

ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER REPORTS ON SPORTING EVENTS FROM THE ASPECT OF GENDER INEQUALITY

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The aim of our research was to establish how Slovene media report on sporting events. We were especially interested if there is a prevalence of reports about male athletes, and if there are differences in manner, amount and style of reporting between the articles about male and female athletes. We analysed two daily newspapers and compared the size, the number of articles, and the photographs. We have classified the articles into three groups; articles about male athletes, articles about female athletes and articles about both. We took a closer look at the style of writing. The photographs also play an important role. Therefore, we also compared the amount, type, size and static/dynamics of photographs.

The results of this study confirm some of the preliminary conclusions that the newspapers offer less space, publish less articles and pay less attention to female athletes. By studying the photographs we have reached the conclusion that photographs of male athletes are better positioned and more frequently in colour. The female athletes are depicted in a way that highlights their physical appearance and not their role in sports.

Keywords: Media coverage, gender differences, women's sport.

INTRODUCTION

Sports and media are linked directly. Moreover, nowadays they cannot exist without each other. The world of sports has changed dramatically during the history in the spotlight of mass media. Today, the media choose, interpret and represent sporting events predominately to draw in an audience. Sports in media reflect the ideas of certain people and values in certain sports and the values of the society in which the events take place. The style and content of sports programmes are designed to entertain the audience who can sometimes be so engrossed in what they read, hear or see that they tend to accept it as the only reality (Maguire, 2002).

Similarly, the participation of female athletes in sports has changed over time. In past, women were forbidden to participate in sports, but gradually the society allowed them to enter the sports sphere. Today, there are less and less sports that women cannot participate in. But there are still many differences when it comes to female participation in sports. Male athletes still have more representatives in sports (Olympic Games 2000 – 62% male athletes and 38% female athletes), more competitions (Olympic Games 2000 – female athletes participated in 44% of all the competitions), which are seen by more audience. The male sporting events are better covered by media; they get more written articles and they are published differently than those which cover female athletes' successes, female teams and individuals.

Including women and men into sports partly depends on the definition of what a woman and a man represent in a society. The primary difference is biological (sex). Nowadays, in humanistic debates people point out the social meaning of differences (gender). The society attributes certain characteristics to individuals of certain gender. But these characteristics already differ on the level of different cultures. The social organisation of the environment is the factor that influences the way members of a society perceive each other, how they behave and how they communicate. Throughout the history the social definition of gender was described as polar and unequal. The role of women was limited mainly to reproduction, care for home and family. The male dominance was obvious in all other areas of life, living and work. In the twentieth century more radical changes occurred, resulting in the increased participation of women in activities, which were viewed as male, including sports (Leonard, 1998).

In the last two decades there has been an increased interest of experts in the question of female participation in sports and physical activities. Numerous researches show that gender inequality in sport is still a persistent problem. The perception of sport today is not universal – it is divided into female and male sports. The direct comparison of female and male results strengthens the assumption that female sports are less appreciated than male. In sports, there is a considerable difference in the ideological differences between sexes, which is evident from the descriptions of the events – as if that goes

without saying – as neutral facts. “The female sport is a phenomenon of secondary importance in the society. It is nice and precious, but it definitely cannot be compared to the importance of male athletes’ achievements. They cannot be judged equally, although the female and male parameters are constantly compared” (Doupona, 2004).

The media have a great influence on how the society views the sporting achievements. The mode and frequency of reports on male athletes plays an important role. Many researchers (Duncan, Messner, Kane, Lensky etc.) claim that female athletes are frequently overlooked and that they represent a mechanism that keeps the sports as a part of men’s world. The female athletes are mostly the subject of false commentary or are presented in passive role in order to contribute to the male dominance (Chrisholm, 1999; Daddario, 1994; Harris, 1999). Men used to dominate in sports; they represented the power and the privilege that women did not have. In media, sports often reflect the ideology of dominance and cultural idea of gender. It seems that sports in media reflect the balance of power between sexes in sports and in the society as a whole. They reflect a cultural trend which gives women a relatively subordinate position in comparison to men. Female sports are less reported on than male, in press as well as on television. The amount of space in newspapers intended for women’s sports is extremely small. The published stories and news on women’s sports focus on the appearance of the athletes, rather than on their performance. This is how the sports in media reinforce the ideals of manhood and femininity (Maguire, 2002). Lever and Wheeler used a longitudinal study to monitor the reporting on sports pages from 1900 to 1975. They discovered that in 1900 female athletes were awarded 1.2% of the whole space in the paper. Between 1925 and 1950 the percentage grew to 2.8%, until 1975, when it grew for only 0.1%. In the English speaking world more important newspapers (The London Times, The New York Times, Morgunbladid), according to the research done by Valgerisson and Snyer (1986), dedicated less than 10% to female athletes (Vincent et al., 2002). In spite the impressive performance of female athletes in the last decades, the media tend to underrate their accomplishments. A study after study, preformed in the last years, has shown a clear pattern showing that the media report less on female sports and tend to trivialise it (Bodenstedt, 1988).

The purpose of this research was to determine the characteristics of reporting in two selected Slovene newspapers and to establish how press reports on male and female athletes and how they are portrayed.

METHODS

We included two Slovene daily newspapers in our analysis. They are not geographically specific; they cover the whole Slovenian territory. Delo is a daily newspaper that covers all types of events, and has 2 pages of sports, except on Monday when it contains a sports supplement. Ekipa is a sports newspaper and contains only articles on sports. In the period of one month (except on Sundays) we monitored the articles in Delo, and during this period we also monitored Ekipa for one week. For the article analysis we used the basic statistics for determining the balance between articles about male and female athletes, the size and number of articles, and photographs. In the beginning we classified these articles to male (reporting exclusively on men), female (reporting exclusively on women) and mixed articles (reporting on both female and male athletes). We were interested in sports that are most frequently mentioned, and in the balance between male and female articles. We carefully examined the writing style and tried to determine whether the article describes a professional, public or private life of male and female athletes. We also measured the size of the articles. The photographs have an especially important role in the articles; therefore, we compared the amount, type, size and dynamics/static of photographs. The size of the articles and photographs was expressed in cm². We monitored the objectivity of reports or the means of expression, which describe sporting events from other standpoints (for example, focusing on bodies of female athletes).

The daily Delo was monitored in the period between 8 July 2003 and 7 August 2003. During this period (26 days) the paper published 576 articles on sports. The sports daily Ekipa was monitored from 21 July to 26 July, and it published 282 articles in that period. The newspapers were chosen on the basis of the following factors: national reach, media coverage of sporting events, availability (market price of the two is comparable).

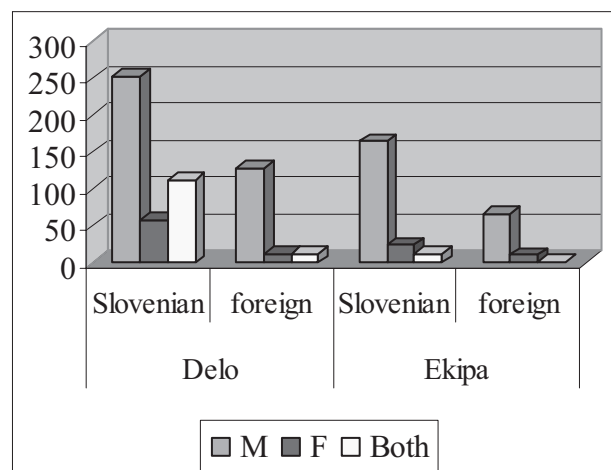
RESULTS

Delo published 381 articles which reported exclusively on male athletes, of which 252 (66%) articles on Slovenian athletes, and 129 (34%) articles covering foreign athletes. Female athletes featured in 70 articles, of which 58 (82%) on Slovenian athletes and 12 (17%) on foreign athletes. There were 125 articles which featured female and male athletes. In total, Delo published 12% of articles featuring only female athletes and 21% of arti-

cles which featured both, of which 73% featured Slovene female athletes. The daily Ekipa published 282 articles. 232 (82%) featured male athletes, of which 58% articles featured Slovene athletes. Only 35 or 12% of the articles featured female athletes, of which 8% featured Slovene female athletes. 15 articles were mixed and 4% about Slovene athletes.

Fig. 1

Articles in Delo and Ekipa (classified according to sex)

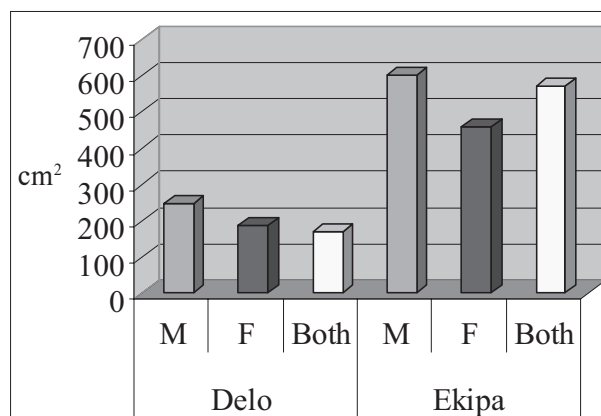


Division of the articles according to sex shows that male articles are dominant in both newspapers. In both newspapers there are 12% of female articles in comparison to male. Ekipa published fewer articles featuring mixed reports on events than female articles, if compared to Delo. Both newspapers featured more events of Slovene athletes than the foreign ones.

In proportion with the number of articles, male athletes also get more lines in the articles – a larger article size. By measuring the size of the articles we determined that Delo has an average article size of 222.8 cm². The articles that feature female athletes have an average size of 186.2 cm². The articles featuring male athletes have an average size of 246.5 cm², while mixed articles average is 171.6 cm². Taking into account the fact that Ekipa is a sport daily, the article size follows its purpose. Their average size is 574.7 cm², which is 2.5 times larger than the average in Delo. The average size of articles featuring female athletes is 460.1 cm² (604.4 cm² for male athletes). Mixed articles have the average size of 574.7 cm². The balance between sizes of female and male athletes' articles in both dailies is 1 : 1.3.

Fig. 2

Article size in Delo and Ekipa



The writing style in male and female articles differs especially in terms of objectivity, presentation of the individual's accomplishments/failures, and inclusion of relevant (or irrelevant) circumstances of the activity in the article. The men – the athletes, are mostly described as strong, tireless, and full of energy. On the other hand, women are described as vulnerable and helpless. Special attention is devoted to their physical appearance. The comparison between the newspapers showed that both Delo and Ekipa contain a great number of articles that describe women – female athletes as described above. The statements that confirm the dominance of men were found in Delo and are stated below:

- ...a talent, born only once every thirty years...
- ...it awoke the beast in the champion, hungry for the grandest sports pleasures...
- ...strong as an elephant and fast as a cheetah...
- ...the king of sprint, Caesar of Ethiopia...
- ...yellow cowboy, killing machine, tracker, superhero...
- ...Iron Mike...

The daily Ekipa adds also:

- ...grand master, magician...

Examples of statements for female athletes in Delo:

- ...she fell asleep at the start...
- ...her competition will be in the form of two bunnies...
- ...she often appears in advertisements and "men's" magazines...
- ...a goldfish, beautiful Hannah (a man in the same article is a torpedo)...
- ...Cuban flea...

Ekipa delivered the following statements describing female athletes:

- ...her bottom...
- ...new "pin up" tennis girl...
- ...if she had balls...

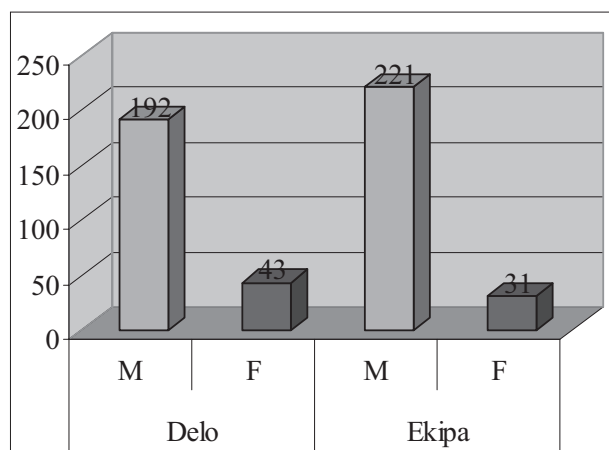
No matter how successful they are, male athletes are described as strong men, heroes, and invincible persons who never make mistakes. If the mistake should occur, it is not published in the media, or the writer uses the style that alleviates all the weight and discomfort. In contrast, the failures, mistakes and “awkwardness” of female athletes are a desired subjects for discussion and reports. The icing on the cake are the photographs attached to these kind of reports, which only strengthen the female “incompetence and weakness” on sports terrains. A statement, that “she has fallen asleep at the start” proves that the writer attributed to the athlete the inability to perform a good start, while male athlete was crowned as a “king of sprint”.

The daily Delo published 2.1% of articles dealing with private life of athletes and 2.7% articles dealing with public life of athletes of both sexes. In Ekipa we recorded 1% of private and 3% of public articles. The rest of the articles were defined as professional articles – they reported exclusively on sporting events.

The analysis of the articles also included the photographs in them. In the photograph analysis we wanted to discover whether Slovenian situation also follows the same patterns as foreign one, and whether Delo and Ekipa differ in the amount, themes and bias of the photographs published. The photographs complemented numerous (probably) more important articles.

Fig. 3

Number of photographs in Delo and Ekipa



Delo published a total of 242 photographs, of which 192 of male athletes, 42 of female athletes, and 7 mixed. Ekipa published 254, of which 221 of male athletes and 31 of female athletes. Of all the published photographs in Delo, 144 (59.9%) were black and white. The rest (98 photographs, or 40.4%) were in colour. 192 photographs portrayed male athletes (79%). Less than a quarter of photographs (17.8%, or 42) were of female athletes, the rest (2.9%, or 7) were mixed. 77 or 31.8%

colour photographs were of male athletes, while female athletes were portrayed 17 times (or 7.0%) in colour photographs. Delo published an average of 8.9 photographs per issue. Ekipa published 254 photographs in a week, of which 182 (71.6%) were black and white, and 72 (28.3%) were in colour. Female athletes were portrayed in 31 (12.2%) of photographs, while male athletes in 221 (87%). Only one of the photographs was mixed. Photographs of female athletes were in colour in 14 cases (5.5%), while photographs of male athletes were in colour in the quarter of the cases (22.4%, or 22 photographs). On average, Ekipa published 42.3 photographs per issue.

An average photograph of a female athlete in Delo was 97 cm² in size, while the average photograph of male athlete was 72 cm², and total average photograph in Delo was 77.7 cm² in size. The average size of photographs in Ekipa was 123 cm². The photographs of female athletes in Ekipa had an average of 115.5 cm², while the average size of male athletes' photographs was 124.4 cm².

We classified the type of photograph according to static or dynamic contents. Inside static photographs we especially defined the category of portraits. More than a half of photographs in Delo (54.9%, or 133 photographs) featured female or male athletes in action. 109 (45.9% of 242) dynamic photos were of male athletes, while female athletes were photographed in action 23 times (9.5% of 242). 109 or 45.0% were static photos, while there were 94 or 38.8% portrait photographs. The division of photographs to static and dynamic has shown that, similarly as in Delo, Ekipa also featured more than half of dynamic photographs (56.2%, or 143 photographs). Female athletes were photographed in action 234 times (9.4%), and male athletes 119 times (46.8%). Altogether 109 (42%) were static photographs, 101 (39.7%) of which were portraits.

DISCUSSION

The aim of our study was to learn if the female athletes are inferior to male athletes in the way media report about their sporting accomplishments. We tried to classify the details and differences between sports articles of the two daily newspapers and to establish if the media are biased.

We discovered that there is a difference in the amount and tone of reporting that the two dailies apply when dealing with sporting events. Most of the findings of this study confirm that the dailies in a way encourage the male dominance – male athletes. Among all the articles (858) there were 613 articles identified as about men, which represents 71% of all the published articles. With the exception of tennis and athletics, most

articles feature men, the majority is dedicated to football (88 in Delo and 117 in Ekipa). The amount of reporting is not always an indicator of quality; nevertheless, the analysis established that articles on male athletes are longer than the ones on female athletes. The mode of reporting about sporting events also contributes to the establishment of a certain opinion about the events. According to our findings, female athletes were more often represented as helpless, vulnerable, etc. The male athletes were described as strong men, full of energy and zest, endurable and invincible.

We believe that the media can represent one of numerous obstacles to establishing of female athletes. The photographs are often more convincing than words. In the analysis of articles on sports we also included the analysis of photographs depicting male and female athletes. In the past studies, as well as in our findings, female athletes were depicted in a way that highlights their physical appearance (outlook), their psychological characteristics, bodily strength (or the lack of it), and their family role.

Together, both daily newspapers published 496 photographs, where male athletes were depicted in 82.2% of photographs, and female athletes were depicted in only 14.9%. In Delo 45.0% of all the photographs were dynamic, and showed male athletes in action. In Ekipa there were 46.8% of such photographs. Female athletes were depicted in action in Delo in 9.5% of cases, and in Ekipa in 9.4% of cases. It is apparent that female athletes get fewer articles and also fewer photographs. Male athletes get not only larger number and size of the articles but also more photographs, and the articles and photographs are placed in places that are easier to be noticed by the reader (front page, first page, on top). The relevance of the accomplishments of female and male athletes cannot be compared. For example, female athletes win a second place in the World championship, but the article about it is put on the last page, at the bottom of the page. By analysing Ekipa for the whole week, there was not a single photograph of a female athlete on the front page. Delo published 12 photographs of female athletes in a month on the first page, which were in the top position in only three cases. "By assigning this position to photographs depicting female athletes, the media – newspapers – emphasise the unimportance and inferiority of women in sports" (Petersen, 2002). Through the study of photographs, we discovered that the photographs of male athletes are better positioned and more often in colour. This way the newspapers represent an additional obstacle that encourages the marginalisation and contributes to the feeling of triviality in case of female sporting activities.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study confirm previously proven statement that female athletes are awarded less space in newspapers, get less articles and are paid less attention. This is how the stereotypes that sport is men's sphere and that men are better adapted to sporting activities are supported. A majority of analysed factors (except the size of photographs in Delo) shows that sport which media report on is "reserved" especially for men – male athletes.

It seems that, like running a marathon, reaching the equality of women in media coverage is a long lasting process.

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**ANALÝZA NOVINOVÝCH REPORTÁŽÍ
O SPORTOVNÍCH AKCÍCH
Z POHLEDU NEROVNOSTI POHLAVÍ
(Souhrn anglického textu)**

Cílem našeho výzkumu bylo zjistit, jakým způsobem slovinská média referují o sportovních akcích. Zvláště nás zajímalo, zda převládají zprávy o sportovcích a zda existují rozdíly ve způsobu, počtu a stylu článků o sportovcích a sportovkyních. Analyzovali jsme dva deníky a porovnávali rozsah, počet článků a fotografie. Články

jsme rozřadili do tří skupin: články o sportovcích, články o sportovkyních a články o obojích současně. Podrobněji jsme sledovali jejich styl. Velkou úlohu rovněž hrají fotografie. Srovnávali jsme proto množství, typ, velikost a statický/dynamický charakter fotografií.

Výsledky této studie potvrzují některé z předběžných závěrů o tom, že noviny sportovkyním poskytují méně místa, publikují o nich méně článků a věnují jim menší pozornost. Zkoumáním fotografií jsme došli k závěru, že fotografie sportovců jsou lépe umisťovány a že jsou častěji barevné. Sportovkyně jsou zobrazovány tak, aby vynikal jejich tělesný vzhled a nikoli sportovní role.

Klíčová slova: pozornost médií, rozdíly podle pohlaví, ženský sport.

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