

Sport and Gender in the Mirror of the Media in Hungary at the Beginning of the 21st Century

Abstract of PhD Thesis

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Introduction

The changes in the relationship between the genders, as well the impact of these changes on the macro level are part of the most important and most exciting contemporary issues. The concept of gender, namely the norms, values and the formation of behaviour patterns characterizing femininity and masculinity have been subject to social scientific research for decades in Western countries. The school of “Gender Studies” has become more and more specialized recently. Nowadays the social position of men and women is analysed by research on men and women, feminist essays and by studies about people with different sexual orientations (gays and lesbians). That is, social scientists understood that only research focusing on such topics can contribute to the effective solution of problems which are rooted in the inequalities between men and women.

Sport sociology started dealing with the question what are the major characteristics of the relationship between the genders in sports rather late. This is surprising, as in other areas, e. g. in production, examining the history of the shaping of male identity in the first place; sport was regarded as an outstanding factor in the formation and reproduction of masculinity. Although some feminist authors questioned the traditional male hegemony of the field, they were mainly interested in topics such as discrimination against sportswomen.

The extremely dynamic development of mass media in the 20th century and its total interpenetration with competitive sport opened new dimensions for research in this area. More and more experts made attempts to show the existing quantitative and qualitative differences in the representation of male and female sports with the analysis of the mass media contents. The results prove unambiguously that women are significantly in a disadvantageous position in sports media compared with men. This statement proved to be true to both the quantitative and qualitative attributes of the media coverage. In the latter case the decisive role of outward appearance is called “Kournikova-syndrome”.

Media and gender type research projects could only start in Hungary following the 1989-1990 democratic changes. Notwithstanding, research focusing on the special features of male and female sports representation in the media has never been carried out here until now.

Objectives

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the relationship between gender, modern sport and media, and to discover the characteristics of the gender representation by the printed sports media.

Beside the quantitative and qualitative content analyses of the daily papers, the opinions of newspaper readers, sports journalists and elite female athletes are also examined. The latter can be considered as a novelty even in the international arena. Research questions are related to the proportion of the genders in the sport-related articles and photos of daily papers, the changes of the above mentioned dimensions in the Olympic period, as well as to the interpretation of gender representation in the printed media by elite female athletes and newspaper readers.

The following hypotheses were set up:

It was assumed that

- female athletes are under-represented in the printed sports media compared with their male counterparts;
- the representation of male and female sports are equalized in Olympic reports;
- in case of sports photos the proportion of gender representation is similar to the proportion of articles;
- elite women athletes evaluate their own representation in the sports media better than it is in reality;
- there is a correlation between the newspaper readers' socio-economic characteristics and their opinion on gender representation in the sports media;
 - male newspaper readers esteem the gender representation in the printed sports media to be more balanced than their female counterparts do;
 - older newspaper readers are of a more negative opinion about media coverage of the genders than younger ones;
 - part-time students esteem the gender representation in the sports media to be less balanced than full-time students;
 - older newspaper readers are of the opinion that the quantity of media coverage depends on the success of the athletes and their sports.
- sports editorial staff is a “preserve of male power” where the selection of news is influenced by the fact that women's sport is less appreciated than male sport.

Methods

In order to answer the research questions attempts were made to combine quantitative and qualitative ways for collecting information. Therefore the following three methods were used:

Content Analysis

In the sample of the content analysis three national daily newspapers were chosen. Their front pages and sport sections made up the units for analysis. Two out of three daily newspapers are traditional daily papers (Népszabadság, Magyar Nemzet) the reading publics of which can be distinguished from each other on the basis of their political preferences. The third one is a daily tabloid (Blikk) the target group of which is more heterogeneous consisting mainly of individuals with low socioeconomic status. In addition, the selection of all three daily papers was justified by their place of high-rank on the sale sheets; the “Blikk” has been the market leader for many years and out of the public daily papers the “Népszabadság” is the most popular in Hungary. The articles and photos of the above mentioned daily papers made up the units of observation in the research.

The issues of the three newspapers published between August 7 and September 5, 2004, that is during the two weeks of the Summer Olympic Games in Athens, as well as those published one week prior to and one week following the Games were analysed. The same period in 2005 was chosen for the second period of the content analysis. Variables and attributes were created for coding the issues.

In the statistical process the SPSS13.0 software was applied. In order to justify the hypotheses chi-square test and independent t-test were employed.

During the altogether eight weeks in the two periods 2637 sport related articles were analysed, this is the total size of the sample (N=2637).

Survey Method

The survey was carried out at Semmelweis University, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Sciences in the second part of 2006. It was localized to the 2nd and 3rd grade full-time and part-time students with different majors. The sample is representative for the 2nd and 3rd year students but not to all students studying at the University in the same academic year.

Since the respondents are students with sport related majors, in principle they are sports enthusiasts and they know more about sports than common people do. This circumstance had to be taken into consideration when the findings were interpreted.

The questionnaire consisted of altogether 27 closed and open ended questions.

First the descriptive statistics were calculated. Then in order to justify the hypotheses independent t-test, Pearson's correlation test and factor analysis were applied.

In-depth Interviews

For the sake of revealing the elite women athletes' and reporters' opinion, in 2006 and 2007, so called semi-structured guidelines were prepared. It means that some questions were precisely formulated and put to each respondent. These questions made it possible to compare the opinions of the elite women athletes and the sport journalists. The other part of the questions was formulated during the interviews and it proceeded from the course of the conversation.

In-depth interviews were made altogether with 34 elite women athletes and 7 journalists. They were recorded first by Dictaphone, and then they were put down in writing. The sample consisted of sportswomen from handball, water polo, kayak-canoe, shooting, fencing, swimming, volleyball, table-tennis, gymnastics, weight-lifting, tennis, basketball and judo.

The sample of journalists was made of sport journalists working with the sport sections of the examined daily newspapers and of a deputy editor working with a light daily paper. In the editorial staff of the "Népszabadság" and "Magyar Nemzet" you could not find any female sport journalist, but from the staff of the sport section of the "Blikk" and the light daily paper women journalists could be chosen.

The scenes of the in-depth interviews were different and lasted 20 to 90 minutes.

Results

The theoretical framework of research was based on the theory by Stuart Hall named „circuit of culture” which attributes a decisive role to five factors (consumption, representation, regulation, production, and identity) in the shaping, continuance and development of the meanings circulating through the communication flows of society. Results of this thesis are presented according to these five dimensions.

Consumption

In the mirror of the findings, it can be stated that daily papers are read by more newspaper readers than tabloids. Moreover, daily papers are consumed more regularly. The sportswomen gather information rather seldom from the traditional public daily papers and from the tabloid "Blikk". They are looking only for articles about themselves published in newspapers in the

periods of their major competitions in the first place. In their views the main reason of the lack of their continuous interest is that the overwhelming majority of sports news in newspapers deal with male soccer. They think that this is unfair, especially taking into consideration the present low position of Hungarian soccer.

Both the sportswomen and the sport journalists are of the opinions that sport sections are mostly read by men. This fact might explain why priority is generally given to soccer and to popular sports practised mainly by men all over the world, such as car race and professional boxing.

Representation

In view of the number of articles it can be said that the highest number of sport related articles can be found in the tabloid „Blikk” , the traditional daily papers cover far fewer sporting events and give far less information about athletes. The sports section of the tabloid has an own inside front page, and its size is many times longer than that of the daily political papers. According to the research data, 69,8% of the reading public find the size of sport section to be insufficient. The readers of tabloids show an interest in sports much above the average. Namely, the size of sport section is the longest with the tabloid; however, its reading public also find it too short.

In the newspaper readers’ estimation female sports are underrepresented compared with male sports in both the political daily papers and the tabloid. To their mind, the gender differences are more significant in the daily papers and they are less in the tabloid.

Drawing a comparison between the total number of articles in all examined issues and the number of contributions in the individual newspapers, the most articles about women sport were published in the “Népszabadság” (17,20%) , and the fewest was reported in the “Blikk” (15,56) (see Figure1.). It was examined whether there was any correlation between the nature of the newspapers and the number of information on sportsmen and sportswomen, respectively. The result of the chi-square test is the following: $\chi^2 = 14.271$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$. So the results mean that there is a significant correlation between the papers concerning the number of article about sportsmen and sportswomen.

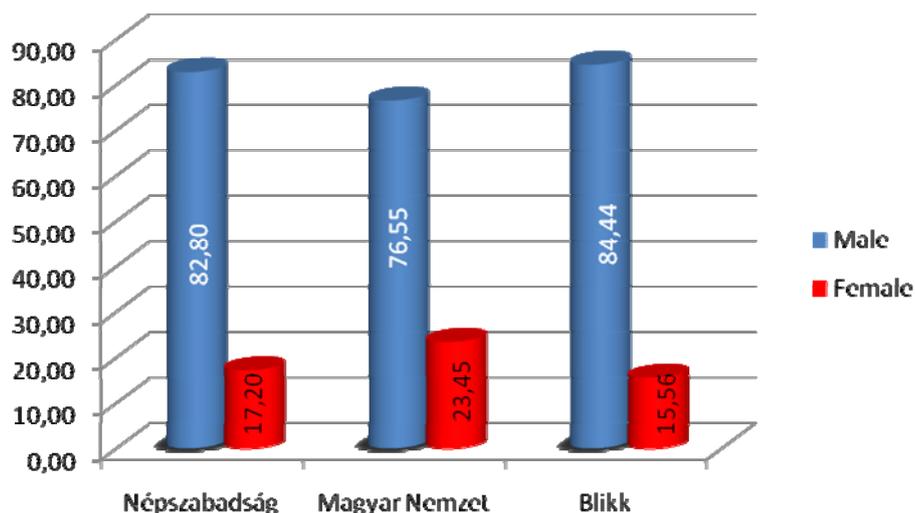


Figure 1. Number of articles per daily papers according to gender

Thus, the respondents were right when they believed that male athletes had been over-represented in the sport sections of daily newspapers. However, in the case of both kinds of papers they over-estimated the representation of sportswomen. Concerning this issue they became the victim of a delusion rather in the case of “Blikk”, since the most important differences in gender representation was registered in the tabloid.

Statistical analyses showed that out of the respondents’ examined socio-economic and demographic characteristics (gender, age, socioeconomic activity) their opinions are influenced only by their age; the older the respondents are, the less favourable are their views on gender representation.

Significant correlation was found between the factor variables of age and of successfulness with the help of factor analysis. It means that the older respondents tend to think that out of the athletes’ outward appearance, their achievement and popularity only the success of the athletes and their sports have an impact on their representation in the newspapers.

The findings of the content analysis also proved the newspaper readers’ estimation according to which the quantitative features in the sports media change during the periods of the Olympic Games. Namely, greater stress is laid on the sportswomen representation in the reports about Olympic competitions than in articles about other sporting events (see figure 2.)

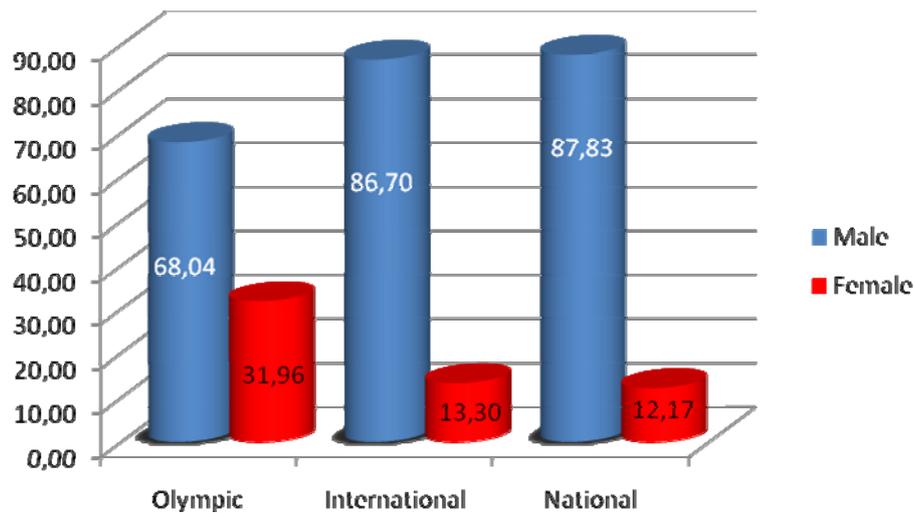


Figure 2. Proportion of reports published about sports competition on a different level according to gender

The overwhelming majority of sportswomen assumed that sportsmen are characteristically overrepresented by 70-30%. Their views were highly influenced by the media suitability and the success of their sports. The most negative opinions were expressed by athletes practising traditionally “masculine sports”, such as weight –lifting and water-polo.

Sport journalists mentioned unanimously the advantage of male sports in the media. Concerning the proportion of sportswomen’s representation, the two female journalists were the most optimistic. To their mind “only” 60-70% of sport sections deals with male sports. Men supposed that the disproportion of gender representation in sport sections is typically greater, at the very worst it is 85-15%.

It shows a lot about gender differences in media representation that 90,67% of sports news published on the front page are about sportsmen, only 9,33% of them give information on women sports. Thus sportsmen are brought on the front page ten times more than sportswomen are, the latter have enormous difficulties to become a front page story.

All sportswomen but one declared that outward appearance is important. However, there were different views on the question whether this statement holds to both genders or not, and to which degree their appearance has an impact on the athletes’ media coverage. More than 50% of the athletes are convinced of the outstanding importance of attractive looks, which – beside

calling the attention of the media – can contribute to increasing self-assurance and gaining the sponsors' favour. They believe, it is important especially in case of women, nevertheless it plays an ever-growing role with sportsmen as well. Among sports journalists only correspondents of the tabloid were explicitly of a similar opinion.

Correlation between gender and the size of reports and photos was examined with the help of unpaired t- test. It turned out that reports on sportsmen are longer on the average than articles on sportswomen. This is the same with the athletes' photos published in papers, the size of the sportsmen's pictures is generally bigger (see Figure 3.).

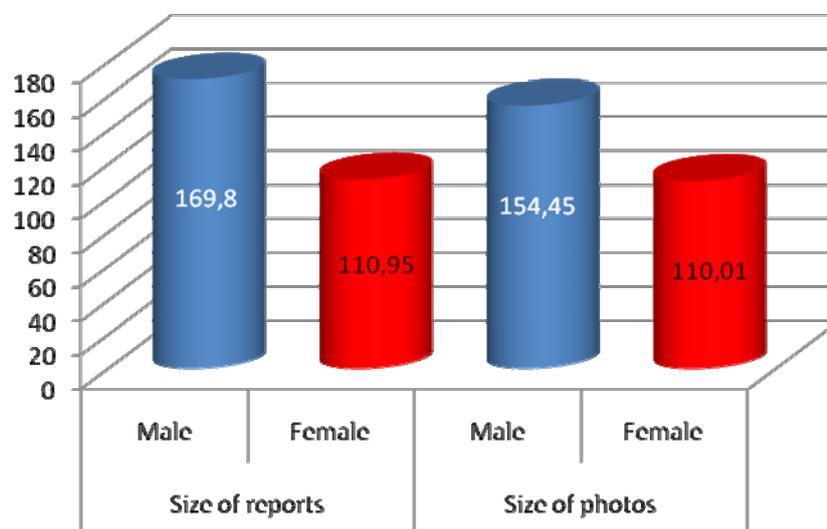


Figure 3. Size of reports and photos on an average published in 2004-2005 according to gender

To the sportswomen's views, "Kournikova-syndrome" does not exist in Hungary. Newspaper readers reinforced this statement arguing that there are more sportsmen among attractive athletes to whom the media pay special attention.

Regulation

Although the trade of journalists responded to the disadvantageous position of women journalists and to gender inequality in the media representation, it is not quite clear-cut to which degree their reactions reach the sports media. Hungarian daily papers are not subject to any special regulation with the intention of promoting gender equity in media representation. Only the correspondents of the "Blikk" gave report on an action taken in 2004 by the editors

according to which sports journalists were obligated to publish at least one article about women sports in the sport section every day. The correspondents of the “Népszabadság” and “Magyar Nemzet” could not render account of similar measures with their papers.

Production

When studying the process of production the most exciting task was to discover the fundamental principles of the sport journalists at the selection of gender representation. What the “coders” mostly men, said was that their first and most important motive at the selection of sports news is the level of sports achievement, and then the dominance of soccer. The editor of all three daily papers agreed on the necessity of covering sports in which Hungarian people show interest, and at the same time they are known and popular abroad: Thus, it is not accidental that the so called problem of ”traditional Hungarian sports versus sports popular all over the world” gives sports journalists much troubles in connection with the media representation of different sports.

In all interviewed journalists’ views the athletes’ gender does not play any role in news selection. However, their further answers revealed that this factor had a great deal to do with the depiction of results of team sports.

Identity

The majority of newspaper readers, about 60% of them, accept the statement according to which women sport is equivalent to men sport. The journalists are of the opinion that women can become as great stars as men can in individual sports. However, in team sports, they are in a disadvantageous position concerning the quantity of media representation since the matches of men are more dynamic and more spectacular, and consequently, they are more attractive for media coverage. Another problem of women sport in Hungary is that here there are no outstanding elite women athletes in those sports which are truly popular on the whole world.

The news is selected by male sport journalists sticking to a traditional concept on masculinity and femininity. Therefore, they refuse categorically the depiction of women competing in sports, labelled as masculine. The mentality of female sport journalists working in a social

environment that can be rightly characterized by male power showed great adaptability, but they did not give account of any discriminative actions they had to endure.

Conclusions

In this thesis, the relationship between gender, sport and media are analysed and attempts are made at discovering the major characteristics of gender representation in the written sports media. Hypotheses were set up according to the major research dimensions. Several methods were used for their verification.

The assumption according to which sportswomen are underrepresented in the sports media proved to be true. The quantitative analysis of the sport-related articles published in Hungary in two traditional public daily papers (Népszabadság, Magyar Nemzet) and in a tabloid (Blikk) showed clearly that the proportion of male sports depiction is significantly higher. In this respect gender differences are the biggest in the “Blikk” (84,44% versus 15,56%). It is followed by the “Népszabadság” (82,80% versus 17,20%) and the “Magyar Nemzet” (76,55% versus 23,45%). Regarding the size of the reports it can be stated that the articles about sportsmen were longer on the average than the length of information about sportswomen in both identical periods in the two examined years. These findings about the underrepresentation of women’s sport show similar tendency to research data reported in the relevant international literature.

The second hypothesis suggesting that the proportion of the two genders representation is more balanced in Olympic reports was denied. Based on the content of sport related articles it could be concluded that the proportion of women’s sports representation improved somewhat, but it is far from being well-balanced. Therefore, in the Olympic period, more articles are published on women sports than usually, but it does not mean equal representation at all. These results partly differ from the experiences gained in the international arena.

The third hypothesis also had to be rejected, since the proportion of gender representation in case of sport related photos did not follow the size of the articles published in sport sections. Regarding the average size of the photos, it can be said that from this point of view, gender differences are smaller than in case of sports reports; sportswomen are in a less disadvantageous position on this area.

The presumption, according to which elite women athletes estimate their representation in the written sports media more favourable than it is in reality, was verified. During the in-depth interviews the vast majority of them said that, generally speaking, 70% of sports sections cover men sports, while 30% of them deal with women's sports. A few sportswomen believed that there is no difference in the sports media at all. At the other extreme, two sportswomen thought that 90% of sports related media coverage focuses on male athletes.

The newspaper readers' view on gender representation in the sports media was also examined in the thesis. In connection with this topic, four sub-hypotheses were formulated concerning the impact of the respondents' gender, age and socio-economic status (full-part or part-time students) on their opinion. The first one, supposing that the opinion of female newspaper readers' on gender representation is more equitable, was denied. Statistical tests analysing the impact of gender on the opinion did not find significant correlation between men's and women's views.

The second sub-hypothesis, according to which the older newspaper readers have more negative opinions on women's representation in the sports media compared with men's proved to be true; the statistical test showed significant correlation between the respondents' age and their estimation on gender representation in percentage. Notwithstanding, it has to be mentioned that correlation was relatively weak.

The third sub-hypothesis, presuming that part-time students' opinions on gender representation in sports section are worse than full-time students' views, was not justified; therefore, it had to be rejected. Namely, in the process of the chosen statistical treatment (factor analysis) significant difference could not be found between beliefs of students with dissimilar status at university.

The fourth sub-hypothesis, according to which the older newspaper readers attribute more and more importance to the success of the athletes and to the successfulness of their sports from the aspect of media coverage, was verified. The result of the statistical treatment (factor analysis) showed a significant difference between the respondents' age and factor variable comprising their views on the importance of sports achievement. However, significant

correlation could not be found between the respondents' age and the factor variable containing the athletes' appearance and the popularity of their sports.

Finally, the sixth assumption was also justified, since the findings of the in-depth interviews supported the pre-supposition suggesting that sports editorial offices are "male preserves", where the selection of news is highly influenced by the fact that male journalists underestimate the significance of women's sports. The journalist trade is dominated by men being convinced of the inferiority of women's sports, and with this, preventing female athletes from equal media representation. In addition, in all three daily papers reports and information enjoy priority over all other sports at the selection of news. Moreover, in the tabloid policy, preference is given to extremely popular sports practiced by men all over the world, e. g. boxing, and motor sports. The above mentioned factors and the refusal of women's intention to practise sports regarded as traditional male sports make it very difficult to improve female athletes' representation in the sports media.

Summarizing the quantitative and qualitative results of the research, it can be concluded that gender representation in Hungarian sports media is similar to international trends revealing the under-representation of women sport. Hereby it can be stated that, likewise in many other areas of social life, women are in a disadvantageous situation in the sports media, and their position is not in harmony with their sporting achievements. This statement can be well illustrated by the Hungarian Olympic team in the 2004 Summer Olympic Games, where out of eight gold medals five were gained by female athletes. However, even this outstanding achievement was not enough for reaching equal media representation with men. According to specialists, sports sections of daily papers devote more space to male soccer, the standard of which is unspeakable, than to some much more successful female team sports; they neglect for instance the world champion female water polo players and the Olympic medallist female weight lifters. They might expect women athletes to be successful in sports which are regarded as feminine. Sometimes the gender differences in media representation are explained by the fact that more men are involved in sports than women. This might be true. However, the share of women sports in international events has increased recently; it was almost 40% in the last Olympic Games. This tendency cannot be noticed in the sports media yet, although a radical change in the attitude within the media would probably have a desired effect on the development of women sport in all respect.

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