

**‘We should also have a chance to
be included.’**

Disability, Gender and Physical Education

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Doctoral thesis:

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(2012)

*'Like everyone else'
Gender, functionality
and sporting bodies*

Aim

To explore how young, sporting women with physical impairments experience physical education.

Research Questions

- How do the young women handle the two subject positions that emerge as a result of them being viewed, on the one hand, as deviant – the disabled body – and, on the other hand, is viewed as accomplished – the sporting body?
- Which strategies of resistance do they develop
- Which forms of femininity are available to them?

Phenomenology

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir,
Toril Moi, Sara Ahmed

- We experience the world through the body
- What kind of body I have influence how I experience the world, and how people interact with me
- The experiences sediment in the body

Phenomenology

de Beauvoir:

- The individual has a potential to become an acting subject.
- Can be limited by other actors or structural power relations.
- Men are regarded as subjects, women are socially constructed as the Other.

Methods and materials

- Participating observations
- Ten qualitative in-depth interviews with young women between 15-28 years old
- Three video diaries
- Sledge hockey, wheelchair basketball, table tennis and horseback riding



Analysis

1. The context: three general themes
2. Their experiences of exclusion during lessons in PE

General themes

1: Being normal and independent

[I had] a completely ordinary childhood, like everyone else. [...] My parents treated me just like they treated my siblings. I should help myself.

Hanna, 25 years, interview

General themes

2: Being capable, independent, strong

Then they came to adjust our home. It was a lot of wall-to-wall carpet at that time. "We will change them to parquet floor". My father said: "No, no, no, no! She shall fight! She has to fight to make her way." I got really strong arms. Until fifth or sixth grade I beat all the boys in my class in arm wrestling.

Felicia, 28 years, interview

General themes

3: Being a (sexually) attractive young woman

How do you perceive your body?

Well, it's not the most good-looking in the world. Not if you compare with how it looked before [the accident]. So, it's tough, it really is, of course. But now, at least, I have found my husband (big laughter). Who has a gorgeous body, and that's fun (big laughter)!

Julia, 26 years, interview

General themes

Strategies of resistance

- Negation of differences: I am like you (autonomous, capable, heterosexual), despite my disability.
- Dis-identification and othering: I am not like other people with disabilities.
- *Both* emphasized femininity and compliance with the gender order (Connell 2013)...
- ... *and* resistance by accentuating their physical capacity and comparing their strengths with boys.

Being excluded

It has been like: "Well, you do your program that you have gotten from the physiotherapist". But sometimes I have been able to participate in the Physical Ed, but that's really, really, really, really seldom. [...]

I think it's really bad, because I think we should also have a... chance to be included, like everybody else.

Ingela, 17 years, interview

Being singled out

It wasn't anything serious. But, there have been problems. Like teachers, who were unappreciative and quite insensitive. [...]

Maybe it was a bit wimpish. But I am standing at one end of the gym and the teacher is at the other end. And she has just given us the instruction for the class. Then she calls out to me: "You, you do your best". Or no, no. She says: "You do it in your own particular way". [...] I remember how everybody turned around, and they looked at me and like: "Oh, yes." **It really wasn't anything she [the teacher] said to be mean.** But, yes, it made an impression.

Maria, 17 years, interview

The impossible and the grades

He [the teacher] didn't notice my impairment at all. When I couldn't take part, I got bad grades. And it was such things that I absolutely couldn't do. [...] Running in the woods, it has to be flat ground [...] At that time I began to feel that one always got behindhand. [...] I fought and fought, but I could never be as good as the other.

Hanna, 25 years, interview

Their own solution

- Keep a dialogue.
- Regard their knowledge as a resource.

Strategies of resistance

...during the interview

- Shift from "I" to the collective "we"
- Minimizing the seriousness by using phrases such as "it wasn't something she said out of spite"

...against a discriminatory situation

- Choose not to participate, and train or learn to swim by themselves instead
- Showing medals to get a higher grade

Discussion

1. They cannot perform all of the different aspects that are included in PE in the same manner as their classmates.
2. Teachers wish to protect them from aspects that are seen to be too demanding or difficult for them to perform.
3. Teachers own investments in their bodies have oriented them (Sara Ahmed 2006), towards some kind of bodies, which places other bodies in the background.

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