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Introduction

Wheelchair basketball is one of the widespread disability sports. In Germany, there is a competitively oriented league system. Men and women play together on the club teams. On the national teams, the genders play separately. In view of this difference, the situation of female athletes in competition seems particularly interesting. However, there has yet been little focus on this complex situation in sport science research. This study aims at analyzing the interdependencies of the difference categories gender and disability in this competition-oriented sport setting:

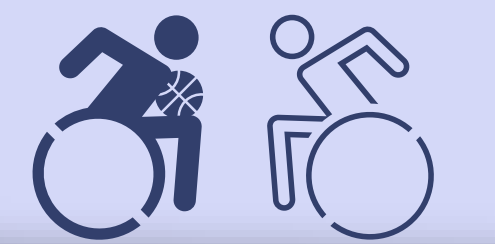
How do the difference categories of gender and disability interact in the context of the two competition settings in wheelchair basketball? Which stereotypes can be reconstructed in the two competition settings?

In sport, there is a clear segregation along the category of disability. This separation between people with and without disabilities is accepted by most players as the normal state of affairs. Joint competitions between people with and without disabilities are a rather rare phenomenon in Germany (Greve & Bechthold, 2019). Gender is also a highly relevant category in sport and especially in competitive sport. Competitive sport is gender segregated in almost all sports. Heckemeyer (2018) notes that competitive sport represents is a heteronormatively structured field.

Methodological Procedure

With a view to this research interest, an intersectional research design was chosen. The aim is to reconstruct the interaction and connection of the difference categories of gender and disability in the social practices of competitive wheelchair basketball. In this way, the intertwining of the two social categories of difference, gender and disability, will be analysed in their interaction on the three levels described above. In this research approach, the interview partners (five men and seven women) were encouraged to be as open as possible about their competitive sporting careers within the framework of autobiographical narrative interviews (Schütze, 1983). The presentation of one's own sporting career is a selective narration of an autobiographical aspect. In such contexts, the interviewee decides what is important and what is said, thus giving the decisive weight to one's own biography (or the part that was asked about here, the interviewee's career in wheelchair basketball; Schütze, 1983). The interviewee is the expert and selects between important and unimportant biographical episodes, events and memories. The data collection and analysis took place following grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Based on the identity constructions of the athletes, this procedure enables the connection to social structures and symbolic representations and thus avoids a reification of inequality-generating categories. Only open and axial coding were used in this study. Selective coding, the elaboration of the core category, was not used.

Results



The evaluation of the data generated a system of categories according to the analytical procedures described above. This described various phenomena in the light of the questions raised.

- The male view of women in the game
- Women and disability: Double disadvantage in mixed teams
- Collective stigmatising of attributions in competition
- Asymmetrical power structures on the field

I was the mum of the team.
Um, and what did— G [a teammate] was so sweet, (...) pretty much at the end of the season, (...) we played against Lahn-Dill 2 I think. (...) That was a cup game. And um, some asshole twisted my arm really badly, really badly. It really hurt. Um, I took the ball up here and he didn't just take the ball from me as a huge person, but he grabbed my arm, took the ball and drove away. And so, there, I couldn't get any further. Um, and then I was substituted, because nothing worked at that moment and then G said 'Save the queen' and then he kicked him out — he knocked him out, he knocked him out, he suffered. The Lahn-Dill player suffered. He said, 'If you do something to our queen, you suffer for it. You suffer for it'. And really, when opponents were very rough, they said 'Who did that? Number so and so? Mhm'. They didn't necessarily foul, but they let him fly.



Discussion

In the analysis of the competitive setting of wheelchair basketball, a clear reproduction of a traditional gender structure becomes visible. The reinforcement of power-hierarchical gender relations in the given structures of sport (e.g., classification system and mixed-gender and single-gender competitions) is accepted as natural by the players and influences their identity formation. The question arises whether the implementation of a gender-mixed sport setting in Paralympic competitive sport is at all possible without reproducing the social construction of gender stereotypes. Future research should identify ways to sensitise stakeholders to the issues of disability-gender-performance.



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