

Do the Right Thing

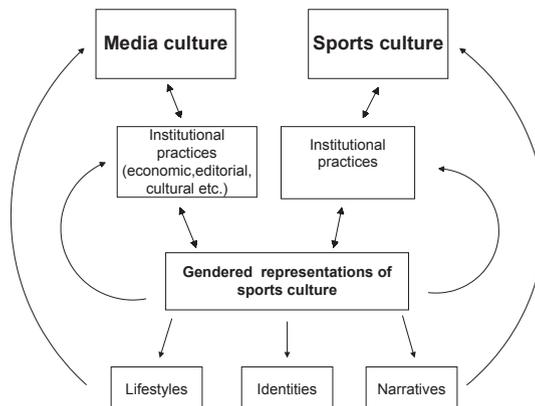
Gendering Practices in Sports Media

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The realm of sports culture is one of the corner stones of 21st century western culture. Prevailing forms of culture invite certain lifestyles and identities, dominated by sports and competition. These invitations are constructed and renewed in the network of media and other channels of public debate that form the public sphere of sports culture. This public sphere is diverse, and is divided into various genres and different media. It is also a mixture of styles, requirements and practices that derive from the praxis of (mediated) industries of popular culture.

Usually, talk about the public sphere of sports refers to the sports spectacle, which has experienced a dramatic implosion during recent years; that is top competitive sports, the sports sections of newspapers, sport magazines and huge events, like the Olympics or the World Championships that gather together whole nations (Kellner 2001, Pirinen 1999, 30-43, Silvennoinen 1999, 163-175, Ojajärvi ja Valtonen 2001, 19-26). This mediated sports spectacle involves, according to Kellner, “passive consumption of media images.” It does not necessarily turn into active life politics but continues to distract social subjects from real life (2001, see also Debord 1967/1994). When it comes to life politics and formation of lifestyles, not only are the top sports interesting, but also the whole range of public sphere within which individuals construct their (bodily) identities, the “sports culture”.

Table 1.



In the sphere of popular culture, different forms of symbolic change, identity and agency are made possible by representations (Grossberg 1995, 25). Following Bourdieu, we think of popular culture as a field within which people struggle for their place/space in reality. Thus, identity and representation become political categories by and through which it is possible to organize reality claims and, to put it simply, do things.

Media culture necessarily represents many contradictory forces. Media texts operate as fields for concrete societal battles. Media texts must be able to resonate with the worries and wishes of the people in order to become profitable (as products of media industry) – therefore they have to be able to convey divergent, even contradictory, meanings even within a single text. Thus popular media culture monitors carefully fears, hopes, tastes and targets “on the air” and holds a central position in formation of lifestyles typical of our times. It creates significant symbols that are intertwined with common experiences as well as with individual identities. The meanings circulated within the field of mediated sports culture call on people to evaluate their lifestyles: the interpretations of these meanings deal with processes like identification, differentiation, self-reflection and even guilt. An analytical overview is therefore needed.

To grasp the public sphere of sports culture, a week of media reality (the television programmes, Finnish sports magazines, Finnish web sites and advertising within these media, see Appendix 1) was analysed from the point of view of gendering practices. The theoretical and methodological starting point of the analyses is the presumption that language is an ideological, consequence-bound system that actively constructs social reality. Discourse in its turn is understood as a framework with and within which social problems are brought under processes of governance. Discourse makes it possible to conceptualize the world from a relatively set point of view (e.g., Foucault 1972, Valtonen 2000): for example sports culture can be presented in countless ways (paroles), but some of these ways become dominant. Thus there are discourses constructing sports culture, and they define what is understood to be part of “sports culture” as well as what can be said about sports culture and how.

We concentrate on the diverse meanings of sports culture that are circulated within the field of popular culture and especially in specific sports media. From the vast range of interesting aspects, we have chosen to focus on how these meanings tend to be organized in ways that have gendering consequences. In theory, sports culture could be considered a field within which gendering practices lose at least some of their significance. Both sexes definitely have bodies, and both sexes can either, neglect their bodies or maintain, strengthen and cultivate them. The joy practising sports gives cannot be located in sex or in chromosome structure, and yet, the field of sports is strongly gendered. This derives from the fact that the body is the exact spot where gender difference is traditionally thought to be located. This difference looks permanent and is thought to influence irrevocably on how a body marked by one of the sexes relates with the world. Following from this, the joy of sports seems to be categorized into two different ways of exercising and taking care of one’s body. Due to the central position of gender dichotomy, the forms and products of popular culture seem also to approach their consumer according to his/her sex.

In the following analyses, we wish to trace at least some of the logics and strategies on the basis of which the gendering practices are carried out. We look for practical acts, visual, verbal or discursive, through which the public sphere of sports culture is gendered. How, in practice, do imaginaries make themselves more available to one gender than another? What kind of ideological consequences do these imaginaries have? What kind of material do they offer for constructing active subjectivities or doing identity

work? Grasping gendered representations and analysing them can be considered a modest effort to point out and re-articulate existing undemocratic symbolic practices. The analyses must, however, start by defining the field in question.

Battlefields of Mediated Sports Culture

Body and its governance are central to (Western) culture. There is no place outside what is culturally intelligible (see Butler 1993), and as a member of a body-centred western culture one can either take part in the projects of forming one's body (by exercising and/or dieting) or refuse to do so. There are whole industries concerned with the body in one way or another, and between these industries and the people there is a network of public spheres offering meanings and images for people's identity work. This network of different media, industries and relationships is here referred as the public sphere of sports culture.

The public sphere of sports culture is not restricted to explicit magazines, television programmes or Internet sports sites; the implications of sports culture connect to contemporary culture in various ways. The variety of stages for sports culture is so wide that their existence might even appear as insignificant (see Grossberg 1995). For the same reason, a closer look at at least some of the forms of this billboard-like public sphere of sports culture becomes necessary and may shed light on its multiple cultural consequences.

Sports culture is a central theme of television content in general. Especially youth programmes and serials, sitcoms, and single's programmes refer to sports culture both explicitly and implicitly, for example through the use of young, trim bodies familiar from the aesthetics of sports. At the same time, the programmes promote a certain body-oriented lifestyle: the fictive characters of TV series are permanently on diets and/or exercising in order to attract the opposite sex. Traces of what we call sports culture can also be found in the advertisements presented within the above-mentioned programmes: in commercials for food, fashion, cosmetics and different services, imaginaries from sports culture are taken advantage of in various ways.

Sports culture at its barest is represented in workout programmes in television where the young and fit (women) in their exercise outfits persuade their viewers to participate in their 15-minute workout schedule. Sports as entertainment is represented for instance by *SmackDown!*, where professional athletes fight in staged struggles. Also referring implicitly to sports culture are shows like *Temptation Island* or *Survivors*, where half-naked tanned people with well-developed muscles play different kinds of games. Sports news and competition results as well as sports magazine programmes represent more traditional forms of sports culture.

TV's sports magazines and serials have their own web sites, which are linked to various networks of sports zines and forums that consist of interactive services, chats, product advertising and sites connected to more traditional sports media (magazines and TV programmes). Many of the texts and articles we found were already published in other popular media – a form of intertextuality within sports culture. Besides all this, the Internet offers an endless number of zines that are related to sports culture: fanzines of famous athletes or teams, personal homepages of athletes, teams, clubs, gyms etc., chat rooms that focus on athletes and/or different sports and a wide range of lifestyle and hobby sites (skate boarding, extreme sports, surfing, etc.). In a similar manner, sports culture appears in popular press: magazines that concentrate on one sport as well as general lifestyle magazines, women's magazines, advertisements and references to other

popular media (TV programmes, movies). The news and dailies also report issues connected to public health and exercise campaigns and advertisements and information posters on the streets, on public vehicles and even packages for foods and other commodities constantly remind us of sports culture.

The ways in which the television, the Internet and the popular press deal with sports culture ooze over to the fields of cinema and music videos, whose aesthetics, styles and topics are in dialogue with all other representations of sports culture. The training programmes of movie stars and other celebrities ("how to get Madonna's arms?") are revealed in women's magazines as well as the hard work required to accomplish a role in movies, etc. The arenas of competitive sports are often taken advantage of in constructing storylines for music videos (e.g., Christina Aguilera's video *Dirrrty*) and movie characters are represented as struggling with similar problems as "ordinary people" (e.g., *Shallow Hal* or *Bridget Jones's Diary*). There are countless movies derived directly from the field of sports (so-called sports movies, for instance *Rocky I-V*, *Le Grand Bleu*, *Driven*, *Bend It Like Beckham*, or *A League of the Their Own*). Also action movies (kung fu and karate films for example) and dance movies from *Fame* and *Flashdance* to the recent *Billy Elliot* and *Save the last Dance*.

Making Genders – Or Faking Them?

In a culture that centres on the body, and understands gender as one of the central cultural divides, most aspects of life are easily defined and categorized with the help of gender stereotypes: basically everything, even a word in relation to another word, can be interpreted in terms of the "feminine" –

"masculine" axis (e.g., Cameron 1985/1992, see also Davis 1997). Feminist media studies have clearly shown how dominant gender hierarchies are circulating in the media. The consequence is/has been that women and men are represented as well as addressed in different and unequal ways.

As abstract concepts *feminine* and *masculine* are hard to define, yet binary oppositions like strong-weak or hard-soft or active-passive settle quite unproblematically as characteristics of either men or women. To play with a thought: the same is true of other combinations of words, like knife-fork, salt-pepper, vanilla-chocolate (Cameron 1985/1992). Or, what would be the genders of red-blue, exercise-sports, or round-angular? It sounds simple, but because the producers of sites, texts and programmes share the same culture with their readers and viewers, the shared meanings are easily adapted and circulated. Clearly enough, gendered images not only represent how genders are; they also produce two considerably different cultures. Media are powerful in constructing the realm of what is possible to represent, as well as in defining the culturally intelligible limits for genders and their assumed qualities (Butler 1990, x; Butler 1993, 9-10; Pulkkinen 2000, 56).

Gender-oriented research on the public sphere of sports has focused on sports journalism, and from theoretical and/or methodological point of view, it has been "traditional" in two senses: on the one hand, it has mostly theorized gender in a traditional, essentialist way and, on the other, it has concentrated on quantitative issues like head counting, etc., and taken very little account of the work on construction of gender and conceptualization of body that is central to feminist theory. Contemporary gender studies have increasingly shifted the focus from gender differences to differences within genders, and to deconstruction of the inevitable dichotomy between genders both on the cultural and material (corporeal) level (Brooks 1997; Davis 1997; Butler 1990; 1993).

In the field of mediated competitive sports, men are put in advantageous positions in numerous ways: stories about sportsmen are longer and placed on tops of pages/ sport sections of news more often than are stories about sportswomen. Also the criteria for newsworthiness are different for the two sexes (see, e.g., Ojajärvi & Valtonen 2001, 19-26; Pirinen 1999, 32). Gender hierarchies are also to be found in processes like constructing layouts, picturing stories, and in choice of vocabulary. In practice, this can be seen in the facts. For instance, in reporting the winter Olympics, the Finnish media tend to write quantitatively more about male ice hockey before the games have even started than they do about female ice hockey during the whole games. In addition, gender difference can be strengthened by attaching different characteristics to athletes: in Finland it is natural for sports journalists to talk about male javelin throwers as “Finnish bears” and their female colleagues as the “javelin girls” (see, e.g., Pirinen 1999, 30 & 33 and Virtapohja 1998).

The products of popular culture tend to appeal to explicit or easily recognizable gender qualities and in doing so they re-construct the difference between genders. Re-presentations are necessarily connected with previous representations and it is simply inevitable that they have sufficiently familiar and recognizable elements (de Lauretis 1987, 5; Ojajärvi 2000, 119-122; Skeggs 1997; Tasker 1998, 21-26). This need to recognize sex and/or gender itself reproduces gender difference and gendering practices. In competitive sports, differentiating the sexes has been carried out to the extreme (sex testing, etc.), but when it comes to sports culture in general, one would think that sex should not have such significance. Popular culture and its products, however, seem to indicate that sexes and gendered bodies should be separated in all practices of sports culture.

This indication has been constructed on the basis of earlier research on three levels of practices (see, e.g., van Zoonen 1994, de Lauretis 1987, Markula 1995, on sports journalism see also Ojajärvi & Valtonen 2001 and Valtonen & Ojajärvi 2003). These practices are unavoidably intertwined in the processes of signification, but for analytical purposes we claim it is possible to separate the practices that set the agenda for the public sphere of sports (define what is possible to talk about), the practices that visualize the same public sphere, and the practices that define how one can operate in the field (discursive strategies; styles, vocabularies, relations between actors and phenomena etc.). The discourses of mediated sports culture are formed in the interplay between these “levelled practices”. The analysis is conducted following this tripartition and presented, again simplifying reality, one medium at time.

Read Yourself Beautiful

Considering media’s function of maintaining democracy, magazines would not be the most central, but when it comes to lifestyles, they are certainly important and close to their readers. Magazines succeed in handling complicated matters in encouraging and touching ways (e.g. Lowenthal 1984). They aim to “grasp something essential of both time and its modes of expression” (Kivikuru 1996, 51); in other words, they seek a combination of contents and styles that apply to target audiences.

Actualization (“on-the-air” –journalism etc.) and specialization have been central trends in the field of media within past decades – for instance, the traditional genre of women’s magazines has expanded to a range of specialized magazines (fashion, interior design, needlework, health & beauty, etc.). When it comes to sports culture, this specialization is clear: there are more than thirty magazines published in Finland that focus on one sport.

For this purpose, we concentrate only on the magazines that focus on sports culture. Some of them were addressed to women, whereas others did not have explicit gender address. By their own definition, magazines addressed to women are called *Sport and LadyFitness*. Others do not define their target audience explicitly. We interpreted some of these magazines as “gender neutral” (*KuntoPlus*, *Kunto & Terveys* and *Fitness*¹), and some as “manly” (*Kuntosali*, *Bodaus*, *Juoksija*). “Manly” or masculine by our definition was a magazine that had specific sections or appendixes for women or the headlines of articles referred casually to men only: “Cut out the middle, man!” or “You can tell he is fit from the way he moves”.

Interestingly, women’s magazines and “neutral” or men’s magazines were classified differently by a Finnish organization that provides magazines to retailers. Women’s sports culture was situated without exception into category of “beauty & health”, whereas the neutral or men’s magazines were found in the category of “sports”.

Get Fit, Eat Right!

Because all magazines treated in the data are explicitly focused on sports culture, the fields on which the topics and interests are gathered are somewhat similar. Still, there are clear differences in the topics and in quantities of certain topics that seem to “make” the magazines either traditionally manly/masculine or womanly/feminine. Analysing the thematic aspects of the public sphere of sports culture might seem like a thing from the past, but when focusing on the practices that gender the very same field, it regains at least some importance. The choice of topics and themes is of course part of editorial policies, but at the same time, there are ideological and discursive limits to what kinds of issues are even possible to discuss when talking about sports and women or men. We see that discourse is a way of representing the knowledge about a particular topic: it defines and produces the objects of our knowledge and influences how ideas are put into practice. It is, thus, interesting to see where the contents of women’s and men’s sports media overlap and where there seems to be no connection between the two “knowledges” of gendered sports culture.

All magazines naturally write about sports in general. In the magazines that we interpreted as “manly” and in so-called gender-neutral magazines, this tends to be the most common category of stories. New sports are introduced or the consequences that practicing any sport can have on the human physique are discussed, for example. In women’s magazines, stories of sports fashion, workout plans, diets and beauty are more common than stories introducing new sports, and the consequences of sports are generally limited to weight loss and gaining firmness. Also peculiar is the way women’s sports magazines present different sports as seasonal: they are dependent on trends, they become fashionable and, later, disappear as fast as they once appeared. Women are not expected to make commitments to their sports-oriented hobbies, whereas men, for their part, are served with media that focus on a certain sport and function on the idea of loyalty and commitment among the practitioners.

Also the contents of stories with kindred headlines are strikingly different. Whereas manly magazines and the neutral magazines write about general aspects of training, new approaches to coaching, or new angles on or applications of traditional training methods, women’s magazines focus on spurring their readers to keep up their sporty hobbies and presenting advantages of doing sports (weight loss, increasing calorie consumption or toning the body for better looks). Celebrity stories differ almost as clearly. The womanly/feminine way of writing celebrity portraits seems to be presenting the celebrities as “one

of us”, women dealing with societal pressure to stay fit and thin. Celebrities chosen for presentation are thus more likely to be models, actors, singers, etc., than athletes or other actors in the field of sports. In magazines interpreted as masculine, portraits are written by successful athletes and people working in the field of sports (sports ministers, leaders of sports clubs and institutions, experts of sports medicine or top physiotherapists). Women’s magazines also write success stories or stories about ordinary people who practise exotic sports more often than do the rest of the magazines in the field.

Look Great!

Sports magazines in Finland come out once in a month or even more rarely. These magazines are usually printed on thick, good quality paper, and they have a certain mark of luxury in their appearance: the pages are filled with double page pictures and advertisements. Women’s sports magazines repeat the pattern: they are quite reminiscent of traditional women’s magazines. The sports magazines targeted to both sexes are slightly more modest in their appearance, but still recognizable within the genre. The magazines with implicit male target audience differ clearly: the paper is not necessarily thick and shiny nor are the pictures and advertisements luxurious in any way. This probably has to do with the fact that men’s magazines are not so-called lifestyle magazines like women’s magazines or the ones interpreted as ‘neutral’ in this sense, but sports magazines focusing on one sport (Runnersworld, Cyclist etc.)

Also the covers of magazines are strikingly different in layout, colours, typographics as well as in the choice of pictures. Women’s magazines are covered with fashion photographs, whereas men’s magazines have cover pictures of practising sports. Women’s magazines are coloured in pastel colours or bright shades of pink and fuchsia, while the masculine equivalents appear in basic colours: strong blues, greens, reds and yellows. The fonts used on the covers of women’s magazines as well as magazines targeted to both sexes were round, thick and in upright position. Men’s magazines had at least their name written with narrower letters and in dynamic cursives (attributing to sports).

The differences do not end on the covers, but grow more profound. In women’s magazines, there are surprisingly few pictures that, without the stories around them and without the context the media itself gives to the pictures, could be interpreted as pictures of sports. The pictures are more kindred with glamour photography in fashion and lifestyle magazines: they are designed, colourful, trendy and definitely fashion oriented. If exercise is practised in them, it is seldom sports (entailing sweat for instance), but rather having fun and playing in sporty atmospheres and arenas (sailing boats, golf courses, spas or track fields). The seldom-visible sweat appears on a perfect young face in a close up, and in addition to sweat, no other signs of fatigue are ever shown. The role of clothes, cosmetics and accessories is emphasized – even explicitly, for the products used in creating the pictures are usually listed on the side (make-up, hair care products, make-up artists and hair designers, etc.). One thing is common to all modelled pictures: the lips. They are red and shiny and parted – maybe because of enthusiasm or inspiration?

There appears to be repeated strategies for creating “sports” in the photos. On one hand, the models may be photographed in the traditional fashion photography style but in arenas connected to sports. On the other hand, the models can be pictured against the “empty”, one-colour background familiar from fashion photography, but then the model must be in motion; most typically flying wildly through the air after a hidden jump on a trampoline. The prevailing conventions and practices seem to lack possibilities to pic-

ture women doing sports in any other way than the one already known from the field of fashion (e.g., Laiho 1996, 61-66, Vänskä 2002, also Koskinen 1998).

In men's sport magazines the pictures are about sports. The athletes (not models!) are captured with expressions of concentration on their faces: the sport seems to be the main action and the camera the side kick – in many of the photos they are probably not aware they are being photographed at all. The pictures are mostly taken in the arenas of sports – track fields, gyms, swimming pools – and from big sporting events. Alongside the stories are a series of graphic presentations: tables, drawings and curves, which help to illustrate aspects of the performance. Compared with the women's magazines, the magazines are visually anaemic: the matt paper does not give the same kind of shine to colours and the advertisements are smaller, less colourful and less designed. The advertisements, like the actual stories, focus on either the performance or the “science” and “technology” assisting the performance.

The visual aspects of these magazines are interesting, for we assume that the imaginaries of sports do symbolic yet powerful acts to enable different ways of combining gendered bodies with practicing sports. The prevailing ways of picturing women and men, and visualizing the ways they practice sports, have to do with the content and practices of the whole sports culture. It also has an affect on the possibilities men and women have for self-identification and action.

Shape Your Life!

The biggest differences between the magazines appear in their ways of speech and in how they address their audiences. These are not separate from the thematic and visual differences, but they all work discursively together to reinforce the gendering practices and to bring about the fact that similar issues (diets and workout or presentations of new sports, for example) are dealt with in quite dissimilar ways.

In women's magazines, the predominant style of speech is chatty – like a bunch of friends talking together (see Hermes 1995). In this friendly manner the magazines address a person starting a new hobby or having difficulties in keeping up with an existing one. Different sections of the magazine repeat this almost parental way of warning women about various dangers: temptations or relapses concerning diets or about the scary tacit fat in processed foods. This leads the reader to conclude that unhealthy eating, lack of inspiration or the premature aging of the skin are lurking around the gym corner and that the task of the magazines is to spur and encourage the women.

It is peculiar how the topics are not addressed with their proper names, but explained with almost childish practical examples and periphrases. For instance dieting or improvement of aerobic capacity is rarely approached with physiological explanations, but with expressions like: after a few weeks of following this routine, you will notice you no longer become out of breath so easily or that you can button the top button of your jeans again. Women's sports magazines have adopted some of this childish language, which would be totally incomprehensible in men's magazines. The magazines classified as “neutral” lie in the middle. Thus, sports in the proper meaning of the word is separated from women and femininity on the level of vocabulary and discourse and, at the same time, femininity is connected with exercise or conditioning.

A specific feminine point of view permeates all stories. This framework seems to emphasize looks as the core of women's sports culture. Achieving a certain look is seen as the key motivational element in the ways women practice sports as well as the key factor in women's relationships with their bodies. The choices these magazines make

Table 2. *Gendering Practices in Sports Magazines*

Gender address; interpretation grounded in:	Addressed to women: Sport, LadyFitness	No explicit gender address: Fitness, Kunto ja terveyst, Kunto+	Addressed to men: Kuntosali, Juoksija
1) Themes of stories and their frequencies	fashion, sports accessories, (celebrity) portraits, looks, outdoor activities, health workout routines, sports presentations, diets, recipes, dieting & weight beauty & cosmetics, self confidence & personal growth, relationships, success stories, product presentations, FAQ in medicine, beauty or training	sports presentations, sports in general, (celebrity) portraits, news product presentations, health relationships, workout routines & tips nutrition & recipes travel sex dieting & weight	sports in general, techniques, (celebrity) portraits, workout routines, tips & comparisons capacity & physiology sports results events (marathons etc.) nutrition dietary supplements equipment
2) Visual style	colours: pastels, pinks fonts: round, upright, stylized covers: models presenting sports journalistic pictures: big, like fashion photographs, women pose, not perform	colours: basic blues, reds, greens, yellows fonts: stylized covers: pictures of performing bodies, pictures from events/ competitions journalistic pictures: big, like covers, seldom models posing	colours: basic blues, reds, greens, yellows fonts: narrow, stylized, dynamic cursives covers: pictures of performing bodies, pictures from events/ competitions journalistic pictures: smaller, like covers, models/athletes posing only in workout stories
3) Discursive strategies	addressing audience: sisterly, encouraging style: chatty, even childlike, practical vocabulary: practical, vivid, not professional other: everything is rendered womanly by combining it even artificially with "naturally feminine issues"	addressing audience: simple, straightforward encouraging, style: businesslike vocabulary: practical, perspicuous	addressing audience: parts of community style: businesslike, even professional vocabulary: practical, perspicuous, even scientific

include assumptions about women as bodily creatures, as members of a culture and as practitioners of sports. Even if top athletes were sometimes introduced and more often their bodies admired in women's sports magazines, the choices and ways of life these athletes represent are interpreted as strange and deviant from the framework of the discourse. When it comes to competitive sports, women are not expected to understand the sport itself nor are they expected to be motivated to act as audience. Rather, they are persuaded to view sports (since during the Olympics, for instance, their spouses do it anyway) by introducing new angles: the beautiful (male) bodies to fancy, the beautiful (female) bodies to inspire their own training, the possibility to cuddle with their spouses on the couch.

Men's magazines and the gender-neutral magazines write in a more matter-of-fact, substantial style. The "us" constructed within the stories consists of sports practitioners

and this “us” is addressed using professional, specialized discourses. The stories use professional vocabulary and explain issues and phenomena “scientifically”. Problems are solved by interviewing experts, and solutions and suggestions for action are shown in tables, graphics and even chemical compounds. If the discourse the feminine magazines use seems confusingly chatty and the actual facts are sometimes hard to find, their masculine equivalents do the exact opposite: the point is often buried among the countless technical details.

These gendering practices work effectively to form gender stereotypes, which can be quite narrow and unconditional. The stereotypes are not harmless and innocent descriptions of the different characteristics and interests of the two genders, but they renew the idea that everything is naturally gendered (e.g., Tainio 2001, 19, also West & Zimmerman 1987, Schegloff 1997). As an idea, a women’s sports magazine is possible – we tend to think that women practice sports in a specific, womanly way, which is separable from men’s way of doing sports. The same kind of magazine for men is unimaginable – if they would produce one, it would probably not succeed very well. Even magazines like *Men’s Health*, which covers a wider area of interest than just sports, have had difficulties finding sufficiently big audiences – the Finnish one lasted for almost a year. The differences within the sexes tend to fall into oblivion when the stereotypes become too strong.

These observations can in most respects be applied to other media as well. Because the analysis is inevitably partly descriptive, the following chapters on the Internet and television are written emphasizing the practices that take on different forms in these media.

Bodies Dot Com

Technically, an Internet site is a multimedia presentation; a visual field that consists of various graphic elements, for instance tables, windows, icons, fields and different animations (banners, gif-animations and java-applets). We are, however, more interested in their content and styles of expression and the network of practices that are formed between a site, its content and other media. The websites are here considered as a central part of contemporary visual imaginaries that, in addition to creating new media practices, circulate and re-form styles and elements from traditional media²

For the analyses, we selected websites that focus mainly in health-/ fitness-oriented sports and exercise (see Appendix 1.) The sites targeted at women were recognizable at first sight. Pale pastel colours were dominant in the backgrounds of the sites as well as in the illustrations and the headlines of texts. Also the compositions of the sites were feminine, and the typography that repeated the round and wavering forms of balls, bubbles and flowers. The femininity of these was highlighted, when we compared them with “gender neutral” sites (SKUL, Suomen Latu) or sites that promoted only one sport. Clear and strong blues and greens combined with angular forms characterize the visual images of the “masculine” sites. Pictures and texts appear in separate boxes, whereas in women’s sites they usually overlap.

Individual pictures strengthen the impression of difference. The photographs at women’s sites represent young, smiling women who, even if in the middle of their gym workout, have turned to pose to the camera. This gives an impression of passivity, in contrast to “gender neutral” sites that represent photos of whole families hiking, biking, paddling, etc., –actively doing something together. The focus of these family-photos seems to be in the activities more than in posing, which seems to be “natural” only to

women (see Mulvey 1975; Kuhn 1994). Photos on sites that are targeted to men also seem to have caught men “in the middle of action”: they do not care about the unknown observer of their action.

Magazines and Internet sites seem to be kindred as forums of sports culture judged by their content, visual style, discursive strategies and use. Both of them are scanned page/text by page/text. They share the privacy of the acts of reading/using them as well. Thus, the Internet could be considered the modern extension of women’s magazines and sports magazines (like McLuhan’s (1964) idea of television as the extension of eye, etc.). Both of them have, however, their special characteristics on levels of use, contents and aesthetics.

Internet’s particularity is constructed on its interactivity and versatility. Even if the sites are grounded on visual elements (icons, arrows and colours), their contents are based on texts and interaction to the extent that other elements (pictures, sounds and moving images) are subordinate to texts (Paasonen 2002). The articles that resemble those of magazines are remarkably shorter on the Internet, but the medium makes it possible to open long and detailed texts “under” a collection of hyperlinks. The reader is lured to stay, since the next zine is temptingly close... The interactivity and reader-orientation of the Internet become obvious while acquainting oneself with the number of discussion forums where readers communicate in real time. Characteristic of the medium, but also familiar from magazines, are the experts who answer reader’s questions. The advantage of the Internet is that it contains huge archives for the interested reader.

From Talking Heads to Sporting Bodies

Same visual imaginaries, discursive strategies and topics circulate from one media to another. Television is bursting with meanings that are related to sports culture. During the research period, sports news was naturally available, but also magazine programmes reminiscent of traditional magazines and Internet zines on sports culture, workout programmes and discussions of various talk shows that touch upon sports culture. In addition, codes of sports culture are taken advantage of in advertisements, drama programmes and docusoaps, projects of bodybuilding and dieting and/or weight problems are dealt with quite often.

Traditional classifications of television programmes consider sports programmes as “masculine” (for example Fiske 1987, Craig 1992, see also Brown 1990). We would rather state that the gender address of television’s sports programmes is more difficult to define than is that of the popular press or the Internet. The magazine programme *Ihana aamu – naisten makasiini* is obviously targeted at women on grounds of its title, the treated topics as well as the visual style and discursive strategies. The visual style of *Ihana aamu* connects the programme with the feminine style of women’s magazines and Internet sites: the studio is decorated with round forms and “feminine colours” as well as with indoor plants. The same goes for workout programmes that are staged in “mood-lighting” (*Joogamatto/Joogi*) or stimulating red and yellow (*Aamujumppa*).

Other magazines that focus on sports culture contain presentations of sports and athletes (*Hot sport, Idrottsbiten*), bring together athletes and ordinary people (*Elixir-sport*) in order to give training tips for the performers as well as the audience, or represent a variety of topics related to health, sports and general well-being (*Akuutti*). These versions of the genre are somewhat hard to interpret as being targeted to either of the genders, or even to favour either of them. They differ in a significant way from the women’s maga-

zine, as their focus is on “traditional sports”, that is, top elite and professional sports or other serious practitioners of a sport. This would motivate an interpretation of the topics of these programmes as being masculine rather than feminine. The parade of female sports news anchors that started in Finland in the 80’s has had a definite effect on the visual imaginary of the sports magazines. The young, female anchors might have been considered fresh, but time has shown that the changes have been quite ostensible: middle-aged women do not have a foothold in the programmes previously occupied by middle-aged men. Nor have the changes reached the gender hierarchies of the programmes’ contents. Still, these programmes do not seem to fit unambiguously into the gender matrix we have found quite useful so far.

Why, then, is it so complicated to define the gender address of these programmes? The explanation could be traced to the qualities of television as a medium. The target audiences for the nationwide prime-time programmes are not narrow segments consisting of devoted sports fans, but rather diverse groups of viewers (e.g., families with people of different ages and genders). These programmes clearly seek an audience that is interested in sports culture (read: athletes, different sports, workout tips), regardless of gender and without explicit references to feminine or masculine cultures. Our purpose is not to claim that television programmes are less gendered than other popular cultural products. In the context of sports culture, however, it seems that the gendering practices of the other media are even more explicit, especially on the level of visual imaginaries.

It is necessary to keep in mind that research produces no final meanings, but differently biased interpretations of reality to compete with other interpretations (Lehtonen 1998, 220). Skimming through the quite non-existent research literature on the public sphere of sports culture made us realize once again that meanings are constructed in the process of interpretation, and that it is sometimes difficult to avoid renewing the very practices one is criticizing. In what ways are our interpretations biased by prevailing conventions and naturalized practices? What makes a researcher, for example, describe a tennis racket as light and feminine sports equipment (Pirinen 2001, 31)? Is tennis a “light and feminine sport” or could it be so that the fact that the racket is in a woman’s hand leads the interpretation astray? And following the same line of thought: are we claiming that women’s sports culture is appearance oriented because young and beautiful women (models) serve to visualize it in the media?

Think Healthy!

The gendering practices within the field of sports culture have been studied in Finland since the 1980’s. The focus has been on gendered discourses within sports (Veijola 1998), images and discourses of women’s bodies (Markula 1995), men’s corporeal experiences and masculine subcultures (Tiihonen 2002), or the history of women’s sport (Laine 2000). Within the fields of media studies, the focus has been on competitive sports, such as heroes in sports (Virtapohja 1998) or women athletes in the media (Pirinen 1999). From our point of view, the analytical gaze on the public sphere of sports has been limited to competitive sports, and in many of the studies, the media contents have been considered as “mere” representations. The larger context of sports culture and its public sphere have remained undefined territories, not to mention the effects of this field of public sphere on people’s lifestyles, tastes and identities. The brief overview of the public sphere of sports culture we conducted, even if it is incomplete, has demonstrated how complex and difficult it is to define the field.

The public sphere of sports culture is obviously gendered: the combination of themes, actors, styles and visual representations of sports culture construct genders in inter-referring and inter-textual repetitions, where the sexes/genders are approached in different ways; explicitly, implicitly as well as aesthetically. Sports, judged by representations in different media, are not included in women's life. Rather, what women are (thought to be) interested in are the *consequences* of sports. Women's assumed aim is to look good and this is achieved by self-control reinforced in the articles, discussions and tests in the "women's media". The focus is, then, on fulfilling the requirements of stereotypical norms rather than enjoying the action. Women are encouraged to reward themselves after a workout and to enjoy *that reward* (perfume, moisturizer, fruit, or relaxed feeling), whereas the pleasure that men are suggested to gain from sports is related to the improving capacity of the body and "pleasurable pain" that is an essential element of sports. It seems that, when it comes to public sphere of women's sports culture, the *woman* defines both its content and form much more than does the *sport*.

As the consequence, women are *representing* sport (in the sense that there is always someone looking, at least the woman herself), while men are *performing* (e.g., concentrating on what they are doing). The difference between *representing* (as an object) and *performing* (as a subject) is constructed by numerous visual and discursive strategies. Sports becomes a field of action that is not "natural" for women, a field in which women participate only because they have to for other purposes. On the contrary, they have to be persuaded and encouraged. Is active, creative agency even made possible for women within the discourse of women's sports culture? What kind of ideological consequences does this have? How does it affect the identity work of both women and men?

Confusingly, it seems that there is still a need for magazines committed only to women's sports culture even though combining sports and women seems almost impossible. Unlike being a woman, being a man does not seem to outline the whole public sphere of sports culture – there are no such things as *men's* sports magazines in the same sense that there are women's. The media targeted to men are *organized according to interests in a certain sport, not according to gender*. A man chooses magazines to read according to his interests (hobbies, tastes), whereas a woman is expected to make the same choice on the basis of her gender.

Taking popular culture seriously or, in other words, as one of the fields within which people obtain material for constructing their identities, the strict division of genders in its practices has definite consequences. First of all, the reiteration of gender as differences between men and women – rather than of gender as a matrix of different desires, norms, preferences and positions – works to mark womanhood as something *essential* – thus women's pleasures are to be found from women's media. Secondly, the public sphere of sports culture renews the cliché that only women have a sex and a gender.

In contemporary media culture, professional sports are major field of the spectacle. Whereas the activity of participating in sports involves an active engagement in creative practice, spectator sports involve passive consumption of images of the sports media. When thinking of the relationship between media publicity and lifestyles or identities, a wider scope should be taken. Sports spectacles naturally provide material for identity work, but it is the more mundane media content that activates "ordinary people" to become involved in sports. Thus sports culture in its widest definition should be taken as the object of analysis, which should be conducted from the point of view both of diversity and of hegemony. Discourses that rather deconstruct gender stereotypes and gendering practices than renew them enable diverse, positive identifications. Unfortu-

nately, the data we examined do not provide many alternatives to the traditional gender stereotypes.

Looking at the media contents it seems that the flow of hegemonic femininity is so strong in its volume that not many alternatives for identity work (in spite of alternative readings) are in sight. The same obviously applies to hegemonic masculinity; it cannot possibly cover all men and their interests, but it seems that, especially in the field of sports culture, the alternatives for female identification are quite small in number. The practice of repeating common knowledge of femininity and masculinity speaks of a need to reproduce and maintain these categories, and thus the sexual contract.

Notes

1. Translations of all Finnish titles in Appendix 1.
2. The remediation of the Internet works in two ways: also the traditional media apply the Internet's graphic styles in their layouts and typographies (Paasonen 2002, 8).

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Appendix. Analysed TV Programmes, Magazines and Websites

Friday 30.8

20.55-21.00	Urheiluruutu/ TV1 (Sports news)
20.20-20.55	Melonnan MM-kilpailut/ TV2 (World championships of canoeing)
23.05-0.40	Jalkapallon Super Cupin finaali/ TV2 (Football Super Cup Finals)
16.00-17.00	Urheilukanavan ikkuna/ MTV3 (Sports news)
18.00-19.00	Speden Spelit/ MTV3 (A sporty game show)
20.00-21.00	Gladiaattorit/ MTV3 (The gladiators, a game show)
21.00-23.00	Golden League:Bryssel/Nelonen (Athletics, the Golden league in Brussels)

Saturday 31.8

18.00-18.15	Idrottsbiten Nuorison urheilumakasiini/ TV1 (Sports magazine for young people)
11.20-11.45	Hot Sport/ TV2 (A sports magazine)
14.45-15.15	Sporttitähdet: Janne Niinimaa /Nelonen (Sports Stars: janne Niinimaa)
23.35-23.40	Urheilu-uutiset /Nelonen (Sports news)
21.30-22.20	SmackDown! /Nelonen

Sunday 1.9

18.55-19.45	Lihavat ystävät /TV1 (Fat friends)
18.10-18.35	Ruutulippu /TV2 (Motor sports news)
20.15-21.00	Yllytyshullut/ Nelonen (The Gullibles, a game show)

Monday 2.9

21.00-21.25	Sportmagasinet/ TV2 (A sports magazine)
23.05-0.00	Viettelysten saari/ MTV3 (Temptation Island)

Tuesday 3.9

18.35-19.05	Akuutti/ TV2 (Medical magazine, includes health and fitness section)
22.55-23.24	Euroopan Vuoksi: Asfalttiurheilijat/ TV2 (A documentary on skate board culture)
20.30-21.00	Painopartio/Nelonen (Fat camp)

Wednesday 4.9

16.30-16.55	Hot Sport/ TV2 (A sports magazine)
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Thursday 5.9

20.05-21.00	Suuri seikkailu/ TV2 (The great adventure – survivors-style game show)
21.00-21.50	Jääkiekon Tshekin turnaus/ TV2 (Ice hockey)

Friday 6.9

15.20-16.10	Selviytyjät /MTV3 (Survivors)
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Sports magazines:

Fitness, LadyFit, Kunto+ (Shape+), Sport – naisten liikuntalehti (Sport, women's exercise magazine) Kunto ja Terveys, (Health and condition) Kuntosali (The gym), Bodaus (Bodybuilding), Juoksija (The runner)

Websites:

www.keho.net, www.tuuli.net, www.verkkoklinikka.fi/kuntoverkko, www.uku.fi/clinic, www.yle.fi/naistenhuone, www.mtv3.fi/helmi, www.skul.fi, www.suomenlatu.fi, www.terveysinfo.net, www.slu.fi, www.juoksijalehti.fi, www.fitness.fi, www.kpfitness.fi, www.menaiset.fi/terveys,