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A WOMAN IN POLITICS OR POLITICS IN A WOMAN? PERCEPTION OF THE FEMALE LEADERS OF POLISH POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 2015 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Agnieszka TURSKA-KAWA – Agata OLSZANECKA-MARMOLA

ABSTRACT:
According to theories presented in scholarly literature concerning the subject, women are perceived in terms of soft qualities such as empathy, agreeableness, friendliness or mildness, whereas politics is presented as ruthless and full of conflicts. Therefore, dispositions expected from politicians are not compatible with the culturally and socially held elements of the feminine role. The aim of the study is to compare the weight of two factors: qualities attributed to women, and qualities attributed to politicians. The verification is presented through an experiment (N=82). Its procedure involved the respondents' initial evaluation of female leaders of Polish political parties in the 2015 parliamentary election, and then showing them campaign spots in which the evaluated women were straightforwardly presented as active politicians. After watching the spots, the respondents were asked to evaluate the women once again. The results of the experiment demonstrated that in the main traits indicated in the pre-test were those resulting from the social role and deep-rooted stereotypes. This perception was significantly changed by the stimulus affecting the participants, i.e. the exposure to campaign spots, in which the three women were presented as active politicians.

KEY WORDS:
2015 parliamentary election in Poland, female stereotypes, political advertising, political leadership, women in politics

Introduction

In Poland, women have a low share in the public life and politics. After the first entirely competitive election, the first-term Sejm only included 10 % of women. This under-representation of women in politics is a phenomenon typical for other Central and Eastern European countries, too,[1] which can be explained with the

1 *Women in Parliaments, 1945–1995: A World Statistical Survey*. Geneva : Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1995.

Ancien Régime heritage and the dominance of patriarchal values in the society. The increase of the number of female members of parliament only occurred after the 2001 election. The introduction of voluntary electoral quotas by some parties, along with the changes in awareness, produced 20 % participation of women in the Sejm. In the electoral code adopted in 2011, 35 % electoral quotas were implemented in Polish law. Yet, the application of that instrument failed to bring the expected significant changes: in 2011, the percentage of women only increased up to 24 %, and after the 2015 election, it is 27 %. The data regarding women holding the positions of ministers or party leaders are even poorer. In the years 1990-2015, the percentage of female ministers was 10.6 %, and Ewa Kopacz was the only female leader of a relevant party. True, women have been Prime Ministers twice (Hanna Suchocka and Ewa Kopacz); however, it never occurred directly after the elections but rather as a result of some reshuffles within the political arena (Waldemar Pawlak's inability to set up the government, and later, Donald Tusk taking the position of the President of the European Council).

The 2015 parliamentary electoral campaign brought a dramatic change in the leaders of the main political parties. For the first time, women were presented as candidates for the office of Prime Minister in an electoral campaign. These women were: the former Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz (Civic Platform *[Platforma Obywatelska]*), Beata Szydło (Law and Justice *[Prawo i Sprawiedliwość]*) and Barbara Nowacka (United Left *[Zjednoczona Lewica]*). One possible goal was to soften the view of politics as something hard, devoid of empathy and full of conflict, which had recently been intensified by numerous disputes on the political arena.

From the Social Role to Stereotype

The social functioning of sexes is connected with the division of responsibilities. The conclusions from researches carried out by many anthropologists first of all show that gender is the foundation of attributing social tasks and different roles associated with them, secondly, a certain set of tasks is consistently attributed to one gender only, and lastly, apart from a small number of tasks attributed to (biological) sexes, there is a great variety of roles in culture: what is regarded as feminine behaviour in one community may be characteristic of males in another.[2] In the process of socialisation, females are mostly taught and prepared to serve traditional roles connected with family and care, whereas males are to fulfil professional roles. For example, the following differences have been identified in spontaneous emotional education: 1) parents more often talk about emotions (except anger) with girls than with boys; 2) girls receive more information about emotions from their parents than boys do; 3) parents use more words referring to emotions in stories told to girls than to boys; 4) when playing with their babies, mothers express a broader range of emotions to daughters than to sons; 5) when talking to their daughters, mothers describe emotional states in greater detail than they do when talking to their sons; 6) in conversations with sons, mothers focus on the causes and effects of negative emotions.[3] What is developed in women is a calm, friendly disposition, i.e. mildness and readiness to compromise; men, however, are expected to express aggressiveness and activity.[4] Research shows that women are more sensitive to the issues connected with taking care of ill family members,[5] they feel more responsible for the health of members of family, and have higher emotional competence.[6]

The traditional perception of feminine and masculine roles generates stereotypes. A gender stereotype is defined as simplified judgments and concepts of male and female behaviours which are prevalent in the community and taught in the process of growth and socialisation in that community.[7] They (in a certain way) reflect different roles attributed to a man and a woman: the masculine role is more causative and active, while the feminine one is closely associated with the formation of community, empathy, and warmer emotions.[8] Stereotypes are a useful cognitive tool, especially in situations when people have limited information on certain phenomena, persons or social groups. This also refers to politics.[9]

Politics is commonly perceived as a "masculine" field of activity. Voters prefer candidates with "masculine" qualities at each level of electoral competition.[10] At the same time, empirical studies show that people attribute to politicians qualities such as: strong, ruthless, competitive, manipulating others, and caring about themselves only.[11] In a way, the functioning of women in politics contradicts the traits and dispositions natural to female gender. A female politician goes beyond the social and professional roles traditionally attributed to women. Actually, this affects the strategies applied by female candidates for political offices – they often fight gender stereotypes, assuming masculine features or emphasising their competencies related to typically masculine issues.

Accordance to Leonie Huddy and Nayda Terkildsen, gender stereotypes in politics can be divided into two types as follows: *belief stereotypes* (referring to the fields of political activity attributed to males and females) and *trait stereotypes* (related to personality traits attributed to each sex).[12] In terms of *belief stereotypes*, women are perceived as better in "feminine" matters such as education, healthcare, welfare or environmental protection, while men are more proficient in "masculine" subjects such as defence, counteracting crime and terrorism, economy, public finance, commerce and agriculture, as well as foreign policy.[13] This is confirmed by American studies concerning legislative activity, which show that women who participate in the legislative process mostly concentrate on issues stereotypically considered as feminine.[14] As of *trait stereotypes*, women who deal with politics are perceived as more empathetic, trustworthy, consensus-oriented and less resolute than male politicians,[15] while men are considered to be more assertive and rational.[16] Furthermore, men are associated with resoluteness, competence, strong leadership, and the ability to cope with critical situations.[17]

The Issue of the Study

As mentioned before, it is expected that a politician should have traits and dispositions that are not compatible with the culturally and socially accepted elements of the feminine role. In accordance with the presented theories, women are perceived as possessing 'soft' qualities such as empathy, agreeableness, friendliness or mildness, whereas politics is ruthless and full of conflicts. The aim of the study is to compare the weight of two factors: qualities at-

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3 GOLEMAN, D.: *Inteligencja emocjonalna*. Poznań : Wyd. Media Rodzina, 1997, p. 87.

4 For more information, see: MANDAL, E.: *Podmiotowe i interpersonalne konsekwencje stereotypów związanych z płcią*. Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1995; VASTA, R., HAIT, M., MILLER, S.: *Psychologia dziecka*, Warszawa : Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1995.

5 VERBRUGGE, L. M., WINGARD, D. L.: Sex Differences in Health and Mortality. In *Women and Health,* 1987, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 103-145.

6 FILIPIAK, G.: Kompetencja emocjonalna kobiet i mężczyzn a życie rodzinne. In *Roczniki Socjologii Rodziny,* 2001, Vol. XIII, p. 197-207.

7 DEAUX, K., LEWIS, L. L.: Components of Gender Stereotypes. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 1984, Vol. 46, No. 5, p. 991-1004.

8 EAGLY, A. H.: *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social-role Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ : Erlbaum, 1987, p. 47-58.

9 RAHN, W.: The Role of Partisan Stereotypes in Information Processing about Political Candidates. In *American Journal of Political Science*, 1993, Vol. 37, No. 2, p. 472-496; LAU, R., REDLAWSK, D.: Advantages and Disadvantages of Cognitive Heuristics in Political Decision Making. In *American Journal of Political Science*, 2001, Vol. 45, No. 4, p. 951-971.

10 ROSENWASSER, S. M., DEAN, N. G.: Gender Role and Political Office: Effects of Perceived Masculinity/ Femininity of Candidate and Political Office. In *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 1989, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 77-85.

11 For more information, see: JARYMOWICZ, M.: Makiawelizm – osobowość ludzi nastawionych na manipulowanie innymi. In REYKOWSKI, J. (ed.): *Osobowość a społeczne zachowanie się ludzi*. Warszawa : Książka i Wiedza, 1976; REYKOWSKI J.: Psychologia polityczna. In STRELAU, J. (ed.): *Psychologia. Podręcznik akademicki*. Gdańsk : GWP, 2000.

12 HUDDY, L., TERKILDSEN, N.: Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates. In *American Journal of Political Science,* 1993, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 119-147.

13 ROSENWASSER, S. M., SEALE, J.: Attitudes toward a Hypothetical Male or Female Presidential Candidate – A Research Note. In *Political Psychology,* 1988, Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 591-598; LEEPER, M.: The Impact of Prejudice on Female Candidates: An Experimental Look at Voter Inference. In *American Politics Quarterly,* 1991, Vol. 19, No. 2, p. 248-261; KAHN, K. F.: *The Political Consequences of Being a Woman*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 43-65; KOCH, J.: Candidate Gender and Assessments of Senate Candidates. In *Social Science Quarterly,* 1999, Vol. 80, No. 1, p. 84-96; DOLAN, K.: The Impact of Candidate Sex on Evaluations of Candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives. In *Social Science Quarterly*, 2004, Vol. 85, No. 1, p. 206-217; DOLAN, K.: The Impact of Gender Stereotyped Evaluations on Support for Women Candidates. In *Political Behavior,* 2010, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 69–88.

14 THOMAS, S.: The Impact of Women on State Legislative Policies. In *Journal of Politics*, 1991, Vol. 53, No. 4, p. 958-976; NORTON, N. H.: Uncovering the Dimensionality of Gender Voting in Congress. In *Legislative Studies Quarterly,* 1999, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 65-86.

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16 HUDDY, L., TERKILDSEN, N.: Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates. In *American Journal of Political Science*, 1993, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 119-147.

17 PAUL, D., SMITH, J.: Subtle Sexism? Examining Vote Preferences When Women Run Against Men for the Presidency. In *Journal of Women, Politics, and Policy*, 2008, Vol. 29, No. 4, p. 451-476.

tributed to women, and qualities attributed to politicians. In a study by Agnieszka Gawor, female politicians were perceived in terms of qualities connected with appearance (e.g. "wears suits"), personality traits (e.g. "ambitious"), social competencies (e.g. "easily establishes contact with people", "is a good negotiator"), motivations to political activity (e.g. "fights for the rights of other people"), and typical activities (e.g. "often goes away").[18] The diagnosed set of qualities suggests that a woman in politics is perceived both in terms of qualities characteristic of women and those characteristic of men, which proves interaction between the two factors. The experiment presented in the article was designed to verify the strength of these variables. The designed inquiry procedure involved the respondents' initial evaluation of female leaders of political parties in the 2015 parliamentary election, and then showing them campaign spots in which the evaluated women were straightforwardly presented as active politicians. After watching the spots, the respondents were asked to evaluate the women once again. If the perception of women is dependent on the role they serve and additionally determined by the existing stereotypes, and politics is stereotypically perceived from the perspective of hard, specifically masculine qualities, then the subjective evaluation of a woman should be significantly lower than when she is clearly associated with the sphere of politics (higher rate in the pre-test). If, however, the first factor proved to be more significant, then the introduced independent variable of watching campaign spots would not significantly change the evaluation of the women.

Two other variables have also been introduced to the model: the level of interest in politics and ideological self-identifications. Interest in politics is the variable most often associated with subjective knowledge on politics. A higher degree of interest in politics is more often connected with skills of evaluation and interpretation of political phenomena and processes.[19] Moreover, interest in politics translates into higher exposure to political stimuli, which in turn generates higher participation in politics.[20] The other variable was the respondents' ideological self-identification, conceptualised as a place in the unidimensional left wing – right wing area.

Research Sample and Methodology

The experimental procedure of the study involves before-and-after measures.[21] This experimental design is based on measuring the dependent variable; both before and after the participants have been exposed to the independent variables (stimuli). The effect of stimulus is examined by observing differences between the values of the dependent variable in pre-test and post-test. This procedure is successfully used for exploring the change of political image, also in research based on small sample group.[22]

The research sample involved 82 students of the University of Silesia in Katowice (Poland) – 59 women (72 %) and 23 men (28 %). The study was carried out on 19th October 2015, during the week preceding the 2015 parliamentary election. The experiment had three parts. In the first stage, the respondents were asked to anonymously fill in a pre-test questionnaire, including questions about their socio-demographic data, political preferences and interest in politics, as well as feelings thermometers and semantic differentials involving 12 seven-point bipolar scales, developed by the authors of this study,[23] which they used to express their attitude to party leaders and candidates for the position of Prime Minister: Ewa Kopacz (Civic Platform), Beata Szydło (Law and Justice) and Barbara Nowacka (United Left).

18 GAWOR, A.: Stereotyp kobiety polityka a wybrane zmienne demograficzne i psychologiczne. In BRONOWICKA, A. (ed.): *Wyzwania i zagrożenia demokracji w Polsce w obliczu wyborów 2005*. Opole : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2006, p. 155-172.

19 For more information, see: JAKUBOWSKA, U.: *Preferencje polityczne: psychologiczne teorie i badania*. Warszawa : Wydaw. Instytutu Psychologii PAN, 1999.

20 For more information, see: SKARŻYŃSKA, K.: *Podstawy psychologii politycznej*. Poznań : Zysk i S-ka, 2002.

21 KAID, L. L., CHANSLOR, M.: Changing Candidate Images: The Effects of Political Advertising. In HACKER, K. L. (ed.): *Candidate Images in Presidential Elections*. Westport, CT : Praeger, 1995, p. 83-111.

22 KAID, L. L., McKINNON, L. M., GAGNERE, N.: *Male and Female Reactions to Political Broadcasts in the 1995 French Presidential Election.* Paper presented at the International Communication Association Convention, Chicago, presented on 22-26 May 1996. See also: CWALINA, W.: *Telewizyjna reklama polityczna. Emocje i poznanie w kształtowaniu preferencji wyborczych*. Lublin : Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 2000, p. 97-137.

23 The semantic differential scales were made up of the following opposite adjectives: dishonest – honest, quarrelsome – agreeable, unreliable – reliable, inefficient – efficient, seeking the benefit of the party – seeking the benefit of Poland, incredible – credible, looking bad in the media – looking good in the media, irresponsible – responsible, inconsistent – consistent, weak – strong, hostile – friendly, embarrassing – nice (remark by authors).

After the completion of the questionnaire, the participants were shown campaign TV spots of the evaluated candidates, selected randomly from free blocks of campaign spots broadcast nationwide.[24] After watching the spots, the group filled in the post-test questionnaire including the same feelings thermometer and semantic differential scales.

The influence of the campaign spots was measured with differences in feelings thermometer and semantic differential scales. A feelings thermometer is the standard method used to measure emotional attitude to people, phenomena or things.[25] It is also useful in the process of designing an experimental study, being an indicator which shows the influence of a stimulus on the experimental group. The emotional attitude towards candidates and political groups was evaluated by the respondents using a scale of 0-100 degrees. The scores of 0 to 50 degrees meant that the participant had negative feelings towards the candidate or party, 50 degrees indicated a neutral attitude, and values above 50 degrees showed the participant's positive feelings for the candidate or party. A semantic differential is used to study the meanings associated with certain terms, items, or persons.[26] This tool is also useful in the process of studying the structure of political image and its changes in time.[27] Feelings thermometers and semantic differentials are successfully applied in research of the influence of electoral TV spots in American,[28] Western European[29] and Polish conditions.[30] The comparison of pre-test and post-test values enables us to diagnose the effect of political advertising on the respondents' emotional attitude to presented female politicians and their images.

The female politicians analysed in the experiment are the leaders of political parties, which indirectly means that the policy of each of the parties clearly approves of women's active participation in political life. As shown by previous research,[31] identification with a party which does not approve of women in politics may lead to perceiving female politicians in terms of typically feminine qualities that are generally useless for a politician.

Interest in politics was measured on a 5-point scale, where 1 meant zero interest, and 5, very high interest. Ideological self-identifications were measured as part of unidimensional left-right space, with the use of a 7-point scale: extreme left, left, centre-left, centre, centre-right, right, extreme right, plus the "I don't know" category. The significance level adopted in the study was $p<0.05$.

The conducted experiment aimed to verify the hypothesis assuming that exposure to TV political spots changes the evaluations of presented party leaders and candidates for the position of Prime Minister. We assume that the primary evaluations of female politicians (in the pre-test) will be conditioned by the social role of women and deep-rooted stereotypes and it will be significantly changed by the stimulus – campaign spots presenting them as active politicians.

24 The spots used in the experiment were: (a) Ewa Kopacz: "Chodzi o waszą przyszłość" ("It's your future"), "Silna gospodarka, wyższe płace" ("Strong economy, higher incomes"); (b) Beata Szydło: "Spotkajmy się w drodze" ("Let's meet halfway"), "Praca, nie obietnice"("Jobs, not promises"); (c) Barbara Nowacka: "Jesteśmy wśród ludzi" ("We are among the people"). In the latter case, this was the only TV spot featuring Barbara Nowacka broadcast during the campaign (remark by authors).

25 PIEŃKOWSKI, R., PODLASZEWSKA, K.: Raporty z Sopotu. In GRABOWSKA, M., KRZEMIŃSKI, I. (eds.): *Bitwa o Belweder*. Warszawa-Kraków : Myśl i Wyd. Literackie, 1991, p. 164-176.

26 OSGOOD, C. E.: The Nature and Measurement of Meaning. In *Psychological Bulletin,* 1952, Vol. 49, No. 3, p. 197-237. For more information, see: OSGOOD, C. E., SUCI, G., TANNENBAUM, P.: *The Measurement of Meaning*. Urbana, IL : University of Illinois Press, 1957.

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28 KAID, L. L.: Videostyle and the Effects of the 1996 Presidential Campaign Advertising. In DENTON Jr., R. E. (ed.): *The 1996 Presidential Campaign: A Communication Perspective*. Westport, CT : Praeger, 1998, p. 143-159; KAID, L. L.: Technodistortions and Effects of the 2000 Political Advertising. In *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2001, Vol. 44, No. 12, p. 2370-2378.

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30 For more information, see: CWALINA, W.: *Telewizyjna reklama polityczna. Emocje i poznanie w kształtowaniu preferencji wyborczych*. Lublin : Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 2000; OLSZANECKA, A.: Wpływ telewizyjnych reklam wyborczych z kampanii wyborczej do Parlamentu Europejskiego 2014 na postrzeganie partii politycznych. In OLSZANECKA, A. (ed.): *Polityka-media-relacje interpersonalne. Małe formy eksperymentalne z zakresu komunikowania*. Katowice : Towarzystwo Inicjatyw Naukowych, 2014; OLSZANECKA-MARMOLA, A.: Pro-systemic Voters Versus Anti-systemic Ones: Emotional Attitude to Candidates and the Influence of TV Political Advertising in the 2015 Presidential Election in Poland. In *Political Preferences,* 2015, No. 11.

31 SIEMIEŃSKA, R.: *Płeć a wybory: Od wyborów parlamentarnych do wyborów prezydenckich*. Warszawa : Instytut Studiów Społecznych; Fundacja im. Friedricha Eberta. Przedstawicielstwo w Polsce, 1997, p. 10.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The respondents display a medium level of political interest, approximately 2.98 in a 5-point scale (with SD=0.89). Men display a significantly higher (t=-5.115; df=80; p<0.01) level of interest in politics (3.70 vs. 2.71).

In the diagnosis of self-ideological views, 30 individuals (36.6 %) were not able to specify their preferences. Among the others, the mean was 4.71, which shows the shift of self-identification towards the right wing. Some differences also occurred between the sexes (t=-2.077; df=50; p=.043); men appeared to be more right-oriented than women (5.15 vs. 4.43).

Experiment results

In accordance to the hypothesis, the analysis of the experimental results showed statistically significant differences in the mean rates of semantic differential scales for Ewa Kopacz and Beata Szydło. Such differences were not observed in the case of Barbara Nowacka.

Table 1: Mean semantic differential rates for Ewa Kopacz, Beata Szydło and Barbara Nowacka

		Perception of candidates					
		N	mean	SD	t	df	p
Ewa Kopacz	pre-test	82	3,3152	1,20538	2,074	81	,041
	post-test	82	3,1809	1,35361			
Beata Szydło	pre-test	82	3,6157	1,16692	2,048	81	,044
	post-test	82	3,4604	1,36080			
Barbara Nowacka	pre-test	82	3,5632	,98373	,044	81	n.i.
	post-test	82	3,5591	1,15237			

Source: own processing

In the case of Ewa Kopacz, the analysis of differential scales only revealed significant differences in the dishonest – honest (t=3.467; df=81; p<0.01) and irresponsible – responsible (p=2.721; df=81; p<0.01) pairs. In each case, the candidate's rating after watching the spots was significantly lower.

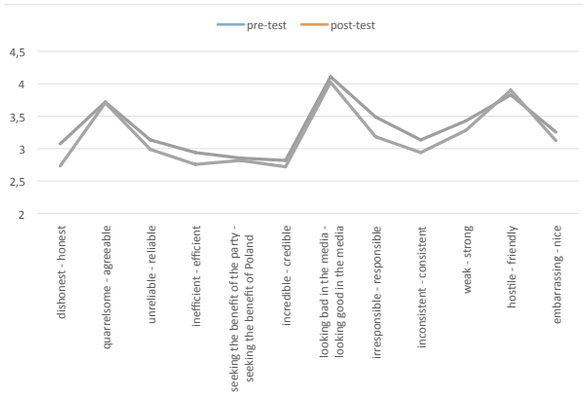

Chart 1: Distribution of rates in scales evaluating Ewa Kopacz in pre-test and post-test

Source: own processing

For Beata Szydło, statistically significant differences in pre-test and post-test rates were found in the following pairs of qualities: dishonest – honest (t=3.312; df=81; p<0.01), unreliable – reliable (t=2.254; df=81; p=0.027), looking bad in the media – looking good in the media (t=2.005; df=81; p=0.048), inconsistent – consistent (t=3.139; df=81; p<0.01), weak – strong (t=2.180; df=81; p=0.032), and hostile – friendly (t=-2.304; df=81; p=0.024). In all the cases except one, the post-test rates were lower that pre-test ones. The only exception was the last pair of adjectives: after watching the spots, Beata Szydło appeared significantly friendlier.

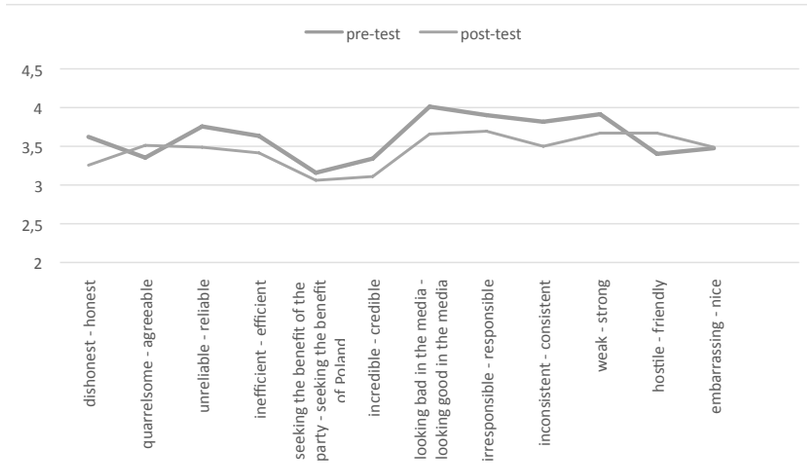

Chart 2: Distribution of rates in scales evaluating Beata Szydło in pre-test and post-test

Source: own processing

Although the mean rate of differential scales concerning Barbara Nowacka was not statistically significant, the experiment reveals statistically significant differences in the following pairs of qualities: inefficient – efficient (t=2.000; df=81; p=0.049), inconsistent – consistent (t=2.053; df=81; p=0.043), and embarrassing – nice (t=-2.212; df=81; p=0.038). The change of evaluations was only positive in the case of the last pair: after the spots, Barbara Nowacka seemed nicer.

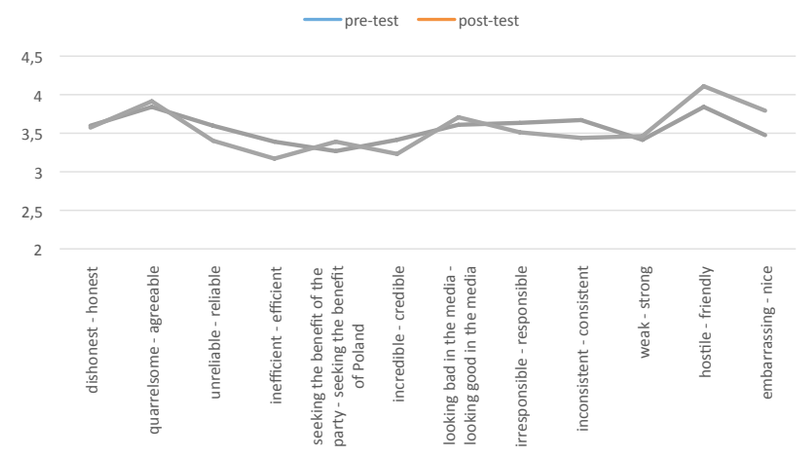

Chart 3: Distribution of rates in scales evaluating Barbara Nowacka in pre-test and post-test

Source: own processing

In the subsequent phase of the experiment, multiple stepwise regression analysis was applied to predict data from the feelings thermometer on the basis of adjectives of the semantic differential (Table 2).

Table 2: Adjectives explaining the variance of the feelings thermometer based on multiple correlation analysis

politician	Test situation	R2	Significant differential adjectives
Ewa Kopacz	pre-test	0.74	quarrelsome – agreeable*
	post-test	0.74	unreliable – reliable*
Beata Szydło	pre-test	0.73	seeking the benefit of the party – seeking the benefit of Poland**
	post-test	0.62	looking bad in the media – looking good in the media*
Barbara Nowacka	pre-test	0.43	dishonest – honest*
	post-test	0.53	inefficient – efficient*

Source: own processing

The presented findings demonstrate that the semantic differentials explain feelings thermometers quite well. The result shows a qualitative and quantitative difference in the predictors between the pre-test and post-test. Firstly, there were significantly more influential qualities in the pre-test, and secondly, the post-test predictors were less 'meaningful', e.g. embarrassing – nice or looking bad in the media – looking good in the media. This may show the respondents' greater engagement in the first stage of the experiment, but also greater strength of evaluations before watching the campaign spots in which the two analysed factors clashed.

Discussion and Conclusions

The experimental study presented in this article involved the diagnosis of the view of a female politician. The project was inspired by the contradictory common attribution of qualities on the one hand to women, who are more often perceived as having 'soft' dispositions, and on the other hand, to politics, which is perceived as a field more often reserved for men, requiring 'hard' predispositions with no room for empathy and friendly relationships. The applied procedure aimed to indirectly verify which of the presented factors was stronger and would ultimately prevail in perception.

Nearly all the obtained significant results show that in the pre-test, the evaluations were more positive than in the post-test. The evaluations of female politicians in the pre-test included mainly traits that resulted from the social roles and deep-rooted stereotypes. This perception was significantly changed by the stimulus affecting the participants, i.e. by the exposure to campaign TV spots, in which the three women were presented as active politicians. The re-evaluation showed significant drops in the rates of female politicians. Ewa Kopacz appeared to the participants to be less honest and less responsible, Beata Szydło, less reliable, looking worse in the media, less consistent and weaker, while Barbara Nowacka, less efficient and less consistent. The only opposite results were found in two cases: after watching the spots, Beata Szydło became significantly friendlier, and Barbara Nowacka was perceived as nicer. The obtained results prove that when the two analysed objects of perception are involved, politics is significantly stronger, disturbing the original evaluations of female politicians. When the respondents were shown the women as politically active, the factor of politics became activated and proved to be the stronger one. In the post-test, the women received much lower rates, which was greatly the result of watching campaign spots.

Interestingly, when filling in the pre-test, the participants were aware that they were rating politically active women, but this did not make them lower the rates. It was only the visualisation in the form of campaign spots that significantly changed the evaluation. This indirectly proves the influence of content accompanied by a visual message. TV spots are the most attractive from the point of view of the voter and can most effectively influence the voter's emotions and facilitate the absorption of information included in them. This is also affected by the television's key means of expression, such as vision, sound and movement. The obtained results fit the trend that can be found in scholarly literature, which proves that political advertisements lead to the change of voters' views of the candidate and the configuration of qualities being part of this image.[32] In addition, in the same period of the 2015 electoral campaign, the authors carried out an identical experiment with regard to the political parties represented by the female candidates. In this case, there were no significant differences in the values in the semantic differential scales. This strengthens the thesis that the initial evaluation of female candidates resulted from the qualities attributed to them due to gender stereotypes, which was upturned by showing campaign spots that present them as politicians.

Another noteworthy fact is that the respondents were young people (18-24 years old). This fact is significant when interpreting the results, first of all due to the greater criticism among young citizens,[33] which could make the participants stricter in their evaluations and more often perceive women in terms of their professional role of politicians.

The presented study is not free from certain limitations, which could affect the results. First of all, the authors are aware of the low numerical strength of the group taking part in the experiment. The small sample made it impossible to analyse the results with consideration of political preferences, which could have enriched the conclusions a lot. The study was carried out during an electoral campaign, and the women included in the experiment were the leaders of active political parties, so political preferences could have significantly affected their perception, probably giving the leaders of the preferred political parties higher approval of their political activity. Naturally, the authors are also aware of potential exposure of the participants to the campaign spots before the experimental procedure, which may impact on the study results. It seems, however, that it is practically impossible to isolate a large group of people from the mass media during the election campaign. In conducted research the authors applied a procedure based on a single viewing of TV spots by a study group. It would be interesting to check the effect of repetition of campaign spots on candidate evaluation. Similar studies in the context of negative advertising leads, for example, Juliana Fernandes who revealed that the frequency of advertising spots' broadcasting determines the evaluation of the message sender.[34] However, we regard this study as exploratory, providing an inspiration for further investigations. In-depth analysis of the perception of women in politics, apart from gender stereotypes, should also involve factors such as: the represented political party, the context of the election, and the incumbency, which in some political systems can determine the image of women in politics.[35]

The consequences posed by the stereotypical image of a female politician for her effective functioning in the public sphere are another very interesting issue which is worth investigating. The previous studies prove that behaviours inconsistent with the stereotype are evaluated negatively – regardless of gender.[36] Despite the fact that 'women behaving like men' are exposed to less social disapproval than 'men behaving like women',[37] the politics is widely considered as an area reserved for men.[38] Does it mean that public activity of a female politician will be evaluated by the citizens as less valuable, because her activity in politics reaches beyond the entrenched stereotype? The presented research shows that presentation of women in political role has a significant impact on their perception, which may indirectly prove the above-mentioned statement. Could we nowadays, in the era of growing number of women taking up political positions, overcome this stereotype? These and other research questions inspire us to further explorations.

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33 For more information, see: OBUCHOWSKA, I.: Adolescencja. In HARWAS-NAPIERAŁA B., TREMPAŁA W. (eds.): *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka. Charakterystyka okresów rozwoju życia człowieka*, t. 2. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000; TURSKA-KAWA, A.: *Polityka w opinii młodych. Idee-Instytucje-Obywatele*, Katowice : Remar, 2012.

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