

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

# Sports fans' socialization, team identification and gendered differences between sport consumption

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## Abstract

**Background:** This study focuses on sports fandom, consumption and socialization in the role of a sports fan. **Objective:** The study aimed to analyze the international differences between Polish sports fans and those in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Greece, Norway, and Qatar, based on a comparison of the results of studies using the same research methodology. **Methods:** The research utilized the Sports Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ) and the Sports Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) concerning fan-related behaviors and socialization in the role of a sports fan. A total of 286 Polish students were surveyed (53% male and 47% female, mean age of 21.3 years). **Results:** Investigated students strongly identified with the role of being sports fans. Males demonstrated a significantly higher level of sports fandom than females. Male socialization agents for sports fandom and consumption, particularly fathers, were important for both genders. Both genders were less likely to watch women's sports and mainly followed men's sports. Polish women ranked second on the SFQ (27.69) and the SSIS (37.15) among the compared national surveys and their average SFQ and SSIS scores indicate strong identification with the role of being a sports fan. Polish women, like British women, indicated school and parents as the most influential fan socialization agents, while data from other countries pointed rather to the role of community and friends. **Conclusions:** As in all other national samples, indirect sports consumption precedes direct consumption, and watching sports on television is the most common form of sports consumption in the media. Moreover, male dominance in sports fandom patterns and the role of a sports fan was evident in both males' and females' responses. That is why the male socialization agents may impact the creation of the identity role the most.

**Keywords:** sports fandom, team identification, socialization, sports consumption, women

## Introduction

Sports fandom has been studied for many years, with a strong focus on sport consumer loyalty and fan team identification analyzed from the perspective of psychology, sociology and sports marketing, management, economics, and consumer behavior (Bodet & Bernache-Assollant, 2011; Melnick & Wann, 2004, 2011; Theodorakis & Wann, 2008; Wann et al., 2001, 2021). Less attention has been paid to female fandom and women's sport in sports media but this gap in research has been also already increasingly filled (e.g., Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Farrell et al., 2011; Gemar & Pope, 2022; Havard et al., 2016; Koch & Wann, 2016; Kossakowski et al., 2022; Organista et al., 2021; Ridinger & Funk, 2006), and less involved sport fans, in other words, sport consumers, their mundane sport-related consumer practices (Crawford, 2003; Gemar, 2020) and changing their styles of media use (e.g., Chan-Olmsted & Xiao, 2019).

In this paper, we focus on a comparison of international data from studies using the same validated research tools measuring fans' team identification (understood as the strength of fans' psychological attachment to a sports team;

Wann et al., 2001), socialization into sports consumption and the social role of being a sports fan. Interesting cross-national gender differences with regard to sport consumption socialization and fan identity were also analyzed. The decision of using the same validated research tools in cross-national comparisons (data from seven countries) and surveying comparable samples caused the necessity to compare the data from different years and analysis limited only to student samples. These drawbacks of the presented research are described in more detail in the limitations of the study at the end of this paper.

In this study aiming at comparing data from several mentioned cross-cultural studies, the following research questions were asked: (1) To what degree do the respondents engage in behaviors commonly associated with sports fandom? (2) To what extent did parents, friends/peers, school and community contribute to respondents' socialization into the sports fan role? (3) Which socialization agents were most influential in their becoming a sports fan? (4) How strongly do the respondents identify with the role of a sports fan? (5) Do the respondents have a favorite team

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or teams they follow? (6) How strongly do the respondents identify with their favorite teams?

### Literature review

The process of socialization into participating in sports has already been well described and gathered probably the highest sport sociology interests in the 1980s (e.g., classic sport socialization research of Patriksson, 1981; Smith & Theberge, 1987). Research on this complex developmental learning process and sport-related internalization of values, norms, and attitudes include analyses of the impact of significant others, the family, its individual members (father, mother, siblings) and family structure. It often focuses also on past sports experiences of family members and parents' attitudes toward sports, but also on their social position or class and how it affects children's sports and recreational involvement (e.g., Craig & Mellor, 2010; Lenartowicz, 2016; Moens & Scheerder, 2004; Stuij, 2015). Due to girls' lower involvement in sports activities, as girls are often subjected to a different type of gender-related socialization in sports than boys (Craig & Mellor, 2010; Wheeler, 2012) and need stronger environmental support to undertake and maintain their involvement in sports (Coleman et al., 2008; Davison et al., 2003), some studies on sports socialization are also devoted to this issue. For example, in a review of studies on demographic, psychological, behavioral, and social factors correlated with physical activity in adolescent girls, Biddle et al. (2005) stated that the most important correlates of girls' physical activity were psychological variables, participation in organized sports activities, and general support from the family and its members. The socialization of girls into sport participation and sport consumption also seems to be more complex in comparison to the boys and it requires further studies.

In the sociology of sports, the problem of socialization into sports consumption and introducing children to the roles of sports consumers (the vast majority of which are recipients of sport television or Internet broadcasts), is less frequently addressed. We know that both for girls and boys, fathers and other male socializing agents are most often responsible for developing an interest in sports (Melnick & Wann, 2004, 2011; Parry et al., 2014). This may result in shaping a greater interest of women in watching men's sports competitions (Farrell et al., 2011; Melnick & Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis et al., 2017). Thus, while contemporary longitudinal research (e.g., Gemar & Pope, 2022; Meier et al., 2017) indicate an increasing interest in watching sports among women and the feminization of sports audiences, it mainly concerns man's sports. This might be the result of accepting the higher status of men's sports in the process of sports consumption socialization (Whiteside & Hardin, 2011) and the traditional masculine fandom culture rules and expectations when entering the sports fandom (Kossakowski et al., 2022). The nature of the socialization of women into sports consumption may be also similar to how female sports journalists are influenced by male journalistic culture and their more positive perceptions of man's sports (Organista et al., 2021).

Sport participation and sport consumption with direct or indirect references to socialization in these social practices are sometimes interlinked. It is the case for social class analysis and the omnivore-univore cultural activity concepts. DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) and Peterson and Kern (1996) have noticed that the higher the social position the higher the activity in all cultural domains which may include sport participation and general cultural consumption. The thesis that high-class members play more sports, but also are more often sports fans is supported by a significant body of research (e.g., Erickson, 1996; Gruneau, 1999; Hartmann-Tews, 2006; Moens & Scheerder, 2004). Some Bourdieu theory-based research like the Canadian study of Wilson (2002) or Scandinavian research by Thrane (2001) and Mehus (2005) also seem to confirm the hypothesis that adults who participate more in sports, are also more often attending live sports events. On the other hand, Mehus (2005) claims that the higher the educational level, the less frequent consumption of sports via television and hence the link between sport participation and spectatorship may be more relevant for stadium attendance and less for media sports consumption. In the case of Poland (e.g., Lenartowicz, 2016), higher class members were more involved in leisure sports, but significantly less in media sports consumption, while lower class members were very active sports univore television users who did not necessarily were practicing sports themselves. It is not clear whether intensive leisure sports participation automatically means intensive sports consumption and socialization into sports participation is automatically linked to the socialization into sports consumption. Due to huge sports broadcasts in easily available mass media, sports consumption is more common than sports participation, and socialization into sports consumption may be much more linked to socialization into consumption in general than socialization into sports participation.

To examine interest in sports, the level of fans' involvement in sports, and socialization in sports consumption, Wann's (2002) and Wann and Branscomb's (1993) scales – the Sports Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) and the Sports Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ) – were employed upon prior consent from authors' scales. Considering our research results and the findings of similar research carried out in the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, Qatar, Greece, and Australia, where the SSIS and the SFQ research tools have also been used, we aimed to analyze what extent do parents, school, friends, and the local community contribute to the socialization of the respondents into the role of being a sports fan, who is the most influential sport consumption socialization agent and how do obtained results relate to the results from other countries and for different genders. Another aim was to analyze how strongly respondents identify with the role of being a sports fan and with their favorite teams, and how the obtained results relate to the findings from other countries.

## Methods

Since one of the research goals was to compare Polish results with findings from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Norway, Greece, and Qatar we based on previous work on sports fan socialization used the same five sections in the questionnaire as it was in Melnick and Wann (2011), Parry et al. (2014), Theodorakis et al. (2017), Wann and Branscombe (1993), and Wann et al. (2001). For the same reason, the convenience sample of university students drawn from sports-related faculties was used as in previous studies. The only difference was that the Qatari students were not related to sports studies. In terms of sample size there were 163 Australian students in Melnick and Wann's study (2011), 252 UK students in Parry et al. (2014) study, 132 Norwegian students in Melnick and Wann's (2004) study, 183 US students in Wann and Branscombe (1993) study, 351 Greek students in Theodorakis and Wann (2008) study and 259 Qatari students in Theodorakis et al. (2017) study. Moreover, the examinations in all previous studies were guided by almost identical research questions to ensure the possibility of exploring cross-cultural differences in sports fandom. Again, the one difference was in the Qatari study, in which there was not a research question about the most influential socialization agent but the single agent responsible for the selection of their favorite team (rather than fandom in general).

## Questionnaire and procedure

Pilot studies were carried out to verify the correctness of the translation of the English versions of SSIS and SFQ research tools into Polish. The field research was conducted in 2018. The students who agreed to participate in the study were given a questionnaire packet containing five sections.

The first section requested students' demographic data. In the second section, participants indicated how often they engaged in sports fandom-related behaviors. The respondents specified how often they personally attended sporting events, watched sports on television, listened to sports on the radio, followed sporting events on the Internet, and discussed sports with friends and relatives. The answer sheet for the second section, concerning the assessment of the respondents' frequency of participation in sporting events, was based on an 8-point Likert scale.

The third section targeted sports socialization. Based on previous research (Melnick & Wann, 2004; Theodorakis & Wann, 2008; Wann et al., 2001), four socialization agents (parents, friends, school, and community) were identified as having the greatest impact on the sports fan socialization process. Respondents indicated each agent's influence on a Likert scale, with response options ranging from 1 (*no influence*) to 8 (*a great deal of influence*).

The fourth section required completing the SFQ, which verified the degree of student's identification with the role of being a sports fan (answers were based on a Likert scale). The SFQ has been widely used to survey sports fans (Melnick & Wann, 2004; Melnick & Wann, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis & Wann, 2008; Wann, 2002).

The fifth section of the questionnaire examined the level of identification with a sports team. To assess identification

with a team, Wann and Branscombe (1993) created the SSIS, which has been successfully used in numerous countries, including Australia (Melnick & Wann, 2011), the United Kingdom (Parry et al., 2014), Greece (Theodorakis & Wann, 2008), Norway (Melnick & Wann, 2004), Qatar (Theodorakis et al., 2017), and the United States (Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann et al., 2001).

The reliability and validity of the scale were checked repeatedly. Students were asked to indicate their favorite team and complete the SSIS. Using a Likert scale, they again assessed how important it was for them to be a sports fan, how strongly they identified with the selected team or player, and consequently, what behaviors they exhibited toward other teams and players (that they did not support).

## Participants

The respondents constituted a target group of 286 undergraduate and graduate students at Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland. The research sample consisted of 53% males and 47% females; the mean age of the respondents was 21.3 years ( $SD$  1.51, range 19–32). The university where the respondents were studying offers courses related to physical education and sports sciences. Students who chose these faculties probably demonstrated a significant interest in sports. The researchers were aware of this fact, but to compare the obtained results with those from similar studies conducted in the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, Greece, Australia, and Qatar, such a target sample was selected. In previous studies, to which the results of the authors' research have been compared, the research sample also consisted of students enrolled in courses related to sports and physical education.

## Data analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to describe the sample, assess relationships between key variables, and compare the data with similar studies conducted in other countries (Spearman correlations, regression analyses, mixed factor analysis of variance, chi-square test). All calculations were made using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 23; IBM, Armonk, NY, USA). Significance was set at  $p < .05$ .

As part of the initial data analysis, the five sections of the SFQ were combined to form a single index of sports fandom (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ ,  $M = 29.35$ ,  $SD = 8.57$ ). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the gendered differences in sports fandom. Men ( $M = 30.58$ ,  $SD = 8.15$ ) had a significantly higher level of fandom than women ( $M = 27.69$ ,  $SD = 8.89$ ),  $F(1, 281) = 8.04$ ,  $p = .05$ . Subsequently, the seven items comprising the SSIS were combined to form a single index of identification with a favorite team ( $\alpha = .90$ ). The average SSIS score for all the subjects was 38.19 ( $SD = 0.59$ ). Melnick and Wann (2011) indicated that a score above 35 evidence respondents' strong identification with the selected team. No differences were observed between men ( $M = 38.84$ ,  $SD = 10.85$ ) and women ( $M = 37.15$ ,  $SD = 10.17$ ),  $F(1, 276) = 1.943$ ,  $p = .15$ .

## Results

### Sports fandom-related behaviors

Participants' frequency of engaging in sports fandom-related behaviors (attending events in person, watching sports on television, listening to sports on the radio, watching sports on the Internet, and discussing sports with others) is presented in Table 1. Except for listening to sports on the radio, males exhibited greater frequencies of each behavior; 27% of men and 17% of women selected the three response options indicating the highest frequency of attending events in person. Similarly, 51% of men and 18% of women selected the two response options indicating the highest frequency of watching sports on television. Gendered differences have also become apparent regarding sports consumption via the Internet, for which 53% of men and 22% of women chose the three response options indicating frequently engaging in this behavior. Smaller differences were found regarding discussing sports, with 48% of men compared to 38% of women stating that they discuss sports daily.

Consistent with the findings of previous similar investigations in other countries (Melnick & Wann, 2004, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis & Wann, 2008; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Wann et al., 2001), the indicated frequency of sports fandom-related behaviors

was correlated with the level of team identification (SSIS results) and the level of sports fandom (SFQ results). All the relationships were positive and statistically significant (Table 2).

Regression analysis was performed to further examine the relationship between sports fandom, team identification, and sports fandom-related behaviors. For each of the analyses performed, one behavior related to sports fandom was the dependent variable, and team identification and sports fandom were used as independent variables (Table 3).

The SFQ scale was a significant indicator of each of the five sports fandom-related behaviors. However, the SSIS scale was significant only in relation to watching sports on the Internet and attending events in person. To conduct an in-depth analysis of the relationship between sports fandom, team identification, and fandom-related behaviors, a multiple regression method was used. Each of the analyses used one behavior related to being a fan as the dependent variable and being a fan (SFQ) and identifying with a team (SSIS) as independent variables. Regarding attending events and watching sports on television, the total effect of the two independent variables was significant. Regression analysis related to listening to sports on the radio demonstrated that the total effect of both independent variables was also significant, similar to

**Table 1** Responses (percentages) concerning fandom-related behaviors

Behavior	Response							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Attending sporting events in person								
All participants	6	16	27	19	11	14	4	4
Males	2	17	26	20	8	15	5	7
Females	12	14	28	17	14	13	3	1
Viewing sports on television								
All participants	1	3	6	13	17	25	19	18
Males	1	2	5	8	13	20	24	27
Females	0	4	7	18	23	31	12	6
Listening to sports on the radio								
All participants	45	17	10	10	6	5	3	3
Males	48	19	9	9	4	4	4	3
Females	43	13	13	12	8	6	3	4
Engaging with sports on the internet								
All participants	7	5	12	22	14	16	14	9
Males	4	2	7	22	12	22	20	11
Females	13	8	18	22	18	9	6	7
Discussing sports with family and friends								
All participants	0	1	3	8	7	15	23	43
Males	0	1	1	9	6	13	22	48
Females	1	2	5	6	8	18	23	38

Note. Response options: 1 = never, 2 = once a year, 3 = twice a year, 4 = once a month, 5 = twice a month, 6 = once a week, 7 = thrice a week, 8 = every day. Percentages for each item may not sum up to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 2** Correlations between team identification (SSIS scores) and sports fandom (SFQ scores) and the five sports fandom behaviors

Scale	Attendance	Television	Radio	Internet	Discussions
Team identification	.34**	.36**	.14**	.38**	.32**
Sports fandom	.41**	.52**	.23**	.39**	.44**

\*\* $p < .01$ .



watching sports on the Internet. The last regression analysis concerned discussing sports and again revealed that the total effect was significant (Table 3).

### Socialization into sports consumption and the social role of being a sports fan

A mixed-factor ANOVA was used to examine the impact of the four socialization agents. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 4. Significant statistical differences were noted for gender, Wilk's lambda = .872,  $F(1, 278) = 2.98$ ,  $p = .01$ . Subsequent univariate tests indicated a statistically significant difference between the genders, where women indicated school significantly more often,  $F(1, 278) = 6.413$ ,  $p = .01$ . Univariate analysis demonstrated no statistically significant gendered differences regarding the remaining socialization agents: parents  $F(1, 287) = 0.41$ ,  $p = .52$ ; friends  $F(1, 287) = 1.20$ ,  $p = .27$ ; and community  $F(1, 278) = 1.89$ ,  $p = .16$ . As shown in Table 4, the respondents reported being most influenced by their friends (similar to the results of the Australian survey). Table 5 presents the respondents' answers

regarding the four basic socialization agents for each research sample.

Table 6 presents the respondents' answers concerning the people or institutions that were the most important for them in the process of socialization into sports consumption and the role of being a sports fan. The respondents indicated family as the most important agent, followed by friends, school, and father.

In total, responses indicating the family (and its individual members: father, mother, brother, grandfather) accounted for 42%, suggesting that among the Polish students surveyed, the family was the most important socialization agent. The family was indicated more often among women (45.7%) than men (40%). Additionally, female students indicated their fathers and friends separately as the most important socialization agents more often. For men, the more important socialization agents, compared to those women cited, were schools, physical education teachers, coaches, and mass media. It is worth emphasizing that the surveyed women did not indicate any female socialization agents.

**Table 3** Regression statistics for the analysis of sports fandom-related behaviors as the dependent variable and team identification (SSIS) and sports fandom (SFQ) as the independent variables

Behavior	Team identification		Sports fandom		<i>F</i>	Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
	Beta	<i>t</i>	Beta	<i>t</i>		
Attendance at events	.165	2.43*	.298	4.39**	28.66**	.17
Viewing sports on television	.060	0.94	.485	7.61**	51.10**	.27
Listening to sports on the radio	-.043	-0.60	.300	4.18**	11.33**	.07
Engaging with sports on the Internet	.199	3.05*	.336	5.14**	41.08**	.23
Discussing sports	.091	1.43	.464	7.28**	51.07**	.27

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 4** Means and standard deviations for the impact of the four socialization agents by participants' gender

Socialization agent	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Parents		
Males	5.54	1.99
Females	5.69	2.26
Total	5.60	2.10
Friends		
Males	5.86	1.75
Females	5.60	2.09
Total	5.75	1.90
School		
Males	5.22	1.96
Females	5.81	1.94
Total	5.47	1.97
Community		
Males	5.23	1.90
Females	5.55	1.73
Total	5.36	1.83
Total		
Males	5.46	1.92
Females	5.66	2.01
Total	5.55	1.96

Note. Response options ranged from 1 (agent had no influence) to 8 (agent had a great deal of influence).

**Table 5** Means and standard deviations for the impact of the four socialization agents in the examined samples

Socialization agent	United Kingdom		Greece		Australia		Norway		USA <sup>a</sup>	Qatar		Poland	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Parents													
All participants	5.67	2.03	4.36	2.93	5.72	2.23	4.67	2.28	4.69	4.46	2.37	5.60	2.10
Males	5.72	2.00	4.85	2.94	5.76	2.18	4.43	2.30	4.88	4.84	2.19	5.54	1.99
Females	5.54	2.14	3.16	2.57	5.66	2.34	4.48	2.26	4.52	3.42	2.56	5.69	2.26
Friends													
All participants	5.67	1.76	4.47	2.71	6.01	1.80	4.97	1.93	5.47	5.02	2.33	5.75	1.90
Males	5.91	1.69	4.47	2.74	6.24	1.58	5.47	1.89	6.02	5.44	2.12	5.86	1.75
Females	5.01	1.80	3.81	2.52	5.65	2.07	4.62	1.89	4.99	3.88	2.49	5.60	2.09
School													
All participants	5.33	1.77	4.26	2.47	5.52	1.86	3.82	2.12	5.14	4.04	2.23	5.47	1.97
Males	5.36	1.72	4.56	2.46	5.45	1.79	3.59	1.98	5.25	4.14	2.22	5.22	1.96
Females	5.27	1.92	3.55	2.36	5.63	1.99	3.99	2.21	5.04	3.77	2.26	5.81	1.94
Community													
All participants	3.97	1.89	4.28	2.57	5.42	2.00	5.33	2.01	4.08	4.52	2.28	5.55	1.96
Males	4.09	1.86	4.53	2.44	5.65	1.84	5.45	1.94	4.30	4.56	2.26	5.46	1.92
Females	3.66	1.94	3.65	2.78	5.03	2.19	5.25	2.15	3.88	4.42	2.35	5.66	2.01

Note. Response options ranged from 1 (*agent had no influence*) to 8 (*agent had a great deal of influence*). <sup>a</sup>Wann et al. (2001) did not provide standard deviations for the US sample.

**Table 6** Socialization agents who were the most influential regarding respondents becoming a sports fan (percentages)

Socialization agent	All participants	Males	Females
Father	11.0	8.8	15.2
Family	27.0	26.5	27.6
School	11.5	12.9	9.5
Friends	13.5	10.2	18.1
Physical education teacher	7.5	8.8	5.7
Coach	7.5	8.8	5.7
Mass media	8.7	9.5	7.6
Romantic partner	2.0	2.0	1.9
Brother	1.6	2.0	1.0
Mother	0.4	0.7	0.0
Grandfather	2.4	2.0	2.9
Sports club	6.0	6.8	4.8

### Examining team identification and favorite teams or players

Wann et al. (2001) indicated that an average SSIS score above 35 allows us to consider respondents as identifying strongly with sports fandom. Hence, the results obtained for Polish students, both men ( $M = 38.84$ ) and women ( $M = 37.15$ ), allowed us to define them as strongly identifying with supporting specific teams, as 93% of respondents indicated their favorite team. Of the respondents, 46% selected a Polish team or player as their favorite, while 54% selected a club or foreign player. Of those who indicated their favorite team or player, 96% selected a male athlete or team. None of the male respondents indicated a female athlete or team as their favorite. However, among few the responses that included female players or women's sports teams (4%), all were from female respondents. Furthermore, women indicated a Polish club or player significantly more often than men (58%; chi-squared = 17.152,  $p = .01$ ). In turn, male respondents indicated a foreign player or club more often (64%). However, Student's  $t$ -test for independent groups did not show significant statistical differences between the

level of fandom involvement among women and men who indicated their favorite team,  $t(278) = 1.33$ ,  $p = .16$ , or between the level of fandom involvement in respondents indicating a foreign or Polish club,  $t(322) = 0.97$ ,  $p = .84$ . Most respondents declared that they were football fans and that they supported a player (e.g., R. Lewandowski, J. Błaszczykowski, C. Ronaldo, L. Messi), a club (the most popular foreign clubs were Real Madrid and FC Barcelona), or a football team. Over half of the respondents were concerned with football. The largest number of respondents indicated that they supported the Polish football club Legia Warszawa (12%), followed by the Polish national football team (11%). On the other hand, when summing up all the responses containing football clubs, more respondents indicated identifying with foreign sports clubs than Polish clubs. The most popular sports disciplines were volleyball, ski jumping, basketball, motorsports, and martial arts.

In both male and female Polish students, strong identification with the role of a sports fan was observed. Compared to samples from other countries, men ranked third on the SFQ (30.6) among the compared countries, following the British (34.7) and Australians (33.6), and fifth on the SSIS (38.8), behind the British (44), Qatari (41.5), Australians (41.1), and Greeks (40). As in the Australian sample, only the SFQ scale showed a significantly higher level of sports fandom among Polish male students than among female students. In a Polish study, a small difference was observed between men's and women's results compared to other samples (except for the Australian sample). Women scored second on the SFQ (27.7) and SSIS (37.2); in both cases, only Australians scored higher (30.3 and 38.7, respectively). Moreover, the surveyed female Polish students who indicated their favorite team and athlete did not differ from the male Polish students in their level of fandom involvement. This indicates a relatively high level of sports fandom among the surveyed Polish females. Nevertheless, the results of Polish students confirm the findings demonstrated in

other research: that men are more often involved in the role of being sports fans and identify more strongly with sports teams or players (Melnick & Wann, 2004, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis & Wann, 2008; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Wann et al., 2001).

## Discussion

Research on Poles' sports consumption has shown that similar to all other national samples, indirect sports consumption precedes direct consumption, and watching sports on television is the most common form of sports consumption in the media. An often-cited explanation of this fact is the respondents' economic status, which predisposes them to less expensive media consumption rather than pricier direct consumption (Melnick & Wann, 2004, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis & Wann, 2008; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Wann et al., 2001). The surveyed young Poles watched sports on television every day less often than the British, Australians, Norwegians, or Qatari. They also indicated doing so much less often than Australians, Greeks, Qatari, and Norwegians (no data were available for the United Kingdom); that is, they watched sports on television three times a week. They also indicated discussing sports daily with family or friends less frequently (43%) than Norwegians (51%) and the British (84%) and at a very similar level to Australians. Compared with the results from Qatar (39.5% and 14.7%) and Australia (25% and 17%), Polish respondents indicated that they followed sports on the Internet every day (9%) and at least three times a week (14%) less frequently. Comparing responses of "at least once a week" regarding direct consumption, only the Greeks (5%) demonstrated a significantly lower frequency than that recorded for the Poles. Fourteen percent of Polish respondents, much like Norwegians (14%) and Qatari (14.9%), declared that they attended sporting events in person once a week. Higher results were obtained in Australian (33%) and American (20%) samples (no data were available for the United Kingdom). The results for the remaining samples were similar. Of all the surveyed countries, Polish respondents declared the lowest level of listening to sports on the radio. This may be related to the loss of radio audiences due to the comparative benefits of other media.

A comparison of sports consumption and the SFQ and SSIS scores indicates that sports culture (understood as general social interest in sports and possibly the position of sports and athletes in the educational system as well as in society in general) has probably developed the most in Australia and the United Kingdom (Parry et al., 2014). In Polish research concerning sports consumption, there are more similarities to the sports consumption patterns of Norwegians and Greeks.

Polish women's average SFQ and SSIS scores indicate strong identification with the role of being a sports fan. However, a comparison of female respondents' declarations regarding sports consumption revealed that female Australians, Norwegians, and Qatari demonstrated a higher level of sports consumption (no data were available for the

United Kingdom). For example, the answer "at least twice a week" regarding watching sports on TV was selected by 12% of Polish females, 42% of female Australians, 18.6% of Qatari females, and 19% of female Norwegians. Concerning listening to the radio, 3% of Polish female students answered, "at least three times a week," compared to 7% of female Australians, 9.7% of Qatari women, and 7% of Norwegian women. Regarding following sports on the Internet, 8% of female Australians, 11.4% of Qatari women, and 6% of Polish women reported doing so, while 31% of Australians, 25% of Norwegian, 21% of Qatari, and 23% of Polish women discussed sports with family and friends three times a week. Polish female students outpaced Qatari (1.4%) and Norwegian (1%) women on the answer "at least three times a week" with the level of direct sports consumption. Australian women declared that they watched sports live as often as Polish women. Greek women had lower levels of sports consumption.

To compare the present study's results regarding the significance of the four indicated socialization agents (parents, friends, school, community) with previous findings (Melnick & Wann, 2004, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis & Wann, 2008; Theodorakis et al., 2017; Wann et al., 2001). The results of the research involving Polish students confirm that friends are consistently assessed as the most influential socialization agents connected to being a sports fan. Among the five surveyed groups, friends had the highest mean score among Poles, followed by the United Kingdom and Norway. In particular, men's average responses confirm the significant influence of friends on forming the sports fan identity, as well as behaviors and interests related to sports fandom. Except for Greece, males in all samples indicated their friends most frequently. In the Polish sample, as in three others (the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom), it was determined that the community has the least influence on becoming a sports fan. Norwegians chose the community the most often. Ranked second in the Polish sample, parents seem to have a similar impact on the socialization process in all samples, ranking second (Greece, Australia) or third (United States, Norway, Qatar) in the classifications, except for the United Kingdom, where parents were indicated the most often. In the Polish sample, small differences were noted between individual average responses (ranging from 5.55 to 5.86) compared to other samples (e.g., in Norway, the difference was between 3.59 and 5.25, and in the United Kingdom, it was 3.66 and 5.91).

It is more difficult to find common international patterns when analyzing women's responses to questions concerning the impact of individual socialization agents. First, Polish female students indicated school the most often, followed by their parents. Earlier studies in other countries have pointed to the role of community and friends in the process of women becoming sports fans (as can be seen clearly in the responses Norwegian, Greek, and Qatari women gave and the fact that American and Australian women identified "friends" as the second most common socialization agent). It was emphasized that since women are sports fans mainly for social reasons and the desire to

spend time with friends, friends would have a great influence on their behaviors associated with the role of being a sports fan (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). Polish women, like British women, indicated school and parents as the most influential socialization agents. Melnick and Wann (2011, p. 463) emphasized that:

It appears that the sports fan socialization process is more complex and nuanced for females than males and is probably influenced to a greater extent by the complex interactions of several factors including access and opportunity, family structure, gender dynamics, and the sociocultural context.

Using individual in-depth interviews, Mewett and Toffoletti (2011) examined the process of socialization in the role of being sports fans among Australian females supporting the national football league (AFL). Their research findings also support the importance of family in initiation into sports fandom. At the same time, they pointed to the roles of social ties and significant others in appreciating sports fandom. Further research is needed to explain the differences in the responses of Polish female students and their counterparts from other countries provided, especially when choosing the most important person who influenced their decision to become a sports fan. Female students indicated friends (18.2%) more often than at school (9.5%). On the other hand, the results presented in Table 6 support the importance of family for the socialization of women as sports fans.

As in previous studies to which we compared our results, male dominance in sports fandom patterns and the role of a sports fan was evident in both males' and females' responses concerning the most important person who contributed to the respondents describing themselves as sports fans. In previous studies (Melnick & Wann, 2004, 2011; Parry et al., 2014; Theodorakis & Wann, 2008; Wann et al., 2001), fathers were the most frequently identified as the ultimate socialization agent for influencing the development of an interest in sports and becoming a sports fan. Polish students most often indicated family as the most important agent. The answer "father" was the fourth most frequently selected. However, considering the small number of reports of "mother" as the most influential socialization agent and the lack of other female socialization agents, it can be concluded that socialization into being a sports fan is associated with male socialization agents and the family.

Male socialization agents may impact the choice to support male teams and male players, with whom respondents identified the most. Farrell et al. (2011) showed that men influence women's sports consumption and characteristics. Men are often less willing to watch women's sports, preferring to follow men's sports. When entering the world of sports fandom, thanks to male socialization agents, women may also internalize beliefs of men's sports superiority (Whiteside & Hardin, 2011). The present study's results have confirmed the above statements, as 95.8% of the respondents indicated supporting a male athlete or a male team. None of the male respondents declared their support for a female player or a women's team, which was the case for only 4.2% of the female respondents.

### Study limitations

The present study has several limitations. A limitation shared by all studies conducted on this topic so far is that the research sample consisted entirely of students. However, it was necessary to select a similar research sample to compare the Polish research results with the previously collected data. Undoubtedly, caution should be exercised when attempting to generalize the results to other groups that differ in age, education, or family status. It would be useful to supplement this survey with surveys of other social groups or a representative national sample. Another of the research's limitations is the time gap between the surveys from the United States (2001), Norway (2004), and Poland (conducted in 2018). This difference requires caution when comparing the obtained research results, which could also be supplemented by individual in-depth interviews, giving the respondents the opportunity for free expression. The latter would require a completely different research approach and would limit the possibility of international comparisons.

### Conclusions

The analysis aimed to examine the interest in sports, the level of fans' involvement in sports, and the socialization of sports consumption among Polish students. Employing the Sports Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) and the Sports Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ) enabled us to compare the research results with the findings of similar research carried out in the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, Qatar, Greece, and Australia. Regardless of cultural differences, Polish respondents' patterns of sports consumption were similar to all other national samples, except for some results concerning female respondents. In the case of the Polish sample, indirect sports consumption (with the predominant role of television broadcast) was more popular than direct sports consumption, while sport-related Internet use was less frequent than respondents from the Qatari and Australian samples. Polish respondents were less active in terms of discussing sports daily with family or friends in comparison to other countries, which may mean lower actual sports involvement or more sports spectatorship than a sports fan approach. Friends were consistently assessed as the most influential socialization agents in the process of becoming a sports fan in the Polish sample. Polish women's average SFQ and SSIS scores indicate strong identification with the role of being a sports fan. This result may support the arguments of Pope (2017) about increasing opportunities for women to get involved in sports as fans. Yet, even though Polish female respondents obtained stronger than expected identification with the fan role, male dominance in sports fandom patterns and the role of a sports fan was evident in both males' and females' responses. That is why male socialization agents may impact the creation of the fan identity role the most.

### Conflict of interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.



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