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Sport in the new media. Media coverages of selected sport disciplines during the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro

KEYWORDS

sport, media, media coverage, gender, Olympics, femininity, masculinity

ABSTRACT

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This study concerns the online sports media coverage, a topic that has not been previously analyzed in Poland. In recent decades many studies (in Anglo-Saxon countries in particular) indicated the major underrepresentation of women's sport and different framing of sportswomen and sportsmen. Those studies showed that the media plays important role in upholding gender stereotypes in sport and hindering empowerment of sportswomen. This study analyzes media coverage of three sports disciplines (gymnastics, swimming and weightlifting) during Rio Olympics on five websites. Findings revealed underrepresentation of women's sport and setting the trend to write about women's sport in disciplines consider as appropriated for women. The qualitative analysis did not indicate gender-specific descriptors in materials about sportspeople.

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Introduction

In the last few decades, social researchers dealing with sport have devoted much attention to the analysis of sports media coverage. In particular, they focused on the underrepresentation of information about women's sport. Information about men's sport prevailed both in the printed media and in television broadcasts (Fink, 2015; Kane, 2013; Cooky et al., 2015; Jakubowska, 2015, Dziubiński et al., 2019). If any information about women's sport appeared in the media, it referred to sport disciplines that represented femininity in its traditional sense, focusing on the physical appearance of female athletes (tennis, rhythmic gymnastics, figure skating, etc.) (Sherry, 2016). Qualitative analyses indicated that women's sport was described differently from men's sport. Women's sport was often described in an ironic manner, and female athletes' effort was often trivialised (Bruce, 2013). According to some researchers, the new media¹ that are not limited by the place and time of media communication can provide an opportunity to describe women's sport more broadly. In connection with the absence of studies on the online media coverage of sport in the Polish literature of the subject, it was checked whether the coverage of women's sport and men's sport in the new media is comparable. The manner in which sportswomen are portrayed is important also due to the interest of girls in sport and active leisure. Sport is a social institution that was created by men and for men (Whitson, 1989; Kimmel, 1989). Sport was a means for naturalising the gender difference and, thereby, maintaining social inequalities (Messner, Dworkin, 2002: 17–29). Images of successful female athletes respected in society could potentially influence the attitude of girls and women to sport and to legitimate their interests or make them more active (Messner, 1998). Many academicians, particularly in the USA, highlighted the fact that women's successes in sport might influence the gender structure of society (Cooky, 2009). The female athletes that are successful due to their physical potential weaken the constantly functioning narration about the 'natural lack of interest in sport' among girls (Sabo et al., 2004) and contribute to the "dismantling" of gender inequalities being created

¹ My work draws upon the definition of the new (online) media from the paper *Dziennikarstwo wobec nowych mediów [Journalism in comparison with the new media]*: 'The new media are techniques, technologies and institutions used for communication and making use of digital methods for the registration, recording and storage of data and the creation and transmission of messages. The new media are characterised by the hypertextual structure of communication and reception, the possibility of programming (...), interactivity, cumulateness, global reach and, at the same time, the individualisation of access' (Bauer, 2009: 126). Comparisons concerning the traditional and new media can also be found in: McQuail (2012: 57–59, 149–153).

in society on the basis of the assumption of gender difference. The online media coverage of sport seems to be essential, because particularly girls and boys draw their knowledge largely from the Internet and information obtained from that source have an impact on their evaluation of what is “feminine” and “masculine” (Subrahmanyam et al., 2001).

Theoretical assumptions

Sport and the mass media are closely interrelated and interdependent.² The media constitute a powerful social institution that can fundamentally influence recipients' opinions in many fields. In consideration of the fact that consumers receive a large majority of sports events in a mediated form, without “live” participation in sports events, the contents communicated by the media seem even more significant.

This study draws upon the theory of framing that was introduced by Erving Goffman in 1974 (Goffman, 1974). In the last few years, many studies concerning the underrepresentation of women's sport in the media used the theory of framing. As Denis McQuail writes after Robert Entman: ‘frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgements.’ The use of frames allows us to make a comprehensive interpretation of separate facts, but it is not free of certain bias, which may sometimes be unintentional (McQuail, 2012: 374). Therefore, the media take up selected topics and then assign a certain meaning to them. In this way, they act as gatekeepers ensuring a specific manner of presenting events. Decisions on presenting or describing certain topics and omitting some others shape recipients' opinions. Eagleman and her collaborators remark that if the media coverage of a certain topic is unified and changeless for a long time, the omitted issues become invisible (Eagleman et al., 2014). Mary J. Kane, a researcher of the media coverage of women's sport, noted that the omission of news concerning women's sport is the creation of a false narration that women's sport is unattractive and unworthy of the recipient's attention (Kane, 2013). The strategy of ambivalence in descriptions

² The combination of the media and sport with economic factors is also important. Today much attention is devoted to the inseparable connection of cultural factors and economic factors in societies of advanced capitalism. The media are the driving force for economic factors (because they attract capital), while disseminating and strengthening the current narration about sport by attracting more recipients and capital (Rowe, 2004: 68–79). The close relationship between the media, sport and economy is reflected by the following terms: *sport–media complex* or *media/sport production complex*.

of women's sport raised by some researchers (Fink, Kensicki, 2002; Bruce, 2013), which is based on the message that seems to be positive at first glance, but actually contains words, phrases or topics that finely ignore women (Eagleman, 2015), results in the lower evaluation of women's sport than of men's sport.

Sports media coverage

Presented systematically for years, the results of research concerning sports media coverage are largely consistent with one another. The media coverage of Olympic Games was analysed particularly well, e.g., because of the largest audience in the world. Studies on the media coverage of Olympic Games indicate the promotion of sportsmen above female athletes, although the number of the latter increases in each successive Olympiad. The 2012 Summer Olympics in London were the first ones where each participant was represented both by female and male athletes. Female athletes competed in all sports. It is envisaged that female athletes accounted for 45% of participants in the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio (International Olympic Committee, 2016).

According to analyses by Andrew Billings from the NBC station broadcasting the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, men received three fifths of airtime after the exclusion of events in which women and men participated together (e.g., pairs in figure skating) (Angelini, MacArthur, Billings, 2012); for comparison, they received approx. 60% in Turin (Billings, et. al. 2008) and approx. 65% in Salt Lake City (Billings, Eastman 2003). During the Summer Olympic Games (in 1996, 2000, 2004), differences in the airtime given to women's sport and men's sport amounted only to 4–5%. Billings attributes the difference between Olympic Games in 1998, 2002 and 2006 and Summer Olympics to the larger number of sports in which women compete during the latter (Billings, 2008b: 112–118).

Another explanation of the more frequent coverage of women's sport during Olympic Games than in the remaining part of the season is the fact of representing the given country rather than appreciating female athletes in sport (Wensing, Bruce, 2003; Hedenborg, 2013). The analyses of time between Olympic Games indicate the considerable underrepresentation of women's sport. According to the longitudinal study by Cheryl Cooky, Michael Messner and Michel Musto (2015), the coverage of women's sport in American television stations dropped to 1.6% in 2009, which is the lowest level in the last 25 years, and amounted to 3.2% in 2014. Other studies on television broadcasts confirm the results obtained by researchers (Martin et al., 2016; Turner, 2013; Billings, Young, 2015).

The initial analyses of printed media during Olympic Games also indicated the underrepresentation of the coverage of women's sport. However, the results show increasingly often the proportional coverage of women's sport and men's sport. Studies checking the media coverage in Canada and Great Britain (Vincent et al., 2002) as well as in five European countries did not show statistically important differences (Capranica et al., 2005). Interestingly, O'Neill and Mulready showed that the coverage of women's sport returns to the pre-Olympic number/quantity after Olympic Games (O'Neill, Mulready, 2014). Between Olympic Games, the considerable underrepresentation of information about women's sport was also ascertained in printed media (Godoy-Presland, 2014; Haris, Clayton, 2002; Crolley, Teso, 2007; Bishop, 2003). The persistently disproportionate amount of women's sport coverage allows researchers to maintain the thesis about the symbolic annihilation of women in the media that was put forward in the late 1970s (Tuchman, 1979; Kane, 2013; Fink, 2015).

In Poland, two studies on the coverage of sport in the printed media have been conducted so far. In the Polish part of the research project *The International Sports Press Survey 2011* (April–July), Honorata Jakubowska analysed 815 articles from Polish newspapers: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Głos Wielkopolski* and *Gazeta Codzienna: Fakt* (Jakubowska, 2015). Over 85% of published information concerned men's sport, with 60% of news devoted to team sports. In the case of women, proportions were different. 73% of women's sport coverage referred to individual sports. The analysis of news from *Gazeta Wyborcza* from the years 2010–2013 by Dziubiński and co-authors showed the considerable advantage of information about men's sport (Dziubiński et al., 2019). Out of 2,997 analysed articles, only 12% of them concerned women's sport, whereas 84% concerned men's sport. The described analysis is also consistent with results of Jakubowska's study on the description of the media coverage of specific disciplines in women's sport and men's sport. 88% of information about women's sport concerned individual disciplines, whereas the analogous share of information about men's sport accounts for 72%.

Overview of literature regarding qualitative analyses of sports media coverage

Summarising years of research on media coverage, Toni Bruce indicated the repeating "rules" or schemes concerning the manner of portraying female athletes (Bruce, 2013). Women's sport is "produced" in a worse manner. It engages lower financial or technical resources, resulting in less interesting messages than those concerning

men's sport (Greer et al., 2009). The small number of female journalists working in sports departments also reinforces the belief that sport is men's domain (Miloch, Pedersen, Smucker, Whisenant, 2005). For example, *The International Sports Press Survey* in its part concerning Poland indicates that female sports journalists account for 8% of all journalists (Jakubowska, 2015). Research done by Kian and Hardin suggested that the journalist's gender may have an impact on the manner of portraying women's sport (Kian, Hardin, 2009). Men reinforced gender stereotypes more often when describing female athletes. They also described women's sport less frequently than women did. Other studies indicate that employing a larger number of female journalists will not make a big difference. This may have little to do with the dislike of female journalists towards women's sport; more probable reasons include their fear of being accused of favouring female athletes and publishers' reluctance to present women's sport (Hardin, Shain 2005; Kian, 2007). As Hardin and Shain observed, female sports journalists in their professional work constantly have to negotiate between femininity and the culturally established attitude of a professional journalist. In order to be regarded as professionals, they often have to dissociate themselves from their gender identity (Hardin, Shain, 2006; Schoch, Ohl, 2011). A study by Bridget Gee and Sarah Leberman showed that a text about women's sport has to meet higher criteria in order to be approved for publication (Gee, Leberman, 2011). Journalistic training is also characterised by sex-typing, i.e., attachment to describing sports "suitable" only for the relevant gender (Cronk, Theberge, 1994). Information regarding women's sport concerns individual and non-contact sports, whereas information about men's sport refers to contact sports and team games.

Tony Bruce also draws our attention to the way of calling sports competitions. Men's competitions are called simply 'world championships', whereas women's competitions are 'women's world championships'. In this way, it is suggested which events are prototypes and standards in sport (Crolley, Teso, 2007; Bruce, 2013). Texts about female athletes customarily refer to their life outside sport: the roles of a mother, wife or partner (Daddario, 1994). Female athletes are also compared to their male "counterparts". This reinforces men's "greatness" and the belief that male characteristics constitute a norm in sport. The media are constantly more willing to describe female athletes in heterosexual relationships. According to Bruce, the practice of putting the pressure on the portrayal of female athletes representing the traditional ideal of womanhood (a slender figure, white skin, emotionality, dependence on others) is combined with compulsory heterosexuality (Fink, Ken-sicki, 2002). This "principle" is also connected with the sexualisation of female athletes. The media often present female athletes as sexual objects rather than in terms of their sporting skills (Bissel, Duke, 2007).

Bruce also notices new tendencies in the description of female athletes. Press photographs increasingly often portray female athletes in action during sport competition, not in the context unrelated to sport. Descriptions of female athletes as exemplary and praiseworthy citizens or role models become visible, too. It happens, however, that such descriptions refer only to female compatriots, and female athletes representing other nationalities are described by means of “old rules” (Bruce, 2013).

Online media coverage

The number of studies concerning media messages in the new media is incomparably smaller. Many researchers suggested that the Internet would create conditions for a more impartial coverage of women’s sport as a medium that did not have the spatial limitations of the printed media and television. Being a new medium, it would bring some changes to the established scheme of reporting on women’s sport (or the lack of it) and bring about changes in the perception of women’s rivalry. Also because of the discussion about the “gender” of the Internet and beliefs shared by a part of male and female researchers that the Internet creates and maintains the women-friendly environment (van Zoonen, 2003), this medium began to be perceived as an opportunity to change the scheme of sports media coverage. Wendy Griswold (2013: 206) is of a different opinion. According to her, interactions on the Internet do not have to lead to a change of gender stereotypes in users, even in spite of access to various experiences and ways of life of people from around the world. Communication in the new media may also deepen traditional beliefs by providing another place where they can be disseminated (blogs, chats, etc.). Griswold concludes that current studies tend to confirm that the Internet allows people to think and do what they have thought and done so far, but more effectively. Moreover, she remarked that the new media change the manner of collection and edition of information and access to them by consumers. In addition, the new media are used most often by young persons, which would involve their broader openness to the contents that are ignored in the traditional media (Real, 2006).

The results of studies concerning the coverage of sport in the new media are not as cohesive as studies on traditional media presented above. Some analyses indicate that online publications present female and male athletes in a different manner than the printed media and the television, so it is not possible to maintain the thesis that the coverage of sport supports male supremacy. When analysing

the content of ESPN.com and SportsLine.com during basketball tournaments, Kian and collaborators did not find any differences in the description of male and female athletes that characterise messages in the traditional media (Kian et al., 2009). More descriptions of physical appearance, clothes and non-sport life roles referred to men. However, researchers stated that the ‘overwhelming majority’ of online contents reported men’s competitions. Eagleman and her collaborators checked the content of websites in six countries during the Olympic Games in London for potentially biased information about gender and nationality (Eagleman et al., 2014). Also these studies support the thesis about the Internet coverage of sport based more strongly on equality. The authors found only a few differences between messages concerning men and women. Within the scope of their analysis of Internet pages during 2010 Olympic Games, Lauren Burch and her collaborators did not find statistically important differences in the amount of space devoted to women’s sport and men’s sport proportionally to the number of participating female and male athletes (Burch et al., 2012).

Dianne Jones analysed the website of the Australian broadcaster ABC News during the successive Olympic Games in the first decade of the 21st century. Her research showed that differences in the description of women’s sport and men’s sport still exist. Women’s sport was described more frequently with the use of infantilising language and sex stereotypes and the tendency to present female athletes as ‘passive objects’ rather than ‘active sportspeople’ (Jones 2010, 2004, 2006). Female athletes were rarely described in team sports (associated with “male” sports) (Jones 2006), whereas the coverage of women’s sport was larger than in the traditional media, and a larger number of sports was presented (Jones, 2004, 2006).

Jones examined also the content of websites of ABC (Australia), BBC (Great Britain), CBC (USA) and TVNZ (New Zealand) during the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. She actually found statistically more information, photographs and main topics about men’s sport than about women’s sport. Not only were stories of male athletes the main topic of the Olympic Games, but also female athletes were presented stereotypically as physically weak, emotional and dependent on others’ help (Jones, 2013).

Aim of the study

In connection with the absence of the subject–matter of research on the online media coverage of sport, the aim of the study was to check whether the media coverage of selected disciplines in women’s sport in the new media during

the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro was comparable to the coverage of men's sport.

The detailed objective was to check whether the new media maintain the tendency to describe women's sport mainly in disciplines regarded as female appropriate and men's sport in disciplines regarded as male appropriate.

The results of research on the traditional media obtained so far indicate that women's sport is covered mainly in disciplines that sustain the concept of femininity in its traditional sense (Jakubowska, 2014: 459–470; Koivula, 2001). The study included an analysis of materials concerning sports gymnastics and rhythmic gymnastics regarded as a “female appropriate” discipline, swimming regarded as a “neutral” discipline in terms of sportspeople's gender and weightlifting as a discipline regarded as “male appropriate”. This classification of disciplines was made on the basis of surveys by Nathalie Koivuli (2001) and Honorata Jakubowska (2014: 463–470). In Koivuli's survey, respondents mentioned precision, aesthetics and femininity as the most important characteristics of “female appropriate” disciplines. “Male appropriate” disciplines are primarily considered to require brutality, contact, strength and aggression (team sports and martial arts). Honorata Jakubowska mentions four essential indicators influencing the perception of a given sport as “male appropriate”. They include: contact, motor indicators (strength, endurance and quickness), the inclination to risk and dangerous behaviours (motor sports, extreme sports) and the creation of homo-community (maintenance of male bonds). The research done so far shows that most of the space or airtime in the media is occupied by disciplines regarded as “male appropriate”. The division into female and male sports is supplemented by “gender-neutral” disciplines (e.g., badminton, swimming, tennis, sailing, volleyball) that are perceived as suitable for each gender. In Koivuli's survey, respondents stated that the most important characteristics influencing the perception of a given sport as “neutral” included precision, quickness, fair play/high level of morality.

By means of focus interviews, Jakubowska examined the extent to which the division into “male appropriate” and “female appropriate” sports was established in Poland. All respondents perceived gymnastics and synchronised swimming as feminine sports. The respondents unanimously specified weightlifting as a masculine kind of sport (Jakubowska, 2014: 459–469).

The second detailed objective was to examine differences in the examined material in terms of the gender of sportspeople being described. Another detailed objective was to check by whom the analysed messages had been prepared. The last objective was to check whether the analysed material referred to Poles or foreign sportspeople.

Research method and sample

The study was carried out using the content analysis method. It is suitable for examining various types of data intended for communication: verbal, pictorial or symbolic. The content analysis method is commonly used in the comparison of media contents referring to women's sport and men's sport (Cooky, 2015; Jakubowska, 2015). It is regarded as one of non-reactive methods, the use of which does not impact the surrounding social reality. Moreover, non-reactive studies allow us to avoid typical errors of researchers making use of reactive methods, i.e., imposing their will on respondents and, therefore, distorting the results of studies (Babbie, 2009: 358–375). The content analysis method is also used most frequently for answering questions regarding media coverage: 'who says, what, to whom, why, how and with what effect' (Babbie, 2009: 358).

The analysed material consists of articles published on websites on the days of 5th–21st August 1986 during the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. A decision was made to analyse the media coverage of Olympic Games, because it is the biggest global sports event, which reaches a majority of people via media (Billings, 2008b: 5–6). Because of the number of fans watching this event, we can also say that Olympic Games have a large influence on the formation of opinions about sportspeople. They also provide an opportunity for female athletes to present their skills. This is because the interest in women's sport is higher than normally during Olympic Games (Billings, 2008b: 107). Olympic Games arouse huge interest in Poland. They are broadcast by the public television for the main part of the day. The last Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro were broadcast in three public television channels (TVP 1, TVP 2 and TVP Sport, as well as the streaming of 12 special channels with sport broadcasts). 28 million Poles, i.e., 80% of persons having access to a television set, watched some part of the Olympic Games (*Business Insider*, 2016). In view of the fact that 65% of Poles are regular web browsers, there is no reason to suppose that the online coverage of sport was not popular, either (CBOS, 2016).

An article posted on sports websites selected for analysis was considered to be a unit of analysis. The analysis covered 106 articles on gymnastics, 408 articles on swimming, and 105 articles on weightlifting (Table 1). The aforementioned articles had been posted on five most popular sports portals; they were examined on the basis of the Megapanel PBI/Gemius analysis for December 2015³, i.e.: (eurosport.onet.pl; sport.tvp.pl; sportowefakty.wp.pl; sport.interia.pl; sport.pl).

³ <http://media2.pl/badania/131499-Megapanel-grudzien-2015-kategorie-tematyczne/17.html>

Publications containing only visual elements (videos, photographs) were excluded from the analysis. The researchers ignored also materials that did not refer directly to events during the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro (they were called neutral articles in the table) and brought up sport-related topics from other fields (law in sport, interviews with doctors, officials, etc). Altogether, 168 articles were excluded. These publications concerned mainly the detection of forbidden substances in samples for doping tests submitted by Adrian and Tomasz Zieliński and Krzysztof Szramiak and interviews and opinions related to that matter. The statements made by activists of the Polish Weightlifting Association and the Polish Swimming Association were not taken into consideration, either.

Table 1. Number of articles about a given sport discipline on each website

Website	Sports discipline		
	Gymnastics	Swimming	Weightlifting
www.eurosport.onet.pl	22	98	22
www.sport.tvp.pl	21	71	18
www.sportowefakty.wp.pl	36	91	34
www.sport.interia.pl	16	73	18
www.sport.pl	11	75	13
TOTAL	106	408	105

Source: own elaboration

A coding sheet was created for the analysis of materials. In the quantitative part, information was collected about the sex of sportspeople, the discipline being described, the length of articles (the number of words was examined), and the sex of the journalist writing the article (if the article was signed). In the qualitative part, four categories of coding were determined on the basis of differences in the portrayal of women's sport and men's sport that are described most frequently in the literature of the subject. The first category of coding referred to descriptions of the physical appearance and sexuality of sportspeople (emphasising their beauty or clothes). The second one referred to their roles outside sport (mothers, wives, girls, daughters). Another category concerned the sarcastic or infantilising language used in the description of women's sport, and the last one referred to the stereotypical method of dealing with victories or defeats (emphasising of poor performances, the role of coaches, the dependence of athletes on other persons, the way of explaining defeats, etc.)

Results of the study – a quantitative analysis

The analysis covered 106 articles concerning gymnastics, which is regarded as a “female appropriate” discipline. 58 articles (55%) concerned women, whereas 47 articles (44%) referred to men (Table 2).

Table 2. Articles on gymnastics divided according to gender

GYMNASTICS – 106 articles			
Website	women's sport	men's sport	Neutral
eurosport.onet.pl	11	11	0
sport.tvp.pl	11	10	0
sportowefakty.wp.pl	20	15	1
sport.interia.pl	10	6	0
sport.pl	6	5	0
TOTAL	58	47	1

Source: own elaboration

The author's gender was identified in 36 out of 106 texts. In other cases, the author was not specified, or authorship was ascribed to the entire editorial staff. From among the aforementioned 36 texts, 15 (42%) were written by women and the remaining 21 by men.

It is also necessary to mention the symptomatically high number of articles the content of which referred to foreign sportspeople. There were 99 publications of this kind, in comparison to 7 referring to gymnasts from Poland. Such proportions are fundamentally different from the tendency to describe mainly one's compatriots particularly during Olympic Games that has been presented so far.

Out of the analysed 408 articles about swimming, 62% concerned men, and 35% referred to women (Table 3). 11 messages were regarded as neutral in terms of sportspeople's sex, which accounts for 3% of all articles.

Table 3. Articles on swimming divided according to gender

SWIMMING – 408 articles			
Website	women's sport	men's sport	Neutral
eurosport.onet.pl	35	63	0
sport.tvp.pl	25	44	2
sportowefakty.wp.pl	33	55	3

sport.interia.pl	25	46	2
sport.pl	26	45	4
TOTAL	144	253	11

Source: own elaboration

A large part of articles about swimming in the five analysed sports portals was not signed (141), or the entire editorial staff was specified as the author (149 items). As regards other publications, male journalists wrote 87 articles (21%), whereas women wrote 31 (8%). 119 articles referred to the performances of Poles during the Olympic Games in Rio, and 289 concerned foreign sportspeople.

105 articles referred to weightlifting, which is classified as a “male appropriate” sport (Table 4). A large part of articles – 66 (63%) – concerned men. Out of the remaining publications, the content of 37 articles (35%) referred to women’s rivalry, whereas 2 articles (2%) were neutral.

Table 4. Articles on weightlifting divided according to gender

WEIGHTLIFTING – 105 articles			
Website	women’s sport	men’s sport	neutral
eurosport.onet.pl	9	13	0
sport.tvp.pl	7	11	0
sportowefakty.wp.pl	12	21	1
sport.interia.pl	5	13	0
sport.pl	4	8	1
TOTAL	37	66	2

Source: own elaboration

In 72 cases, the authorship of the analysed articles was ascribed to the editorial staff, or the author of the text was not specified at all. Out of the remaining 33 publications, 30 contents were prepared by male journalists. The remaining three articles were written by female journalists.

A significant majority of the analysed articles (89, which accounts for 85%) was written about foreigners. The remaining 16 contents (15%) referred to compatriots.

Results of the study – a qualitative analysis

In the analysed group of publications, only in one case was the beauty of a female athlete emphasised: it was an article about the Hungarian female swimmer Zsu-

zsanna Jakabos. The description of Jakabos's physical appearance had nothing to do with her swimming predispositions. The titles of press reports also highlighted the female athlete's appearance and could serve as an "incentive" to read articles.

Each appearance of the beautiful Hungarian on the Olympic swimming pool thrills the audience of the competition in Rio de Janeiro.

'Spectacular Jakabos has been highly popular in the Balkans for a long time, often appearing on the colours of glossy magazines' (10.08.2016 www.sportowefakty.wp.pl, *She does not win medals, but enchants the spectators. Beautiful 'Zsu' appeals to male senses [Nie zdobywa medali, ale zachwyca urodą. Piękna "Zsu" budzi męskie zmysły]*).

In the remaining publications, discussing the physical characteristics of male and female athletes did not bear the traits of sexualisation, but it emphasised their chance for success in the given sport discipline.

Experts anticipate that the young American can dominate this sport in the next few years. She has something that other female swimmers do not have, obviously except the relevant body shape: she weighs 45 kg with only 142 cm of height, almost entirely consisting of muscles. (14.08.2016 www.sportowefakty.wp.pl, *Rio 2016: an incarnation of the American Dream. Simone Biles breaks barriers and records [Rio 2016: ucieleśnienie American Dream. Simone Biles przelamuje bariery i rekordy]*).

Phelps has a wingspan of 2.04 metres, and his shoe number is 48.5. Ideal parameters for a swimmer. He is presumably the first man who can move in water in such an obvious and elegant manner. (08.08. 2016, www.eurosport.onet.pl, *A complete man [Kompletny człowiek]*).

It must be noted, however, that physical abilities of female athletes are presented several times with regard to men's capabilities, particularly in the case of unquestionable stars of the Rio Olympics: Simone Biles and Katie Ladecky. This creates the impression that their greatness is determined by being "like men". Such a manner of portraying female athletes reinforces the belief that model sportspeople are always men.

She is only 19 years' old and only 145 cm tall, but there is no way to avoid comparing her humble person to great legendary Muhammad Ali.' (15.08.2016 www.sport.tvp.pl, *More than sport: Biles like Ali – symbol and hope of "black" America [Więcej niż sport: Biles jak Ali – symbol i nadzieja "czarnej" Ameryki]*)

She is 1.44 metres tall, but she stands arm to arm with Phelps and Bolt. (11.08.2016 www.sport.pl, *Rio Olympic Games 2016. Gymnastics. Simone Biles has arrived [Igrzyska olimpijskie Rio 2016. Gimnastyka. Nadleciała Simone Biles]*).

'She was taught this by her former coach Yuri Suguiyama, who also thought that Ledecky could thrash her legs around like a man: powerfully and quickly. This is the key to making full use of her strength and fury.' (13.08.2016 www.sport.pl, *Rio 2016: Katie Ledecky beyond competition; she competes virtually with men* [*Rio 2016. Katie Ledecky poza konkurencją, wirtualnie ściga się z mężczyznami*]).

In the analysed publications, no cases of reporting non-sport aspects of female or male athletes' life were found. No space was devoted to information about sportspeople's family relations, either. Moreover, apart from one example, no description methods marginalising or ridiculing sportspeople were found. The only exception was having called the Olympic champion Penny Oleksiak a 'child' and a 'princess'.

Therefore, she is helped with her lessons by older sportswomen; Sandrine Mainville from Quebec helps her with French, and psychology student Chantal van Landeghem helps her with all the rest. The child outperformed her tutors in less than a week. The Olympic swimming pool has another princess. (14.08.2016 www.sport.pl, *Rio 2016. Here comes awkward Penny Oleksiak, the little star of the whole Canada* [*Rio 2016. Nadchodzi nieporadna Penny Oleksiak – gwiazdka całej Kanady*]).

The analysed articles lack also stereotypical explanations of sportspeople's failures (such as the aforementioned emotionality, the lack of commitment, mental weakness, etc.) On other hand, the authors emphasised the strength of athletes and expressed recognition for them. This was particularly visible in articles about weightlifting, which is considered to be a "male appropriate" sport. But also in swimming, Katinka Hosszu's class was appreciated, and the author often repeated her nickname "Iron Lady", clearly referring the reader to the sportswoman's endurance and strength.

What a power! This was how the world's strongest women competed at the Olympic Games.

The world's strongest women carried huge weights (the winner had 307 kg in push and pull competitions). This cost them plenty of effort. It is enough to look at their faces. (15.08.2016, www.sportowefakty.wp.pl, *Rio 2016: what a power! How the world's strongest women competed at the Olympic Games* [*Rio 2016: co za moc! Tak na igrzyskach walczyły najsilniejsze kobiety świata*])

The Olympic weightlifting competition in the category above 105 kg, where great strongmen compete, brought thrills already during rivalry in Group B. (17.08. 2016, www.eurosport.onet.pl, *Rio 2016: Lasha Talakhadze wins Olympic gold in weightlifting category above 105 kg* [*Rio 2016: Łasza Talachadze mistrzem olimpijskim w podnoszeniu ciężarów w kategorii powyżej 105 kilogramów*])

The length of articles may have had an impact on the results of the qualitative analysis (Table 5). Most publications were very short. In such a situation, it was not possible to create stories abounding in details. The articles were often limited to reporting the progress of rivalry and the results. It is also worth noting that more medium-sized and long articles about women's sport concerned only gymnastics. With regard to swimming and weightlifting, more medium-sized and long articles referred to men's sport. This is consistent with the tendency described in the theoretical part, i.e., devoting more space to descriptions of women's sport in "female appropriate" disciplines and to descriptions of men's sport in disciplines regarded as "male appropriate".

Table 5. Length of articles under analysis

SWIMMING – 408 articles			
	Short (≤ 200)	Medium-sized (200–550)	Long (≥ 550)
Women's sport	100	34	10
Men's sport	139	101	13
GYMNASTICS – 106 articles			
	Short (≤ 200)	Medium-sized (200–550)	Long (≥ 550)
Women's sport	42	12	4
Men's sport	40	6	1
WEIGHTLIFTING – 105 articles			
	Short (≤ 200)	Medium-sized (200–550)	Long (≥ 550)
Women's sport	25	12	0
Men's sport	35	27	4

Source: own elaboration

Discussion

The results of the quantitative part of the study show that in the case of three sport disciplines under analysis, the coverage of men's sport (336 articles; 60.5%) is still larger than the coverage of women's sport (239 articles; 39.5%). Although the analysed publications concerned the Summer Olympic Games, where no differences in the amount of space/time in sports messages devoted to each gender were observed in the press (Capranica et. al., 2005) and on the television (Angelini, MacArthur, Billings, 2012; Billings et al., 2008; Billings, Eastman, 2003), the difference is significant with regard to three analysed disciplines. On the other hand, the share of articles regarding women's sport is higher than in some analyses con-

cerning the traditional media in the period between Olympic Games (Jakubowska, 2015; Dziubiński et al., in the review; Godoy-Pressland, 2014; Cooky et al., 2015; Haris, Clayton, 2002; Crolley, Teso, 2007). We must remember, however, that only three sport disciplines were analysed in this paper.

We can also notice that more is written about women's sport than about men's sport with regard to gymnastics as a "female appropriate" discipline. This allows us to sustain the thesis about the sex typing of sports messages (Chronk, Theberge, 1994). In swimming, and particularly in weightlifting, even more has been written about men's sport (there were also longer articles about male sportspeople). However, in consideration of the fact that almost no space was devoted to women's sport in the traditional media in male disciplines (Jakubowska, 2015; Dziubiński et al., 2019; Cooky et al., 2015), the number of messages regarding the participations of female athletes in weightlifting can be regarded as a harbinger of positive changes from women's perspective. All the more so, because no publications disavowing female athletes' efforts were found in the qualitative analysis, and the Polish women's national weightlifting team was not very successful during the last Olympic Games.

Only in part of them can we find an answer to the question about the gender of journalists writing about selected sports during the Rio Olympic Games. Much more publications were signed by male journalists, but a large amount of information that cannot be clearly determined as written by a male or female journalist does not allow us to formulate unequivocal conclusions.

Unlike a majority of studies conducted during the Olympic Games in the traditional media, the results of these studies suggest that sportspeople's efforts are covered irrespective of their country of origin. Traditionally, the larger coverage of women's sport than in other parts of the season was justified with the fact that participations of the country's representatives are treated as an expression of the condition of such country (Bruce, Wensing, 2003). Andrew Billings's research proved that the Americans were portrayed in the NBC station more frequently and in a better light than non-Americans (Billings, 2008b: 99–105; Billings et al., 2008a). Also Hendenborg (2013), analysing the Swedish media coverage of the London Olympic Games, stated that it was 'nationalistic rather than internationalistic'. This study, just like research on the new media by Eagleman and her collaborators (2014), did not prove the tendency to portray or favour mainly compatriots. This may be connected with the lack of spatial limitations concerning the publication of a certain number of messages.

The presented results of studies concerning the manner of portraying female athletes during the Rio Olympic Games do not confirm the results presented by

Jones (2013, 2006, 2004). No cases of portraying female athletes in a devaluing manner or using an ironic comment were found. Neither were those athletes described in non-sport roles, which had been one of the more frequent tendencies so far (Bruce, 2013; Fink, 2015). Apart from single cases, female athletes were not treated as sexual objects, either. One of the “old rules” that characterised messages about women’s sport was the comparison of female representatives to their ‘male counterparts’ (Bruce, 2013). In spite of these cases, the manner of presenting women’s sport must be regarded as a step forward. Particularly the appreciation of female athletes’ results in weightlifting is a positive sign of empowerment of women’s place in sport. Thus, the results of the study support the research done by Kian and collaborators (2000), because the analysed publications lacked one specific feature of stereotypical messages: emphasising the gender difference.

Of course, this study has its limitations. First of all, only three sport disciplines have been analysed. In the future, it would be necessary to examine all sport messages published in selected web portals during Olympic Games. The online coverage of sport in the remaining parts of the season would have to be checked, too. These findings would make it easier to evaluate generated results during the Rio Olympic Games. The lack of a larger number of Polish studies on sports media coverage makes it considerably difficult to draw conclusions from the results of the study. Comparing research on the Polish media with analyses of contents from other countries would be obviously entangled in methodological problems.

Conclusions

This study referred to the field of sports coverage in the new media that had not been analysed in Polish research practice until quite recently. The presented results of the content analysis suggest both the underrepresentation of articles about women’s sport and the presence of tendencies that typically occur in sports media coverage, with women’s sport being described mainly in disciplines regarded as “female appropriate” and men’s sport mainly in disciplines regarded as “male appropriate” and “neutral”. The qualitative analysis showed that gender-based prejudices in the description of female and male athletes actually did not occur. This fact and (comparably to other results of research) a large number of messages about women’s sport allow us to reckon that the new media can be a good opportunity to promote women’s sport. This is important not only in terms of the promotion of healthy lifestyle and encouraging girls to participate in physical culture, but also

with regard to striving for gender equality in society and the promotion of images of physically active girls. Presenting female athletes as strong, resilient and successful persons can help to eliminate the stereotype of the “weaker sex”. Recognition in the media and the resulting appreciation might lead to the deconstruction of gender stereotypes.

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