Läsinstruktioner

Detta är en text som ska ingå i Sport in Society’s special edition *Sex integration in sport and physical culture*.

**Jag har 4000 ord inklusive referenser att arbeta med.** Jag har alltså inte samma utrymme som brukligt. Texten ska ingå i en sektion i tidskriften redaktören kallar ”research insights”, vilket innebär att den har samma upplägg som en artikel men snarare ska: ”focuses on highlighting important issues involved in your research rather than comprehensively attempting to resolve them” (redaktörens instruktion).

**Texten är en första version.** Språket kan därmed lämnas därhän för tillfället.

**Analysen är enbart påbörjad.** Den ska komprimeras och kompletteras med teori och andra perspektiv. Det som är inkluderat nu, är vad jag hittills valt att utgå från ur mitt material.

Det finns en del upprepningar i de olika analystemana, som jag ska disponera bättre.

**Alla synpunkter är välkomna, men utgå från de villkor jag har att ta hänsyn till.**

Väl mött!

Marie
Transgressing hierarchies of gender? Adolescents playing floorball in School Sport

Marie Larneby

I am in a sports hall. Approximately twenty adolescents are running around, each with a floorball stick in their hands. I hear balls bouncing, shoe soles grinding and sticks irregularly touching the floor. The adolescents are skillfully controlling the seemingly uncontrollable small balls with their sticks. It is a pass-and-shoot exercise. A player passes a ball across the pitch to another player who comes running towards the goal. His pass is hard and distinct. The receiver controls the ball with the blade of her stick. She dribbles at high speed and shoots towards the goal. It is a hard shot. The goalkeeper can’t keep the ball outside his goalposts. She scores, the coach comments by shouting “great shot, Alice!” Rather indifferent, she runs to the other side of the pitch, places last in a new line. The boy who passed before now runs in front of the goal, awaiting a pass. Instead of receiving and dribbling the ball, he shoots directly. The goalkeeper saves. The shooter shouts “cunt!” and furiously beats his stick on the floor and sullenly walks across the pitch to his line. A new pass, another shot. Speed, accuracy and focus. A whistle breaks the intensity and the players gather the scattered balls.

(Field notes, October 2014).

This is a description of a typical School Sport floorball lesson at a secondary school in Sweden, with students from 7th to 9th grade. They are accepted at this particular school with the objective to develop their athletic skills, alongside reaching general educative goals. The students described above are enrolled in floorball. They form a mixed-sex group in school, in contrast to leisure time, where boys and girls play separately. The aim of this article is to explore and discuss how gender is constructed and displayed in a mixed-sex student group within School Sport floorball. The questions to be discussed are: How is gender manifested by the students in the School Sport floorball context? How do they manage notions of gender in sport?

Previous research

Usually, competitive sports in Sweden are organized during leisure time in sport clubs, and not during school hours. However, School Sport is often a copy of competitive sports, and an optional subject in addition to compulsory physical education. Since the 1990s, the interest to choose this educational profile has increased, as approximately 10 percent of Swedish students participate in some form of School Sport from 7th grade. Hence, School Sport as an educative concept challenges the traditional organization of sport in Sweden (Ferry, 2014).
Furthermore, during leisure time sport, girls and boys are organized separately. According to the Swedish sport federation policy document *Sport wants!* (2009), boys and girls should do sports separately from adolescence, due to differences of sex.

Scholars claim it is problematic to talk of gender and sport since one of sport’s logics is the division of men and women (cf. Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). Boys and men are often favored in sports, as sport still is “a space that is actively constructed by and for men” (Messner, p. xviii, 2002), although girls and women participate successfully and in high numbers. According to Connell (2005), sport functions as a symbolic proof of men’s superiority and their right to rule, and where men’s strength and success is cherished. Messner (2002) and Adams et.al (2010) argue that boys and young men, especially in team sports, are socialized into a hypermasculinity. However, Anderson (2014) argue that not only female athletes and femininities are marginalized due to the notion of sport and hypermasculinity, but also boys and men, as this notion conforms and excludes rather than differentiates and includes. Steinfeldt et.al (2011) and Krane et.al. (2004) discuss that female athletes live a paradox of negotiating the societal standards of femininity with a drive for muscularity needed in sports. Since muscles traditionally are related to men and masculinity, muscularity blurs societal gender ideologies. Yet, by using feminine attributes during sport performance, women can be athletic and using masculine attributes without performing masculinity (Krane et.al. 2004). Azzarito (2010) discuss how sport is used in contemporary western society as a site of transformation and resistance for girls, producing new images of girls and femininity. The *Future Girl* and *Alpha Girl* represents new ideals and femininities, as participation in sports construct girls to be athletic and strong, believing they have “the same opportunities that men have in society, in education and sport” (Azzarito, p 266, 2010).

**Theoretical framework**

Insights from the theory *inclusive masculinity* (Anderson, 2009), referring to a changing nature of masculinities, is used to analyze this floorball group. It is developed from Anderson’s ethnographies, mainly including university-aged male athletes. The theory originates from why men, masculinity, heterosexuality and sports are strongly related in the first place. In times of high homophobia, especially team sports have “influenced boys and men to develop a narrow sense of heteromasculinity” (Anderson, p. 14, 2014), as a means to enhance the need of a homosocial institution. Anderson’s theory is a response to Connell’s (2005) theory, arguing that men who express a hegemonic masculinity dominate other men and masculinities, but also femininities and women. Anderson argue that this perception of
gender is not applicable to the same extent in contemporary society, since new generations have different views on society, identity and sexuality (2014).

Anderson (2009, 2014) claims there is a change from homophobic attitudes enhancing heterosexuality towards a more inclusive view on masculinities, femininities and sexualities. This change is taking place in some sport contexts. It doesn’t mean that homophobia don’t exist in the world of sports anymore, but as homophobia diminishes, hyper/heteromasculinity is just one but many masculinities accepted in sport.

An inclusive culture reduces the hierarchization between men and various masculinities, as well as it acknowledges femininities, women and various sexualities (Anderson, 2009). This statement is the main reason I use this theory. However, it is not without problem, since the theory is based on findings from a narrow target group: young male athletes in college/university. It doesn’t focus neither female athletes nor femininities. Is it applicable at a mixed-sex context? Are younger male athletes acknowledging different masculinities and female athletes in this School Sport context? My ambition is to test how this theory can be used to discuss gender constructions in general, and not only in relation to masculinity. What I can identify is if, and to what degree, the floorball group is an inclusive sports culture or not, and how this is manifested.

Methodology
An ethnographic approach is used to be able to get hold of the adolescents’ voices, attitudes, conscious and unconscious ways of displaying, constructing and negotiating gender in sport (Ennis & Chen, 2012). By combining observations and interviews, my ambition is to identify the intersection between what I see and what the students tell me. The discussion is based on field notes from ten floorball lessons (90 minutes each), conducted during March, October and November 2014. Three interviews with seven students from 8th grade took place in October and November 2014, at a total of three hours. Interviewing the students the way they suggested – one boy individually, four boys in one group and two girls in one – is motivated by the fact that I wanted to give them agency (Ennis & Chen, 2012).

When analyzing the field notes, I notice I have drawn experience from my own athletic experiences. Being a soccer player, a sport with similar characteristics as floorball – controlling the ball, body contact, and tactics of the game – is very evident in my field notes. It influences what I see, what I don’t see, how I understand and interpret it. Hence, in the analysis I discuss postures and motion, inspired by Young’s (2005) reasoning of how and why men and women move differently. TO BE DEVELOPED
Analysis

When combining field notes and interview transcripts, I have identified similarities and differences in what the students say and what they do. Overall, it can be concluded that I put emphasis on individual similarities, but the students mostly talk of differences between them as boys and girls. This is an important finding, as the intersection of various data provides a more nuanced perception of the students’ daily context. I have identified four recurrent themes I discuss in relation to construction of gender in this group: playing floorball in school, skills, different use of power and various displays of gender. I use Young’s (2005) arguments and Anderson’s (2009, 2014) theory of inclusive masculinity to analyze the data.

THIS IS NOT YET INTEGRATED IN THE TEXT

Playing floorball in school

The floorball group consists of approximately 25 students, 13 to 16 years old. My impression is that they enjoy playing floorball. However, the sport lessons is like any subject, sometimes they don’t focus at the specific task, and the coaches calls for better attention and concentration. “Accuracy and focus!” and “you have chosen to be here” are phrases frequently used. In contrast to other lessons I have attended, like math or history, I experience a sense of unity in the sports hall. When asking them what it is like being a student at this school, all seven agree it is the best educative situation for athletes: “It is fun”, “it is a pause from other school work”, “a possibility to develop further”, “doing what you love the most” and “doing it with others with the same ambitions”. However, this is where the commonalities end. I ask what it is like to play floorball in school, and they primarily talk about what it is like to play with the other sex. The two girls, Anna and Alice reply: “It is good in some way. But before, last year, the boys offended us more than now”. I asked them to clarify this:

Anna: Because we are girls and inferior compared to them.
Alice: It was kind of… ‘Oh no, I got on the same team as Alice, we’re going to lose’.
Anna: And they said it out aloud, directly to us!
Alice: Yes. And mostly the 9th graders. They are the worst.

(Interview, October 2014).

This is what they told me first, indicating it is of significance to them. I will come back to this.

The girls also talk about advantages playing in school. Since they are the best players in their team during leisure time, they feel that their development is more progressive in school as everyone has a high and more homogenous level of skills. They think it is good playing
with older students, but first and foremost, they underline it is good for them playing with boys.

Asking the four boys what it is like playing floorball in school, they initially say that boys and girls should play separately, like during leisure time. When I ask why, Daniel says it would have been a “little better”, but he directly changes his mind saying that boys need girls:

Daniel: Because girls’ knowledge can also be better. They need us and we need them. They can learn from us and we can learn from some of them [...]. Girls have less ego, I think. They pass the ball a little more. And we have a little better tactical understanding.
Paul: Boys maybe think they have a greater role. Some think they are better than girls… Just because you are a boy.
Marie: Why do you think it is like that?
Tom: Because boys are supposed to do sports, I think that is why.

(Interview, November 2014).

The opinion that boys and girls should play separately seems to be these boys’ default position. In contrast, Peter, who was interviewed individually, says it is good practicing together, regardless of age and sex. He talks of differences between boys and girls as positive, as he learn various ways in solving occurring situations. He thinks it is an “evenly matched group”.

Daniel’s way to state that boys can learn from some girls, can be explained as a way to hold the default position boys-are-better-than-girls, simultaneously acknowledging girls. However, the default position is disturbed, as the other three in unison confirms Daniel saying “you don’t think of it when you play. In some way it is like playing with lots of boys because you are used to it, you forget that you actually play with girls.” Carl adds, that he “perceives them as boys”. Daniel replies: “Exactly! When I practice, being focused, I don’t think of that I play with girls”. Peter is the only one of the students that doesn’t differentiate boys and girls, rather, he talks of individual skills and attributes.

Although the student’s description differ to some extent, the culture of this group can be described as balancing between including and excluding. The five boys acknowledge the girls in general, but their default position is to play separately. The girls don’t always feel acknowledged and included, but they choose to continue, since playing with boys progresses their skills. NOT DONE

Skills

In general, the level of skill is similar and with a high quality. It is a homogenous group, regardless of the students’ age and sex. Yet, looking closer at how they move on the pitch,
focusing details, when the students act dissimilar, I identify two ways of difference: Most of the boys alter between keeping a high pace and being quite indifferent, regardless if it is an exercise or play, and of the opponent’s sex or age. All the girls, in contrast, always act focused. Following field note describes when I look closer at the girls’ movements:

All movements are distinct, to the fullest, the running, the passing, the shooting. It is always full speed towards another player. However, when playing in teams, I sometimes see differences in the approach towards some of the boys. When this occur, it looks like she doesn’t expect being able to dribble past him, or to break his attempt to dribble past her. This is manifested as a barely visible hesitation, a change in her posture. (Field notes, March 2014).

Although this situation doesn’t occur very often, it clearly diverge from the girls’ usual ways to act, move and play. It appears as the girls in these situations consciously let the boys get past. I have written a why? in my field notes. Could it be to not risk getting their speed and bodyweight against themselves, or to not be totally over-played? Discuss Young!

In the interviews, I get an answer when the students talk of skills. Peter explains that “boys go more into clinches, it is visible. And the girls solve it by dribbling past you. It is fun playing with them too, so you get to see what differences there are”. Could the fact that boys go more into clinches be the answer to why some girls hesitate in some situations?

Through the interviews, I learn that this hesitation can be explained by expectations on girls in sport. Anna and Alice think boys are better than girls, saying they don’t want to admit it. As a sporting girl, you have to accept the differences, but not the way differences are valued. They tell me that they respect the boys too much, especially the 9th graders, partly due to their better skills, partly due to their way to dominate the common space (which I return to later). This confirms my reflection of why some girls seem to reduce their skills in clinches with some of the boys. Simultaneously, the girls benefit on differences in skills, since it develops them. They also say, they don’t think the boys develop as much as the girls in this group. Not done.

**Different use of power** So far mostly from the interview with the girls

As stated above, differences in skills are not big. Despite this, skills seem to be an important way for these students to relate to each other and exercise power. During my observations, I often wonder why some boys get to dominate the common space and why all but one girl
seem to reduce themselves on the pitch on the behalf of this domination. Anna’s and Alice’s feel that they are patronized because they are girls. They tell of the different ways they are subordinated. It is mostly expressed in terms of skills, they say there is not much room for failing. If they do, they sometimes get comments of not being “good enough”. This is also discussed among the four boys. They say, it is easy getting irritated at an inferior player if it misses a pass, expressing a frustrated sigh or “focus!” When an equally or superior skilled player misses, it is encouraged with “it’s OK, come on!” Daniel says the frustration is often directed to girls, “not to be mean, but some of them are worse than other in the group”. It is something they don’t think of, in the heat of the play. The other ones agree. However, Peter says that there are much room for trial and error in the group, “that is why we are here, to practice and develop”. I ask Anna and Alice why they think some of the boys say and do stuff like this. They believe it’s because the boys don’t know how to handle the girls’ ability to play. “We can also play and they know how much we have developed”. Anna and Alice believe that when differences in skills and failings DO occur, the patronizing is a way for some of the boys to express the expectation that boys should be better than girls in sports. This is one way to use power for some of the boys. However, it is not that powerful. As a way to resist this, using the power they can, Anna and Alice are striving to develop their skills even more.

Anna and Alice witness of more ways to get marginalized:

Alice: They give us sexist comments, too. Right on the pitch! They comment on our bodies. For real! Like, ‘your ass is too big’ or ‘your ass is too small’. 
Anna: Mmm. But not to the girls in the 9th grade.

(Interview, October 2014).

This is a different exercise of power that the girls are unable to defend themselves against. Using their athletic capital to counter the patronizing due to skills works fairly well. But the sexist comments has got nothing to do with them being floorball players, but are directed towards them as women and objects. I haven’t asked these boys about the comments, what they mean by it. But Anna’s and Alice’s subjective experience of the comments is their reality and what deal with in this context. Alice says she know she should tell them to stop, but she resigns: “why should I talk back? I stand here alone and has nothing to talk back for”. It indicates an awareness of the exercise of power, but Anna and Alice (the only girls from 8th grade) don’t know how to handle it, other than not attending the lessons if the other girl isn’t there. “I don’t dare to go alone when the 9th graders are there”.
At a first glance, it appears that the 9th grade boys have succeeded in their exercise of power. However, it can be interpreted the other way around: they choose not to tell their coach or the principal of the sexist comments, being afraid that boys and girls might be separated. It indicates the girls’ awareness of the severity of sexist. Instead, they try turn to the situation to their favor, staying in the group, progressing as floorball players. They use the older boys’ skills: “It just makes us good, having them at the lessons. You learn in a different way, another speed. Another technique. It is much more serious”. This is how I interpret these girls exercising power – by developing their skills.

It is a different use of power, but can be contrasted to how some of the boys exercise power by sexist comments and patronizing inferior skills. Anna and Alice believe that many boys feel a threat to their own predominant position as sporting boys. Thus, it seems like Anna and Alice actively choose the advantages of this group composition and choose to put up with the disadvantages.

Another possible explanation why the girls seem to accept this exercise of power, is that they don’t know another context. They are angry because they know it is wrong getting harassed and being patronized. It as if they want to be a part of this context, they need to put up with being undervalued in various ways. They resist through their skills, and the essence of their story to me, is that no one can take that away from them.

Displays of gender

Discussion
References


Steinfeldt et.al 2011, Muscularity beleifs of female college student-athletes, Sex Roles, 64, p. 543-554.
