

MEN AND SPORT SOCIALIZATION TO MASCULINITY

Olga Modzelewska

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland

Abstract. *Socialization as a long-life process is an extremely important element of every human's life. From a early years every child is taught the right behaviour in the social space. One of the areas in which we are socialized are the behaviours and the roles of each gender. Little girls are taught behaviours based on empathy and care while boys are guided towards diverse physical activities. Sport then becomes a space where boy learns behaviours that are considered by the society to be proper for the men. Features described as "typically male" which boys learn while doing sports include domination, aggression or competition. Learned desire to dominate in this space is one of the determinants of Pierre Bourdieu's habitus of men. Domination structures are also the product of endless reproduction processes which results in the duplication of behaviour patterns including in the case of gender roles. Men and women are the main victims and prisoners of contemporary dominant cultural ideas. Not only the fact of doing sports is perceived as an appropriate socialization for masculinity but also being a fan is an area of "proper gender socialization". Sport as a space of manifestation by men of their strength and courage is also an exemplification of the hegemonic masculinity presented by Raewyn Connell.*

Keywords: *habitus of men, hegemonic masculinity, masculinity, men, socialization, sport.*

Introduction

The following text will deals with the issues of socialization of young boys, and adult men through sport to masculinity. Diverse physical activity allows people to express themselves, their worldview and helps in creating their identity. Physical recreation, within which sport is located is understood as "(...) different kinds of activities, undertaken in free time, voluntarily, for pleasure, self-expression, formation of one's personality, renewal and multiplication of psychophysical forces" (Wolańska, 1997: 59).

Practicing sport can mean belonging to a specific social circle and fulfilling a specific role in it. "As research shows, gender and related whit it roles and stereotypes significantly determine the structure of time use - this also applies to free time" (Chmura-Rutkowska, Głowacka-Sobiech, & Nowak-Kluczyński, 2012: 485).

From the dawn of time, sport was a man's thing, "(...) in its early stage, sport was seen primarily as a way to masculinity of both players and viewers" (Uliński,

2011: 164). In Ancient Greece only men could compete in Olympiads, a similar situation was in the Middle Ages, where only knights competed with each other in sports arenas. For many years” the sports training and sports shows were a place of meeting and socialization of men in their own community, mutual grounding of identity and self-value and consolidation of male intergenerational bonds” (Uliński, 2011: 161).

Thanks to sport, men shape their identity. “Sport is an example of one of many cultural practices that influence the shape of male identity” (Kluczyńska, 2010: 87). This is because sport is still seen as an area where you can confirm your strength and dominance of male power. Sport teaches people discipline, which, especially young men, can learn how to become a “real man” (Kluczyńska, 2010). At a time when people often talk about the feminisation of society, men are lost and are looking for a way to show their value and authority. Thus “sport has become one of the last bastions of male power and exaltation over - and separation from - feminization of society and transformation boys into men” (Kluczyńska, 2010: 88.). It was therefore perceived as a basic element of proper development of boys, so that he could belong to the world of real men must be characterized by endurance, physical strength, must be ambitious and persistently strive for victory.

This article aims to review and analyze literature that rise a subject of socialization, sport and masculinity. Performed interpretation and in-depth analysis of the topic will allow for proper knowledge and understanding of the issues discussed in the text below.

Gender socialization

The process of socialization that lasts from the moment of birth, everyone to life in society. “Socialization is a process based on the acquisition of norms, values, rules of social life, whose knowledge will provide the individual's place in society” (Karkowska, 2006: 119). By acquiring knowledge and skills of appropriate behaviour in the social world from childhood, we become full-fledged members of society. This process is complex and multifaceted and consists in learning appropriate behaviours, “thanks to which a man, a biological being, becomes a social being, a member of a specific society and a representative of a specific culture” (Szacka, 2003: 137). It is a process of putting yourself on the side that the social environment expects.

Gender socialization refers to messages about shaping an individual's identity in the context of his gender. “Her content focuses primarily on the value of messages and norms related to gender roles” (Karkowska, 2006: 119). In this process, ways of fulfilling gender roles are also transmitted, and „(...) gender is constructed and transmitted socially” (Dziekanowska, 2008:5 8). The ways of

socialization, and what is being handed on in it, are conditioned by the cultural and social contexts in which it takes place. Katarzyna Gawlicz pointed that that gender-shaping processes take place “in a context determined by dominating discourses that set norms regarding the behaviour of women and men (and girls and boys) and constitute a powerful force limiting individuals in their thinking and behaviour”(Gawlicz, 2009: 89).

Humans are not born with the skills that allow recognizing the gender, but he acquires them in the process of socialization. Despite the fact that the child is not aware of his or her gender from birth, his parents give him certain characteristics before birth and attribute properties typical for boys or girls (eg. Brannon, 2002; Mandal, 2003). As Linda Brannon (2002) points out, in the early months of life the child begins to recognize the faces of women and men, but their differences can be noticed mainly on the basis of the length of hair, without understanding the gender difference. “But when children start talking, they quickly learn words that indicate to gender” (Brannon, 2002: 199). Around the age of two the child accurately uses gender labels. Linda Brannon emphasizes that a much faster development of this skill can be seen in those children whose parents paid attention to gender, and they themselves often manifested the traditional / stereotypical attitudes assigned to each gender (Brannon, 2002). Children, observing their relatives, mainly parents, learn what behaviours are adequate for their own and which are for the opposite gender (Pankowska, 2005).

Eugenia Mandal in her book *Femininity and Masculinity* (2003: 37) indicates that already in “24 hours after birth, parents differentiate their description of the child depending on his sex. Girls are considered to be more delicate, weak and less mobile than boys”. The very fact of choosing a name or colour of a layette for a child is also conditioned by gender. Parents treat their children in a different way, depending on whether it is a boy or a girl, they give them different requirements, expect other behaviours. “With age, boys and girls are offered other games, plays, interests or literature” (Chmura-Rutkowska & Ostrouch, 2007: 26). Fairy tales, which are reading for young children very often contain a stereotypical image of gender. Most of the characters in children's literature are boys or men. These figures are characterized by “typically masculine” features, which are “(...) ingenuity, bravery, perseverance, achievements, sport (...)” (Pankowska, 2005: 82) and are much smarter and more active characters.

Analyzing toys it is easy to notice that depending on whom they are addressed, they influence the development of various traits and skills (Renzetti & Curran, 2005). Already for a boy who is just a few years old are offered electronic, constructional toys that encourage inventiveness, manipulation of elements, competition and aggression. Young boys have also been encouraged to participate in various sports activities since childhood, because sport is perceived as the place of “(...) identification with traditional masculine identity” (Melosik,

2015: 315). Another place that requires from each gender different behaviours is school. “Teachers from the first years of schooling have a tendency to put tasks to the children according to their own concept of student-boy and student-girl. Girls receive tasks that require careful work, boys - tasks requiring independence” (Mandal, 2003: 38). In addition to the requirements set by teachers, peers play a very important, and sometimes even much more important role in the process of socialization. Contemporaries socialization exerts intense pressure on young boys and on their behaviour. The pressure from contemporaries groups is much bigger compared to boys than girls. The boys are “(...) forced to hiding these character traits that conflict with the image of hardness, masculinity, bravery” (Bradley, 2008: 41).

Sport beyond the extremely important role - activating and influencing a healthy human life, also has a socializing role. “Young men in a sports competitions they are look for recognition, acceptance, self-value, and finally their own identity. They learn the fact that, to be accepted person you must won” (Modzelewska & Ostrouch-Kamińska, 2015: 147). Urszula Kluczyńska indicate that “if a boy wants to belong to the dominant mainstream of masculinity (referred to as the main one), he must be characterized by physical strength and toughness, he must strive for success and compete, fighting for victory” (Kluczyńska, 2010: 88). Sport can therefore be described as an immanent feature of boys' development. “Sport defines aggressive behaviour, strength and hardness as a norm - the norm of masculinity - and socializes to it. Constructs the identity of young men and reproduces male hegemony, because the sports hero is perceived as a real man. Athletes are becoming heroes and authorities, who are adored, exalted and elevated to the cultural pedestal” (Kluczyńska, 2010: 89).

Masculinity in sport

Not only during childhood and early youth, man is subject to the process of socialization. This process is constant and it lasts all the time. Thanks to socialization, an individual creates and constructs a sense of them own “I” and identity. One of the areas of shaping the man identity, also in the early stages of his life, is a variety physical activities, while the sport itself is often associated with competition and domination, which is culturally assign to masculinity. Sport is one of the most “important and at the same time perfectly clear areas of celebration [male - O.M.] dominance (...)” (Kluczyńska, 2011: 67), and the fact of connecting it with prestige and respect further underlines its importance in society.

Constant changes and evolutions of social life have awake in some people a sense of fear of excessive feminisation of the whole society. One of the reactions to this state was the escape of men in sport, which was to become “(...) a place of

supremacy and separation from women” (Arcimowicz, 2003: 65). Sport is an area of confirming the traditional power of masculinity, strength and violence (Kluczyńska, 2011). The established order, structure, values and principles transmitted within it are confirmed in the concepts of dominant, traditional masculinity. “The world of sport is an important cultural arena that partially serves to socialize boys and young men in values such as hierarchy, competition, aggression” (Messner, 1987: 66).

It is pointed out that the concept of masculinity and femininity emerges as part of sport. Young men are looking for respect through the results they get in sports. This social sphere of life emphasizes the importance of rivalry and strength and the simultaneous domination of men. It also helps in the socialization of young boys not only as an indication of masculine attributes, “but it can also be used to humanize men” (Arcimowicz, 2003: 65). However, sport, is a sphere where strength and competition are extremely valued features, is supporting the view of male domination and helps in the construction of men's hegemony (Arcimowicz, 2003; Kluczyńska, 2011). Sport can be described as a kind of field of reproduction of hegemonic masculinity, but also of violence and aggression (Jakubowska, 2017b: 28).

Some researchers, however, indicated that aggression is an inseparable element of the so-called “male sports” (Jakubowska, 2017a: 136) Jolanta Miluska (1996) pointed that such sports can include football, boxing or hunting, but you can also include here various types of motor sports, in which “both contestants and viewers are mainly men, which contributes to the perception of this discipline as typically masculine. What's more, the car, competition and risk as the main attributes of motor sports are traditionally reserved for men” (Brzuszkiewicz, 2013: 129). These sports are very often high-risk activities. Many times they are called as an extreme sports, that is, disciplines, “(...) which practicing requires above-average skills, courage and action in conditions of high risk, often life-threatening. Participation in them involves overcoming extreme external difficulties, psychological limitations and emotions associated with it” (Muszkieta & Gembiak, 2004: 478). People who practice extreme sports to a large extent are guided by the desire to test their abilities and skills in conditions of increased risk. “In such circumstances, man forgets about the surrounding reality and becomes a hero not only in his own eyes, but also in the face of crowds of gathered fans. It is a great form of releasing, giving enormous complacency. Practicing extreme sports gives the feeling of accomplishing something extraordinary, regardless of whether the person treats them as a form of establishing new opportunities for people or as just great fun”(Muszkieta & Gembiak, 2004: 487).

Performing extreme sports requires participants not only to be properly physically fit, but also to have psychological resilience and perseverance. Strong

psychology and strong nerves are sometimes much more important and more significant at critical moments, where contestants must face not only a specific task, but also themselves, emphasizing their masculinity and the fact of being a “real man”. Therefore, during the training of young boys next to physical fitness, it is extremely important to shape the psychological immunity. Often a stereotype of a man is reproduced in society as a person who is strong psychic, which is additionally confirmed by proper sports training.

Michał Lenartowicz (2012: 51) indicates that “sport and physical recreation in free time were in the past and are still used as distinguishing features of social belonging (...)”, which in turn connects with the concept of habitus presented by Pierre Bourdieu. The author of this theory describes habitus as “ (...) matrices of perception, thinking and action (which - O.M.) could be called transcendent historical, because they are universally imposed on all members of society as transcendent: as a consequence, the androcentric images of biological and social reproduction are inscribed into the objectivity of common sense (...)” (Bourdieu, 2004: 45-46). Therefore, it can be stated that, for example, male domination in sport is one of the determinants of men's habitus determined for this sphere of life. While “gendered habitus are getting, among other in the process of socialization” (Jakubowska, 2014: 158).

Pierre Bourdieu points out that domination structures are the result of constant reproduction processes (Bourdieu, 2004), which in turn results in mapping behaviour patterns among other in reference to gender roles. The author adds that the main prisoners and victims of the currently prevailing cultural ideas are men, because, as he states, the dispositions “which confirm the supremacy and execution of dominance, are not written in nature but they are subject to the process of construction - they are the creation of a long process of socialization, that is, the active process of gender differentiation” (Bourdieu, 2004: 63). Socialization to gender roles imposes on men some kind of behaviour, that is, the above-mentioned habitus. In addition, men are required “ (...) to constantly prove their masculinity in opposition to femininity” (Pankowska, 2005: 15). Men live in a world that requires them to constant subordination to the framework of behaviour imposed by society.

The world in which we live nowadays has created around some disciplines and sports events the atmosphere of the holiday sometimes on the rank of a national holiday. Polish society, like many others considers football- which is the most popular sport in the world - as its national sport. This discipline has a lot of fans, and the very matches of the national team are followed by the majority of the society. Football players become the idols of young boys who dream of becoming an outstanding sportsman enjoying the fame and recognition of society as their idols. “Sport gives the young boys a tempting promise - it is a promise of admiration, appreciation or even worship” (Kluczyńska, 2010: 97). This situation,

especially in the case of young boys, highlights the fact that our society is very much attached to doing sport. Boys from an early age are encouraged to play football, and in later years in sports activities at school this type of activity is also very promoted. As indicated by Zbyszko Melosik, “football is undoubtedly a sport connected with the *“culture of men”*, embodying the homogeneity of this gender” (Melosik, 2015: 313). In addition, as indicated by U. Kluczyńska (2011: 84) “..football is an important way to shape the dominant masculinity and identity of men”.

Apart from active participation in this sport, the fact of supporting and being a fan plays a large role in Polish society. Zbyszko Melosik emphasizes that the support culture has archetypically masculine character (Melosik, 2015). It is worth mentioning the period when in 2012 in Poland the European Football Championship was played. The whole country was interested in this sporting event. Media broadcasts were dominated by the coverage of continuous games, and the broadcasts themselves were watched by a huge audience, which were not only great fans, but also people who are not interested in this sport every day. At that time, the fact of following the Championships was an important social experience.

Conclusion

Summarizing the considerations above, at this point it is possible to try to formulate a few general conclusions about discussed topic.

At first, sport is now one of the most spectacular phenomena of contemporary culture and constitutes a space in which gender segregation is common and generally accepted (Uliński, 2011: 161), and “(...) helped and helps to ground the symbolic and cultural advantage of masculinity in society” (Dziubiński, Organista, & Mazur, 2017: 86).

Secondly, sport and various physical activities in the patriarchal society is developed mainly by and for men. Zbigniew Krawczyk indicates that “(...) one can and should consider sport as a form of human searching for its essence and ways of *“transgressing itself”* (Krawczyk, 2000: 45). It is also a practice that to a very large extent shape the identity of a man and his social position - its defines masculine hegemony, becoming “one of the central areas of social production of masculinity”, as indicated U. Kluczyńska (2010: 97) based on the text of Davis Whison (1990: 19).

Thirdly, send to children, often unconsciously, the content and requirements for the behaviour of each gender including gender stereotypes can have a very negative impact not only on the perception of the world and diversity, but can also inhibit the self-development of children, and raise the fear of going beyond the learned framework of gender behaviour.

And finally the considerations discussed above regarding sport and socialization to masculinity by sport are only one of the possible points of view. Obviously, not all men are able to meet social expectations in the same way and become a perfect example of a “suitably socialized” individual. Each of the men shapes his gender identity in a different way through sport, which takes a different place in his life. Therefore, it is worth mentioning here the concept of hegemonic masculinity Raewyn Connell, which indicates that in the modern world there is not only one pattern of masculinity, but there are many, because they depend on historical, geographical or socio-cultural conditions. This masculinity pattern “embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 832). According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity is the configuration of “(...) gender practices that accept and legitimize patriarchy, guaranteeing the simultaneous dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 1987: 77). This concept is often used by the researchers to understand the popularity of body contact confrontational sports—which function as an endlessly renewed symbol of masculinity—and in understanding the violence (...) in sporting milieus” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 833). In this concept sport emphasizes hegemonic masculinity and sport is regarded as the most 'male' social institution.

Gender socialization through sport constantly communicates a stereotypical set of characteristics and requirements for each gender. Young boys, but also adult men who are shaped in such a way often without reflection reproduce only the patterns of behaviour, male habits and do not reflect on possible alternatives of constructing their own “I”.

References

- Arcimowicz, K. (2003). *Obraz mężczyzny w polskich mediach*, (pp. 65-66). Gdańsk.
- Bourdieu, P. (2004). *Męska dominacja*, (pp. 45-47, 63). Warszawa.
- Bradley, H. (2008). *Płeć* (p. 41). Warszawa.
- Brannon, L. (2002). *Psychologia rodzaju*, (pp. 199-200). Gdańsk.
- Brzuszkiewicz, A. (2013). *To nie jest sport dla kobiet - Analiza dyskursu wykluczającego na przykładzie wyścigów Formuły 1* (p. 129), „Człowiek i Społeczeństwo” t.XXXVI - z.1-2013.
- Chmura-Rutkowska, I., Głowacka-Sobiech, E., & Nowak-Kluczyński, K. (2012). *Męska natura- męskie rozrywki. Zdrowie mężczyzny w kontekście męskich pasji i czasu wolnego we współczesnych czasopiśmiech hobbistycznych wydawanych w Polsce*, (p. 485). “Nowiny lekarskie”, Nr 5.
- Chmura-Rutkowska, I., & Ostrouch, J. (2007), *Mężczyźni na przełęczu życia. Studium socjopedagogiczne*. (p. 26). Kraków.
- Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and Power*, (p. 77). Cambridge.

- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity. Rethinking the concept, *Gender & Society*, Vol. 19, No. 6, 832-833.
- Dziekanowska, M. (2008). Męska płć kulturowa w perspektywie socjologicznej, In: Radomski, A., Truchlińska, B. (Eds.) *Męskość w kulturze współczesnej* (pp. 58). Lublin.
- Dziubiński, Z., Ogranista, N., & Mazur, Z. (2017). O męskości konstruowanej medialnie: zarys zagadnień teoretycznych i przykład analizy empirycznej (p. 86). „*Kultura i Społeczeństwo*” 61/2017.
- Gawlicz, K. (2009). Negocjowanie znaczenia kategorii płci. Pomiędzy różnicowaniem płci a przekraczaniem granic, In: Kopciwicz, L., Zierkiewicz, E. (Eds.), *Koniec mitu niewinności? Płć i seksualność w socjalizacji i edukacji* (p. 89). Warszawa.
- Jakubowska, H. (2014). *Gra ciałem. Praktyki i dyskursy różnicowania płci w sporcie*. Warszawa.
- Jakubowska, H. (2017). Płć, In: Jakubowska H., Nosa P. (Eds.), *Socjologia sportu*. Warszawa.
- Jakubowska, H. (2017). Emocje, In: Jakubowska H., Nosa P. (Eds.), *Socjologia sportu*, (p. 28). Warszawa.
- Karkowska, M. (2006). Socjalizacja rodzajowa dziewcząt i chłopców a ukryty program edukacji szkolnej. In: Chomczyńska-Rubacha, M. (Eds.), *Role płciowe. Kultura i edukacja*. Łódź.
- Kluczyńska, U. (2010). Sport jako obszar konstruowania tożsamości mężczyzn. Znaczenia wpisane w sport i możliwości ich definiowania. In: Dąbrowska, M., Radomski A. (Eds.) *Męskość jako kategoria kulturowa* (pp. 87-89, 97). Lublin.
- Kluczyńska, U. (2011). Męska dominacja i piłka nożna. Analizy medialnych prezentacji, In: Wojnicka K., Ciaputa E. (Eds.), *Karuzela z mężczyznami. Problematyka męskości w polskich badaniach społecznych* (pp. 65,67, 84). Kraków.
- Krawczyk, Z. (2000). *Sport w zmieniającym się społeczeństwie* (p. 45). Warszawa.
- Lenartowicz, M. (2012). Klasowe uwarunkowania sportu z perspektywy teoretycznej Pierre'a Bourdieu. *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, nr 3.
- Mandal, E. (2003). *Kobiecość i męskość*. Warszawa.
- Melosik, Z. (2015). Społeczno-Kulturowe konstrukcje piłki nożnej: Męskość, kolektywna tożsamość i japonizacja. *Studia Edukacyjne*, nr37/2015, 313-315.
- Messner, M. A. (1987). The life of a Man's Season. Male Identity in the Life Course of the Jock, In: Kimmel M.(Eds.) *Changing Men. New Direction in Research on Men and Masculinity*. (p. 66). Newbury-London-New Delhi.
- Miluska, J. (1996). *Tożsamość kobiet i mężczyzn w cyklu życia*. Poznań.
- Modzelewska, O., & Ostrouch-Kamińska, J. (2015). Dominacja i współziałanie. Sposoby doświadczania męskości przez off-roadowców, *Szkice Humanistyczne*” XV nr 3-4 (vol. 38), 147.
- Muszkiet, R., & Gembia, M. (2004). Uwarunkowania i motywy uprawiania sportów ekstremalnych, In: Dziubinowski Z. (Ed.), *Edukacja poprzez sport*, 478, 487.
- Pankowska, D. (2005). *Wychowanie a role płciowe* (pp. 15, 71, 82). Gdańsk.
- Renzetti, C. M., & Curran, D. J. (2005). *Kobiety, mężczyźni i społeczeństwo*. Warszawa.
- Szacka, B. (2009). *Wprowadzenie do socjologii*. Warszawa.
- Uliński, M. (2011). Sport jako obszar modelowania męskości i kobiecości, In: Bartosz B. (Ed.) *Wymiary kobiecości i męskości* (pp. 161, 164). Warszawa.
- Wolańska, T. (1997). *Leksykon Sport dla wszystkich – rekreacja ruchowa*. Warszawa.
- Whitson, D. (1990). Sport in the social construction of masculinity, In: Messner M. A., Sabo D. F. (Eds.) *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives* (p. 19). Champaign: Human Kinetics