

THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA AND IN POLITICS

– AN INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

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Poznań 2010

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Cover designed by

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Adam Mickiewicz University,
89 Umultowska Street, 61-614 Poznań, Poland, Tel.: 61 829 65 08

ISBN 978-83-60677-90-2

Skład komputerowy – „MRS”
60-408 Poznań, ul. P. Żołotowa 23, tel. 61 843 09 39
Druk i oprawa – Zakład Graficzny UAM – 61-712 Poznań, ul. H. Wieniawskiego 1

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Women in international TV news¹

Introduction

Television is regarded by many viewers to be the most 'real' form of the media. If this is the case, then it is important for us to question how real the representations of women are on television and how this affects the attitudes of those who watch.² In particular, in a world where women are numbered greater than men, can television be said to reflect the world as it is, or dictate to it? At the same time, we may consider the other potential role of the media, that is an accelerator of some social, political and cultural changes. In that case we may ask to what extent do the media shape an image of women by presenting the most frequent female roles, socially accepted attitudes or behaviors, and social and cultural expectations towards women.

While much scholarship examines advertisements and soap operas – the most watched, and perhaps influential genres of television viewing,³ less is known how TV newscasts portray women. This study attempts to fill this gap through primary quantitative content analysis of the evening editions of two Polish TV newscasts, that is 'Fakty' (TVN) and 'Wiadomości' (TVP1). The aim of this chapter is to examine how much attention is paid to women (female actors). In particular, the paper addresses following questions: (1) How often are women presented on the newscasts? (2) In what kind of the media stories are women most frequently presented? (3) What roles do the women most frequently play in the events covered by the media?

The study

The basis for this analysis is data from the current multinational research project "Foreign TV News" administered by Akiba Cohen from the University of Tel Aviv. The project investigates the foreign TV news by public and commercial broadcasters in almost 20 countries. Researchers in the participating countries executed content analysis

¹ The author was supported in years 2008–2011 by The Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Poland, grant No. N N116 113534.

² H. Ingham, *The Portrayal of Women on Television*, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Students/hzi9401.html> (16 April 2010).

³ See: M. E. Brown, *Soap Opera and Women's Talk – The pleasure of resistance*, London: Sage 1994; G. Dines, and J. Humez, *Gender, Race and Class in Media*, Sage 1995; B. Gunter, *Television and Sex Role Stereotyping*, John Libbey, London 1986; I. Desperak, *Stereotypy ról kobiet w reklamie telewizyjnej i praktyce rynku pracy*, Acta Universitatis Lodziensis, "Folia Sociologica" 2001, No. 29, p. 7–72.

of TV news by the stations with the highest range of transmission in a 4-week sample period (20.01.–26.01., 10.02.–16.02., 02.03.–08.03. and 23.03.–29.03.2008). To ensure a high degree of quality control the participants held a number of briefings about the media sampling and coding scheme at international conferences before the actual coding process started.

By now data from 15 countries in five regions of the world are available: Asia (China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan), Europe (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Poland, Switzerland), South America (Brazil, Chile), North America (Canada, USA) and the Near East (Israel, Egypt). Meanwhile the data set contains over 16,000 news items. Polish sample consists of 540 news items originated from 56 evening editions (28 editions per station) of 'Fakty' (TVN) and 'Wiadomości' (TVP1).

In order to answer the research questions mentioned above, I conducted a study on the actors. Actors are defined as people who appear in the item (as individuals or as representing some entity, for example, country, commercial firm, social group etc.). Actors can appear as speaking or as being quoted (directly or indirectly – for example, "The president said: 'we will not give in'" or "the president said that the United States would not give in").

All identifiable actors were coded. There were two forms of identification: (1) Actors who were verbally identified by reference to their name and/or with a visual caption on the screen; (2) well-known persons such as the country's president where sometimes no formal identification was provided but the assumption was that the coder can identify this person with certainty.

Actors who were only seen but not quoted were not coded. The assumption was that in most cases if an actor was seen but not heard (in his/her voice) there would at least be some reference to his/her identity. This would also be the case for groups of people (for example, demonstrators, customers in a checkout lane in a store) who were not identified by name but they (or at least someone in the group) were quote, directly or indirectly.

While providing the results of the study in the next sections of the paper, in some cases all coded actors in all the items will be taken into consideration (general analysis of international data), and in some cases only 5 main actors in each item will be considered (more detailed analysis of the Polish data).

The results

The Table 1. contains percentages about the type and gender of each actor in news items. The percentages are weighted by length of news items, i.e. longer news items have a greater weight than shorter news items. A general conclusion that can be drawn from the data collected in the Table 1. is that in fact a minority of actors in TV news around the world is female.

While comparing Polish TV newscasts to the ones broadcast in other countries under the study, one may notice that there are some countries where women are more often than in Poland presented on the TV newscasts (see: Singapore, Chile, and Canada), but there are also examples of countries where women are less frequently actors in TV news (see: Egypt and China).

Table 1

Type and gender of actors in TV news per country

Country	Type of actor		Gender	
	Individual (%)	Group (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)
Belgium	91	9	27	73
Brazil	60	40	30	70
Canada	84	16	31	69
Chile	92	8	25	75
China	98	2	14	85
Egypt	99	1	10	90
Germany	100	0	22	78
Hong Kong	81	19	21	75
Israel	98	2	24	76
Italy	81	19	21	78
Poland	98	2	22	78
Portugal	100	0	25	75
Singapore	91	9	36	64
Switzerland	98	2	26	74
Taiwan	98	2	28	72
United States	95	5	24	76

The cross – culture differences might be only to some extent explained by such a cultural dimension like a masculinity versus its opposite, femininity, introduced by Geert Hofstede. This dimension refers to the distribution of roles between the genders which is one of the fundamental issues for any society to which a range of solutions are found. The Hofstede's IBM studies revealed that (1) women's values differ less among societies than men's values; (2) men's values from one country to another contain a dimension from very assertive and competitive and maximally different from women's values on the one side, to modest and caring and similar to women's values on the other. The assertive pole has been called 'masculine' and the modest, caring pole 'feminine'. The women in feminine countries have the same modest, caring values as the men; in the masculine countries they are somewhat assertive and competitive, but not as much as the men, so that these countries show a gap between men's values and women's values.⁴

Brazil, Canada, Singapore and Taiwan might be described as countries with the masculinity index (MAS) lower than a world average. Thus, not surprisingly, a percentage of female actors in TV news is higher in these countries than in the others. At the same time, in Egypt the MAS index is 52, only slightly higher than the 50.2 average for all the countries included in the Hofstede MAS Dimension. This would indicate that while women in the Arab World are limited in their rights, it may be due more to Muslim religion rather than a cultural paradigm.⁵ One may face the same problem while explaining a small number of female actors in Chinese TV news, where the MAS index is 50.

⁴ G. Hofstede, *Cultural dimensions*, www.geert-hofstede.com (10 April 2010).

⁵ As above.

Hofstede's dimension is also of a little help while analyzing such countries like Switzerland and Italy (the MAS index 70 and 65, respectively) in comparison to Chile, Portugal, and Israel (the MAS index 22, 35 and 41, respectively). Although differences in the MAS index are quite significant here, it does not affect a number of female actors in TV news. In Poland, the MAS index is almost equal to the world average (50), while only 22 percent of all actors speaking or being quoted in TV news were female.

The results of an analysis of two Polish TV stations, a public TVP1 and a commercial TVN show that there is no difference between them regarding how many women are presented in the news. While examining 5 main actors speaking or being quoted in every TV news item, in both stations under the study, one can notice that only 22 percent of them were female, while 78 percent were male (see Table 2).

Table 2
Gender of actors in TV news per station

	TVP	TVN
Female	194 (22%)	209 (22%)
Male	681 (78%)	725 (78%)
Total	896 (100%)	943 (100%)

The second major question of this chapter regards a kind of media stories in which female actors were presented. In order to understand the results of this part of the study, we should first examine events covered by the news items (topics), and the main role categories of the actors appearing in news items. Table 3 and 4 collect the data from 15 countries from the project.

Table 3
Main topics in TV news (%)

Country	Social issues	Internal politics	Internal order	Economy	International politics	Culture, religion and ceremonies
Belgium	25	16	21	14	8	10
Brazil	32	16	14	21	15	14
Canada	22	29	24	12	18	10
Chile	21	9	22	14	4	11
China	36	36	7	17	8	7
Egypt	12	15	9	15	49	8
Germany	23	27	22	26	14	8
Hong Kong	26	22	17	28	5	8
Israel	24	20	31	9	27	12
Italy	12	34	26	10	5	11
Poland	26	32	22	17	13	12
Portugal	34	26	32	23	11	9
Singapore	34	16	13	26	5	12
Switzerland	24	27	24	18	10	19
Taiwan	19	36	13	14	2	9
USA	26	40	6	29	16	5
Total	25	24	20	18	12	11

Table 4
Main role categories of actors in TV news

Country	Internal politics	Social issues	Citizens	Economy	Internal order	Sports	International Politics	Culture and Religion	Science and environment	Military and defense	Celebrities and royalty	Number of actors in news
Belgium	19	13	13	11	9	16	5	8	3	0	4	3369
Brazil	20	20	19	7	9	4	11	4	4	1	1	1370
Canada	20	22	18	10	7	5	6	5	3	3	1	1406
Chile	15	13	17	13	12	17	3	6	2	1	1	2963
China	53	7	10	15	2	1	4	2	2	5	0	761
Egypt	21	4	6	1	1	16	46	2	0	2	0	733
Germany	29	11	16	17	7	8	5	3	3	0	1	907
Hong Kong	31	15	13	23	7	1	4	4	2	1	0	1820
Israel	21	14	26	8	11	4	3	7	2	3	1	1703
Italy	42	10	18	7	9	2	2	7	2	0	1	1841
Poland	33	16	13	9	9	4	4	5	3	4	1	2509
Portugal	23	15	24	10	7	8	4	5	1	2	1	2789
Singapore	20	37	16	12	4	2	3	3	1	0	1	1582
Switzerland	20	12	18	16	7	7	6	9	3	1	1	1883
Taiwan	32	16	16	16	6	1	1	5	2	1	4	2586
United States	40	29	5	10	1	2	5	3	2	3	0	1299
Total	26	16	16	12	8	7	5	5	2	2	1	29521

Table 3. contains percentages of news items dealing with the main topic categories. Original 25 main categories have been recoded in 11 main categories (but only 6 with the highest numbers of percentage are presented here). For example, the category "social issues" includes transportation, health, welfare, social services, population, education, communication, housing, social relations. The category "economy" includes business, commerce, labor and industrial relations. The percentages are weighted by length of news items, i.e. longer news items have a greater weight than shorter news items (see above). As each news item can be coded with up to three topic categories, the sum of percentages exceeds 100%.

The results show that in Polish TV newscasts almost one third of all the news items was dedicated to internal politics, and a half of the news items (54 percent) was dedicated to either internal politics or internal order. Thus, we can expect that most of the actors in the TV news will be representatives of the internal political sphere. Indeed, the data collected in the Table 4. supports this hypothesis. To set the Table 4. original 20 main actor categories have been recoded in 11 main categories. For example, the category "social issues" includes transportation, health, welfare, social relations, population, education and communication. Economy includes labor and business, commerce and industry. The percentages are weighted by length of news items, i.e. longer news items have a greater weight than shorter news items.

As the data collected in Table 4. shows, one third of all the actors speaking or being quoted in the Polish TV news represented internal politics. Consequently, since most of the Polish political leaders, parliamentary leaders and members and ministers are men, one could expect that a majority of 5 main actors in each news item dedicated to these topics would be male. Indeed, the Table 5. reveals that more than 80 percent of 5 main actors in news items on domestic politics were male.

Topics and gender of actors in TV news

Topics	Number of actors		Female (%)		Male (%)	
	TVP	TVN	TVP	TVN	TVP	TVN
Internal politics	105	113	16	18	84	82
International politics	65	27	17	18	83	82
Military and defense	32	22	19	9	81	91
Internal order	86	95	31	18	69	82
Economy	19	27	37	33	63	67
Labor/industrial relations	24	22	21	23	79	77
Business/commercial	27	29	41	24	59	76
Transportation	8	16	0	25	100	75
Health, welfare, social service	39	43	33	35	67	65
Social relations	15	16	27	50	73	50
Population	8	22	37.5	45	62.5	55
Education	7	6	71	67	29	33
Communication	24	19	29	21	71	79
Sports	25	44	16	16	84	84
Culture	30	15	40	33	60	67
Fashion	2	3	100	33	0	67
Ceremonies	13	13	46	38	54	62

This time, all topic categories were taken into consideration in order to study topics dominated by male actors, and the ones with a majority of female actors. Interestingly, only one topic, among these most frequently covered by the media, that is education was represented mostly by female actors. It is worth mentioning that although news items on fashion broadcast on the public TV station (TVP1) contained exclusively female actors, a total number of these actors was too small to draw any general conclusion. The other news items in which women were quite frequently represented were these on ceremonies, culture, social relations and population. However, a percentage of women in these news items was still lower than a percentage of men.

While comparing two Polish most popular newscasts, one can notice some differences regarding a representation of women in news items on some particular topics. Namely, in a public TVP1 there were more women in news items on internal order, international relations, business and commerce, communication, culture, ceremonies and fashion than in the commercial station. On the other hand, in the commercial station TVN there were more women in news stories about social relations, population and transportation than in the public one (TVP1). Thus, one could conclude that the commercial station represented a traditional division between 'male topics' and 'female topics' to a higher extent than the public station. Nevertheless, differences between both stations in that matter are slight.

In order to examine a representation of women in TV newscast, one should address at least one more question, that is what roles do women play in the stories covered by the media. The results of the analysis of two Polish newscasts show significant differences between male and female actors in that matter. Studying 5 main actors speaking or being quoted in the news items in both stations under the study, one can notice that men representing internal politics (a president, a prime minister, ministers, parliamentary leaders, parliamentary members, and others) were the major actors in the news items. Furthermore, men playing roles of senior or rank security/emergency officers as well as heads of foreign countries had a frequent access to the media. Men presented in the news were playing also such roles as: scientists, coaches, athletes, artists, drivers or pilots, while only few or none of women were actors in the news items on science, transportation, or art.

At the same time, women were predominantly presented as playing a minor role in the internal politics (a category 'other'), or were introduced as volunteers in some organizations, while significantly less frequently as senior or rank officers or parliamentary members. One of the roles that women frequently played in the stories covered by the media was a victim or a survivor. In comparison to men, women were less frequently presented as athletes or artists, and never as scientists.

Furthermore, once presented as representatives of a particular field, women were less frequently presented as holding a high rank position. For example, in the news stories on business or commerce, women were presented as salespersons, while men were introduced as either salespersons, heads of companies, or the owners of the stores. It was also a case in the news items on culture or health care system (most of the heads of organizations were male).

Conclusions

The chapter provides the results of the primary studies on the content of two Polish newscasts, 'Fakty' (TVN) and 'Wiadomości' (TVP1). The results show that Polish TV newscasts pay as little attention to women as TV stations in most other countries in the international project on the foreign news in TV. Since most of the news items were dedicated to internal politics and internal order, men as being over-represented in these fields, were also over-represented in the news items covering these topics. It means that as far as a number of male and female actors in the TV news is concerned, both Polish newscasts represent real life by giving an access to the media to those who actually play crucial roles in the internal politics.

At the same time, when journalists covered topics such as education, social relations, or ceremonies, more women had an access to the media. Women were also present as the actors in the news items on business and commerce, or culture. Still, the roles they played were of a lower rank than the men's roles.

Interestingly, despite the same percentage of women in the news items in Polish TV stations under the study, there were some significant differences between them. First of all, the public TV station gave more access to women than the commercial one while covering such topics as: military and defense, business, or internal order. On the other hand, the commercial TV station provided women with an access to the media more frequently than the public one while covering transportation, social relations and population issues.