

# **Sport in Society**



Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fcss20

# Dressed for success or undermining the achievement? Material culture of recreational sporting events for women in Sweden

## **Annie Woube**

**To cite this article:** Annie Woube (2022): Dressed for success or undermining the achievement? Material culture of recreational sporting events for women in Sweden, Sport in Society, DOI: 10.1080/17430437.2022.2144723

To link to this article: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2022.2144723">https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2022.2144723</a>





#### RESEARCH ARTICLE

**3** OPEN ACCESS



# Dressed for success or undermining the achievement? Material culture of recreational sporting events for women in Sweden

Annie Woube (D)

Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

#### **ABSTRACT**

This article explores meaning-making and performances of femininity through material culture among ordinary women who engage in recreational sports races for women in Sweden, and the discursive effects for individual participants, and society at large. Positioned within a framework of discourse theory and poststructuralism, the study is based on a multi-method approach in data collection of written and oral accounts of race participants, auto-ethnographical notes, and material objects. The exploration shows that the female participants' usage of sportswear and gear points to stereotypical gender identities that are tied to women's shopping practices, which discursively undermine the physical achievement, while creating a female sports community. Linked to social class and resources, women can learn how to enhance their athletic practices and become proper athletes with the help of sporting clothes and gear – even when their bodies are weak, aged or malfunctioning.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Athlete identity; recreational sports races for women; femininity; gender; material culture

#### Introduction

Recreational sports races for women are organized throughout the world, and in Sweden these races have become an important part of the sports movement. Hundreds of thousands of women annually join races in running, cycling and skiing, such as Tjejmilen (running 10 K), Tjejvasan (skiing 30 K), Tjejvättern (cycling 100 K), or Vårruset (running 2,5 or 5 K), which is a running series that is organized in 20 cities throughout the country. Since the start in the beginning of the 1980s, these sporting events have attracted female participants of all ages, and have become successful recurrent events in Sweden. Over the years, the race days have also become marked off as a celebration of women who do recreational sports by both race organizers and the female collective of racers (Lindelöf and Woube 2019). Even though sporting events for women appear around the globe, the races in Sweden can be used as an important mini laboratory for discussing the conditions of women's exercising, as Sweden has a strong gender equality norm and an international reputation of gender equality already set in place (Martinsson, Griffin, and Giritli Nygren 2016). In paradox to

the reputation, the Swedish female racers often use different forms of *material culture* that are explicitly coded as feminine, which make the events clearly and visibly separate from other sporting events. The different ways that race participants use sportswear and gear in the races express various gendered ideas and discourses about gender equality and the conditions for women's excising with the strong link between sports and masculinity as a contrasting backdrop to the cultural phenomenon (cf. Dunning 1986; Messner 2003).

This article aims to explore 1) how female recreational sports race participants use and give meaning to sportswear and gear as part of performing femininity (cf. Butler 1990, 1993), 2) how sportswear and gear become productive for the women in preparation for and participation in the races, and 3) the discursive effects of this usage and production of meaning for individual participants, and society at large.

#### Literature review

Material culture forms a central part of recreational sports through the specific equipment and clothing that are used throughout exercise and race participation. Despite its' significance, material culture in recreational sports for adults is a narrow research field due to a limited body of research of recreational sports for adults in general (see Wheaton 2013a, 2013b; Andreasson, Johansson, and Danielsson 2018; Andreasson and Johansson 2018).

There are some thematic issues of scientific journals that have devoted specific attention to the material culture of sports. One example is *Rethinking History* (Borisha and Phillips 2012) that examines how material culture can be useful to understand sports history. The issue highlights that material objects serve as a source to the cultural purpose of artefacts, and to understand culture itself throughout history. In the discipline of fashion and textile studies, the scientific journal *Fashion Practice* (Bielefeldt Bruun, and Langkjær 2016) has a focus on sportswear as garments of textile innovation that are increasingly popular among youth, fitness, health and sports clubs. The articles investigate the relationship between sportswear and fashion, functionality and sustainability. More so, the scholars of sports history Hardy, Loy, and Booth (2009) have established a typology of material culture in sports that has been residual over time: playing equipment, venues, training equipment and sport medicine technology, sportswear, prizes, symbolic artefacts, performance measurement technology, ephemera and detritus, and memorabilia.

Similar to the present article, a gender perspective of material culture is often used in studies within the disciplines of history, anthropology/ethnology, as well as textile and fashion studies. Within the latter, feminist research on fashion clothing and gender constructions is a broad field in the aftermath of influential works of Hollander (1978) and Wilson (1985). Entwistle's (2000) publication *The fashioned body* continues, for example, to deepen the investigation of how fashion, gender and sexuality are interrelated in modern society. Scandinavian ethnologists (Gradén and Petersson McIntyre 2009) have also broadened this field through their research on transcendence and identification of the dressed and fashioned (female) body in an anthology from 2009.

Research on sportswear from a cultural and gendered perspective has attracted the attention of several cultural studies scholars (Rundquist 2005; McIntyre Petersson 2005, 2009; Berggren Torell 2011; Larsson 2012; Rönnbäck 2015). This research has focused on the socio-cultural implications of sportswear that point to social differentiations, to functionality, to performance enhancement or to material embodied practices and technics. They



have independently shown how sporting clothes send signals of social status and standing, seriousness and experience, and have a potential to extend body limits.

With the stated previous research as a background, the material objects of female recreational sporting races become an important gateway to understand ordinary people's sporting practices, their identifications, lifestyles, consumer habits, subjective meaning-makings in this specific context, and its' connections to discourse in society at large, specifically on gender equality, gender constructions and gendered norms in sports.

## Methodology

To focus on the usage and meaning-making of material culture are classical analytical entry points in line with the hermeneutic understanding of culture, in which culture is defined as practices of meaning-making (Fornäs 2012). Meaning-making is not only made through value statements by individuals but people also make meaning through how, when, and where they use particular material objects, in this case sportswear and gear, and through the situations where the material objects emerge (cf. Prown 1988, 1993). Hence, things are not just fixed objects in themselves, but mediums and parts of processes of meaning-making, self-understanding, self-presentation, and in the creation of giving the objects qualities and characteristics – at times with the ability to transcend its' bearer or user (Miller 2005; Tilley 2006). The dialectic, processual and reciprocal dimensions are central to this understanding of how material culture and people interact, theoretically known as objectification (Tilley 2006).

In this article, both the theoretical framework and the empirical material is based on a movable search light approach, common for the exploration of cultural phenomena, practises and processes (Kaijser and Öhlander 2011). Theoretically, the approach is related to abduction (Peirce 1990, 233), which implies a movement between deriving conclusions from the empirical material, and deriving conclusions from an already established theoretical framework, in this case discourse theory, poststructuralism and Judith Butler's theoretical thinking on gender constructions (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Butler 1990, 1993). In accordance with this theoretical tradition, the usage and meaning-making of material objects that emerged throughout the empirical data have been interpreted and analysed as articulations of discourses, through which certain types of meaning are established, and others are left out when different elements are set in relation to each other in certain ways (cf. Jørgensen and Phillips 2000; Neumann 2003). Analysis is done through an identification and deconstruction of chains of signs and meaning found in the data, since the intention is to study material matters that appear objective in relation to sports and gender and instead regarded conceptions as politically and culturally created (cf. Lindelöf 2012). Along the lines of the tradition of political (or post Marxist) discourse theory, all social or cultural phenomena are considered discursively constituted (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). All kinds of signs are regarded discursive and permeated with meaning in this fashion, not only expressions of oral statements and abstract concepts, but also customized practices and material objects (cf. Ingold 2011). Thus, discourses appear through material culture, and material objects fix discursive structures in society (cf. Gerber 2012). For instance, clothes can mediate discourses through visual codes (Höpflinger 2014, 177) that are filled with content and meaning when they are set in relation to, or associated with, other signs. In this process, they also provide certain central concepts or phenomena with meaning – in this article for instance 'racing women' and 'races for women'.

Furthermore, matters that occur outside a certain discursive field can be linked as important to the discursive field. The surroundings function as a *constitutive outside* – as counter phenomena. This may imply that the meaning of pink sportswear in women-only races is created, for example, in relation to pink as a feminized colour in society at large (cf. Ambjörnsson 2011; Samuels 2011), or in relation to sportswear in specialized sport stores. Analytically, the article highlights discursive fields that surround the sportswear and gear in races for women, in addition to interpreting the effects of the relation between practice and discursive field for individuals and society at large.

The empirical material was collected through a qualitative research tradition that uses different categories of data collected through a diverse set of methods in order to capture where, how, when, and for whom material culture emerge, in line with the *movable search light* approach described earlier (Kaijser and Öhlander 2011). I have collected *any* concreate material object or account of material culture in stories, ethnographical observations, descriptions, or talks etcetera during ethnographical fieldwork of sports races for women in Sweden during 2014-2017. The focal and prioritized source of empirical material is, thus, *material objects as they emerge in the totality of data*. The following types of material have been examined:

(Auto)ethnographic fieldwork notes through participation and observations at women-only races in running, cycling, and skiing in Sweden during the years 2014-2017, besides the running race New York Mini 10 K in the USA, which function as contrasting material to the field notes from the Swedish races. There are also transcriptions from interviews with members of organizing race committees, volunteers, and spectators of the stated races. Material objects from the races were also gathered, such as goodie bags, race products, sportswear etc.

Written accounts about race experiences from more than 600 participants in Swedish women-only races; these were collected through a questionnaire from the Nordic Museum (Nordiska Museet), Stockholm, during the years 2011-2013. The written accounts contain of both written long, detailed stories, and brief and concise answers of the questions. The variation shows the complexity in the experiences of the women, but when the answers are too sparse, they function as a complementary source. The accounts contain of descriptions of the participants' relation with material objects in general, but also of answers of a specific question about purchases made prior to the race participation.

Transcriptions of interviews with 11 female race participants, five out of six conducted in pair, which partially involve the role of material objects. For instance, how to use and experience the gear. The interviewees, albeit being of different ages (28-75 years old) are a homogenous group in terms of being heterosexual women belonging to the middle class. They have all participated in several races for women in different types of sport.

At last, the analysis is based on *material from websites*, *mass media*, *social media*, *as well as training literature* written by women in connection to the races.

#### **Results and discussion**

#### Shrinking and pinking of sportswear

Recreational sports races for women in Sweden seem to entail a dress code and certain aesthetics of appearance prevail the looks of race participants: ponytails, braids, use of

make-up, painted nails, tight sports clothes, and sometimes sport skirts or dresses, designed for running, skiing and biking in the colours of pink, orange and purple. This is evident in both the ethnographical observations of races and the autoethnographical participations made during the data collection to this study. These kinds of visible features construct a certain type of femininity linked to athleticism, together with the common trait to show skin and a slim bodily form (cf. Tolvhed 2016).

The appearance dominates sports races for women in Sweden, but also travel abroad when Swedish female racers participate in recreational races for women in other countries. This was very apparent during an (auto)ethnographical fieldwork at the running race New York Mini 10 K (the first recreational race for women in the world) with a Swedish group of female runners. The Swedish travel organizer gave the group a sports T-shirt in polyester. On the day of the race, several runners had modified the T-shirt by cutting the sleeves, a more visible neckline and cleavage, and altering it at the bottom to show the waistline. To change the T-shirt into a tank top gave it a sexier look with more skin shown, according to a certain expected, but implicit and unspoken, feminine aesthetics. This practice of modifying the sportswear as a performance of athletic femininity has also been recognized in a study of teenage girls' basketball (Rönnbäck 2015:150ff).

The stereotypical feminine clothing and looks seem peculiar in contemporary Sweden, in light of its' reputation and high international ranking as one of the world's most gender equal countries (Martinsson, Griffin, and Giritli Nygren 2016). What is gained through such visible performance of femininity in the arena of recreational sporting events? In what ways are the feminine dress code productive for the race participants?

Firstly, the high pony tails, the nails, the makeup, and the magenta-coloured sports clothing are ways of creating likeness and togetherness, which become a base for creating collective fellowship, and a specific kind of female race participants' community (cf. Rönnbäck 2015). The female race participants might need a collective costume to engage in an activity often regarded as a masculine activity (Dunning 1986; Messner 2003). In this community of sports racers, the women become part of the norm and can be absorbed by the sporting masses of magenta clothing and high pony tails. While pink and colours alike often produce a diminishing and infantilizing effect (Ambjörnsson 2011), the female race participants become intelligible through this particular appearance, which has been created through a constant repetition of certain aesthetic practices and expressions in association to femininity ever since recreational sports races for women started in the 1980s in Sweden (cf. Butler 1990, 1993). This seems like the proper way to dress for Swedish race women, and it contributes to the demarcation and fixity of sporting events for women, as a different sporting event and separate from other types of sports races despite sex (cf. Hardy, Loy, and Booth 2009,138).

'Clothing is first and foremost a material medium of communication' (Höpflinger 2014,188), and the communication at hand in the races can be interpreted as a performance of hyperfemininity (Bell et al. 1994), which has become the front-runner cultural ideal for woman's expression in the western world thanks to neoliberal consumer society and postfeminist discourse (cf. McRobbie 2009). The hyperfeminine sportswear also locks the participants into traditional ideas of womanhood, as the practice reflects the gender norms of society at large, which part and parcel connect hyperfeminine clothing to a womanhood of heterosexual attraction and desire between men and women.

The emphasis on eros and the erotic, as in the example of the modified T-shirts in New York Mini 10 K, is also central in women's sports in general: 'commercial promoters, sponsors, and sportswear manufacturers clearly highlight the erotic aspects of femininity' (Hardy, Loy, and Booth 2009,143, see also Guttmann 1996). A female sexy, lean and well-trained body has been a central ideal for women during the greater part of the twentieth century until today (Cahn 2015; Tolvhed 2016), and gains meaning in relation to the fear of turning sporting women into mannish, homosexual women, which still is a prominent conception of athletic women (Cahn 2014). Along the lines of Judith Butler's theoretical thinking ([1990] 2007, 30ff), there is a linear connection between biological sex of woman/man via femininity/masculinity to the sexual desire between woman and man. The presented dress code of the sports races upholds the gender binary order through a distinct mode of appearance for female recreational sports women (cf. Rönnbäck 2015). There seems to be a need to accentuate femininity when women engage in masculine arenas, such as recreational sports races. Historically, this has worked compensatory for female athletes. Women, who emphasize their femininity, have preserved gender norms, but also made room for and legitimized their sporting activities (Tolvhed 2008, 2015, 2016; Cahn 2015).

A common procedure in the industry of sportswear and sports gear is to 'shrink and pink' sporting clothes for women (Samuels 2011, 24). The pink colour (defined as a feminine colour), together with the slim and sexy cutting of clothes, constitute the athletic female body as infantile, playful and inferior to male athletic bodies – hence, the shrinking aspects (cf. Ambjörnsson 2011). An exaggerated focus is placed on the participants' gender identity through the sportswear, why the women's physical achievement come to be diminished. This is a common pattern in women's sports, which is seldom regarded as serious achievements that really counts (see Messner 2003; Dowling 2002; Tolvhed 2008).

#### Athlete identification through consumption

Sportswear can also have an empowering and liberating effect for the female race participants, who describe in their written accounts and in interviews that they often buy new sporting clothes and gear before the races, or in connection to the sporting events in the shopping tents of the starting areas of the races. In one of her books, the Swedish author Martina Haag (2012) depicts her running career from being an unexperienced long-distance runner to complete a 10-kilometer running race for women, and eventually moving on to run marathons. She describes her relationship with material sports culture in the following way:

To run is so basic, not a lot of hustle and fuss, it is the original exercise of the first human beings. Running is so down to earth, just me and my legs. That's all that is needed! And a pair of shoes. You have to have a good pair of shoes, or else the knees might be injured. I have given myself a decent pair of shoes as a gift, because yesterday I was able to run for 20 minutes without a stop. [...] I have invested in a Garmin watch too. It is a GPS that measures how far and fast I have run. [...] It actually becomes more fun to run with it on my arm. I have noticed that it gets 1000 times easier to keep running if you give yourself treats to motivate yourself to continue even if it sometimes isn't easy. [...] I am like a human being from the stone age [...] in a lycra-sports bra with hidden elastic straps and a sweat absorbing and ventilating exercise top, but still! [...] Sport socks are also important. With the wrong kind of socks, the nails will come off like small, hard cornflakes when you take them off after a run. I have also realized the importance of

running in the right kind of pants. Light, tight and those that end just under the knee. Preferably, black. But the top can be in a happy color. In the same color as my hair scrunchies [...] I must have braids when I run, or else my hair gets into my eyes. [...] A jacket if it is cold outside and a reflective vest is of course a must. [...] And you have to have music. I refuse to run a meter without really good music in my iPod. [...] Running doesn't demand almost anything. It is just me, the wood and twenty-two unbearable accessories. (Haag 2012, 23-25)

The ironic autobiographical account of Haag depicts how she uses clothes and gear as a reward when she has reached the goals of her training and racing. Beginners in sports races for women or participants that do not regard themselves as proper athletes, often participate in the races in sportswear and with gear on discount or from the low-price offerings of sport stores. Many also use everyday clothes they already have at home: ordinary t-shirts, shorts, tops, anoraks etcetera. But as these participants become experienced race participants and come to occupy a self-evident identity as athletes, the new identity is often manifested through the purchase of new sportswear and equipment with higher quality. This interpretation is also true for Haag, but she puts a greater emphasis on the fact that the sportswear and the gear can turn her into an athlete – she buys the accessories and equipment to become a runner through an objectification process that blurs the opposition between subject and object, according to Christopher Tilley (2006). The written accounts of the participants in this study have the same message, which is in line with the instructions of Sofia Hedström, who is a journalist and runner. She encourages her readers 'to dress themselves into shape [...] [because] [d]ressed as a runner, you feel like a runner' (Hedström 2016, 24).

On the level of personal identity, the theory of objectification indicates that material objects and clothing have, indeed, the capacity to transform its' bearer (cf. Miller 2005, 9; Tilley 2006). The sociologist Woodward (2005, 36) has named this practice 'the material embodiment of [...] intentionality' that is aimed to have an impact on the self and the surrounding people. In this particular case, it means to be perceived of as a runner in the eyes of self and others. Hence, the participants can use the outfit to look like a runner, feel like a runner, and achieve like a runner - there seems to be a way to dress for success, and transcend the stressed focus on gender identity in races for women.

Already dedicated and experienced race participants, and beginners with a wish to turn themselves into athletes through sportswear and gear, are conditioned by social class in relation to relative income and general patterns of consumption (cf. Tolvhed 2016), as high-quality functional equipment of well-known sports brands are bought in specialised retailer shops and priced accordingly. Ever since its beginning, the phenomenon of sporting events for women in Sweden has discursively been linked to both femininity and to consumption in general. The organizers have also informed the participants of what, how, and where to buy the equipment needed in the races through advice, advertisement, and through separate exhibitions and expos in connection to each race. Hence, the organizers have educated the participants on how to perform an athlete identity through consumption of sportswear and gear, which also taps into (middle class) women's traditional and today indisputable role in consumer society (cf. Ganetz 1995; Björk 1999). Shopping has historically been a female practice within the bourgeois, and is seen as a central aspect of shaping femininity along contemporary global beauty and fashion norms (McRobbie 2009). Today, young women use the art of shopping as a power tool to show off self-confidence, strength, determination and leader skills (Harris 2004). The same traits are also articulated in association with the sports races for women, both from the perspective of the organisers and

from the participants themselves. The shopping of sportswear falls into the expression of lifestyles, dreams and ideals of presenting oneself as an active, youthful, sporty and achieving woman, despite biological age (cf. Featherstone 1994). This is a new gender ideal in western society, according to Historian of Sports Helena Tolvhed (2016).

### Beneficial gear

The race participants also have found that sporting equipment and gear have a potential to enhance their athletic performance in line with the identification with self-evident sporting subjects:

The body [on a bike] is easier than to run. You roll so if you are over-weight, it does not matter - you can use the petals [...][The cycling] is the most fun because you don't need to drag a heavy and stiff body around. (67 years old, retired, middle-sized town in central Sweden)

But skiing is good. It is an amazing sport if you have bad knees. It is better than walking, and running is difficult. It is softer. You slide forward. You don't get hits... (73 years old, retired, middle-sized town in central Sweden)

The bike and the skiis enable and empower all bodies (also those that might be overweight or aged bodies) to perform in the races, according to the accounts. The equipment helps to compensate for the different limitations the body might have (cf. Berggren Torell 2011; see also Bäckström 2011). This resembles functional sportswear that is designed to work as a second skin for the athlete, which let body and clothes merge and become one as to enhance the athlete's performance. '[Functional sportswear] achieve something, enhance the performance of its' bearer and carry a making', according to the ethnologist Magdalena Petersson McIntyre (2009, 31; see also Entwistle and Wilson 2001). Accordingly, female race participants that master gear into athletic excellence transform discursive understandings of female athletic bodies, as sports mastery and strength are qualities far from the normative discourse of female athletic bodies. Contrary, the female body has been depicted as either too vulnerable and incapable of doing sports, or completely unsuitable for physical activity throughout the history of sports (Cahn 2015). As such, the female passive body has been understood with the male active body as its' counterpart, or its' constitutive outside to speak in terms of discourse theory (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

The difficulty in learning how to use the gear can also impede the performance for race beginners. In skiing races, for example, the participants need to learn how to master the skis, coordinate the different movements with the tracks and the natural environment, and come to terms with the fact that they need to ski side by side with fellow participants of the thousands. When this is accomplished, however, the gear might become part of a learned body scheme (cf. Hardy, Loy, and Booth 2009, 136), through which the body moves, directs its' attention, and becomes athletic. The gear used properly may support the athlete to go beyond the body limits, as the technology extends the body towards new embodied potentials (cf. Merleau-Ponty 2006).

For peak performance, the equipment also has to be served and taken care of before and after the races. There are many opportunities to learn how to handle the sporting gear in connection to the sporting events for women, and the actual learning is central to identifying oneself as a proper athlete. Most often, to serve the bike or prepare the skies with ski wax are articulated as masculine coded activities in the empirical material, and the participants

rather hand over the waxing of skis to a male partner or relative, than to tackle the maintenance of gear themselves.

Noteworthy is the fact that this practice is given separate meanings within two completely different contexts, depending on experience and dedication of the skiers in races for women. More competitive and experienced skiers hand in their skis for waxing as a practice that is taken for granted and a sign of professionalism if you are a serious and active skier. This is the way to act when you partake in competitive sports races. For less experienced and less competitive participants, to hand over the waxing to somebody else, often a man, indicate lack of competence in equipment maintenance, since waxing to a high degree is regarded as a masculine field of competence. The results are two seemingly identical practices; but one signals professionality among competitive skiers, and the other creates gender among the non-competitive participants. When women have knowledge and skills in maintaining the equipment and do this themselves, it is nevertheless often participants with a lot of sport experience, who identify themselves as proper recreational athletes.

More so, it is common that participants help other women and can learn from one another in how to handle and use the sports equipment before, during and after race day. The participants speak of this reciprocity in appreciative terms since it limits any 'mansplaining' in how to master the gear, that is: men that explain things to women – a phenomenon that the feminist writer Rebecca Solnit (2014) has drawn attention to in her book Men explain things to me. Research on women's physical experiences in the outdoors have reached similar conclusions. To learn physical skills in a single-gendered free zone is less intimidating for women than in mixed sport settings for both women and men (Nolan and Priest 1993; McDermott 2004), since sports is considered a self-evident masculine activity that men are supposed to have skills in. To learn the usage and eventually master the gear is an essential part in race performance, and by extension to become a proper race athlete.

#### **Conclusion**

In this article, I have shown various aspects of how female race participants use and give meaning to sportswear and gear in recreational sports races for women in Sweden, and the discursive effects of the usage and production of meaning. One such discursive effect is the shrinking and pinking of sportswear and gear that are dominant and used in the performance of athletic femininity, which keep women in place within conventional discursive understandings of women's assumed qualities, interests and skills. This performance seems to suggest that women cannot be interested in recreational sports in their own right, which is an assumption that both supports the gender binary order and the male sports norm. Within the discursive understanding of the race participants, the performance and accentuation of hyperfemininity is frequently displayed by the race community. The performance become productive and beneficial for individual racers in that similar looks, colours, and feminized sportswear create a collective, recognizable and culturally comprehensible community of women racers. This appearance reinforces the masculine norm of recreational sports since hyperfemininity does not seem threatening, but as something inherently different from ordinary performances of recreational athletes. For individual women, the crowd of female racers seem valuable as a safe space for them to take part in recreational sports and to experience being part of a norm. The effect of a women's race collective can be interpreted as empowering and liberating for individual race women.

The material culture that are used in the sporting events also has the potential to be supportive in other ways. With the help of sporting clothes and gear, women can learn how to enhance their athletic practices and turn themselves into becoming proper athletes – even when their bodies are weak, aged or malfunctioning. This is, however, linked to resources, social class and general patterns of consumption, within which shopping is traditionally seen as a feminine domain (Björk 1999). Besides purchasing high quality functional sporting clothes in order to identify oneself as a female sports racer, athlete identification can also be achieved through learning how to technically master the gear needed for specific sports, such as skies in cross country skiing. Identification and enhancement of technical skill go hand in hand as the equipment handled correctly have the effect to extend the body, and evoke sensations of strength, speed and physical functionality. Skilled female race participants come to experience bodies of power and force with the help of the material culture, which legitimize the athletic performances of the women, and run counter to discursive understandings of ordinary female bodies as weak and unsuitable for sports (cf. Dowling 2002).

In sum, the material culture that emerge in recreational sports races for women harbour qualities of both *immanence* and *transcendence* for the participants (cf. de Beauvoir 2012). The classical concepts, discussed by Simone de Beauvior ([1949] 2012) in the examination of women's abilities to achieve emancipation, can here be used to show how the material culture of recreational sports races for women both limits race participation through gendered norms and ideals, *and* opens up towards liberation and the ability to transcend the immanence and go beyond conventional gender identities and practices to the athletic experience of mastery, empowerment and athletic functionality.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, my project leader, associate professor in Gender Studies Karin S. Lindelöf, and the research seminars at the Centre for Gender Research, and the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, both at Uppsala University, Sweden, for valuable comments.

#### **Declaration of interest**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

#### **Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, AW, upon reasonable request.

## **Funding**

This work was supported by The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences [Riksbankens Jubileumsfond] during the years 2014–2016 [grant number P13-0783:1], and The Helge Ax:son Johnson Foundation [grant number F18-0308], to which I am truly grateful.

#### **ORCID**

Annie Woube http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6888-3052



#### References

Ambjörnsson, Fanny. 2011. Rosa: den Farliga Färgen [Pink: The Dangerous Colour]. Stockholm:

Andreasson, Jesper, and Thomas Johansson. 2018. Extreme Sports, Extreme Bodies: Gender, Identities and Bodies in Motion. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Andreasson, Jesper, Thomas Johansson, and Tom Danielsson. 2018. "Becoming an Ironman Triathlete. Extreme Exercise, Gender Equality and the Family Puzzle." Sport in Society 21 (9): 1351-1363. doi:10.1080/17430437.2017.1388787

de Beauvoir, Simone. 2012. Det Andra Könet [The Second Sex]. Stockholm: Norstedt.

Bell, David, Jon Binnie, Julia Cream, and Gill Valentine. 1994. "All Hyped up and No Place to Go." Gender, Place and Culture 1 (1): 31-47. doi:10.1080/09663699408721199

Berggren Torell, Viveka. 2011. "Hellre Lätt Och Snabb än Väl Skyddad. Om Fotbollskläder Relaterat till Hälsa." [Rather light and fast than well protected. About soccer clothes in relation to health]. In Kulturstudier, Kropp Och Idrott [Cultural studies, body, and sports], edited by Helena Tolyhed and David Cardell, 169-192. Malmö: idrottsforum.org.

Björk, Nina. 1999. Sireners Sång: tankar Kring Modernitet Och Kön [Songs of the Sirens: Thoughts on Modernity and Gender]. Stockholm: Wahlström and Widstrand.

Butler, Judith. 1990. Gender Trouble. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1993. Bodies That Matter. New York: Routledge.

Bäckström, Åsa. 2011. "Sinnligt Kunnande Och Lärande. Balans Och Proprioception ur Ett Samhällsvetenskapligt Perspektiv." [Knowing and learning by the senses. Balance and proprioception from a social science perspective]. In Kulturstudier, Kropp Och Idrott [Cultural Studies, Body, and Sports], edited by Helena Tolvhed and David Cardell, 193–209. Malmö: idrottsforum.org.

Cahn, Susan. 2014. "From the 'muscle Moll' to the 'butch' Ballplayer: Mannishness, Lesbianism, and Homophobia in U.S. women's Sport." In The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior, edited by Rose Weitz & Samantha Kwan. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cahn, Susan. K. 2015. Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sport. 2nd ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Dowling, Colette. 2002. The Frailty Myth: Redefining the Physical Potential of Women and Girls. New York: Random House International.

Dunning, Eric. 1986. "Sport as a Male Preserve: Notes on the Social Sources of Masculine Identity and Its Transformations." In Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process, edited by Eric Dunning and Elias Norbert. New York: Basil Blackwell.

Entwistle, Joanne. 2000. The Fashioned Body: fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Entwistle, Joanne, and Elizabeth Wilson, eds. 2001. Body Dressing. Oxford: Berg.

Bielefeldt Bruun, Mette, and Michael A. Langkjær. 2016. Sportswear: Between Fashion, Innovation and Sustainability." Fashion Practice 8 (2): 181-188. doi:10.1080/17569370.2016.1221931

Featherstone, Mike. 1994. Kultur, Kropp Och Konsumtion: kultursociologiska Texter [Culture, Body, and Consumption: Cultural Sociological Texts]. Stockholm: B. Östlings bokförlag Symposion.

Fornäs, Johan. 2012. Kultur [Culture]. Malmö: Liber.

Ganetz, Hillevi. 1995. "The Shop, the Home and Femininity as a Masquerade." In Youth Culture in Late Modernity, edited by Johan Fornäs, and Göran Bolin, 72–99. London: Sage.

Gerber, Sofi. 2012. "Det Materiella i Fokus. Diskursetnologiska Perspektiv på Murens Fall." [The Material in Focus. Discourse Ethnological Perspectives on the Fall of the Berlin Wall]. Kulturella Perspektiv 21 (3/4): 50-58.

Gradén, Lizette, and Magdalena Petersson McIntyre, eds. 2009. Modets Metamorfoser: den Klädda Kroppens Identiteter Och Förvandlingar [The Metamorphos of Fashion: The Identities and *Transformations of the Dressed Body*]. Stockholm: Carlsson.

Guttmann, Allen. 1996. The Erotic in Sports. New York: Columbia University Press.

Haag, Martina. 2012. Heja, Heja! Från Att Orka Stappla 20 Meter till Att Springa Marathon [You go! *From Being Able to Stumble 20 Metres to Running a Marathon*]. Stockholm: Pocketförlaget.

Hardy, Stephen, John Loy, and Douglas Booth. 2009. "The Material Culture of Sport: Toward a Typology." *Journal of Sport History* 36 (1): 129–152.

Harris, Anita. 2004. Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century. London: Routledge.

Hedström, Sofia. 2016. "Klä Dig i Form!" Runners World, September.

Hollander, Anne. 1978. Seeing through Clothes. New York: Viking P.

Höpflinger, Anna-Katharina. 2014. "Clothing as a Meaningful Marker of Space: A Comparative Approach to Embodied Religion from a Cultural Studies Perspective." In Religious Representation in Place, edited by George M. Pezzoli-Olgiati, 177-192. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Ingold, Tim. 2011. Perception of the Environment. London: Routledge

Jørgensen, Marianne Winther, and Louise Phillips. 2000. Diskursanalys Som Teori Och Metod [Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Kaijser, Lars, and Magnus Öhlander, eds. 2011. Etnologiskt Fältarbete [Ethnological Fieldwork]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. 1985. Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics. London: Verso.

Larsson, Marianne. 2012. "Huru Skidåkerskan Fick Ta Steget Fullt ut: skidkläder, Kroppsrörelse Och Kvinnlig Frigörelse." [How the Female Skier Could Take the Step Fully: Clothes for Skiing, Body Movement, and Female Emancipation]. In Markeringar Och Maskeringar: att Visa Eller Dölja Sin Kropp [Markings and Masks: To Show or Hide the Body], edited by Roger Quarsell, 113-141. Stockholm: Nordiska museets förlag.

Lindelöf, Karin. S. 2012. "Vad Gör Tjejlopp? Diskursteoretiska Perspektiv på Motionslopp För Kvinnor." [What Does a Girl's Race Do? Discourse Theoretical Perspectives on Women's Sports Races.] Kulturella Perspektiv – Svensk Etnologisk Tidskrift 21 (3-4): 32-40.

Lindelöf, Karin. S, and Annie Woube. 2019. I Tjejers Spår – För Framtids Segrar. Om Tjejlopp Och Villkor För Kvinnors Motionsidrottande [In the Tracks of Girls - For Future Victories. About Women's Sports Races and the Conditions for Women's Training]. Stockholm: Makadam förlag.

McDermott, Lisa. 2004. "Exploring Intersections of Physicality and Female-Only Canoeing Experiences." Leisure Studies 23 (3): 283–301. doi:10.1080/0261436042000253039

Peirce, Charles. S. 1990. Pragmatism Och Kosmologi [Pragmatism and cosmology]. Göteborg: Daidalos. Petersson McIntyre, Magdalena. 2005. "Kläder Som Andas, Kroppar Som Formges: kroppskonstruktioner, Genus Och Sportmode." [Clothes that Breathe, Bodies that are formed: Body Constructions, Gender, and Sports Fashion]. Kulturella Perspektiv 14 (3): 51-59.

Martinsson, Lena, Griffin, Gabriele, and Katarina Giritli Nygren, eds. 2016. Challenging the Myth of Gender Equality in Sweden. Bristol: Policy Press

McIntyre, Magdalena Pettersson. 2009. "Genus, Sportmode Och Flexibla Fibrer." [Gender, Sports Fashion, and Flexible Fibers]. In Modets Metamorfoser: den Klädda Kroppens Identiteter Och Förvandlingar [The Metamorphos of Fashion: The Identities and Transformations of the Dressed Bodyl, edited by Lizette Gradén, and Magdalena Petersson McIntyre, 30-54. Stockholm: Carlsson.

McRobbie, Angela. 2009. The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change. London:

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2006 [1999]. Kroppens Fenomenologi [The Phenomenology of the Body]. Göteborg: Daidalos.

Messner, Michael. A. 2003. Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Miller, Daniel. 2005. "Introduction." In: Materiality, edited by Daniel Miller, 1-50. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Neumann, Iver. B. 2003. Mening, Materialitet, Makt: en Introduktion till Diskursanalys [Meaning, Materiality, Power: An Introduction to Discourse Analysis]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Nolan, Tammy, and Simon Priest. 1993. "Outdoor Programmes for Women Only?" The Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership 10: 14–17.

Prown, Jules. 1988. "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method." In Material Life in America, 1600-1860, edited by Robert Blair St. George, 17-37. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Prown, Jules. 1993. "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?." In History from Things: Essays on Material Culture, edited by Steven Lubar, and W. David Kingery, 1-19. Washington, DC.: Smithsonian Press.



Borish, Linda J., and Murray G. Phillips. 2012. "Sport history as modes of expression: material culture and cultural spaces in sport and history". Rethinking History -the Journal of Theory and Practice 16 (4): 465-477. doi: 10.1080/13642529.2012.728382.

Rönnbäck, Julia. 2015. Det är Väl Typiskt Tjejer: om Basket, Kropp Och Femininitet [That is typical for girls: about basketball, the body, and femininity]. Diss. Malmö: Malmö högskola.

Rundquist, Angela. 2005. "Sport, Klass Och Mode." [Sports, class, and fashion]. In Tankar Från Baslinjen. Humanister om Idrott, Kropp Och Hälsa. [Thoughts From the Base Line. Humanists on Sports, Body, and Health, edited by Jesper, Fundberg, Klas Ramberg, and Dan Waldetoft, 197-122. Stockholm/Stehag: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion.

Samuels, Mina. 2011. Run like a Girl: How Strong Women Make Happy Lives. Berkeley: Seal.

Solnit, Rebecca. 2014. Men Explain Things to Me. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Tilley, Christopher. 2006. "Objectification." In Handbook of Material Culture, edited by Christopher Tilley, 60–73. London: SAGE.

Tolvhed, Helena. 2008. Nationen på Spel: Kropp, Kön Och Svenskhet i Populärpressens Representationer av Olympiska Spel 1948-1972 [The Nation at Stake: Body, Gender, and Swedishness in Representations of the Olympic Games 1948-1972 in Popular Press]. Umeå: H:ström Text and Kultur.

Tolvhed, Helena. 2015. På Damsidan: Femininitet, Motstånd Och Makt i Svensk Idrott 1920-1990 [On the Ladies' Side: Femininity, Resistence, and Power in Swedish Sports 1920-1990]. Göteborg and Stockholm: Makadam

Tolvhed, Helena. 2016. "Hälsosam Femininitet Och Postfeministiska Subjekt." [Healthy Femininty and Postfeminist Subjects]. Tidskrift För Genusvetenskap 37 (3): 75-95. doi:10.55870/tgv. v37i3.3070

Wheaton, Belinda. 2013a. The Cultural Politics of Lifestyle Sports. London: Routledge.

Wheaton, Belinda, 2013b. ed The Consumption and Representation of Lifestyle Sports. London:

Wilson, Elizabeth. 1985. Adorned in Dreams: fashion and Modernity. London: Virago.

Woodward, Sophie. 2005. "Looking Good: Feeling Right - Aesthetics of the Self." In Clothing as Material Culture, edited by Susanne Küchler and Daniel Miller, 21–40. Oxford: Berg.