



# GENDER STEREOTYPES AS A DETERMINANT OF PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS IN CHILDHOOD

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## INTRODUCTION.

In general terms, women's participation in the sports sector is indicative of inequality with respect to men (Vázquez, 2007). During the twentieth century, the education of Spanish women was determined by social stereotypes concerning gender. The physical education that female children and adolescents received consisted of low intensity activities based essentially on rhythm and coordination, with the primary aim of protecting their basic function - reproduction - and avoiding their masculinisation. As a result of this latter criterion, for example, female participation in athletics was not permitted until 1961.

When broaching an education in values through participation in sports, co-education becomes the benchmark. In our most immediate geographical context, regional and State guidelines establish the need to integrate boys and girls into school sports programmes (CSD, 2011). Even today, negative stereotypes and patterns of inequality still exist that determine women's participation in sports. In the case of girls, adherence to the principle of equality in sports during schooling gradually declines from preadolescence onwards. In addition, Fernández (2002) has identified social culture as a transmitter of stereotypical images of boys and girls as regards their relationship with and participation in sports activities. We believe it is important to study the impact of these gender stereotypes about sport since this would provide information about the relationships that boys and girls establish with physical activity and sport.

The aim of this research was to analyse children's participation in municipal sports schools of a Spanish city, and determine whether it reflected the gender stereotypes reported in the specialist literature.

## METHODOLOGY.

Using a qualitative approach, the specialist literature was reviewed to identify traits associated with male sports activities (strength, endurance, more active, aggressive, risk) and female sports activities (rhythm, expression, elasticity, flexibility, coordination).

Documentary sources	Masculino	Femenino
Alvariñas et al., 2009	Strength and risk	Rhythm and expression
Blández et al., 2007	Physical condition and skill	Aesthetic
Gil_Madrona et al., 2014	Soccer/football and Hockey	Rhythm and swimming
Ruiz, 2009	Soccer/football and cycling	Rhythmic Gymnastics, cycling, ballet and swimming

Table 1. Features and sports attributed to both genres according to some documentary sources.

In relation to the quantitative research, the sample consisted of children participating in the various sports activities offered by the Municipal Sports Schools in the 2012/2013 season and aimed at children of both sexes between 6 and 11 years old. A descriptive statistical analysis was performed.

Genre	N	%
	1804	51,5%
	1701	48,5%
Total	3506	100%

Table 2. Participation of children aged 6 to 11 (boys and girls). Municipal Sports Schools in León (Spain).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

Overall participation in sports was higher among boys (51,5%) than girls (48,5%). Although sport has traditionally been considered a male domain, the data reported in this study coincide with the specific literature. Thus, during early childhood there is very little difference in the participation of boys and girls. However, during adolescence, a very significant number of girls stop participating in sports (Vázquez, 2007).

Leon Wrestling in EDM (León)



Pre-Sport in EDM (León)



Overall, it is greater participation in those sports that are taught from the first stages of school sports (basketball, futsal and rhythmic gymnastics), and in water sports (live saving). This finding coincides with the data reported in various studies published in Spain concerning the principal sports in which Spanish adults participate (water sports, rhythmic activities, football, basketball).

Sports	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	Sport	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
<b>Athletics</b>	46.9	53.1	<b>Hockey</b>	88.9	11.1
<b>Badminton</b>	67.3	32.7	<b>Leon Wrestling</b>	57.9	42.1
<b>Basketball</b>	44.1	55.9	<b>Orienteering</b>	56.0	44.0
<b>Handball</b>	72.6	27.4	<b>Pre-sport*</b>	71.8	28.2
<b>Capoeira</b>	75.0	25.0	<b>Rugby</b>	66.7	33.3
<b>Cycling</b>	93.8	6.3	<b>Live saving</b>	43.9	56.1
<b>Chess</b>	75.6	24.4	<b>Tennis</b>	60.0	40.0
<b>Scheldt</b>	77.8	22.2	<b>Table-tennis</b>	74.4	25.6
<b>Futsal</b>	91.3	8.8	<b>Archery</b>	100	0
<b>Artistic Gymnastics</b>	18.2	81.8	<b>Triathlon</b>	40.0	60.0
<b>Rhythmic Gymnastics</b>	1.2	98.8	<b>Volleyball</b>	5.4	94.6

Table 3. Participation by sex and sport (6-11 years old). Municipal Sports Schools in León (Spain).

\*Multisport proposal based on the development of motor skills in various physical activities and sports, without exclusive association with a sports discipline. This is aimed at children aged between 7 and 8 years old.

Table 3 shows the participation by sex and sport. The highest rates of participation were observed in activities associated with male traits (handball 73%, futsal 91%, hockey 90%, Leon wrestling 69%, rugby 95%), compared with those in which the female traits described in the literature predominated (rhythmic and artistic gymnastics 100%-80%, volleyball 91%). Thus, the results of this study reflect the persistence of certain male and female practices with regards to sports, although as has been reported in other studies, these differences are narrowing (Alvariñas, Fernández & López, 2011).

However, the data also revealed that female participation was higher in activities such as basketball and athletics. The case of basketball contradicts the widespread notion that individual sports are 'feminine' while team sports are 'male' (Alfaro, 2007). In their study conducted in schools, Blández et al. (2007) identified a series of sports that they classified as neutral. These were perceived by the schoolchildren as being equally male and female. They consisted of sports such as swimming, tennis, table tennis, paddle tennis and basketball. In the case of athletics, actions to promote sports at a local level - within the context of federations - are aimed towards girls. This determines female participation, related to the profile of local athletics teams.

## CONCLUSIONS

From infancy, gender role socialisation and social and cultural pressures inculcate socially acceptable gender practices.

Coeducation and the involvement of various social agents would enhance adherence to sport, especially among girls. However, the strategies adopted do not lead to the same kind of sports experiences for boys and girls.

Although there is very little difference in participation at an early age, boys nevertheless tend to participate more than girls. There is no doubt that some sports are still considered feminine and others masculine, i.e. that gender stereotypes still persist in sport.

Interventions should be aimed at promoting the presence of social agents of both sexes (coaches and monitors, referees, sports managers, etc.), as well as at the immediate environment (family, school, teachers, etc.).

In order to minimise gender differences, the competent authorities should implement actions from the very start of schooling that promote sports from a perspective of gender equality.

## References:

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Basketball in EDM (León)

