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A GENDERED LENS ON SPORT
FROM A HISTORICAL AND
SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Gerd von der Lippe is Phd in sportshistory and sports sociology and professor in sports sociology at Telemark University College, Norway. Her main area of research is centered on sports, gender and media and power from a historical and sociological perspective. Presently her focus lies on research about female and male image in today's sports journalism. An important ongoing research project is "Football, masculinities and war on the Gaza Strip".

SUMMARY

Mass culture often assumes there is a fixed 'true' femininity beneath the ebb and flow of daily life. We hear about 'real women', 'natural women', and the 'deep feminine', contrasted against 'real men', 'natural men', and the 'deep masculine.' Such constructions are hard to kill, and are continually being reconstructed in films, popular books, magazines, television programmes, and the daily and weekly press. These constructions can be categorised as essentialist because they select single features that are purported to define the core (essence) of femininity and masculinity. However, the concept of masculinity and femininity is inherently relational: Femininities exist only in relation to masculinities. Also, women and men are 'doing gender' in culturally specific ways. From this perspective, questions of gender depend on time, place, culture, tradition and upbringing, and in our case, the particular sport in question.

TAKE-HOME MESSAGE:

- As long as men are the implicit and explicit first sex in elite sports, retain the highest and most symbolic capital in this arena, and have the status of representatives of the human race—in sport and in most other areas of society—the term ‘sport’, when used to describe games played by women, will be prefaced by *women’s* or *female*. Because the mediascapes of today facilitate the flow of information between the local and the global, they act as important conduits for the globally connected national sporting bodies. Thus, each country is influenced by a mix of national and global ideas, and tends to portray its sports idols in traditional, ambivalent or contradictory ways in terms of which sex is more important, competent and worthy of the fans’ rapt attention.



INTRODUCTION

This text focuses primarily on gendered practices involving or affecting women in sport and society, from a perspective of power. The discussion centres mainly on sport in Norway, with some Danish and Swedish examples. Understanding relationships between traditional and non-traditional male and female sports is crucial to understanding developments in this field. Examples are given to show the importance of time, place and culture in the development of gendered practices and attitudes towards participation in different sports; what sports are more open to women, and what kinds of gendered structures are less easily changed. According to Jennifer Hargreaves (1994), most sports are heavily weighted in favour of men; in general, female sports have inferior social status. However, in some elite sports, although there may still be a general tendency to place more emphasis on male sports, this is not always the case. The text then discusses sports journalism because of the growing emphasis on media coverage of sport and the complex, subtle gender representations that are often presented. Some historical glimpses from the 1880s until today are also presented.

The topics of this text are:

- Organised sport for both sexes before 1940
- Constructions of gender in cross country skiing and handball before the 1950s.
- Football: The man's world in sports journalism.
- Women's ski jumping and gender equality.
- Gender issues in contemporary sports journalism.

Since the Renaissance, the woman, her body and 'the feminine' have traditionally occupied special, but opposing, positions in art (paintings and sculpture) and sport, especially in northern European cultures. In art, the naked body of the woman has long been on open display; in sport, from the 1880s until the 1950s, as much of the female body as possible had to be covered. Gazing on the female body from the artistic viewpoint has a long history of acceptance; so too has there been a long history of unthinking acceptance of the myths and 'knowledge' about women's physical and mental capabilities. For many years, these historic gendered attitudes proved a barrier to participation for sportswomen.

The first example of sports journalism presented draws from the coverage of the Swedish hurdler Susanna Kallur at the Olympic Games in 2008. Then follows 'Sport is war: Masculine contests in skiing', in Norway and Sweden during the relays at the World Championships in Oslo in 2011. Finally, sports journalism is discussed as a thoroughly sexualised and complex subfield of modern journalism.

In this text, the ideas and constructs of others are used to aid in the historical and sociological analysis of the nature and extent of women's participation in sport. These include the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's perspectives on habitus and cultural and symbolic capital; the North-American social scientist Erving Goffman's concepts of 'back region or backstage' and 'front region or front stage'; and the perspectives of English sociologist Richard Sennett on authenticity and the overexposure of feelings. I also discuss my own view of sports journalism as 'a masculine-dominated exposure industry' within a network of central sports leaders, coaches and sponsors. These concepts are linked to ideas on national identity and the expectations placed on the idols in today's mega-sports events. Appadurai's concept of 'mediascapes' is also relevant to the sexualisation of sports journalism.

ORGANISED SPORT FOR BOTH SEXES BEFORE 1940: MOVEMENTS OF THE PEOPLE?

During the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, different types of people's movements developed in Norway, Denmark and Sweden. They include the temperance movement, Red Cross, Boy Scouts, and women's, workers' and socialist movements. National sports organisations were formed in Norway in 1861, in Denmark in 1896, and in Sweden in 1897.

Many social changes took place during this time. The size of industrial towns, worker numbers and transport infrastructure continued to grow. The number of working hours per week gradually reduced over time, although this began later in Norway than in the other two countries. The women's movements had been fighting for the right to vote since the end of the 19th century; this became a reality for women in Norway in 1913, in Denmark in 1915 and in Sweden in 1921.

According to the Swedish sports historian Jan Lindroth, Swedish sport, in many ways, developed as a movement of the people before 1914, but not until 1940 was it understood as a real people's movement. Matti Goksøyr claims that Norwegian sport became popular (people-oriented) between 1910 and 1940.

The myth that women were weak, both physically and mentally, was a barrier to women's sporting development. Several medical texts of the time discussed male sports but ignored female sports. Men—the 'first' sex—were regarded as 'natural' participants in all sports, while women were viewed as the 'second' sex, needing special care.

By 1940, women participated in 13 of 42 sports in Sweden. The first official Swedish championships for women were in figure skating in 1908; swimming in 1910; fencing and golf in 1911; tennis in 1913; and cross country skiing in 1917. Danish female athletes could take part in 10 of 18 national championships in 1940, whereas their Norwegian sisters could compete in only 6 of 21 championships before 1940. These were tennis, 1910; swimming, 1911; figure skating, 1912; fencing, 1928; speed skating, 1933; and equestrian show jumping. However, female athletes in 'workers' sports' were able to compete in national championships in the so-called masculine sports of the time, such as track and field and cross country skiing.

At that time, the sports typically reserved for women in all three countries were gymnastics, swimming, tennis, fencing and figure skating. However, the number of women participating in sport, compared to the number of men, was far fewer in Norway than in Sweden and Denmark. In 1940, Norwegian women could play in only 9 of 21 sports. Leading Norwegian sports officials of the time concentrated more on why women should *not* take part in particular sports, rather than trying to involve women in sports generally. The numbers of male and female members of sports organisations were not shown separately in reports of the bourgeois sports (Landsforbundet for Idrett: 1919–1940), or in the national overviews in the yearbooks of the Norwegian Confederation of Sports (NCS) from 1946 until 1951; there were too few women participants to be recorded in their own categories. The first year that the number of female members was reported was 1951, when women comprised about 23% of participants. Of these, 19% were mature women and 30% girls under 17. (In 2010, the proportion of women was 40 %.) Women comprised the majority of members in one sport—gymnastics—in all three countries before 1940. However, as early as 1871, 875 women were members of the Copenhagen Skating Club (Københavnske Skøiteforening). The following text is about a competition in pair skating in that same club:

We note that the man's role is to support his partner in a gentlemanly way. He has to allow her to display her skills to the audience, so that they can admire her. Thus, the important art of the man is to keep himself in the background in order to allow the audience to admire her skill and the flexible grace of her skating. (Trangbæk, 2005, pp. 80–81)

The role of the male figure skater was to provide support for the lady so that she could show off her femininity and her body in ways that were 'correct' and socially acceptable. This attitude and practice reinforced the societal norm that women needed the assistance of men.

Men know best what sports women should play

The quotation from Trangbæk reflects what was probably the dominant attitude of male sports officials towards female sports players in the three countries at that time. The most important aim of women's sport was to uphold the notion of female bourgeois grace, rather than to offer an arena for serious competition and the display of mental toughness.

The medical profession backed central leaders in their scepticism about women's sports. According to the Norwegian doctor Peter Torgersen, writing in 1915, sports that developed visible muscles were for men only. Torgersen regarded it as moral debasement (*fornedrelse*) leading to physical ruin if bourgeois women playing sport worked as hard as women farmers. Helge Løvland, the Norwegian Olympic decathlon winner in 1920, wrote in 1938:

It has ... to be stated clearly that sports for women have to be essentially different from sports for men. If women's sports do not follow this line of guidance, sport might have detrimental effects on females ... The following two points are very important: Firstly, the focus [in women's sports should be] on pleasure and joy, and secondly, that [the sports should be chosen so that] women are able to learn the practices easily in order to achieve rapid progress. The woman's efforts have to be oriented towards grace, flexibility and rhythm ... Women's sports have to be more playful than men's, with only minor interest in competition. The sportswoman's femininity has to be preserved, even if this reduces her chances of winning. (Løvland, 1938, pp. 160–161)

Two years later, he wrote about health and coaching ('Helse og treningslære'). In this work, his main point on women's sports was:

The 'feminine' must not be lost in sport. Consequently, the sports most suitable for women are those that are natural for her and that cultivate those traits men prefer. (Løvland, 1940, p. 90)

The assumption is made that men decide which sports women ought to play. According to this view, the female athlete herself does not know her own body best, and cannot determine which practices she wishes to engage in, or the way she would like to perform them. Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist, would say that, here, men are the custodians of the cultural capital (the knowledge of the body and its movements) of both sexes. Thus, females are not seen as active agents in this field. Bourdieu defined the term 'habitus' as the active residue, or sediment, of a person's past experiences that is drawn upon in order to function in the current life situation, and which influences the shaping of perceptions, thoughts and actions. Female shaping of social practice apparently did not count in the competitive sports of the time. As late as 1948, Otto Johansen, a doctor working in the field of Workers' Sports Movement, claimed that women should be banned from endurance sports and strength exercises because these were unhealthy [for women] and made them more masculine.

Thus, before 1940, organised sport in the three countries seems to have developed as a movement for men. But what about women? According to the female sports historians Eva Olofsson and Jan Lindroth, Swedish reports in 1940 contained no overall numbers of sports club members for each sex. Lindroth, and the Norwegian sports historian Matti Goksøyr, failed to consider women, just like the male sports leaders of the 1940s. Both made similar statements in which females were invisible; this practice was the 'normal' way of describing sporting reality for a long time. If we regard women as people, we cannot state that, in these countries in the first half of the 20th century, organised sports were popular, that is, people's, movements, involving all the people. The sports movement was first and foremost for men. According to the historian Finn Olstad, the negative view of Norwegian women in sport remained essentially unchanged between the two world wars.

However, two extraordinary Norwegian women, Synnøve Lie and Laila Schou Nilsen, held world records in speed skating between 1932 and 1940. What about sportswomen in Denmark and Sweden? Before the 1932 Olympic Games, a Swedish leader of track and field wrote to the secretary of the Norwegian National Federation of Sports (NFS: 1919–40) to enquire in which events Norwegian women would be competing. The NFS replied that female track and field competition was of little interest to the organisation. In contrast, Sweden sent female athletes to the 1932 Olympic Games.

Until the mid 1960s, the idea that elite sports were a 'natural' way of socialising young men, but not young women, was dominant among several central male leaders of organised sports in the three countries. This thinking is one of many examples of the dualistic, oppositional gendered perspective of the time.

The norm: Men as the first sex in sport

The following traits were often implicit in the definition of supposedly masculine sports and sportsmen, and thus were 'unnatural' and 'unfeminine' for women: logical, active, controlled, rational, aggressive, superior, independent, potent, oriented towards competition, hard, strong, offensive, achievement-oriented. The male sex defined the reality. Wrestling, boxing, weightlifting, football, long-distance running, ice hockey, water polo, cross country skiing and cycling were men's sports, according to Løvland.

Women: The second, 'special' sex in sport

The following traits were seen as related to the feminine: irrational, passive, weak, anxious, careful, flexible, dependent, the object of men's gaze, inferior, caring, soft, exposed, available, defensive, relation-oriented and emotional. These traits were believed to be innate biological and psychological differences between the sexes and thus were indirectly tied to women's sports such as gymnastics, swimming, figure skating, tennis and fencing.

Thus, in society at large, and in many sports, the ideal feminine norm was the bourgeois white woman and her doings, and the opposing characteristics listed above formed the basis of the principles and rules of men's and women's sporting bodies in historical—and sometimes even contemporary—contexts. Consequently, women participated in only a few sports. As already mentioned, for many years women were not allowed to compete in so-called masculine sports at a national level, because the male leadership of the peak sporting bodies regarded these practices as unfeminine. But exactly how and why did the Scandinavian countries construct this dualistic perspective of gender? The answer can be found in the history of, for example, skiing, handball and football.

GENDER CONSTRUCTS BEFORE THE 1950S

Gender constructs in cross country skiing

Gender constructs can differ between countries. For example: Why was cross country skiing for women accepted as a national sport in Sweden 37 years before the first national championship in Norway?

Non-competitive skiing has a long tradition in both countries, but skiing was not a competitive sport at national level until more recently. As we have seen, the Norwegian sports leadership and doctors generally had restrictive attitudes towards women's sports, and proportionally fewer women took part in Norwegian sports and national competitions. A Swedish woman won the bronze medal for the 800-metre run in the 1928 Olympic Games, four years before the NFS sports officials stated that the organisation was not interested in track and field events for women. Swedish women were recorded as members in more sports federations than were Norwegian women, and, more importantly, they were able to compete in more national sports competitions than were their neighbours in Norway. Why did these differences exist between the two countries in such a typical Nordic sport as cross country skiing?

As early as 1882, the central skiing federation in Sweden had a program for a 2-kilometre race for girls under 15 years of age. The first official Swedish championship for women was held in 1917 over a distance of 10 kilometres, while the first Norwegian championship was not held until 1954. Swedish women began national competitions in organised sports amid a mixture of negative backlash and positive encouragement. Unfortunately, the 800-metre run for women in the Olympics was abandoned after 1928, when an economic depression contributed to antifeminist attitudes for a decade.

In Norway, ski jumping and cross country skiing were regarded as national sports. The idea of a national identity includes common symbols and rituals in a country. Eric Hobsbawm refers to important central traditions that are constructed, the so-called invented traditions. In the Norwegian context, sport is a more important base for the construction of national identity than are institutions such as universities, which have their roots in European 'high culture.' This factor, together with Norway's sparse population, late industrialisation, location near the North Pole, and paucity of internationally known artists, authors and politicians compared to Denmark and Sweden, led to Norway's being regarded as somewhat underdeveloped. This label contributed to sports victories being given a special focus. At that time, nationalism connoted, first and foremost, masculinity, and men's power and competency.

The Olympic Games is a media event with national rituals and national victories. Male cross country skiers from Norway and Sweden have been among the best in the world, and have won many medals since 1924. The first Games to include this sport for women were in Oslo in 1952. Although the Norwegian leaders did not want women to participate in this sport, they had to yield to pressure from other countries, among them Sweden and Finland.

The male, bourgeois, antifeminist ski leaders from the western part of the capital dominated this sport until the 1980s. Until then, cross country skiing in Norway was considered best suited to men, despite the fact that the Norwegian national women's team won the 4 x 5-kilometre relay in the 1968 Olympic Games. When Norwegian female athletes again won in the 1984 Games, it became impossible for male sports officials to refuse giving priority to this elite women's sport.

Now, we will look at the construction of gender in handball in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Gender constructs in handball

Denmark and Germany in the lead

Both Danish and German sources claim that handball was invented in their country. However, several countries, especially in Europe, played this game at the beginning of the 20th century. According to Ole Skjerk, most historical evidence suggests that handball was invented in Denmark. Germany initiated making the game an official national sport when an international federation of handball was formed in 1928. Initially, the 11-man version was dominant. The first German championship for men took place in 1921 and for women in 1923. This version became a demonstration sport at the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936.

Male athletes played the first indoor tournament in 1921, with women following in 1926. The 7-a-side game was regarded as the normal version for both sexes. When the Danish Handball Federation (DHF) was formed in 1935, the rules prescribed the 11-a-side outdoor game as the main version for both sexes. In 1937, the number of male and female members of handball associations was about the same for both sexes. National championships for men and women were first held in 1939. In 1950, 43% of the Federation's members were women.

In 1926, many journalists in Denmark expressed admiration for the bodies of women playing handball:

Two of the ladies from Roskilde were extremely beautiful and attracted much attention. Much slimmer and more elegant, however, were those from Copenhagen, especially the small, light-footed sylph in the goal. (Skjerk, 2001, p. 12)

In Sweden, handball was originally regarded as a male sport and was organised as such on a national level in 1930. The first championship for men was held in 1932 and for women in 1942. However, women were invisible in the Swedish rules until 1947. Germany and Sweden won most of the international competitions in men's handball before 1940, with the German team usually the best in Europe in the 11-a-side version and the Swedish team often ranking second. The rules for both 11-a-side and 7-a-side men's handball in Sweden allowed tougher body contact than the Danish rules.

Handball: The new women's sport in Norway

When the Norwegian Handball Federation was formed in 1937, both sexes were invited to take part. From the very beginning, until today, female members of the federation comprised two-thirds of the total. Why was this so?

In Norway, the 7-a-side version of handball became the norm because, as it was a new game, handball was unable to compete with the old and popular football for playing venues. Unlike in Denmark and Sweden, no appropriate indoor sports facilities larger than school gymnasiums were available. Therefore, in Norway, the indoor 7-a-side version became the usual outdoor version as well. From 1937, only the 11-a-side version allowed athletes with an open hand to play the ball out of the hands of an opponent. In contrast to the rules on body contact in Germany and Sweden, the rules were the same for both sexes in Norway in the 7-a-side version. Although some Norwegian competitions used the 11-a-side rules for men in 1945, the 7-a-side version was the norm for both sexes.

Because handball was regarded as a women's sport from the start, male sports journalists wrote positive articles about women's handball games from the very beginning, in contrast to the commentary on female athletes in, for example, cross country skiing and track and field.

On Tuesday, the handball cup started at Bekkelaget [Oslo]. I admired the good-looking young ladies who did not care about the terrible dust on the field. They had to return to their homes blacker than the women of the visiting team, without having had a bath ... This lady from Bekkelaget ran like a goddess—I mean, like a goddess ought to run. Honestly, I did not think I would ever see such an achievement from a woman ... In summary: handball is a beautiful women's sport, which combines grace with power, speed and team spirit, and the marked increase in its popularity is therefore quite natural. (Lippe, von der, 1997, p. 334)

Here, we see evidence of a wider acceptance of femininity in handball, because, in this sport, strength was tied to female beauty and not to being a man or a monster of a woman. Acceptance of this version of femininity led to the production of many positive texts on this new women's sport. Women's magazines and newspapers wrote that 'handball turns out to be ladies' football'.

When Norwegian women's teams competed against Swedish teams, the contest was often evenly balanced, whereas the Swedish men's teams were mostly dominant. Norwegian sports journalists did not mention that the Swedish men's teams often ranked second in all of Europe. Consequently, the impression was given that women's handball teams in Norway were better than the men's teams. Here is an excerpt from *SportsManden (The Sportsman)*, the leading sports magazine in Norway at the time:

We can state for sure that our men didn't have any chance of beating the Swedish team, especially when we consider the difference between the attack and defence of both teams, and the variations in the game; the Swedes were totally superior. Yes, from beginning to end it was like cats playing with mice. (Lippe, von der, 1997, p. 341)

During a discussion with a male handball referee in 1946, football referees from Oslo categorised handball as 'castrated football,' which reinforced the belief that handball was a feminised ballgame in Norway.

The first national team competition was between the Norwegian and Swedish women's teams, held in Norway in 1946. Between eight and ten thousand fans met at Bislet in Oslo to watch the Norwegian handballers. Sweden won 5 to 2, but the articles by the Norwegian sports journalists stated 'A breakthrough for women's handball, even though the Swedes won. Norwegian handball is progressing'. The fact that Norwegian sports athletes had boycotted sports competition during the Nazi occupation (1940–1945), in contrast to athletes from unoccupied Sweden, helped to sweeten the bitter pill. The headlines of the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten (Evening Post)* proclaimed: 'Sweden won 5–2. Well done by the Norwegian team. The winning margin did not reflect the run of play'.

A comparison of gender constructs in handball

Female handballers were regarded as second-ranking in Sweden, but were first-ranked in Norway; both sexes were invited to compete in this sport in Denmark. For some time, the rules, national championships and international teams were constructed exclusively for men in Sweden, in contrast to the situation in Norway, where female clubs memberships and national teams were dominated by women. The 7-a-side rules for both sexes disallowed body contact, which did not attract Norwegian men, who preferred playing football with 11 players and body contact. Swedish athletes played both 11-a-side and 7-a-side handball, although the rules for Swedish men allowed tougher body contact than did the Danish rules. According to Ole Skjerk, it is uncertain if Danish men really played this version of handball. Men dominated the membership in Swedish handball, whereas women dominated the

membership in Norway. In Denmark, the numbers were more even, about 50% for each sex.

This brief history of handball shows that gender may be constructed differently in different countries. In this case, factors such as the available facilities, the rules adopted, whether women were invited to play from the beginning of the new organised sport, and the attitude of male sports journalists were more important than biology in the sport's construction of gender in the three countries. However, the construction of gender differed markedly in the biggest sport of all: football.

FOOTBALL: THE MAN'S WORLD IN SPORTS JOURNALISM

Early history

Women have most likely played football at local level for many centuries. Britain is recognised as being the cradle of modern football for both sexes. Women have been playing football in Scotland since the beginning of the 19th century. Skogvang (2006) describes a yearly ritual match between married and unmarried young women in Inverness. The goals were between two trees and the audience were men searching for a wife. Competitions also took place between different parishes and schools, and between towns and villages. The first female football federation was formed in 1894 in Scotland. Around 1921, there were 150 female football clubs in England. Many people watched the female matches, often more than watched men's matches. Finally, the English Football Association (FA) banned women's football on 5 December 1921. My interpretation of Skogvang's information is that the male footballers could not accept that the women's games were very popular; the men wanted to get rid of the competition. In the end, it came down to money.

Men and their football: The boys' club

Norwegian male politicians appear to view men's football as the most natural thing in the world. For example, in 1999 the then Norwegian Prime Minister, Kjell Magne Bondevik, arranged a trip to Spain when Molde Fotballklubb, at that time ranked second in the Norwegian Premier League, was playing a Champions League match there. The previous year, he had planned a similar meeting with the French prime minister to coincide with Norway's World Championship match against Morocco. The Minister for Culture, Trond Giske, went on a 'lads' trip' with Åge Hareide, the manager of the national football team, and some of the financial elite, to watch Rosenborg Ballklub, Trondheim, play out a draw with Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in the autumn of 2011. This shows a very great tolerance for 'men and their football' in Norwegian society. This is why Bondevik becomes a charmingly boyish 'man of the people' when he attends football matches at taxpayers' expense. Similarly, nobody bats an eyelid if the Minister for Culture hitches a ride with the financial elite when he gets the chance to go to a football match!

The unnatural media coverage

It is well known that football is Norway's most popular sport. It is less well known that Norwegian men and women take part in at least 60 other forms of sport, because the media sports coverage is almost totally dedicated to men's football. In 2006, football coverage comprised 36% of all broadcasts on TV2, Zebra, NRK1, NRK2, TVNorge and TV3. In reality, and if we don't examine its sport coverage from a gender perspective, NRK1, the Norwegian Broadcasting Company, which is the main public TV station, broadcasts a wide spectrum

of sports. However, 'football fever' on NRK will remain curtailed as long as the commercial channel TV2 has exclusive rights to all TV sports broadcasts. As a result, women's football games occupy less than 7% of total sports coverage on any of the major TV channels. In addition, the presenters and guests in TV studios are usually men, except for the odd occasion when a women's football game is being broadcast live.

Media coverage 1970 to 2005

Early in the 1970s, the feminist movement and the increasing number of young women interested in sport inspired Leif Isdal, the sports editor of *Dagbladet* (*The Daily Magazine*), to initiate a debate about football and gender. Women in Norway were late getting involved in club football, especially compared with Italy and Germany, but also with Denmark and Sweden. In 1971, *Dagbladet*, and the sports club, Frigg Oslo Fotballklubb, arranged the first unofficial Norwegian football championships for women. Three years later, the *Aftenposten* sports reporter remained sceptical about this initial foray into women's football, writing in 1974:

The Norwegian Championship in women's football is unofficial, and should remain so. For how long is up to the ladies themselves. There are those who wish to give the title of 'Norwegian Champions' to the winners of this tournament. They can't have any respect for this title. We visited the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences yesterday, and what we saw on two different fields was enough to conclude that the women's ball skills and understanding of the game are at beginners' level ... It's not easy to win gold medals, and they should most definitely not be handed out when the result is limited by the abilities of those taking part. (Lippe, von der, 2010, p. 171)

The journalist assured readers that he was not against women's football in principle. The participants were just not worthy of the title 'Norwegian Champions'. According to him, he and the photographer were duty bound to cover the story, and therefore they were just doing their job when they wrote about what they saw out on the playing field. Regardless, the statement that things went a bit 'arse over tit' symbolises men's attitude to women's football in 1974. 'Football ladies' fury against *Aftenposten*' was one of the headlines in *Dagbladet* the next day. In this article, Isdal revealed who the journalist 'Ra.L.' was. According to Isdal, the journalist only watched the matches for 20 minutes. The football manager at Frigg called it 'a mean form of journalism' and stated that this article completely ruined the entire event economically.

Finally, in 1976, after a lot of noisy disagreement, women's club football became officially organised. There was no end to the arguments against women's football. We were told everything from 'women's football is idiotic' to the claim that 'female football players attempted to seduce' the wife of a club leader, and that hard footballs could ruin women's breasts. The first official Norwegian Championship was played in 1978. Thirteen years later, in 1991, the national team won the unofficial world championship; in 1995, they won the first official World Championship for women. The sports section in *Dagbladet* acclaimed the winners thus:

The girls have been compared to the boys for 25 years. Now it is over. Yesterday, women's football became more than just a little TV distraction for old-age pensioners. Hege Riise and the rest of the football girls have entertained us all. (*Dagbladet*, 10 December 1995)

Unfortunately, however, the sentiments expressed in this quote were only a dream. The men's national team was interviewed on national TV about the girls' chances, before their

departure for the championships in Sweden. The interview was quite a spectacle, with a grimacing team surrounding goal keeper, Frode Grodås, who could barely stay serious as he attempted to muster a few polite words of encouragement as a send-off. And not everyone was equally excited after the games, even though Norway had become world champions. Trygve Hegnar, the editor of the financial magazine, *Kapital*, which published the article 'Bloody awful football women', stated that 'Norwegian female football players score from corners because female goal keepers are like strung-up sacks of potatoes.' He then focused on the audience, claiming that not many people would want to pay to see clumsy ladies running confusedly around without the power to really kick the ball. The financial writer rounded off the article with: 'Women's football? Sorry to laugh. They get paid for their effort. Full stop.'

Yet Hegnar didn't stop there. After the national team had a 3–2 win over Sweden in the European Championships in England in 2005, he re-ran his article as a commentary in *Finansavisen* (the Norwegian equivalent of the *Financial Times*), saying 'women's football was as exciting as watching paint dry'. He also recruited Arild Rønsen, Vålerenga Fotball (Club) supporter and writer for *Klassekampen* (*The Class Struggle*), who stated that women's football is okay, as long as it isn't an 'official phenomenon'.

But some things have changed since the 1970s. Women play better football, and this is something most sports journalists have realised. The sports editor at *Aftenposten*, Bertil Valderhaug, replied thus to Hegnar's article:

As sure as mosquitoes on a hot summer's night, you get aggressive critics turning up when the Norwegian football girls fight for medals in the World Championships, the European Championships or the Olympics ... Yesterday's thriller at Halliwell Jones Stadium [in Warrington, UK] was, in any case, far more entertaining than many of the matches played by the men's national team that I've yawned my way through over the past few years. (Lippe, von der, 2010, p. 128)

On the other hand, Hegnar would more than likely receive a great deal of support from various sports bloggers. During the World Championships in China in September 2007, Esten O. Sæther wrote a challenging article under the heading 'Only the girls count in the Olympics' (<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-06-05-lippe-en.html>). It was, according to Sæther, women that should have received the money to prepare for Beijing 2008. He highlighted, among other sports, handball and football. Here, he said, one found international top-level performance. The article caused strong reactions on the net, of course. A male blogger from Oslo wrote:

(The women's national football team) are good within their own league. Sadly, it's the case that few are interested in handicap-leagues. Whether it's about basketball for people who can't walk, skiing for the blind, or football for women, it's okay for people to be impressed by the talent displayed in spite of physical shortcomings. It is still only the very best practitioners one wishes to observe; women's sports, as with other disabled sports, can therefore never attract the same level of interest, prestige, and admiration. That's just the way it is! (Lippe, von der, 2010, p. 128)

Here, it is appropriate to use Pierre Bourdieu's thesis that 'the masculine order's strength becomes visible through its appearance as neutral'. Everybody can see that male football players run faster than female players do, and that they shoot harder. Young male bloggers have adopted a diehard masculine order of the sexes where images of men as a group are not just the norm, but outrank women as a group, regardless of whether the women achieve highly or represent their country. Men have balls; women don't. The conclusion is obvious for the macho males: women have inferior bodies and are, therefore, inferior in every way.

By relying on biological 'facts', this erroneous conclusion is given credence as logical and neutral.

Keeping up the male hegemony

Football, supported by sports journalists, can be seen as the last male bastion in society, where men can display their sovereignty and act out their emotions without interference from the opposite sex. The dedicated fan can worship masculinity, not through violence, but through his dedication to the sportsman and his ball. In a changing world, where women are forever gaining access to new areas, where more men take part in care-giving, and where male footballers play with their hair styled, a great number of guys cling to football as a frozen part of their identity. They can share this part of their identity with women, but first and foremost, these women must worship male football. When traditional male ideals are threatened, many men tend to glorify physical strength so that male dominance (hegemony) can be retained. Hegnar's and Rønsen's attitudes do seem old-fashioned, if not totally outdated. Expressions such as 'We should have been 11 tigers, but were 11 old biddies' are perhaps on the wane, but this cannot by any means be taken for granted as long as a man in Åge Hareide's position makes the statements that he does. As former manager of the national team, he was a pivotal role model, especially for young boys taking up football. When Hareide makes the point that, to play football, one has to be a real stubble-chinned guy, with rod in backbone and no handbag, he adds fuel to the many prejudices against women in general, and against female football players in particular. He is the person in Norwegian elite football who most clearly claims football as male territory: he marshals his troops. And in his platoon, there is no place for anything that could be viewed as civilised.

A brighter note from 2011

The women's World Football Championship played in Germany in 2011 was a great success. The German Football Federation prepared for the competition very thoroughly with advertisements and many fine presentations about the players. About one hundred thousand Norwegians saw the opening-day match between Germany and Canada. For the first time, the Norwegian Broadcasting Company screened all the matches. This example shows that it is possible to change attitudes towards women's football, at least when championships are played in Europe.

According to the reports of the National Football Federation (NFF), the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) president, Joseph S. (Sepp) Blatter, said:

The World Cup of 2011 is going to be a milestone in the development of women's football. Why? Because this championship is in Germany, a country in the anchor of European football. It is going to be a fantastic tournament. It is splendid for women and the whole world that one also is able to get a feel for the game of women's football, when we are thinking about this country as a nation in which football for men plays such an important role. I am convinced that we will see fantastic football and an impressive referee competency.

Here, Blatter challenges the dualistic view of sex and gender, and hopes that both sexes playing the sport will be appreciated. At last, the leader of FIFA has expressed clear support for women's teams. But what is the attitude of the leading officials in ski jumping, a typical Nordic sport in which Norway and Finland are dominant?

SKI JUMPING: STILL A MAN'S WORLD?

Two pioneers

The first piece written about a female Norwegian ski jumper was in 1863. According to the newspaper *Morgenbladet* (*Morning Paper*), Ingrid Olsdatter Vestby asked if she was allowed to jump in a male competition. She was then only 16 years old. Because of her age, she was allowed to jump and performed very well. She is a symbol of young girls who were allowed to compete.

Another girl also performed very well in the early 1930s. Johanne Kolstad (1913–1997) from Nordsinni in Nordre Land was the best female ski jumper of her era. Her world record of 72 metres, set in 1938, was unbeaten until 35 years later, when Anita Wold jumped 73 metres. In 1931–32, Johanne toured through Norway and Finland with Hilda Braskerud; from 1933 until 1939, she jumped in the USA. She grew up on a small farm with six sisters and brothers. Her father, a carpenter and farmer, made her skis himself. Several national male ski jumpers from the Nordre Land club, including Hans Vinjarengen, Eleiv Kolterud, Sverre Kolterud and Ola Moon, lived nearby. There were no national cross country or alpine skiers in her village, so ski jumping became her sport of choice.

A journalist with *Dagbladet* interviewed the two women. He was astonished to learn that Johanne had already jumped 46.5 metres, and Hilda had jumped 35 metres, in Flubergbakken (Fluberg Hill) using skis that were twice as long as the girls were high! Under the large banner, 'No problem performing a standing jump, say the ski ladies from Nordre Land who arrived in Oslo yesterday afternoon', the *Aftenposten* reported:

We have never seen anybody accept their success with such natural calmness as these two ladies. The fact that the journalists and other fans rained questions down on them did not affect them at all. They did not answer many of the questions. The small and beautiful Hilda Braskerud did not answer any at all. Good heavens—how good looking she is! However, Johanne Kolstad managed to make herself heard, saying that it was easy to perform a standing jump: 'I have done that since I was 6 years old' ... Gentlemen, you must excuse us, because for once the attention is on the women. (*Aftenposten*, 31 January 1931)

The two female jumpers visited the capital for the first time. According to the newspaper, an audience of 9000 watched the jumps. The next day, under the front page headline 'The ladies enjoyed success', the paper ran photographs of each girl jumping. The liberal *Dagbladet* had a photo on its front page of Crown Prince Olav and Crown Princess Marta with Kolstad, under the banner headline: 'No doubt, she looks like a crown princess'.

Johanne was able to compete in her own country while still a girl, but could not as an adult; such was the male-oriented hierarchy of sport at that time. Thus, 'tomboyism' was tolerated as long as the child remained prepubescent. The image of the tomboy can be tolerated only within a narrative of blossoming womanhood. Within such logic, tomboyism is seen as merely a resistance to adulthood itself, rather than as a legitimate form of adult femininity. Kolstad loved ski jumping, and therefore the USA presented an opportunity to continue her jumping career.

From 1933, Kolstad jumped in the USA during the ski season. She also jumped in Canada in 1938 and returned to Norway permanently in 1939, just before World War II. When interviewed about her experience in the USA, she was asked if she had any fear of jumping:

'No,' she said simply. Her manager told me afterward that he didn't believe Johanne knew what fear was. One of the ski jumpers added that probably she,

like most jumpers, had occasional attacks of 'ski fever' before a tournament, but that with most of them there was little nervousness at the actual time of the jump. (from Johanne Kolstad's private archive)

Johanne thrilled everyone, even the judges, with her beautiful skiing form and the smooth execution of her jumps. She was described as the queen of skis; the star of the ski; the ski rider; the dress hater; the girl who put men to shame; the flying Norsewoman; and the descendant of the Vikings.

New Boston Hill, the highest and steepest jump in the USA, was introduced in the 1936 season. Members of the New England Ski Club provided many breath-taking thrills on the hill. Johanne made a twin leap there with John Erkkila of Detroit, which was reported under the subtitle 'Thrilling double jump':

Added to the regular program yesterday was a thrilling twin jump by Miss Johanne Kolstad, women's world champion, and John Erkkila. With hands clasped together, the two showed great form and control in coming down the steep hill. They landed on the 167-foot marker, a long jump for a twin leap. (from Johanne Kolstad's private archive)

The Norwegian Ski Federation had a great opportunity to make women's ski jumping a success during the 1930s. In 1931, *Dagbladet* was in contact with 18 female ski jumpers. However, attempts to introduce female competition upset the men in power, who wanted the sport to remain a masculine domain. This anti-female attitude continued among the prominent male leaders of ski jumping for the next 60 years.

The Vikersund fight in 2004: Are women competent?

The first unofficial Norwegian junior female championship in ski jumping was held in 2000; the first official one took place in 2004.

On 11 February 2004, a front-page article in *Aftenposten* reported that Torbjørn Yggeseth, a Norwegian leader of the ski jumping committee of the Fédération Internationale de Ski (FIS), was purported to have said '... half of them jump, whereas the other half were doing something similar to sledding.' He reportedly gave this as the reason for unexpectedly denying women a chance to be 'test flyers' at the Norwegian Vikersund competitions on 8–9 March of the same year. Ski flying takes place in Norway on big jumps with a critical point (C-point) of 185 metres for men and 90 metres for women. Only at Vikersund can athletes fly as far as 185 metres. 'Test flying' is normally done by young men who are not yet qualified for FIS competitions in either ski jumping or ski flying. At that time, Anette Sagen was ranked as the best Norwegian female ski jumper. She and some of her ski jumping friends, including Line Jahr from Vikersund, were interviewed in different media during February. They confirmed that they wanted to test jump at Vikersund. Until the 'Yggeseth–Sagen debate' started, ski flying and ski jumping were considered an exclusively male preserve by many male sports leaders. [The FIS ski jumping committee excluded women from ordinary ski jumping competitions until 1998, and women are *still* not allowed to compete officially in ski flying.] An intense debate began in Norwegian papers, with the discourse centring on the question of equal rights. This is another example of friction between feminine and masculine constructs, and who has the power to decide whether others are competent.

Thus, in Norway in 2004, 'doing gender' for female athletes within the boundaries of the heterosexual norm meant playing handball and football, or competing in cross country skiing; ski jumping and ski flying were not part of the gender construct. Accordingly, Anette

Sagen and her ski flying friends were not engaging in what were regarded then as traditional female practices, despite, as we have discussed, a few Norwegian women competing in these sports since 1863. Such practices were considered marginal and not for 'real women'. Hence, since 2004, these young sportswomen have been attempting to build a new female gender construct. The classic asymmetrical power relationship in elite sport is evident in their struggle—the older male leader (Yggeseth) dominating the young female competitors (Sagen and other sportswomen).

PRACTICING GENDER EQUALITY: THE DISCOURSE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

In Norway in the 1970s, thanks largely to the women's movement, questions concerning gender equality became more prominent in the media. In 1973, the Proposal for a Gender Equality Act, a key pillar of what later became official Norwegian equal status policy, was introduced as one of the ten major planks of the Labour Party's election platform. The intention of the *Gender Equality Act 1978* was to promote equal income, workers' rights and educational opportunities, regardless of gender. However, family life and religious organisations outside the state church are not brought under this law's jurisdiction.

Unfortunately, the gender equality law constructs a very narrow picture of power. I believe that the remaining barriers to gender equality will be very difficult to change. An example is the imbalance in gender representation in leaders of, for example, the police service (98% men); private business and industry sectors (92% men); and voluntary organisations (73% men).

The current system of Norwegian politics is about 120 years old. The idea of equal rights derives historically from the idea of the free and rational individual. The Norwegian sport-specific discourse on equal rights dates from 1972 and the fight over the Holmenkollen relay.

We were unable to reveal the doxa (what is believed to be so natural that it goes without saying and discussion) before 1972. Although a few of us did not believe in the legitimacy of the status quo, it was, nevertheless, unthinkable for us to see ourselves as active agents who could change the traditions of the H-relay. In this sense, we were all subjected to the power of tradition because, although we wanted to participate in the contest, we were not invited, and felt unable to challenge the all-male rules (Lippe, von der, 2000, p. 184).

Ingrid Ellingsen and I ran illegally in the men's team in 1972. This was done as a protest, and it signalled that the time was ripe to include women in the relay. The women's run received huge media attention. Even today, this 'heresy' is rehashed by sports journalists, and 32 years later, the question of gender in ski jumping still arises: Does public opinion support the exclusion of women from the Vikersund competition? The answer to this formal question about gender equality seems simple. However, the discourse on gender equality in Norway has contributed to the notion that equality has already been achieved in this country and is, naturally, a matter of course; it is something we already have. In this context, gender equality is regarded as something all Norwegians, simply by being Norwegians, must support. In fact, Norwegian citizens believe Norway is a world leader in gender equality.

This belief was challenged by the ski flying controversy. According to *Dagbladet*, Anette Sagen has 'become the new face of feminism and the struggle for gender equality in Norway'. The debate became heated when, for example, the Sheriff of Modum, after

Yggeseth's about-face, threatened to stop the ski flying meet in Vikersund. The tension between the gender constructions of one of the 'old fogies' (Yggeseth) and the young, sexy Sagen created a tabloid tale about the skiing nation of Norway in 2004. The most intriguing part of the tale is that it was told by male editors and sports journalists writing for conservative newspapers such as *Aftenposten*.

Ski jumping in the Olympic Games?

This question was debated in most countries whose female ski jumpers hoped to take part in the Games competition. In 2009, women were allowed to compete in the World Cup. Consequently, people were optimistic that the sport would be included in the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. In fact, women's ski jumping was excluded on the grounds that competitor numbers were too low, and the standard of competition was not high enough. According to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), there were only 80 jumpers. However, the German scientist, Annette Hoffmann, showed that the correct number was 500. Furthermore, the IOC allowed entry into the Games of other winter sports with far fewer competitors: snow cross with 34 female athletes from 20 countries; bobsledding with 26 women from 13 countries; and ski cross with 30 women from 11 countries.

For me, the core issue here is still that of the new female gender construct versus the entrenched and outdated gender stereotypes of femininity and masculinity fiercely defended by old male leaders. With the new w-style of jumping, the biology of women gives them an advantage: they do not weigh as much as men and, therefore, their bodies are easier to launch into the air, and they can stay airborne longer. Therefore, if women have a much longer overrun before the jump, the best of them might even jump further than the best man's performance! During the World Cup in Oslo in 2011, the judges allowed the women only a little longer overrun than that of the men. Therefore, the jumps were not remarkable. The pressure on the IOC to include women had been growing since 2010. Finally, the Committee was forced to include women in the 2014 Games. This great and important barrier is now gone; however, as long as women do not compete in the same events as men, ski jumping remains, in some ways, a man's world.

Women's sports and women's position in society have made great steps forward since the end of the 19th century. But what about today's sports journalists? How do they portray male and female athletes and the current sports idols?

GENDERED NATIONAL TALES FROM THE SPORTS JOURNALISTS OF TODAY

I will now use two examples to illustrate how sports journalists portray female and male athletes: the first concerns the Swedish hurdler, Susanna Kallur; the second the Norwegian cross country skier, Petter Northug. Then we will look more generally at the various depictions of sexuality in sport.

Tears and feelings

Hurdler Susanna Kallur was the Swedish gold-medal hope at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Unfortunately, she stumbled at the first hurdle after a slow start in the semi-final. The popular idol had recorded many previous victories, among them gold in the Junior World Cup in 2000; gold in the indoor European Cup in 2005 and 2007; gold in the European Cup in 2006; and bronze in the World Cup in the same year. After the race, Susanna was

interviewed by the media. Here are two polarised ways in which the unfortunate elite athlete was interviewed.

The female Norwegian sports journalist, Line Andersen, talked compassionately with Susanna after the catastrophe. Notice how this journalist began the interview:

(soft voice): I feel enormous sympathy for you. I have been crying a little myself, although you must feel much worse than I do.

Contrast this sympathetic approach with that of the Swedish SVT reporter, Peter Jonsson, who was granted a long interview with Kallur directly after her short run:

Yes, you can see for yourself Susanna Kallur taking the first hurdle in an odd way. A very strange and pathetic exit from these Games.

Thus, the two journalists created the tone for their interviews. Here are some extracts from the Anderson interview:

Yes ... it is quite tough / What happened really? / I dived forward too much before taking the hurdle / I realise that it is extremely hard. Especially after Osaka last year when you missed out on a medal by a hundredth of a second and were the favourite for gold, and surely because of your preparations for this meet? / Yes, I have had ups and downs. / Tell me, what you are thinking and feeling right now? / What did you say? I do not understand Norwegian very good. / You cannot understand Norwegian very well (with great compassion). It is good that you can laugh a little. / Yes, yes, the margin between success and failure is very small. So, these things do happen. / Good luck. We sincerely hope that the margin will be on your side next time. / Yes, I hope so.

And from the Jonsson interview:

And you have hurt yourself as we can see. First, how are you? / Yes, I have only these blue marks, it is really okay. / We will check if we can replay the video. Is it possible to play it again in order for Susanna to have a look ... Here it is.

After looking at the replay and being asked how she felt about her performance, Kallur started to cry. The last shot from this interview showed Susanna putting her face in her hands as she left Jonsson. This is how a blogger, Panter-katten (The Panther), felt about the interview:

The tears would never stop, and neither would the interviewer. How is it possible for a reporter to act without empathy? To continue with stupid questions when he saw how upset she was, was a scandal. He wanted to see tears at any cost. Shame! So revolting!

The two introductions represent polarities in the styles of interviewing a vulnerable athlete. Several Swedes reacted negatively to the tough tactics of Jonsson, who did not agree with the criticism. In contrast, Andersen's style of sympathising with the athlete can be used as an example of a new, less intrusive kind of sports journalism.

The next story concerns the ritualised, masculine 'war on skis' between Norway and Sweden, in the context of Petter Northug against the Swedish skiers during the World Cup in Oslo, 2011.

'Sport is war': Masculine contests in skiing

Sport journalists tend to describe important competitions between countries using the metaphor 'sport is war.' This so-called war occurs mostly between male athletes and seems to be more important for smaller Norway than for bigger brother Sweden. Using sport as a yardstick for national identity is not helpful for international relations. The stereotypic media representations often define both one's own identity, and that of the 'Other.' International sporting competitions provide countless opportunities for the media to promote such representations. Because the language and practice of sport are easily understood, the social and political messages that emanate from sporting competitions have considerably more impact than the rhetoric of politicians or economists.

The creation of symbolic national identity involves comparisons with the Other, and such comparisons are often steeped in political events of historical importance. For example, Norway was occupied by Denmark for almost 400 years, until 1814. Denmark, as one of the defeated antagonists in the Napoleonic Wars (1799–1815) was forced to relinquish territory to Sweden. Thus, Norway came under the political influence of Sweden until 1905. This transfer of power, seen as humiliating by the subservient nations, affects the relationships between these three nations, notably in the realm of sport. Norway celebrates its victories over Denmark or Sweden, but even today, a loss to the Swedes is considered far worse than a loss to the Danes. Arguably, the sporting scenario that symbolically expresses the historical tension associated with the transfer of Norwegian territory after the Napoleonic Wars is for Sweden to lose, and lose decisively.

During the 2002 Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City, it was not uncommon to see headlines in *Dagbladet* such as '2920 days since Sweden won a gold medal in the Olympic Games.' Norwegian athletes began consistently winning medals, ending with a tally of thirteen gold, seven silver and six bronze medals, whereas Sweden had to settle for two silver and four bronze medals. *Dagbladet* featured a table called 'The Nordic Winter War' that showed the medal tallies of Norway, Sweden and Finland.

According to the Norwegian tabloid paper *VG (Verdens Gang; The Way of the World)*, skiers in Norway and Sweden have been fighting this war for over 50 years. Some of us remember the competitions between the Norwegian Hallgeir Brenden and the Swede Sixten Jernberg in the 1950s; Harald Grønningen and Asar Rönnlund in the 1960s; Oddvar Brå and Thomas Magnusson in the 1970s; Pål Gunnar Mikkelsplass and Gunde Svan in the 1980s; Bjørn Dæhlie and Torgny Mogren in the 1990s; and Thomas Alsgaard and Per Eloffson in the first decade of the 21st century. Since then, Petter Northug and Marcus Hellner have been the main protagonists.

We will look at the reporting in the Norwegian papers of the 4 x 10 kilometre relay on 4 March 2011 during the World Championship. The Norwegian team won the relay, with the Swedes taking the silver medal. Petter Northug (three gold medals) skied the last lap for the Norwegian team and Marcus Hellner the last for his team. Northug gained widespread international attention when he controversially crossed the finish line sideways after convincingly beating his opponents. This gesture was regarded by some foreigners as utterly disrespectful, most notably towards his fiercest rival, Marcus Hellner.

The front page headline of the biggest newspaper in Norway, *Aftenposten*, read, in Swedish: 'Degrading', 'A pig', 'Witch-hunt', 'Insult'. The introduction to the front-page photograph was:

It is boiling in Sweden after Petter Northug insulted the Swedes on the finish line. He was cheered by 100,000 people yesterday. (*Aftenposten*, 5 March 2011).

The picture shows Northug in profile standing just short of the finish line. Behind him, Hellner and the German, Tobias Angerer, are skiing towards the goal. Just before the finish line, Northug made a 45° turn, standing and waiting for Hellner in profile to provoke the Swede. Jonas Karlsson, a commentator on Swedish television muttered, 'He is a pig'. Marcus Leifby in *Aftonbladet* noted 'As I see it, he [Northug] is a great athlete—but a small sportsman'. The Swedish starter is reported to have said, 'It would have been cool if he had fallen'. The German team leader also criticised Northug's behaviour. Northug himself did not regret his actions: 'If the Swedes are crabby, then it is a double victory'. He added that it was arrogant of Hellner to cross the finish line on one ski during the sprint race, in which Northug took silver. 'It was not planned, it just happened.' However, Hellner did not seem too disturbed when asked by Norwegian sports journalists for his reaction. Neither did the other skiers from Sweden.

The debate and comments about Northug's finish came thick and fast. The sports commentator of *Aftenposten*, Bertil Valderhaug, produced this piece:

All this frustration comes from a [nation of] people who have the loud-mouthed footballer Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who have had the impudent high jumper Patrik Sjöberg, and who have learned to appreciate athletes who make a difference. Petter is no different from them, is he? He is only skiing's version of Zlatan. (*Aftenposten*, 5 March 2011).

High jumper, Patrick Sjöberg, is reported by the tabloid, *VG*, to have commented on Northug's finish as follows:

I am not a great fan of skiing and I did not watch the relay, but I have read a lot about what Northug did, and I think it was good. The sport needs athletes like this. I would have liked to compete against his type. (*VG*, 5 March 2011).

Here is another comment from the same paper on the same day by Sixten Jernberg:

It was a little provoking when Northug stopped on the line. Everyone must decide for themselves, but in my time, no one did things like that. I do not think it is appropriate to mock another athlete.

The tabloid *Dagbladet* ran with the headline on 5 March: 'The people love you, Petter'. The article began 'Sure Petter Northug is a pig—a young pig'. However, *Dagbladet's* poll was crystal clear: 78% of the (Norwegian) people answered 'no' to the question 'Do you dislike what Northug did at the finishing line?' This representative poll shows the importance for Norwegians of beating the Swedes. However, a well-known commentator for *Dagbladet*, Esten O. Sæther, wondered 'Who else besides Norwegians cares about another Norwegian relay victory?'

Such a media war could never have raged between female skiers such as the Norwegian Marit Bjørgen, and the Swede, Charlotte Kalla. It is purely a male discourse. The construct of these tales is historical, with both covert and overt textual references to earlier battles between both male politicians and male athletes. As already mentioned, skiing is regarded as the Norwegian national sport. Thus, male athletes still own the essential history of cross country skiing as a 'common culture' and 'collective experience'. These shared states are presumably established when men share an experience that deeply affects them; women are invited to participate only as audiences. The network of the masculine-dominated

exposure industry (the media sports editors and journalists, the national coaches and peak sports leaders, and the major sponsors) has created this discourse on ‘sport is war’. Thus, women are excluded. However, in this context, I do not promote equal rights: let the men own this discourse on war. Female athletes have their own discourse on their sports, *women’s sports*.

Sexualised stereotypes in sports journalism

First, let’s look at how sports journalists actually write—what terms and descriptions they tend to use. I will give some examples of the stereotypes used in sports journalism, some of which are taken for granted and thus interpreted as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’. Previously, I have labelled sports journalism a profession dominated by the masculine exposure industry. Only 8% of members of the Sports Journalists Federation are women. They represent a subgroup of journalists, producing sports commentary while surrounded by a cooperative network of prominent male sports leaders and male national coaches. Also included in this network are the sponsors. When the three groups in this ‘boys’ club’ agree on a particular topic, for example, their views on men’s and women’s football, the underlying stereotypes and assumptions are strengthened.

Next, we’ll look at the media attention currently focusing on the rules of beach volleyball and the consequences for two Norwegian athletes. Finally, I will discuss the new, complex, sexualised media portrayals of both sexes.

The language of sports journalism: A male tradition

Behind the philosophy of sports journalism lies a fundamental gender stereotype that forms the basis of sports language. The general term ‘sport’ is still usually associated with men’s sport, whereas sport for women is usually termed ‘women’s sport’. We read about *women’s* track and field, swimming, beach volleyball and football, whereas men’s competitions in the same sports are just called football, track and field, et cetera. Of course, language is created by human beings; there is nothing ‘natural’ about naming the different sports concepts, because people with the powers of definition for sport have a large and important impact on the official language. Now, however, bloggers writing about particular sports can contribute more easily to the sports vocabulary.

Language is not a neutral creation; it can inhibit our thoughts, affect our feelings and change our values. People make language live. Thus, sports journalists—mostly middle-aged men—produce their metaphors and special vocabularies, such as ‘sport is war’; male handball players are ‘colleagues’, while women are ‘friends’. Further, young female handball players have been described as ‘a bundle of charm’; are designated as ‘soon to be married’; and if they fail, they might be ‘stripped of confidence’ and have to be comforted. On the other hand, male handball players ‘fight like warriors’, and are described as ‘sacrificing their lives’ and ‘playing like cannons’ in important matches. These descriptions of men are especially prevalent in handball because, in Norway, it is still typically categorised as a sport for women. Journalists strive to avoid attributing so-called female traits to male players to protect their potency and masculinity.

The next examples are taken from football journalism, including the words of a former Norwegian male coach, Åge Hareide, that were reported in the sports media. Hareide has also distinguished himself through using terms related to female anatomy as swearwords.

In the autumn of 2004, the men’s national team had to beat Scotland to qualify for the World Championship finals in 2006. If the Norwegian players were to succeed, Hareide said, they

had to be a team of real men. 'We need to turn up in Glasgow with a bit of stubble,' Hareide said, adding that 'we may have to put aside our ambitions to be good-looking on the field ... To offer resistance at Hampden Park, to have a bit of rod, that is incredibly important.'

In Hareide's estimation, to play with a 'rod' distinguishes the men from the boys. On 9 September 2004, *Dagbladet* reported 'When asked by VG what he meant by the expression, Hareide explained that it's about inserting an iron rod through the body, from the neck to the balls. It makes you a bit stiff, but if you're still standing, you've got a rod.'

In many cultures and through many ages, masculine dominance has often been associated with a straight back. At the end of the 19th century, having a straight back was an ideal in sports such as cycling, rowing and ski jumping. 'Stand to attention!' is an important command in the army. Bourdieu shows how different ways of moving the body enforce masculine honour and feminine subservience; compare a straight-backed man with a confrontational stare and a woman with lowered head and soft posture. For Hareide, however, associations with a straight back are not enough. A year later, after the Norwegian defeat by the Czech Republic, he expanded on the idea that only 'real men' play 'real football'. In his opinion, the reason the Norwegian national team lost was that they didn't behave like real men. 'We were simply too girly at Ullevaal. We tiptoed around on high heels and allowed ourselves to be pushed around much too easily.' So the Norwegian team didn't lose because they were badly organised, lacked precision when passing the ball, or met a technically better opposition; they lost because they weren't manly enough! Or rather, they lost their masculinity when they lost the match. The greatest insult you can inflict on a loser is to de-genderise him by applying (supposedly) feminine attributes.

The Norwegian national men's team only managed a draw against Turkey on 15 August 2001. John Carew missed a penalty. Even worse, Tore André Flo shot over an open goal from 3 metres. *Dagbladet* ran this ironic heading in its sports section:

Now look, MISS NORWAY. This is a ball ... This is a goal ... You've gotta work the rest out for yourselves.

The first sex in sport may easily slide from heaven to hell if the loss is too great for the sports journalists to digest. More importantly from a gender perspective, if the disappointment is big enough, the metaphors of loss are feminine. Conversely, if a female footballer plays extremely well, like the Brazilian, Marta Vieira da Silva, five times winner of the FIFA World Player of the Year award, she is described by sports journalists as 'playing like a man'.

Elite female athletes compelled to wear revealing sportswear

Since the 1990s, the focus on the naked skin of athletes in general, and on that of women in particular, has increased in the sports coverage in the Norwegian tabloid media. More and more, the bodies of sportswomen are being sexualised.

The combination of elite sport and sexuality is very easy to market in a neo-liberalist, male-dominated exposure industry. Revealing sportswear was a hot theme in the Norwegian newspaper and television coverage of the 2004 Summer Olympic Games. The male leaders of the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) decided to designate women's sportswear under 'marketing guidelines'. Thus, wearing small bikinis or shorts less than 7 centimetres on the side seam became compulsory for women, and their tops are more low-cut than the men's tops. In contrast, the men are not allowed to show the skin on their backs or stomachs.

Volleyball audiences had plenty of female skin to ogle when the male photographers zoomed in on the buttocks of the players. The excuse offered for this behaviour was that, when one of the players is serving, the other signals with her fingers behind her buttocks the position to which she will move next. The economic profit to be gained by exploiting the bare skin of young female athletes is the likely driving force behind this dress code. Thus, sex appeal has become an intrinsic part of beach volleyball, and is both a cause and an effect of the gender construct in this sport. Women are confronted with a simple choice: either accept the dress code or stop competing in international meets like the Olympic Games. Kathrine Maaseide, one of the Norwegian beach volleyball players in the 2004 Games, is reported to have told VG that she did not think about the dress code. Her aim in these games was, of course, to play well; that was her only focus as an athlete in such an important competition. Surely, it is a paradox, however, that women in bikinis on the beach can claim to be harassed if photos of them are published without their consent, while in this sport women who compete for their country are required to be half naked.

Goffman used the theatre as a metaphor to understand human behaviour and experience. Actors meet the audience out front on the stage, whereas they prepare themselves backstage. Onstage, questions of dignity, decency, morality and respect for others are vital, in contrast to backstage. Aspects of our lives that once belonged and remained backstage (i.e. were private) are now, in many ways, onstage in full view, especially in sports journalism. According to the sociologist Richard Sennett, Western societies experience confusion between public and intimate life. In order to use female bodies to promote their sport, the FIVB has constructed a dress code that brings intimacy, in terms of half-naked athletes and personal feelings, into women's sports as a measure of success.

The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai postulates five dimensions of local–global cultural flows, according to their specific fields or ‘-scapes.’ Of these five, mediascapes (movement of information), financescapes (capital flows), ethnoscapes (movement of people) and ideoscapes (flows of ideas and ideals) are highly relevant in sport; in particular, international sports leaders present the semi-exposed female body in today's global mediascapes.

Let's now look at some recent illustrations of this concept in the sports arena.

‘Sporno’: The new sexualised portrayals of athletes in sports journalism

To date, porn is not accepted in traditional Norwegian sports journalism. In 2004, a promising young female cross country skier was depicted naked in 10 photos in the soft-porn magazine *Lek* in Norway. The article began: ‘— is the first top female athlete to undress in *Lek*. Now, we are hoping that the rest of the elite come forward as well’. The young athlete was shown naked in pornographic positions. Without her permission, the journalist created a fantasy story about her as an ‘active agent of love’. She was described as a ‘sexy talent of sport’.

What happened to the woman's potential talent after this episode? She wrote in her blog that she had received so many comments and questions that she became seriously depressed, and that she now regretted what she had done. In a discussion on NRK (the Norwegian Broadcasting Company) with Mayken Mangel, the female editor of the magazine, in December 2004, I repeated the statement the young woman had made on her blog. The editor replied that the athlete was stupid to regret her actions. The young ex-skier's response was also published in some of the national papers. Here is an excerpt from a VG article:

I have accepted the pictures, but not the text, she says. Yesterday, facsimiles of the pictures were published on several net papers ... / Why did you expose yourself like this? / I reflect on that now. Everything happened so quickly. They phoned me one day and the pictures were taken the following day. I believe that I did not really have time to think about what I was doing or the consequences of it ... I want to end this story ... / She wants to go all-out for cross country skiing, and her best result is fifth rank in the U23-World Cup. (VG, 1 December 2004).

The feature in the soft-porn magazine apparently had quite an impact on sponsors, sports leaders, sports journalists and female athletes. The young woman had stepped over an invisible, but mutually agreed, line. The distinction between porn and the sexualisation of athletes would remain. So far, this consensus view is holding in the world of women's sport in Norway.

Other types of self-representations, however, are apparently more fluid. The tabloid *Dagbladet* published a picture of a naked male football player from the Oslo Ski- og Fotballklubben Lyn (Ski and Football Club Lightning) on the front page and the back sports page. Some of the man's pubic hair was visible in the photo, a new form of self-representation in Norwegian sports journalism.

In international sports media, however, photos of international male sports idols depict the athletes in a mix of sporting and porn poses, which Mark Simpson calls 'sporno'. In his blog, he suggests that the sporting spirit of the victorious Italian national men's football team during the 2010 World Cup was not as important as their porno spirit:

In a spornographic age, it's no longer enough for the male body to be presented to us by consumerism as merely attractive, or desiring to be desired, as it was in the early days of nakedly narcissistic male metrosexuality. The masculine coquettishness, pleasing as it is, no longer offers an intense enough image. Or provokes enough lust. It is not very shocking or arousing any more. In fact, it's just too ... normal. To get our attention these days the sporting male body has to promise us nothing less than an immaculately groomed, waxed and pumped gang-bang in the showers. (Simpson, 2010; <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/show/474231>)

This is the opinion of the man who invented the term 'metrosexuality'. He seems to be describing a new order that is a few steps ahead of sports journalism in the Scandinavian countries. However, our male victors still manage to attract much attention on television and in magazines and papers, without a porno context—although the self-representation of the football player from Lyn almost qualifies as Simpson's post-metrosexual aesthetic.

In a neo-liberalistic, globalised world, all kinds of sexual expressions of both sexes may be considered products to be sold and sexually desired, with the message 'come and take me'. New aesthetics are also continually developing and being applied. Unchanging and old-fashioned depictions are associated with yesterday's outmoded history in an irresistible and hectic chase for continually new looks. According to Sennett, however, constructing life histories around the single theme of intimacy and personal feelings has proved a trap rather than a liberation.

CONCLUSION

For a long time, the history of women in society and in sport could be described with these keywords—women, nature and control—with the implication that feminine traits exist only in relation to masculine traits. Of course, the men in power described the reality as they saw it.

Female athletes were not regarded as active agents in the sports arena because their cultural capital was disregarded. Consequently, the sporting female was usually accepted only if she became an object of beauty and grace, according to the 'nature' of women of the time. Even today, traits traditionally ascribed to men, such as mental toughness and muscular strength, can produce ambivalence and unease and challenge the accepted notion of femininity when ascribed to women. However, beliefs about what are feminine and masculine traits and characteristics have now been widened, and the dualistic attitude discussed at the beginning of this text has, in many ways, been relegated to history in Western culture.

We have also seen that constructions of gender in sport depend on time, place, culture, tradition, upbringing and the particular sport in question. When Swedish and Danish women were able to compete in national championships before the Norwegians, elements from all these factors were relevant, as in the entry of women into the sports of handball and cross country skiing. That handball was simultaneously regarded as a typically masculine sport in Sweden and as a feminine sport in Norway illustrates national and cultural impacts. This view contrasts with that of biological reductionism: the idea that gender differences can be understood purely in terms of biology. As an example, in Norway the physically weaker sex—not the stronger, faster sex—has dominated, and continues to dominate, representations of handball in the media. Female ski jumping, the last sport to attain Olympic status, also proved problematic for the leaders of the IOC.

However, the sport that still evokes connotations of masculinity in all the Scandinavian countries is football. This attitude is reinforced, almost daily, by the male-dominated profession of sports journalism. Thus, men are still definitely the first sex in football in the Scandinavian countries, and in the rest of Europe. The dominant football habitus is the male body—the code is definitely not a secret. We have seen that female metaphors are used when the losses of the men's teams are disappointing, and how a female football player who was five times acclaimed the best in the world 'plays like a man'. It appears that sports journalism is based on the tenets of biological reductionism: men are stronger and faster than women, and therefore are more important and deserve more attention. These biological characteristics are, of course, real, but the consequences of relying only on these facts are unbalanced social and cultural power relationships and, in the world of sport, more money and better media representation for men. These consequences are often legitimised as neutral truths that function, in the language of Bourdieu, as a huge symbolic machine that perpetuates the masculine social order of elite sport as a matter of course. This machine assumes an enormous invisible power when people do not reflect critically on the status quo and unthinkingly accept it as the objective truth.

According to Sennett, impersonal practices and issues do not arouse much passion. The sexualised bodies of athletes portrayed in the media represent attributes of the athletes' personal state of being, rather than representing their acts of sporting prowess. Sennett sees such representations as essentially isolated from the sexual experience of a person, as illustrated clearly by the example of the young female cross country skier in the soft-porn magazine; the editor invented a fantasy about her sexual activities in an attempt to connect the depiction and the reality. Any previous boundaries between the private world of feelings and the public arena seem to have disappeared in the borderless, free-floating mediascape in the globalised world of today. Sports idols of both sexes are extremely popular with the public, and are often the targets of the journalists' hunt for authenticity. Thus, Goffman's term, backstage, is relevant to the sexualised representations of the bodies of these idols. In the sports media of Norway and the other Scandinavian countries, however, the border between sport and porn is still apparent, in contrast to Simpson's 'sporno'.

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