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## ***Conflicting Femininities:*** **The Discourse on the Female Body and the** **Physical Education of Girls in** **National Socialism**

The national socialist ideology of the “Third Empire” not only shifted norms and values, but also the social and gender order of every day life. Physical education and body culture played a central role in the re-education of the Germans and in the preparation of women and men for their roles and tasks. Boys were to be prepared as soldiers, girls as strong mothers of many strong children. But this seemingly fixed definition of femininity could be interpreted in a number of different ways and was adapted to the changing situations of the times. Consequently, the attitude towards women’s paid employment changed according to the needs of the labour market. Different groups with different interests interpreted and redefined the role and the characteristics of women according to their specific aims. These new definitions of femininity were ambiguous, alternating between the traditional notion of a weak sex and the necessity to have strong women.

Shifting discussions about femininity also affected the aims and contents of women’s physical activities and posed the question of how strong could or should women be? At this time there were significant struggles about notions of the female body and the ‘right’ femininity of girls. As early as 1934 a new curriculum was planned for German girls but because of the antagonistic views about femininity, the female body, and gender specific physical activities, it was not implemented. It was only in 1941 that a curriculum for girls’ physical education could be published that reconciled traditional and newly emerging views of femininity. This paper is based on new sources, some of them accessible only since the reunification of Germany. The most important materials are those from the Ministry of Education (*Bundesarchiv Koblenz*) and the publications of the National Socialist Teacher Organization (*Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerbund*).