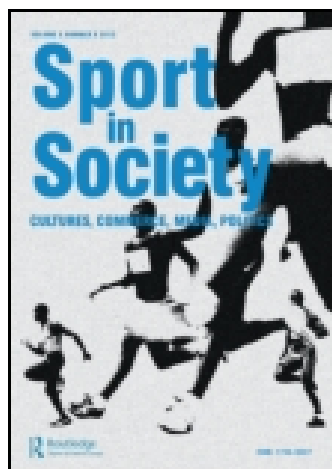


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Publisher: Routledge

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Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fcss20>

Are women still the 'other sex': gender and sport in the Polish mass media

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Published online: 12 Nov 2013.



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To cite this article: Honorata Jakubowska (2015) Are women still the 'other sex': gender and sport in the Polish mass media, *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, 18:2, 168-185, DOI: [10.1080/17430437.2013.854464](https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2013.854464)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2013.854464>

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Are women still the ‘other sex’: gender and sport in the Polish mass media

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The aim of this paper is to present and discuss the sports coverage in the Polish media from a gender perspective. Do women and men receive the same amount of coverage? It is assumed that the interest of the media depends, among other things, on the popularity of a sport and the fame of an athlete. However, it must be noted that the prestige of a sport depends on the gender of the participants. Furthermore, it can be assumed that male athletes have a greater chance of being in the focus of attention than women athletes. This paper has two main objectives: (1) to present the status of women’s events in the Polish media by comparing men’s and women’s coverage and (2) to point out the main explanations of the different treatment of male and female athletes by the Polish media. Both quantitative and qualitative data are used in this paper. The first set of data is secondary data concerning media coverage, viewership and the media value of athletes and sports. The results of *The International Sports Survey 2011* are quantitative in character and were conducted and coordinated by the author of this paper. The qualitative data – results of the author’s own research: individual in-depth interviews and focus group interviews – are of complementary nature. They are used to complement and discuss the information concerning media coverage.

Introduction

Differences in the media coverage of male and female athletes have been the topic of a number of publications in different countries (e.g. Duncan 1990; Daddario 1994; Duncan and Messner 1998; Messner 2002; Duncan, Messner, and Willms 2005; Billings 2008; Messner and Cooky 2010). According to the available studies, with reference to female sports, the media (1) devote less space or time to the coverage of women’s events than men’s events; (2) pay little attention to sports dominated by women, e.g. rhythmic gymnastics and synchronized swimming; (3) depreciate the achievements of women by focusing on the appearance of sportswomen or their roles outside sports rather than their sports skills and results; and (4) infantilize sportswomen by emphasizing childlike qualities or their roles as daughters (frequent in women’s female tennis), as well as through naming practices (use of terms such as ‘girls’, ‘our ladies’, the informal use of first names) (Daddario 1994; Fuller 2006).

Gender inequality with regard to the coverage is an important issue because the media play a very important role in sport today (Jhally 1989; Maguire 1993; Rowe 1999; Miller et al. 2001). Only the sports that are shown on television have any chance of gaining sponsors. The media make sports and athletes visible, and this affects their market value. Modern professional sport is organized around the ‘sports stars’, whose essential attribute is a ‘recognizability’ offered by the media (e.g. Andrews and Jackson 2001; Smart 2005; Whannel 2002).

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Nowadays, a sports fan consumes sports primarily through the media and in this way acquires a sports media *habitus*, as has been noted by Wu (2008). A sports fan receives so much information, regularly and repeatedly through the media, that she/he has become completely habituated to it. Watching competitions on television creates a set of dispositions, practices and, crucially, perceptions. Both what is shown and how it is shown significantly influences the way viewers perceive men and women in sports and how sports disciplines are perceived as 'feminine', 'masculine' or 'neutral' from the point of view of gender.

In Poland, the (un)equal treatment of male and female athletes by the media is absent from any public discussion in the media and is not at the centre of public attention. Most people seem not to be aware of the discrimination of female athletes in the media, or they consider the marginalization of female athletes to be 'normal' and 'natural'. Sport and sport in the media do not attract the attention of gender scholars or people engaged in feminist movements. This paper is meant to fill this gap, if only partially, and to familiarize the readers with the issue of sport and gender in the Polish media.

This paper has two main objectives: (1) to present the status of women's events in the Polish media by comparing men's and women's coverage and (2) to point out the main explanations of the (un)equal treatment of male and female athletes by the Polish media.

Methods

To achieve the objectives stated above, different kinds of data were used. These were, first of all, quantitative data, namely (1) available information about media coverage and viewership and (2) the results of the *International Sports Press Survey 2011 (ISPS 2011)*. During the part of the *ISPS 2011* conducted in Poland, 815 articles from three newspapers, *Gazeta Wyborcza* (the biggest national newspaper), *Fakt* (the biggest tabloid) and *Polska Głos Wielkopolski* (the biggest regional newspaper) were analysed according to key code by students and PhD students of the Institute of Sociology at Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznań) under the author's coordination.¹ The methodology used in this research was constructed by the Play the Game organization (Denmark) in cooperation with German Sport University Cologne. The main purpose of this research was to study how sport is presented in the print media.

This paper also draws on qualitative research. More than 40 individual in-depth interviews were conducted by the author in the first half of 2012. The material gathered will be presented and discussed in a forthcoming book about gender and sport in Poland. Media coverage was one of the issues raised in the interviews. Other issues included sports socialization, training, financial dimensions, etc. The interviewees were sportswomen, coaches and members of sports clubs and federations active in five sports disciplines (football, running, boxing, shooting and chess). The athletes interviewed were only women while the trainers, club members and federation members were mostly men, as men tend to dominate these professions and institutions. All informants came from the Wielkopolska Province, but most of them have an insight into the situation in Poland in general because they have been members of national teams or work with national teams. Thus, it can be claimed that their statements refer to sport in Poland in general, not only in Wielkopolska.

One should be aware that informants may be biased in their opinions and feel that the media do not cover their disciplines sufficiently. However, their statements correspond with the quantitative data to a large extent, which makes them reliable. With reference to media coverage, the data drawn from the interviews are treated as complementary to the quantitative data.

In addition, three focus-group interviews with 30 sports fans (both women and men) living in Poznań (the capital of Wielkopolska Province) were conducted in summer 2012.

Like the in-depth interviews, these interviews were carried out with the aim of gathering material for the above-mentioned book on sport and gender in Poland. The main questions concerned the perception of sports along the continuum 'feminine' versus 'masculine' and sports watching habits. One group consisted exclusively of women, one exclusively of men and the third group included male and female fans. The main argument for this division, which was confirmed during the interviews, was the fact that sex/gender is an important criterion in the perception of sport. This issue will be discussed later in this paper. The sample in this research was not representative, so the results are used rather as an illustration of some of the phenomena discussed and not as evidence.

Gender (in)equality in the Polish media

The analysis of television sports news and the press coverage of sport shows that the Polish media focus mainly on men's competition (Figure 1).

Almost 90% of sports news concerned men's events and only about 10% presented women's events. The results of the *International Sport Press Survey 2011* showed, furthermore, the domination of football in the Polish print media. Of the 815 articles from three newspapers (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Fakt* and *Polska Głos Wielkopolski*) analysed between April and May 2011 during the *ISPS 2011*, 57% were concerned with men's football. The dominance of football in the media was confirmed by the analyses of TV news conducted by sociology students in 2012 and 2013. In Kluczyńska's (2011) studies, 55% of the analysed television sports news from four channels (TVP1, TVP2, TVN, Polsat; Sep.–Dec. 2008, 518 items of sports news) related to football – football thus constituting 62% of all information about men's sports. Kluczyńska also discovered that football appeared at the beginning of sports news programmes; and only in exceptional circumstances (e.g. gold medals won by Poles in world championships) did it give way to other sports information, including information about sportswomen.

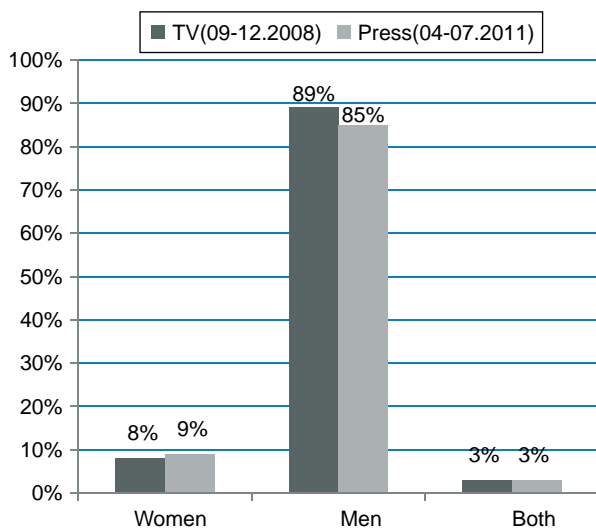


Figure 1. Gender of athletes in Polish sports news.

Source: Kluczyńska's own research on TV news (Kluczyńska 2011, 390) and International Sports Press Survey 2011.

In comparison to the international results of the *ISPS Survey 2011* (Horky and Nieland 2011), Polish journalists wrote significantly more about motor sports, in particular, speedway (8% of articles). The third discipline in terms of the number of articles was basketball, which was due to the women’s EuroBasket championship being played in Poland (Figure 2).

The print media focus on team sports. The contents of two-thirds of the articles analysed for the *ISPS 2011* dealt with team sports, primarily men’s team sports (Figure 3).

Three-quarters of the articles on women’s events were related to individual sports, while in the case of men, it was only a little more than one third. Thus, men are more often covered in team sports than women.

Like the press, Polish television focuses its attention primarily on other team sports (volleyball, handball and basketball) besides football and motor sports (Pentagon Research 2011). During winter, two other sports besides football dominate the Polish media, especially at weekends: ski jumping and cross-country skiing.

The *ISPS 2011* also revealed significant differences in the number of articles covering men’s and women’s events in the various disciplines (Table 1).

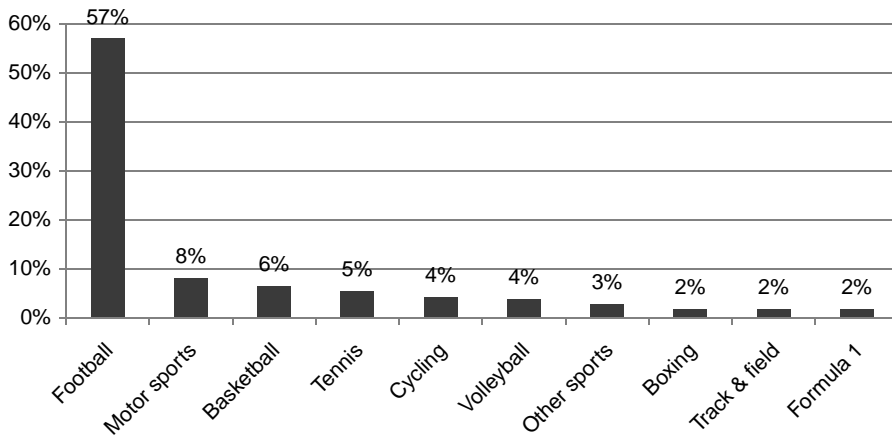


Figure 2. The top 10 sports disciplines reported on in the Polish press.
Source: The International Sports Press Survey 2011.

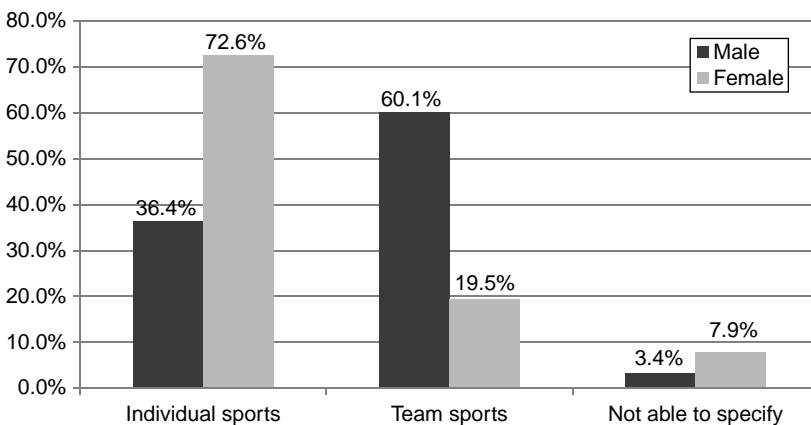


Figure 3. Proportions of individual and team sports in the Polish press.
Source: The International Sports Press Survey 2011.

Similar data on television broadcasting are not available. Based on incomplete information (a one-month analysis of 11 TV channels conducted in February 2011), one can say that the differences are similar to those observed in the print media (Pentagon Research 2011). These disparities were also confirmed by representatives (athletes and coaches) of the various disciplines during the author's research. An explanation for the gendered nature of the coverage will be provided in subsequent sections.

Different disciplines: different reasons for unequal media coverage

As mentioned above, most of the articles analysed during the *ISPS 2011* related to football. None of them, however, were concerned with women's games – neither Polish events nor matches in the women's World Championship that took place in Germany during the summer of 2011. The marginalization of women's football is not characteristic of the period analysed and the print media alone, all of the respondents involved in women's football who were interviewed by the author also attested to the fact that the discipline received very little media coverage. According to one of the coaches 'the media are not generally interested [in women's football – HJ]. It is very difficult' (P/O, football).² According to another coach, there exists an unfounded belief in the sports environment that women's football 'is not a product, and [that] no one wants to watch it' (J/O, football).

Table 1. The number of articles concerning men's and women's events.

	Sex of athletes				Sum
	Men	Women	Both	Not specified	
Football	461	0	0	3	464
Other motor sports	64	0	0	1	65
Basketball	22	30	0	0	52
Tennis	19	21	3	1	44
Cycling	25	7	2	0	34
Volleyball	21	9	1	0	31
Other sports	8	0	2	14	24
Boxing	14	0	0	1	15
Track and field	7	2	6	0	15
Formula 1	14	0	0	0	14
Ice jockey	11	0	0	0	11
Team handball	11	0	0	0	11
Canoe and kayak	0	2	6	0	8
Field hockey	6	0	1	0	7
Martial arts and wrestling	3	0	0	2	5
Equestrian sports	1	0	2	0	3
Rugby	0	0	0	3	3
Bodybuilding and fitness sports	0	0	2	0	2
Sailing	1	0	0	1	2
Cricket	0	0	0	1	1
Dancing	1	0	0	0	1
Nordic skiing	0	0	0	1	1
Swimming	1	0	0	0	1
Table tennis	1	0	0	0	1
Sum	691	71	25	28	815

Source: The International Sports Press Survey 2011.

At the same time, the informants have noted some positive changes since 2005, caused one the one hand by the reorganization of women's leagues and on the other hand by broader sociocultural changes (e.g. a growing importance of physical activity, a growing acceptance of women in 'male' sports, changes in socialization patterns). As an example of such a change, the informants pointed to the broadcasts of the games played by the women's national team and shown on TVP Sport (a public sports channel) for the first time in 2011. It will probably take a long time before women's football matches are shown as frequently as those of their male colleagues in the main public TV channels (if it is ever going to happen), but the broadcasts of the national team's matches are a sign of positive changes. TVP Sport also showed selected matches of the women's Olympic football tournament in 2012. The whole Olympic tournament was covered by nSport, a private TV channel, where female players and coaches were invited to comment on the matches. It should also be noted that the Eurosport channel broadcasts almost all major women's football tournaments, which has contributed to an increase in the popularity of women's football, evidenced by a growing number of female football players and teams.

Men's football in Poland is primarily covered by pay TV channels that do not show the women's league matches. There have been only a few broadcasts of women's matches. The regional TV stations broadcast women's football as well as men's, but only infrequently. One can agree with one of the informants, who said that the local media 'have a mission here. There are many regions where a women's football team is the one with the biggest achievements [among athletes in the region – HJ]' (U/A/O, football). It should be noted, however, that sports clubs often solicit the interest of the local media, using their contacts with local journalists, or look for a sponsor who will pay for the broadcast of the match (this applies only to the local media). Therefore, although women are more successful than men (at the local level in particular localities), they do not appear on TV.

Several informants also pointed out that the media sometimes also cover women's football during major football tournaments for men, as a kind of 'peculiarity'. One of the female players said:

... when there is an event, such as the men's World Cup, the media always wake up and want to speak about women, as a kind of opposition [to the men's event – HJ]. The same situation took place during Euro 2012. Interviews with women players were published. Usually, it is the case that there must be an event in men's football to show or print something about women. (G/A, football)

It may be surprising that women's football appears in the context of men's football. In the author's opinion, however, it highlights the status of women's football in Poland; as mentioned above, women's football is perceived as a 'peculiar' rather than as a 'normal' everyday practice.

The statement quoted above was confirmed by other informants. Women's football is more marginalized in the media than other sports; usually it is not covered at all. And although there are also differences between the attention given by the media to men and women in other sports disciplines, they are nowhere as large as in the case of football. First of all, these differences may be connected with financial aspects. Men's football has a professional character: it is perceived as a product, a business, and therefore comes under the rules of the market and the media. Women's football, with its rather amateur and niche character, is not perceived in this way. Disparities in media coverage cannot be explained by the number of female players. Although women constitute only 1% of all football players, their number is comparable with the number of female volleyball or basketball players, who appear in the media more often.

As in the case of football, none of the articles about motor sports that were analysed for the purposes of the *ISPS 2011* was concerned with women. However, it should be noted that the number of women practising motor sports in Poland is very small. For example, it was only in 2013 that the first Polish woman was licensed to compete in speedway. In several other sports, such as boxing, ice hockey and handball, women's events were also absent from the print media during the *ISPS 2011*. The most popular of these three in the Polish media is boxing.

This sports discipline is often present in the media, but in the majority of cases, the media broadcast a professional boxing fight and not amateur boxing. As one of the informants said, 'the media tend not be interested [in amateur boxing – HJ]. It's difficult. Professional boxing is more popular, the media show the boxing galas, etc.' (N/O, boxing). The domination of professional boxing on television is important from a gender perspective because in contrast to amateur boxing there are hardly any women practising it.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the stars of the Polish sports world and the media were two Polish women who were the first to practise professional boxing and kickboxing and the winners of many championship titles: Iwona Guzowska and Agnieszka Rylik. They often appeared in the media and became well known; and they still are, due to their careers in public life (the first one as a parliamentarian, the second as a journalist). The lack of successors made women's professional boxing disappear from the media.

In recent years, Karolina Owczarz, one of two current professional women boxers, has gained the attention of the media, albeit rather disproportionately to her success. As a professional boxer she took part in only four fights in Poland and is not recognized abroad. Despite the absence of major successes, she has been invited to many TV programmes, interviews with her have been published in various magazines and she has taken part in many photo sessions. The media's interest in Owczarz resembles that shown to Anna Kournikova, an ex-tennis player who was recognized more for her beauty than her sports skills (e.g. Smart 2005; Wertheim 2002; Harris and Clayton 2002).

In 2012, for a short time, Karolina Michalczuk, the first Polish female boxer at the Olympics, became a media heroine. This temporary interest was due to the debut of women's boxing at the Olympics and an absence of Polish male boxers. As mentioned above, the media are not usually interested in amateur boxing.

The informants explained the lack of interest in amateur boxing by pointing to, among other reasons, the absence of good results (in men's boxing), which makes negotiations with sponsors more difficult. Although female boxers are successful, the media do not broadcast their competitions either. In the interviews, the informants associated with boxing also mentioned that (as in the case of women's football) the clubs' management called the media asking them to come and broadcast even a short fragment of a women's boxing event. The female boxers stressed that the media showed very limited interest in the women's events, but – as in the case of women's football – things were starting to change very slowly. The Internet plays a crucial role in this process as this is where a great deal of information about women's boxing may be found: its history, news, reports from events and numerous interviews with boxers. However, television is rarely present at training camps or during women's major tournaments.

Several explanations can be given for gender disparities in the media coverage of boxing. Women's fights in professional boxing are not shown because female professional boxing practically does not exist in Poland. The gender issue does not seem to be crucial in this case. On the other hand, in the case of amateur boxing, gender appears to be important. For a long time, Polish sportsmen were very successful in boxing, and this discipline was one of the most important in Polish sports history. Furthermore, boxing has always been

associated with traditional masculinity. Success in women's boxing highlights the decline of men's boxing and, at the same time, deprives the discipline of its 'masculine' character. Broadcasting women's boxing would strengthen this message. The third reason is the viewers' unwillingness to watch women in combat sports. Boxing is associated with aggression and violence, and, as such, women's boxing is inconsistent with the traditional image of femininity. In this context it should be also mentioned that the history ('herstory'; Pfister 1996, 213) of women's boxing, both amateur and professional, is much shorter than that of men's boxing. Therefore, viewers, as well as sponsors, may need time to get used to women involved in martial arts. On the other hand, other sports with only a slightly longer 'herstory' (at least at the Olympics, e.g. weightlifting and pole vault) are more often broadcast in the media. This means that not only the history of discipline but also its character matters.

Only in two disciplines, basketball and tennis, was the number of articles on women's events greater than those on the men's events. In the case of basketball, as mentioned above, it was due to the women's EuroBasket championship, played in Poland. The high number of articles on tennis is mainly due to Agnieszka Radwańska, one of best players in the WTA ranking. During the winter the same can be said about the Polish 'Queen of Winter', the cross-country skier Justyna Kowalczyk, one of the best in the world in her discipline.

Small, but relatively higher compared with other sports, was the number of articles on women's cycling and volleyball. Maja Włoszczowska is one of the sportswomen representing the first discipline who appears very often in the media. For many people she is a good illustration of how much physical attractiveness matters in the case of a sportswoman. The perception of physical attractiveness as a 'password' to the media is confirmed by international research (e.g. Duncan 1990; Kane, and Greendorfer 1994; Messner 2002; Billings 2008). Without wishing to question Maja Włoszczowska's sporting successes (a Olympic silver medal, many European and World Championship medals, including gold), it should be noted that the media are interested in her more than other sportswomen with comparable achievements. Physical attractiveness is also important for female volleyball players and helps them maintain the interest of the media. However, their popularity may be due to the success they had in the years 2003 and 2005 when they won the European Championships.

Differences between the coverage of women's and men's events can be explained by different factors. The first one is simply the smaller number of women or women's events in some sports, as well as a shorter 'herstory' – a shorter history of women's events, as demonstrated by the example of motor sports. The second, very important, factor is the financial dimension, the perception of a sports event as a product that will attract the attention of viewers and sponsors. The third factor is the perception of some sports as 'male' and the lack of acceptance of women taking part in them. They are seen as negating the traditional images of femininity, and the media usually promote those women who fit these images.

However, women become heroines of sports news when they succeed in sports, especially in sports where there are no men who are equally successful. This rule does not apply to the so-called 'male' sports, as shown by the example of boxing. For men, the element of success is not required, which is very well illustrated by the amount of information dedicated to the men's national team and club competitions in football. In the Polish media it is not only the case of football but also other team sports and motor sports. One could say that the media coverage of men's sport is based on the popularity of the discipline, and the coverage of women's sport focuses around the names.

Asked about athletes who have achieved a significant success in recent years, participants of the focus groups listed at least a few women. In addition to Agnieszka Radwańska and Justyna Kowalczyk, mentioned above, Anita Włodarczyk (hammer throw), Anna Rogowska and Monika Pyrek (pole vault) were mentioned, along with ex-competitors Renata Mauer-Różańska (two-time Olympic champion in shooting) and Agata Wróbel (two-time Olympic medallist as well as European and world champion in weightlifting). The author's own studies and secondary data confirm that sportswomen who have become successful are shown by the media, become recognizable and are appreciated by sports fans (Kompas Social Media 2012).

Women as a minority in sports journalism

The marginalization of women's sports can also be explained by the marginalization of female sports journalists. The discrimination of women in this environment has been confirmed by many studies (e.g. Etling 2002; Lapchick, Brenden, and Wright 2006). The results of the *ISPS 2011* show that sports journalism in the print media is a man's world: 92% of the articles were written by men and only 8% of the articles by named journalists were written by women. The proportions in Poland look even less favourable for women, who are the authors of only 5% of the articles (Figure 4).

It should be noted that these figures relate only to those articles accompanied by the author's full name. Thus, if one also takes into account the articles with only the author's initials, it can be assumed that the extent of male dominance is even greater. In Poland, only 14 (out of 287) articles with the author's full name were written by women, and hardly any (just one) were directly related to sporting events (results, reports of sports events or previews of sports events).

It is estimated that only 10% of all journalists working in sports are women (Cecamore et al. 2011). On Polish television, the number of women appearing on sports programme is very small. Usually, there is only one woman working as a sports news presenter on every TV channel. Women rarely prepare sports news, and if they do, it is most often related to certain issues around sports events, such as the elections in sports federations, technical problems at a stadium, etc. The situation is slightly better in the local media, where the number of women is greater. Women work least frequently as sports commentators, both

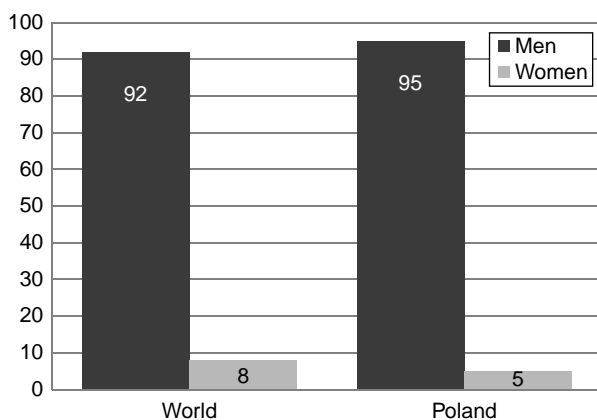


Figure 4. Gender of journalist.

Source: The International Sports Press Survey 2011.

during ‘everyday’ broadcasts and at major sports events. For example, Polish public television did not send a single female journalist to the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

It sometimes happens, though, that women do appear as commentators, or even as experts, but only in the case of women’s events or ‘feminine’ sports such as figure skating or gymnastics. Extremely rare are cases in which women comment on men’s events, either live or in the studio. However, certain exceptions can be noted, e.g. Agnieszka Rylik commenting on a boxing event as an ex-competitor.

The questions raised in the discussion that took place in the late 1970s in the USA about the role of women as sports commentators are still valid: ‘Why can women talk about such things as war, riots and presidential travels, and cannot talk about sports? Why is there a sacred relation between men and sports?’ (Morse 2003, 22). The answer to these questions is not simple, and should be the issue of a separate article. However, it seems that the sources of male dominance in the journalists’ environment should be seen in the sports socialization process and the acquisition of sports *habitus* and taste, which will be discussed later in this article.

As shown by the results of the *ISPS 2011*, women write more often about women’s sports. Only 8% of articles written by men concerned women’s events while, in the case of women as authors, this share grew to 28% (Figure 5).

The data in Table 2 show that both female and male journalists focus their attention on football. However, in the coverage of other sports disciplines gender differences can be seen.

Compared with men, female journalists wrote more about tennis and less about team sports. It is interesting to see that 13% of the articles written by women were concerned with disciplines not listed among the 31 disciplines of the key code. This result confirms that women are marginalized in the world of sports journalism not only in the quantitative but also in the qualitative dimension, i.e. with reference to the importance (popularity) of particular sports disciplines.

One can assume that increasing the number of sports journalists could bring about a greater presence of women’s sports in the press or – more broadly – in the media. However, as pointed out by Hardin and Shain (2005), ‘female sportswriters may help uphold masculine hegemony in sport’ (quoted in Kian 2007). They may not be interested in covering women’s sports ‘in large part due to a lack of career enhancement opportunities and a perceived lack of interest in women’s sports from newspaper readers’

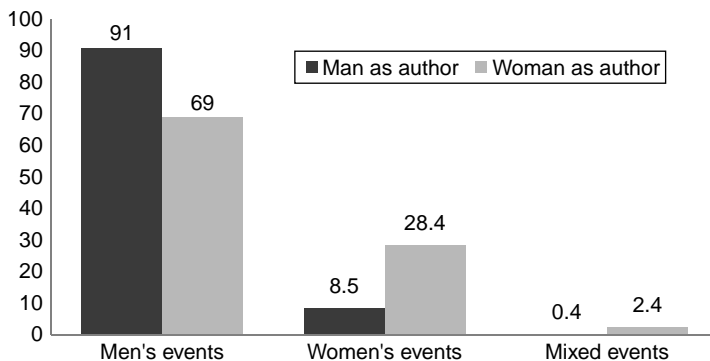


Figure 5. The percentage of articles written by male and female authors on men’s and women’s events. Source: The International Sports Press Survey 2011.

Table 2. Sports disciplines more frequently covered by male and female authors.

Men wrote most frequently about (%)		Women wrote most frequently about (%)	
Football	40	Football	25
Rugby	8	Tennis	15
Tennis	6	Sports not included in the key code	13
Hockey	5	Athletics	6
Cricket	5	Cycling	2

Note: Data refer to international results, in Polish press the number of articles written by women was too small to compare.

Source: The International Sports Press Survey 2011.

(Miloch et al. 2005, quoted in Kian 2007). The aim must be to increase the number of female journalists, but it is also necessary to increase the importance of women's sports events. Then, female sports journalists could write more about these important women's sports events and raise their own status in the hierarchy of sports writers.

Gendered taste of audience

Another explanation for the dominance of men's events in media coverage can be provided by the assumed taste of the audience. Gender differences are crucial here. According to Wu:

... no matter how significant gender difference in mediated sports audiences might be, the mass media are convinced that the majority of their viewers and readers are men and therefore their representation of sport has a strong and overt male-orientated appeal. (2008, 162)

In Poland, the percentage of people interested in sports has decreased in recent years (see Figure 6).

This decreasing interest in sport, characteristic primarily of younger age groups, is explained mainly by greater access to various forms of entertainment, including the Internet. According to a survey carried out in 2012, shortly before Euro 2012 (which may have affected the results), only 30% of Poles were not interested in sport (TNS Digital Life

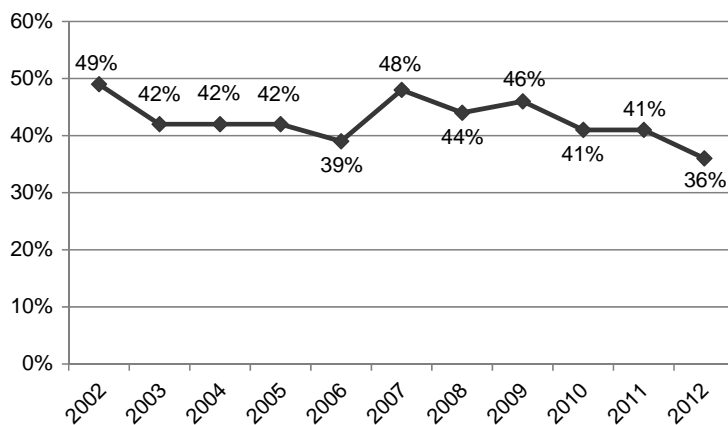


Figure 6. The percentage of people interested in sports in Poland (2002–2012).

Source: ARC Rynek i Opinia (2013). ($n = 1808$, age: 15–65 years, method – CAPI).

2012). This survey stressed gender differences in people's (lack of) interest in sport. Among those who were interested in sport, 60% were men and 40% were women. But among those who were not interested in sports, 77% were women.

The Polish fan is primarily a television fan. Ninety percent of fans watch sports events on TV, 18% follow other media and only about 13% of fans are (infrequently) present at the stadium or in a sports hall (see Figure 7).

Viewers of sports transmission are primarily men, which was confirmed by research conducted in the Wielkopolska Province in 2012 (see Figure 8).³

Only 10% of women and up to 64% of men stated what they watched sports programmes. At the same time, about 30% of women assessed sports transmissions as one of the worst TV programmes, as compared with 4% of men. Therefore, gender-differentiated attitudes towards sports and sports consumption can be perceived as an issue of gendered *habitus* and taste (Pfister, Lenneis, and Mintert, forthcoming).

Gender influences not only a general (lack of) interest in sport but also the choice of sports disciplines to watch. According to a survey from 2006 (ARC Rynek i Opinia 2006; more recent data are not available), the most 'feminine' disciplines with regard to audience were aerobics, figure skating and horse riding, and the most 'masculine' were chess, judo, Formula 1 and boxing (see Figure 9).

To a large extent the gender ratio among viewers coincides with the perception of sports as 'feminine' or 'masculine' (Koivula 1995, 2001). According to Whiteside and Hardin (2011), female viewers prefer to watch sportswomen in 'female' disciplines such as gymnastics, skating and tennis; they do not like to watch too 'masculine', strong and muscled female athletes. This was also confirmed by the author's research, in which female viewers presented very negative opinions about women taking up boxing and, especially, weightlifting.

The female participants of the focus-group interviews stated that they usually watched competitions in which Poles participated, particularly those with a chance of success, and all major sporting events like the Olympic Games. While some of them had their favourite discipline (e.g. tennis, handball, jump diving, track and field), it was difficult to identify one or two sports that were primarily attractive to them. Men stated that they usually watched both Polish and foreign football. In addition to football, the male respondents willingly followed games in the other team sports, including, in particular, volleyball. Most of the

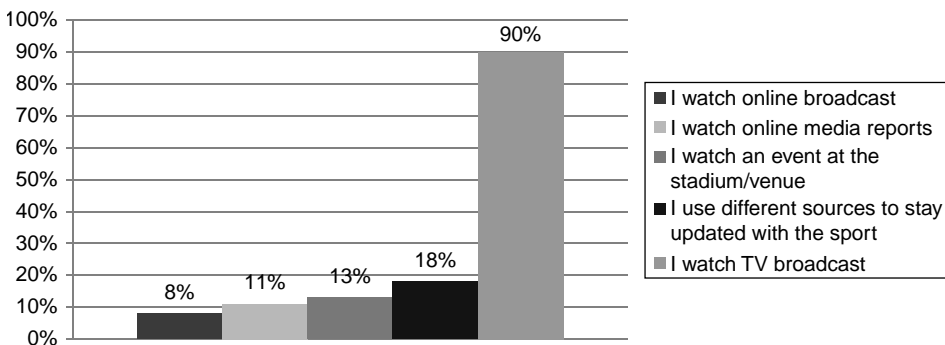


Figure 7. What do you do to stay updated with sports?
Source: TNS Digital Life (2012).

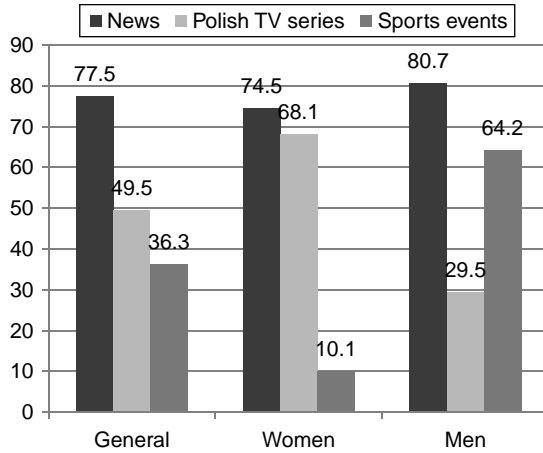


Figure 8. Favourite types of TV programmes according to sex (%). Source: Mateja-Jaworska (2013).

male respondents were also viewers of motor sports. Less important for the male participants of the focus-group interviews was the participation of Poles in the competition.

Both female and male viewers prefer to watch men’s events rather than women’s events (Farrell 2006; Whiteside and Hardin 2011). This was also confirmed by the author’s own research: all respondents reported that they usually watched men’s competitions. Only in the case of the Olympic Games, did the sex of the athletes not matter. Asked to compare male and female competitions, the respondents described men’s events as better, more spectacular and dynamic. As examples they mentioned volleyball, tennis and handball. Three of the respondents stated that they could not imagine watching women’s football. The focus-group participants who stated that they were interested in football

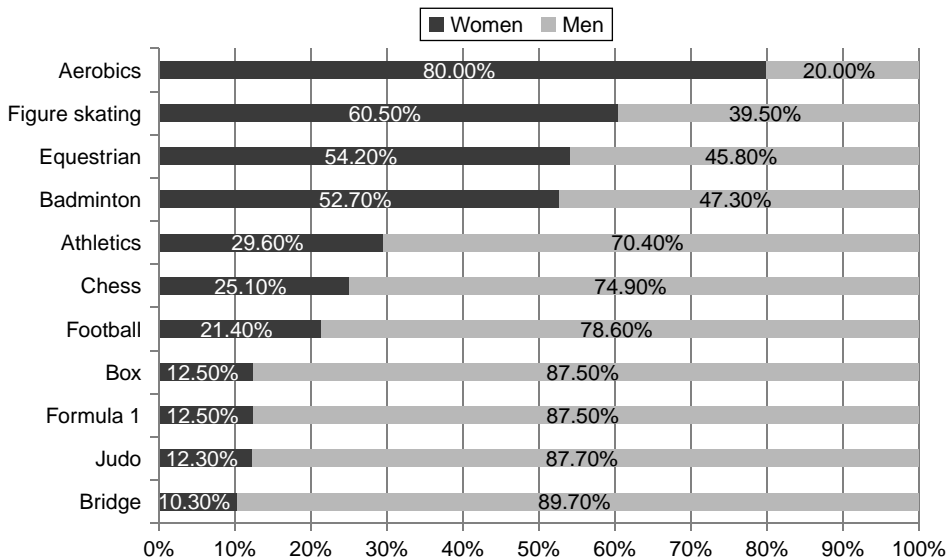


Figure 9. The viewership of sports disciplines according to sex (2006). Source: ARC Rynek i Opinia (2006).

watched only men's football and only a few of the respondents watched the women's events or fragments of them.

This lower evaluation of women's events may be related to viewing habits, which favour primarily men's sports. As it is mainly men's sports which are shown on television, they become the norm, determining the level and style of the competition. It should also be mentioned, however, that women usually watch sports due to the male members of the family. In childhood, their tastes are formed by their fathers (and also brothers) and in adult life by their partners or husbands. One of the conclusions of the research carried out by Farrell (2006) was that women do not treat sport in the media as a pleasure in itself but as a tool to share time with the men or, more broadly, the family. And because men usually watch men, women watch them too.

Not only gender matters

Although gender is a very important factor influencing media coverage and the tastes of consumers, it is also important to stress that other factors become sometimes more important, both for the media and viewers.

The first factor – the presence of stars and a chance of good results – can be illustrated by taking the example of athletics. Athletics, in particular, running, are popular topics in the media. This was confirmed by the respondents associated with the discipline, but, as they stressed, interest is restricted to the major athletic events with the participation of the world's stars. According to one informant, 'Today no one is interested in an athletics event with the participation of the Polish champion and a Polish record. If there is no widely recognized star, such as Isinbajewa, everything else is unimportant' (SZ/O, athletics). An ex-contestant confirmed that Polish running is not attractive enough to be shown in the media. She elaborated on this by adding '[because of] the lack of good results, success (...) And if you're good, they (will) talk about you, it will sell forever' (Z/A, athletics). The value of specific events is determined primarily by the two factors mentioned above: the presence of stars and the chances of good results, e.g. breaking the current world record. The gender of the athletes is not important in this case, as shown by Isinbajewa's example.

For sponsors as well as brands, rankings of the media-generated value (calculated using the average CPT [cost per thousand] for monitoring channels and sports events viewership) are an important indicator of the media coverage of various sports disciplines and their viewership. The data from 2011 confirm previously presented conclusions (Pentagon Research 2011). The most watched sports are (men's) football, (men's) ski jumping and men's and women's volleyball. It is worth noting that the high (fifth–sixth) position in the rankings of cross-country skiing should be attributed not to the discipline itself but to Justyna Kowalczyk, the only recognized and successful cross-country skier. For a decade, the star of ski jumping was Adam Małysz, and now his successors, Kamil Stoch and Piotr Żyła, are at the centre of media attention. Ski jumping is a kind of phenomenon in Poland. The long-lasting successes of Adam Małysz made Poles devoted fans of ski jumping. Competitions in which he participated achieved record audiences. The examples of Justyna Kowalczyk and Adam Małysz show that an athlete who regularly wins the most important competitions is able to generate media and brand value – regardless of gender.

It is worth pointing to two more issues. First, apart from football, the different TV channels focus in their sports news on those disciplines for which they have the TV rights. Thus, public television gives more space to ski jumping and cross-country skiing in the winter season because it broadcasts the World Cup competitions in both of these

disciplines. The commercial stations, on the other hand, provide much less information about these sports and much more information about other disciplines for which they have the rights. For example, in the sports news on Polsat one can hear much more about volleyball and handball because Polsat Sport broadcasts them both. Here, TV rights, not gender, are the criterion of choice.

Outside the financial dimension one category appears to be more important than gender – and that is nationality. According to Wu (2008, 161):

The mass media play a very important role in constructing and reinforcing national identity and this could not be revealed better than in the media coverage of international sport competitions, especially huge sporting events such as the Olympic Games.

All the participants of the focus-group interviews showed their interest in the Olympics. In 2012, 70% of Poles stated that they would watch the Olympic Games in London (CBOS 2012, 15; Wu 2008; see also Bariner 2001; Hogan 2003).

When women viewers (also men, who usually prefer men games) decide to watch a broadcast of the Olympic Games, they consider the participation of Poles and their chances of winning a medal, not the gender of the players and the discipline.⁴ The sports discipline and the athlete's gender become less important. The participants of the focus-group interviews said that they would even watch men's synchronic swimming or gymnastics if they had a chance of winning a medal. However, this is not possible because there are no men's events in either of these disciplines.

The national context also changes the perception of female athletes and their bodies. As mentioned above, women have a rather negative attitude towards women lifting weights. At the same time, they showed a very positive attitude towards the former Polish competitor in this discipline in the heaviest weight category, Agata Wróbel. The fact that she represented Poland and achieved considerable success turned the viewers' attention away from her body and appearance, which contradicted a traditional image of femininity. Therefore, nationality makes other divisions (e.g. men vs. women, 'feminine' vs. 'male') less significant.

Conclusion

Women's competitions must generally give way to men's competitions since men's competitions are more popular. At the same time, women's sports have no chance of achieving a similar popularity since they are not present in the media. Media coverage depends to a large extent on the assumed tastes of viewers. Men constitute the majority of sports fans and are interested in men's events. Women usually watch sports in order to share time with the male members of the family. Therefore, it is primarily masculine tastes which determine the choice of sports broadcasts.

The marginalization of women in the media may be the consequence of, at least partly, the small number of female sports journalists. Women write more often about women's events, so that increasing their number could result in more articles and broadcasts of women's events.

The gender inequality in the media should be considered in conjunction with other factors: the history of sport, the number of players, its character – but most of all, the financial dimension. Some categories, such as nationality, make the gender of the players become less important.

A woman has to achieve significant success in sport in order to appear in the media and to gain recognition. In the case of men, this condition is not necessary, especially in

football and other team sports. The largest gender disparities in media coverage can be observed in the most popular sports; in niche sports the player's gender loses its significance. The media coverage of men's sport is based on the popularity of the discipline, and the coverage of women's sport focuses around the players' names. Women's events are still marginalized in the Polish media, but this situation can, and should, be changed.

Notes

1. The main coordinators were Thomas Horky and Jörg-Uwe Nieland. In the case of Poland, the coding analysis was done twice by two independent researchers. There were no differences in coding.
2. Letter refers to the name of respondents: A means athlete, O means other (trainers, federation/club members, etc.).
3. This survey was conducted in March and April 2012 in Wielkopolska Province. Quota sampling, $n = 380$. Similar data for Poland are not available.
4. This selection is partly forced by the Polish media, which focuses primarily on competitions with the participation of Poles.

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