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INCREASING FEMALE REPORTERS' REPRESENTATION IN SPORTS JOURNALISM

УЛУЧШЕНИЕ РЕПРЕЗЕНТАТИВНОСТИ ЖЕНЩИН В СПОРТИВНОЙ ЖУРНАЛИСТИКЕ

Цель доклада – изучить возможные решения проблемы недостаточной репрезентативности женщин в спортивной журналистике. В первой части доклада представлен анализ исторической и текущей ситуации в отношении гендерного соотношения и причин существующего неравенства. В этом докладе основное внимание уделяется оценке двух потенциальных решений для устранения гендерной дискриминации, особенно в спортивной журналистике. В следующем разделе оцениваются вышеуказанные меры и анализируются их сильные и слабые стороны и возможности увеличения числа женщин в спортивных СМИ. Вывод доклада заключается в том, что оба решения могут быть эффективными способами решения текущей проблемы.

Ключевые слова: спортивная журналистика, гендерное равенство.

The aim of the report is to explore the possible solutions to solve the problem of the lack of female representation in Sports Journalism. The first part of the report examines the background of Sports Journalism, including the analysis of historical and the current situation regarding to a gender ratio and finds the reasons for the existing disparity. To that end, this report mainly focuses on evaluating two possible decisions, which contain potential solutions for the shortcomings of gender discrimination, particularly in Sports Journalism. The following section evaluates the above measures and analyses their strengths, weaknesses and the possibilities in growing the number of women in sports media. Finally, the report concludes that both solutions may be effective ways to tackle the current issue.

Keywords: sports journalism, gender equality.

Казспорт, Астана, Казахстан.

It might seem that female sports journalism is a modern phenomenon; however, women started covering the sport in media approximately a hundred years ago, in the 1920s [Miloch, Pedersen, Smucker & Whisenant, 2005]. Then, between the 1950s and 1960s, the number of female presenters in that field was extremely insignificant. The situation has been changed since the 1970s after the passage of Title IX forbidden gender discrimination in education. This U.S. federal law slightly positively influenced by various social processes, including the development of journalism. Nevertheless, during that period, female sports journalists experienced inequality. For instance, work conditions of women were not as comfortable as their male colleagues' were. They were even not allowed to enter locker rooms and gained access there in the 1980s [ibid]. Eventually, in 1987, sportswriters officially united in the special organization Association for Women in Sports Media [AWSM] to support each other and share their experience. Traditionally journalism has been perceived to be a male-related or male-dominated sector; that is why the process of involving females into this business took such a long time [Cann & Mohr, 2001, p. 162]. In many Western countries, even currently this gender disproportion exists in spite of equal rights policies. According to

Miller and Miller [1995], a significant number of male sports journalists consider that women are inferior to them in terms of professional skills.

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It is confirmed by studies that during past 30 years there are vertical and horizontal forms of discrimination in journalism based on sexual identity [North, 2014]. Vertical type is an underrepresentation of women in leadership positions; for instance, in 1995 they supervised only 3 percent of media organizations around the world [ibid]. Whereas, horizontal form means that females are traditionally considered as soft news reporters; therefore, a majority of editors keep them out of male-dominated areas, such as politics, economics, and sport. For example, North [2014] emphasizes that sports journalism in Australia is overwhelmingly male territory where women constitute solely 16 percent. In addition, it was discovered that there is the similar situation in other Western countries, such as the UK and the USA, where media mainly prefer men for covering politics and sport [ibid]. For instance, based on a Sports Journalist Association survey in 2006, Arnold [2013, online] claims that women's representation in British sports journalism makes up less than 10 percent.

According to Miller and Miller [1995], female sports journalists face various disadvantages in their professional field; and the most common of these are unequal opportunities for advancement, sexism and a lack of respect among male colleagues. Miller and Miller [1995] interviewed over 200 hundred of the female members of the Association of Women in Sports Media [AWSM] about their satisfaction by career. Respondents found that, in general, they have fewer possibilities to gain high positions compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, Miloch et al. [2005] suggest that women have to work more than a decade in order to achieve prospects, which men receive for less than ten years.

Table 1
Responses to Questions about Equal Opportunity in the Workplace
(Source: Miller and Miller [1995])

There is equal opportunity in the workplace for women sports journalists.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	5%	29%	6%	46%	13%
There is equal opportunity to receive coveted beats within sports.	3%	21%	14%	45%	18%
There is equal opportunity for promotions within the sports department.	2%	31%	12%	42%	14%
Job assignments are better for women sports journalists at my news organization.	7%	29%	34%	22%	8%
Promotions are better for women sports journalists in my news organization.	6%	23%	37%	25%	9%

(N=215)

As shown in Table 1 above, a majority of the interviewed disagreed with the statements «There is equal opportunity in the workplace for women sports journalists», «There is equal opportunity for coveted beats» [getting valuable and prestigious assignments] and «There is equal opportunity for promotions» [Miller and Miller, 1995]. The results of this questionnaire showed that 59 percent of the respondents estimated their chances to succeed in sports journalism as extremely low.

On the other hand, over 60 percent of women agreed with the given statements about equal opportunities at their own news organizations [ibid]. They suggested that maybe their personal circumstances were better, compared to other female reporters. However, Reich [2015] maintains that «the overall picture regarding status indicators suggests that discrimination of female reporters did not disappear but simply migrated to less overt and observable places». For example, the barrier for women's promotion at a TV and printed news is virtually inconsiderable compared to online media and radio, where females heavily

gain prominence [Reich, 2015]. Moreover, particularly sports journalism has differed as one of the most hegemonic masculine area [ibid].

It is not surprising, that female sports journalist admit that they often feel unimportant [Miller and Miller, 1995]. Their frustration might be related not only to their minor representativeness in that occupation but also with disrespectful male counterparts' attitude to them. As one respondent said, «Although I have more experience than all my colleagues on the desk, I am invisible; no one asks my opinion or hears me when I speak» [ibid].

Some researchers describe sexist opinions regarding female reporters that are prevalent and depict women as having humble backgrounds and considerably less knowledge; as it can be seen from the Table 2 below. As a result, females may have to satisfy stricter requirements to prove their professional suitability and gain access to the area of sports reporting and commentary [North, 2014].

Responses to Questions about Perceived Performance in the Workplace
(Source: Miller and Miller [1995])

Table 2

More errors are expected of women sports journalists.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/ disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	1%	17%	19%	40%	23%
Men expect me to know less about sports.	19%	40%	10%	20%	11%

(N=215)

It is clear that more than half of the respondents working in sports journalism are career-conflicted [Miller and Miller, 1995]. Women face colleagues' preconception of knowing less about sport and that is why they do not feel sufficiently confident in the workplace [ibid]. One of the women interviewed complained that when she makes a mistake her supervisor always criticizes her loudly and in the presence of colleagues, while he never does the same when the male subordinates make errors.

North [2014] points out that sometimes females need to have practical experience not only as writers but also as sports players for employment. That demand of media managers probably seems logical and, obviously, they prefer to hire specialists with the deep understanding of the subject. However, it is not fair because that deprives thousands of women of opportunities to work in sports journalism due to a lack of the requisite experience [ibid]. Whereas, men are considered to be well-educated specialists a priori.

As previously mentioned, another obstacle that may make sports journalism less attractive for females is sexism and sexual harassment. The respondents noticed that they could collect a whole book with disrespectful comments of their male counterparts [ibid]. For instance, men discuss sexy films and make derogatory remarks against women even in the workplace [ibid]. In addition, Lewis [2013] indicates that managers seem concerned about the negative impact of females' sexuality on the opposite sex. Media authorities suggest that this factor probably distracts men from their working obligations and provokes harassment to women. It seems that editors wrongly consider that women themselves cause sexism [ibid].

It seems that in spite of existing gender divisions in sports journalism, most women are satisfied by their occupations and do not want to move into other fields. Some researchers highlight that currently females are becoming more and more career-confident in the sports sector and eventually they do aim not to escape from the drawbacks, but to solve them [Miller and Miller, 2005]. Moreover, young female sportswriters are extremely optimistic about the atmosphere in their newsrooms [ibid]. This positive attitude might be related to fresher and fairer outlooks of the young generation.

Irrespective of encouraging viewpoints of youngsters, the gender discrimination in sports media still exists. For instance, one of the journalists confesses that she was considering leaving her job because of the rude attitude of her colleagues, who are mainly middle-aged men [ibid]. She suggests that they are not keen on working alongside women and it may be the reason for their impolite manners. If she is right, the situation can be improved only by attraction into sports journalism of open-minded specialists who do not have stereotypical opinions regarding females' professionalism. However, this significant shift needs approximately 20–30 years when all presenters of the old school will retire.

There are two possible solutions to tackle the problem of the lack of female representation in sports journalism. The first suitable decision is diminishing gendered identity, which means that women should be not vulnerable to offensive jokes regarding «weaker sex» and become «thick-skinned» [Hardin and Whiteside, 2009]. According to the respondents of Hardin and Whiteside [2009], this method's secret is not paying great

attention to male counterparts' actions, but on the contrary, keeping calm and ignoring rudeness. Females can share their own experience of adaptation to the area controlled by men. The successful example of using this strategy is Sandra Gin, who initially has chosen the tactic of being non-threatening [Stein, 1993]. Currently, she occupies an executive producer position at WGGT-TV in Greensboro, N.C; where «the general manager, station manager, and sales manager are also women» [ibid]. Gin underlines that she tries to promote a completely new culture into media management. From her experience, it proves that females should make an effort to be indifferent to insolent comments of their co-workers in the workplace and concentrate solely on professional accomplishments. Subsequently, male colleagues will likely respect them because of their conclusive results in a career. To sum up, the method of minimizing gendered identity tends to be suitable for female sports reporters who cannot easily become a part of a men's team.

On the other hand, the technique mentioned above would be not efficient for sociable women, who are able to establish valuable and constant contacts with men and do not have the desire to avoid communication with them. They can follow the alternative way, which includes specific gender assimilation in order to join a boys' club. For example, some women prefer to work principally with the opposite sex and consider that is an intriguing and exciting thing. One of the respondents of Hardin and Whiteside [2009] says: «I am pretty much left to just hang out with guys. I mean, for the most part, I am used to it so it is not that big of a deal. I have always been able to handle myself around guys because I am very much a smart aleck and very sarcastic, which is how 90 percent of guys are».

The positive fact for female reporters ought to be mentioned that at the present time they can take benefit from their identification with gender. For example, Janet, the NBA [National Basketball Association] writer believes that as a woman she has a better chance compared to her mature male counterparts to interview famous sportsmen [ibid]. In Janet's opinion, young soccer players prefer to talk with her, a beautiful person, then negligent middle-aged male journalists [ibid]. In addition, women may be given more time for filming during sports teams' training, says another reporter Elizabeth [ibid], while male journalists would not be allowed to do the similar things [ibid]. According to Hardin and Whiteside [2009], other respondents, who are also Janet's colleagues expressed the view that young female graduates are more attractive not only for sportsmen but also financially attractive for employers. The fundamental reason for these curious circumstances is that less experienced workers, starting their career, request lower salaries than skilled mature men do [ibid]. However, in spite of earning not sufficient wages at the beginning of their career, females may gradually get prominence and afterward the increase of remuneration. Based on the different references, it becomes clear that positions of female sports reporters in Western countries are progressively improving. According to Cann and Mohr [2001], «the gender revolution in journalism» takes place in the last twenty years. It could influence an increasing number of women in sports journalism.

To conclude, there are several reasons for the lack of female reporters in sports journalism. According to Miller and Miller [2005], the «tradition» of disparity still exists because of unfair opportunities for advancement, disrespectful attitudes, and sexism regarding women. That is continuing since the creation of sports journalism, when males have dominated, whilst the opposite sex has been presented as insignificant.

There are several solutions, which may be helpful for females in their «fight» for equal rights in the occupation.

Firstly, women may minimise their gendered identity to become members of a «boys' club». Ignoring sexist comments, they can reply to men by overachieving in careers. Males would have to appreciate female counterparts for their absolute success and outstanding professional skills. Secondly, women should try to bring advantages from their sexual identity to gain better opportunities in work. The attractive appearance, flexibility, and curiosity can be the women' instruments in order to get a promotion. As Stein's [1993] survey showed there are dozens of beneficial examples of using gendered identity in sports journalism.

The observed positive changes in the gender proportion in sports journalism may mean that the era of males' supremacy in that sphere is steadily ending. Furthermore, currently, a considerable number of women notice that «doors are opened for them simply because they are female» [Miller and Miller, 2005].

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