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A History of the Present on the "Sportsman" and the "Sportswoman"

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to disseminate the construction of manliness and womanliness in Swedish sport. Of particular interest is gender equity policy in sport as a new way of creating sexual/gender difference. Michel FOUCAULT's concept "a history of the present"—a genealogical approach—serves as an important tool in this work. Interviews with athletes in their teens (track & field athletics) and texts published by the Swedish Sports Confederation serve as empirical material.

When asked about themselves as track & field athletes and their ways of seeing others participating in track & field, the boys often speak about themselves and other boys in a straightforward and unproblematic way. The girls on the other hand, speak about themselves and other girls in a problematic way. This is not an unexpected result, but the conventional interpretation is that it is a sign of gender inequalities in sport. From a genealogical point of view, it might rather be seen as an effect of gender equity policies.

Gender equity policy can be seen as a practical strategy of guaranteeing women and men the opportunities to do the same thing—sport, simultaneously performing two distinct and clearly differentiated gendered subjects, to be equalised. As such, gender equity policies might be perceived as an apparatus that produces and regulates sexual/gender difference.

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> Some might say that the scandal of the first volume of Foucault's History of Sexuality consists in the claim that we did not always have a sex. What can such a notion mean? Foucault proposes that there was a decisive historical break between a socio-political regime in which sex existed as an attribute, an activity, a dimension of human life, and a more recent regime in which sex became established as an identity. This particularly modern scandal suggests that for the first time sex is not a contingent or arbitrary feature of identity but, rather, that there can be no identity without sex and that it is precisely through being sexed that we become intelligible as humans. [...] As Foucault points out, sex has become to characterize and unify not only biological functions and anatomical traits but sexual activities as well as a kind of psychic core that gives clues to an essential or final meaning to, identity.
>
> Judith BUTLER, Sexual Inversions, 1993

1. Introduction

1.1 Gender in sport

This article aims at disseminating what constitutes the perception of sex/gender in Swedish competitive sport, i.e., how manliness and womanliness is discursively constructed in sport, during the latter half of the 20th century. In other words, the studies represented here are about ways of seeing and reasoning about sex/gender in sport. The major research question is how sport functions, on the one hand, in the production of "women" and "men" as objects and subjects of knowledge, and on the other hand, as a technique or procedure for regulating men's and women's behaviour and ways of reflecting upon themselves. The interest is thus aimed at how *gendered subjects of sport* are made. At the core of the problem is the interest for subjectivity, in particular the conditions of possibility for the occurrence of a particular kind of subjectivity, namely gendered subjectivity, as the effects of certain power-knowledge relations. Of specific importance is the concept of equal opportunities between women and men in sport—or gender equity in sport—as a new way of creating sexual/gender difference and gendered subjectivity. Sometimes it is said that gender equity policies aim at the reduction, or even dispersion, of gender differences. In this article, I examine the sexual/gender differences in sports as the effects of specific power/knowledge relations. [1]

Sport, particularly competitive sport, has for a very long time been seen as a rather masculine practice (cf. MESSNER & SABO 1990), although women have participated in competitive sport to a great degree in Sweden for several recent decades (OLOFSSON 1989). During this time, the work for gender equity in sport has been intensified, for instance, through several plans for gender equity presented by the Swedish Sports Confederation, and through education on sex/gender in sport. This work for gender equity in sport seems, however, to be carried out from a rather unproblematic perspective. The issue of masculinity and femininity in sport seems also to be discussed in an unproblematic manner. My purpose is to problematise the concept of gender equity in sport, to investigate its historical conditions, and to explore what unexpected effects the work for gender equity in sport might have had in relation to the construction of masculinity and femininity in sport. What is at stake here is not that competitive sport is not equal enough in terms of gender, but rather that gender equity and the work for equal opportunities give rise to new kinds of gendered problems. [2]

Empirically, the studies derive from twenty-two interviews, eighteen with teenagers, aged sixteen to nineteen, and four with male coaches, all of them participating in track & field athletics. The interviewees were part of four fairly welded together groups of 15-20 athletes. The semi-structured and tape-recorded interviews took place during the spring and summer of 1996. The interviews were scheduled around four themes: a) "me and my sporting experiences", b) "boys and girls in sport", c) "the body" and d) "the coach". A second material comprises of texts published by the Swedish Sports Confederation (and on two occasions the Swedish Government: reports from governmental committees concerning sport) within a period ranging from the 1940s to the 1990s. What is at stake here is the construction of gender in present day sport, and the problems of the present, and not the construction of gender in sport in earlier days—which reflects the reversed order of the analyses of the two types of empirical material below. It might, however, be productive to approach history from a somewhat unconventional angle. This reflects the perspective outlined by the French philosopher Michel FOUCAULT. [3]

1.2 What is a history of the present on gender in sport?

Analytically, the studies draw from FOUCAULT's concept *a history of the present*, a genealogical approach to historical analysis. A history of the present, or a history of thought, is, in the words of FOUCAULT:

> "[...] the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience becomes a problem, raises discussions and debate, incites new reactions, and induces crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices, and institutions" (FOUCAULT 2001, p.74). [4]

In this study, the "unproblematic field" turning into a "problem", is the male habit of participating in sport, turning into an issue of *equal opportunities* between women and men, or a problem of *gender equity*. My studies are about how discussions, i.e., debates about equal opportunities in sport, along with changed

habits and practices, i.e., women taking up competitive sport, can be related to something that might be called a *gendered subjectivity*. This way of approaching the issue of gender:

> "[...] refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view; rather [... it] investigates the political stakes in designating as an origin and cause those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin" (BUTLER 1990, p.ix). [5]

This means that such things as "men's and women's experiences of sport", and their habits, values and interests in sport, are the effect of power relations, networks that govern human behaviour. In the words of BUTLER, government, in the very broad sense of the word (meaning not just the government), is in modern societies linked to heteronormativity, i.e., that heterosexuality serves as the normative ground in the relations between women and men, which Butler refers to as a "heterosexual matrix" (BUTLER 1990, 1993). From this point of view, the construction of "men" and "women" revolves around the alleged "normal" sexual relationship between a man and a woman. Statements about sex (as a natural, unproblematic category) turn out to be statements about heteronormativity. Statements about "men" and "women" are, consequently, constituted in a discourse on men and women as heterosexuals. [6]

Important analytical tools in this work are the concepts of *subject*, *discourse* and *performativity*. To FOUCAULT there are two meanings of the word *subject*: Subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to one's own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge (FOUCAULT 1982, p.212). The subject occurs as "I' in a discursive practice, where the term discourse designates the rules of speech, both as far as what can and what cannot be said, and who can and who cannot speak. Discourse might be seen both as a practice (discursive practice) and the rules by which speech is made possible (ways of reasoning). Besides its function as a *representation* of the "things" said, discourse simultaneously *performs* those "things". Performativity means, then, that discursive practices perform objects, acts, desire, identities and self-knowledge—certain knowledge and an attitude towards oneself and the world around. [7]

Sporting practices perform identities, or certain kinds of self-knowledge, that constitutes behaviour and ways of reasoning among those who play sports. The teenager's subjectivities are conditioned by those discourses, historical to their nature, which can be found in competitive sport, but also by the interview as a social practice. I will return to this last issue after the presentation of the interviews. First, I would like to pose the problem of the present, the construction of gender in sport, and in section three I will try to analyse the historical conditions that rendered gender equity in sport a problem, and how this problem might be seen as constituting different kinds of subjectivity. [8]

2. The Present Athletic Girl and Boy

2.1 Constructing boys and girls in track & field

In Swedish youth track & field, girls and boys most often train together. Although they do not compete against each other, girls/women and boys/men compete in the same events and they often spend a great deal of time together in practice. Departing from some excerpts from two interviews, one with a girl, the other one with a boy, I will analyse the discursive construction of "girls" and "boys" in athletics. I would like to point out that the interview quotations serve as examples of how the interviewees' say the things that they say. The approach is not interpretative in a hermeneutic way; thus it is not my intention to try to determine a deeper meaning or to offer multiple interpretations in relation to the interviewees utterances. The aim is rather to try to stake out the genealogical conditions that shape the kinds of subjectivities that are outlined in the interviews. I asked the teenagers questions on the one hand about *themselves* and *their own* sporting experiences, and on the other hand about their opinion about *other* boys and girls in sport. Let us listen to Karen and Marcus, both 17 years of age. The first is Karen and her way of presenting herself:

Karen: I suppose I'm pretty ambitious, or I know what I want to do … And if I've decided to do something, then I'll do it. I have quite a difficulty in taking things easy. I always have to do something … and then I often feel stressed and get a headache … But it's … still when I have the most things to do that is when I feel at my best.

Håkan: You said you know what you want to do. Can you tell me what it is that you want to do?

K: Well … or … I guess I know that I … want to do something special, or I want to get far …

H: In athletics then or …?

K: Well, yes, in athletics and everything … I don't want to be "ordinary' [giggle].

H: And then you've continued with athletics. You said something about doing well in athletics, is that the main reason or … what made you continue with athletics?

K: Well, it was that I became better and better all the time. It was … fun. And then you get a lot of friends and stuff in athletics … […]

H: Is there anything that would make you quit sports?

K: Weeell … I suppose … if I stopped performing well … and didn't get any better … […]

H: What do you think is the best about athletics?

K: Weeell [cough], I suppose it's … success … No, I can't say what is the best … to, well to feel that you are good at something […] that you feel that you can be number one … And there are other things as well, the social, all the friends and going to training camps and travel to competitions and such … […]

H: Is there anything about you and your participation in athletics that I haven't asked about?

K: My results [giggle]. [9]

Karen states two main reasons for doing sport/athletics that are known, both from previous research and the interviews with the other teenagers, i.e., to be highly significant in today's youth sport in Sweden. One reason is that she is good and successful in athletics (achievement), the other one being all the friends and travels and things like that (relations). In the interview above, Karen clearly emphasises achievement. She always mentions competition/achievement before friends and fellowship. At the same time, she seems to hesitate when asked about her goals. I would like to focus here on the hesitation as such, rather than on what this hesitation might mean. Although it may not be very clear in the interview passages above, Karen, and several other interviewed girls, seemed to have a bit of a problem dealing with the relation between achievement and relations. In the discourse of the girls, these dimensions in sport participation did not seem compatible. Now, let us turn to Marcus and how he presents himself:

Håkan: What do you feel is the best about athletics?

Marcus: The fellowship. That you've got more or less best friends in Malmoe (a town 60 kilometres from Marcus' home town) and, you know, everywhere. People that you meet at competitions and such … […]

H: Competitions … what do you think about them?

M: It differs […] some competitions, the big ones; they are the best there is in athletics. Then it's really fun. But then you have the small competitions, club matches for instance, and they can be really boring. Then training is better than doing that competition. No, but the actual competition … I don't have a problem with getting nervous. I think it's fun […]

H: Could anything make you quit now?

M: No.

H: Okay, there's nothing?

M: No, I don't think so … No, because if it gets bad somewhere, like if you have trouble in school, or with friends, or anything, at home or something, I'm always calm when I train. I can really relax during those hours. So I feel safe when I train. [10]

To summarise the passages above, one might say that Marcus' answers are of a more straightforward kind than Karen's. Marcus emphasises, as did many other interviewed boys, relations, without hesitating about the importance of achievement. He gladly talks about friends and, at the same time that the competitions must be meaningful. Further, Marcus' participation in sport is portrayed in a more unproblematic fashion than Karen's when asked about what would make him quit. Athletics does not seem to stress him and he only vaguely speaks about his goals in athletics. The training is depicted as a kind of free zone where he could feel relaxed and safe. [11]

Telling me about *themselves and their participation in sport*, the boys more often emphasised social relations—to have a good laugh with friends. Instead, it was several of the girls who said that serious training and competing (achievement) were most important. Although having some difficulties coping with the situation of competition, several of the girls said that competing was very important, especially the girls who trained in groups where they were the majority. I will now turn to what Karen and Marcus have to say about other boys and girls in sport/athletics.

Håkan: Why do you think that young people do sports … generally?

Karen: I think, with team sports, it's got a lot to do with people wanting to do things together. To get friends and do something meaningful together. But I think … with athletics, which is so individualistic—track & field athletics is *sport* for real—in the beginning it's probably because you want to be with friends and do something together, but later on it's more and more that you train to be good and it's those who do progress that continue … most often.

H: Do you think that applies to both boys and girls?

K: I don't know … Boys maybe want to achieve better; I train to achieve. I guess I've done that all along. Then there's the social thing—and that's good … but I don't train because my friends train, but because I want to … want to …

H: Why do you think that people stop playing sports?

K: I think one stops doing sports because … because you don't perform well … I think. Or maybe you just simply get tired of it. Find something else to do that is more fun.

H: Are there any differences there between boys and girls, or are the reasons the same?

K: I don't know … Girls might give up more easily, when they notice that they don't get any better. They want to try something new. [12]

"Young people", a gender-neutral concept, participate in sport because they "want to do something meaningful together" first and foremost—at least when it comes to team sports. In athletics, which is regarded as a "real" sport, one participates mainly because one wants to compete and perform well, at least when one gets older. When I ask about "girls and boys", Karen's discourse finds other paths. Boys "want to achieve", while girls do it for the "social thing"—but not Karen! *She* trains because *she* wants to be good, not because her friends train. One quits with sport because one does not make any progress—girls at least, it is said. Boys do not "give up" as easily as girls. That is the athletic world of "the others" in the discourse of Karen. What about Marcus' discourse?

Håkan: Why do you think that young people at your age participate in sport, generally speaking?

Marcus: Fun.

H: So that's the main reason?

M: Yeah.

H: Do you think that might vary between girls and boys?

M: Yes, I think boys are more … From the beginning it's because it's fun (regardless of whether you're a boy or a girl; my note) […] but when you are at the age of … well when you start going out a lot, then boys probably understand better than girls that you must begin to take it more seriously, because girls take it more as play.

H: What do you mean by serious then?

M: Well, when you see sport as something deadly serious … I mean, I've played ice hockey since I was little, and that … that's really serious, when you're out playing, and, if you're fourteen … a boy thinks: 'I want to be the best', more like that. That's the main difference (between boys and girls; my note) I believe.

H: Why is it like that?

M: Boys have more egos.

H: And that's just the way it is, or what do you mean?

M: Yes, I think it's like that … or we are … by nature more prone to show who is the biggest and the best. That's just the way it is … Because a girl can leave her soccer team if her best friend leaves. I don't think that's very common among boys.

H: Okay, regardless of how good you are?

M: Yeah [cough].

H: Why do you think that one gives up sport?

M: You … you … make heavy demands on yourself … If you don't want to carry on at a lower level … 'No, I didn't become best so …'

H: What's it like there for boys and girls? Do you think there are differences or are the reasons the same?

M: I think that a boy, he tries more than a girl. He's a bit more stubborn, until he absolutely sees that 'I won't make it'. [13]

When asked about other teenagers in sport, other girls and boys in sport, Marcus and Karen give a fairly uniform picture. Marcus states, even more clearly than Karen, what he experiences to be the main reasons for participating in sport when it comes to differences between boys and girls. Talking about *other boys and girls in sport*, both Karen and Marcus said, as did most other athletes and coaches, that boys are more oriented towards goal achievement and performance ("outward"—doing) while girls are seen as more oriented towards relations and feelings ("inward"—being). The athletes thought winning and competing were more important to boys in general, as they were said to be more "serious" about sport. Friendship and recreation were considered more important to girls, and the girls were more often said to "fuss around" at the arena. [14]

This paradoxical situation, that boys and girls on the one hand spoke about *themselves* in a more gender-crossing way, and on the other hand spoke about *other boys and girls* in a very gender specific way, seemed to be problematic in the discourse of the girls, while it was not in the discourse of the boys. "Boys" were constructed as *subjects* of sport, autonomous and self-regulating, while "girls" were constructed as *objects* of sport, dependent and in a need of control. On the other hand, one can say that the girls, speaking about themselves (and I am of course not only speaking about Karen here), showed greater awareness about their conditions in sport and their own personal "seriousness" about sporting activities. The boys, on the other hand, showed greater unawareness and could quite easily be said to merely participate in sport because they were

expected to. The point here is not to say that one interpretation or the other ought to be seen as the truer one, but rather that there seems to be a tension between a "traditional" notion about boys and girls, and a more unconventional one, constructing the girls as more "serious" than the boys. The point is also to say that of these two modes of interpretation, the first one is the one preferred or most often chosen within a sporting context. [15]

2.2 The body

When speaking about "the body", the male sporting body was often presented as one body: an instrument or a tool—an *acting* body.

> Håkan: What do you think about your own body?
>
> Marcus: It's … okay.
>
> H: You're content?
>
> M: It's .. muscles and not fat I guess.
>
> Håkan: What do you think about your own body?
>
> John: Well, it's … it's okay I guess. […] I would like to be a bit more muscular on my upper body, so I try to train that.
>
> Håkan: Why do you like to run 400 meters?
>
> John: I thought … that it was a fun event, and then you've got to be very strong when you've got lactic acid in your legs. [16]

The female sporting body was presented in a dual manner: on the one hand an *acting* body and on the other an *appearing* body. The body of the adolescent girl hardly ever seemed to match the demands for continuous improvement of physical ability in track & field discourse.

Håkan: Are you content with your body?

Eve: No, I'd like to be either smaller and more slender or taller and thinner. Something like that. I feel like I'm stuck in a grey zone that I don't like.

Håkan: Are you otherwise pleased with your body?

Karen: Weeell … I'm rather … I'd like to be taller, even though I am pretty tall anyway.

Håkan: What do you think about your own body?

Ellen: That I'm not so satisfied about.

H: In what way?

E: Everybody thinks like that: I'm too fat!

H: Mhm, and do you think that too?

E: Yes I do.

H: You said: everybody thinks like that …

E: Or a lot of girls …

H: Okay, do you think it's more common among girls?

E: Yes.

H: Do you think it occurs among boys?

E: No, probably they think that they're too thin, or want to have more muscles … [17]

In the next quotation, Peter highlights, I think, the complexity with this issue:

Håkan: If you consider boys' and girls' bodies, are there any differences?

Peter: Yes … girls don't like to have big muscles … Maybe they're too occupied about it? But it's a woman's thing to think like that. Like a guy wouldn't say: Ugh, how ugly, I've got muscles; I don't think that. Even though I don't think it's really suitable [for a woman to have muscles]. [18]

Muscularity is from the point of view of the acting body in sport necessary for both boys and girls to develop. From the point of view of the "appearing body" however, muscles are inextricably linked to heterosexuality and the male body. The tension might here be seen as constituted by on the one hand a "one-sex-model" of the body when discussing training issues, and on the other hand a "two-sex-model" when discussing appearance. In the one-sex-model, "sex" is constructed as a quantitative category, the female body being qualitatively the same as the male body, but physically inferior. In the two-sex-model, "sex" is a qualitative category, the male and female bodies being qualitatively different. When speaking about the body, boys' bodies, both as acting and appearing bodies, are depicted in a straight way—muscles work out regardless of whether one speaks about acting or appearing, while girls' bodies are problematised—particularly the relation between the acting and the appearing body. [19]

2.3 The coach

"The coach" is depicted in three, more or less, well-defined ways. *The first coach* (and I speak about discursive constructs here) is an autocratic coach.

> "Sometimes we discuss a lot what we would like to do, but most often it's he (the coach) who decides what to do" (Kelly).
>
> "He's not much for letting us take responsibility, or letting us decide [...] He says more like: This is what you'll do. [...] He's often the determined kind of coach: you're here to train, not to talk" (Irene). [20]

This kind of coach acts as the sovereign centre of the track & field activities. His perspective is *the* legitimate perspective when it comes to knowledge about "correct training" and how "reality" should be interpreted. The autocratic coach is also constructed as the moral subject of the activities. Without his guidance, the training would be less "serious" and turn the focus from (wanted) performance to (unwanted) social relations. [21]

The second coach is a democratic coach.

> Håkan: Does he decide the training in advance or on the occasion?
>
> Peter: Yes, we know in advance really. We decide that together with him.
>
> H: Would the training work out if he weren't there?
>
> P: Yes, it would. [22]

This kind of coach is still the centre of the track & field activities, but he is not the sovereign moral subject, hierarchically superior to the athletes. As subject he acts as a counterpart to "the training group" (a collective). It is not the will of every individual athlete that is legitimate in relation to the will of the coach, but the will of the whole training group. [23]

As far as both these types of coaches are concerned, they are said to be closer and more friendly to the boys, while being more distant and instrumental in relation to the girls. It is not by accident that the quotations regarding the autocratic coach come from girls, and the quotation regarding the democratic coach comes from a boy.

> Håkan: Do you meet outside the training as well?
>
> Coach: Mhm, we do.
>
> H: What do you do then?
>
> C: Then we play basketball and sometimes we watch … we video record the training and then we watch it and things like that … Now, when the boys are eighteen … well … I can have a few beers with them. [24]

Several of the boys told me the same thing as the coach above, but none of the girls. Very little of the chatting and laughing, that is said to take place between

coaches and boys during the training practice, is said to occur between coaches and girls. The girls' relation to the coach is depicted as strictly instrumental:

> Eve: He's the one who knows … what is right and what I must do. He's the one who … well … I can't take responsibility for what I do, because I don't know, but he knows exactly what has to be done. He's the one with the knowledge.
>
> Håkan: Does he know? What do you think?
>
> E: Yes, he often does, and if he doesn't I get terribly mad. [25]

The third coach is also a democratic coach, but his "counterpart" as a subject of will is not "the group" but "the individual athlete".

> "Most of them (the athletes) are better at their events than I am; they outrun me and so on, so I don't help them through showing them what it should be like. Rather, we reason on the basis of what I see and what they feel when doing something [...] I don't make any difference, I think, if it happens to be a boy or a girl, and change the training or anything like that. The difference is more like [...] *you* need this and *you* need that. I differentiate individually [...] Hopefully they get what each one needs regardless if it's a boy or a girl" (Coach). [26]

In this discourse, the group is not an organic entity, but a functionally operating network of athletes. The responsibility of the coach is aimed at every individual athlete. In this discourse, it seems to be irrelevant whether the athlete is a boy or a girl. [27]

Before I summarise the interviews, I would like to return for a moment to the issue of interviewing as a social practice that in itself is involved in the construction of identities. The interviews and the statements of the interviewees ought not to be seen as representations of a more or less true opinion about oneself and other teenagers in sport, about the body or about the coach/coaching. The practice of interviewing, as represented above, can be seen as a way of performing gendered bodies and individuals in sport, where the subjectivities of the interviewer and the interviewees intertwine. The practice of interviewing is thus inextricably linked to the creation of sex/gender differences since the practice of interviewing might be seen as an "incitement" to talk—in itself a discursive practice (cp. FOUCAULT 1979). This is true, of course, not only concerning *what* things are said, but also, more importantly, concerning *how* things are said. [28]

To sum up the interviews, what interests me is perhaps not so much *what* things are said but, as was stated above, *how* they are said. When speaking about oneself, conventional perceptions about boys and girls in sport are often opposed; when speaking about others, conventional perceptions about boys and girls in sport are reproduced. While these contradictions do not seem to pose any problem to the boys, they do to the girls. A conventional way to deal with this issue is to say that sport is not (yet) equal enough. From the point of view of the

genealogical approach, the question is rather: what historical conditions have made this seemingly paradoxical situation possible? [29]

3. A History of the Present on the Sportsman and Sportswoman

I will now analyse the discourses of manliness and womanliness in sport in texts published by the Swedish Sports Confederation during the 20th century, with a special focus on the last three decades. In particular, I would like to emphasise the relation between power and knowledge, in the sense that governmental changes go hand in hand with new kinds of knowledge production and ways of constructing the objects and subjects of government (here sportsmen and -women). [30]

3.1 Between "willing" and "able"

Some hundred years ago, sport was practised in relation to a discourse on the public level stressing nationality, character building and masculinity—*a patriarchal discourse*. Competitive sport was seen as unsuitable for women. Women were more or less limited to gymnastics. During the early decades of the 20th century, a certain "women's gymnastics" was developed. In it was inscribed a discourse of *difference* between women and men, stating that the differences between women and men are of a qualitative kind. Women's gymnastics were practised in relation to a discourse stressing physical and social health, and feminine beauty. The struggle for women's rights to participate in competitive sport, however, which was fought parallel to the development of women's gymnastics, was formulated in a discourse of *similarity* between women and men, stating that the differences between women and men are merely of a quantitative kind. A common view about women's participation in sport during this time was that women were seen as "willing, but not able" to compete in sport. [31]

After the Second World War, and parallel to the dreams about the creation of a Swedish welfare state and an equal society—*a social liberal discourse*, the discourse of manliness and womanliness in sport changed at the political level. Sport was now, especially among young people, practised in relation to physical and social health. Through the concept of "sports for all", sport was seen as a tool in fostering the Swedish youth. The sporting subject, at least in the official texts of the Swedish Sports Confederation and in some governmental reports, turned out to be a gender-neutral subject, constituted in a discourse of similarity between women and men. The Swedish Sports Confederation turned completely around in its official view on women's sport. The discursive changes, focusing on social and educational aspects of sport, along with new kinds of economic subsidiaries (activity benefits), made it easier for women and other so called "minority groups" to join the sports movement. During the 1960s and 1970s the share of women in sport rose from ten or fifteen per cent to around thirty-five per cent. More unofficially, women in competitive sport were now seen as "able, but not willing" to compete in sport, since girls and women were not as keen as boys and men on competing as the Swedish Sports Confederation had hoped, and also since girls seemed to quit sport several years earlier than boys. [32]

3.2 Action plans in sport

At the end of the 1970s, the first action plans for the Swedish sports movement as a whole, and for gender equity in sport in particular, were put into practise. At first, these action plans were constituted in the discourse of similarity between women and men, focusing on the quantitative aim of recruiting more women to sport, particularly as coaches. The first gender equity program was called *Idrott tillsammans—på lika villkor* (*Sport together—on equal terms*, 1977). The program states, "specific investments are to be made in order to equalise women's conditions to participate in sport as compared to men" (IDROTT TILLSAMMANS 1977, p.6). As it turned out, however, the program also tells us that:

> "In order to realise the propositions in this program, we suggest, naturally, that girls and women are prepared to put up with existing conditions. The joy to practise sport and to coach in sport, the identification, fellowship and the feeling of doing a great deal for oneself and one's clubmates will for most people, in the future as well as in the present, be the only reward" (IDROTT TILLSAMMANS 1977, p.12). [33]

The formulations in this program are not only based on a discourse of similarity between women and men with quantitative aims, but also on a non-provocative discourse. Not unexpectedly this program passed without making any difference as far as the number of, and conditions for, female athletes, coaches and leaders were concerned. [34]

A decade later, the situation changed. In the action plans of 1989 (both one for sports in general and one concerning gender equity in sport) the discourse of difference between women and men came to dominate. By the end of the 1980s, the quantitative aims of gender equity in sport had been complemented with qualitative goals. This means that "equality in sport" was not only about women's rights to do the same things as men, but *to do it in "their own" way* (or on "women's conditions"). Also the non-provocative discourse had been reformulated to a decidedly more provocative one.

> "'We live in a male-dominated society, a society where men's experiences and values are normative and women's divergent.' [...] As long as the man is seen as the norm in our society, women will be seen as different and deviant. [...] The rules and organisation of sport are formed to fit men" (IDROTTENS JÄMSTÄLLDHETSPLAN 1989, pp.1ff). [35]

Subjective kinds of difference between women and men, such as knowledge, experience, values and interests, were emphasised rather than objective ones, physical difference for instance:

- "*Women and men have different knowledge and experiences*. [...]
- *Women and men have different values and interests*" (IDROTTENS JÄMSTÄLLDHETSPLAN 1989, p.4; italics in original). [36]

Qualitative goals have grown in significance during the 1990s. Parallel to that development, a strong emphasis on individuality and the agency of the individual emerges in the programs—*a neoliberal discourse*. The sporting subject is no longer a gender-neutral subject in an organically composed (and singular) sports movement (*sport*; in singular), but a gender specific, albeit individual, subject in a fragmented world of *sports* (in plural). One can say that the policy of the Swedish Sports Confederation of the 1990s stresses on the one hand individuality in a social constructivist discourse of a fragmented society, and on the other hand gender specificity in an essentialist discourse of a unified sex/gender.

> "We must in all instruction and teaching [...] consider differences between girls and boys in order to, eventually, give every individual, regardless of sex, the same opportunities to develop their own personal ambitions, interests and talents" (IDROTTEN VILL 1996, pp.15f). [37]

Gender, as it turns out in *Idrotten vill* [Sport intend], is no longer something like a collective role that fits loosely over a more concrete sex, but rather an individual identity, inscribed in material body. In *Idrotten vill*, the gap between gender and sex disappears, making it seemingly more difficult to escape one's gendered fate. [38]

3.3 From "attitudes" to "knowledge"

The discourse of equal opportunities shifted during the 1980s from being constituted on the notion of (bad/wrong) *attitudes* towards female athletes and coaches, to being constituted on the notion of a lack in knowledge about female athletes and coaches. "Female athletes ought, for example", according to the gender equity program of 1989, "to have access to coaches and leaders with knowledge and competence about *women's specific needs and conditions*" (in sport; my note; my italics; IDROTTENS JÄMSTÄLLDHETSPLAN 1989, p.9). It is interesting to see how this equity program, as we saw above, first criticised the fact that sport is built on male values etc., and then speaks solely about *women*'s specific needs and conditions, as if sporting women were problematic (as opposed to the quite normal sportsmen). In fact, the people working for equal opportunities called:

> "for a *paradigmatic shift* that changes the perspectives that allow female and male leaders be developed on equal terms, side by side. In discussions about gender, equality, and feminism, we easily base what is said on biases and personal ideas. Everyone has an opinion on the issue. This report aims at avoiding this pitfall. We will attempt to reason on the basis of men's and women's concrete *experiences* of leadership within different branches of sport, to reach conclusions, and to draw up guidelines for the future [...] The social patterns of women's and men's behaviour not only varies between individuals, but also between cultures. From a global perspective, there is therefore a further danger in nailing down truths about how women and men *are*" (LEDARSKAP PÅ KVINNLIGT VIS 1993, pp.5-6). [39]

What, then, did this paradigmatic shift look like? Several popular scientific texts or educational material were published during the 1990s, particularly by the Swedish Sports Confederation's own publishing company, SISU Idrottsböcker (SISU Sports Books), with the purpose of shedding some light on girls and women in sport (no such texts aiming specifically at the conditions of boys—as a gendered category—were published). Even though the texts discussed female participation in sport in particular, it seemed impossible to discuss women's sport without relating it to men's sport. Sometimes images of male sport are explicated, but most often male sport appears in a more implicit way. Let me give you a couple of examples: [40]

a) explicitly

> "Recent research shows that the motives for participating in sport differ between girls and boys. The studies show that girls are less interested in competition than the boys. Girls are more oriented towards social relations" (MOGREN 1997, p.12).
>
> "[...] that the most important motive for girls [to participate in sport] are social relations, i.e., to socialise and have fun together. To the boys, competition is the main thing" (TJEJER PÅ ARENAN 1998, p.49).
>
> "Existential sport means that you move (do physical activity; my note) because it first and foremost is fun or enjoyable. You experience movement and nature, and you enjoy them. You do not have a body—you are one! Girls more often take it easy and experience more, while boys are more achievement oriented" (JOHANSSON & SKIÖLD WIDLUND 1994, p.70). [41]

These are of course just three examples, but during my studies of the discourse of gender in Swedish competitive sport, I have not once encountered a discursive practice that contests this way of depicting boys and girls. This is a fact even though one now and then comes across statements like Karen's above, and the following summary of some statements made by female football players: "In our interviews it has come out, contrary to what most people say, that football to the girls often is about WINNING" (emphasis in orig., DAHLGREN & DAHLGREN 1990). [42]

Despite this, when speaking about girls and women on a general level, or as metaphysical categories, it seems hard to describe them as competitive and achievement oriented in sport. [43]

b) implicitly

> "Puberty is often problematic. Especially for girls. They develop into women and start to menstruate. The body changes and many girls get a negative body image. They search for an identity. Role models have a big influence [...] Fellowship is important to girls. Closeness and intimacy is more important than competition and individuality. The group is more important than one's own success. These so important qualities for girls are not always acknowledged in the sports movement" (FLICKORS IDROTTSVÄRLD 1989). [44]

If one tries to distance oneself from the text in the quotation above, asking questions about it, interesting things might show up:

- For whom is puberty problematic?—Especially for girls—alas, not for boys.
- Why is it so problematic?—They develop into women; the problem is inscribed *within* women?
- What is so problematic about that?—They start to menstruate; again it seems as if it is the female body that poses the problem. And so on. [45]

The second part of the quotation is interesting because it gives us a hint about the alleged "normal" sportsperson, the sports*man*. "He" is not so keen on fellowship, closeness and intimacy. Competition and individuality are on the other hand very important to him, as is personal success. And these characteristics are apparently firmly established in the sports movement as well as, incidentally, in men. I would like to propose that the characteristics of the alleged sportsman ought to be seen more as an object of thought, an invention, rather than as a real man. As such it serves as a silent constitutive ground when constructing the modern sportswoman. In the next, and last, quotation, I will try to explore in more detail how this imagined man is constructed.

> "For the girls, it does not suffice to compete and be the best one. We are humans first, only then athletes. Our female players *want* to achieve, and they *are* good, but they focus on entirely other things than the boys. For them (the girls; my note), it is also about finding one's own personality, a deeper motive for one's sporting activities. The achievements are, one could say, a bonus" (LEDARSKAP PÅ KVINNLIGT VIS 1993, p.9). [46]

I will now rewrite this text, beginning with "for the boys ..." Let us listen to what that would sound like:

> *For the boys, competing to be the best one is the primary thing. We are sportsmen first, only then humans. Our male players achieve, and they are good, and they focus entirely on this task. For them, it is not so much about finding one's own personality; they already have one as a sportsman*. [47]

These two statements echo, I think, the statements of Karen and Marcus. The first one is of a more problematic and paradoxical kind and leaves a bitter aftertaste, as did Karen when speaking about herself and other girls in sport. This kind of discourse concerning sporting girls—girls as primarily something else than achievement oriented—serve as the constitutive ground for the sporting girls' ways of relating to themselves and their sport participation. The second one is of a more straightforward kind, as Marcus' way of speaking about his sporting experiences, although the quotation above leaves a bitter aftertaste (I am thinking about being a sportsman first, and only then human, in relation to moral issues in competitive sport: drug abuse, the technification of the body, and so on). The boys are discursively constructed as achievement oriented first and foremost,

e.g., achievement is taken for granted without opposing other dimensions of life (relations for instance). [48]

4. Conclusion

4.1 A political level

Analytically speaking, the history of the present on the construction of manliness and womanliness in sport at a political level points out that *patriarchal discourses*, where young men were seen as the only "appropriate" competitive sportsmen, have subsequently been transformed into *social-liberal* and *neo-liberal discourses*. Within the frames of social-liberalism, "sport for all" becomes a leitmotif. The sports movement appears almost as an organic entity, ensuring the social, mental and physical health of its participants. Not only men and women are legitimate sportsmen, but also the youth (and later on children), elderly persons, disabled persons and so on. Despite this, the legitimate political subject is a *gender-neutral* subject, however as such quite disembodied. Within the frames of neo-liberalism, the individual appears as the solid base for sport practice, the individual, however, is not merely an individual but a gendered (and embodied) individual, who is simultaneously a decidedly heterosexual individual. The emergence of the gendered individual seems to be the effect of a problematisation of sexual difference and gender relations "*inside*" (experiences, desires, values, knowledge, interests) the subject rather than outside (physical aspects—genitalia etc.) or between (social aspects—work division for instance) the subjects, and as such it can be seen as a part of a new mode of government: *the sportsman* and *the sportswoman* as an identity. Modern power relations perform gender differences as a mode of *subjectification* rather than as a mode of *objectification*. [49]

4.2 An individual level

In respect to the interviews with the teenagers, it can be said that the discourses presented above cannot be seen as a simple chronology. Quite the contrary, those discourses that constitute the interviews express all of the previously mentioned three discourses (patriarchal, social-liberal and neo-liberal), simultaneously existing in the historical present. In patriarchal discourses, a strong emphasis is put on differences between girls and boys. Boys act as subjects of sport (the sportsman), while girls act as objects of sport (female bodies). The body appears as an object, a gender-specific object, of the male, or masculine, subject, which is either the male athlete or the male coach. In relation to this, the gaze of the coach is given the preferential right of interpretation. The relation between coach and athlete is constructed as a hierarchically organised subject-to-subject relation. The relation between coach and female athlete is constructed as a subject-to-object (female body) relation. Individual character and "seriousness" about sport (i.e., performance orientation) is at the forefront in patriarchal discourses. [50]

In social-liberal discourses, less emphasis is put on gender difference. The body still appears as an object, but now a gender-neutral object. Social relations and fellowship are at the forefront in social-liberal discourses. The coach-athlete relation is not first and foremost a relation between the coach and his individual athletes, but a relation between the coach and the group. The group is constructed as a collective subject, acting as equal to the coach. The preferential right of interpretation is equally divided between the coach and the collective (the group). Still the coaches and the athletes describe the relation between the coach and girls' groups as rather distanced and instrumental, while the coach-boys' group relation is described as close and friendly. [51]

In neo-liberal discourses, again very little emphasis is put on gender, at least in the interviews, but not so in the texts of the Swedish Sports Confederation. The coach is still a subject of knowledge, but the gaze of the coach is not given the preferential right of interpretation. This right lies within the experience of the athlete, the coach merely aiding the athlete in reflecting on the athletes' experiences. The coach-athlete relation is depicted as a relation between the coach and the individual athlete in neo-liberal discourses. This relation can be described as a subject-to-subject relation. There seems to be no antagonism between social relations and performance. Thus, to recall the interviews with Karen and Marcus to our memories, in order to be recognised as a serious athlete, it seems as if Karen, as many other girls, are obliged to discursively emphasise those traits that are identifiable as representative for a "serious" athlete: I am serious, I train because I want to win, and not because of my friends, and I see performance as the main reason to taking part in athletics—emphasising the "I" as opposed to other girls. As far as the boys were concerned, no such obligation seemed to exist. Merely being a boy seemed to grant the boys the characteristics of a serious athlete—without them having to express their seriousness themselves. [52]

4.3 Equal opportunities as a performer of sexual/gender difference

A common argument, as was mentioned above, is that gender-equity policies aim at the reduction of gender differences. This might be true concerning practicalities of women's and men's rights to do the same things (i.e., to have the same kind of work—with the same salary, to participate in sports and so on) in the objective world. On the other hand, the concept creates two metaphysical categories; either they are constructed as "natural" or "social" in the subjective world. Thus, from a genealogical point of view, gender-equity policies might also be seen as creating new kinds of gender differences. The concept of gender equity is, from this perspective, a technology aiming at securing the notion of "normal" (normative) heterosexuality. Gender-equity policy performs two distinct and clearly differentiated categories, which may be equalised, and as such it might be perceived as an apparatus that produces and regulates sexual/gender difference. [53]

During the 1990s, neo-liberal discourses have come to influence the ways of reasoning about sport and about gender in sport. Sexual difference and gendered subjectivity are in neo-liberal discourses constructed more as "inner"

(psychological; a difference in mentality) than "outer" (social and physical) aspects of life. Of course this change occurs parallel to the changed notions about "reality". While reality used to be seen as the objective ("outer"-gaze) world, it now seems to be the subjective ("inner"-feeling) world that is to be seen as the most real one. What is important here is to understand, through the discourse of sport, the development of the concept of equal opportunities as a way of governing the behaviour of men and women and their ways of self-reflection. [54]

To conclude then, one can say that while formerly being constituted as "sporting" (the sportsman) and "non-sporting" (women) respectively, both young women and men nowadays participates in competitive sport to a great degree. It thus seems as if new ways of constituting sex/gender differences have occurred and risen in importance. While both women and men participate in sport, they compete in two different classes. Simultaneously, in other parts of society, gender segregation is seen as illegitimate. The main argument in this article is that sport constitutes the construction of the modern gendered, and heterosexualised, "*sportsman*" and "*sportswoman*". It is my contention also, that women's increased participation in competitive sport might be seen as a way to perform "the female individual", and not only the sporting female, as a (gendered) political subject, at the same time assuring heteronormality, that is that male-female (sexual) relations are seen as a "natural" base for social organisation. This whole project can be regarded as a part of a form of government, where the focal point is *government in the name of equality between women and men*. [55]

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