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Sport and "trans" - an overview from a German perspective

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Hello to you all. First of all I would like to thank you and WHRC very much for the invitation to speak and also thank you for the excellent preparation.

Additionally, as co-organiser of the Lesbian Spring Gathering 2021, I would like to thank you again for the great support, which came about not least through our speaking opportunity at the WHRC, and which made it the online LFT2021 very successful despite the massive campaign against us in Germany because of alleged transphobia.

I want to talk about the development and impact of "trans" in sport for girls, women and lesbians, especially in Germany. To mention only a few affected areas, these are:

- School sports
- competitive and high performance sport
- recreational sport - which in a broad sense also includes the long tradition of women's swimming pools and women's saunas.
- Rehabilitation and disabled sports
- LGBTIQ* sports contexts
- Women's sports research with all disciplines (including medicine, training science and didactics) and the policies of large sports associations, including federal policies, also in an international context.

Sport in general

While the one hand, each of these areas have had their own long history and their own independent progress, we can these days see a rapid development in very many places - often wrapped in subclauses, subordinate sentences, in which the idea of an innate gender identity is being packaged into the demand for acceptance and the full integration of lesbians and gays, in evermore colourful ways. This also affects laws and regulations, suggestions or directives regarding the implementation of such demands, and party political programmes. These developments are often led by women in sports or women's associations, and by women professors in academia and in gender institutes doing research on sports or on health (both academic areas originally fought for by and through women's studies). Some of these associations and academic institutions were originally rather autonomously feminist but have now developed in the direction of queer feminism since around the mid-1990s. Today, their research and teaching increasingly focusses on "trans" and LGBTIQ*. The L, if researched at all, is always denoted as "queer" and therefore as cis and transgender. Particularly in LGBTIQ* studies, women as a sex are virtually absent and linguistically speaking, literally absent. This means, for example: the contradiction that every female competitive athlete still has to endure within our societies, i.e. on the one hand to train and fight with so-called masculine values in

order to be able to achieve success, and on the other hand to be binarily constricted by newly narrowed down images of women's bodies, is no longer researched, transformed into political demands and solved in women's and lesbians' sports, but blurred into "all women". Today, female football players, including most lesbians, usually have long hair and appear - to put it rather bluntly - frighteningly uniform. I would have questions about this, e.g. about role and body images. I find these questions rarely if ever asked or addressed in gender sports research. At the same time the demands made via the term "intersectionality" often do not even meet the minimum criteria of scientific research.

As of today, there is no "outed" trans woman in German high profile competitive sport, but this will not be long in coming after an "outing" in Switzerland last week. The pushing by the trans associations together with the Greens, the Left (that is a party in Germany) and also the FDP (i.e. the liberals) is currently omnipresent in Germany and is increasingly having an effect on all areas of sport, without the conditions for women and girls having improved in any way.

Thus, even the basic problems of alarmingly high numbers of sick, overweight and underweight, depressed, autistic, allergic children and adolescents are not specifically and topically being addressed by gender sports research. Developments in this area are not yet clear or foreseeable, nor has the impact been considered of the adamant demands by trans associations to have the German Constitution, i.e. the Basic Law amended to include Self-ID. What we have is increasingly helpless parents, new brochures and children's books about "my trans child". This plays into the hands of right-wing groups in all of these areas, at all levels and at the same time.

School and sport

On the situation of "trans" in German school sport, here's a quote from an official brochure for pupils in NRW, 2020:

"For some trans* young people - not for all - school sport constitutes a psychological and emotional burden. Some trans* pupils do not take part in sports lessons due to a high level of distress. **This distress, also called dysphoria**, refers to the discomfort or rejection of one's own body or parts of the body that are perceived as not fitting **one's own gender** (emphasis added by the author's note). As sport/ P.E. – physical education – is the most physical subject in school, it is essential that doctors' or medical certificates excusing pupils from participation are accepted and alternative tasks discussed." (In: Trans and School, ed. by Schlau, 2020)

This sheds a clear light on the entire dilemma posed here. Distress becomes "dysphoria". A term that is in itself clearly defined in trauma research and therapy is now redefined in a subordinate clause. One's "own gender" is separated from any biology. Moreover, this tends to reject the therapeutic healing power of physical exercise, of body movement – society would

rather a certificate. Yet physical education, that needs to be good, that needs to be well done, could and should be so important.

In Germany, there is a massive increase in non-binary and queer* girls. On the one hand, I take a positive view of this, as a way to partially get out of the currently and newly narrowed binary role-body images and restricted options for action, but on the other hand, many of them, also because they want to be modern and committed to progress, end up on the "transtrain" - currently an estimated 15-20%. The newspapers - online and print - are full of daily reports about so-called transkids. We cannot yet estimate the specific effects of all of this on sports in general and in all areas. Unlike in Spain, for example, women's sports associations of federations have until now not expressed any criticism or concern. I suspect that many are not even aware of the problem or the scale of the problem.

In fact, this development is promoted and networked into associations and universities by the largest German and also largest European LGBTQ sports association, based in Berlin, an association called: Seitenwechsel - Sportverein für FrauenLesbenTrans*Inter* und Mädchen e.V., (Changing sides – registered sports club for women, lesbians, trans, inter and girls), which is now a queerfeminist association. I co-founded it in 1988 together with ten other lesbians as the women's, lesbians', girls' sport association; the FrauenLesbenMädchen-Sportverein. For a long time, the association developed impressively, also internationally, for participation in lesbian and gay sports games (e.g. the Gay and EuroGames), and designed many approaches for lesbian women's and especially for girls' sports. This association has now been queer* for several years. Lesbian groups without trans are no longer possible. Trans men/women or non-binary, queer* - persons - (not "women") coach professionally in all sections – introductory pronoun rounds are the order of the day. Personally, the board has remained constant: one of the co-founders and still serving board members, has moved from being a lesbian to openly appearing as trans for a few years. I only faintly and rudimentarily discern any remnants of feminist sport and movement culture.

GayGames and other lesbian sports

Based on the concept of the Olympic Games, but with much more open performance categories, the Gay Games were well on the way to achieving parity between lesbians and gays and also to partially breaking traditional roles and regulations. I remember four example a pair of women the UK dancing as partners in Partner Dance at the Sydney Games in 2002. One of them was heavy in a good sense, and very charismatic in her presence. Both women constantly and beautifully switched leading roles. It was a delight to nurture: RolePlay and taking space, sensual, erotic in the most beautiful sense without sexualisation.

Many lesbians who took part in these games in the past and around that time tell us about their empowering experiences. These days, the Gay Games have become "open to all" and trans is also taking up more and more space. This is being supported by the relevant associations.

Lesbian groups are seriously impacted. During the European Lesbian*Conference 2017 in Vienna, young lesbians from Cyprus and another country reported how their small, well-functioning lesbian groups were fundamentally being roughed up by trans women, that these were tremendously aggressive and that the lesbians were leaving the groups in frustration. The international sports federation has not responded to the speakers or to my specific questions here. The regulations on membership are increasingly being modified in all areas.

Feminist Sport and Exercise Culture - an outline.

As a girl I wanted spatial freedom, and I was lucky to be allowed quite a lot of support from my parents, but I hated everything cliché girly, especially the swimming costumes, and as a teenager, for whom the word "lesbian" didn't even exist, there were also times I hated my body, especially my breasts. My salvation was sport and volleyball which in 1967 in West Germany was almost unknown and gender- / sex-neutral.

It is not by chance that I became a qualified sports teacher and movement therapist and have been working in very different areas since the end of the 1970s, neither is it by chance that I founded the Feminist Sport and Movement Culture in Practice and Theory in West Berlin and West Germany in 1982. The first officially named lesbian sports group in Germany was founded in 1982, initiated by a Turkish lesbian whose school sports experiences had left a lot to be desired, and who was a member in our autonomous lesbian project.

Throughout my studies I was interested in alternatives, other approaches to conventional sport and physical education. My interest was informed, among other things, by engagement with approaches of the reform pedagogical movements of the 1920s as well as with a feminist analysis of the origins of "German gymnastics", created by a German pedagogue F.L. Jahn as far back as 1811 – the feminist analysis of what has actually become of his ideas for women or also: what they could be turned into. Forms of exercise that were revolutionary for soldiers at the time later became equipment installed everywhere with set standards of movement, performance and posture grades: the tree trunk crossing a stream became the balance beam in gymnastics – to many girls a horror instrument. A wall to be climbed over became an empty, regular box, a tree became a climbing frame, etc. Depending on sports policy and often individual luck, girls found positive experiences or not. There were always the supposedly good and the supposedly bad at sport. This alone is already a separation of women and a separation from our bodies par excellence.

How many girls can't throw! Not because they can't "by nature", but because they don't learn the technique. If I can't throw and catch well, this affects my perception, my ability to move in space and, if necessary, to defend myself, which always has direct or indirect effects on my body feeling and body awareness.

The questions are and have been: how can I develop genuine alternatives despite physical handicaps/disabilities and illnesses that are not just some form of rehabilitation? What are the chances and the limitations in both competitive and recreational sport, in sports as a school subject, for and with women with disabilities? How are lesbian approaches different, sometimes seemingly contrary to those of and for other women?

Sport as a word from Latin first taken as a term for English football as a game of rules played by men, means from the root word *desportare* to feel good, to enjoy oneself. This is an important root for doing both sport and movement research in history and the present - this interdisciplinary and intercultural. Which rules apply, how and why, who sets them - which ones have I internalised in such a way that I don't even know their rule, so I can't deny them. There is already the connection to everyday life and the new discovery of space and time. The many experiences of violence, and of sexual and sexualised violence in particular, were incorporated early on into feminist sport and movement culture research and into broad practice in the 1980s, and by no means only in self-defence.

Girls knowing their potential as well as their vulnerabilities and being strengthened from an early age leads to significant individual as well as collective political effectiveness. Time and again, we have discovered performance abilities that conventional sports science does not consider possible. This also means that there is still a cross-generational knowledge of women's bodies that does not appear at all in research.

In queerfeminist sports research, the deconstructed women's body is dissolved to the point of non-existence in the genderless identitarian "queer". Ancient body knowledge - including, for example, around menstruation and pregnancy/birth - is once again erased. To put it wickedly: there are binders and mastectomies instead of positive female bodily experiences while climbing trees and jumping over railings or spirally deflecting attacks or playing ball, while dancing or canoeing or massaging together.

Outlook with insight

Interestingly, a new development started in the late 1980s to mid-1990s when women in sport became stronger and also stronger worldwide. One record after the next was set and more and more girls in countries of the global south got access to sport. It is striking that "trans" arrived in sports together with queer research taking place, at a moment when women were becoming stronger and leaving many good men behind (Griffith Joyner/ Martina Navratilova) and that this happened at the same time when an independent feminist form of sports and its approaches developed right into universities.

In my view, we need to develop a new autonomous feminist research as well as practice in sport – we didn't call our approach Feminist Sport and Movement Culture for nothing. I see the danger that by arguing against the abolition of girls'-women'-lesbians' spaces not least in the field of sport, we ourselves get stuck in too narrow research criteria and make women the weaker sex again. Our own research criteria and questions would also have to be reviewed. I think it is important to build up new spaces or to reclaim old ones. There is enough material and knowledge: it just needs to be used.

Selection of literature

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