

# **Fairness or Possibilities**

**Equal opportunities in Swedish sports**

# Abstract

In this thesis I will study and analyze official policy documents from the Swedish Sports Confederation(RF). I will be performing a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on these documents from a gender theory perspective, also influenced by queer theory. Sports remain one of the most gendered institutions in society. It is the purpose of this study to ascertain the way RF treats gender in its official policy documents. This is important because RF has a very powerful position within Swedish sports, in comparison to other countries, with the power to directly influence and coerce lower level sports organizations to adopt their philosophies. I find in my study that RF hold very naturalist views of gender, that are not in phase with current research being done in the area of gender constructions in sports. That RF is not accepting responsibility in constructing gender and adding to the sexualization of our public spaces. There is a great deal of work put into gender equality within RF, however this work is so far only being done on a very formal level focusing on fairness between groups rather than questioning the construction of these groups. I also try to provide ideas for how RF could try to weaken the strong gender structure of sports.

Keywords: Gender, Sports, Sweden, Policy, RF, Riksidrottsförbundet, Equal Opportunities

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# 1 Introduction

I have for over 15 years been an active participant in basketball in Sweden, both as a player and as a coach. During that time I have taken part in activities that now later in life seem very unsettling. From about when I was 10 years old my club had a tournament every year on St. Lucia's Eve. All the teams in the club partook and when we played the girls team they received 4 points for every goal while we received 2. My older sister was once told by a national team coach that she "played too much like a guy" and that wasn't good since she was a girl.

Sports have been one of the largest influences in my life and I believe it is for many others. It is therefore very important that we not only educate people in schools and child care about identity construction but also the sports movement where children spend large parts of adolescence

## 1.1 Purpose and research question

My purpose with this thesis is to study the views the Swedish Sport Confederation(RF) have on gender. Before one can decide how to best affect a change it's important that we have a good understanding of what the situation is today.

I hope to be better equipped to make suggestions for change after having first gained this insight. I will put forth a few ideas on how RF could try to deal with the strongly gendered structure of sports as well as avenues for further research that have been made clear after my study. My research questions are:

- What views on gender are conveyed by RF through their policy documents?
- Does RF take responsibility in constructing gender identities?
- Is it possible to identify any tensions within RF on the nature of gender and consequently gender equality.

## 1.2 Theory and method

I have chosen to conduct a critical discourse analysis(CDA) of official policy documents from RF and National Government. Any discourse analysis is founded on the constructivist idea that discourses help inform our understanding of reality. The way we communicate something shapes our perceptions of that something. So language constructs barriers for our thinking and our actions (Bergström & Boreus 2005 p. 306).

In CDA, discourses not only construct social identities but reaffirms current social identities. In CDA discourse has three different functions: First a function of content or ideas. Secondly they have a relational function, since relations between groups are established, for example teachers and students. Thirdly identities are constructed in discourses(Bergström & Boreus 2005 p. 322).

The notion that identities are somehow based on material properties is refused, instead identities like female, male, worker or professor are not given, they don't exist "out there"(Bergström & Boreus 2005 p. 326).

The overall aim of CDA is examining relations between discourses and social structures(Bergström & Boreus 2005 p. 322). Norman Fairclough, considered one of the most influential researchers within CDA( Bergström & Boreus 2005 p. 307) writes:

"My view is that 'discourse' is use of language seen as a form of social practice, and discourse analysis is analysis of how texts work within sociocultural practice."

Fairclough 1995 p. 7

Finally CDA is interested in power. In seeing discourse as a form of social practice, it follows that some actions or practices are favored in the discourse. The question of who gets to speak in policy decisions is of huge importance from a power perspective, since the discourse decides what is allowed and feasible.

This notion of power is similar to what Lukes calls the third dimension of power, the 'power over thought' (Lukes 1990).

This study will not be particularly concerned with individual actors, as the focus of the paper is on gendered structures. In my analysis of these policy documents I borrow from strategic-relational approaches to agency.

“, the context itself presents an unevenly contoured terrain which favors certain strategies over others and hence selects for certain outcomes while mitigating against others.”

Hay 2002 p. 129

In short agency and structure can't be separated, they are relational and exist only in relation to the other. In a very telling example Hay says that instead of thinking of agency and structure as two sides of a coin we should think of them as two metals melted together to form the coin (Hay 2002 p. 127). Informed by this and by theories about gender structures, presented in the theory chapter, I approached my research material.

I used an open ended approach without pre-determined categorizations but rather with a critical perspective trying to reach an understanding of how RF in their documents convey notions of gender.

## 2. Background

In this chapter I will briefly outline the way sports is organized in Sweden. I also point to what makes sports in Sweden a particularly promising field for reform and for moving towards a less gendered structure compared to other nations.

### 2.1 Sport organization in Sweden

The vast majority of sport in Sweden is carried out in clubs affiliated with RF. RF is an umbrella organization that works as a governing body for sport in general in Sweden.

A local gymnastics club would be member of the local gymnastics confederation, which would be part of the local sport federation and the national gymnastics federation, both of which are members of RF. It is in effect impossible to carry out organized sports outside of RF in Sweden since they and their members are the only partners local and national authorities negotiate grants and public funding with.

In order to become member of RF the sport your federation is involved in cannot already be represented within RF. This means it is effectively impossible to start an alternate federation in any sport, since membership in RF would be withheld.

The national government in 2002 spent 500 million SEK on grants to clubs administered by RF, local government spent 70 million SEK also administered by RF. (RF Sport in Sweden 2002). Also these grants are dependent on the club adhering to guidelines determined by government and RF( Idrotten Vill 2005).



## 2.2 Why sports in Sweden

This is a very unusual arrangement, most other nations have more or less open structured sport where you have schools and club teams and several different federations for sport.

For example in the US there are two major federations for Intercollegiate Athletics where schools can be part of one or the other as well as possibly switch federation. The level of public funding for sports is also unusually high in Sweden.

This makes sports in Sweden not only a social institution but an explicitly political one. This special status compared to other nations would imply that major reforms in sport would be easier to implement than in countries lacking this national structure.

In Sweden most sports would be hard pressed to continue their activity if public funding was withheld. RF has the authority to withhold funding for organizations that do not adhere to their different guidelines and strictures(Förordning om statsbidrag till idrottsverksamhet, 1999).

Swedish government in extension has the right to at any time stop using RF as intermediary for public funding of sports, instead choosing alternate ways of organizing sports(Förordning om statsbidrag till idrottsverksamhet, 1999).

This sets the field so to say and makes Swedish national government very much able to dictate the rules and regulations concerning any and all aspects of publicly funded sports in Sweden.

## 2.3 Research material

In this study I will limit myself to studying official RF materials. I would like to have been able to further study the gender discourse within RF through interviews or taking part in the RF board of directors meetings, however I felt I would not have the time needed for such a study.

In limiting myself to official materials I run the risk of missing important elements of the discourse. I should however be able to analyze the most dominant voices in this discourse as it would follow that they dictate the content of official material.

The material in RF's official policy documents could also be an expression of a "political game" in the spirit of political correctness, this in itself could be very telling of the political climate concerning gender structures.

The focus will be on the two policy guiding documents called "Idrotten Vill", a mission statement for RF and the Swedish sports movement, and "Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan", a policy paper on equal opportunities between the sexes in Swedish sports.

I have however also read a great deal of other RF material, most importantly perhaps an anthology over Swedish gender research within a sports context called "Idrott, kön och genus".

These other documents are not the focus of my study, the focus rests on the policy guiding materials because they are the most likely to reflect the majority of RF's leaderships views and also are more likely to reach lower levels of sports governance in Sweden.

The other material while not the focus of my study are important because they give clues as to how the discourse within RF looks and might give an insight into where the discourse is heading.

## 3. Theorizing gender

In this chapter I will theorize gender and sex and by doing so provide the reader with a basis for later understanding my analysis of the material. I will begin by trying to theorize gender and the often used division of sex and gender.

It is important to point out that I will continually use words like “man”, “female” and others that pertain to notions of gender. This is not to imply that these notions are real or truth bearing, but rather they are constructed and relate to certain notions of biological or social gender. I will therefore not put these words in citation in the rest of the paper for purposes of having a more fluid text.

### 3.1 Gender and sex

As other researchers have noted when we talk about gender it is often perceived as synonymous with talking about women (Koivula 1999, p. 1). Larena Hoerber found in interviews with sport officials at a Canadian University department that the perceived meaning of gender equity was a women's only issue (Hoerber 2007).

I however am not concerned with the divisions between constructs of male and female in particular but with the construction of those categories. Within gender theory it is the usual practice to separate the terms gender and sex. The difference of sex and gender is said to be one of biology and sociology, that is, sex is biological and gender is socially constructed.

There is a presupposition that sex is fixed whereas gender is more fluid (Jönsson 2007, p170). While today most people accept gender as being socially constructed, for example boys are socialized into playing with masculine coded toys whereas girls are socialized into playing with feminine coded toys, there is an unwillingness to say the same about sex. The thinking here is that men and women are born with particular physiological traits universal to the group.

### 3.1.1 Naturalist views

Proponents of naturalized gender then argue that the constructed gender is a consequence of biological traits. So for instance an argument could be: Males have higher levels of testosterone so they learn to like wrestling. Researcher Birgitta Fagrell jokingly puts it that biology is the independent variable and culture the dependent variable (Fagrell 2000, p 60).

Essentialist views are focused on finding differences between the constructed groups men and women but avoid seeing differences within the same groups. Within a naturalist discourse it is inevitable that women will be caretakers, because it's biologically determined that females carry children, and since caring for children will take place in the home it's natural for the home to be a female domain.

This theory has a hard time explaining why we have so many people that don't fit the norm for femaleness and maleness. There are no mechanisms that allow for individuals that don't fit the norms for maleness or femaleness, if we adapt a biologically deterministic perspective.

Within the "gender in sport" discourse there are few proponents of this theory, however it is still often expressed in news media and everyday language.

A naturalist discourse then is very much focused on finding differences in the groups of men and women, while discarding the differences within the group.

## 3.2 Gender as a construct

Most researchers are in agreement that all societies have been and are gendered. Every aspect of society is gendered in different ways (Fagrell 200, p 63, Jönsson 2007, p 172).

A word might be feminine or masculine, a space can be appropriate for women or men. In this discourse gender is constantly being "made", gender could be considered a process, accentuating the fluid nature of the construction. Gender is

therefore made and continuously performed in conjunction with other identities, and there are no “true” gender identities(Jönsson 2007 p. 172).

Gender identity is constructed in a context, so there can be several different perceptions of maleness or femaleness in different contexts.

One can however oppose the “natural” status of sex. Sex could also be viewed as constructed. Most people have accepted men and women as a “natural” division, there are however other ways of looking at it. There are tribes that have constructed four genders that in our understanding could be termed woman, man, man-woman and woman-man(Jönsson 2007 p. 173).

An equivalent act to what is commonly labeled homosexual would in some tribes be perceived as interactions between the same sex or the same gender (Jönsson 2007 p. 173). It has been customary to view sex as deciding gender, or at least what gender will be constructed. Transgendered persons offer an objection to this perspective, someone born with male genitalia can still construct a female gender.

In New Guinea there is another construction of sex, based on bodily fluids like semen and blood. In this context one becomes a man when one has consumed enough semen through oral, vaginal or anal intercourse. Women of enough age and experience can then claim to have consumed enough semen that they are now men (Jönsson 2007 p. 174).

### 3.3 Scientific gender

The most steadfast objection however is one of biology, scientific research is claimed as “proving” a difference between men and women. This “proof” is at best statistical and has no bearing on individuals, like I stated earlier naturalist views close their eyes for differences within constructed groups(Fagrell 2000 p. 59).

That, for example, there are individuals perceived as or constructed as men

that are much less strong than many individuals labeled as women is ignored.

In my experience, perhaps the most persuasive criticism of a naturalist view of sex is one based on biological arguments.

Whatever definition one has of a sex there are exceptions, if genitalia is the deciding factor there are persons with both male and female genitalia. If it's chromosome set there are many variations including XX, XY and XXY. XX and XY are most of the time considered male and female chromosome sets(Jönsson 2007 p. 173).

### 3.4 A constructivist approach

If we proceed with the understanding that sex and gender are both constructed we have reached a conclusion for a constructivist approach. Most gender research is geared towards examining changes in construction or ways in constructing gender(Fagrell 2000, Dowling 2000, Koivula 1999).

However when we discuss gender and it's constructions one could argue that we are not really de-constructing gender but rather re-constructing gender. By using the terms gender and sex we help strengthening their status as “real” categories, it is however hard to avoid this risk(Jönsson 2007 p. 176).

Based on this discussion I will proceed in the paper with only using gender, not differentiating between sex and gender. I recognize that sex-gender-body is a construct, and therefore I will not make a distinction. Individuals constantly “do gender” and in so doing affect the nature of gender.

In a theoretical setting the body is a biologically and socially gendered agent in a gendered structure, where the agent is limited by structure but the agents choices also alters structure (Hay 2002).

## 4. Gender in sport

This chapter will discuss sports informed by the previous discussion on gender. It is meant to exemplify ways in which sports is a gendered activity. First I will try to define sports in order to limit the range of the discussion. Later I will cover gender labeling of sports and the ways that gender structures in sports is about power. I will also discuss how masculine labeled sports are valued higher than feminine labeled sports, and also ways that sports conserve gender structures.

### 4.1 Defining sport

Sport is a word that most people use with regularity, but most people would probably have a hard time defining what they mean by sport. Definitions most often have themes including competition against oneself or others, which requires physical skill and is conducted in accordance with rules(Koivula 1999 p. 6).

It is sometimes differentiated between sport and physical exercise, so playing table tennis during physical education in school is a physical exercise with the purpose of exercising, and playing table tennis in a organization is sport, with the purpose of achieving other goals than exercise, like winning or getting better.

For this paper I will focus on the sport conducted under the umbrella organization of RF

### 4.2 Sport and society

Sport is of great importance to large sections of the worlds population. In all parts of the world sports are a popular past time, either actively participating or being a spectator people spend time on sport.

Sports importance cannot be attributed to the health benefits for practitioners, especially since most adults do not participate in any form of organized sport, or unorganized sport for that matter(Koivula 1999 p. 6).

Looking at the amount of sport in the media and the large numbers of spectators at sporting events makes the importance of sport in society evident.

Sport is a social institution and a symbol. For example, athletes can be viewed as symbolic warriors defending the nation (Creedon 1994, Guttman 1986).

Sport is perhaps the “final frontier” where notions of masculinity are actively encouraged and reproduced. Journalist Stephan Mendel-Enk writes about masculinity in football fan organizations, exemplifying that not only practicing a sport is constructing gender but also involvement as fans or supporters (Mendel-Enk, 2004, Koivula 1999).

In the nation wide daily newspaper *Aftonbladet* sports reporter M. Wennerholm, in regards to rule changes to punish excessive violence in ice hockey, writes: “Real hockey requires bodily contact, .... and an occasional fight sometimes.”, he also continues to explain that the problem with the new rules is that players become hesitant to play rough and aggressive which would remove the most important element of the sport (Wennerholm 08-01-1998).

In sports it is normal for otherwise criminal behavior to be accepted as part of the sport. When ice hockey players get in a fight they are often times lauded for their courage and their unwillingness to “back down”, in this respect sport, and especially masculine labeled sports, is a rare context where behavior otherwise condemned is celebrated (Koivula 1999 p. 26).

It is one of the few arenas left in society where this kind of 'male' activity isn't penalized. Only in masculine coded sports, are these kind of actions encouraged. Actions that 'ordinary men in ordinary life' cannot perform without sanctions (Koivula 1999 p. 27).

Women are never allowed to act in the same way, athlete or not, because it's not considered appropriate behavior for a female. I argue, that tackling which is considered a very macho activity, isn't allowed in women's ice hockey is an expression of this gender structure.



### 4.3 Gender labeling

As discussed earlier, every aspect of society is gendered, but in few places more explicitly so than sport. In close to all sport participants are sorted by gender, athletes compete exclusively against athletes with the same gender label.

In some sports, like tennis, there is mixed competition but the teams in the competition cannot be composed of a mix of gender labeled individuals but must have one woman individual and one man individual. Sport is a male domain, exceptions are sports like riding, gymnastics and figure skating which are considered female activities.

Studies have differentiated between male, neutral and female sports. In different surveys sports like ice hockey, boxing and motor sports have been identified as especially male sports (Fagrell 2000, Koivula 1999). The choice of the term “neutral” sport might give the impression that this sport is gender neutral, this is however not the case (Koivula 1999 p. 25).

Rather these sports are less male, the sports that are regarded as feminine are however not considered appropriate for men to partake in. Nathalie Koivula also points out that these labels of sports are constructed and as such they are fluid in nature (Koivula 1999 p. 38).

Koivula exemplifies using cheer leading which was a masculine activity but as the sport changed and women were more involved the sport by the 1970's had changed its label to one of a feminine activity (Koivula 1999 p. 38).

The gender appropriateness of different sports are established with children at a young age. Birgitta Fagrell conducted interviews with children aged seven to eight years old. The children are able to identify conceptions of male and female sports and also provide explanations why these sports are more appropriate for one gender and not the other (Fagrell 2000 p. 133-137).

## 4.4 Label differences

To further illustrate in ways which sport is gendered I will provide examples of gendered structures in sport. This is to inform the discussion on gender within sport and to be able to move beyond a focus on gender equality based on essentialist notions of gender.

In the gender labeling of sports it is common that feminine labeled sports are less likely to get accommodation from local government to build or supply training facilities and or equipment(Jönsson 2007).

Local government instead prioritizes the “big” sports like soccer or ice hockey. Sports that are based in notions of masculinity. It is also useful to note that RF in it's presentation of sport in Sweden remarks that AIK, the largest soccer club in Sweden, in taxes paid 18 times the amount of the states grants for them(Idrotten Vill 2005).

The product of this could very well be that local government prioritizes sports that are more likely to produce revenue and by design pay taxes, these sports of course are all dominated by males. This could be regarded as one of the more subtle ways that societal structures affect women's opportunities in sport.

Feminine labeled sports are often sports that reward traits considered feminine, where the competitors are judged by their aesthetic movements in front of an audience. Sports like modern gymnastics, figure skating and dance are all feminine labeled sports and are all presentational sports(Koivula 1999 p. 26).

Masculine labeled sports often emphasize trying to overpower other competitors by body contact and aggressiveness is encouraged. Examples could be ice hockey, American football and boxing(Koivula 1999 p.27).

Both feminine labeled sports and masculine labeled sports actively encourage behavior that fits with certain notions of gender(Koivula 1999 p. 26).

## 4.5 Sexualization in sport

Sport in general is a sexualized environment, in volleyball female competitors are mandated to wear shorts half the length of men's regulated length, in beach volleyball bikinis are mandatory for female competitors(Jönsson 2007).

In explaining the decision to adopt shorter shorts for female athletes in volleyball the volleyball association claimed that it was to promote the sport and to compete with beach volleyball for audiences. It is interesting to note that beach volleyball and volleyball are regulated by the same federation(Jönsson 2007).

In interviews with female snowboarders Laurendeau and Sharara find that some female snowboarders appreciate the non-sexualized clothing that is common in snowboarding. The interview subjects like that they can remain anonymous in baggy clothing and helmets with visors. They employ this as a strategy to avoid sticking out in relation to the male snowboarders(Laurendeau & Sharara 2008).

How athletes are depicted in commercials and other media appearances is important. Famous football player Fredrik Ljungberg has appeared in a line of commercial ads wearing only underwear, similarly football player Josefine Öqvist in 2004 appeared in an "expo" in the men's magazine *Slitz*. This on the surface very similar act can serve to exemplify the way sexualization of sports is also an expression for a gender power structure. In Fredrik Ljungbergs pictures he is selling a product, in the "expo" of Josefine Öqvist she is the product(Jönsson 2007).

It is common that the sexualization of female athletes focus on culturally sexualized body parts that have very little to do with the performance of their sport.(Jönsson 2007)

When the athlete is depicted outside their sport it is more than likely that they're not being depicted in capacity as athletes but in a way that in some ways are meant to "prove" their womanhood, which would be in contradiction of their status as elite athletes.(Larsson 2007)

## 4.6 Gendered bodies

Sport, like society in large, has a hetero-normative structure which informs notions of gender. In this structure a female body is conceived as weak, small, thin, smooth and possessing other feminine traits, whereas a male body is conceived as strong, big, muscular, aggressive(Fagrell 2000).

This is of course a constructed conception of gendered bodies, because as noted earlier there are, for example, female gendered bodies that are stronger than male gendered bodies.

In Fagrell's study of children and their notions of gender she investigated what the children would identify as the ideal male or female body. In her study children were presented with pictures of male and female bodies and asked to identify what body was the most female and the least female. A majority of children identified the picture of a woman with big defined muscles as the least feminine(Fagrell 2000).

In sports female athletes that are exceptionally good are often labeled as manly, and because a man is conceived as a person that is attracted by individuals with female genitalia, they are frequently labeled as homosexual as well. This is also the case of non-hetero sexual men in sport who challenge the construction of the male(Koivula 1999 p. 28).

Because individuals labeled as homosexual would by that label fit in a feminine label they challenge the notions of the male. In sports therefore it is very common to find homo-negativity in practitioners, this is a response to the threat posed by their norm breaking behavior(Koivula 1999 p. 28).

Practitioners are constructed in accordance to their sports gender label, a male figure skater is often viewed by others as homosexual, since if he were a "normal man" he would not enjoy a feminine sport. If a male ice hockey player was very aggressive, big and strong and not heterosexual he would threaten the construction of male aggressiveness, because with those traits he "should" be a

heterosexual man(Koivula 1999).

When an individual goes against the norm of what constitutes male and female it's challenging the discourse of separation that gender is set to uphold, the majority will often times penalize individuals that break norms of gender. A body that doesn't fit in to notions of a female or male body would then be suspect and ridiculed, in effect reaffirming the notions of female or male labeled bodies(Fagrell 2000 p. 64).

A female coded body for example with large and pronounced muscles would then be suspected of not really being female. In turn females with muscular bodies and great athletic prowess frequently get depicted as grotesque and unnatural(Dowling 2000 p. 206).

## 4.7 Rationales for excluding women

For a sport to be classified as male it has to socialize males into being different from women. So even if a sport promoted physical overpowering of the opponent and aggressiveness it would not be a masculine sport if women were allowed to participate (Koivula 1999 p. 27)

In the history of sport there have been different biological reasons claimed to prevent women from entering sport. Concern about women losing their reproductive function has been expressed throughout history, also concern that women are not physically equipped to participate in some sports and it would be to dangerous for them(Dowling 2000 p.53-56).

In an example Koivula retells of a male competitor in a cliff-diving competition and how he objected to there being a female in the competition. He reasoned that "men are taking a great gamble to prove their courage. What would be the point if everyone saw that a woman could do the same?"(Koivula 1999 p. 8)

In viewing gender-sex-body as a construct it follows that bodies are lived

experiences. The main difference between the constructs of men and women is the amount of essential body fat needed to carry out bodily functions, especially for reproduction(Koivula 1999 p. 9).

Women are estimated to have 12% essential body fat and men 3%, these estimations are broad generalizations and the lower limits of essential fat would vary between individuals (Koivula 1999 p. 9). Other generalizations are that men have more muscle mass than women. This and other differences between biological gender are often viewed as independent from social experiences(Koivula 1999).

If one takes into consideration that children are socialized into gender from birth, the picture changes. Boys are socialized into physical activity, and through physical activity develop muscles, and coordination, girls that are socialized into less physical activity develop less muscle and less coordination(Dowling 2000 p. 68).

## 4.8 Sex tests

The conception of “natural” difference between male and female bodies is in sport even more explicit. Already in 1948 the British Amateur Confederation started to use “sex tests”, they required that female competitors submit to a doctors examination to prove that they were women(Dowling 2000 p. 184).

Because women are constructed as weak, small and fragile any woman that was exceptionally talented as an athlete would be suspected of being a man, how else could she be that good(Dowling 2000 p. 184)?

“Sex tests” developed along with advances in medical science into a chromosome mapping test. This test was disallowed by the IOC in 2000, but is still carried out in some parts of the world. In 1964 Ewa Klobukowska was disqualified and lost her two Olympic medals after it had been discovered that she had a XXY chromosome set, and it was deemed too hard to determine her gender (Jönsson 2007, p. 181).

## 4.9 Beyond gender equality

Perhaps we could conceive sport that was not gender divided. Most people would oppose gender neutral sport, because it would be unfair to women. Men would totally dominate the majority of sports, winning every medal.

There are however some examples of where this gender divide is being challenged, Billie Jean King played Bobby Riggs in 1973, and Annika Sorenstam played in men's golf competitions in 2003.

These events were perhaps most motivated by financial concerns (Jönsson 2007). I would also argue they both presented little threat to notions of masculinity because Annika didn't win, although she finished near the middle of the field. Bobby Riggs was old, so Billie Jean really didn't beat a male tennis player, just an old man.

There are also cases when gender divides are being constructed or reinforced. In the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 a female competitor in Double Trap, Zhang Shang, won the gold in a mixed field. The competition was mixed because there were too few female competitors to have their own field of competitors. In 1996 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) didn't allow female competitors in Double Trap, and in 2000 female competitors were allowed in an all female field. It would seem here that fairness wasn't the reason for a gender divided field in Double Trap (Jönsson 2007 p. 186).

Philosophy professor Torbjörn Tännsjö argues for gender integrated

competitive sports. He argues that the basic premise for competitive sports is that the best athlete wins, independent of outside factors. Tännsjö simply sees gender as irrelevant in deciding the best athlete(Tännsjö 2000).

## 5. Results

In studying all the material I identified six reoccurring themes relating to gender constructions that I will cover in depth. They are: Sex, Upbringing, Fairness, Resistance, Sexualization and Deflection. I will try to explain and exemplify each of these themes.

### 5.1 Sex

In the RF 'Equal opportunities plan'(Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005) they have an introductory word list trying to define some important concepts and words. Among them are words like 'Equality'(jämlighet) and 'Feminism', there is however no definition of gender and/or sex.

Moving past the introductory word list there are no attempts made to further specify RF's view on the nature of gender. However the word exclusively used in this document is sex(kön) not gender. It is hard to discern how conscious this choice is, but in reading passages regarding boys and girls it is easy to get the impression that RF's view is that sex is a biological fact.

*Övergången mellan barn- och ungdomsidrotten ska ske successivt och hänsyn tas till flickors och pojkars olika behov, förutsättningar och utvecklingstakt.*

- Idrotten Vill 2005 p. 16

The above passage exemplifies how RF constructs boys and girls into two distinct groups. This grouping is never questioned. The above passage is mainly



concerned with perceived physiological differences between boys and girls.

These differences are thought to increase when children grow into puberty, further showing how tied notions of sex are with sexuality.

*Vidare måste hänsyn tas till olikheter mellan flickor och pojkar och den ökade betydelse könstillhörigheten får under ungdomsåren.*

- Idrotten Vill 2005 p. 13

*Samtidigt ger den snabba kroppsliga utvecklingen upphov till många frågor. Det är därför viktigt att ungdomarna får en sund och positiv kroppsuppfattning.*

- Idrotten Vill 2005 p. 13

The focus on startling changes during puberty is related to sexual maturity, it is never stated but it is hardly coincidence. With sexual maturity it is now considered even more important to boys and girls separate.

Before puberty it is not as important to keep the two groups divided but when sexuality starts being a concern it is important that we consider the differences between the sexes. However it is also hinted at that naturalized differences are present on a social level also.

It is not just a difference in physical prowess informed by naturalist notions of biological gender, there is the suggestion that boys and girls have different social and psychological traits.

*Jämställdhet mellan könen är inte bara ett viktigt krav från demokratisk utgångspunkt utan mycket, såväl forskning som enskilda människors erfarenheter, talar för att det främjar effektivitet och utveckling för både organisationer och individer.*

- Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 6

The message here is that women and men have different traits and that organizations that have a good mix of women and men will have a good mix of these qualities. This further accentuates the notion of a naturalized difference between men and women in a social and psychological capacity.

What is interesting to note is how the argument that equality is a democratic, and consequently a human rights issue, is not enough. That alone isn't reason enough to affect a change, instead positive effects on effectiveness and organizational benefits are needed for this to be something to strive for.

*Ledare inom ungdomsidrotten i föreningar och förbund ska få möjlighet att fördjupa sina kunskaper såväl om träningsplanering inom den egna idrotten som om flickors och pojkars fysiska, psykiska och sociala utveckling.*

- Idrotten Vill 2005 p. 14

This passage states that boys and girls develop differently socially and psychologically. It enters territory where men and women naturally have different ways of working in groups and could be an expression of notions like “girls are less competitive than boys”.

## 5.2 Upbringning

RF claims a large role as teachers, promoting the positive role sports can have for children and youth's. With some pride RF claims sports is the most influential institution for children and youth beside family and school.

*Nästan alla barn och ungdomar i vårt land är under någon period av sitt liv med i idrotten. Det ger idrottsledarna de näst efter familjen och skolan största möjligheterna att påverka och fostra ungdomarna och att härigenom bidra till en positiv samhällsutveckling.*

- Idrotten Vill 2005 p. 22

*För många barn är idrotts-föreningarna, näst efter hemmet och skolan, den viktigaste miljön för fostran och utveckling. De attityder och värderingar som förmedlas där präglar i stor utsträckning barns och ungdomars personliga utveckling.*

- Idrotten Vill 2005 p. 11

So RF claims a prominent role for sports in socialization of youth's in it's goals for sports. It is not important if the claim has merit, but to note the claim being made.

When discussing sexual harassment and gender structures in it's equal opportunities plan RF however doesn't take any responsibility for this, but rather projects an image of sports as a mirror image of society.

*Brist på jämställdhet, sexuella trakasserier och övergrepp är frågor som hänger samman. Mycket talar för att idrotten på dessa områden är en spegel av samhället i stort. Idrotten är vare sig bättre eller sämre.*

- Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 9

*Självklart påverkar också jämställdheten, eller bristen på jämställdhet, i samhället i stort utvecklingen inom idrotten. Mäns och kvinnors värderingar och attityder formas av och formar samhället. Medias värderingar och spegling av kvinnors och mäns idrottsutövning har stor betydelse.*

- Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 8

Instead of claiming how sports has one of the largest responsibilities in counter acting these structures sports is rather the victim of society at large and media's portrayal of athletes.

There are no attempts at self criticism or thoughts on how to counter act this development. There is no discussion on how sport could try to change the circumstances for sport activity in Sweden or how coaches and leaders through their actions might influence kids in a way that reinforces or constructs these negative effects.

Instead we are left with very generic descriptions of what RF intends to do to affect a change.

*Det kräver att kvinnors och mäns idrottande värderas och prioriteras på ett likvärdigt sätt och att resurser fördelas rättvist. - Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 10*

### 5.3 Fairness

In the different RF materials studied the focus has been on fairness, fairness in dividing resources between male and female practitioners and in representation on boards and leadership positions.

This is , as the previous quote alluded to, what RF for the most part means when they advocate equal opportunities.

*SF uppmanas att forma egna jämställdhetsprogram med åtgärder som bidrar till att inriktningen i Idrottens jämställdhetsplan uppnås samt att bland sina förtroendevalda utse två jämställdhetsansvariga, en man och en kvinna, och rapportera in dessa till RF.*

- Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 16

*När det gäller det aktiva idrottandet kan vi glädjande nog konstatera att en positiv utveckling har skett under hela denna period. Flickor och kvinnor har ökat sin andel av deltagandet inom nästan alla idrotter. På elitnivå har kvinnliga idrottare blivit alltmer synliga.*

- Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 6

In this discourse it seems that RF is creating a house with two rooms, one for women and one for men. The house is to be ruled by equal representation from both rooms, and the rooms are to be identical in factors as size and occupants.

There is no ambition to bring the two rooms together, they are divided by an impassable barrier. What is also implied is that women and men have their own certain needs, an essentialist notion of gender, where there is one specific image of female and male.

There is a short passage that questions the view of equal opportunity as a women's issue.

*Jämställdhetsarbetet har länge setts som en kvinnofråga med kvinnan i fokus. Men jämställdhet handlar om att kvinnor och män ska ha samma rättigheter, skyldigheter och möjligheter.*

- Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 23

Here also, the focus is on fairness between the sexes, but it is important to note that the focus goes beyond rights and obligations and mentions possibilities.

There are some other places where there is a more nuanced language that goes beyond formal representation and number of practitioners.

*”Olikheten och attraktionen mellan könen minskar med ökad jämställdhet.”  
Detta påstående konserverar både könsroller och den heterosexuella normen.  
Jämställdhet handlar om att utveckla mångfald, inte den tvåfald som de  
traditionella könsrollerna mer eller mindre formar oss i.*

- Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 24

It starts off stating that this kind of statement conserves gender stereotypes and a heterosexual norm. It also states that the goal is diversity and not a duality.

In the end however it is still concerned with an unequal power structure, not really concerned with de-constructing this structure but adjusting it so it becomes fair to the two sides.

*Jämställdheten berör inte biologiska faktorer utan sociala konstruktioner som leder till ojämställd könsmaktordning.*

- Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 24

The division made between biological and social gender here is interesting because it allows RF to have different structures for men and women. It is also interesting to note that notions of biological factors could very well be used as rationales for social gender structures. Social gender would then be informed by biological facts, in effect naturalizing social gender as well.

## 5.4 Resistance

In studying the material I was trying to find text expressing a view perhaps moving past the idea of fairness, perhaps giving some thought on gender-power structures or similar ideas that are current in social sciences and humanities. One quote previously visited, I found to be most interesting.

*Jämställdhetsarbetet har länge setts som en kvinnofråga med kvinnan i fokus. Men jämställdhet handlar om att kvinnor och män ska ha samma rättigheter, skyldigheter och möjligheter.*

Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 23

My interpretation of the passage is that there is at least some resistance to the focus on formal conditions of equal opportunities within RF. The critique that gender issues often are conceived as a women only issue is common in recent gender theory (Koivula 1999, Fagrell 2000), which would indicate that someone in RF is partaking in current research.

*”Jämställdhet är en generationsfråga”*

*Med detta påstående kan man framhålla att jämställdheten i stort kan lösa sig av sig självt. Det handlar bara om tid. Generationsfrågan är bara en faktor, och den innehåller brister. Eftersom ojämställdheten i organisationer är strukturell anpassar sig ofta yngre till dessa ojämställda strukturer och riskerar också med tiden att själva bli formade och därmed bärare av dem.*

Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 23

The the widening of the scope to include possibilities tells of a more constructivist approach to equality than otherwise expressed in RF.

Presenting their anthology on gender-in-sports research as well as an

anthology of research on sexualization in sports, shows that someone or some people in RF are motivated enough to read and partake in the latest research being done in that area.

If I allow myself to speculate, I would think it likely that there is at least a small part of RF that is serious about affecting a change relating to gender constructions in sports.

## 5.5 Sexualization

RF at a few times mentions sexualization in their equal opportunities plan, however they do so in the same manner as in which they do upbringing. They simply state that it's a concern in society and therefore a concern in sports.

*Sexualiseringen av det offentliga rummet diskuteras allt mer. Det är ett prioriterat område i regeringens handlingsplan för jämställdhet. Kvinnor och flickor objektifieras och sexualiseras i media och annonser. Också män objektifieras. Det bidrar till att stärka fördomar och befästa ojämställdhet. Hur män och kvinnor framställs är en fråga också för idrotten.*

- Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 9

So sexualization of public spaces is a larger societal issue, and is also relevant in sports. There is no depth to this discussion and no options on how to make a change are offered.

Later there is one small mention of a possible avenue for change. It is the only time athletes clothing is addressed in the equal opportunities plan.

*Det kan exempelvis gälla ovidkommande regler för vilken klädsel idrottsaktiva ska ha, vilket kan förmedla och stärka fördomar.*

- Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 18



## 5.6 Deflecting

As noted earlier RF manages to deflect responsibility for shortcomings in sports on media and society in general. Also, detailed in chapter 2, there is a structure in place that gives the Special Confederations(SF) a great deal of leeway in organizing and setting the structure within their own sport. In that structure RF can wash it's hands of any practices carried out in the SF, and thus deflect responsibility.

*Tävlingsidrotten organiseras av specialidrottsförbunden, vilka har det fulla ansvaret för tävlingsverksamheten inom alla de idrottsgrenar förbundet administrerar.*

- Idrotten Vill 2005 p. 21

Overall the different policy guiding documents that RF has put out in large part tell of a success story, while very briefly and sort of under the radar admitting some faults. The times that RF aren't able to deflect they still give the impression that flaws or shortcomings aren't that serious and efforts to better the situation are underway.

*1989 års jämställdhetsplan har varit framgångsrik. Samtidigt kan det konstateras att idrottsrörelsen bara har nått målen inom vissa områden.*

*95 procent av SF-ordförandena svarade i enkäten På lika villkor (RF-rapport 2004) att kvinnor och män har samma möjligheter. Samtidigt framkom brister på detta område då några idrottsorganisationer genom projektet Förbundsutveckling genom 3R (Utvärdering: 3R 2004) genomförde en kartläggning och analys. Brister beträffande kvinnors och mäns lika möjligheter som dessa idrottsorganisationer inte själva tidigare hade varit medvetna om.*

- Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 19

RF makes a good point in mentioning “the silent resistance” and how this is one of the toughest obstacles to equal opportunity work.

*“Det tysta och diffusa motståndet”*

*Det aktiva motståndet mot jämställdhet är idag mindre än tidigare. Det finns ofta en politisk korrekt hållning. Ett tyst och diffust motstånd kan vara såväl medvetet som omedvetet. Allvarligast är om det passiva motståndet kommer från ledningen då det blir legitimt för andra att ignorera jämställdhetsarbetet. Tyst motstånd innebär till exempel att demokratiskt fattade beslut i jämställdhetsfrågan glöms bort eller läggs åt sidan.*

– Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 24

It is however most revealing when taken into context of the following passage.

*Vidare beslutades att det ska finnas kunskap hos förtroendevalda, ledare tränare och anställda på alla nivåer inom idrottsrörelsen om de villkor som gäller kvinnor och män, flickor och pojkar. Någon sådan bred utbildningsinsats för ökad kunskap om jämställdhet inom idrotten har inte genomförts. Därmed saknas i praktiken kunskap hos många inom idrotten att kunna införliva jämställdhetsperspektivet i den dagliga verksamheten*

Idrottens Jämställdhetsplan 2005 p. 20

It certainly gives the impression that there is a good amount of lip service within RF. Equal opportunities is a big issue politically and must be addressed but this certainly seems like the same kind of “silent resistance” that RF mentions themselves.

## 6. Discussion

In this chapter I will discuss issues with sport regulations and organization and risks and opportunities that exist with gender identities in focus. I will also give my thoughts on what future research I think would be fruitful.

### 6.1 Fairness – Is it hurting or helping?

Reading this material it has become clear that the focus of practically all work for equal opportunities is based on principles of fairness. RF in its equal opportunities plan states that it has been hard to get good data for measuring fairness as most clubs and organizations do not have a gender split budget.

Gender split budgets would of course make it easier to keep track of spending and making sure it's equal, but what it also does is that it makes this gender divide even more solidified in the organizational structure of sports. It is not inconceivable that we after a while will have pure male and female sports, with their own budgets and boards.

In this attempt at equality we would be even further essentializing gender. There could be risks in developments in terms of sex. For example, there could be no resources for female hockey, because it's not what "girls" want to do, those resources should be spent on synchronized swimming because that's what girls want to do.

### 6.2 What to do?

Even though sports is a powerful tool for socialization it would be naïve to think that we today could reform sports over night, most people would not want that or accept it. However there are things that we could do today that would probably be accepted although with some resistance.

RF has the power to force change onto clubs. The goal of any equal

opportunity work in sports has to change from creating two separate spaces to creating one space and fighting the gender-power structure within that space. Instead of focusing on representation and participation we should focus on the conditions for sport.

### 6.2.1 Mixed teams for children

It is common that children, in my own basketball club as young as eight years old, are placed in boys and girls teams. There are no physiological reasons claimed for this but it has always been that way.

The most common objection to not dividing teams in this way is that children want to be divided into boys and girls, and would play for another club if our club organized that way. There is no merit to what children want in this case, they want things all the time that they don't get. If they never had the option of gender division they would more than likely not ask for it.

### 6.2.2 Uniforms

Uniforms is another hands on area where we could make changes with, hopefully, positive outcomes. Instead of mandating identical uniforms we should allow for any style of uniform as long as they serve their purpose which is in team sports to allow spectators and athletes to identify what team an individual athlete is on.

If someone wants to wear long sleeves and pants and someone else just a pair of shorts why not let them? Just try to keep the color schemes and patterns similar to allow for easier identification, so people can enjoy watching.

This wouldn't remove the problem of sexualization, it could actually increase it as athletes and children would be allowed to wear less than they are today. It would however help in solving the problems that many Muslim women face when participating in sports.

### 6.2.3 Same rules

The rules for sport should not differ between male and female competitors. That tackling is banned in women's ice hockey helps maintain notions of masculinity within male ice hockey.

Even within a naturalist discourse where women are weaker than men and don't like tackling, it still doesn't make sense to have different rules. Since they are playing other women it doesn't matter if they are weaker than men, and if they don't like tackling they would probably not do it much.

The fact that it was deemed necessary to ban tackling gives the impression that there are in fact women that would tackle if they were allowed to.

In basketball the ball is smaller in women's basketball than in men's, because women are smaller presumably. This is interesting since the shortest player on a men's team might be 170 cm while the tallest is 210 cm. It is never suggested that the smaller player be issued a smaller ball. Also the tallest player on the women's team could be 200 cm but playing with a smaller ball than the 170 cm tall male player.

### 6.3 Sport without gender division

Every sport awards certain traits, physical, mental or both. In basketball the favored trait is height, in professional basketball the average height of competitors is substantially above the global average.

We however never consider basketball unfair to people of short stature. There are no basketball leagues for "short" people. If we don't accept gender as something natural but as something constructed, the division of male and female competitors in basketball actually makes less sense than a division made on grounds of height. If a competition was fair, female athletes should be able to accept that there were other competitors that were better, they just happened to be male (Tännsjö 2000).

If we view gender as any other physiological trait it is not more unfair for women to compete in basketball with men than it is for short women to compete in basketball with tall women.

## 6.4 Future research

As I noted earlier it would be very interesting to conduct interviews with higher level RF officials and elected board members. It would hopefully shed further light on the fight for a policy more concerned with sports structure that I believe one can see signs of in the existing policy documents.

Research on how local government works in concert with local sport organizations would also be very interesting. What are the mechanisms involved in deciding what sporting facilities are built and who gets to use them.

It would also be interesting to have research on identity construction with a more intersectional perspective, not solely focused on gender identities. An intersectional approach taking into consideration other identities, religious, ethnic or socioeconomic in conjunction with gender. This is an aspect never covered in RF materials, and the literature on the field of gender in sport is also missing an intersectional approach.

## 6.5 Final thoughts

In reading the research on the area and gaining new insights and ideas it has led me to examine my own experiences from basketball.

It has made me question what I have been doing as a coach for children and youth's. It has also led me to question my commitment to sports in general, what's it good for? I feel strongly though that sports can be a positive influence in many peoples lives and act as a bridge between people.

However today sports is in many ways doing the opposite in building walls. I feel that I managed to gain considerable insight into how gender is handled by RF. I also hope that sports gets examined and questioned more closely in the future and that this thesis adds to that scrutiny.

Sports is a very conservative environment, the “purity of the game” is often celebrated and there is an inherent resistance to change. The gendered division in sport isn't going to disappear in the near future. It is important to remember that even if we did have sports that were not gender divided in Sweden all international competition would probably remain so. In Sweden however we have a system in place that allows for considerable reform from a top down perspective, something I hope we can one day enjoy using to affect a change in the gender-power structure of sports.

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