

GERTRUD PFISTER

GENDER AND SPORT - EMPIRICAL DATA AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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In the context of enhancement discourses and strategies in Western societies, health is conceived and advertised as a “product” which can be acquired, or at least enhanced, by buying the right products and adopting the right behaviour, among other things by being physically active.

In spite of the well-documented benefits of recreational physical activities and the constant flow of advice on health matters, a considerable percentage of the populations in Western countries does not participate in sport (defined in a broad sense). Sports participation, i.e. number of participants as well as the duration, intensity and type of activity, differs to a considerable extent in the various regions and countries of the world, and also in Europe.

In this article I will share information about the prevalence of recreational physical activities in Europe with a focus on gender and youth. The available information reveals large gender differences. As a rule, girls are less physically active than boys. In the second part of the article, I will discuss theoretical approaches, e.g. to gender and socialisation, which offer insights into and an understanding of gendered sporting habits, tastes and practices.

Gertrud Pfister, University of Copenhagen, Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences, Nørre Alle 512200, Copenhagen, Denmark.

POINT OF DEPARTURE

“The King was no longer pleased that his daughter left the straight and narrow paths of his kingdom and dallied in the by-ways, so he let her have a horse-drawn carriage.

‘Now you don’t have to walk anymore,’ he said.

‘Now you ought not to walk anymore,’ is what he meant.

And now she couldn’t walk anymore is what he achieved”.¹

¹ G. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen: Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution*, München 1956, p. 96.

in this quote I substituted daughter for son, because Günther Anders' metaphorical commentary on the modern conditions of life is particularly appropriate for girls and women, as will be shown later in this article. Currently, it seems that large parts of the populations in Western countries make too much use of their "carriages" with seemingly detrimental effects on individuals and communities. Food, fat and physical inactivity are today at the centre of health discourses, and a sedentary life-style is regarded by the World Health Organisation as a major risk factor for a variety of diseases. At the same time recreational physical activities are hailed as the best prevention for many evils of (post)modern life.²

In the context of enhancement discourses and strategies in Western societies, health is conceived and advertised as a "product" which can be acquired, or at least enhanced, by buying the right products and adopting the right behaviour, among other things by being physically active. However, the messages about the benefits of physical activities obscure their innate meanings and joys of moving. Therefore, healthism, the moral imperative to be active and healthy, can have counter-productive effects and it is a moot question whether people comply with the recommendations provided by increasing numbers of doctors and "health gurus".³

In this article I will share information about the prevalence of recreational physical activities in Europe with a focus on gender. In addition, I will discuss theoretical approaches which offer insights into and an understanding of gendered sporting habits, tastes and practices.

1. PARTICIPATION IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES AND SPORT (FOR ALL) - A FOCUS ON GENDER AND YOUTH

In spite of the well-documented benefits of recreational physical activities and the constant flow of advice on health matters, a considerable percentage of the populations in Western countries does not participate in sport (defined in a broad sense). Sports participation, i.e. number of participants as well as the duration, intensity and type of activity, differs to a considerable extent in the various regions and countries of the world, and also in Europe.

² In addition, psychologists emphasize that physical activity contributes not only to a healthy body but also a healthy mind. In many ways, too, it is beneficial for well-being in various social and psychological areas, e.g. it has a positive influence on the body concept, depression, etc.

³ R. Crawford, *Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life*, "International Journal of Health Services" 1980, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 365-388.

The Eurobarometer, a series of representative surveys on public opinion and living conditions in EU countries, provides excellent insights into the sport-for-all activities in this region of the world. In some member states, e.g. the three Nordic EU countries, more than half the informants report that they play sport at least once a week. In Poland only 6% of the population state that they participate regularly in sport or physical activities.⁴ The statistics of sports federations and studies conducted in many European countries, regions and cities provide similar information about the sports participation of their members and citizens respectively, e.g. with regard to frequency and duration, types of sport, performance levels, motives, etc. A report published by the Willibald-Gebhard Institute (based in Germany) comes to the following conclusion: “European sports clubs have enjoyed constant participation rates for years. So the degree of organisation in Western European and Scandinavian countries ... lies between 50-70% among children and between 30-50% among young people. However, the high degree of participation in sport is not able to compensate for the increasing inactivity in everyday life. About half of Europe’s young people do not get the recommended amount of physical activity needed for good health.”⁵ The WHO Regional Office for Europe presented even worse figures in a press release in December 2006: “Only 34% of European young people aged 11, 13 and 15 years reported enough physical activity to meet current guidelines.”⁶

This statement is based on a study of “Health Behaviour in School-aged Children” (HBSC) that provides comprehensive data on activity patterns among children and adolescents across the world.⁷ This survey was developed by the WHO and is conducted every four years in 43 countries and regions across Europe and North America using the same questions and procedures. The HBSC study conducted in 41 European countries in 2006 revealed that 25% of boys and 19% of girls aged 13 years and 19% of boys and 12% of girls aged 15 years were vigorously active for at least 60 minutes

⁴ *Eurobarometer: Sport and Physical Activity*, Brussels 2010, http://ec.europa.eu/sport/library/documents/d/ebs_334_en.pdf [access: 1.12.2012], s. 10.

⁵ http://www.wgi.de/media/Pdf/lifestyle_sedentariness_english_819279.pdf [access: 1.12.2012]; see also http://www.wgi.de/media/Pdf/HealthyChildreninSoundCommunity-pic_47434.pdf [access: 1.12.2012].

⁶ <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/disease-prevention/physical-activity/facts-and-figures/10-key-facts-on-physical-activity-in-the-who-european-region> [access: 1.12.2012].

⁷ The HBSC was initiated in 1982; the first cross-national survey in five countries was conducted in 1983/84; see www.hbsc.org [access: 1.12.2012].

on five or more days per week (as required in health recommendations).⁸ There are large differences between countries: 46% of Slovakian boys but only 11% of Swedish boys and 29% of Slovakian girls but only 5% of girls in France and Portugal (all aged 15) met the demands of health experts.⁹

The HBSC data also showed that 39% of girls and 45% of boys aged 11 in Poland are moderately or vigorously physically active for at least one hour five times a week. Among the 15-year-old respondents only 23% of the girls and 39% of the boys reach this amount and level of physical activity. A comparison with children in other countries illustrates that the activity levels of Polish children and adolescents are rather low: among 11-year-old Irish children 51% of girls and 61% of boys are very active while among 15-year-old adolescents in the USA the numbers are 42% for girls and 57% for boys.¹⁰

The statistics presented above reveal that participation in sport differs considerably depending on the country. However, there is a universal “gender gap”: according to the HBSC data, girls are generally less physically active than boys. Surveys conducted in various countries present a similar picture and show a dramatic decline in physical activities in particular among 13 to 15-year-old girls. The following statement issued by the Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation reflects the situation in the UK: “There is a crisis in women’s sport and fitness in the UK. More than 80% of women and girls are not doing enough physical activity to benefit their health. Young women are now half as active as young men. The situation is forecast to get even worse over the next ten years.”¹¹

But girls are affected by this trend in different ways and to different degrees. A high percentage of middle- or upper-class girls are active in sport,

⁸ Since the last survey in 2002, the percentage of active children has decreased. The HBSC data provide information about trends, but have to be interpreted with caution. Country-specific conditions may not have been taken into consideration satisfactorily.

⁹ A snapshot of the health of young people in Europe, a report prepared for the European Commission Conference on Youth Health, Brussels, Belgium, 9-10 July 2009. http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc/documents/a_snapshot_on_young_people_in_europe_2009.pdf [access: 1.12.2012]; see also European Commission, 2006. See also Currie (2004). This report had a slightly different perspective focusing on daily physical activities.

¹⁰ For Denmark see G. Nielsen, G. Pfister, L.B. Andersen, *Gender Differences in the Daily Physical Activities of Danish School Children*, “European Physical Education Review” 2011, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 69-90.

¹¹ <http://www.womeninsportconference.com/homepage.asp> [access: 1.12.2012]; there are numerous studies on this issue; see e.g. S. Whitehead, S. Biddle, *Adolescent Girls’ Perceptions of Physical Activity: A Focus Group Study*, “European Physical Education Review” 2008, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 243-262; H.E. Yungblut, R.J. Schinke, K.R. McGannon, *Views of Adolescent Female Youth on Physical Activity during Early Adolescence*, “Journal of Sports Science and Medicine” 2012, no. 11, pp. 39-50.

whereas female adolescents with a working-class or migrant background are overrepresented among physically inactive teenagers. The Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS) confirms the HBSC data and shows large gender differences with regard to physical activities among adolescents aged 13 to 15, differences which are even more significant in Islamic and/or developing countries.¹²

Sports-related gender differences refer not only to participation in sport and physical exercise but also to types of sport. Worldwide – as well as in Poland – team games, in particular football and sports based on strength, power and/or aggressiveness such as various forms of martial arts are male domains. Risk sports such as parkour or free climbing attract virtually only male adolescents. Skateboard arenas, trick ski areas or mountain-bike slopes are also dominated by (mostly young) men. Women are overrepresented in activities which demand harmonious and graceful movements such as rhythmic gymnastics and ice skating. Women and men share an interest in recreational sports such as swimming and skiing, which can be performed at various levels of skill and in diverse environments. In recent decades ballet and horse riding have emerged as favourite sports for girls although very few girls have the opportunity to fulfil their dream of owning or hiring a horse.¹³ Adult women engage mostly in gymnastics and fitness activities.

A small percentage of children, adolescents and mostly young adults take part in competitive sport, the majority of whom are boys and men. A large proportion of them play football, mostly on a local or regional level. Football has also become popular among girls worldwide, but in particular in Western countries. In Norway, for example, the percentage of girls among football players in the under-18 age group is 24%.

Information about sports participation in Poland fits the picture drawn above. In 55 of the 67 Polish sports federations women are a more or less small majority. Exceptions are sports which are traditionally women's domains such as rhythmic gymnastics and synchronised swimming. Some sports such as horse riding and figure skating have developed in recent decades into "female sports" with more than 70% female members. Some

¹² G. Pfister, *Muslim Women in the Diaspora: Sport-related Theories, Discourses and Practices – Analysing the Situation in Denmark*, [in:] *Muslim Women and Sport*, eds T. Benn, G. Pfister, H. Jawad, London 2010, pp. 41-76. See also Global school-based student health survey (GSHS), initiated by the WHO and conducted in numerous countries, shows the same gender-specific patterns of physical activities. See <http://www.cdc.gov/GSHS/de> [access: 1.12.2012].

¹³ K. Larsen, *Skolebørns deltagelse i idræt og andre fysiske aktiviteter i Rudersdal*, 2006, Center for Forskning i Idræt, Sundhed og Civilsamfund. Retrieved from <http://www.idan.dk/vidensbank/forskningoganalyser/stamkort.aspx?publikationID=f039b7c6-c316-4646-9cf2-981200df11eb> [access: 1.12.2012].

sports attract men and women alike, e.g. swimming, volleyball, alpine skiing and snowboarding. But participation in the most popular sport, football, is still a men's privilege: In Poland, only 1% of players are girls or women.¹⁴

In Europe sports clubs are the main sports providers and participation in many sports, e.g. team games, is only possible for members. Women are a minority among the members of sports clubs: in Denmark and in Germany, for example, the percentage of female members is around 39%. In Poland only 15% of the 478,000 members of sports clubs are girls and women. However, we must also take into consideration that only around 1% of the Polish population join a sports club. The German Olympic Sports Federation has 27.6 million club memberships, which means that around one third of the population are members of a club.¹⁵

In the world of sport men dominate in positions of power – as the members of the executive committees of sports organisations, from the IOC down to club level, clearly show.¹⁶ The percentage of female IOC members is less than 20%, and 68 of the 73 international sports federations are headed by a male president. In all executive boards of these federations women are more or less small minorities – with two exceptions, netball and softball, which are women-only sports. The average percentage of women on the boards of international sports federations is 9.75%. Among coaches, too, women are a small minority. Checking the various Olympic delegations at the London Games in 2012 revealed that around 90% of coaches were men.¹⁷

It could be argued that the traditional male dominance in sport is changing as women have gained access to all sports. At the Olympic Games they even participate in “hard core” sports such as boxing, weightlifting, wrestling and ski jumping. However, the data presented above give clear evidence that the few participants in these sports has not had an impact on the overall physical activity levels of girls and women and has not changed the gender imbalance among the population active in sport. How should we evaluate the findings presented above? What are the reasons for the gender differences in sporting activities?

We could argue that girls and women dropping out of physical activities and sport is a problem since they do not then enjoy the health benefits

¹⁴ See the data from the sports federations.

¹⁵ For Germany see www.dosb.de [access: 1.12.2012].

¹⁶ See, for example, I. Hartmann-Tews, G. Pfister, *Sport and Women*, London 2003.

¹⁷ See my report for EPAS, an institution of the Council of Europe; <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/epas/resources/texts/INF25%20Gender%20equality%20and%20elite%20sport.pdf> [access: 1.12.2012].

of an active life-style.¹⁸ Current Danish research shows that the fitness of 16 to 19-year-old girls has decreased considerably in recent decades. Only 47% of 16-year-olds and 35% of 18-year-old girls have a good level of fitness. 46% are not satisfied with their weight.¹⁹

Numerous studies have revealed that sporting activities contribute decisively to the quality of life of both genders and among people of all ages.²⁰ Inactive women and girls, it can be argued, miss the numerous benefits of sports participation, e.g. learning skills to play with others, experiencing the thrill of competition and enjoying being part of a community. However, we must also take into consideration that the sports choices of boys and men deprive them likewise of certain experiences and pleasures, such as the enjoyment of rhythmic and aesthetic movements as in dancing or the experience of relaxation as in yoga.

But if both genders benefit from participating in all fields of sport (including leadership and coaching), the question arises as to how the gender differences described above can be explained. Follow-up questions must lead to an evaluation of these differences and explore the possibility of increasing the quantity and quality of physical activity of the male and female population. Before these questions can be addressed, it is important, therefore, to define gender and propose theoretical approaches which help to understand the development of gender similarities and differences with regard, among other things, to participation in sport.

2. GENDER AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

From the perspective of a constructivist epistemology, gender can be defined as “a process of social construction, a system of social stratification, and an institution that structures every aspect of our lives because of its embeddedness in the family, the workplace and the state as well as in sexuality, language and culture”²¹ – and, I would like to add, in sport. Gender as

¹⁸ See the information given by WHO: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/disease-prevention/physical-activity/facts-and-figures/10-key-facts-on-physical-activity-in-the-who-european-region> [access: 1.12.2012].

¹⁹ <http://www.cancer.dk/NR/rdonlyres/B80033B8-4431-4BC5-9DBF-E96AD145EA24/0/MULD2008.pdf> [access: 1.12.2012].

²⁰ E.g. European Heart Network, *Children and Young People – the Importance of Physical Activity*, 2001. Retrieved from <http://www.ehnheart.org/files/phyactivity-084635A.pdf> [access: 1.12.2012]; R.D. Telford, *Physical activity, health and quality of life: A review of recent literature*, Melbourne 2004.

²¹ J. Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender*, New Haven-London 1994 p. 5; J. Lorber, *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics*, New York 2012; M.L. Andersen, D. Hysock Witham, *Thinking about Women*, Boston 2011.

a category is intertwined with social institutions and is, at the same time, an individual property embedded in identities and presented in interactions. Lorber describes the relations between these three perspectives of gender as follows: "The social reproduction of gender in individuals reproduces the gendered societal structures; as individuals act out gender norms and expectations in face-to-face-interaction, they are constructing gendered systems of dominance and power".²² Hirschauer²³ emphasises that gender is part of the collective knowledge and anchored in culturally defined patterns of interpretation which structure information using a binary code.²⁴ According to him, gender is a system of classification which divides the population into two categories. Bodily differences are constructed as gender signs, and the identification of gender differences depends on the existence of already defined dichotomous categories. Before gender differences can be identified, it has been already decided upon to differentiate between persons with different primary sexual characteristics and place them in two different categories.

As a social institution gender organises daily life.²⁵ Social responsibilities and duties are allotted according to the major categories of gender, age, class and ethnic origin, the categorisation being legitimised by norms and values and enforced by institutions such as religion and science, law and administration as well as the educational system and the mass media. In these domains gendered norms, ideals and scripts are produced which guide thinking and behaviour, as well as perceptions and interpretations in everyday life. At present there is general agreement among scholars of gender studies that gender has different dimensions and must be interpreted as a lifelong process with ambivalences and contradictions.

Connell²⁶ adds the dimension of the body to constructivist theories; he emphasises the "social embodiment" in gendering processes. "Bodies are both objects of social practice and agents in social practice. [...] The practices in which bodies are involved form social structures and personal trajectories which in turn provide the conditions of new practices in which bodies are addressed and involved".²⁷ Social processes and face-to-face

²² J. Lorber, *Paradoxes...*, p. 7; J. Lorber, *Breaking the Bowls: Degendering and Feminist Change*, New York 2005.

²³ S. Hirschauer, *Wie sind Frauen, wie sind Männer. Zweigeschlechtlichkeit als Wissenssystem*, [in:] *Was sind Frauen? Was sind Männer? Geschlechterkonstruktionen im historischen Wandel*, ed. C. Eifert, Frankfurt 1996.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 242.

²⁵ J. Lorber, *Paradoxes...*, p. 15.

²⁶ R. Connell, *Gender*, Cambridge 2002.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 47.

interaction always include men's and women's bodies and bodily activities, which in turn are connected with gendered social norms and interpretations.

Such scholars as Judith Butler, Judith Lorber, Raewyn Connell and Stefan Hirschauer emphasise the role of presentations and interactions in the construction of gender. People are categorised as belonging to social groups, and also to one or other of the sexes, by means of outward features such as dress, hairstyle, movements and body language – and, as a rule, this happens unconsciously. Gender, therefore, is not something we are or have but something we produce and do. “Gender is constantly created and re-created out of human interaction, out of social life, and it is the texture and order of that social life [...] which depends on everybody constantly doing gender”.²⁸

Gender is embedded in cultures, and its meaning changes together with social developments. Currently, traditional gender roles are losing their importance, among other things because of individualisation processes in late modernity, the decline of “normal biographies” of women and men and structural changes in the labour market.²⁹ Today the opportunities for choices and for combinations of various life-styles have increased, and numerous individual gender constructions and self-definitions are possible. Depending on the situation, gender differences can be played down or emphasised, and various femininities and masculinities can be embodied and enacted.

3. DOING GENDER IN AND THROUGH SPORT

Depending on the country and the culture, sport can have different meanings. The term sport, as used in many European countries, can refer to various activities, intentions and arrangements from the top-level marathon to gymnastics. It ranges from a profession which requires total involvement to a leisure activity. In the broad sense of “sport for all” it includes the recreational physical activities of the population as a whole.

Sport (in the broad sense) is one of the few areas in our culture in which the human body, as well as bodily practices and abilities such as physical strength, endurance, power and aggressiveness, and also grace and elegance, plays a decisive role. Sporting activities always involve the presenta-

²⁸ J. Lorber, *Paradoxes...*, p. 13

²⁹ U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London 1992.

tion of the body and its capacities, the demonstration of physical performance and the enactment of a person's image. Therefore, sports, e.g. playing football or rhythmic gymnastics, are used as stages upon which differences, in particular gender differences, are re/produced and performed. Even running in a park or playing basketball on the street are gendered "performances" in the double sense of the word. Doing sport is always doing gender; it is always presenting oneself as male or female and demonstrating various forms of masculinity or femininity. Competitive sport is a social arrangement which has been "invented" and developed by men for men. Thus, men are the measure for sporting performances, and sports which are labelled male are important and receive much public attention whereas women and women's sports are not usually in the limelight.³⁰

In modern societies sport is the only area in which different rules, regulations and norms exist for men and women. Sporting records seemingly present convincing evidence that the myth of the strong and the weak sex is true. Therefore, sport is both the motor and the result of the existing gender order and a field in which gender hierarchies appear to be "normal" and natural. Normalising processes in sport and in other social areas contribute decisively to the continuity of the current hierarchical gender order; they conceal the fact that sport was a male invention and, as such, caters for men's capacities.

Women and men develop preferences for certain sports in accordance with gendered social norms, values and expectations. Images and ideals, as well as histories, ideologies and practices, create a typical culture for each type of sport which is furthered by the enactments of the participants, who choose their sporting activities in accordance with their identities and images. Female dancers, for example, adopt a dancer's persona and present images which differ decisively from the images of female football players. The gendering of sports cultures is successful not least because playing sport is doing gender, meaning that the participants express and enact their gendered identities via their appearance and behaviour in sporting situations.³¹

Sport, however, is a social sphere in which gender cannot only be produced but also changed. In a number of studies it has been emphasised that by taking up sports such as body-building or boxing, women are putting up resistance to the gender order and that, as a result, it might be possible to

³⁰ E.g. G. Pfister, *Women in Sport – Gender Relations and Future Perspectives*, "Sport in Society" 2010, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 234-248.

³¹ E.g. G. Pfister, *Doing Sport is Doing Gender*, [in:] S. Farrokhzad, C. Nikodem, *Arenen der Weiblichkeit: Frauen, Körper, Sport*, Köln 2008; G. Pfister, *Women in Sport...*

expose the construction of gender. Women who practise these sports undoubtedly offend against traditional ideals and norms of femininity; the muscular physiques of women bodybuilders destroy the illusion of the “weaker sex”. However, it is doubtful whether this will change gender stereotypes, gender ideals or gender arrangements. Observations and interviews with women bodybuilders have revealed that they, too, wish to act out gender difference – although perhaps with new signs and signals.

Understanding sport as a gendered activity and an arena for doing gender helps to interpret the gender differences in the area of physical activities and sport described above. Men and women, boys and girls follow the gendered scripts which label some sports male and others female activities. In the last part of this article I would like to focus on the question of how both genders appropriate “adequate” sports using socialisation theories as a theoretical backdrop.

4. SOCIALISATION AS A GENDER PROJECT

The interrelations between the gender order on the one hand and sports-related habits, tastes and practices of women and men on the other can be explored by drawing on current concepts of socialisation. Following the arguments provided above, it can be concluded that gender is appropriated in lifelong processes of socialisation.³² Boys and girls are identified as male and female mostly even before birth and immediately treated differently, e.g. by being dressed in blue or pink clothes. Boys get cars and balls, girls get dolls as toys. On school playgrounds boys play football while girls have fun rope jumping. Children learn gendered rules, norms, values and patterns of interpretation as well as scripts which guide their behaviour. They grow up in and into a gendered world, but this is not a simple and easy process since socialisation is always connected with ambiguities, variability and multiple opportunities. In addition, one must take into account the adaptability and the flexible actions and reactions of individuals, along with situation-specific “doing gender” and changes in gendered behaviour during a person’s life course. It must also be mentioned that growing up is mostly connected with resistances and conflicts and that integration into the gendered world of grown-ups can be very difficult, in particular for those children who do not fit into the rigid cultural expectations. Boys who like

³² E.g. K. Hurrelmann, *Einführung in die Sozialisationstheorie*, Weinheim 2008.

pink dresses and girls who want to become boxers can easily become outsiders.

According to Bilden³³ socialisation is self-training in and through cultural practices. Connell uses the term 'active learning' and integrates the body into her approach to socialisation. "The pleasure involved in learning gender is to some extent a bodily pleasure, pleasure in the body's appearance and in body performance".³⁴ Growing up is always connected with changes in the body, but many of these changes are ambiguous and may cause conflicts, e.g. menstruation.

Connell³⁵ proposes interpreting the appropriation of gender as a series of projects in which children learn how gender arrangements work and how they can deal with them. They develop patterns of practices and in this way appropriate femininity and masculinity, including male or female identities and behaviour patterns. This approach allows us "to acknowledge both the agency of the learner and the intractability of gender structures. Gender patterns develop in personal life as a series of encounters with the constraints and possibilities of the existing gender order. In these encounters the learner improvises, copies, creates and thus develops characteristic strategies... if the strategies are successful, they become settled, crystallizing as specific patterns of femininity and masculinity".³⁶ Doing sport while doing gender is learned in socialisation processes, in "self-training in and through social practices", and socialisation into sport can be described and interpreted as part of a gender project since doing sport and doing gender are intertwined.

Bourdieu describes socialisation into sport as a relation between the supply of physical activities and the dispositions of individuals. According to him, "sports participation is the result of relating two homologous spaces, a space of possible practices, the supply, and a space of dispositions to practise, the demand. On the supply side, there is a space of sports understood as a programme of sporting practices. [...] On the other hand, there is, on the demand side, a space of sporting dispositions which, as a dimension of the system of dispositions (*habitus*), are relationally and structurally determined".³⁷ The *habitus* is the hinge between the individual and society and is formed by the system of dispositions, which depends on

³³ H. Bilden, *Geschlechtsspezifische Sozialisation*, [in:] *Neues Handbuch der Sozialisationsforschung*, eds K. Hurrelmann, D. Ulrich, Weinheim-Basel 1991.

³⁴ R. Connell, *Gender*, p. 78.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

³⁷ P. Bourdieu, *Program for a Sociology of Sport*, "Sociology of Sport Journal" 1988, no. 5, pp. 153-161.

social and cultural conditions and determines thoughts, perceptions and actions, thus reproducing specific cultural practices in each social group. *Habitus*, and the tastes related to it, thus characterise social classes, ethnicities, (religious) groups and gender. A central role in this is played by the body, which assumes an important symbolic function, expressing values which are specific to an individual, group, ethnicity or class, and thus becoming the bearer of social distinction and cultural capital. It is the body *habitus*, i.e. the socially structured system of dispositions, which influences not only individual attitudes to the body and its management but also to physical activities and sporting habits.³⁸ Changes in norms, rules and expectations, as well as the acquisition of capital, may change bodily practices and encourage even cross-gendered sporting activities.

5. APPROPRIATION OF SPORT – INGREDIENTS OF THE PROJECT

The theoretical approaches described above provide numerous points of contacts where our existing knowledge about the development of sports-related habits, tastes and practices can connect. Numerous studies provide the background to the following re-construction of gendered sporting biographies, but I will name only some significant publications which present well-known results. These studies refer to common situations in European countries; however, a closer look would also reveal differences and variations.

Throughout the world women were latecomers to the world of sport, and it took more than a hundred years before women were allowed to participate in all sports, albeit in gender-segregated competitions.³⁹ Sporting histories, traditions and places of memories, as well as the mass media and popular wisdom, still convey the message that real sport is men's sport.

As described in the section above, socialisation into sport begins in childhood. Parents deal with boys and girls differently, partly as a reaction to perceived and/or imagined gendered behaviour of the children, partly because of their own gender ideals and influences from the environment. They provide different toys and sports equipment for boys and girls, they take their children to a football club or a ballet lesson, and they often encourage them to play sports which seem appropriate for their gender.⁴⁰

³⁸ P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste*, Cambridge, MA 1984.

³⁹ E.g. I. Hartmann-Tews, G. Pfister, *Sport and women*, London 2003.

⁴⁰ E.g. L. Raudsepp, R. Viira, *Influence of Parents' and Siblings' Physical Activity on Activity Levels of Adolescents*, "European Journal of Physical Education" 2000, vol. 5, pp. 169-178;

Their advice and encouragement, as well as praise and blame, are influenced by the child's gender. Habits and tastes, along with the cultural and social backgrounds of the parents, have a strong impact on the opportunities their children have of playing sport – which also explains, at least partly, the low levels of physical activity of migrant girls whose parents may not have grown up in a 'sports-friendly' environment.⁴¹ Studies also reveal that parents have a large impact on the choice of the sport their children take up and that their support is more important for girls than for boys, who are often involved in peer groups. In addition, mothers and fathers are also role models in the area of sport; but since mothers tend to be less active in sports than fathers, girls have fewer athletic role models of the same sex than boys.

In spite of their different designs and their different samples, numerous studies show that boys and girls use the environment in different ways: boys use larger spaces and cover larger distances than girls, and they appropriate space with sports equipment of various kinds such as skateboards and mountain bikes. Spaces also have a different attraction and provide different opportunities for males and females⁴²; for example, public spaces like parks may not be used by women, at least at night time, because of the fear of sexual harassment.

Sport plays an important role in boys' peer groups: playing together and competing with each other strengthens their relations and teaches them to cooperate. Sporting skills and performance bring prestige and popularity in boys' groups, and boys who are not athletic may become outsiders.⁴³ Boys can also become members of male sporting sub-cultures like the streetball or skateboard "scenes" whereas girls tend to play with their best friends or enjoy the company of other girls in horse-riding stables. In this way, peer relations contribute to the construction of gendered sporting cultures.⁴⁴

G. Pfister, A. Reeg, *Fitness as "Social Heritage": A Study of Elementary School Pupils in Berlin*, "European Physical Education Review" 2006, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 5-29.

⁴¹ E.g. T. Benn, G. Pfister, H.A. Jawad, *Muslim Women and Sport*, London 2010.

⁴² E.g. G. Pfister, *Appropriation of the Environment, Motor Experiences and Sporting Activities of Girls and Women*, "International Review for Sociology of Sport" 1993, vol. 28, pp. 159-173; G. Pfister, *Zwischen neuen Freiheiten und alten Zwängen. Körper- und Bewegungskultur von Mädchen und Frauen*, [in:] *Raus aus dem Haus. Mädchen erobern die Stadt*, eds A. Flade, B. Kustor, Frankfurt-New York 1996, pp. 45-66; M. Robertson, M. Williams, *Young People, Leisure and Place: Cross-cultural Perspectives*, Hauppauge, NY 2004.

⁴³ E.g. N. Sheriff, *Peer Group Cultures and Social Identity: An Integrated Approach to Understanding Masculinities*, "British Educational Research Journal" 2007, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 349-370.

⁴⁴ E.g. S. Gerlach-Rausch, H. Lange, B. Rigauer, *Zur Bedeutung des Reitsports für die Sozialisation von Mädchen und Frauen: eine empirische Studie*, Magisterarbeit, Oldenburg 2001; M. Warrington, M. Younger, 'Life is a Tightrope': *Reflections on Peer Group Inclusion and*

According to current fashion in many Western countries, the princess has become the dominant role model, a trend which is strongly supported by various companies such as Walt Disney. Barbie now has many sisters, who all look beautiful and sexy. Little girls wear pink ball gowns, curl their hair and use make-up. Although the “princess mania” may not hinder girls from being active in sport, it does not encourage sporting activities, on the contrary, it emphasises femininity and glorifies the passive role of the young girl waiting for the prince to come and rescue her.⁴⁵

Numerous studies show that teachers treat male and female pupils differently in PE, that girls and boys behave differently and that they learn different skills, even in countries in which the PE syllabus is not differentiated according to gender.⁴⁶ Research also reveals that a large number of girls do not like PE and that many girls, especially after the onset of puberty, do not take part seriously in the exercises demanded by the teachers, with many even playing truant. Observations and surveys have shown that many girls hate ball games, in particular when they are played in co-educational settings. This is particularly true of female students with a migrant background, who often have to stay on the sidelines since their culture does not allow them to mix with the boys.⁴⁷

There is a huge body of literature on the differences of the media coverage of female and male athletes. The results are clear: with the exception of the coverage of “mega events” such as the Olympics, sports journalists generally ignore female athletes and women’s sport. What is more, an increasing feminisation and sexualisation of female athletes is to be observed in the tabloid press.⁴⁸ Sport, especially sport in the media, “constructs men’s bodies to be powerful, women’s bodies to be sexual”.⁴⁹ The gendered media coverage of sport conveys a clear message: sport is a men’s affair. No wonder that boys choose football players as idols whereas girls admire film stars and pop stars.⁵⁰

Exclusion Amongst Adolescent Girls and Boys, “Gender and Education” 2011, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 153-168.

⁴⁵ E.g. M.B. Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, New York 2001; N. Degele, *Sich schön machen: Zur Soziologie von Geschlecht und Schönheitshandeln*, Wiesbaden 2004.

⁴⁶ See the literature in G. Pfister, N. With-Nielsen, *Ida spielt ihr eigenes Spiel – “doing gender” im Sportunterricht*, “Spektrum der Sportwissenschaften” 2010, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 43-63.

⁴⁷ E.g. N. With-Nielsen, G. Pfister, *Gender Constructions and Negotiations in Physical Education: Case Studies*, “Sport, Education and Society” 2011, vol. 16, no. 5, pp. 645-664.

⁴⁸ E.g. T. Bruce, J. Hovden, P. Markula, *Sportswomen at the Olympics: A Global Content Analysis of Newspaper Coverage*, Rotterdam 2010.

⁴⁹ J. Lorber, *Paradoxes...*, p. 43.

⁵⁰ C. Biskup, G. Pfister, *I Would Like to be Like Her/Him: Are Athletes Role Models for Boys and Girls?*, “European Physical Education Review” 1999, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 199-218.

CONCLUSION

Sporting activities are learned and done in lifelong socialisation processes in which the parents, the peers, the school and the mass media play an influential role. Sport is embedded and embodied in the *habitus* in Bourdieu's sense of the term; it is one of many practices of doing gender and it must be adjusted to the life-styles and "tastes" of girls and boys, of men and women. Sporting "careers" are inseparably intertwined with other life lines and, together, they form masculine and feminine biographies. Sport is part of gender play and integrated into the gender projects which contribute to the gendering of sporting cultures.

The gendered patterns of physical activities presented at the beginning of the article are intertwined with the social and gender orders of Western societies, in which doing gender and doing sport interact.

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