Sports press coverage of Polish female athletes during the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro

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Summary
During the last Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, the Polish female representatives won significantly more medals compared to men. This fact made the authors examine whether female athletes received proportionate media coverage compared to men. In the course of research, articles from the two largest Polish dailies were analysed ("Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Fakt Gazeta Codzienna"). With the use of content analysis, 197 articles were analysed in order to check whether any quantitative and qualitative differences can be observed in describing women's and men's sport. The results show underrepresentation of press coverage regarding women's sport. The results of qualitative analysis also point to a number of differences when portraying women's and men's sport.

Key words: sport, media coverage, press, Olympics, femininity

When commenting on the invisibility of sportswomen in the media, which has not changed for years, Mary Jo Kane, one of the most recognised researchers on the issue of media coverage on women's sport, said that: “the better sportswomen get, the more the media ignore them” (Kane, 2013). Other researchers focused on the issues related to portraying women’s sport in the media stress the unchanged-for-years tendency to marginalise women’s sport and trivialise their accomplishments (Cooky et al., 2015, Cooky et al., 2013, Fink, 2015). They also notice that even if the amount of media coverage on women’s sport goes up, it does not mean that the sport is portrayed properly, i.e. by appreciating women’s progress and giving up on stereotypical presentations (Bernstein, 2002, Fink, 2015). The issue of underrepresentation regarding media coverage of women’s sport is especially interesting in the context of the last Olympic Games and winning eight Olympic medals by Polish sportswomen compared to three in the case of men. The journalists and commentators of the Polish Olympic representation claimed that “Polish sport is based on women” (Bares, 2016, Zimoch, 2016, Nowakowska, 2016). That makes it even a more interesting task to check whether Polish female athletes received media coverage for their achievements during the Olympics which is at least comparable to that of men. Thus, the fundamental purpose of this article is to analyse the media coverage concerning women’s and men’s sport during the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro based on the two most popular Polish dailies, namely “Gazeta Wyborcza” and “Fakt Gazeta Codzienna”. The article will also discuss reasons for marginalisation of women’s sport in the media.

Women and the Olympic Games

There are more and more females entering subsequent Olympic Games. The London Olympics was the first one in which each country was represented by both women and men, with women taking part in all competitions. In the case of the US representation, more women than men competed for the first time, and women also won more medals (Kane, 2013). In Rio de Janeiro, sportswomen made up 45% of all contestants (International Olympic Committee, 2016). During the Winter Olympics, the number of sportswomen is smaller, however, it is becoming increasingly higher (40.3% in Sochi, 40.7% Vancouver and 38.2% Turin, 36.9% Salt Lake City, respectively) (International Olympic Committee, 2016). Although the representation of Polish female participants during the last four Olympics was always smaller compared to men (Vancouver 45%, London 43%, Sochi 41%, Rio 42%), it is women who won more medals (19 medals for women, 14 for men). Taking into account the constantly increasing statistics for the participation of women in the Olympic Games and other globally-recognised sport events, media coverage concerning women’s sport seems to be an interesting subject to analyse.

The quantitative differences in media sport coverage – overview of literature

Social researchers have devoted plenty of space to examining gender inequalities in media sports coverage.

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The Olympic Games and related television coverage have been thoroughly analysed, among others, due to the number of viewers which cannot be compared with any other sports event (Billings et al., 2008, Angelini & Billings, 2010, Angelini et al., 2012, Billings, 2008b, Billings & Eastman, 2003). Despite the fact that female athletes are given more attention during the Olympics than in the remaining parts of the season, still, the interest is not representative compared to the number of female representatives at the Olympics.

The studies on sport coverage during the Olympics also point to promoting men over women. In Vancouver, men were given 3/5 of the broadcasting time, after excluding mixed-gender competitions (Angelini, MacArthur & Billings, 2012). During the Olympics in Turin, this number was about 60% (Billings et al., 2008) and in Salt Lake City, about 65% of the broadcasting time analysed (Billings & Eastman, 2003). When also comparing the broadcasting time devoted to women and men during the Summer Olympics in 1996, 2000 and 2004, Billings also points to modest differences of a few percent (4-5%) and much more substantial differences (23%) during the Winter Games in 1998, 2002 and 2006 (Billings, 2008b, p. 112-118). The differences in the amount of broadcasting time with regard to gender may be justified by the larger number of disciplines considered to be feminine during the Summer Olympics, which have been accessible to them for a long time (Billings, 2008b, p. 116). The fact that during the Olympic Games women may count on more coverage is also connected with representing a given country and not with valorisation of femininity in sport (Wensing & Bruce, 2003, Hedenborg, 2013).

Initially, press research also demonstrated under-representation of women. More recent studies, however, point to the media coverage which is proportional to the number of sportswomen. When examining the British press, King demonstrated continuous occurrence of gender differences between the years 1948 and 1996, and a fundamental change in the trend in 2004 (King, 2007). Comparing five papers in the USA, K. Kinnick demonstrated lack of any quantitative differences in gender-related press coverage during the Olympics in Atlanta (Kinnick, 1998). Also, Vincent et al., when comparing papers in the USA, UK and Canada, demonstrated that women receive comparable media coverage (Vincent et al., 2002). In a study concerning five European countries, Capranica et al. point to the press coverage which is proportional to the number of women competing in the Olympics (Capranica et al., 2005). In turn, O’Neill and Mulready demonstrated that after the games, the coverage on women’s sport goes back to the number from before the games (O’Neill & Mulready, 2014).

The studies of sport media coverage aside from the Olympic time indicates much lower interests in women’s sport. They revealed that women’s sport is under-represented and sport coverage on women is burdened with gender-based prejudices (Cooky et al., 2015, 2013, Billings & Young, 2015, Turner, 2013). The longitudinal study by Cooky et al. has shown that in 2014, only 3.2% of the airtime (local Los Angeles network affiliates) for the sports news was devoted to information on women’s sports. During 25 years of research, only in 2009 did the surveys provided lower values (Cooky et al., 2015). As Kane comments on the obtained results of research, it is surprising, since 40% of sportspeople in the USA are women. According to the researcher, the obtained results prove that women are not so much ignored in the media but rather false narration is created, demonstrating that women are either not interested in sport or not talented enough (Kane, 2013, p. 235).

Research concerning Polish media also indicates significant under-representation of women’s sport. The research concerning the TV sport news in 2008 has shown that 93% of the total transmission time was devoted to men’s sport (Kluczyńska, 2011, p. 390). The results of The International Sport Press Survey 2011 concerning “Gazeta Wyborcza”, “Fakt” and “Głos Wielkopolski” analysed from April to May 2011 have shown that 85% of press articles concerned men’s sport (Jakubowska, 2015). The results of the four-year long research concerning sport articles in Gazeta Wyborcza in the years 2010-2013 look similar. In each year, the percentage of articles about women’s sport did not exceed 15.3 % (Dziubiński, Organista, & Mazur 2018).

In sports media, gender differences are reproduced by dividing sport disciplines into those which are stereotypically associated with femininity and those which are considered as inappropriate for women (Koivula, 2001, Jakubowska, 2014, p. 464-479). Doing sports by women is approved as far as sport disciplines require a slim figure, grace of movements or a sense of rhythm (individual sports: rhythmic gymnastics or figure skating). Sport disciplines in which physical strength is employed, stamina and aggression required, are not considered as sports appropriate for women in common perception (team sports - collision and contact sports) (Cooky, et al. 2015, 2013, Jakubowska, 2015).

Under-representation of coverage takes place despite the constantly increasing interest in women’s sport and physical activity more and more frequently undertaken by women. A report by the Central Statistical Office (GUS) from 2013 shows that 43% of women and 48% of men take part in sport and recreation activities, whereas 18.9% of Polish women and 21.8% of Polish men do it on a regular basis (GUS 2013). Women are more frequently sport consumers both directly and via the media (Meier et al., 2013, Clark et al., 2009). According to the research by the Institute for Market and Social Research, in 2012, 64% of women in Poland declared watching TV sports news, and a year later, 74% (IBRIS, 2014). Despite the data proving the increasing interest of women in sport, their experience is often ignored. In this context, Pfister writes about refusing women a “cultural ticket” to be a sport fan (Pfister et al., 2013) and Jones about functioning outside the “imagined community” of fans (Jones, 2008).
Qualitative differences in media sport coverage – overview of literature

The results of the qualitative research on media coverage are also very disturbing. If anything is written about women’s sport at all, it is usually in a manner which is different when writing about men’s sport. Janet Fink mentions the five most popular practices which are different for the presentation of women’s and men’s sport. Gender marking refers to a situation of stressing the participation of women in specific competitions in order to mark the difference between women’s and men’s sport. This results from treating men’s sport as a standard and reproducing stereotypical claims that women’s sport has secondary status. Another practice is to infantilise sportswomen. Journalists often use only their first names or call them “girls” (Daddario, 1994). This can be rarely observed in the case of men. Here, martial metaphors are often employed. The vocabulary is stylised, full of references to famous battles or war heroes, which sustain the myth of a man-warrior (Sabo & Jensen, 2002, Vincent, 2004, Dzubiński et al., 2015). Additionally, in the case of women, their relationship with family is emphasized, giving the readers an impression of dependence and the need to be taken care of. Such language sustains the low status of women in sport (Ducan et al., 1994). The third typical practice is to minimise commentaries about abilities of female contestants and maximise such content in the case of men’s sport. Failures of sportswomen, emotionality or the fact that their success depends on the work done by their coaches are often emphasized. In the case of men, their involvement, commitment or extraordinary abilities are emphasized much more frequently (Angelini, MacArthur & Billings, 2012, Billings & Eastman, 2003). Ambivalence was also described as a method of portraying sportswomen. Positive comments are combined with information undermining the status of women. As Eagleman noted when summarising her research, ambivalence shows the power of the media which minimises the achievements of female contestants (Eagleman, 2015). Another framework distinguished by Fink which is used to portray sportswomen concerns stressing their femininity and heterosexuality. Their beauty or physical appearance are commented on, and their out-of-sport roles (of mothers, wives or girlfriends) are mentioned. Emphasizing the attractiveness of female athletes refers to male viewers to whom the media coverage is adapted (Fink & Kensicki, 2002, Prinnen, 1997, Kane, 1996, Daddario, 1994). For example, Bissel and Duke proved that the video coverage of women’s beach volleyball concentrates on their physicality, which was perceived as a strategy for attracting the viewers to this sport (Bissel & Duke, 2007). Jones demonstrated that the television coverage of figure skating was focused on the contestants’ faces 30% more frequently compared to men, which the author took as a technique aimed at emphasizing their sexuality and emotionality (Jones, 2011). The last fundamental difference between women’s and men’s sport described by J. Fink refers to a different method of production of sports events. The information about women’s sport is often reduced to a simple report of results of a given competition, while in the case of men’s sport, deepened reviews and presentations of sportsmen appear much more often. This makes women’s sport seem boring (Cooky et al., 2015). As Messner noted, sportswomen are much more rarely employed to promote and advertise sport (Messner, 1998), which gives the impression that women’s sport is less interesting. When doing research on the method of producing athletics competitions during the Olympics in Athens, Greer and her female colleagues proved that more time, means and ingenuity were devoted to men’s competition which made, in the authors’ opinion, women’s sport seem “naturally less exciting” (Greer et al., 2009).

Reasons for underrepresentation of women’s sport in the media

The presented research results which prove marginalisation of women’s sport in the media are justified with the limitations resulting from the need to care for the viewing figures and financial profits. It seems to be a common belief among sport producers, journalists and commentators, that only men are interested in sport and thus, media coverage should be tailored to their needs. Social researchers point to the fact that such beliefs are shaped by the patriarchal structure of contemporary societies which values the masculine more (Connell, 1998). Sport in its current form was created in the 19th century by men, and its main purpose was to sustain the conviction of male greatness (Dworkin & Messner, 2002). Due to the importance of physical abilities, it is perceived as reproducing the natural gap between the sexes and not their social structure. The frailty myth of women supported by the 19th century medical discourse even consolidated the belief that physical effort is not recommended for women (Jakubowska, 2014, p. 33-41). Nevertheless, the data concerning physical activity as well as direct and indirect sport consumption shows that a significant number of women not only watch sport on TV but also actively exercise. This fact seems to be still ignored by those responsible for sports coverage. As Kane and Fink point out, sport reaches its recipients mainly in mediated form (Fink, 2015, Kane, 2013). The way of communication has fundamental impact on how women’s sport is received by the audience. Therefore, people in charge of sport coverage have active impact on the opinions of the audience.

In the last two decades, a lot of research has been done to demonstrate whether the traditional method of portraying women’s sport (described in the previous subchapter) is desired and accepted by the audience. The research proved that both boys (Daniels & Warena, 2011) as well as girls and grown-up women (Daniels, 2012), have much worse opinions about sportswomen described or presented in sexualised postures. Descrip-
The obtained results show that particularly women react badly to marketing strategies which make use of sexualised images of female contestants (Antil, Burton & Robinson, 2008). Respondents were to watch sport events. Afterwards, they were to note down their level of excitement. It was noted down as higher when watching men’s sport. Physiological tests performed simultaneously for the level of excitement when watching sports did not demonstrate differences when watching women’s or men’s sport. That being so, it may be assumed that cultural factors are responsible for the fact why the respondents noted down a higher level of excitement when watching men’s sport.

Research challenging the belief that women’s sport can be “sold” most easily by presenting physically attractive sportswomen can also be found. It was traditionally assumed that men’s sport should be advertised by means of their achievements in sport and in the case of women, by means of sexualised presentations. In the case of two experiments where the materials promoting a tennis and softball tournament manipulated with the attractiveness and abilities of female contestants, it turned out that the materials stressing achievements and abilities resulted in greater intentions to participate in the events (Fink, Cunningham & Kensicki 2004, Cunningham, Fink & Kenix 2008). Subsequent research which made use of focus group interviews with male and female sport fans also showed that the marketing strategy in women’s sport used so far brought effects which were rather opposite of what was expected. In the research by Kane and Maxwell, fans between the age of 18 and 54 were shown six types of photos of sportswomen classified from those representing “athletic competences” to “soft porn” (Kane & Maxwell, 2011). The results showed that women and older men pointed to the photos presenting sport abilities as those which increased their willingness to participate in sport events most. In addition, they felt offended by the “soft porn”-style presentations. Younger men had positive opinions about the sexualised images of women, however they claimed that such images did not increase the chances of their participation in women’s competitions. Similar research was conducted by Antil, Burton and Robinson. The obtained results show that particularly women react badly to marketing strategies which make use of sexualised images of female contestants (Antil, Burton & Robinson, 2012). Based on the presented research results, it seems highly probable that women’s sport is at a loss regarding the attempt to attract an audience based on the conviction that physical attractiveness is the most essential aspect in women’s sport.

Sports journalism and audience demand

Apart from the mentioned-above patriarchal structure of societies and sexism resulting therefrom and the belief that sport is a male thing, also the practices employed in sport journalism marginalise women’s sport in media coverage.

The research concerning sport journalism revealed its gender-oriented nature. The majority of journalists are men, and sport journalism is seen as a traditionally male area (Boyle & Haynes, 2009, p. 134). The majority of the male audience for sport coverage makes the producers of sport programmes and authors of press articles think that their coverage from sport arenas meets the needs of the audience (Hardin, 2005). A small number of female sport journalists reinforces the belief that sport is a male thing. The International Sports Press Survey in the part devoted to Poland shows that female journalists account for 8% of all journalists (Jakubowska, 2013, 2015). The consequence of such a state of affairs is that there is no one in the media to remind us of the issues specific to women, showing their experience and perspective. It is essential because, as the research by Kian and Hardin showed, the sex of the journalist influences the way women’s sport is portrayed (Kian & Hardin, 2009). Men more frequently consolidate gender stereotypes when describing sportswomen. They also less frequently write about women’s sport compared to women. Although not all research shows that employing more female journalists would increase coverage of women’s sport, this fact should not be linked with the reluctance of female journalists to women’s sport but with their fear of being accused of “favouring” sportswomen and the unwillingness of publishers to present women’s sport (Hardin & Shain, 2005, Kian, 2007). The research by Gee and Leberman showed that the coverage of women’s sport has to meet higher criteria compared to men’s sport in order to be approved (Gee & Leberman, 2011).

Rare research concerning female sport journalists shows that they are still marginalised at work. They earn less, it is assumed that they know less about sport than their male colleagues and their articles have to meet higher standards (Miller & Miller, 1995, Kian, 2007). In addition, they experience various forms of abuse both at work (due to the fact of masculinisation of sport sections in the media) and from coaches, contestants and activists (Miller & Miller, 1995, Miloch et al., 2005). As Hardin and Shain noticed, in their professional life, they have to constantly negotiate between femininity and a culturally-established attitude of a professional journalist (Hardin & Shain, 2006). They fall into the pattern of double bind. In order to be accepted, they have to be feminine: empathic, understanding, kind, etc. and at the same time, they have to negate such features in order to be treated as professionals at work.

The research concerning media publishers from the Southeast in the USA brought very interesting results (Hardin, 2005). Such research is very important because the choices made by publishers in terms of texts
to be published, shape the preferences of readers. A survey conducted among 285 publishers showed that, frequently, they do not verify the preferences of readers (only 55% check the demographic data concerning the readers, and 40% make use of some method of surveying interests of readers). Publishers also rely on their personal beliefs concerning inferiority of women’s sport and that an average male reader is not interested in following women’s sport. That being so, the views of publishers shaped by the prevailing patriarchal cultural beliefs would be a major factor in marginalising women’s sport in the media. As the author of the research concludes, it is also disturbing that a large portion of publishers have opinions about women’s sport which justify its exclusion from media coverage. Thus, they do not feel that they create reluctance or invisibility of women’s sport in the public space. They do not think that their task is to provide fair coverage for both sexes and, at the same time, do not notice that by keeping the status quo, they also make certain socially-significant decisions. Kane points out that narration: “nobody’s interested in women’s sport” – ignores the growing interest in women’s sport both in terms of direct participation and via the media. The narration shared by journalists may no longer have anything to do with social reality, but with the beliefs of publishers, journalists and producers themselves (Kane, 2013, p. 233).

Methodological assumptions

The main purpose of the study was to perform a quantitative and qualitative comparison of the press materials from the last Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Results of quantitative analysis

85 articles in “Gazeta Wyborcza” and 112 in “Fakt” were analysed. Respectively, 24 and 36 articles were written about women’s sport. This data shows that the press coverage on the Rio Olympics was disproportionate since the females accounted for 42% of the representation and received only 28% of space in GW and 32% in Fakt (Fig. 1).

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<tr>
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<th>Gazeta Wyborcza</th>
<th>Fakt</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of articles</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>112</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of articles about women (% of all articles)</td>
<td>24 (28)</td>
<td>36 (32)</td>
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Fig. 1. Number of articles about women’s sport

The research method used was content analysis. “Gazeta Wyborcza” (GW) and “Fakt Gazeta Codzienna” were chosen for analysis. The daily circulation of Gazeta Wyborcza (GW) in May 2018 was 93,136 copies, according to the data of Związek Kontroli Dystrybucji Prasy, 2018 [the Association of Press Distribution Control] (.). “Gazeta Wyborcza” has the opinion of a liberal paper which promotes the values of social equality and justice. The other paper selected for analysis is “Fakt Gazeta Codzienna”. It is a tabloid paper with the highest circulation among daily newspapers in the country (248,993 copies).

In the study, all sports articles published from the day of starting the Olympic Games to the day after completing were analysed. The column “w skrócie” [in brief] was not analysed because it presented only the results. Also, the analysis did not cover the articles about sport which were not directly related to competing in sports, such as e.g. concerning the construction of sports stadiums, economic potential of sport, etc. These articles are described as neutral. Mixed articles made up a separate category, i.e. such which described both events in men’s and women’s sports.

A code sheet was developed to code the results of the analysis. The articles were coded due to their length (number of words was decisive), journalist’s sex (if it was signed) and sports discipline. The other part of the tool for the qualitative analysis distinguished five coding categories: appearance and sexuality of athletes (emphasizing the beauty, clothes, etc.), referring to out-of-sport roles and tasks (of a mother, daughter, wife), language and comments (infantilising – limiting competitors to the role of teenagers and children, sarcastic, but also using martial metaphors). Another coding category described the skills of the contestants (describing physical and mental properties which were decisive for the victory or lack of it in case of failure). Every text was analysed twice and coded by both authors.

It is even more puzzling in the context where Polish female athletes won eight medals compared to three won by men. In addition, during the Olympics, “Fakt” published over three times as many sport articles (118) not related to the Rio Olympics. Mostly, these were articles concerning the Polish highest football league – Ekstraklasa, and related results. Taking account of the fact that the Polish league is not among the best in Europe, such coverage in the press may be surprising. It is known, however, that football is still the most popular sport discipline in Poland and a kind of a “bastion of masculinity”.

Articles in “Gazeta Wyborcza” were significantly longer compared to “Fakt”, which to some extent, may compensate for their smaller number (Fig. 2).
Articles in “Fakt” provided rough reports from sport events, however, definitely more photos were attached. Articles in GW were more complex, with plenty of descriptions of not only the course of the competition, but also preparations and analyses after the show. In GW, the number of long articles (more than 550 words) about men’s sport was higher, the number of shortest articles (less than 200 words) was also definitely smaller compared to the articles about women’s sport. In “Fakt”, medium-length articles about men’s sport could be found more often (21% of all articles) and fewer short articles (79%), with adequately 14% and 86% of materials about women’s sport.

None of the articles about the Olympic Games were written by a female journalist. In the two largest daily papers in Poland, only men write about sport, which does not facilitate equal engagement in reporting sport events concerning women and men.

As to the question about the disciplines described in the newspapers, this can be answered only partially. Due to the fact that mainly occurrences of Poles were reported during the Rio Olympics, a lot was written about athletics (gold medal and world record by Anita Włodarczyk) as well as canoeing and rowing. A small number of articles about non-Poles was focused on disciplines appropriate for each sex. Women’s basketball, handball or football tournaments were not reported either, but space was devoted to individual feminine-deemed disciplines. The information about men’s sport was also related to the disciplines considered masculine or neutral (weightlifting, handball, athletics) (Fig. 3).

**Results of qualitative analysis**

In the articles about women’s sport, numerous allusions to the physical appearance of sportswomen can be found. Contrary to the descriptions of physicality of men, such descriptions are not connected with chances to succeed in a given sport discipline. Descriptions of women’s physicality are assessment of their attractiveness for the opposite sex.

“A beautiful Polish woman is a revelation of the javelin throw” (Marysiu! Zrób to jeszcze raz [Marysi! Do it again], 18th Aug. 2016, Fakt)

“They are beautiful and play beach volleyball very well. Brazilian men, who adore beautiful women and beach volleyball, don’t need more” (Rio szaleje za Polkami [Rio is crazy about female-Poles], 9th Aug. 2016, Fakt)

“Marta likes pink. Marta likes distinctive colours, neon nails. Marta is laid-back and publishes bold photos of herself on Facebook”/ “She does not part with her old pink canoe, does not quit her neon nails, she loves the stars tattooed on her neck and back – a strong-delicate woman, Marta Walczykiewicz, Olympic vice-champion” (Medalowa mieszanka wybuchowa [A ujednolicono kolejnosc zapisu, GW]).

The last quotation demonstrates the ambivalent message concerning female contestants well. On the one hand, their physical strength needed to succeed in sport...
is emphasized, on the other, such comments are neutralised by judgements about their physical attractiveness. Such a manner of narration may be an attempt to “cram” sportswomen into conventional femininity from which their athleticism might ‘exclude’ them.

Descriptions of male physicality much more often refer to translating their physical conditions into their capabilities within a given discipline. Their athleticism and muscle mass are emphasized.

“The USA team have it all to challenge everyone. Tall, aggressively attacking forwards led by Matthew Anderson, well-known from the Master League, who likes to torture Polish teams. (...) Versatile and athletically-perfect players play a very well-organised volleyball” (Polacy na podbój Ameryki [Poles to conquer America], 17th Aug. 2016, GW).

“This team commands respect even when singing the anthem, with a line of giants holding hands on each other’s shoulders, all of almost the same height. As to physical conditions, their advantage over Poles was huge”. (Koszmar zwyciężonych’ [Nightmare of the defeated], 22nd Aug. 2016, GW)

Both, female and male contestants were portrayed in their out-of-sport roles. With men, the role of the father was emphasized (T. Majewski, M. Phelps). The status of a lady-killer, skirt-chaser or a partygoer was also stressed (R. Lochte, M. Phelps). This strategy is aimed at stressing masculinity of sportsmen reproduced by means of their sexual performance. With women, relationships with their husbands were stressed (K. Hosszu).

“Larissa is better known – four years ago she won an Olympic medal and three years ago got married ...to another beach volleyball player, Liliane Maestrini” (Zagrają w kotle [To play in the cauldron], 11th Aug. 2016, Fakt).

“Then, her friend gave birth to a child. And Magda married Michal Kozłowski, who is her coach” (Mamy złoto [We’ve got the gold], 12th Aug. 2016, Fakt)

Significant differences can be found in the commentaries and language used to address female and male contestants. Especially in “Fakt”, females were frequently addressed directly, by their name and using diminutive forms. This can be seen even in the titles of articles: “Anita, you are grand!” (16th Aug. 2016), “Marysia, do again” (18th Aug. 2016) or “Zosia did not samba” (19th Aug. 2016). However, also in GW, females were frequently described using only their first names: “Katinka, who enraptures and shocks, is on a winning streak” (11th Aug. 2016, GW), “May the power be with Maja” (20th Aug. 2016, GW). Additionally, in “Fakt”, female contestants were described as: “our ladies” (“Magda i Natalia pokazaly siłę” [Magda and Natalia showed strength], 8th Aug. 2016, Fakt). No doubt, Polish female athletes were considered “closer” or more “ours”, which could result in more intimacy and such a way of presentation. It can be hard, however, to treat it as a sign of respect or a mature attitude towards sportswomen.

What is also noticeable is comparison of the achievements of female and male contestants. Sportsmen are seen as examples and sportswomen only as their counterparts, which may cause their further trivialisation. In the articles, it was stressed that S. Biles is a star like M. Phelps (“Nadleciała S. Biles” [Here comes S. Biles], 12th Aug. 2016, GW) and Polish female canoeists are as strong as men (“Medalowa mieszanka wybuchowa” [Medal explosive mixture], 17th Aug. 2016, GW).

Martial metaphors would occur more frequently in texts about men’s sport, but exceptionally good results of female contestants were also described with the use of such metaphors. Martial metaphors stress valour and strength of male contestants and give the reader the impression that sport is something much more important than entertainment. They occur in articles about men’s sport more often because they describe disciplines stereotypically linked with masculinity, that is, mainly collision and contact sports.

“A commando platoon well-coordinated in training has contact via radio with the headquarters in the car”. (Czterej pancerni w Rio de Janeiro [Czterej pancerni – the four tankers – in Rio de Janeiro], 6th Aug. 2016, GW)

“The Argentinian “La Nación” wrote about a tennis match in Rio that del Porto used his right hand as if with each strike he bombed Vietcong and ISIL at the same time”. (Jak Juan Martin del Potro bombardował Wietkong [How Juan Martin del Potro bombarded Wietkong], 9th Aug. 2016, GW)

Sportsmen were also compared to gangsters (U. Bolt), musketeers or even gods (M. Phelps). Dominance of women was noticed, especially in the case of Anita Włodarczyk, however, descriptions were not as colourful and evocative as in the case of men’s sport.

Apart from one example, in the analysed material, no statements were found which would explicitly ridicule or humiliate female contestants. In numerous cases, their sport skills were appreciated. Their class (Maja Włoszczowska), dominance (Anita Włodarczyk) and strength (canoers, rowers) were noted. However, when describing men’s sport, colourful descriptions of their competitions, spiced up with positive adjectives, were created. Their dedication and determination were praised, struggles with sport injuries and status of unquestionable stars worldwide were described.

“And it is Bolt who will stay in our minds as an imprinted photo at the moment of his celebration after winning – his right elbow bent, drawing back the bowstring to send an arrow into the skies. Or lightning like an ancient god” (Największy wszechczasów [The greatest of all time], 16th Aug. 2016, GW).

The Olympics which were unsuccessful for the Polish woman fencer, made a “Fakt” journalist ridicule Aleksandra Socha.
“After four Olympics, with our money, Aleksandra Socha came to a conclusion that she is not fit for fencing because she is sorry when her rival loses” (Machanie szabelką zamiast szermierki [Waving a mini-saber instead if fencing], 12th Aug. 2016, Fakt).

It was the only article with a demeaning comment. Otherwise, women’s sport was often described in a less exciting manner, their achievements were neutralised with references to traditional femininity, however, legitimacy of their participation was not undermined.

Conclusions

The results of the content analysis of media coverage are to a significant extent, consistent with the previous studies (Cooky et al. 2013, 2015, Fink, 2015, Jakubowska, 2015, Kane, 2013). The analysed material points not only to underrepresentation of women’s sport in the two largest Polish dailies, but also to a different manner of describing sport depending on sex (Eagleman, 2015, Fink 2015, Fink & Kensicki 2002). Taking the higher number of medals won by Polish female athletes compared to men into account, underrepresentation of articles about women’s sport may be surprising, even more when we compare it with the number of articles about sport events not related to the Olympics. Success of Polish female athletes did not receive as much coverage as football league matches. In addition, in the analysed material, no articles appeared which would analyse achievements of Polish female athletes, their status in sport or barriers they face even to be able to present their efforts in the media. It seems that the opinion of Mary Jo Kane quoted at the beginning, also fits perfectly in the case of Polish female athletes (Kane 2013). Despite increasingly better results in sport, sportswomen cannot count on fair media coverage. Lack of female sport journalists and understanding of the problems of sportswomen result from the conviction about the “masculine” structure of sport (Jakubowska, 2015, Hardin, 2005, Kian, 2007). The status of women as ‘the others’ in sport can still be seen, even in the manner they are portrayed. A tendency can be observed to describe them in the categories of classic femininity, which neutralises their sport achievements.

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