also wondered why the men's premiership club rugby is more newsworthy than women's in the context of Hong Kong which has one of the highest percentages of women's players in the world (nearly a quarter) - with seven women's teams and six men's involved. Does news value depend on genitalia? If so - should it? Are girls and women to feel grateful for disproportionately less coverage? Are readers to keep their opinions - based on irrefutable quantitative evidence about imbalanced gender coverage - to themselves? Please peruse the full correspondence with the reporter and Mr. Prentice. ***Is this the editorial position of the SCMP?***

In the interests of being fair and balanced as requested, and in making it clear I will **not** be intimidated, I am making this discussion public to the Women's Rugby community.

Mr. Prentice demands my respect. He and his staff have this as and when their journalistic and editorial policies and practices deserve it.

With thanks for your attention to this matter.

Linda

Linda Olson

Reply all |

You replied on 1/5/2016 10:24 PM.

Dear Noel,

Thank you for your e-mail. May I share it with my students?

Since you have included others in this discussion - here was my response to Kevin's e-mail.

With thanks,

Linda

Dear Kevin,

Thank you for your response to the my e-mail.

I have not described you as sexist - the adjective specifically describes 'coverage' of the 2016 NYD tournament.

I wrote to you because you were the author of the article about the 2016 Youth NYD tournament which at time of publication had no mention of 50% of the players. You are correct that those who did watch the video would have found the U12 girls' coverage in the video, which I made clear.

I understand from this e-mail that after a long work day you were keen to get the article out in a timely fashion and were waiting for more information from the HKRU.

I can see from your e-mail that the body of your work is supportive of girls and women's rugby - for which I thank you. Indeed - overall, there has been more coverage of girls and women's rugby over the last year with more articles and inclusion of the women's premiership club results on the SCMP/HKRU rugby page. There seems to be growing awareness that there is a Wrugby audience.

However, very often in the SCMP coverage - when both men and women or boys and girls are mentioned in

articles (rather than in separate coverage) - the females get short shrift. e.g. Weekly Club Premiership coverage where only a very small percentage of the article is about the women, usually tacked on in the last paragraph of the article. Although this is an improvement on last year - when there was no coverage of the women at club level - it can hardly yet be described as genuinely inclusive/representative -with 7 women's premiership teams and 6 men's - the proportion of coverage should be more like 50/50, surely. I have hope that this will be addressed in 2016.

Additionally, unless Hong Kong is involved, the SCMP does not yet cover major international women's rugby events in the way that it does the men's (e.g., the World Rugby Sevens Series, the Six Nations, and test games.

If you are able to do something about the above - I would greatly appreciate this. As you have chosen to cc multiple others in your response, I have included them in my cc as well in hopes that they will also consider the above suggestions.

To be frank, I am confused as to why you have mentioned Natasha so many times in your e-mail. The views I am expressing here and in 'Women's Rugby - Hong Kong' (WR-HK) are my own. My e-mail was about the 2016 NYD youth tournament article -which is ages 19 and under. It is obvious from the time that I spend on WR-HK that my concern for proportionate/equitable Wrugby coverage goes well beyond my daughter. I don't want anyone's daughter to be invisible, marginalized, or treated as a second class citizen.

With your permission, and with 'fairness' in mind - I would like to share your e-mail reply with my students. I am also quite happy to publish it, with your permission and without comment - in 'Women's Rugby - Hong Kong' (or you can yourself). Of course, if you would prefer that I do not do that - I will respect that as well.

Finally - thank you for the broader reporting on girls and women's rugby you have done and for making me aware of your substantial contributions to Wrugby coverage. As you may be aware - I regularly share SCMP articles in WR-HK whose membership has grown by over 1000 over the last year. It seems that even if we cannot agree about whether the coverage in the NYD tournament was gender-fair- we are actually allies.

All the best,

Linda

Noel Prentice

Reply all |

To:

You replied on 1/5/2016 1:15 PM.

Action Items

Dear Linda Olson,

I take exception to you accusing my reporter and SCMP of sexist coverage when Kevin has gone out of his way to cover rugby and the New Year's Day tournament. He spent 16 hours compiling the online and print coverage so please have some respect.

SCMP is a great supporter of rugby and we give what many consider a niche sport a disproportionate amount of coverage. And we have also gone out of our way to cover the emergence of women/girls in the game and the opportunity they have been afforded.

We do not have the resources to give blanket coverage to any sport and all sports and events are judged on their news value.

We also strive to be fair and balanced and I would expect you to also adhere to these principles when delivering any gender bias lectures to the students of Li Po Chun United World College of Hong Kong.

Noel Prentice
Sports Editor
South China Morning Post

-----Original Message-----

From: Kevin Kung

Sent: Tuesday, January 05, 2016 1:30 AM

Subject: RE: Sexist coverage of the 2016 Youth New Year's Day Rugby Tournament

Dear Linda and Marion,

I just received your messages as I am on leave after the NYD tournament.

Linda, I treasure your feedback but it's really sad to see you described me and my reporting as "sexist" because I have been working really hard to promote Hong Kong's women's rugby for years. Natasha and Christy Cheng know that.

If you ask Natasha, she should know I am the only reporter around to cover the Hong Kong women's team, not only during the Olympic qualifiers and had several interviews with her and other team members last year. You had figures in your e-mail and I would like to let you know at least two-third of the local women's rugby reports in SCMP in recent years were written by me, including this popular video on the women's team:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZN-hLb0D-iI>, with Natasha in it.

Here is a list of the reports on women's/girls' rugby:

The youngest member of the Hong Kong women's Sevens team is ready for action
<http://yp.scmp.com/news/sports/article/87172/blood-sweat-and-tears>

Rugby girls tackle start-up problems

<http://yp.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/3335/rugby-girls-tackle-start-problems>

Sevens heroine Aggie Poon and coach Anna Richards on Hong Kong's third-place finish at Olympics qualifier

<http://www.scmp.com/video/sport/1876770/sevens-heroine-aggie-poon-and-coach-anna-richards-hong-kongs-third-place-finish>

Hong Kong women stay optimistic ahead of the second day of the Asia Rugby Sevens Qualifier

<http://www.scmp.com/video/sport/1876555/hong-kong-women-stay-optimistic-ahead-second-day-asia-rugby-sevens-qualifier>

Women's sevens captain Christy Cheng says Hong Kong can qualify for the Rio Olympics

<http://www.scmp.com/video/sport/1874078/womens-sevens-captain-christy-cheng-says-hong-kong-can-qualify-rio-olympics>

Hong Kong skipper Christy Cheng says she must remain calm for Asian women's two-leg Olympic qualifier

<http://www.scmp.com/sport/rugby/sevens/article/1874547/christy-cheng-says-she-must-remain-calm-and-collected-asias-two>

China women make giant leap to earn core World Series status

<http://www.scmp.com/sport/rugby/article/1591992/china-make-giant-leap-earn-core-irb-world-series-status>

And another video with Natasha

<http://www.scmp.com/video/sport/1874655/hong-kong-name-sevens-squads-asia-olympic-qualifier>

And I have more which were not uploaded to the web. For the NYD Tournament, this is our first time in some years to have coverage in the main paper. I have been fighting for coverage on youth rugby for the main paper as these usually go to Young Post. The web version was first rewritten from a captioned story with a photo from the U19 boys' game and we were waiting for more information from the HKRU as I couldn't stay for the whole tournament and edit the video at the same time with no support. Our editor updated the story subsequently when we had more information available.

To remind people that this tournament is not only for boys, I produced a video clip including the U12 games to include another age group.

I started the day at 8am and left office at 1am, going back and forth from the HKFC and my office for editing and reporting, with a passion of delivering more community rugby news to our readers. I am delighted to see the overwhelming response and view counts for the report, but it is also very disappointing to see how you and the girls' think of us based on one report.

I can't say it's a good piece, but is it fair enough to tell your students it's a gender bias? You decide.

Anyway, I copied my boss Noel in this e-mail. If you have any suggestions, you can also send him a message. Night.

Regards,
Kevin Kung

Reporter , Sport & Racing
South China Morning Post Publishers Limited

寄件者: Linda Olson

寄件日期: Monday, 4 January, 2016 21:51

收件者: Kevin Kung

主旨: Re: Sexist coverage of the 2016 Youth New Year's Day Rugby Tournament

Dear Mr. Kung,

Thank you for the updates you have made to your article. This is what I have posted in <https://www.facebook.com/groups/womensrugbyhk/> about it.

UPDATE Some changes/improvements have been made to the NYD article:

1. Sub-headline includes the word "girls" making it gender neutral
 2. A photo with caption of Gracie Hood<<https://www.facebook.com/gracie.hood.5648>> (GH) has been added
 3. A paragraph was added at the end of the article - mentioning the U19s girls' game and GH being named Best and Fairest of the match.
- On the other hand - the following problems remain:
- A. No quotation from GH / the U19s girls' captain as there was with the boys.
 - B. A quantitative analysis shows that girls, who made up 50%, i.e. HALF of the tournament (excluding the Warriors exhibition match) were underrepresented as follows:
 - i. Photos and Video (initial view) 1 out of 4; Within the video 1/4 sections
 - ii. Percentage of 305 word count (including sub-headline, captions, and copy):
 - a. About boys (excluding the paragraph about Mark Coeberg because as winner of the Larry Abel Award - he should get extra attention) - $186/305 = 60.1\%$. If the paragraph on MC is included - $235/305 = 76.9\%$.
 - b. About girls only $55/305 = 18\%$
 - c. Neutral (about both) $19/305 = 6.2\%$

Good enough now? You decide.

I'll def be still be using it as an example of textual/media gender bias with my classes tomorrow... It still sends the unfortunate messages that the boys are center and the girls are an afterthought.

Linda H. Olson
Teacher of English & ToK / Head of House

From: Linda Olson

Sent: Sunday, January 3, 2016 7:09 PM

To:

Subject: Sexist coverage of the 2016 Youth New Year's Day Rugby Tournament

Dear Mr. Kung,

I am wondering why you only reported on boys' rugby in the article below? The headline makes it sound as if only boys took part. The article itself makes no mention of the girls who played.

The video includes only brief coverage of girls rugby (the U12s team and captain).

This is unacceptable.

Nearly a quarter of rugby players in Hong Kong are girls/women and it is the most rapidly expanding demographic here.

Please ensure that your coverage is more inclusive in future.

Linda