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## “Legless Aphrodite” and “Hercules in a wheelchair”—About Disabled Women and Disabled Men Practicing Sport<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract** Sport is one of the areas of social life where patterns of femininity and masculinity are defined. The body plays a basic role there, and competition almost always takes place with division into the sexes. Therefore, in the article I will raise the notions related to the non-standard bodies of a sportsman presented in the social space, with consideration of the division into the sexes. The sport body is a subject of interest as a product of socio-cultural practices. Hence, special attention is paid to the creation of particular categories and the relationships between them.

The article raises the notions of changes that take place in the life of a physically disabled person which are caused by their engagement in a sports activity. The text is devoted to the problems of experiencing one’s corporeality, with division into the female and male body, and it serves to expose the similarities and differences of the sexes in sport for the disabled.

Qualitative data are used in the research, collected through the technique of in-depth free interviews and observations conducted among the disabled who practice sports. Analysis and interpretation of the research material is performed in accordance with procedures of grounded theory.

**Keywords** Disability, Sport, Body, Sex, Femininity and Masculinity Patterns

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Sport is one of the areas of social life where patterns of femininity and masculinity are (re)defined and (re)produced. As written by Honorata Jakubowska (2014:13), it is a special area, as the body plays a basic role there, and rivalry almost always takes place with division into the sexes. Therefore - referring to the mentioned author - several reasons may be listed which make sport a highly interesting sphere, differing from others with the analyzed sex relations and images (Jakubowska 2014:13). First of all, there is the measurability of sporting achievements, in contrast to the non-measurable or hardly-measurable determinants for success in other fields of life. Hence, it is much easier to compare the achievements of women and men, and to measure their competences of predispositions. But, it needs to be stressed that the results of competition in sport and the differences in achievements of women and men, may be used to question the equality concept. Therefore, sport is often regarded as one of the most significant “bastions” of masculinity, the area of diversification of male domination, hegemonic masculinity, whose significance increases in accordance with the feminization of other spheres of social life (Jakubowska 2014:13-14).

At the same time, sport is not a special sphere of social life, rather it presents duplicated schemes, also occurring in other areas of human existence, where power belongs more often to men than

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women. That is why, when referring to the category of sex, we may repeat after Honorata Jakubowska (2014:338) that the specificity of sport consists in the fact that here it is necessary to reconcile two superficially opposite values - difference and equality. On the one hand, it is impossible for sport to ignore the differences between men and women, and on the other, one of the main sporting principles is equality, meaning equal treatment of everyone during the same competition, and not excluding anyone from the sport. According to the concept of equal principles, sportsmen are divided according to certain criteria so that those competing have equal chances to win the sports competition. The most significant criterion is sex (Jakubowska 2014:23).

A similar situation applies to the sport of the disabled, which regarding the willingness to provide equal opportunities to people with various kinds of dysfunctions of the body and mind, has undergone meticulous categorization, separating it at the same time from sport practiced by the able-bodied. Therefore, there was a willingness to provide everyone with equal treatment during the competition, regardless of the type of disability that we are dealing with (Brittain 2012). Thus, one of the most significant phenomena, from the perspective of my deliberations, characterizing the transformation of sport, is the growing democratization that consists in the fact that some groups excluded in the past, including women and the disabled, are among its participants today (Rymarczyk 2012:112). However, there are still visible divisions and differentiations that exert a significant influence on the manner and character in which an individual is perceived in

relation to their sex. It is necessary to refer to stereotypes and prejudices to explain them. Both female and disabled bodies are perceived as different, incomplete, deprived of the elements of continuity and a certain holistic nature. Therefore, the body becomes the root of exclusion. This results from the fact that the cultural pattern of vitality and health is related to the trend for bodily sensuality and sexual attractiveness, as well as a panicked escape from aging and being elderly. Today's commercial-popular culture puts special emphasis especially on hedonist and aesthetic body values (Cynarski 2011:199).

Therefore, in this article I will make an attempt to reconstruct the manner in which a person with a dysfunctional body who is physically active is perceived, and the way in which the image of a disabled sportsman is currently developed, where one of the crucial categories is posed by - apart from the bodily dysfunction itself - the sex. Hence, I put special emphasis on establishing specific relationships between the categories of body, sex and socio-cultural practices that make up their components.

### Sex, culture and disability—basic notions and their definitions

The notion of sex is usually used in order to specify a certain biological phenomenon, mainly related to anatomical differences, which result from sexual dimorphism. Discrepancies between a woman and a man are present in the reproductive, hormonal and anatomical functions. Features that result from those discrepancies are conditioned biologically, regardless of social factors (Mazur 2013:166). At the same time, it must be borne in mind that sex

is also a social and psychological phenomenon. In such terms, it is defined by patterns of life activity or specific feelings of identity. Sociologists tend to use the category of a cultural sex ("gender") in relation to the psychological, social and cultural differences between men and women. Hence, gender is related to social creation of the masculinity and femininity concept (Bem 2000). Differentiation between sex and gender is crucial, as biological differences remain unchanged (apart from surgical interference in this scope). Differences in gender are conditioned socially, and they may transform. And it is the gender, not the biological sex, that decides male or female sexual identity (Mazur 2013:167).

A new sub-discipline that has emerged in this field, the so-called sociology of gender, which considers different manners of functioning of men and women in various spheres of social life, makes an attempt to grasp the determinants of distances and inequalities between them. A subject of this discussion is posed by various forms of social differentiation, for example, in relation to the labor market, power and politics, or in the sphere of public life (Mazur 2013:165). The literature of the subject often suggests formulations (Bourdieu 2004; Douglas 2007; Jakubowska 2013), according to which sex is believed to be one of the most important dichotomous categories that order the surrounding reality. As a consequence, the differentiation of the sexes, emphasized in numerous contexts, is one of the basic social divisions, present in each culture, which is made visible through the existence of sex classification in institutions that are important for a given society (cf., Gill 2007). One of them is contempo-

rary sport, where numerous phenomena of social life are reflected, including those related to gender and its multi-dimensional contexts (Jakubowska 2014).

At the same time, what is especially worth stressing is that, in social perception, sport is the domain of men, and it remains in opposition to cultural standards both of female beauty and attractiveness (Mazur 2013:171). Women who treat sport as a kind of career are perceived by society as deprived of femininity, often masculinized. This stereotype has reduced the number of women practicing sport and determines the behavior of sportswomen (Mazur 2013:171). In turn, male sports are those full of brutality, violence, enormous muscle engagement, risk and danger. Female disciplines are full of delicacy, sensitivity, movements full of grace, conforming to the standard of female beauty (Mazur 2013:173).

Therefore, a thesis may be put forward that contemporary sport remains an institution that provides a clear division of the sexes, through its instrumental legitimization, ideology, organization and patterns of the body (cf., Hall 1994). Despite the fact that at the turn of 20th and 21st centuries women won their right to practice almost all disciplines, the division into male and female sports can be observed. This differentiation, apart from biological and psychological argumentation, is conditioned with cultural definitions of sex, and the manners in which female and male bodies are treated (Mazur 2013:173). As suggested by Honorata Jakubowska (2013), in the world of sport, a body with a specified sex plays a fundamental role, not

only in terms of physical predispositions but also through the presented image. It is the basis and justification for separations and exclusions. However, at the same time, it becomes a source for its questioning. A conclusion can be drawn that sources of a human identity should be sought in the social aspect. The majority of sex-specific behaviors are a consequence of certain socialization techniques and patterns (Mazur 2013:167). Hence, a female body, not only in sport, although especially here - regarding the domination of male forms and values - is perceived through differences to the male body. A body becomes a basis for exclusion, which is made visible - according to Iris Young (1990a) - in the attitudes of sexism, homophobia and racism. In each case, the attributes of a body, such as sex, sexuality or skin color, are a reason for rejection, and also disgust, which strengthens hegemonic, bodily identities, developed in opposition to the "Other" ('s body) (Young 1990a). In the dominating discourse, the "others" are presented through attributes of a body which are described as ugly, dirty, contaminated or sick (Young 1990b). In the case of sport, female bodies are defined as weaker, slower and less efficient. These personified differences become the basis for the different treatment of women and men, thus becoming sexual inequalities. A difference between a male and a female is not natural, but it creates a hierarchical sexual order (Jakubowska 2013). Therefore, a sportsman is still identified with qualities that are ascribed to the masculinity stereotype, such as good physical conditions independence, attitude towards success, impetus, or persistence in one's beliefs. The second pole is occupied by a stereotype of femininity, where features such as sensitivity, caring,

protectiveness, mildness, coquetry, care of appearance, the feeling of aesthetics, tenderness, honesty, delicacy are given prominence. Hence, typically feminine features are not very useful in sport, while persons practicing extreme sports personify a stereotype of "a real man" (Zdebska 2013:156). Sport glorifies hardness, aggressiveness, rivalry, that is features accredited to men, but not applicable to women. It results in, first of all, difficulties for women in participating in a sports activity (it especially considers sports that are traditionally ascribed to men); second of all, there is the lower interest of the media in female sporting competitions, and the inclination to evaluate women's participation through the prism of their sexual attractiveness, which is not encountered in the case of sportsmen; thirdly, there is criticism over women's participation in "male" sports (Zdebska 2013:158).

Hence, sport is an area where the cultural order of sex is constantly reproduced (Hall 2002:6-17). At the same time, in sport, where the inequality of opportunities is generated by biological factors, actions towards their removal are undertaken. They cover, for example, the division into weight categories in martial arts or weightlifting. The same purpose (of equaling opportunities) is ascribed to competition that considers division regarding sex (Organista 2013:178). Similar assumptions form the basis for the creation of general principles of rivalry among the disabled. Here, the strive for the provision of equal opportunities is expressed not only through the diversification of competitions of the fully capable and of the disabled but also - in relation to the latter group - a complicated system of sport-medical classification was established, which considers,

among others, the degree and type of disability. Despite the fact that in this case sport was supposed to be an element supporting the rehabilitation process of the disabled - first of all in medical but also in psychological and social dimensions - within the course of time it became an autonomous activity, with all the features and problems characteristic of a contemporary undertaking (Kowalik and Miotk-Mrozowska 2013). At the same time, certain problems appear which might previously have been rarely seen (Jankowski 2013:81). As an example: the question of there being a common contest between the disabled and the able-bodied seemed completely unjustified, and for some it was totally lacking in sense. Events from recent years seem, if not to destroy these existing beliefs, then significantly weaken them, the best example of which is Natalia Partyka, who is successful in competing with the able-bodied, and competes alongside them in the most important tournaments, including the Olympic Games (Jankowski 2013:82).

### Research methods

In the article, I adopted an interpretative paradigm as the cognitive perspective, which goes to the roots of the theory of symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and hermeneutics. Quality-oriented researchers define it in broader or narrower terms, but they always stick to the core that relates to the fact that "(...) all of these trends postulate that the social world cannot be understood in simple categories, casual relations, or analyzed through application towards social universal laws. This arises from the fact that human actions are based on social meaning, such as: intentions, motifs, beliefs, principles

and values (Hammersley and Atkinson 2000:17). According to this approach, an individual's nature is creative, and reality - as an intersubjective product of participants - is dynamic and changeable, and unpredictable (it is impossible to explore the "rights" that govern human behavior) because of the symbolic character of the perception of the world and interactions (interpretation) (Konecki 2000; Hernik 2007:6).

The research material applied to discuss the problems raised in the article encompasses personal experiences of the disabled persons, realizing their physical activity through participation in various forms of sport. Unstructured and narrative interviews were performed with representatives of this category of persons. While triangulating data, the study also exploited some records from observations made during meetings and sporting events, training sessions and consultations.<sup>2</sup>

The premises that support the selection of the above mentioned techniques arise, first of all from the accepted ontological (human experiences, interpretations, knowledge, evaluations and interactions are perceived as significant interdependencies of the social reality) and epistemological assumptions (the legal manner of data generation on the basis of those ontological assumptions comprises of interaction, conversations with people, listening to

<sup>2</sup> The research that provided the background for this text was part of a greater project that relates to life situation of the disabled who practice sports, currently being carried out by the author of the article. The project is co-financed by the Dean of the Economic and Sociological Department of Łódź University. While developing this text, the empirical material was composed of: 56 unstructured interviews and 23 recordings from observations.

stories and gaining access to the knowledge, evaluations and impressions of individuals). Secondly, the obtained data are complete and in-depth, which complies with the ideas put forward by Herbert Rubin and Iena Rubin (1997:205), according to whom qualitative research is applied in the case of notions that require deeper comprehension, and this is served best by detailed examples and expanded narration.

Analysis of the research material was performed in accordance with the procedures of grounded theory (Konecki 2000). A motif for the selection of the chosen methods was the need to identify "factual" manners of life, actions of units and processes of creating meaning, therefore, the desire to bring science closer to "life" and "recognition of the social reality from the perspective of the subject that creates it" (Wyka 1993:34). Furthermore, biographies and their construction in time must consider the individual's life perspective (Melchior 1990:237). At the same time, all autobiographic materials pose a potential source of data on the identity of the person talking about their life, who interacts with the listener/reader as a social actor endowed with a specific set of self-definitions (Golczyńska-Grondas 2014:25).

The selection of subsequent cases was of a theoretical character, based on the method of continuous comparison, which means that subsequent cases were chosen on the basis of current analytical determinations, not according to assumptions agreed on beforehand (Glaser and Strauss 1967:45). The selection of cases lasted until the theoretical saturation of the generated analytical categories was achieved (Glaser and Strauss 1967:61).



## Male vs female body—similarities and differences in situations of the sexes in sport practiced by the disabled

To start our deliberations, it is worth stressing once more that a body is not just a biological organism, but it is (re)constructed individually and socially (Jakubowska 2009). Transformability – posing one of the characteristic features of a “today’s” body – means, on the one hand, that a boundary between the necessity and freedom of choice is shifted (Habermas 2003:35) and, on the other hand, that a body is treated as a certain “task” rather than a ready product (Bauman 2012:94). At the same time, this transformation of a body takes place in accordance with socio-cultural norms and patterns. Therefore, a body adopts certain shapes, it embodies particular patterns, and acquires given embodied skills (Jakubowska 2014:157). It refers to the beauty ideal, which, as stressed by Rafał Biały (2011:267), has been relativized numerous times over the course of centuries. Similarly, the ideal of a female body changed in relation to a given era. Undoubtedly, the female beauty canon was a reflection of her position in a given age and culture. The structure and proportions of the muscles of male bodies did not undergo such fundamental transformations. According to Zbigniew Cynarski (2011:199), cultural trends of the body are related to the fashion for bodily sensuality and sexual attractiveness, as well as a panicked escape from aging and being elderly. Today’s commercial popular culture stresses especially the hedonist and aesthetic body values, while the spreading of mass culture has changed the manner in which women are perceived by the society. According to the previously mentioned Rafał Biały (2011:286), we may

speak here about two phenomena: the femocratization of beauty and the improvement of awareness regarding appearance. As a result of cultural pressure and the “tyranny of a slim body,” women increasingly more often believe that it guarantees happiness and success in life. First of all, a body must be slim. Secondly, a desired body is a young body. Another aspect of a body that meets the beauty criteria is fashion. There are particular criteria present in mass culture which decide whether a woman is attractive or not, and whether she fits the general canons of mass attractiveness (Biały 2011:270).

The image of a perfect body is undoubtedly vivid in sport. We may risk the thesis that a sporty and beautiful body (regarding the practiced discipline) is synonymous with contemporary commercial sport, which poses a significant element of mass culture. Sportsmen are seen as heroes who become objects of media co-organized cult of sexuality. Bodies of sportsmen are often identified as an ideal of beauty and fitness (Biały 2011:275). Therefore, aesthetic perfection of a body is not incidental in sporting success, rather it constitutes an indispensable component (Biały 2011:275).

Disabled sportsmen in this scope will be perceived differently than those who are able bodied, because their bodies are “different,” as they represent a more or less *non-normative* image of what could be called a bodily standard, applicable in a given culture or society. Therefore, it is an example of a dichotomy where, on the one hand, we deal with a sportsman, generally identified with an *over-normative* body, but, on the other hand, with a disabled person, who by definition is perceived through the prism

of stereotypes and prejudices, including those related to the body and its various inefficiencies. Such a contrast of the situation where two superficially opposing values clash - a non-normative body and an over-normative one - may trigger a cognitive dissonance in the case of the recipients, especially those who, on the one hand, do not have knowledge related to the disabled, the different forms disability can take, nor the kinds of activities they can do, including sport, and on the other hand, present strongly internalized schemes of perceiving a man with body dysfunctions.

I’ll put it this way. I have already encountered it many times that the able-bodied, because I’ll be talking about them now, how they see us [the sportsmen - note by JN], and they had no clue that the disabled may practice sport at such a level, they are used to seeing a picture of a disabled person sitting at home, or needing the assistance of ten people while going out, because the poor guy can’t do it on his own, and these able-bodied people are shocked, and it’s a great surprise for them, a great wow. [w.3.14]

At the same time, this contrasting image will be visible not only between an able-bodied and a disabled sportsman but also between a sportsman and a sportswoman. Generally, men are represented with reference to their physicality, muscles, size, strength or speed, that is, through a sportsman’s features. In the case of women, if we talk about strength, it most often has an ambiguous or negative overtone. Although currently more and more female participants play by strength, there is still a need to break the stereotypes related to the fact that strength cannot go hand in hand with feminin-

ity or with beauty (Jakubowska 2014:389). This disharmony was confirmed by my interviewees, who stressed the fact that the requirements that extreme sportsmen must meet broadly overlap with the stereotype of “a real man”. What is more, the subjects raised the idea that the features of “a real woman” are less helpful in a sports career, and in some cases they actually make it more difficult than easy, and they pose a reason for numerous problems with adjustment. Therefore, common opinions of those who practice sport strengthen the belief expressed by some theoreticians that women must experience a conflict of roles, so it is harder for them (than for man) to achieve success (cf., Mikołajczyk 2004:105). It is reflected in the words of one of my interlocutors.

A woman will always be perceived as weaker, the one that is weaker. Actually, we say it all the time that women are the “weaker sex,” so people think about it in this way all the time, and there are such separations, I believe, at least in sport, and I think it is the same in other spheres of life. [w.19.15]

The approach to one’s own corporeality and that of others seems relatively obvious, it is handed down during the socialization process. Since boys are encouraged to develop their sports abilities, to be active and improve their sporting achievements, girls are often deprived of this possibility, or if they are physically active, less attention is paid to the quality of those exercises. In the case of boys, it is important not only that they play football, run or throw but also how they do it. A consequence of this different “sport socialization,” realized both in family homes and at school during PE classes, is often the physical disability of women in the grown-up world of

professional sport (cf., Jakubowska 2014:159). Such differentiated encouragement for girls and boys to do physical activity, and to practice particular sport disciplines, results, as noticed by Honorata Jakubowska (2014:161) from the fact that women and men are ascribed with different attributes - perceived in a dichotomous manner.

Bearing in mind the above deliberations, and referring to the statements of my interviewees, it may be stated that the process of sport socialization leads to the establishment of specific types of habitus (Bourdieu 2004; 2005), and tastes that determine both body predispositions and preferences of particular people in relation to the selection of forms of physical activity as appropriate for a given sex.

I think that it is harder for a woman in various spheres of life. I'm not saying that I'll be moaning here, but it comes from my experience. It's the same with sport, which is proved even by the fact that the number of women is lower, because there are fewer possibilities for them, and some disciplines are simply for men and others for women, but they're also fewer. At least I see it in this way. [w.19.15]

At the same time, on the one hand, while confronting the image of a sportsman's body or that of a disabled person's body with your own, and on the other a male and female body, we can notice, as suggested by Honorata Jakubowska (2014:532), that a male body is synonymous with a sporty body, and that there are numerous common features in cultural images or social stereotypes of a female and a disabled body. In both cases, they are presented as passive (male activity vs female passiveness), de-

pendable, weaker and worse than the male norm, and in this sense they are denied a sportsman's body (Jakubowska 2014:531-532).

To sum up our deliberations on the relationship between sex, disability and sport, we may conclude that these categories are strictly interconnected, presenting specific dependencies. Both women and men who experienced disability, and at the same time undertake actions consisting in practicing extreme sports, must face various difficulties related both to their own weaknesses and limitations, but most of all to society's ignorance and lack of knowledge. The research proves that these women are in a position which seems to be less comfortable, and at the same time more demanding, forcing them to make an additional effort that consists in opposing adverse opinions, according to which a woman should represent a type of a delicate, and at the same time calm person, which in the majority of cases turned out to be contradictory to the image of sportsmen which exists in our culture (they should be strong, brave and, to some extent, aggressive).

On the other hand, it must be noticed that both a sportsman and a sportswoman, if they are disabled, must, to some extent, deal with the same problems brought by the dysfunctionality of their bodies and the society that they need to function in. First of all, attention must be drawn to the fact that sport of the disabled, regardless of sex, is not very popular in our country, thus the situation may be compared to the situation of niche sports, practiced by able-bodied sportsmen. Both niche sports and disciplines for the disabled face similar problems related to scarce social feedback, relatively low media

interest and limited possibilities to acquire strategic sponsors. These notions are strongly related to each other. If we do not speak or write about sport, the interest of sponsors and potential beneficiaries decreases. Those in turn will not be interested if no proper access to information is provided. These were the notions raised by respondents. A statement of one of them is presented below.

Actually, I think I don't need to say much about it [a short pause - note by JN]. In essence, everything is clearly noticeable. There is no awareness of society here, because we cannot be seen or we almost cannot be seen in the media. And it brings further consequences, because it makes us uninteresting for sponsors. So it's a vicious circle. [w.14.14]

Therefore, disability, regardless of sex, generates specific psycho-social consequences. It is understandable when disability is looked at not as a fact but as a social construct, which triggers specific consequences in relation to how it is perceived in a given society. Therefore, there is a need to refer to the specificity of the disability itself and the specificity of sport practiced by the disabled. In those two spheres, especially when they are combined, it is clearly visible that the situation of women and men, who are demonstrated as being disabled sportsmen, is strongly related to their non-normative body, which according to the degree of "deviating from the standard" changes the way in which a given individual is perceived by others, and how he functions in the social space. Here, we can use Goffman's differentiation into discreditable and discredited. In the first case we deal with a category of people with an invisible dysfunction or one that is hard to

recognize, and the second case includes those who have a visible kind of stigma. However, according to Erving Goffman, regardless of the character of the stigma, the existence of stigmatized people is determined - in almost all respects - by the society of people who identify themselves as normal (*normals*), which pertains both to the determination of a certain sphere of life, and subordination to strong control, which may relate to the creation of separated enclaves of "misfits" (Goffman 2005:155). And it is the perception of the body, not the sex, that seems especially significant in social relationships for disabled sportsmen. It is best proved by the experiences of the respondents, where the body dysfunctions blocked the process of their image development as a fully abled sportsman.

Although I would like it very much, it is still not like this, and the majority perceive us first of all as disabled individuals, not as ordinary sportsmen. I say 'ordinary' because I do not care about... I don't know what, I would just like to feel like a fully abled sportsman who is not judged by his appearance. [w.15.9]

What is more, the experiences of the respondents suggest that although it is similar to the case of sport of the fully abled, where sex determines divisions related to participation of sportsmen in specific disciplines, the number of such divisions in the case of the disabled is much lower, and at the same time the possibility of competing in mixed teams is allowed much more often (regarding the discipline). As is often stressed, divisions related to sex, both in sport practiced by able-bodied and disabled individuals, are caused by trying to make the competition fairer, however, sport of the disabled is characterized by

a greater acceptance of teams composed of both sexes. It is possible, especially when the competition is not directly related to the capabilities of a body but often to the effectiveness of the used "tool," most often various prostheses providing both men and women with equal chances to win. The specificity of numerous disciplines of sport of the disabled means that any potential differences resulting from physical deviations related to the body are neutralized, or their role is reduced to a significant extent. Here, it is worth mentioning that the application of a technology (both in the case of disabled women and men) not only means that a given person is more independent, strong or simply capable of a given type of an activity, but they can also create possibilities to achieve additional assets, in the form of strength or greater resistance of their body. What is more, technology is somewhat a "natural" part of disabled people practicing sport, which is reflected in, among others, formal regulations that govern the principles of the sports competition, which stress that particular components of a prosthesis, or even wheelchairs, pose an integral part of a given person (Howe 2011). Any improvements or interventions in a body are treated as "repairing" or striving to equal the opportunities between opponents.

Therefore, it seems that segregation in terms of sex in the sport of the disabled is less intense than in sport practiced by fully abled individuals. This also relates to the matter of greater liberalism, among others, in relation to the participant's age, which in the case of sport practiced by the disabled may be much greater than in sport practiced by the able-bodied. Careful analysis of the situation that disabled women and men practicing sport are

currently in forces us to take a closer look at the matter of sex from a greater distance, and from a more critical perspective. It happens because the disability itself, although undoubtedly posing a highly significant factor influencing the situation of a sportsman, is not able to get rid of the fact that - as in the case of the able-bodied - the sex will always differentiate the situation of women and men to a certain extent.

First of all, what is stressed by those who were researched is that sport of the disabled is a tool for developing masculinity, realized in accordance with the "traditional" pattern - strength, physical fitness and being "tough". The situation of disabled sportswomen is slightly different, however. Their bodies may contradict femininity in two ways: through their disability (contrasting to a cultural pattern of beauty), and, in the case of some disciplines, through their physical strength. Therefore, through getting involved in sport, a disabled sportswoman will not become more feminine, and concentrating on beauty rather than on achievements may trigger her concerns against showing off her body, which is reflected accurately in a fragment of a statement by one of my female interviewees.

First of all, I was afraid of showing myself publicly. It's not that I didn't show myself to people beforehand [laughter - note by JN], but never on such a scale, and never in such a way that I simply put my prosthesis aside, off I go and that's it. No, it was never like that. Because you watch out more, and you don't show yourself so boldly, that you don't have this leg, right. On an everyday basis I try not to show it, try not to draw attention to the fact that I'm different. [w.15.2]

At the same time, these concerns do not seem to be totally justified, as media messages regarding sport of the disabled, if present at all, are rarely focused on the participants' appearance. A disabled body is shown, when it (almost) suits a pattern of perfect femininity and masculinity, an example of which may be Oscar Pistorius, who was often presented as an attractive man, a sportsman, or in case of a sportswoman it would be a representative of Poland, Natalia Partyka (cf., Jakubowska 2014:533).

We are not so attractive, especially women, because it's easier for men, even if they're disabled. They can catch up with strength, determination, passion and other similar assets which are not suitable for a woman, which reduces her femininity rather than enhancing it. In turn, stressing typically feminine features is not too possible in our case because the disability deprives us of our femininity in other people's eyes. [w.15.17]

Simultaneously, the disproportions between men and women in sport of the disabled can be explained by the lack of proper infrastructure or support, but also by the lower interest from women in sports activities. Therefore, a claim made by Helen Lenskyj (2003:177) seems justified - a barrier in practicing sport by a disabled person may be posed not by the impairment itself but by the functional disability. In this sense, the situation of disabled sportswomen is analogical to the situation of their able-bodied friends in those disciplines which are still perceived as bastions of masculinity (Jakubowska 2014:533). This is connected with the fact that a male hero gains his prestige by taking risk, including risking his life. Therefore, in the case of men, any contusions and injuries are proof of a hard fight, and are embedded

in the image of a "masculine" body, which means that it is frequently exposed. Female falls, accidental or caused by injuries, exhaustion or pain, do not evoke such eroticism as male heroism (Schneider 2003:88; Biały 2011:276). In their case, any contusions or injuries are most often presented from a distance, so they do not "spoil" their delicate, "pure," pretty female body (Schneider 2003:87).

A certain way to marginalize female sport or women in sport is the erotization of female participants, and their presentation first of all as sexually attractive objects, and only then as talented sportswomen. The purpose of such actions, according to their creators, is to attract the attention of viewers and, as a consequence, the media and sponsors, to female sport (Jakubowska 2014:323). Paradoxically, an unattractive body, which doesn't conform to the accepted canons of beauty, deprived of natural "femininity," may become an asset in the fight to perceive them not as objects of desire or erotization, but as participants, sportswomen practicing a given kind of physical activity. However, on the other hand, the "aesthetic value" of the performance is drastically reduced, which is deprived of such an important attribute as the mentioned femininity, with all of its assets. In numerous cases it may even discourage potential viewers, especially if they seek not only fun in the sporting environment but also slightly erotic experiences which may be fulfilled only when the desired object meets specific requirements of female beauty, as stressed by one of my female interviewees.

A woman must be beautiful to be spotted. Otherwise, she won't have a successful relationship. The case is similar with sport. If a participant has a nice body, she



is presented more often, she becomes liked quicker, but she will also always trigger something in me. [w.15.17]

At the end, it is worth noticing that the manner in which the female participants are presented in the media is embedded in the broader context of representing the female body in nature. At the same time, the male bodies of sportsmen are also presented in a similar scope, through exposition of beauty and sexuality. This trend is called *sporn*, that is, a combination of sport and porn, and it is reflected in participation of male sport stars in erotic, almost pornographic, advertising campaigns (Jakubowska 2008). In this context, a sportsman's body becomes similar to a female body, which is not specific only for sport, but it becomes more and more legitimate in other cultural messages. Differences in the representation of female and male bodies become blurred to a significant extent, however, we can still observe certain practices of maintaining the boundary between that which is "female" and which is "male" (Jakubowska 2014:394).

## Conclusions

Sex is the main premise of allocating social tasks. As a biological fact, it is expressed in bodily signs, physiological qualities and certain mental distinctions. Sex can be also culturally interpreted. Therefore, there are various ideas, beliefs and views on femininity and masculinity, as well as specific rules of conduct. In the majority of societies, women and men are provided with different social roles. These roles, posing a collection of social expectations towards the sexes, shape behavioral differences between women and men (cf., Mazur 2013:174). Therefore, as highlighted by Natalia Organista (2013:179), the social order is developed,

stabilized and made predictable. What is important is that this order, based on culturally (re)constructed roles of women and men roles, is noticeable, present in almost all spheres of a human life, also in sport.

Taking a look at sport through the prism of sex allowed the author to prove that female sport, including that of the disabled, is trivialized and marginalized (greater commercial value is provided by male sport; it occupies more space in the media; more money is spent on male sport) (Organista 2013:178). Both women and the disabled in sport try to break the traditional manner in which they are perceived, drawing attention to the fact that they are first of all sportsmen, not disabled individuals or women, and that they have features of a real "sportsman," such as strength (cf., Jakubowska 2014:534). Although the difference in the scope of treatment and perception of self and one's body is related both to disabled men and women, in the case of the latter group it is clearer, more restrictive and troublesome at the same time. In this context, it must be stressed that the non-normative corporeality may be a capital during sporting competitions, but it does not play such a role outside this field. In sport of the disabled, regarding specific principles that are present in a given discipline, the differences related to body fitness are meaningful, but, outside this context, a body which deviates from an accepted standard poses a source of problems, suffering and lack of understanding by others. Regarding socio-cultural conditions, this non-normativity of a body is interpreted in a different manner, and is perceived in relation to whether we will be dealing with a sportswoman or a sportsman. The latter may count on greater approval of themselves as people and of their bodies which, despite certain

dysfunctions, usually do not pose such a great barrier in relationships with their environment as they do in the case of women. Involvement in sport, which brings positive effects in itself, both for women and men, in the context of social interactions, seems to be more advantageous for the disabled men than women. This is because women may contradict the ideal of beauty and "femininity" in two ways; firstly, due to their "unnatural" figure which results from their effort related to sport practicing; and also their disability, which more or less means that the body deviates from the canons of beauty assumed in a given culture. At the same time, involvement of disabled women in sport may be one of only a few opportunities to show their environment that they are more resourceful, self-reliant and skillful, stressing to some extent the asset of their femininity. However, it seems that each situation, in relation to the type of practiced sport, its influence on the body, and first of all the type and character of the dysfunctions (mainly its visibility), may mean that physical activity will exert a greater or smaller influence - of a positive or negative nature - on "femininity". The situation of men looks different in this field, because sport, while influencing physical predispositions and appearance to a much greater extent than in the case of women, exerts a positive impact on emphasizing the assets of

sex, through stressing the "masculinity" of a body. Even situations that accompany the physical activity, related among others to contusions, body injuries or not always aesthetic appearance, both in the case of fully abled and disabled men, are compliant with the image (archetype) present in our culture, of a man as a strong figure that "sheds sweat and blood"

Therefore, the evaluation of sport and its influence on a person that practices it undoubtedly depends on the sex, character of the dysfunction and the type of sport. Hence, the influence of sport on the disabled may be perceived in an ambivalent and ambiguous manner. However, it is certain that sport is one of the areas with distinctly arranged boundaries of sex, and at the same time - in contrast to other spheres of life - situations, in which these boundaries are removed are very scarce. The existence of these boundaries seems justified because it guarantees that competition is governed by the principle of fairness or justice, separating those whose physical predispositions are naturally different. At the same time, the existence of those boundaries establishes a hierarchical relation between "masculinity" and "femininity," determining both these categories simultaneously. Both notions are defined as apposed, and the undertaken practices serve to maintain this dichotomy (cf., Jakubowska 2013).

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## „Afrodyta bez nogi” i „Herkules na wózku” – rzecz o niepełnosprawnych kobietach i niepełnosprawnych mężczyznach uprawiających sport

**Abstrakt:** Sport jest jednym z tych obszarów życia społecznego, w którym definiowane są wzorce kobiecości i męskości. Ciało odgrywa w nim podstawową rolę, a rywalizacja odbywa się prawie zawsze z podziałem na płeć. W związku z tym w niniejszym artykule podejmuję kwestie związane z obecnością w społecznej przestrzeni nienormalnego ciała sportowca z uwzględnieniem podziału na płeć. Przy czym ciało usportowione interesuje mnie tutaj jako przedmiot i wytwór społeczno-kulturowych praktyk. Dlatego szczególnie uwagę zwracam na tworzenie określonych kategorii oraz relacji między nimi.

Artykuł porusza zatem kwestie przemian dokonujących się w życiu osoby niepełnosprawnej fizycznie, które powodowane są jej zaangażowaniem w aktywność sportową. Tekst jest poświęcony problematyce doświadczania własnej cielesności, z podziałem na ciało kobiece i ciało męskie, i ma służyć wyeksponowaniu podobieństw oraz różnic sytuacji płci w sporcie osób niepełnosprawnych.

W badaniach wykorzystane zostały dane jakościowe zdobyte za pomocą techniki pogłębionego wywiadu swobodnego, przeprowadzanego wśród osób niepełnosprawnych uprawiających sport. Analiza i interpretacja materiału badawczego prowadzone są zgodnie z procedurami metodologii teorii ugruntowanej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** niepełnosprawność, sport, ciało, płeć, wzory kobiecości i męskości