Women in Male Domains of Sport

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Abstract

Since the 1980s gender studies based research has looked at the problems faced by women in male domains of sports. Initial studies conducted predominantly in English-speaking countries dealt with aspects of marginalization and discrimination against women in the "male domain of top-level sports " in general. The increased participation of women in traditionally male sports in the 1990's caused researchers to gradually give more attention to the situation of women athletes. The following article provides an overview of international research literature related to both topical threads, paying particular attention to studies drawing on identity theories.

Keywords: Women athletes, traditional male sports, gender, identity

1. Introduction

Sports as a male dominated system, which constantly reconstructs hegemonic masculinity through symbolic presentation, has been the focus of gender research since approximately 1980 (Sheard & Dunning, 1975; Bryson, 1983; Hargreaves, 1985, 1986; Connell, 1990, 1999; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Klein & Pfister, 1985; Schenk, 1986, Kröner, 1986; Klein, 1987). However, in the 1990s profound changes in the international sport scene caused sport science to consider the phenomenon of "women in historically male sports ". During this time, many sports like weight lifting, wrestling, boxing, ice hockey, and bobsled, which had been exclusively male, were made accessible for women - both at the recreational and professional level. Simultaneously, women's participation in traditionally male sports that had already been open to female athletes experienced a substantial increase. Examples of this are soccer, cycling, and several combat sports. In Germany, this tendency becomes obvious when looking at the rising numbers of female members in respective associations and at the increasing success of women at the top level of these sports (Deutscher Sportbund, 1992).

Evidence for these two time periods can be found in national and international sport-scientific sources. Five central content-related subject areas can be defined:

1. The marginalization of female athletes and the lack of recognition of their performance in sports historically dominated by men, which leads to a substantial ambivalence for women;
2. Women's penetration into men's sports as a chance to overcome traditional gender constructions;
3. Identity construction within the conflict between "being female " and "being an athlete ";
4. The interconnection of identity, social acceptance, and gender in women in sports historically dominated by men;
5. The role of "sex-gender-desire "-norms for the constructions of body and identity in female athletes.

The theoretical framework of both national and international research on this topic is remarkably inconsistent. On the one hand, this results from the allocation of respective works to different scientific branches and on the other hand from the heterogeneous stages of development of gender research in sport in Anglo-American and German-speaking areas. In German-speaking areas research has only dealt with the topic of women in sports historically dominated by men for the last 10-15 years, while Anglo-American studies have been concerned with this topic since the 1970s.

2. On the Ambivalence of Women's Participation in Sports Dominated by Men

The starting point of all works regarding women in typically male sports is the basic assumption that despite the great variety of gender constructions that exist today the participation of women in these sports requires them to transcent traditional gender boundaries. This is not only due to the fact that still mostly men engage in historically male sports. It is also because the structure of these sports is defined by specific requirements

attached to traditionally male stereotypes, such as toughness and aggressiveness, strength and endurance, competitiveness, and the willingness to take risks (Gieß-Stüber 2000; Kleindienst-Cachay & Kunzendorf, 2003). Especially because of the physical changes brought about by intense involvement in a sport and the changing body image connected with it, female athletes violate existing gender norms and come into conflict with the socially dominant image of a woman (Hargreaves, 1986, 1997; Bryson, 1994; Pfister, 1999; Kleindienst-Cachay & Kunzendorf, 2003). This becomes particularly apparent in the negative judgement these athletes receive from the public. Being labeled as a "mannish ", "lesbian ", or "exotic ", or constantly being mistaken for male makes these women feel severely insecure. Moreover, some athletes report difficulties in their relationships or in the search for a significant other respectively. When interviewed they describe situations in which men make it very clear that they view their partner's body and their appearance as rather unappealing (Kleindienst-Cachay & Kunzendorf, 2003, S. 92; Pfister, 1999).

We also face another central area of conflict previously discussed in a number of works pertaining to gender research (Connell, 1999; Müller, Müller-Franke, Pfeil & Wilz, 2002): Women's penetration into a male domain challenges the domain itself and threatens clearly defined areas and situations for the social formation of masculinity. Sport scientists have discovered distinct mechanisms of social closure and defense, which closely resemble those mechanisms analyzed in respect to women's situation in the military and in the police (Lorber, 1999; Müller et al., 2002). Thus, female athletes who engage in sports that have only recently been opened for women are often confronted with a host of defense strategies which are not only implemented by organizations and officials in clubs and associations but also by the male athletes themselves. Such closure tendencies emphasize that sport still seems to play a key role in the production and reproduction of hierarchical gender differences and their expression (Hargreaves, 1986, 1997; Bryson, 1994; Sisjord, 1997; Kleindienst-Cachay & Kunzendorf, 2003).

In Anglo-American contributions, Hargreaves especially stands out as an author who has closely analyzed these connections in typical "men's sports " like rugby, boxing, soccer, or American football (Hargreaves, 1986, 1997, German version: 2001). In line with Sisjord (1997), she points to the strong opposition women face and stresses the resistance to change that exists within the male hegemony in sport which appears to be greater than in some other social institutions.

3. "Men's sports " for Women: A Chance to Overcome Traditional Gender Constructions?

After works published in the 1980s and early 90s viewed sport primarily as an area nourishing the production and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity, more recent contributions support the thesis that the penetration of women into sports traditionally played by men challenges the male domain of sport altogether and thus paves the way for a gradual dissolution of socially accepted gender boundaries (Hargreaves, 1986, 1997; Hall, 1996, 1999; Kane, 1995; Young, 1997; Scraton, Fasting, Pfister & Bunuel, 1999; Mennesson, 2000; Puig, 2001). This idea is also found in numerous works conducted by German gender researchers; for instance in contributions by Palzkill (1990), Gomolla (1997), Pfister (1999), Benning (2000), and Gieß-Stüber (2000)[1].

Accordingly, Hargreaves (1997) and Hall (1999) propose a thesis regarding the American sport scene which has experienced a vast increase in the number of women participating in sports like boxing and bodybuilding since the 1980s. Hall views this development as a symbol of the change in women's sports that became apparent at the end of the 20th century; even in sport, the victimhood of women construed in the context of feminist deficit and difference theory increasingly gives way to an active, confident, and strong presentation of females.

In the same vein, Puig (2001) uses her contribution on gender relations in Spanish sport to point out the changes and new definitions of traditional concepts of femininity and masculinity: The classical "Machismo " in sport be progressively replaced by versatile and extended gender images. According to Puig, the cause for this development is the growing individualization of experiences related to body and activity. Hence, individuals in today's society are more autonomous: they tend to interpret gender-specific norms in the context of their own needs and desires and thus resist constraining and normative guidelines.

In a similar fashion, the internationally orientated project concerned with women in soccer by Scraton, Fasting, Pfister, and Bunuel (1999; German version: Pfister, 1999) emphasizes the meaning female participation in traditional men's sports has for an enhanced definition of femininity and "being a woman ". However, in agreement with Connell (1990) the authors point out that a (temporary) crossing of gender boundaries does not generally challenge the basic gender dualism or even the socially embedded heteronormativity. Although in the respective sports, girls and young women are frequently referred to as "tomboys ", which attributes to them a distinct status outside of "normal " femininity, this identity is limited to

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[1] For aspects regarding the overcoming of „forced femininity" in sport in general see Kugelmann (1996).

adolescence. No later than in early adulthood, it is replaced by social expectations which represent traditional norms of femininity and heterosexuality. Violating these norms typically entails negative sanctions (e.g., Mennesson & Clément, 2003; Harris, 2005).

But how do female athletes themselves interpret their participation in sports against the background of gender stereotypical expectations? A contribution by Miller and Penz (1991) approaches this question from a post-structuralist perspective. By means of an interview study, they highlight discourse strategies that help female bodybuilders define their male-dominated sport as an activity, which is also socially acceptable for women. The exceptionally important presentation of the body to an audience and to the judges is regarded as congruent with the conception of female "body-work". Accordingly, the female athletes understand bodybuilding as a „sport of appearance" and stress its feminine side in the interviews. This way, they integrate bodybuilding into the common social discourses on femininity and feminine physicality and thus legitimate their participation in this sport (Miller & Penz, 1991).

Scraton et al. (1999) report similar findings in interviews conducted with female soccer players. Besides the classical male connotations of soccer, these female athletes attribute further characteristics to their sport, which go beyond the traditional understanding: they especially highlight the combination play and the team spirit in women's soccer and thereby integrate their own interpretations into the sport. This way, they manage to broaden the traditional characteristics and motives connected with the male domain of soccer without reducing the process to gender-specific inferences. Concerning the example of female athletes in rugby, climbing, ice hockey, and several combat sports, Young (1997) demonstrates a corresponding change in the understanding of stereotypical norms of femininity. He comes to the conclusion that the participation of women in predominantly male sports must therefore be viewed as a "powerful political symbol": the presentation of female athletes as strong, competent, and powerful permits a re-definition of "female appropriate behavior", e.g. behaviors that are regarded as typically female.

Studying recreational rock climbers of both genders, Bähr (2005) also questions presumptions made about male and female athletes. The author rejects the thesis that sport-related movement can always be identified as gender-typical, proving that men and women do not differ in their motor actions in rock climbing. Bähr thus attributes a "potential for undoing gender, or at least for overcoming gender-typical actions and behaviors" to the sport of climbing (Bähr, 2005, S. 163).

4. "Male" Sports - "Female" Identity?

Only since the 1990s, sport-scientific gender research has increasingly dealt with questions regarding women's identity construction in sports historically dominated by men. A central position herein has particularly been assumed by the conflict of "being a woman" and "being a woman athlete", which Gieß-Stüber (2000) formulates in a trenchant fashion. This conflict is characterized by the inconsistency between the specific demands of sports dominated by men and socially embedded gender norms. Furthermore, especially those strategies which serve women in maintaining their gender identity in typically male-dominated sports are analyzed (Watson, 1987; Klein, 1991; Theberge, 1995, 1997; Halbert, 1997; Gieß-Stüber, 2000; Kleindienst-Cachay, 2005). One of the first works in this context is Watson's (1987) study on female basketball players, which discusses those contradictions in top-level sports that evolve from "doing athlete" on the basketball court and "doing woman" off the court. One essential result is that the particular context is decisive for which partial identity is preferred in a given situation: on the court, the women thus act according to their identity as an athlete. After a "metamorphosis" in the locker-room, brought about by hairstyle, make-up, and feminine clothing, the female athletes reversely aim to play their part as women outside of the context of sport.

In his studies on German women in sports, Klein (1991, 1983) also stresses the general ambivalence between the identity of a woman and the identity of a female athlete. He gives special attention to the development of "female" gender role identities in top athletes in technical events of track and field. Klein assumes that gender role identities of an individual are immediately connected to the body and that they account for a substantial part of the so-called personal identity (Klein, 1991, 359f). Statements female shot-putters and discus-throwers give in in-depth interviews indicate that the physical changes brought about by their training cause these athletes to develop massive anxiety that their physical appearance will not (or no longer) be consistent with the socially accepted image of women and the gender stereotypes. Consequently, they feel severely insecure about their sexual identity and their overall identity as a woman. Klein holds that this constitutes a serious threat to the formation of a stable gender identity and thus puts the entire personal identity at risk (Klein, 1991, S. 363)[2].

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[2] This assumption is based on a normative understanding of identity that goes back to Erikson and infers that the development of an individual's identity is ultimately evaluated as "successful" or "unsuccessful". Such an interpretation of identity blinds out the balancing of conflict-prone identity constructions and, in respect to the discussed circumstances, implies a significantly deficit-oriented perspective. This view is unrealistic

Further works conducted by Palzkill (1990) criticize Klein's fundamental assumption and particularly his deficit view. With special regard to feminist theories of the 1980s, she develops a more resource-oriented perspective. Palzkill is specifically concerned with the question how women resist or get around the role intended for them in the predominantly male culture of ball games. Since her work focuses on the development of lesbian identity, she barely touches on the chances, difficulties or ambivalence of heterosexual women.

Benning (2000) and Gomolla (1997) examine women's identity construction in the historically male sports of karate and Aikido, yet without a focus on lesbian identity construction. With respect to the specific profile of each sport, the authors illustrate and analyze these movement-related experiences new to women and, based on of interviews with female athletes in combat sports, interpret them as an enhancement of traditional female movement norms. Gomolla differentiates between two sorts of female athletes: on the one hand, she identifies those who take the experiences of Aikido beyond the mere sport and use them as a relevant psychosocial resource that opens up new capacities of movement and action. On the other hand, she mentions those who view Aikido as a means to experience body and self from an inner perspective and only regard it as a sport which compensates for the restrictions they experience in their daily life. Moreover, Benning refers to special conflicts and sources of ambivalence connected with women's participation in karate. In contrast to Aikido, which is a non-competitive sport, karate training is clearly oriented towards competition and includes patterns of movement and behavior with a masculine connotation that contradicts conventional female gender stereotypes.

Kleindienst-Cachay and Kunzendorf (2003) provide a detailed analysis of moments in women's participation in sports historically dominated by men, which are dangerous or constitutive for identity. In the context of their study concerned with top-level athletes in nine different sports that have historically been dominated by men, the authors give special attention to the interrelation of gender, identity, and body. One basic assumption of the study is that being of a specific gender always has to be „embodied", which implies that the body plays an essential role in gender construction. Moreover, since the presentation of the body always carries with it claims about the self and reveals identities, the authors generally view the body as the visible indication of one's identity. Due to this close connection of identity, body, and gender construction, developing a positive attitude towards one's body is a decisive component in the whole process of identity formation (2003, S.113)3. The study makes it obvious that many female athletes have the socially embedded gender norms deeply internalized and that they are well aware of the discrepancy between their own body and the prevalent ideals of feminine beauty and slenderness. Accepting the training-induced physical changes is particularly hard for those athletes who are active in sports in which structural conditions require them to build up extraordinary amounts of muscle and weight (as for instance in weightlifting, wrestling, and hammer throwing). They look upon their own body as unfeminine and unattractive although they are aware that only this functional use of their body allows them to perform at the highest level (Kleindienst-Cachay & Kunzendorf, 2003, S. 133).

Yet, Kleindienst-Cachay & Kunzendorf, as well as Pfister (1999) in her study on sport in the context of women's lives, note that not all female athletes sense a conflict in the discrepancy between social expectations regarding women's physical attributes and the specific demands of the respective sports. Some of the women interviewed even interpret comments alluding to their muscle mass as complimentary and as positive feedback concerning their successful training (Kleindienst-Cachay & Kunzendorf, 2003, S. 34). In this respect, participation in a predominantly male sport can be a source of self-confidence and self-awareness, especially for those female athletes who disapprove of stereotypical female images and – possibly, but not necessarily – are not heterosexually oriented (Pfister, 1999, S. 152). Based on qualitative interviews with female boxers in the USA, Halbert (1997) confirms these findings. Some of the athletes she studied reject a one-dimensional, e.g. traditional concept of femininity. On the contrary, an equally large number of these female boxers consciously use clothing, jewelry, and other accessories to present themselves in line with common femininity norms (Kleindienst-Cachay & Kunzendorf, 2003, S. 144ff.; Kleindienst-Cachay, 2005, S. 17ff.).

Mennesson (2000) discovers similar aspects in French women boxers. She refers to interesting socialization-related aspects, which show that already in their childhood and youth, these athletes developed a "counter-identity" inconsistent with the social expectations imposed on girls and women. Based on Bourdieu's habitus theory, Mennesson refers to the acquirement of a "masculine-type capital", which is especially important when entering the world of boxing.

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since in light of such an assumption, the violation of common gender norms can never be regarded as positively enhancing an individual's options. It only adds to their insecurity, which is generally undesirable!

3 In this context, Scraton, Caudwell & Holland (2005) criticize the fact that the difference categories of „race" and „ethnicity" are not considered in many sport-sociological contributions on the identity construction of women in sports traditionally dominated by men. They hold that although only little is known about how "gender", "race", and "ethnicity" are interconnected in the life of female athletes, this could only be analyzed if sports like soccer are explicitly studied as domains of *white* males. Only then, it becomes possible to highlight the distinctiveness of the identity construction of African-American woman athletes and, besides sexist experiences, discuss racist moments of involvement in sport as well.

Despite of this common characteristic of the female boxers interviewed, Mennesson emphasizes the variability within the studied group of women concerning intensity of involvement in the sport, social background, gender knowledge, and gender-norms. Some of the women in full-contact boxing reveal a rather traditional understanding of gender and regard women as being "naturally inferior " to men while other athletes stress their emancipation and equality. With reference to Bourdieu, Mennesson concludes that these differences in the boxers ' identity constructions are a result of the complex interactions of various economic, cultural, and, closely linked, gender-related factors (Mennesson, 2001, S. 32).

The structure of the sport under scrutiny becomes particularly relevant when examining identity and coping strategies. Thus, in their work on women's involvement in team sports historically dominated by men, Theberge and Pelak come to the conclusion that being integrated into a group has a positive effect on women's coping with the negative sanctions connected to the deviation from traditional gender-norms (Theberge, 1995, 1997, 2000; Pelak, 2002; Palzkill, 1990; Kleindienst-Cachay & Kunzendorf, 2003).

In the context of a study on women's ice hockey, Pelak (2002) similarly refers to the high importance of being integrated into a team when athletes have to cope with the massive amount of sexist structures and practices they are confronted with. Drawing on Taylor and Whittier's "Collective Identity Theory ", Pelak (2002) describes the construction of a collective identity which facilitates resistance within the structural framework of the respective sport organization. However, as revealed in the course of the study, the collective identity of the team or the particular sport section is only maintained as long as the team is in a marginal position concerning temporal and material resources.

In contrast to Pelak, Theberge (2000) puts a stronger focus on the individual identity construction of female ice hockey players. She differentiates between three areas of identity: firstly, the area of experience, in particular the experience of physical superiority in relation to other women athletes; secondly, the area of team-oriented play, "being unselfish ", and the athletic effort in and for the team; and thirdly, the area of physicality, especially in regard to coping with injury and pain (Theberge, 1997).

Looking at how conflicts are balanced, Theberge (1995), Palzkill (1990), and Pelak (2002) are able to prove that athletes view their teammates as social resources, which means that they support each other in maintaining their involvement in the sport. As Mennesson and Clément (2003) illustrate for the sport of soccer, the act of playing a sport together and the connected overcoming of gender boundaries can lead to a kind of relationship referred to as "permissive homosociability ". The athletes in the teams Mennesson and Clément studied often demonstrate dissociation from classically stereotypical norms of heterosexuality. These women legitimize each others' gender-inconsistent behavior and create a space in which a visibly homosexual lifestyle is tolerated and even accepted.

5. Identity - Social Acceptance - Gender

Current identity theory considers the acquirement of social acceptance as highly significant in the framework of an individual's identity construction, while a lack of acceptance and affection from significant others is seen as potential for conflict and is therefore regarded as counterproductive to identity construction (Keupp et al., 1999; Höfer, 2000). For women in sports typically dominated by men, the acquirement of social acceptance is generally precarious due to the discrepancy between the specific demands of these sports and the socially embedded norms of femininity. Drawing back on the concept of tokenism (Dietzen, 1993), Gieß-Stüber (2000) stresses the acceptance-related conflicts that arise from this inconsistency.

The concept states that if there is a very low number of individuals with specific characteristics or qualities in a particular social setting, these individuals are always assigned a special status. This also becomes apparent in the interaction of the people involved in this context: Gieß-Stüber (2000) examines the situation of women in hang-gliding and finds that female athletes only receive their male colleagues ' recognition for their athletic efforts if they distance themselves from "normal " women and adopt the male behaviors prevalent in their immediate environment. Putting emphasis on feminine appearance or asking male colleagues ' help is interpreted as a sign of incompetence and weakness. As this ultimately causes a lack of acceptance on the level of "being an athlete ", the women aim to suppress such demeanor and adapt to the male behavior (Gieß-Stüber, 2000, S. 81). The result of female athletes' covering their femininity is that they are only perceived as athletes or "buddies " but not as women and heterosexual partners, which turns out to be highly problematic for many women (in regard to other historically male-dominated sports see: Kleindienst-Cachay & Kunzendorf, 2003).

Concerning the example of international players in women's ice hockey, Heckemeyer (2005) also describes a lack of recognition of women in sports traditionally dominated by men: the performance and athletic competence of these athletes get very little to no attention in the media and from the public and are even depreciated by male colleagues and officials. However, following Honneth (1994), Heckemeyer emphasizes that besides looking at the provable

recognition conflicts there is also always the need for a detailed description and analysis of positive examples of recognition. As Heckemeyer states, female ice hockey players feel highly recognized in their close social environment, i.e. in their families and among friends. The appreciation of their athletic involvement and their individual qualities enables the athletes to experience feelings of affiliation and uniqueness which are regarded as highly important for identity construction (Keupp et al., 1999; Höfer, 2000) and ultimately help them to overcome the described ambivalence and negative sanctions.

6. The Sex-Gender-Desire Debate

In the past five years, especially works from English-speaking areas drew back on post-structuralistic approaches and increasingly dealt with the problem of the female body image in sports traditionally dominated by men. (Caudwell, 1999, 2003; Mennesson & Clément, 2003; Cox & Thompson, 2000). Following Butler and Foucault, the authors promote a deconstructivist reading of the category gender, e.g., they view sex and gender as entirely socially constructed and understand the social discourses about gender, gender differences, and sexuality as pre-existent to everything that becomes "visible" at a later point. These studies tend to deconstruct the female body as a site of the so-called "sex-gender-desire "-norms that subdue individuals and their bodies. According to these norms men have to follow the connection "man-masculine-heterosexual " in order to be recognized as *male*, while women have to follow the construction "woman-feminine-heterosexual " in order to be recognized as *female* (also see Mennesson, 2000; Mennesson & Clément, 2003; Cox & Thompson, 2000).

Based on a study on female soccer players in Great Britain, Caudwell (2003) shows that adopting a "masculine style ", as for instance when committing to a sport historically played by men, turns out to be problematic for women particularly because interaction partners constantly associate the connection "woman-masculine-lesbian " with them. The cause for this is to be found in the fact that masculine body images of women confuse the "sex-gender-order " as well as classical heterosexual desires. Caudwell states that especially in the field of sport, "female masculinity " is immediately linked to being lesbian. The female soccer players interviewed by the author confirm these associations of women in men's sports and complain that their sport is stigmatized as a "sport for lesbians " (see also Young, 1997). Due to the deviation from the norm "woman-feminine-heterosexual" and the hierarchy connected to heterosexuality and homosexuality, the female players are confronted with a perpetual discussion about their sexual identity on the one hand and with negative sanctions on the other (see also Harris, 2005). Caudwell therefore speaks of disciplinary action exercised on the "female soccer body" through the imperative "woman-feminine-heterosexual" and notes that desire and sexuality are constructed via sport and the linked male habit, which leads to the depreciation of women in soccer (also see Russel, 2004).

Cox & Thompson (2000) also refer to the linkage of men's sports, gender and sexuality and view gender and body as products formed through discourse. Based on the assumption that bodies are always imbedded into various discourses, the authors develop a so-called "multiple body perspective". This is a perspective, which examines four different dimensions of the "female sports-body": the "soccer body", the "private body", the "feminine body", and the "heterosexual body". This analytical distinction holds a significant potential for explaining the conflict-prone identity constructions of women in sport in general and in predominantly masculine sports in particular. It allows a precise analysis of the players' experiences as well as of the contradictions and problems that result from social expectations projected onto the athletes. Cox and Thompson identify a special ambivalence between the construction of an ideal sports body and a heterosexual body (also see Russel, 2004). Following Butler, the authors assume that in a "heterosexual matrix", bodies are always interwoven into discourses about heterosexuality, which substantially influence women's body construction. Heterosexual body images are usually regarded as ideal or as the norm, respectively. As a consequence of the "homophobic climate" that is extraordinarily prevalent in sport, they cause female athletes to present themselves as "heterosexual" through hairstyle, make-up, and clothing - regardless of their true sexual identity: "They did this (…) to overcome prejudices associated with negative stereotypical images of lesbians and to help preserve their own and the team's credibility in the broader sporting realm " (Cox & Thompson, 2000, S. 17; see also Caudwell, 2002).

In her contribution on women's body satisfaction in the sports of rugby, cricket, and netball, Russel (2004) also refers to the vast impact heterosexual norms have on female body images. In the sport context, the studied athletes experience their body as positive and functional - powerful, competitive, and capable of handling the sport-specific demands - and are thus satisfied with it. Yet, outside of the sport context, they are worried about their body's heterosexual attractiveness. Russel notes that as a result of the significant physical changes in women playing contact sports like rugby, a severe inner conflict can arise between the functional sports-body and the social body, the classical concept of femininity, and norms of heterosexual attractiveness. This conflict can have a negative impact on the body satisfaction of the athletes (see also Kleindienst-Cachay, 2005).

However, in this context we have to take into consideration that "acting in the interest of attractiveness" isn't primarily attached to body or gender, but also to sexuality. Based on interviews with people from different social and (sub-)cultural backgrounds, Degele (2004) reveals that the body image an individual chooses always depends on the question: who do I want to appeal to? To put it differently or more appropriately with respect to female athletes in sports dominated by men: presenting one's body in sports doesn't just serve the purpose of maintaining a merely identifiable difference between the genders. It also always represents a means to express one's affiliation with a specific social group and to communicate sexual desires (see also Kleindienst-Cachay, 2005).

7. Outlook

Overall, it becomes obvious that the topic of "identity/identities of women in traditionally male sports" has been studied in a much more differentiated way in the English language than in German. For the German-speaking research on this topic the following deficits can be identified:

First of all, there are still only few a works that include a differentiated theoretical framework regarding identity construction of women in predominantly male sports. Processes of identity construction are frequently reduced to conflict-prone moments in the formation and maintenance of gender identity, yet leave out the transcendent meaning of such an involvement in sports in the context of identity construction. However, as the number of women in sports historically dominated by men increases and since especially professional woman athletes accept the hardships of intense perennial training despite the negative sanctions frequently described, the identity-constitutive potential of the women's active involvement in these sports will have to be examined more closely.

Second of all, in this context it appears to be necessary to analyze those aspects more precisely which minimize gender differences or represent processes of "undoing gender". In the past, these aspects have mainly been discussed in English-speaking areas. By means of "deconstructivist" approaches, we could identify those shifts and re-definitions of gender and body constructions and the corresponding views of normality that facilitate women's participation in predominantly male sports.

A third research deficit arises from more recent works, which follow Butler in exploring the so-called "sex-gender-desire"-norms. These works add the dimension of "sexuality" or "desire", respectively, and thereby enhance the connection of athletic activity, gender and body image that has predominantly been discussed in the past. As the results gained in English-speaking research show, this approach makes it possible to analyze the ambivalence of women in traditionally male sports in a more differentiated fashion than before. It also provides means to demonstrate the development of new identities.

8. References

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