

# Globalizing Gender: A Study of Sports Stereotyping Among German and American Adolescents

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## Abstract

In an era in which there is increasing acceptance of female involvement in sport, this study investigates American and German adolescents' perceptions that sport is a gendered activity. Our findings show that 'girls' sports are more often stereotyped than 'boys' sports, particularly by American adolescent males, and that German and American adolescents agree over their perceptions of which sports are 'male' and which are 'female'. The reasons given for these perceptions tend to support an 'oppositional' view of gender; that is, if a sport is 'suited' for males it is 'not suited' for females, and vice versa. We discuss the implications of these results for the sporting choices of adolescents, and for the globalization of sport.

## Introduction

In this paper we examine the degree to which sport is a 'gendered' activity in the minds of German and American adolescents. Our rationale for this approach is the belief that adolescent perceptions about the gender appropriateness of sport and the reasons they give for these perceptions, can provide insights into what Messner (1988, p. 198) has called the 'contested ideological terrain' of sport. That is, it can show how sport reinforces male power and, at the same time, provides opportunities for enhancing female status. We are interested then in the problem that sports stereotyping poses for the issue of agency in the sporting decisions of adolescents.

Specifically, our study examines the extent to which so called 'biological differences' between males and females, historically used as the basis of female exclusion from sport, still exist in the minds of contemporary adolescents. Is sports stereotyping gender specific, for example, does it occur more among boys than among girls and does it place more constraints on one gender than another about what sports choices are appropriate? To assess the degree to which sports stereotyping in the United States has undergone temporal change we compare the choices of our respondents with the results of earlier studies on stereotyping and sports. Finally, we make cross-cultural comparisons between German and American adolescents, which have implications for the issue of gender stereotyping as a universal component of global sport.

## Globalization, Sport and Gender

In their model of the global development of sport Jean Harvey, Genevieve Rail and Lucy Thibault (1996, p. 267) endorse four dimensions – political, economic, cultural

and social – of globalization. Globalization at the cultural level they see as involving the emergence of ‘elements of a common ethos’ and ‘values shared by an increasing number of individuals with a sense of shared destiny’. At the social level they envisage the growth of new social movements that espouse these values and cite the example of feminism through which the cause of women in sport has been advanced on a global scale. One common theme in the research on globalization and sport has been the claim that it is becoming ‘homogenized’, in other words that it is becoming the same in different countries (cf. Donnelly, 1996; Harvey, Rail & Thibault, 1996). Other theories of globalization (Maguire, 1994; Robertson, 1995) present a more contradictory picture. In these approaches sport is conceptualized as a number of ‘global flows’ within and across nation-states. These global flows may send ambivalent messages, for example about nationalism (Bairner, 1996) and achievement (Rees, Brettschneider & Brandl-Bredenbeck, 1998) in sport. They may also send mixed messages about gender.

Jennifer Hargreaves (1994, p. 26) has suggested that the impact of feminist intervention in sport sociology has been ‘to uncover ways in which men’s power over women in sports has been institutionalized’, and reminds us (1994, pp. 42-3) that Victorian and Edwardian sports were sites for the generation and reproduction of patriarchal assumptions through which men were naturally aggressive and competitive, while women were inherently emotional, cooperative and passive. These differences were perceived as biological ‘facts’ rather than cultural ‘variations’ (Theberge, 1991; Willis, 1982) and therefore incontestable and unchangeable. If anybody doubted this common sense approach to male/female differences, sport was always there to ‘prove’ that females could not measure up to male standards of performance, or the level of physical aggression given and received in the rough sports played by real men (Messner, 1988). Sports then, have contributed to the general myth of ‘female frailty’ and this stereotype has been used to exclude women from participation, or to admit them on restricted terms (Theberge, 1997). For example, writing in 1965 Eleanor Metheny observed that it was appropriate for women to participate in ‘aesthetically pleasing’ sports in which they moved their bodies in graceful ways, but not in ‘aggressive’ sports where their bodies were used as instruments of power to subdue their opponents (Metheny, 1965, p. 49).<sup>1</sup> Almost 25 years later Kane and Snyder (1989) found that this model still predicted the perceptions of appropriate sporting activities among American college students. Although sporting opportunities for German youth have increased over the last two decades, one finding has remained stable. Boys are much more attracted to aggressive activities while girls seem to favor sports activities that emphasize aesthetic activities and in which body contact with the opponent is avoided (Brettschneider & Brütigam, 1990; Heinemann, 1990; Kutz, Sack & Brinkhoff, 1996).

While levels of participation in sport by girls and women have grown significantly in Europe and North America, it is not clear how much these new opportunities have changed the fundamental perception that sport is a ‘male’ activity in which success is measured in what has been seen as ‘male’ characteristics such as dominance and aggression. We suggest that global sport is a very successful ritual process which ‘makes real’ the myth<sup>2</sup> of male superiority and that this process can be characterized as one of the ‘global flows’ of sport (Maguire, 1994). A cursory

review of the literature in sociology of sport can reveal examples of this process at work in the United States (cf. Birrell & Cole, 1990; Foley, 1990), Canada (Theberge, 1990; Whitson & Macintosh, 1989), Britain (Dunning, 1986; White & Brackenridge, 1985), Germany (Kröner & Pfister, 1992; Kugelmann, 1996), Australia (Bryson, 1987; Connell, 1990), and New Zealand (Thompson, 1988).

## **Gender Stereotyping and the Restriction of Sports Choice**

The view that sport is a gendered activity on a global scale has implications for the 'constructionist' view of gender identity (Lorber, 1994). Constructionists reject the view that gender differences are a result of biology (Cerulo, 1997), and argue that they are culturally produced. Socially defined maleness and femaleness (gender role stereotyping) severely constricts human behavior because it encourages us to accept difference between males and females as 'natural' and permanent.

According to Eccles and Harold (1991, p. 16) adherence to one's gender role<sup>3</sup> may be so central to the individual that 'merely knowing, even at a subconscious level, that a particular activity is stereotypically opposite to the gender role may be enough to prevent future engagement in that activity'. Their research showed that at an early age children perceived the sports domain as more gender role stereotyped than either the Math or the English domain, and this stereotyping was responsible for fourteen per cent of elementary school children's' rating of their ability in sport.

In their participant observation study of interaction among elementary children in and outside school, Adler, Kless and Adler (1992) noted that gender appropriate models, which varied greatly among boys and girls, provided the basis for popularity. Boys developed gender identities based on an awareness of and aspiration to the cult of masculinity wherein a focus on prowess in sport was central. Girls became involved in a culture of compliance and conformity. As they learned to fit within these perceived parameters of popularity, they socialized themselves to gender roles (Adler, Kless & Adler, 1992).

These gender identities influence decisions about involvement in sports and physical activity, and behavior in sports related activities. For example, in their study of British adolescents who were generally not committed to sport, Coakley and White (1992) found that gender had a powerful effect upon self-definitions. Specifically, they noted that a number of young women had learned to define sport in a restricted manner and did not consider themselves 'sportspeople' although they regularly participated in swimming or skating. The results of Chepyator-Thomson & Ennis's (1997) study of junior and senior high school students' choices in the physical education curriculum showed that students reproduced gender stereotypes. Boys avoided aerobics classes (92 per cent female enrollment) and girls avoided weight training classes (62 per cent male enrollment over four classes), in coed softball classes boys often instructed girl teammates not to swing the bat, in the hopes of drawing a walk rather than striking out, and in soccer boys tended to pass the ball to each other rather than to girls.

## **Resisting Gender Stereotyping in Sports**

These brief examples show that stereotyping is a powerful force influencing the choices and opportunities of girls and boys in sport. Nevertheless, sociologists have also found evidence of challenges to this bipolar conceptualization of gender in

sport. For example, Theberge (1997) has noted that, as much as any contemporary social setting, sport is undergoing considerable change with regard to gender relations. Over the past ten years there has been a large increase in the sporting opportunities for females in the United States and also more equality of opportunity relative to males (Sage, 1998). Commenting on the general increase of contemporary sporting opportunities for women, Hargreaves (1994) suggests that some of the fastest growing female sports are aggressive team sports such as soccer and rugby and combat sports such as boxing and judo. Theberge has noted that female presence in these sports is particularly important because they present a challenge to the traditional ideological stereotype and has presented evidence to support this challenge in her study of elite female hockey players (Theberge, 1997).

In their study of elementary school children, Adler, Kless and Adler (1992) noted a 'slight historical shift in perceptions of appropriate behavior for females. They concluded that girls could now more acceptably pursue traditionally 'male' avenues of sports and achievement in comparison with models from earlier times. While noting that students usually conformed to the dominant culture's expression of masculinity and femininity, Chepyator-Thomson and Ennis (1997) did find examples of resistance to the dominant perspective. For example, some females complained about the boys 'poaching' in coed volleyball classes, and others participated seriously in the weight training classes. Furthermore, some boys did acknowledge female ability in physical education.

These examples support Messner's (1988) contention that sport is a contested ideological terrain. They present a picture of participants both accepting and questioning the stereotype of gender. The present study examines the extent of gender role stereotyping in the minds of adolescents who have grown up in an era where female involvement in sport has become more generally accepted than before. What effect, if any, has this trend had on the amount of stereotyping used by girls and boys and on the use of a biological view of sport performance upon which the stereotype is based? Finally, if sport is still a male 'preserve', then boy's involvement in sport should strengthen their tendency to stereotype sport (particularly girls in sport) in a negative manner. If this tendency is found both in the United States and Germany, support is gained for our assertion that gender stereotyping in sport is a global phenomenon.

## Methods

The data for this paper are taken from a larger cross-cultural research project comparing the importance of sport and the body for German and American adolescents (Brettschneider & Brandl-Bredenbeck, 1997; Brettschneider, Brandl-Bredenbeck & Rees, 1996; Rees & Brandl-Bredenbeck, 1995; Rees, Brettschneider & Brandl-Bredenbeck, 1998). This project involved the administration of a questionnaire measuring sportive behavior and the importance of sport and physicality to the self-concept of seventh, ninth and twelfth grade students in suburban New York (Nassau County) (n=989), Memphis, Tennessee (n=752), Berlin (former west and former east) (n=1086), Northrhine-Westphalia (n=580) and Brandenburg (n=490). The questionnaires were completed in school during a regular class or a physical education period.<sup>4</sup>

The following analyses are based upon the answers to two 'open ended' questions. The first question asked respondents to agree or disagree with the statement that 'some types of sports are not suited for boys', give the reasons for their answers, and to name some sports if they thought any were inappropriate. The second question repeated this format for sports 'not suited' for girls.<sup>5</sup>

## Results

For this paper the data from the samples have been combined to compare the responses of boys and girls in Germany with the responses of boys and girls in America. Table 1 shows the responses of these groups to the statement that some sports are 'not suited' for boys. German boys are equally split on this issue, fifty per cent agreeing with the statement and fifty per cent disagreeing. These responses are quite similar to those of German girls: 45.5 per cent of these girls agreed that certain sports are inappropriate for boys, while 54.5 per cent disagree. The American responses showed a different pattern when compared to the German results. Whereas 37.7 per cent of the American boys agreed that certain sports were inappropriate for boys, 62.3 per cent disagreed with this statement. This trend was even greater for American girls, 70.7 per cent of this group disagreed with the view that certain sports were inappropriate for males. If agreement with the statement that certain sports are 'not suited' for boys participation is an acceptable measure of gender stereotyping in sports, the results of this table indicate that stereotyping of boys sports by both boys and girls is less frequent in the United States than in Germany and in both countries it is less frequent among girls than among boys. It also indicates that the large majority of American adolescents in this study and just over half the German adolescents feel that there are no sports which are inappropriate for boys' participation.

Table 1: Some types of sports are not suited for boys – Summary

	YES	NO	n =
German Boys	50.0	50.0	1023
German Girls	45.5	54.5	962
American Boys	37.7	62.3	733
American Girls	29.3	70.7	733

The responses to the statement that certain sports are not suited for girls are given in Table 2. These responses reveal some gender differences when comparing the German and American respondents. For example, 45.5 per cent of the German boys disagreeing with the view that some sports were inappropriate for girls

compared to 52.6 per cent of the German girls. This gender difference is much greater in the American sample. Here only 39.3 per cent of the boys reject the idea that certain sports are inappropriate for girls compared to 58 per cent of the girls.

Table 2: Some types of sports are not suited for girls – summary

	YES	NO	n =
German Boys	55.5	45.5	1012
German Girls	47.4	52.6	954
American Boys	60.7	39.3	730
American Girls	42.0	58.0	731

Comparison of Tables 1 and 2 shows that German adolescents stereotype sports in a more ‘uniform’ manner than do American adolescents. That is to say, about half of German adolescents reject the idea of stereotyping in sports, with minor variations depending on what is the subject of stereotyping (‘boys’ sports or ‘girls’ sport) and who is doing the stereotyping (boys or girls). The American data reveal a different pattern. Here stereotyping of ‘girls’ sports is much stronger than stereotyping of ‘boys’ sports, especially when it is boys who are doing the stereotyping. Only 39.3 per cent of the American boys rejected the statement that certain sports were inappropriate for girls, compared to 62.3 per cent who disagreed with the same statement about sports for boys. Although the majority of American girls (58%) disagreed with the view that some sports were inappropriate for girls, this is considerably lower than the 70.7 per cent who disagree with the statement that certain sports were inappropriate for boys.

Since our study was conducted with seventh, ninth and twelfth grade students we can examine the degree to which age influences the relationship between gender and stereotyping. These data are presented in Tables 3 and 4. The percentage of German and American boys and girls agreeing that certain sports are ‘not suited’ for boys is presented within the three grade categories. These data show differences between German and American adolescents. Among German boys and girls the percentage agreeing that certain sports are ‘not suited’ for boys peaks during the ninth grade (55.2% for the boys, 48.8% for the girls). Among the American adolescents there is a five per cent drop when American male seventh graders are compared to American male ninth and twelfth graders. This difference is greater among the American girls. Here twice as many seventh grade girls think that some sports are inappropriate for boys than do twelfth grade girls (38.8% in seventh grade compared to 19.1% in the twelfth grade).

Table 3: Some types of sports are not suited for boys – agree

	Boys %		Girls %	
	Germany	USA	Germany	USA
<b>Grade 7</b>	46.3	41.0	46.8	38.8
<b>Grade 9</b>	55.2	35.6	48.4	26.7
<b>Grade 12</b>	47.3	35.2	39.5	19.1

Table 4: Some types of sports are not suited for girls – agree

	Boys %		Girls %	
	Germany	USA	Germany	USA
<b>Grade 7</b>	51.7	61.1	43.2	45.4
<b>Grade 9</b>	62.1	60.6	51.3	40.7
<b>Grade 12</b>	51.4	60.2	48.0	38.1

The relationship between agreement that certain sports are inappropriate for girls and grade level is presented in Table 4. The German responses show a peak during the ninth grade, which is consistent with the data for the German boys.<sup>6</sup> Whereas grade level is unrelated to the responses of American boys, it is inversely related to the responses of American girls. As grade level increases the level of stereotyping decreases, although the actual percentages are less than in the stereotyping of ‘boys’ sports (compare with Table 3). Comparing across the two tables, by twelfth grade, over twice as many girls think that there are inappropriate sports for girls than think that there are inappropriate sports for boys (38.1% compared to 19.1%). Although those of us who would like to see gender stereotyping in sport reduced can be positive about the 19.1 per cent when looked at by itself, the bigger picture revealed by these data is that there is a double standard about appropriate sports – one standard for boys and one for girls. Bearing in mind the limitations imposed by the cross-sectional nature of our data, over time American adolescents are ‘learning’ to reject the idea that certain sports are inappropriate for both boys and girls, but they are also ‘learning’ that boys can legitimately have much broader sport experiences than can girls.

The choices made by German and American adolescents about which sports are appropriate for girls and boys can provide insights into the global issue of ‘homogenization’ mentioned in the introduction. To what extent are the sports labeled as ‘not suited’ by our respondents specific to America and Germany, and to what extent are they the same in both countries? Are the choices, for example aesthetically pleasing sports inappropriate for boys and aggressive sports inappropriate for girls, consistent with the model developed by Metheny (1965)?

Tables 5 and 6 show the most common sports labeled as inappropriate for boys participation by our samples of German and American adolescents. For American adolescents these include some sports (e.g., cheerleading, gymnastics, ballet dancing and figure skating), that would be appropriate for girls under the Metheny model, as well as new post-1960s sports, such as aerobics, that have the same characteristics.

Tables 5 & 6: Sports chosen as not suited for boys (USA/Germany)

USA n=528 (boys 55.4%, girls 44.6%)		
Sport	Rank	%
Cheerleading	1	19.1
Volleyball	2	9.5
Gymnastics	3	8.9
Field Hockey	4	8.0
Tennis	5	7.8
Dancing	6	6.6
Softball	7	6.5
Ballet	8	6.3
Badminton	9	5.4
Soccer	10	3.8
Figure Skating	11	3.5
Swimming	12	2.8
Aerobics	13	2.4

Germany n=1394 (boys 48.7%, girls 51.3%)		
Sport	Rank	%
Gymnastics	1	30.4
Ballet	2	22.9
Aerobics	3	20.4
Dancing	4	8.2
Horseback riding	5	4.1
Figure Skating	6	3.1

Such choices support the binary-opposites conceptualization of gender, the idea that appropriate behavior for being a male is opposite to that of being a female. The list also contains anomalies such as field hockey, played in America mainly by females, and soccer, a game that is often considered a 'male' sport in Europe, Central and South America in spite of the fact that it is now played at a national level by women in many of these countries. The fact that men's professional soccer (both the indoor and outdoor variety) is seen on American television and that soccer is frequently played by boys in America has not stopped this sport being considered as inappropriate for males (although by a relatively low percentage of American respondents). The gender of the respondents had little effect on these ratings. Exceptions to this trend were volleyball (boys 11.1%, girls 7.5%), and badminton (boys 7.7%, girls 2.5%), which showed higher ratings on the part of the boys, and cheerleading (17.1% boys, 21.7% girls) and tennis (boys 6.4%, girls 9.6%), rated higher by girls.

With the exceptions of the idiosyncratic 'American' sports mentioned above, the list of sports deemed 'not suited' for German boys by German adolescents is very similar to the list for American boys developed by American adolescents. Some sports, for example gymnastics, ballet, aerobics, dancing and figure skating, are common to both lists, and all of these conform to the Metheny model. Horseback

riding is the only exception, and soccer was (predictably) missing from the German list. Male and female adolescents agreed on the inappropriateness of all these sports for boys, there were no gender differences in the ratings.

The list of sports felt by American adolescents to be inappropriate for females to play contains few surprises (see Table 7). All these sports (including basketball) require physical contact and aggression. The overwhelming choice of football (the American variety) confirms it as a major icon of male status, at least in the North American world of sport. As with the choices of unsuitable sports for girls, gender differences are not a factor. Almost 56 per cent of the boys chose football compared to 60.5 per cent of the girls, 11.6 per cent of the boys chose ice hockey compared to 8.7 per cent of the girls.

Tables 7 & 8: Sports chose as not suited for girls (USA/Germany)

USA n=1124 (boys 56.9%, girls 43.1%)		
Sport	Rank	%
Football (Am.)	1	57.7
Ice hockey	2	10.3
Baseball	3	8.5
Wrestling	4	6.7
Basketball	5	5.2
Boxing	6	2.9
Lacrosse	7	2.8

Germany n=1507 (boys 54.6%, girls 45.3%)		
Sport	Rank	%
Soccer	1	23.2
Boxing	2	16.1
Weight lifting/ body building	3	15.3
Football (Am.)	4	12.5
Rugby	5	12.5
Martial Arts	6	6.2
Basketball	7	6.0
Ice Hockey	8	4.3
Motor sports	9	2.5
Baseball	10	2.5

The choices by German adolescents on what sports are ‘not suited’ for females generally replicates the American findings (see Table 8). Several sports such as boxing, American football, basketball, and ice hockey are common to both lists. Other choices for example rugby, weight lifting, body building, and martial arts have the requirements of strength and/or aggression that ‘qualify’ them as ‘male’ sports, and therefore by definition as ‘inappropriate’ for females. Some gender differences were evident in these ratings as follows: boxing (12.8% boys, 19% girls), American football (15.2% boys, 9.4% girls), basketball (7% males, 4.7% females).

Overall, these data on German and American adolescents’ ratings of what they consider to be unsuitable sports for males and females show that sports in both countries reflect general agreement by boys and girls on what constitutes ‘male’ and ‘female’ sports. This agreement supports a model of gender differences developed in the 1960s, which is still largely intact today, in spite of the increase in sport participation by females and the addition of television coverage of women in some traditionally ‘male’ sports. There is some evidence of variations, for example the

difference between the status of soccer in Germany and the United States, and the choice of field hockey by Americans as an inappropriate sport for males, but the overall implication is that gender stereotyping is part of the message 'made real' by global sport.

Further evidence for the historical durability of this message is provided when the list of sports chosen by the adolescents in our sample is compared to earlier studies on what were considered 'gender appropriate' sports. Two studies, one by Matteo (1986) and one by Roloff and Solomon (1989) asked college males and females to rate different sports on a nine-point scale ranging from one ('strongly masculine') to nine ('strongly feminine').<sup>7</sup> There was great agreement by both sets of respondents on how to classify sports, and great similarity between this classification and the list of sports chosen as 'inappropriate' for boy and girls in our study. Specifically, seven of the thirteen sports chosen as 'not suited' for boys by American adolescents were also included in the Matteo list as 'feminine sports' (the exceptions were volleyball, tennis, softball, badminton and swimming which were classified by Matteo as 'neutral' sport, and soccer was rated as a 'masculine' sport by both sets of respondents, with a mean score of 3.29). The mean score for these 'not suited' sports named by our American respondents based upon a combination of Matteo, and Roloff and Solomon's results was 8.0. Similarly, all the sports chosen by the American adolescents as 'not suited' for females were classified as 'male sports' by both Matteo and Roloff and Solomon's respondents. The mean score for these sports on the Matteo and Roloff/Solomon scale was 2.02. These comparisons further underscore the temporal stability of gender stereotyping in sport. Soccer is the only example of a sport in America, which is undergoing a 'gender change' according to these comparisons.

It was suggested earlier that the 'oppositional' theory of gender underlying the stereotyping process in sport rests on an unchangeable 'biological' model. How important is biology in the reasons given by German and 'American adolescents for why certain sports are 'gender appropriate'? The data in Tables 7 and 8 are based upon a classification system jointly devised by the German and American research teams. The original category list was developed by the first author based on a random sample of 100 questionnaire responses, and then revised by the German researchers based on a further sample of 100 responses. The final list was agreed on by both groups and used to classify the responses of all the samples.

The data in Table 9 show the most important reasons why German and American adolescents think that some sports are 'not suited' for boys. The most common response for both German and American adolescents, 'only for girls', supports the 'oppositional' view of girls and boys sports, but other responses provide insights into the basis of this view. For example, one theme deals with the presentation-of-self in sport. Boys 'look silly' in some sports (ranked equal second in importance by the German adolescents and fifth by the American adolescents), lack skill (ranked fifth in both samples), and are required to dress inappropriately (ranked fourth in the American sample). Some sports are perceived to be 'too feminine' (ranked second in the American sample and ninth in the German sample), and are 'unaesthetic' (ranked eighth by the German respondents). Physiological reasons, such as lack of flexibility (ranked third in America and equal second in Germany), are also mentioned, but in 'boys' sports biology seems to be less important than

appearance. The rankings show similarity between German and American adolescents (the major difference being around the issue of some sports being 'too feminine'). There were also few differences in the way males and females assigned importance to these reasons (the exceptions were 'too feminine', chosen by 23.8% of the American boys and 14.6% of the American girls, and 'looks silly', chosen by 12.5% of the German boys and 21.1% of the German girls).

Table 9: Reasons for sports chosen as not suited for boys

USA (n=312, boys 53.8%, girls 46.2%)			Germany (n=757, boys 48.7%, girls 51.3%)	
Reason	Rank	%	Rank	%
only for girls	1	40.1	1	17.4
too feminine	2	19.6 <sup>a</sup>	9	3.2
not supple/flexible enough	3	11.9	2	16.9
inappropriate dress	4	9.9		
looks silly	5	4.5	2	16.9 <sup>b</sup>
no skill	6	2.2	5	11.4
no effort needed	6	2.2		
inadequate body shape			6	5.2
boring			7	4.1
don't know			4	12.9

<sup>a</sup>= 23.8% boys, 14.6% girls

<sup>b</sup>= 12.5% boys, 21.1% girls

The data in Table 10 show that sports that are 'not suited' for girls are perceived to be characterized by violence and injuries. These two reasons account for over 66 per cent of the total in the American samples. The addition of 'biological predisposition' and lack of strength ('girls too weak') brings the total to over 75 per cent for the American samples and over 51 per cent for the German samples. In both countries, perceptions of the physical weakness and 'fragility' of girls (relative to boys) lie behind these reasons. Boys and girls agree on almost all of these stereotypes, the one exception being the issue of violence chosen by 19.3 per cent of the German boys but only 2.2 per cent of the German girls.

A comparison of these two tables show that the criteria used to stereotype 'boys' and 'girls' sports are different. For 'boys' sports the idea of appropriate appearance is important, while with 'girls' sports the concern is over injury as a result of physical violence. These differences support an 'oppositional' view of gender, one that at least for girls is rooted in a biological conceptualization of the fragile female

who cannot be hit in certain places.<sup>8</sup> This view is equally accepted by adolescents in Germany and America. It is also a view that is endorsed by both boys and girls.

Table 10: Reasons for sports chosen as not suited for girls

USA (n=665, boys 55.3%, girls 44.7%)			Germany (n=905, boys 54.3%, girls 45.7%)	
Reason	Rank	%	Rank	%
too violent	1	39.8	1	20.7 <sup>a</sup>
causes injuries	2	26.5	7	6.0
only for boys	3	10.4	3	9.9
biological predisposition	4	5.5	6	6.7
too weak	5	3.8	2	18.1
too gentle/ sensitive	6	3.6	5	7.5
no endurance	7	2.3		
no skill	8	2.1		
girls don't look nice			8	5.8
too much muscle			9	4.0
Other			3	9.9

<sup>a</sup>= 19.3% boys, 2.2% girls

## Discussion

This research has investigated the extent of sports stereotyping among samples of German and American adolescents. The rationale for this research is that stereotyping has an effect on agency, specifically the options that adolescents feel they have in developing their sports biographies. These choices are important if a liberal feminist agenda is to be advanced through increasing the opportunities for females in sport. They are also crucial to the more critical feminist perspective of women claiming sports as their own and establishing a broader definition of physicality, not dependent on the criteria used to define men (McDermott, 1996). In both scenarios there is a need for females to see themselves as 'equal partners' with males in sport (Messner, 1988) for both females and males to reject traditional attitudes which limit their sporting opportunities (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 274), and for males to begin participating in sports previously stereotyped as 'feminine', thereby modifying traditional gender roles (Adler, Kless & Adler, 1992).

Our data provide some insights into the goal of reducing sports stereotyping. On the positive side, our results show the 'rejection' of sport stereotyping for 'boys' sports by almost fifty per cent of the German adolescents and over sixty per cent of the American adolescents, implying that there is hope that boys will have less

pressure to conform to the demands of restrictive stereotypes in their future sports choices. That American female twelfth graders reject the stereotype of 'girls' sports at a greater rate than do seventh grade girls may also mean that girls' tendency to stereotype decreases with maturation. However, the rejection of stereotyping for 'girls' sports is less than for 'boys' sports in both countries.

Differences between American and German adolescents could be related to variations in their understanding of what constitutes sport. For example, suburban New York adolescents tended to associate the term sport with a relatively small number of institutionalized team sports (e.g., basketball, American football, baseball). Berlin adolescents had a more inclusive approach and demonstrated a wider variety in their concepts of 'sport' (Rees, Brettschneider, & Brandl-Bredenbeck, 1998). If American adolescents were using a concept grounded in team sports such as football, basketball, and baseball this might explain why 'girls' sports were more stereotyped than 'boys' sports, since historically male presence in these sports has been more prominent than female presence.<sup>9</sup> This suggestion has implications for the 'global flow' conceptualization of sport mentioned in the introduction. Gender stereotyping seems to be one of the global flows of sport, but perhaps the system of education acts as a filter to this flow. That is, American adolescents (particularly boys) are likely to 'learn' that sports are gendered because of the salience of interscholastic athletics that has historically emphasized the importance of male sports in American schools. Future research might investigate with in depth interviews how adolescents (particularly in America) are reacting to the increased media covering being given to female involvement in sports such as basketball and soccer previously perceived as 'male' sports.

On a practical level, our results reinforce the point made by Hargreaves (1994, p. 208) that feminists who want to change the position of and ideas about women in sport do not have an easy task. There is consensus about what sports are 'male' and 'female' among German and American adolescents, and these sports are largely the same as the ones that used to develop a theory of sports typing in the 1960s (Metheny, 1965). This model characterizes gender as oppositional; that is, the 'acceptable' sports for boys are the ones that are 'unacceptable' for girls and vice versa. Girls are perceived as 'not suited' for violent aggressive sports, and boys are 'not suited' for expressive, aesthetically pleasing sports. This view rests on a biological basis of male and female differences. Our results show that this basis occurs both in America and Germany and, at least for America, is resistant to temporal change.

We might speculate, however, that biology was more obvious in the stereotyping of 'girls' sports than of 'boys' sports by our German and American respondents. Girls were 'not suited' for sports that required body contact because of their (girls) fragility. In the case of the boys, the issue was less that they were 'not suited' for certain sports than the idea that certain sports were 'not suited' for them because the action and/or dress made the boys 'look silly'. Implied here is the idea that these sports might be changed so that the boys could look 'less silly'. On the other hand the perceived biological inadequacy of girls (compared to boys) means that they (girls) could not be 'changed' to fit into 'boys' sports.

In summary, the results of this study have implications for the issue of agency in the sports choices of adolescents, the mechanism by which the oppositional

conception of gender may be reduced. German and American adolescents are more likely to feel that female sports choices are more constrained by gender stereotypes than are male sports choices. This indicates the extra burden placed on females in their attempts to take advantage of the increase in contemporary sporting opportunities available to them, particularly since these opportunities are occurring in institutionalized sports that we have suggested are implicated in reinforcing gender stereotyping. More specifically, the consensus in the responses of American adolescents over the view that aggressive sports are 'not suited' for females, makes female involvement in these sports an even more difficult option in the fight to reduce gender stereotyping.

## NOTES

1. It is worth noting that Metheny developed a model of stereotyping for global sport since she used Olympic competition as the basis for her claim that some forms of competitive participation were 'categorically unacceptable' for women (see Metheny, 1965, p. 49).
2. The view of sport as a ritual process making real various myths about life was developed by Miracle & Rees (1994).
3. Chafetz has noted that terms such as sex and gender roles have largely been abandoned by feminist scholars who argue that these terms obscure power inequalities, but she also suggests that role analysis is still an important part of feminist theory because many specific social roles are entirely or largely played by members of one sex (Chafetz, 1997, p. 114-5).
4. American and Germany were chosen as sites for this research for theoretical and practical reasons. Analysis of contemporary German society (e-g., Kempe, 1999, chapter 11) notes the great influence of America in shaping the values and attitudes of German youth. While this implies that the interest in and involvement in sport among the youth of both countries should be similar, the importance of sport in the educational institutions of Germany and America is very different (Rees, Brettschneider, & Brandl Bredenbeck, 1998). On a practical level, two of the authors of this study have had extensive research experience studying youth sport in their respective countries, and strong contacts in some of the school systems where the data were collected. The data in Berlin and New York were collected by the researchers and their assistants, and at the other sites by the schoolteachers. The data collection was made possible by a grant from the Quantum Corporation of Milpitas, CA. to the first author, and a grant from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft to the third author. We are very grateful for this research support. We are also grateful for the cooperation of the administrators and teachers in the schools where the data were collected, and to Ralph Wilcox for help in organizing collection of the Memphis data.
5. Coakley (1998, p. 135) charges that such 'gender difference questions' are misleading because they assume an either-or conceptualization of gender and underestimate the variations in girls and boys play behavior. As

sociologists committed to reducing the bipolar view of gender we are aware of the dilemma in asking these types of questions. On the other hand, much of the research cited in this paper has shown the male-female dichotomy to be a 'fact of life' in people's thinking about sport. That it may be a salient distinction in the minds of our adolescent respondents (even though it is rejected by us) justifies our methodology.

6. These 'peaks' could be another example of the 'puberty effect' that has been found in research on the self-concept of German adolescents. Higher levels of stereotyping among German ninth graders could reflect their uncertainty about opposite-sex relations during this period of bodily change. That no "puberty effect" was found for the American sample is also consistent with previous findings on the self-concepts of American adolescents. We have speculated that the desire to "feel good" about oneself is more strongly internalized by American than by German adolescents. This makes American adolescents less likely to perceive and/or acknowledge crises or gaps in the smooth transition from childhood to adulthood (see Brettschneider, Brandl-Bredenbeck, & Rees, 1996, pp. 266-7; Brettschneider & Brandl-Bredenbeck, 1997, p. 172-3, and pp. 180-83).
7. We are grateful to Michael Roloff for providing us with the actual scores for the different sports, which were not included in the original article.
8. One ninth grade American male responded to the question of inappropriate sports for girls as follows: 'Football – because there are some places you can't hit girls'. The tacit assumption for 'male' sports is that it is appropriate to hit boys in all places.
9. This perception may be particularly true for American male athletes. An analysis (not shown) was also conducted on the relationship between stereotyping and the respondents involvement in sport. The only significant result was in the case of the American male respondents. The greater the involvement (measured on a four point scale where 1 = no participation, 2 = participate as a substitute, 3 = play regularly, 4 = star athlete), the greater the agreement that some sports are 'not suited' for boys, (39.5% for 'no participation', 27.4% for 'participate as a substitute', 40.4% for 'play regularly', and 42% for 'star athlete'), and also that some sports are 'not suited' for girls (57.9% for 'no participation', 53.3% for 'participate as a substitute', 62% for 'play regularly', and 68.9% for 'star athlete').

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