

UDC 316.346.2

FEMALE ATHLETES AT THE CROSSROADS OF GENDER IDENTITY

СПОРТСМЕНКИ НА РАСПУТЬЕ ГЕНДЕРНОЙ ИДЕНТИФИКАЦИИ



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Keywords: *gender, sport, change, identification.*

Abstract. *Every day female athletes perform some kind of a feat, overcome themselves in training and competitions inspiring themselves opt for sport again and again. In course of time features of professional activity become personality traits (masculinity). Our research has given the chance to reveal female athletes capable to make deliberate decisions allowing to balance between gender and sports roles.*

Ключевые слова: *гендер, спорт, поступок, выбор, идентификация.*

Аннотация. *Спортсменки каждый день совершают своего рода подвиг, преодолевают себя на тренировках, соревнованиях, подстегивая себя снова и снова делать выбор в пользу спорта. Со временем характеристики спортивной деятельности переходят в свойства личности (маскулинность). Проведённый опрос позволил выявить спортсменок условно мужских видов спорта способных принимать зрелые решения, позволяющие гармонично сочетать спортивную и гендерную роли.*

Introduction. Among the problems for girls engaged in conditionally male sports (weightlifting, football, hockey, martial arts, boxing, marathon running, triple jump, pole vaulting, hammer throwing, etc.), highlight the development of masculine qualities [1, 3, 5-7, 10]. Athletes note difficulties in intimate personal relationships, related to the fact that the forces and thoughts are engaged in training and competitions, and the love of the athlete can negatively affect the following of the regime for the sake of the desire to spend more time with a beloved person. There may be difficulties in the distribution of leadership in a pair – a successful athlete in sports can be difficult to depend on the desires and plans of a man. Girls are afraid of the prospects of marriage («I'm afraid that I can not find a man with whom we

can understand each other», «I do not know what awaits me after the end of a sports career»). There are complaints of excessive aggression («sometimes they accuse me that I am too aggressive towards others», «it can be difficult to restrain ...»). There are difficulties in presenting yourself as a woman – choosing everyday clothes, inability to show women's behavior («I do not like wearing heels», «I feel more confident, free and protected, dressing as a sportswoman»). Fears of becoming overly similar to men, leading to a decrease in self-esteem as a girl, or a decrease in motivation for sports.

The purpose of the study is to find out the conditions under which the process of gender identification of sportswomen of conditionally male sports would be a constructive combination of gender and sports roles.



To be or not to be a man for a sportswoman

The analysis reveals conditions that make the gender identification of athletes more difficult: 1. Deerotization of relations, erasure of the gender boundary. Saying the coach: «For me in training there are no boys or girls, but there are only athletes!», The absence of separate dressing rooms for girls and boys; as a result, the touch ceases to be regarded as an erotic gesture. 2. Uncomfortable living conditions at training camps and competitions. Often in the places of residence athletes lack basic amenities (shower, warm water, heating), sometimes you have to settle for sleeping bags, in hotels there are troubles in the form of bedbugs, cockroaches, mice. The problems of everyday life make the athletes harder, more resistant to stress, encourage to show traditionally masculine qualities. 3. Muscular technologies of mental training of athletes are built on the basis of overcoming obstacles. A vivid example is the words of the sports psychologist R.M. Zagainova: «An athlete can not be pitied, in this case he will feel sorry for himself, and then the end» [12, p. 15]. Sometimes coaches admonish their athletes to be aggressive towards their rival, feel hatred for them. Sports success comes to those who are able to withstand heavy loads, endure pain, fatigue and overexertion.

Sportswomen of conditionally male sports face a number of gender difficulties («a negative attitude towards their body,» «lack of femininity,» «the appearance of male character traits») [9]. The image of an athlete in conditionally male sports is very much like a disciplined warrior overcoming all obstacles in order to achieve the goal. In describing the feminine image, athletes «draw» an airy image of a benevolent girl, open to the world, capable of building harmonious relationships with a man.

So the athlete faces a choice (sometimes unconscious) – either to be successful in the sport, or to be happy in a feminine way, thereby choosing between masculinity and femininity in herself. Therefore, such athletes need additional work to reconcile the role of the athlete and the gender role.

Materials and Methods. Methods of qualitative research were used to collect data: focus groups and structured interviews. Athletes were asked questions about what motivates them every day to make a choice in favor of the training process, which makes them athletes, as well as ways to address gender-related difficulties associated with sports.

The sample consisted of 60 professional sportswomen of conditionally male sports (hockey, contact types of martial arts, weightlifting, soccer,

rowing, ski races) at the age of 17 to 23 years old, having high sports grades and at least 5 years of sports experience. Below is a discussion of the material obtained in the study.

«Permanent» action – the components of the process of overcoming themselves

Athletes make decisions every day – go to training or meet friends, go to competitions or take part in extra-curricular activities at the institute (or spend time with their family). Everyday choice only seems to look like situational decisions – whether to go or not for training. Essentially it is much more significant: to the extent that different values are behind each alternative, these choices are actions – a choice between alternative motives, each of which has its own value [2, p. 54]. They represent a permanent (prolonged) act – every time the choice in favor of continuing to play sports as a kind of activity (and, accordingly, the choice between roles – often female athletes than girls). So, the processes of gender identification of female athletes in men's sports have signs of an action.

As a rule, it is difficult to understand on the basis of what the decision was made – the answers of the athletes sound like «I need it», «I get up and go.» Behind it there are implicit processes: weighing the alternatives in correlation with the accepted values, finding additional arguments and resources, building up the prospects for living in sports, assessing risks, opportunities, and others. The requirements of the main activity (sports) are accepted and maintained by daily elections, gradually internalizing themselves into personal qualities. In this light, it becomes clear how the rigidity, willpower, and strength of character become (formed by the person himself) («tempering the character,» «strengthening the will»).

The daily practice of choice with a constant outcome brings it to automaticity, becomes a skill («I just get up and go to training»). Here there is a kind of trap: it is psychologically easier to play the same role day by day, than to switch from role to role during the day. Switching between roles requires the ability to see different contexts, the ability to quickly switch attention, readiness to master different role repertoires and behavior patterns. Over time, the role of the sportswoman becomes a familiar face (appropriated by the mask) and already requires much less effort to execute it. Constantly choosing a sporting role, the athlete continues to broadcast her not only in the context of sports activities, but also in a variety of other contexts. Therefore, daily decision-making by a sportswoman, making a choice (act) is a mechanism

(process) that translates the characteristic of activity into a property of the person (masculinity).

Types of actions processes that determine quality, awareness and maturity of choice

Identification processes can be those that determine the quality of elections(actions): how a person copes with difficulties, what processes are involved in making a decision. Consider the possible options for the election of the athlete in the situation of harmonization of gender and sports roles. Consider them, moving from the least mature to more mature actions – in accordance with the types of actions [2]. As a model situation, let's take the one in which the parents oppose the practice of masculine sports by their daughter (often a test of the firmness and awareness of the daughter's intentions).

Option 1 («zero» act) – the athlete does not make a choice at all, ignores her need, efforts are spent on «not seeing». The mechanism is a mental defense that generates tension, and how the retarded consequences are psychosomatic manifestations (illnesses, physical traumas). She does not answer «yes» or «no» to her parents. The girl is displeased with these conversations, she tries to avoid or ignore them («I usually do not answer anything»). At the same time, the girl is going through because of the parents' objections, internal tension is felt (there is bitterness in the respondents' voice, tears often appear on the eyes). Attempts to talk openly with parents about their feelings are not done.

Option 2 (pseudo) – athletes or enter into a dispute with their parents, proving the importance of sport in their life («I myself know how I should live, do not interfere»), or they agree with parents, doubt their choice («Sometimes I think : «But the mother is right»). Since the decision is not taken personally, there is a «throwing» from one extreme to another in behavior: there are many doubts and fears for their health and the future outside of sports. But there is always something that keeps them in the sport (emotions, victories, friends, habit, etc.). The absence of a clear solution gives rise to internal tension. Unlike the «zero» act, the athlete already realizes that the girl and the sportswoman are different role positions; she is not ready to lose any of them, and not living fully to either one or the other. The choice is not perfect, attempts to combine the roles are not very productive, because they are superficial, and sometimes even non-constructive. So, if in the first example the athlete is going through because of the lack of support from her parents, then in the second, she worries more because of her own doubts.

Hence the inner shakiness, contradictoriness: on the one hand, the athlete wants to achieve a high sports result, and on the other, is afraid of causing irreparable damage to her health. Therefore, it either works half-heartedly, regrets itself, or, on the contrary, works excessively (with hypercompensation tear), periodically provoking psychosomatic failures. The internal state is the same: a girl can be proud of her body during training, but at the same time consider herself not sufficiently feminine outwardly and be ashamed of the body in other social contexts. It is in the notions of the body that the athletes find the most contradictions. There are often attempts to smooth out the contradiction by adjusting the external image – there are examples when specialists of the model agency taught the athletes to walk on their heels, to show themselves in a profitable foreshortening during the photo sessions. Correcting the external image and movements without changing the internal state only temporarily pushes the difficulty, but the conflict itself is not solved by gender and sports roles. This creates a threat of the development of destructive reactions [4, 11]: either the exertion of tension in the situation (affectation), or an increase in the level of neuroticism. Since deep psychological work with the identity of athletes was not carried out, this led to increased stress due to increased neurotic personality and the effect of the work done quickly disappeared.

Option 3 (responsible action) – the athlete makes a single-valued choice of «or / or». To strengthen the adopted decision, a mechanism of tightening is triggered-supporting its choice (strengthening it with additional arguments), and vice versa, discrediting and depreciating the rejected (or lowered in importance) role [8].

If a girl chooses to be a sportswoman, then she puts her training above all (a few «overplaying», exaggerated), the body is reduced to the status of the instrument. As a consequence, there is a risk for women's health of athletes, the body is sent to develop according to the male type. For athletes, the convention (the norm adopted in this activity) is expressed in the ability to withstand the physical predetermination of the body – in sports there is constantly going beyond the limits of ordinary physical and mental abilities. In training and competition athletes prove that if you really want, you can step over the physical and mental framework, public stereotypes (that «the woman is physically weak»). The athlete is so immersed in sports that she often does not even imagine what she will do in the future. There is another «trap» – sport occupies all living space, the



girl already almost does not see herself as an athlete, other social roles become less noticeable. There is a growing risk of relegating romantic relationships to sports. Proposals of parents to finish with sports are often suppressed («I decided so, they must take my decision»). Often sportswomen do not even notice the risks parents are talking about.

If the girl chooses a gender role, she begins to «cherish» herself in training. Sports success is reduced; these girls do not stay in the sport for long. Nevertheless, whatever the girl chooses, she is free from an intrapersonal conflict, she has made a decision in favor of one of the social roles and successfully implements it. Personal growth is, but relative, as achieved by the price of refusal of flexibility in «addressing the gender issue.»

Option 4 (developing deed) – the girl finds constructive ways of optimal combination of both roles. This is the most personally mature of the options considered. The athlete finds the words to explain to her parents her choice to engage in male sports, expresses her confidence in her position. She realizes her roles, plans the future in detail both in sports and after the end of her sports career, understands the causes of parents' unrest, risks are realized and minimized. It does not matter, parents continue to ask «Is it time you finish with the sport?» Or stopped talking, the athlete is so confident in her decision that there is no inner doubt. Confidence in their choice, persistence of the position allows the athlete to reduce intrapersonal contradictions, remove the need to constantly defend their own choices. Personal maturity liberates volitional resources, allowing them to direct them to achieve sports results. Therefore, in order to solve the difficulties of female athletes in the development of gender identity, it should be more mature, it must occur on the internal (personal) plane (at the level of the self-concept). This is of great importance for sports – the athlete feels more confident in training, in competitions, realizing that sport is her own choice. It will be more stable in the results.

Sportswomen can learn from others sportswomen

As a survey of sportswomen involved in conditionally male sports has shown, addressing gender difficulties is an important stage in the development of their gender identity. Analysis of the presented strategies allows us to say that the more effective the decision taken by the athlete (or the attitude to the difficulty), the more mature of the types of actions he corresponds to. Let's give examples of such statements athletes in accordance with the types of deeds.

«Zero» act: «If you do not accept such what you are – it means the man is the wrong one»; «While you are doing sports, you cannot become such a full-fledged person. I was hampered by sport. I did not have time to watch what's in vogue, take care of myself, there was not time to paint, even thoughts were not occupied with it»; «There is almost no personal life. If successful, then there is no time for personal life. That's only if at the training camp in the team there is a guy with whom there will be a relationship, then yes, and if not, no guy will like that, he will cheat on you».

Pseudo-act: «You will not explain to everyone that you are a small, frail girl who wants to take care. I do not know how to show this. It's easier for me to go and decide. I understand that I am perceived quite differently – not what I am. I do not say what I am, I'm afraid that will not work»; «I'm physically strong, I'm like a kid, and after the training there are emotions, I cannot be gentle. I want to, but I do not know how»; «I will not take away my muscles, I have already gotten used to it, once I chose a sport ... I will not change it, but all the same, girls should be feminine ...»; «Being engaged in professionally sports, is so lazy to be engaged in the appearance»; «Sports sports, but a girl must be feminine.» She does not have to be all in the sport. She must look after herself and learn, develop mentally. Personally, I'm at home as a boy. They prepare everything for me, I do not get out ... Which of my wife will be – I cannot cook»; «I always do everything myself. I can even change the wheel myself. In others, truth is a shock. I do not need to ask for help. It's not difficult for me to do this and the men can prove that I can do it myself. «

Responsible act: «I tried to make up for my sports childhood – new clothes, a new image every week, hangouts. Realizing that the behavior was not the same, she experienced dissatisfaction with life»; «I made my nails for 2 days to make an impression»; «I consciously close my personal life, so as not to be distracted. When I'm interested in anything, I give myself all the time»; «It is clear that physical education brings health, and a big sport picks up. But I have a goal, and I want to achieve it. The opinion of others in general was indifferent. I have a coach, I trust him, he will not spoil my body, my health. He is a professional. «

Developing act. Survey of athletes allowed to identify those who are able to make a choice relating to the fourth kind of actions. Sportswomen recognize themselves as an individual who broadcasts the image of a successful sportswoman of her sport (feel «the face» of her sport). «I do not resist persuasion to quit sports, just translate into a joke»; «I tell those

who do not understand my sports, about the joyful events that I have in sports»; «It's painful to watch when a guy does not press an empty bar. There is bewilderment... Then there is a desire to help, hedge. I could do it, so he can do it too»; «People should be motivated by their superiority in power. I'm strong – but you, too, can be strong. I want to be an example»; «I come to the training beautiful – feminine ... When I wear a uniform, I go to the ice, or I put on sneakers – everything, an athlete»; «It's good for me to have male character traits, just apply them to the place»; «I allow myself to be independent in solving male problems when there is no man near»; «There is a time filter and places where it is possible to show strength. Now I try not to make rude movements, I control the force»; «I know that his parents will not understand if I carry the bag myself, and I do not do it with them»; «I like to read books, take from there images of femininity, manners»; «I try in front of people who want to be more feminine – somehow work on the appearance... I looked at the girls and adults who succeeded in it – what I combine with, tried on myself»; «My everyday appearance creates an image of me and the sport from the public. I can not afford to look neglected ... I look feminine».

If an athlete is capable of taking personally mature decisions, then she can be described as personally mature, able to integrate a gender and sporting role. In this case, the athlete is not torn by contradictions. And this has a positive effect on sports results!

Conclusion. The main condition for constructive combining of gender and sports roles is the ability of the athletes to make mature decisions. As signs of the mature choice of athletes, which are the basis for a constructive solution to the issue of their gender identity, are:

Awareness. The sportswoman deliberately plans her present and future, understands the possible risks of playing sports (changes in body structure, health risks and the formation of gender identity) and ways to minimize them.

Responsibility for own decisions. The girl feels free to make important decisions in her life, is ready to deal with the consequences of her choices and decisions.

Constructive combination of alternative roles and values. The athlete demonstrates the flexibility of behavior depending on the context – she possesses the skills of behavior for both gender and sports roles, she feels the boundaries of manifestation of masculine and feminine qualities.

A sense of inner balance. An athlete girl takes her own personality, builds a unique identity in

accordance with her values. She feels herself whole, experiencing a sense of inner balance. The decisions made are ecological for themselves as individuals, which is manifested in the improvement of the quality of life. The athlete consolidates the adopted decisions in behavior, carries them out as a strategy.

These same signs are appropriate to use both for assessing (diagnosing) the degree of maturity / constructiveness of the solution of the problem of gender identity, and as benchmarks in working with male athletes on conditionally male sports.

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