

THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SPORT

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ABSTRACT

When women's sport is discussed on an academic level, among experts there are, as a rule, no major disagreements. But when we get feedback information from families, the problem of women, be it mother or daughter, is not just a practical problem. Many issues about women in sport arise. The much wanted sport-oriented family becomes questionable. Why? Social conditions have reached such a stage that it is necessary to talk about women's sport with more determination and on a broader scale, than just about sport in the family.

Key words: gender, game, playfulness, culture, physical education, top-sport

IZVLEČEK

Kadar razprava o ženskem športu teče na akademski ravni, med strokovnjaki praviloma ni večjih navzkrižij. Ko pa dobimo povratno informacijo iz družin, se kaže problematika ženske, najsi gre za mater ali hčer, več kot praktičen problem. Opirajo se namreč vprašanja o ženskah v športu. Željena, k športu orientirana družina postane vprašljiva. Zakaj? Družbene razmere so danes dosegle tisto točko, ko je o ženskem športu potrebno odločnejše spregovoriti, in to širše, kot le v okviru športa v družini.

Ključne besede: spol, igra, igrivost, kultura, športna vzgoja, vrhunski šport

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HUMAN PLAYFULNESS, THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN CULTURE

Games – playfulness existed even before man and his culture, including sport culture, thus it is its base. In every developmental phase of human existence, at least on the level of every human's conception, it needed at least three preconditions: freedom, relaxation and absence of fear (7). These are, without doubt, general values strived for in every democratic society. Absence of these values in individual social environments, means a restriction of games in connection with creativity and depends mainly on the inner strength of man to create the two for himself and for his inner world. Every game is chiefly something unrestricted – free. A child or an animal play because playing presents satisfaction. With an adult, the game which gives satisfaction also becomes a need. Playfulness presents a phenomenon by which Homo Sapiens differs from all other animal species. Young animals are more similar to a human than the adult ones: they are playful (7). Adult animals also allow themselves playfulness while fondling their young. But with animals, playfulness soon passes, while humans remain more or less playful all their lives. When speaking of games – playing, we mean that function of a living being that cannot be completely defined, either biologically or logically. It contains something that gives essence, meaning to life. Playing is a self-sufficient activity, which, outside itself, has no goal, there is no separation according to gender, or race or education... there is only division according to playing - playfulness, creativity.

GENDER EQUALITY IN SPORT

The problem women face in all areas of their participation, and so also in sport, varies, but has, in some cultures and civilisation trends - if not similar reasons and solutions then for certain, similar manifestations. Only the ways in which women experience and perceive these problems are different. The starting point for solving them should be: although people are different, they can be equal. And what does equality in sport mean? Equality can be defined in the sense of free choice. Women in sport should not be dealt with separately, but in connection, in context with some other sides of their lives. Equality in sport signifies a conviction that women have a right to engage in sport, that they believe in success and achieve it by contributing women values into the organisation and legitimacy of these values.

In industrial society the difference between the sexes is less evident, but all the more subtle. This being

a fact because, through time, certain stereotypes have formed about the concept of the role of the sexes, well known prejudices and view – points that became deeply rooted in human consciousness. Man's supremacy is also in today's society quite marked, chiefly in spheres of social power and influence.

Today we have reached a phase of development where it is generally accepted that female problems in sport exist. But already in searching for reasons, opinions of scientists vary. Major disagreements are manifest in two views. Some experts advocate the thesis that the causes for these differences should be looked for in biological and genetic diversity of the sexes, while others state that the differences are the product of social and cultural policies – thus artificially formed.

Usually the basic statement that the naturality of every division originates from the biological differences of the sexes. Differences between sport education of boys and girls, their participation and performance, were often explained by the ideas of natural, biological difference. Explanations based on biological determinants were thus subject to many academic discussions. It is clearer and clearer that psychological differences between boys and girls, men and women, are seen as "natural" and "inevitable" and not created by society or culturally reproduced. Nowadays much evidence exists that denies the general suppositions and academic "truths" about the physical or natural sexual differences. Much space is left for critical reflections on the true relevancy of sexual differences in sports and sports education. But we must not accept the view that the existence of stereotypes is predetermined and the result of the consensus on the roles of girls and boys.

It is illogical and erroneous to try and demonstrate that just because relatively more men than women show aggressive and competitive behaviour, these characteristics are typical for the male sex. It is a mistake to treat as "natural" all that is usual, because "natural" (biologically) in one culture does not necessarily mean "natural" in another culture, or, differently, what is "biological" or "natural" varies from culture to culture in such a way that even the category of sex (gender) is determined by culture. The difference of the two sexes regarding demonstrations of aggression and competitiveness can be explained as being the result of social and cultural experience, as a part of a process that is begun at birth. When born, children are of male or female sex but they do not have male or female identities. But as they are born into a social world, where sexual differences present the reality of everyday life, children quickly choose their sex. Gender has to do with an-

ticipated behaviour which is based on an uniform concept of sex character.

In social analyses on sport the most popular manner of explaining how individuals assume gender identity, is the concept of socialisation. Even school is not only an academic experience of institutional life. Routines and rituals shape significant social habits that communicate the basic knowledge about a culture.

By identifying the influence and power of ideologies related to gender and the development of girl sport education, it is possible to understand the role played by sport education in the institutionalisation of gender. Gender cannot be understood only as a demonstration of behaviour and ideas of certain individuals, as, in girl sport education, gender is institutionalised and transferred through the praxis of daily instruction. In frame of girl sport education, the structural analysis, supported mostly by historical evidence, is relevant. The historical analysis contributes to a better understanding of the relations between gender and sport education of girls as it shows that womanhood is not a fixed and constant category, but has to be understood as a social and historical construction.

OVERPOWER OF MENTAL STEREOTYPES IN LAW REALISATION

In the past "gymnastics" was man's domain, meant only for boys, performed (led) by male gym teachers. Only as late as the end of the 19. century did "gymnastics" become possible for girls, for which most of the credit is due to A. Spiess (3). In school physical education, from the very beginning, in Slovenia as well as elsewhere in Europe, boys and male teachers dominated and women, or rather girls, were included only very slowly. Physical education (gymnastics), at the beginning of the 20. century had the character of a "skill", a subject that was not "scientific in nature". It still held last place as a school subject, which shows the importance ascribed to it.

Gymnastics and free exercises, which were for long the basis of sport education, stressed female elegance and sufficed for the then existing demands for good behaviour. Physical exercises were adapted to the fairer sex, as there was a general opinion that male capacity (efficiency) differs from female. Due to this view women performed mainly easy and elegant movements.

For physical education the first post-war years meant a socio-political, ideal, contextual and methodical

determination. The main socio-political starting point of physical education was quantity, which meant that physical education had to be ensured to all schooling children with the aim to increase physical, work and defence abilities.

The pedagogical aim of gymnastic instruction was to accustom pupils to everyday meaningful exercises of the body as well as to understand order and discipline. The new educational plan mainly stressed the concern for the health and safety of pupils. Interests and inclinations of pupils were also considered. Emphasis was given to activity, to the improvement of personal achievements and to the overcoming of fatigue in exercises, and not so much to the formal execution of tasks.

In 1953, by a decree on compulsory 8-year schooling, the number of physical education lessons was increased (8) and a certain improvement showed also in greater importance given to the autonomy of women as personalities. But the utilitarian view of physical education still dominated. In this view there was no trace of a search for playfulness, relaxation, satisfaction, search for new worlds of experience through this activity. Even the goals changed only so much that they were not subordinate only to the interests of a certain social community (state), but also considered women's personal characteristics.

The resolution of the federal assembly then stressed all the mentioned components of socialistic physical education in the formation of a wholesome personality. Word was about the humanistic and self-management adjustment of the wholesome personality to the general social development (1).

In official sources, no difference between the physical education of boys or girls could be noticed. The central aim of girl's sport education regarding the "greatest task for a woman" – the continuation of the race – was still creating a physically and mentally sound female sex. Physical activity was supposed to "strengthen" women for the fight for jobs, as well as for enduring the strain at home and at work, the ideal being a working woman who could carry all the burdens. Often women performed the same physical work as men, participated in work brigades, etc. Sport began to be a means of striving for the realisation of socialism. With the help of physical activity, women were given the right to demonstrate strength, endurance and courage.

At first, the study of gymnastics was left to coincidental teachers. The decree allowed the teaching of this subject without proper education or professional exams defined by the government. The situation

changed after 1871, when it was necessary to create a new vocation – the gymnastics teacher – due to the compulsory introduction of gymnastics into secondary schools and colleges. In 1873, the university cared for the education of gymnastics teachers. In Graz (Austria), a two-year course was introduced, and there were some Slovenes among its students. 49 graduates, who successfully passed (from 1873 to 1914) are still known, of which 7 were women (6). The first high school for physical culture was founded in Berlin in 1920 (3).

In 1946, a government decree was passed for the establishment of the Institute of Physical Culture, the following year a three-year study was introduced instead of the one-year. The next step was made in 1953, when the Institute of Physical Culture was founded in Ljubljana and was, three years later, renamed to the Higher School of Physical Culture (6). In the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, we lagged well behind other republics of former Yugoslavia in this process, as many institutions did not follow the development trends. In the beginning, there really were only few female teachers, nor was there any great eagerness for the profession of physical education teacher. But neither the research nor the profession had any notion about the changing structure as well as about its own demands that still obstructed the participation of women in sport education. This led to a peculiar discrepancy between theory and practice of sport cadre institutions.

REFLECTION OF THE ATAVISMS OF THE PAST

In Slovenia the hierarchical principles are apparent in sport education teaching. Female teachers instruct mostly in elementary school, while male teachers dominate in secondary schools. The hierarchy is even more evident at university level, where, although there are more female students than male, sport is taught mostly by male teachers. Female teachers should instruct girls for the reason that women can transfer knowledge that is nearer to their anatomical structure than men. In this way, female students grasp this knowledge faster and more profoundly. But this theory does not hold out, the least at the university level. Evidently even the profession bends under the hierarchy of the sexes. It is a known fact, that in accordance with the education level, pay increases. In our case, the university is the highest level of education and such is also the level of prestige as well as the fee of its teachers, opposite to those at elementary or secondary level.

In accordance to the supposition that generally looking, more women teach in school than men, there is

also an increase in the number of girls wishing to study at the Faculty of Sport. As all universities, also the Faculty of Sport, only a certain number of students can enrol according to certain criteria. These are the exam results and motor abilities. The specifics of the entrance exam demands a special result processing and this also includes evaluation according to gender. 60% of the candidates enlisted in the end are male and only 40% female, although more girls wanted to study than boys.

This ratio of enrolment ensures that the needs of the educational system, in which 75% of the graduates find employment, are covered. Female graduates most often find jobs in schools, only a small percent in recreational institutions, while they hardly ever get jobs in the coaching profession. Male graduates look for jobs in coaching, recreation or in private practice, while they avoid teaching in school because this work is not socially prestigious. Often they speculate and teach, for example, in secondary school while at the same time work as coaches. In this way they get two fees in contrast with the majority of women with families, who also have two jobs, but get paid for only one.

SPORT IS NOT FOR WOMEN?

Sport education needs a complex approach to student's personality and beside completely expert tasks in the study plan, includes also the task of introducing students (male, female) to some value definitions ensuing from human interrelations, especially those between the two sexes. The task of sport education, to shatter prejudices and introduce major changes in the midst of century long tradition, is still significant. In this regard, the male/female teacher of sport education holds an important position in the field of fast and complete affirmation of women- sport education.

In Slovenia, we have better elementary school sport education than in many more developed countries, but all the same, in the minds of many, a negative view on the physical activity of girls still exists. Not only older people, but also children (even the girls themselves) still think that sport is "not suitable" for women. Many have also a formed, stereotype influenced, pattern of sport activities that are supposedly "suitable" for the female or the male sex. Statistical data on the not-as-yet presented research of Janko Strel and collaborators (4) in which the Slovene elementary school pupils were included, showed the above mentioned views.

In sport education children are not separated by gender the first four years (till the so-called class le-

vel). But this does not mean that it must be so. Just because of the fact that in sport education there is a mixture of education and learning, not training, there exist numerous reasons for the children to practice in mixed groups. Usually female teachers teach girls while male teachers teach boys. But no co-education can be successful if it is plucked from a diverse method of work with boys or girls. In sport, where, in the past, the agonal approach was greatly stressed, co-education was so much less sensible.

The fundamental problem in work with girls is the fact that, in the past, it was the just a copy of the work with boys, when science in this field did not as yet recognise that it is important to cultivate sport as an ingredient of the quality of life and not as a sport FOR better results, sport FOR health, FOR beauty, as sport FOR... (2). There is still too much copying of the image of the boy sportsman model, a fighter and not homo ludens.

Generally we can say that the marginalisation of woman personality in sport, in Slovenia and former Yugoslavia, was not so obvious, regarding the fact that a part of sport atavisms, reflected also in the relation man – woman, ie. coach – female competitor, decreased due to the fact that the majority of sportswomen originated from relatively urban environments. Although this was not always an assurance – let us call it that – of a cultural relation coach – women, as living in urban societies does not ensure this automatically. But it should be considered that, as a rule everywhere in the world, the talented sportsmen/women move into towns where professional cadre and institutions are concentrated, as well as other possibilities that are impossible to find in a village.

Sportswomen, specially young girls, are exposed to all possible abuses, mostly by coaches. Sport practice generally shows that specially women, when the coach is a man and in most cases it is, can experience quite turbulent encroachment upon personal integrity and dignity. It is not just vulgar behaviour, swearing, but even demands for sexual intercourse on account of the coach's thesis about competition success.

In Slovenia, we can speak, to a certain extent, about a different relation between coach and sportswoman as the Slovene society mainly belonged to the Mid-European cultural space, and the "3K" (Kinder, Kuche, Kirche) for women did not exist completely and, in sport, was in many ways surpassed. But a critical reflection does not allow us to think that the elements of a patriarchal family and authoritative management, so typical for sport, are already a past

in Slovenia, be it male or female sport. But the eternal question will be put on the agenda time and time again: is the relation toward sportswomen built on progressive views of the relation of sport toward women or is sport perhaps the last fortress of "male chauvinism"?

Researches of the last few years in Slovenia point toward a change in such sport activities of women where more culture of movement is included (aerobics, dancing). Society (state) did introduce sport education to high school institutions. But all other, negative or positive shifts, were more a consequential reaction to the recognition of the significance of sport education over the world, than some autonomous, even less, autochthon social plan. The articulation of demands and activities was, in greater part, a consequence of cognition, examples of world trends (in accordance with social abilities in Slovenia) than a consequence of well spoken, professionally correct, but in reality non-feasible or unrealised intentions of the legislature or other responsible factors for the development of sport culture.

The aim of sport education is primarily the child's acquisition of sport habits which he/she will keep till old age and therefore it is only fair that sport education enables them that. There exists a great variety of sport activities for which girls show more interest. If a female pupil finds at least one sport activity in the frame of the school sport programme, in which she will be recreationally active in her free time, then sport education has achieved its aim. Therefore, selective sport programmes at all levels of education may be the only acceptable definition of the development of sport as an element of the quality of life. Sport cannot be otherwise than individual and adapted to the structure of an individual. Here and only here does sport become completely part of the spiritual and material culture of an individual as well as of a nation. This also means that it must pass the threshold toward the assertion of human rights and freedoms of a society where such views are more friendly to individuals as well as to sport activity and specially materially and professionally feasible.

Sport is a field of general culture into which viewpoints about gender enter in different ways. This means that sport activities are not simple manifestations of the present, but are a part of historically conditioned and socially produced restrictions and abilities. They are neither static nor reflections of the past or clear visions of the future, but they represent a condition where social relations of power and privileges are mirrored. This argument is neither new nor unique.

At the Congress Women and Sport in Brighton (May 1994), a confederal declaration for women's sport, intended for the promotion of the equality of women in sport, was adopted. The mentioned declaration presented the guidelines for the development of women's sport in the field of top and school sport:

– in frame of top-sport, the directives were adopted with the intention that girls/women would assert themselves faster in two basic areas of their sport activity – that of the coach-woman and as a sports-woman.

– the basic starting points defining the guidelines of sport education are oriented toward the problem of the gender in the complete educational system, from sport education at all levels to the inclusion of women in research projects (5).

In Slovenia, the problem of women's sport has not as yet been tackled. But the theses on the development of sport, which are to be the basic doctrine for all interventions, especially the legislative ones, as well as other legally or illegally regulated relations in sport, are prepared. The resolution about sport, in the process of the birth of the new state, did not establish itself in spite of the fact that two houses of the then-existing three-house parliament passed this as the basis for further building of the doctrinarian approach to sport in new social conditions. In the new parliamentary bodies or the responsible ministry, there was created a thesis on the priority importance of passing a law on sport. The resolution was to become its theoretical base, putting under question also other acts and the doctrine present in the sport field.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The differences between the two sexes existed and will exist. But we should not give them negative connotations. Namely, every individual has a right to otherness in relation to others, irrespective of gender. Therefore the problem of female sport in regard to male sport should not exist. Women differ from one another as well as from men. If we presented such a viewpoint, then no differences, resulting from such or other prejudices, would be ascribed to female or male sport.

By help of expert sources at my disposal, I found the existence of social differences between the two sexes, which, through a longer period of time, formulated themselves as political interests. The concept of dealing with women through historical and cultural periods also promoted the relation toward

women's sport. In this, the surveillance apparatus was quite diverse and many-coloured, but quite evidently ensued from pre-formulated premises about women's role in society. All the same, it is evident that in the 60s, such views changed in favour of women's sport, but after the 60s, in very few fields do we find so much black-white dichotomy as just in the field of women's sport.

It is true that life unrolls itself past scientific researches but it is altogether another matter for it to develop without feeling the influence of social prejudices and ossified views. In a certain way, it is quite tragic for science that in certain periods of time, due to some or other constellations of social relations in the world, it even tried to give the popular stereotypes scientific support. Regardless of development in views on women's sport, the dichotomy still exists. It is presented in the Master's thesis, while some thoughts are concentrated in this article.

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