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On maintaining and blurring gender differentiation – an analysis of the Polish media discourse on Iga Świątek and Robert Lewandowski

**Rzecz o podtrzymywaniu i zacieraniu różnicowania płci – analiza
polskiego dyskursu medialnego dotyczącego
Igi Świątek i Roberta Lewandowskiego**

Abstract: Iga Świątek and Robert Lewandowski are two of the most popular athletes in Poland. They are icons of contemporary culture, capable of influencing social norms, values and aspirations, especially among young people. The main objective of the article is to analyse the discursive strategies related to the maintaining and blurring of gender differentiation in Polish media discourse on the professional sphere of Świątek and Lewandowski. The primary theoretical perspective of the research is the theory of hegemonic masculinity. The research material includes 458 selections from Internet and television coverage published between 2018 and 2024. This paper presents the results of a critical discourse analysis, in which the tools of the discourse-historical approach and quantitative content analysis were used. The discourse is not homogeneous because on the one hand it contains, strategies of gender differentiation connected with infantilisation and trivialisation of the tennis player and the evaluation of her external appearance, and on the other hand, there are numerous examples of metaphorisation and hyperbolisation

of the athleticism of both Lewandowski and Świątek, related to the blurring of gender differences.

Keywords: Iga Świątek, Robert Lewandowski, sport, Polish media discourse, gender differentiation, blurring of gender differences, cultural models.

Introduction

Sport is an important area of socio-cultural life in which we can see many important processes related to the category of gender. Images of sports-women and sportsmen in the media largely influence shaping attitudes and identity of young people in particular. The presence of these images in the media space plays an educational and culture-forming role. In sport, especially media coverage describing this area of human activity, we observe processes of (re)defining and (re)producing patterns of femininity and masculinity (Gee, 2014; Jakubowska, 2014, 2017; Messner, 2007; Kluczyńska, 2011). Iga Świątek and Robert Lewandowski are two of the most popular athletes in Poland who have gained iconic status and, like other sports stars, can play an important role in the context of forming national identity, values and behaviour patterns¹ (Arcimowicz, 2003, 2020; Bowes and Bairner, 2019; Gee, 2014). Today, images of female athletes are largely shaped by the media, and the way they are portrayed can influence the reinforcement or weakening of negative gender stereotypes (Herrera et al., 2024; Jakubowska, 2014).

Despite the transformations in gender relations that have taken place in the Western world over the past few decades, sports are still perceived mainly as the domain of men and a male domain of activity. Women's sports are not only underrepresented in the media, but also shown and described in ways that reproduce stereotypical gender differences and gender hierarchies. Based on the results of the study, recurring phenomena can be mentioned. (1.) Media coverage valorises male sports and portrays male athletes as modern-day heroes (Arcimowicz, 2003, 2020; Bowes and Bairner, 2019; Jakubowska, 2014; Kluczyńska, 2011). (2.) The media depreciates and negatively stereotypes female athletes, often focusing on their physical appearance and emotionality or social roles outside of sport, rather than on their athletic skills and performance (Fink, 2015; Sabo and Jansen, 1992; Vincent, 2004).

¹ This article was written before the International Agency of Tennis Integrity published the information (on 28 November 2024) about a month-long suspension of Iga Świątek because of the detection of a prohibited substance in her body.

(3.) Female athletes' bodies are not viewed solely in terms of their fitness or endurance; female athletes are often judged through the lens of physical attractiveness, which is relatively rare for athletes (Billings, 2007; Fink, 2015; Jakubowska, 2014; Sabo and Jansen, 1992; Vincent, 2004). (4.) The media infantilise female athletes by emphasising their characteristics associated with being a young woman or their role as a daughter, and through naming practices associated with the informal use of first names and/or hypocoristics (Fink, 2015; Halbert and Latimer, 1994; Jakubowska, 2014). It should be noted, however, that there have been studies whose results indicate that there are some changes in how female athletes are portrayed in the media, especially when considering media coverage of outstanding achievements of female athletes (Vincent and Crossman, 2012; Jakubowska, 2017).

The aim of this research is to analyse the main discursive strategies related to the maintaining and blurring of gender differentiation in Polish media coverage of Iga Świątek's and Robert Lewandowski's professional sphere and to interpret them in a socio-cultural context.

Theoretical framework

The basic theoretical concept used in my research is the theory of hegemonic masculinity developed by Raewyn Connell. The Australian sociologist's concept is one of the most well-known and prominent theories. According to Connell, the categories of femininity and masculinity are a socio-cultural construct, and the media play an important role in their creation. The social order of gender that exists in modern societies belonging to the circle of Western culture is based on two pillars: the first, concerns the domination of men over women, and the second, the domination of the hegemonic version of masculinity over other variants of masculine identity, which have been referred to as subordinated and marginalised masculinities (Connell, 2005, p. 77-81). All versions of femininity are ranked lower in the gender hierarchy than hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, p. 183-188).

Hegemonic masculinity is marked by power, authority, aggression, competition, physical toughness and heterosexuality (Connell, 1987, p. 186-187). This version of masculinity may be embodied by men who hold a lot of power, but this cultural pattern is also disseminated and reinforced by the creation of media images of "tough" men (Connell, 1987, p. 77; Demetriou, 2001, p. 342). According to the Australian researcher, subordinated masculinities include mainly homosexual men, but also some heterosexual men who do not meet the criteria for hegemonic masculinity, possessing characteristics traditionally perceived as feminine, related to behavior or

physical appearance (Connell, 2005, p. 78-79). The category of marginalised masculinity includes men whose social and/or economic status is low due to their membership in certain social classes and/or ethnic groups (Connell, 2005, p. 80-81; Demetriou, 2001, p. 341-342).

The author of *Gender and Power* argues that hegemonic masculinity represents an ideal model to which a large group of men aspire, but most are unable to realize it in real life. Men who benefit from supporting the patriarchy, but do not embody all the components of hegemonic masculinity, form a category that the sociologist called complicit masculinity (Connell, 2005, p. 79-80).

According to Connell, three fundamental versions of femininity can be identified. The first, defined as emphasized femininity, is related to the satisfaction of men's desires and needs. The second version is defined by strategies of resistance and disagreement with male domination; this version, following Anthony Giddens, can be called defiant femininity. The third form of femininity concerns a complex combination of strategies of dissent, resistance and co-operation with men within patriarchy. Emphasized femininity is an important complement to hegemonic masculinity in the gender order and is defined in contrast to the dominant version of masculinity. The pattern of female behaviour discussed is characterised by submissiveness, caring and empathy. Defiant femininity rejects the assumptions underlying emphasized femininity, but is thus deprecated in the patriarchal system (cf. Connell, 1987, p. 187-188; Giddens 2004, p. 142-143).

It should be noted that Connell's theory is one of a number of theoretical concepts developed within critical studies of men and masculinities (CSMM), which draw their roots from feminist theory. Other theoretical propositions, for example the concept of hybrid masculinities (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Demetriou, 2001), which is an extension of, but also in some ways a critique of, hegemonic masculinity theory, may also be useful in the study of media coverage of sport.

Methodological assumptions of own research

Research material

Due to the fact that the Internet and television currently have the greatest social reach and power of influence, I focused on the coverage posted in these two media. The basic criterion for the selection of Internet portals was the number of real users and, in the case of television stations, the viewing figures and the share of the television market at the beginning of the third decade of the present century. In Poland, in the sports category,

the most popular sites are sports websites, which are a part of internet portals. The results of the research conducted by Gemius/PBI show that in March 2023, Wirtualna Polska's sports site was the most popular with 8.7 million real users (RU), followed by Onet's (7.6 RU), Gazeta.pl's (6.5 million RU) and TVP's (4.7 million RU) (after: Ulan, 2023). Among Polish TV stations, for many years the highest viewing figures have been recorded by the so-called "big four", i.e. two public TV channels – TVP 1 and TVP 2 – and two commercial TV channels – Polsat and TVN (after: Lil, 2023).

In selecting media coverage for analysis, I focused on the most important focal points of the discourse, i.e. periods in which Świątek and Lewandowski achieved the greatest sporting successes and thus attracted media attention, but also moments when media attention was focused on their spectacular, unexpected failures. In the case of the female tennis player, I focused on Grand Slam tournaments (Roland Garros, US Open, Australian Open and Wimbledon), WTA Finals and WTA 1000 rank, while in the case of the male footballer, I mainly took into account matches played for the national team and for Bayern Munich and FC Barcelona, in which the Polish player scored goals. In the analysis, I have also taken into account Internet and television commentary with a smaller social impact than those posted on the most popular Internet services and television stations, mainly those with a news profile – TVN 24, TVP Info – and a sports profile – TVP Sport, Canal+ Sport, Polsat Sport. The inclusion of coded sports channels in the analysis was mainly dictated by the fact that the television rights to broadcast the vast majority of tennis tournaments in which Świątek participates and football league and cup matches with Lewandowski's participation are held by coded stations, and not by public television or other free-to-air television channels.

The research material includes Polish media coverage that appeared between March 2018 and August 2024:

- **online content (N=262)**: internet articles (N=250), other online material (mainly films and interviews posted on YouTube) (N=12);

- **TV programmes (N=196)**: match broadcasts (N=60)², sports magazines (N=48), news services (N=24), interviews (N=18), pre-match shows and post-match breakdowns (N=16), films and documentary series (N=6), other TV broadcasts (N=24).

² I have analysed eight whole match broadcasts (four in the case of the tennis player and the same number in the case of the footballer) as well as 52 shorts and game fragments.

TV programmes were recorded using a TV decoder and then transcribed using Google AI Studio and the diarisation option³.

Methods

In analysing the media coverage, I referred to the postulates formulated by representatives of the discourse-historical approach (DHA), one of the most prominent approaches within critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Reisigl, 2017, p. 44). The choice of this method was dictated by the fact that, through the use of tools specific to DHA, it is possible to analyse media coverage in depth, to identify the manifestations of discursive reproduction of inequality, gender differentiation and power present in them (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016, p. 24-26). Research conducted in the CDA perspective is generally qualitative in nature, but the use of quantitative methods is not excluded here - in my research project, quantitative content analysis was such a method. For the purposes of the research, I created a classification key with more than thirty categories relevant to the research objective and then coded the collected research material.

In line with the dialectical conception of discourse present in CDA, I assume that discourse is not only contextually – socially and culturally – shaped, but also plays an important role in forming and changing that context (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 258; Reisigl, 2020, p. 51). A key element of DHA is the analysis of the discursive strategies employed by the creators of media coverage. According to Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak (2016, p. 35), the term strategy refers to systematically repeated ways of using language.

In this article I will focus on three, from the point of view of the issue and the aim of the research, the most important types of strategies: nomination, predication and argumentation. Nomination strategies are concerned with defining people and how to talk about them linguistically. Predication strategies involve categorising groups and social actors, assigning them specific characteristics, traits and roles in the discourse. This type of strategy can combine with statements of positive or negative social stereotypes and prejudices. Argumentation strategies are used to justify either positive or negative judgements. An important auxiliary category are topoi, acting as rules of inference (cf. Reisigl and Wodak, 2016; Reisigl, 2010, 2020).

³ Due to the volume of research material, the transcription did not include documentary series, films and some television programmes.

Results of the analysis

In this part of the paper, I present the results of a qualitative study on the main verbal strategies related to the sports sphere of Świątek and Lewandowski extracted from an analysis of 458 Polish examples of media coverage (half of them concerning the tennis player and the same number of the football player) and the results of a quantitative analysis contain 406 selections of media coverage⁴.

Table 1. Main discursive strategies related to the gender category in Polish media coverage concerning Iga Świątek and Robert Lewandowski

Type of strategy	Elements of the strategy and sample terms	
	Iga Świątek	Robert Lewandowski
I. Nomination: referring to athlete by name and/or surname or pseudonym	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Infantilisation associated with the very frequent informal use of the name Iga and sometimes hypocoristics such as 'Igunia', 'Igula'- Lack of a pseudonym	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Frequent use of the surname and rare informal use of the first name Robert- Lack of hypocoristics- Frequent use of the pseudonym 'Lewy'
II. Nomination: referring to athlete in reference to age	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Infantilisation and trivialisation involving frequent emphasis on the young age of the tennis player: 'girl', 'young Pole', 'teenager', '19-year-old', '22-year-old' etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The relatively infrequent use of terms indicating the footballer's age, such as "33-year-old", "35-year-old" etc.
III. Nomination: naming in reference to a profession or function related to the exercise of a profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Frequent use of the terms 'tennis player' and 'female player' and collocation of words e.g. 'Polish tennis player', 'our female player'- The use of trivialising terms, e.g. 'a friend with a racket', 'protected by her crew'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Frequent use of terms such as 'striker', 'sniper', 'shooter', "captain" and collocation of words, e.g. 'Polish footballer', 'our captain', 'Bayern striker', 'Barcelona striker'
IV. Predication: judgement of athletes in reference to their personality traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- In the case of sporting failures, frequent use of terms linked to negative gender stereotyping indicating emotionality and immaturity: 'extremely emotional', 'kid', 'can't lose', 'helpless', 'powerless'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The prevalent emphasis on stereotypical masculine traits linked to hegemonic masculinity, such as competition, aggression, ability to cope with stress, will to win, dominance.- In the case of sporting failures, relatively rare use of negative terms, e.g. 'plastic man', 'not a leader'

⁴ The quantitative analysis did not include non-transcribed broadcasts. Due to the limited scope of the article, I could not discuss all the strategies shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

V. Predication: judging of athletes in reference to physical characteristics and external appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very frequent use of terms indicating strength and fitness, such as 'strong', 'brawny', 'fast', "dynamic" 'motor talent' - Judging the athlete in terms of aesthetics - paying attention to her outfit, make-up, hair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very frequent use of terms indicating physical strength, such as: 'strong', 'powerful', 'strong in the air', 'stands firmly on his feet', 'resilient health'. - Failure to judge a footballer in aesthetic terms
VI. Predication: judgement of athletes related to the professional (sporting) sphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasising the importance of hard work and talent in a tennis player's success - Submission related to the frequent emphasis on the role of the father, coaches in the tennis player's success and thus downplaying sporting success as a derivative of her talent, hard work, outstanding skills and personality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasising the importance of hard work and the athlete's desire to succeed - Recognising the importance of parents (especially the father) and coaches in a footballer's success, but avoiding placing these issues at the centre of the discourse
VIII. Argumentation and topoi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The topos of androcentrism involving making the reference point of a male tennis player's game as the best, unquestionable role model, e.g. comparing her to Rafael Nadal, using terms such as 'she plays like a man' - The topos of gender difference associated with gender stereotyping and emphasized femininity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The topos of gender difference associated with gender stereotyping and emphatic femininity - The topos of "true" masculinity associated with positively valuing the qualities of hegemonic masculinity and depreciating (with few exceptions) signs of weakness - The topos of gender difference involving emphasising the difference between traditionally conceived masculine and feminine traits and between 'true masculinity' and other versions of masculinity

Source: The author's own work

Among nomination strategies, the **large difference in the frequency of informal use of the names Iga and Robert is noteworthy**. The name of the tennis player (without her surname) appears 1,623 times in 139 sources, which constitutes 69% of all references to the sportswoman, whereas the name of the football player (without his surname) appears 101 times in 42 sources, which constitutes 21% of all references to the sportsman. When referring to a Polish athlete, the surname or the first name combined with the surname is used most often - a total of 1,557 times. Thus, it can be said that in domestic media discourse, the football player is mainly referred to as "Lewandowski" or "Robert Lewandowski", while the tennis player is referred to as "Iga", which can be linked to the phenomenon of infantilisation of female athletes (see Fink, 2015; Halbert and Latimer, 1994; Jakubowska, 2014).

Another point I would like to highlight concerns naming by reference to age (see Table 1.). The discourse often **emphasises the young age of Iga Świątek** and uses terms such as: “young tennis player”, “teenager”, “19-year-old”, “21-year-old”, “22-year-old” etc. In total, these types of terms appear 261 times in 126 coverage, which accounted for 62% of all coverage referring to the player - the highest number of such terms is in online articles (appearing 142 times). In the case of Lewandowski, references to his age are much rarer than in the media coverage referring to Świątek – they appear only 38 times, which accounts for 19% of all coverage linking to the Polish footballer.

In television programmes, sports journalists use **hypocoristics such as “Igula” and “Igunia”**.

Discourse actors use the word **“girl”** (52 times) when referring to the tennis player, and their statements sometimes take on a bit condescending tone. An illustration of the issue can be found in Tomasz Wiktorowski’s opinion included in a documentary series on the Polish tennis player entitled *Cztery pory Igi*. Talking about the beginnings of his cooperation with the Świątek, the coach said:

We worked through the preparation period and in 2022 we saw a different **girl**⁵ (Wiktorowski, 2023).

In turn, during the televised broadcast of the 2nd round match of the Roland Garros tournament played in 2024 between the Polish sportswoman and Naomi Osaka, Dawid Celt, tennis coach and captain of the Polish women’s tennis team, commenting on the meeting, said the following words:

Girls at the highest world level, or ladies, not to offend anyone here (Celt, 2024).

Another example of submission is the use of the word **“charge”** by sports journalists. In an article posted on the sports website *Przegladsportowy.onet.pl* shortly after Iga Świątek won the Roland Garros tournament for the first time, the author states:

Under the charge of Piotr Sierzputowski, she was on her way to the final, did not lose a set and lost only 23 games (*Iga Świątek mistrzynią French Open!*, 2020)

⁵ All highlighted phrases in quotations are by the author of the article.

In the analysed research material, did not use the words “boy” or “charge” when referring to Lewandowski. This may be a result of his – advanced for a footballer – age, but also a consequence of the different treatment of female and male athletes in media discourse (see Fink, 2015; Halbert and Latimer, 1994; Jakubowska, 2014; Sabo and Jansen, 1992).

In the coverage about Świątek, **devaluation** is revealed not only in nomination strategies, but also in predication strategies. The discourse on Lewandowski acknowledges the importance of parents (especially the father) and coaches in the player’s success, but avoids situating these issues at the centre of the narrative. In the case of Świątek, discourse actors emphasise the role of the father and the coaching staff in the development of the tennis player’s career and thus downplay her sporting success as a derivative of her talent, hard work, uncommon skills and personality. This problem also exists for other outstanding female athletes (see Fink, 2015; Jakubowska, 2014; Vincent, 2004).

It is noteworthy that when Świątek loses an important match, journalists and sports commentators almost always blame the player rather than the coaches in the first place. An illustration of the issue can be found in Dawid Olejniczak’s commentary during the Polish tennis player’s match against Julia Putinceva in the 2024 Wimbledon tournament and the words uttered after the match by tennis coach Maciej Synówka:

Regardless of how this match ends (...) Tomasz Wiktorowski may have some clues as to **what Iga did wrong** (Olejniczak, 2024)

Iga should have hit crosscourt, but she hit down the line (Synówka, 2024)

In the discourse concerning Lewandowski, sporting defeats involving him are not infrequently reported differently from those involving Świątek. Often the coach of the team (especially the national team) is blamed for lost matches, followed by the players including sometimes Lewandowski. This difference in commenting on the failures of female and male players may be a result of the specificity of football, which, unlike tennis (in the singles format), is a team sport, but it may also be a derivative of gender differentiation in sports discourse (see Jakubowska, 2014; Kluczyńska, 2011)

It is worth noting that sometimes curio terms appear in media coverage referring to Świątek. An illustration of the problem may be the words uttered by a commentator on Eurosport during the broadcast of the 4th

round match between the Polish tennis player and Qinwen Zheng, which took place during the 2022 Roland Garros tournament:

If Iga were a toy bunny, she would have batteries from a certain company (Olejniczak, 2022).

The nomination strategies associated with the use of the name Iga, as well as emphasising the young age of the player using terms such as “girl” or “teenager”, are not infrequently combined with adjudication strategies based on negative stereotypes of femininity. After winning matches, especially fierce ones, the mental resilience and will to fight of the player is often emphasised, but the situation is different in the case of losing matches, as discourse actors in a not inconsiderable number of publications use prepositions suggesting the **fragility or even emotional immaturity of the tennis player** – focusing on the player’s crying, pointing out mistakes that, in their opinion, a tennis player at such a sporting level should not make. **Negative gender stereotyping** is evident in the media coverage of the early period of Świątek’s senior career, by which I mean the statements made by sports journalists and other discourse participants after she lost matches at the Tokyo Olympics and the WTA Finals tournament in 2021, but this stereotyping did not disappear completely in the following years, as exemplified by the coverage of the defeat of a Polish tennis player in the semi-final singles match played during the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris. Due to the small framework of this article, I will limit myself to quoting the titles of a few publications posted on major Polish websites:

Tokyo 2020: Her pain is greater. What Iga Świątek said when she **finally stopped crying** (Stec, 2020).

Iga Świątek **completely fell apart** before the last ball. Dramatic end to a match at the WTA Finals (Pk, 2021).

The drama and tears of Iga Świątek. Eloquent scenes after the defeat (Skrzypczynski, 2024).

At this point, it is worth quoting Robert Lewandowski’s statement, who, responding to journalist Anita Werner’s question whether the footballers rejected by coach Adam Nawalka before the World Cup showed emotions in the form of crying, said:

Tears? No! Men do not show that towards other men (Lewandowski, 2018).

However, the Polish player, after scoring a goal against Saudi Arabia in a match at the World Cup in Qatar, Lewandowski was unable to hide his emotions and tears appeared in his eyes. This fact was noticed by the media, but the behaviour of the national team's captain was not assessed in terms of immaturity or excessive emotionality, as it often happens in the case of Iga Świątek, on the contrary, it was valued positively, as exemplified by the statement of journalist Łukasz Byśkiniewicz quoted in an article published on Przegladsportowy.onet.pl:

The most beautiful were the tears. It shows that you are not a machine, but the wonderful human being with great sensitivity! (Byśkiniewicz 2021).

In the media discourse relating to Świątek, it is quite common to see contradictions related to the fact that the **topos of great athleticism is mixed with strategies of infantilisation and/or trivialisation**. An illustration of the issue can be found in Bartosz Ignacik's commentary during the broadcast of the WTA 1000 final match in Madrid in 2024:

Today, the *Royals* may not become Spanish champions as Barcelona lead Girona two to one with one goal scored by Robert Lewandowski. But today's **the friend with a racket may do something bigger** – with all due respect to Mr Robert (Ignacik, 2024b).

One more important thing that should be mentioned that becomes apparent in the sports discourse is that **Świątek is assessed in aesthetic terms**, which is not done in relation to Lewandowski. Evaluations of her make-up, hairstyle and outfit are most often found in online articles reporting on photo shoots with the tennis player accompanying Grand Slam tournaments or WTA Finals. At this point, it is worth quoting an excerpt from an article posted on Przegladsportowy.onet.pl after the Polish tennis player won the Rolland Garros tournament in 2023:

Iga Świątek stood in front of the camera in an elegant black dress with exposed shoulders (...). **Delicate make-up and slightly curled hair of the Raszynian added to her charm** (ZA, 2023).

Judging a player's outward appearance and attire occurs during television broadcasts of matches involving her. An illustration of the issue can be provided by Bartosz Ignacik, who, together with Joanna Sakowicz-Kostecka, commented on the WTA 1000 match in Miami between the Polish tennis player and Camila Giorgi:

Iga in white, wearing a dress with pink piping, and Camila Giorgi in an outfit she designed. You have to admit, Asia, that these are very nice outfits (Ignacik, 2024a).

The results of the research indicate that a characteristic feature of the language of sports journalists and commentators are strategies using hyperbolisation and metaphorisation (Kluczyńska, 2011; Koper, 2012; Siekierka, 2014). In the analysed research material, I identified **662 instances** of the occurrence of this type of strategy linking to the athleticism and performance of Iga Świątek and Robert Lewandowski, of which 350 referred to the tennis player and 312 to the footballer. Some of the strategies were aggregated, resulting in eight categories of metaphorisation and hyperbolisation (see Table 2.).

The category of metaphors and hyperboles related to **war, combat and physical strength** is the most numerous in the analysed research material. In the discourse, there is a slight quantitative predominance of such terms referring to Lewandowski – they appear 114 times, which accounts for almost 37% of all instances of metaphorisation and hyperbolisation of the footballer's athleticism, while in the case of Świątek they occur 93 times, which accounts for 27% of all metaphors and hyperboles related to the tennis player's athleticism. The Polish player is referred to in media coverage as a "murderer", "killer", "warrior", "striker", "sniper" and "shooter". Discourse actors also speak of him "fighting to the very end" or "forcing the goalie to capitulate" (see Table 2.).

Table 2. Metaphorisation and hyperbolisation strategies relating to the athleticism and performance of Iga Świątek and Robert Lewandowski

Type strategies	Strategies about Iga Świątek total N=350		Strategies about Robert Lewandowski total N=312	
	N (% of total)	Example terms	N (% of total)	Example terms
I. Metaphors and hyperboles related to war, combat and physical strength	93 (26.57%)	'killer instinct', 'terminator', 'roller', 'machine', 'has a hooligan mentality', 'fight to the death', 'massacre with a tennis racket', 'war of nerves', 'incredible exchange of blows', 'total tennis', 'great battle', 'siege'	114 (36.53%)	'assassin', 'killer', 'Polish killer', 'executioner', 'monster from Barcelona', 'gladiator', 'terminator', 'goal scoring combine harvester', 'machine', 'lone warrior', 'outstanding sniper', 'launched a record-breaking attack', 'forced surrender'
II. Metaphors and hyperboles related to excellence and unselfishness	111 (31.71%)	'superwoman', 'unmatched', 'unrivalled', 'brilliant', 'greatest', 'most beautiful', 'sporting genius', 'super Iga', 'priceless', 'fascinating thriller', 'horror', 'thriller', 'insane level'	80 (25.64%)	'genius', 'phenomenon', 'footballer prodigy', 'great', 'amazing', 'record breaker', 'sensational', 'phenomenal', 'he was like in a trance', 'unimaginable', 'insane statistics', 'hung in the air'
III. Metaphors and hyperboles related to power and domination	63 (18%)	'queen', 'queen of Roland Garros', 'empress Świątek', 'queen of New York', 'new queen of Madrid', 'queen of tennis', 'new ruler', 'world dominator', 'dominator of the dominating'	23 (7.37%)	'king Lewy', 'king of the jungle', 'king of the pitch', 'king of the scorers', 'king of the Bundesliga scorers', 'dominator', 'Lewandowski rules at the Mestalla', 'fights for the crown of king of the scorers'
IV. Metaphors and hyperboles related to nationality and heroism	18 (5.14%)	'ambassador of Polish sport', 'Poland Garros', 'national good', 'queen of Poland', 'national heroine', 'national pride'	28 (8.97%)	'machine made in Poland', 'super Pole', 'hero', 'team hero', 'the best footballer any Poland has produced'
V. Metaphors and hyperboles related to the cosmos	21 (6%)	'out of this world', 'absolute star of world tennis', 'rising star', 'cosmic Iga', 'cosmic level'	23 (7.37%)	'cosmic', 'out of this world', 'Bayern star', 'Barcelona star', 'superstar', 'undisputed superstar'
VI. Metaphors and hyperboles related to science and art	21 (6%)	'professor from Raszyn', 'professor', 'Mozart of tennis', 'she gave a concert', 'absolutely spectacular show', 'one woman show'	20 (6.41%)	'professor', 'demonstrated artistry', 'artistry', 'real performance', 'Lewy show!', 'showed off on stage', 'conducted the attack'
VII. Metaphors and hyperboles related to religion and personal role model	9 (2.57%)	'divine Iga', 'mentally strong as hell', 'idol', 'icon', 'icon material'	17 (5.44%)	'our John Paul II', 'reached football heaven', 'inspired', 'saviour', 'young god', 'reached football heaven', 'idol'
VIII. Metaphors and hyperboles related to nature and biology	14 (4%)	'fountain of vitality', 'Polish tornado', 'force reminiscent of a volcanic eruption', 'face of the new wave', 'predator'	7 (2.24%)	'the beast from Munich', 'insatiable', 'gave it his all', 'increased the lead with a pike position', 'flashed his form'

Source: The author's own work

Strategies related to power and domination appeared 23 times in relation to Lewandowski, which accounted for 7% of all instances of metaphorisation and hyperbolisation of the footballer's sporting class, while in the discourse referring to Świątek these types of terms occurred 63 times, which accounted for 18% of the total metaphors and hyperbole concerning the sportswoman (see Table 2.). Attention is drawn to the following expressions: "queen of tennis", "queen of Paris", "empress Świątek", "dominator", "dominator of the dominating". The quantitative predominance of terms related to power and dominance concerning the female tennis player, given the results of previous research (Billings, 2007; Halbert & Latimer, 1994; Vincent, 2004) and the fact that these are characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity, may seem somewhat surprising (I will elaborate on this point later in the article).

In the category of **metaphorisation and hyperbolisation associated with religion**, strategies relating to the footballer are more numerous and varied than those relating to the tennis player, containing terms such as: "young god", "saviour", "reached football heaven", "inspired" (see Table 2.).

It is important to note that, despite the sizable quantitative differences found in some categories of metaphorisation and hyperbolisation, in others, such as those relating to the cosmos or science and art, the differences are very small (see Table 2). In many of the categories of metaphorisation and hyperbole in semantic aspect, **the terms relating to Świątek and Lewandowski are often identical or very similar**: "machine"/"machine" (cat. I)⁶, "terminator"/"terminator"; "sports genius"/"genius", "living legend"/"legend" (cat. II), "queen"/"king", "dominator"/"dominator" (cat. III); "out of this world"/"out of this world" (cat. V), "professor"/"professor" (cat. VI), "predator"/"beast" (cat. VIII) etc.

Discussion and conclusion

In media coverage referring to Iga Świątek, there are strategies of infantilisation, trivialisation and devaluation, as well as those related to judging the athlete in aesthetic terms, which do not appear in the sports discourse concerning Robert Lewandowski. It is not uncommon in television programmes and online articles to see ambivalence in reporting on matches involving the tennis player, as on the one hand, her outstanding tennis skills are emphasised, which fits the topos of a great athleticism,

⁶ The first term refers to the tennis player and the second to the footballer, in brackets I give the category number of the strategy in Table 2.

while on the other hand, infantilising words are used, by which I mean mainly nomination strategies associated with the very frequent use of the name Iga and not infrequent terms such as “girl” or “charge” as well as hypocoristics. Moreover, the emotionality of the female athlete is raised in the media coverage, which is used to “easily” explain her sporting failures and is combined with negative gender stereotyping and the topos of gender difference suggesting the different characteristics of men and women. In the case of the footballer, the topos of “true” masculinity is made visible by positively valuing the qualities associated with hegemonic masculinity and relationally creating it by showing the difference between “true” men and those who are not entitled to this designation and between men and women (see Connell, 1987, 2005; Demetriou, 2001). The discursive strategies mentioned are not fundamentally different from what has been found in other studies, both indigenous and foreign, on gender categories in sports media coverage (see Arcimowicz, 2003, 2020; Billings 2007; Fink, 2015; Halbert and Latimer, 1994; Kluczyńska, 2011).

When interpreting the differences in terms of strategies present in Polish sports discourse in relation to Świątek and Lewandowski, it is important to note that this discourse is dominated by men, mainly sports journalists, former players and coaches, which may be relevant in the context of differentiating female and male athletes in media coverage (see Jakubowska 2014: 381-389). To illustrate the problem, I will state that out of 206 online articles relating strictly to the professional sphere of the tennis player and the footballer, only ten (5.3%) were written by women. In the case of tennis competitions involving Świątek, her matches on TV stations (Canal+ Sport, Eurosport, Polsat Sport) are increasingly often commented on by duos consisting of a woman and a man (usually a former tennis player and a sports journalist), but only men are allowed to comment on the most important matches – the final matches in Grand Slam tournaments.

The issue regarding the underrepresentation of women in sports media is complex. An increased number of female sports journalists does not necessarily automatically and quickly translate into a radical change in the strategy of describing female athletes in media coverage. Other factors may also play an important role here (see Jakubowska 2014: 395-397), for example gender stereotypes and gender hierarchies as understood by Connell (1987, 2005).

However, it should be underlined that the Polish media discourse on Iga Świątek and Robert Lewandowski’s professional sphere is not homogeneous, as strategies related to both maintaining and blurring gender differentiation are evident in it. A clear example of the blurring of this differentiation is

the metaphorisation and hyperbolisation of the athleticism and performance of the tennis player and the footballer. Terms related to fighting, strength and competition referring to Świątek and Lewandowski are numerically similar and semantically very similar in some strategy categories, and sharp distinctions between what is “feminine” and “masculine” disappear.

When attempting to explain the phenomenon concerning the blurring of gender differences in sports discourse concerning female tennis players and female footballers, one has to conclude that women’s tennis has changed in the current century, with more and more female players playing powerfully (see Jakubowska 2014, p. 389), and Iga Świątek can be counted among this group. Moreover, as some scholars suggest, in media coverage of outstanding successes of female athletes, their gender becomes a less significant category, the media focus on the performances of a country’s representatives, regardless of their gender. In this case, discursive strategies related to gender differentiation, are often displaced by a discourse with a national tinge, one of the important goals of which is to create a sense of national pride (cf. Jakubowska, 2014, 2017; Vincent and Crossman, 2012).

The above statement needs to be clarified. The highlighting of nationality issues on the occasion of the success of female athletes does not mean that the category of gender disappears completely from the discourse; on the contrary, it is still relevant, but in a specific way. Emphasized femininity and the associated negative gender stereotyping pertaining to female athletes is largely displaced from the discourse and replaced by strategies that positively value competition, power and dominance. These strategies are tied to hegemonic masculinity, which has long been an important feature of the construction of media coverage about male athletes.

In order to verify the above thesis, it would be advisable to conduct further studies covering a larger number of media coverage concerning more female athletes not only in Poland but also abroad.

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