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**WOMEN'S WEIGHT LIFTING AS SPORT DISCRIMINATED  
AGAINST ON GROUNDS OF GENDER**

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***Abstract***

The research is devoted to the study of peculiarities of perception by adolescents (by both potential weightlifters and / or future parents, who in due time will have to participate in formation of the worldview and sporting interests of their children) of one of the gender denounced kinds of sports – women's weightlifting.

The research methods are as follows: interviewing students in the form of essay and questionnaire survey, qualitative and quantitative content analysis of interview results. 184 Moscow students (67 young men and 117 young women) at the age of 17-19 took part in the interview.

On the whole, the attitude of modern adolescents to women's weightlifting can be characterised as negative. At that, young men demonstrate greater rejection of this kind of sports than young women do. Voicing their discontent with women's weightlifting, young men operate predominantly with exclusively gender-related epithets, the considerable part of which is of discriminating nature.

In case of young women, 62.9 % of negative responses are of gender-related nature, they include: "unsuitable/unacceptable kind of sports for women", "unwomanly kind of sports", etc. The rest 37.1 % of negative responses of young women characterize women's weightlifting as "dangerous and harmful for health", "complicated", "connected with heavy physical loads", "injury-prone", etc.

The obtained findings suggest that the role of gender stereotypes in perception of women's weightlifting by adolescent is extremely large. It manifests itself particularly in young men. However, young women tend to establish frameworks, limiting their own freedom of choice and actions.

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**Keywords:** Women's weightlifting, gender-related stereotypes, gender-related discrimination, teenagers of 17 to 19.



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## 1. Introduction

The stereotypes have been and will remain an inseparable element of a man's public life. As Lippmann wrote: "A social stereotype is nothing but a well arranged, schematic "image of the world" in a man's mind determined by culture" (Lippmann, 1922). The essence of human thinking is built on the principle of saving the efforts, which is why for its proper functioning a man needs simple and comprehensible, and – above all – socially approved standards and patterns (Ryabova, 2001). There is nothing bad in it unless some of them become obsolete or disappear as unneeded, but live on in people's consciousness which fails to adapt itself to the ever changing surrounding environment. Such discrepancies of the real state of things and an individual's subjective "image of the world" often lead to undesirable consequences (Shakhov, Damadaeva, 2011).

The stereotypes are exhibited in many spheres of public life. However, the stereotypes that are most widely discussed in recent years are those pertaining to gender, specifically those that are deeply embedded in culture and society with reference to personal qualities and behavioral patterns of men and women (Burn, 1995; Barabanova, 2016).

## 2. Problem Statement

The gender stereotypes are very persistent within certain social strata, areas of activity and historic eras. Like all stereotypes, they undergo transformations as changes take place in social notions and standards (Okulova, 2012).

This statement truly applies to sports where the gender factor is given much consideration while the stereotypical notions about men and women's involvement in sports have graphically changed from the 20th through 21st centuries.

R. Harris (2004) writes that in the past, boys used to be encouraged to indulge in sports more than girls. The parents (usually fathers) urged them to watch the games on TV, play football or basketball. Not only sporting activities, but watching sports on TV has become today part of a man's lifestyle. The lack of interest in sports casts a doubt on the masculinity and virility of a boy and a youth. The girls, on the other hand, used to be persuaded that sports are an unwomanly pursuit, a boy's occupation.

In the last decades, however, the situation has changed dramatically as girls and women have come to be allowed to look both sports-like and sex appealing. Few wonder today watching women play football and ice hockey and even come onto the boxing ring and the wrestling tatami mat. The women have mastered weightlifting and win medals in martial arts, bodybuilding, and power lifting. Women are referees in football matches and compete with men in chess and motor racing (Vorozhbitova, 2007). On the other hand, young men try their hand in the traditionally women's sports like synchronized swimming, rhythmic and aesthetic group gymnastics (Sudakova, 2009).

Despite the objective trends in the development of the world's sporting movement, the attitude of a significant portion of the modern public to "sports unsuitable on gender-based grounds" is far from tolerant (Damadayeva, 2010; Usoltseva, 2010; Skoblikov, Podbolotova, 2015). Moreover, today there are cases of psychological pressure on girls and young men pursuing "wrong sports". V. Leontyev with co-authors in his article "Men in women's sports" writes: "Several years ago an effort was also made to

create a men's group of synchronized swimming in Russia on the basis of Moscow' Trud swimming pool. But after a few training sessions the group disintegrated since the boys could not bear the sneers of their comrades" (Leontiev et al., 2017).

The attitude in Russia to situations in which girls pursue the so-called men's sports, traditionally considered as an exclusively males' prerogative, such as boxing, wrestling, football, hockey and, especially, weightlifting (Soboleva et al., 2013; Volkova, Stepanova, 2016) is not simple. All this notwithstanding, the women's weightlifting is a sport that has won a wide international acclaim and was included in the Olympic Games program. Seven sets of awards are competed for here, which is an essential number for any country's rating in the total medal count of the Olympiad.

In the social situation like this, it becomes important to study the specifics of perception of sports, among them the women's weightlifting, that are condemned on gender-based grounds.

### **3. Research Questions**

This research seeks to answer the following questions: What is the attitude of modern youth to women's weightlifting? What are the typical notions of modern youth about this sport? What is the role of gender-related stereotypes in the youth's perception of women's weightlifting? Are there gender-related differences in the youth's perception of women's weightlifting?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the research is to study gender-related stereotypes in the teenagers' perception of women's weightlifting.

This research regards teenager girls as potential weightlifters since the age at which training starts in this sport corresponds to the teenage period and girls and boys as prospective parents who, in due time, will have to participate in shaping their children's outlooks and sporting interests.

### **5. Research Methods**

The main methods of research were:

#### **5.1. The students' questioning in the form of an essay.**

The students were proposed to write an essay in which they should briefly, in theses not exceeding 30 words, word combinations and phrases, express their associations, thoughts and estimations related to the women's weightlifting. 184 students of the Russian State Social University and the Moscow City Pedagogical University took part in the questioning: 67 boys and 117 girls aged 17 to 19 years old. None of those questioned pursued weightlifting or was a student of the department of physical culture and sports.

## 5.2. Analyzing the students' essays in terms of quality and quantity.

- The students' statements about the women's weightlifting became categories of the content analysis.
- The meaningful units of content analysis were, firstly, positive and negative responses about women's weightlifting and, secondly, the students' gender-related or discriminatory judgments about women's weightlifting.
- The units of count were the frequency and the predominance of meaningful units of the content analysis in the students' statements.

## 5.3. Surveying of the students.

The same 67 boys and 117 girls, the students of the Russian State Social University and the Moscow City Pedagogical University, took part in the survey. Two questions with an instruction to "underline the answer that corresponds to your opinion" were included in the questionnaire:

- My attitude to women's weightlifting can be defined as: a) excellent; b) good; c) neutral; d) negative; e) very negative.
- If I had a daughter I would: a) absolutely, definitely have her pursue weightlifting; b) definitely have her pursue weightlifting; c) I don't know; d) I wouldn't have her pursue weightlifting; e) I definitely would not have her pursue weightlifting; f) I definitely, absolutely would not have her pursue weightlifting.

The obtained data were mathematically processed.

## 6. Findings

Tables 1 and 3 show negative and Tables 2 and 4 positive judgments about women's weightlifting obtained on the basis of results of content analysis of essays of boys and girls, aged 17 to 19, in terms of quality and quantity.

**Table 01.** Negative judgments of male students about women's weightlifting (n=67)

<b>№</b>	<b>Judgment</b>	<b>Number of answers</b>
1	Unwomanly kind of sport	23
2	Disfigures female body	22
3	Suited rather for males	18
4	Bad for female's health	12
5	I wouldn't have my daughter pursue this sport	11
6	It generates masculinity in female body	4
7	Conscientious choice of masculinity	3
8	Envy of men	2
9	Women's weightlifting must be removed from the Olympics	2
10	Male-like females	1
<i>Total number of negative statements</i>		98

**Table 02.** Positive judgments of male students about women's weightlifting (n=67)

<b>№</b>	<b>Judgment</b>	<b>Number of answers</b>
1	Puts a woman on a par with man	8
2	Fosters willpower and insistence	7
3	Helps women fulfill themselves	6
4	Provokes respect	5
5	Fosters moral and willpower in women	4
6	Woman herself chooses her pursuit	2
7	Improves the body shape	1
8	A beautiful sport	1
9	There are sportswomen one can be proud of	1
<i>Total of positive statements</i>		35

**Table 03.** [Female students' negative statements about women's weightlifting (n=117)]

<b>№</b>	<b>Judgment</b>	<b>Number of answers</b>
1	Sport unsuitable for / incompatible with women	35
2	Mainly men's sport	35
3	Unwomanly kind of sport	33
4	Dangerous for / harmful to health	16
5	Deleteriously affects woman's reproductive function	12
6	Promotes the body's excessive muscle growth	12
7	Excessive stress on the organism	12
8	Sophisticated kind of sport	11
9	Deteriorates female beauty	10
10	Spoils a woman's body shape	8
11	Unsporting sport	6
12	I would never pursue it	6
13	Boring sport	6
14	Sport for manlike girls	5
15	Traumatic kind of sport	5
16	I am categorically against this sport	3
17	Sportsmen's complaints of pains	2
18	Rough sport	2
19	Psychologically moulds a man in a woman	1
20	Provokes a hormone disturbance in a woman's organism	1
21	Useless kind of sport	1
22	Drug-related scandals	1
23	Men dislike women pursuing weightlifting	1
<i>Total number of negative statements</i>		224

**Table 04.** Female student's positive statements about women's weightlifting (n=117)

<b>№</b>	<b>Judgment</b>	<b>Number of answers</b>
1	Evokes respect/admiration	13
2	There are sportswomen one can be proud of	10
3	Develops all groups of muscles	9
4	Develops endurance	9
5	A worthy (serious, important) kind of sport	8
6	I take this sport positively	7
7	Olympic kind of sport	7
8	Develops self-discipline and self-organization	6
9	Develops self-control and concentration	5
10	Builds a beautiful body	4
11	Develops strength	4
12	Develops a woman as a person	4
13	Puts women on a par with men	3
14	Many contests held	3
15	Develops coordination	2
16	Strengthens health	2
17	Interesting to watch on TV	2
18	Develops agility	2
19	I do not consider this sport critically dangerous	2
20	It's fashionable today to pursue men's sports	1
21	Interesting kind of sport	1
22	Women's weightlifting largely contributes to sports progress	1
23	Spectacular kind of sport	1
24	Very exciting kind of sport	1
25	Relatively inexpensive (accessible) sport	1
<i>Total number of positive statements</i>		<i>108</i>

The data of tables 1-4 make it possible to draw the following conclusions:

The total number of negative statements (taking into account the frequency of their appearance in the respondents' answers) about women's weightlifting exceeds the number of positive ones 2.8 times among boys and 2.1 times among girls, which testifies to pronouncedly negative attitude of today's teenagers to this kind of sport.

With boys, all 100 % of negative statements are gender-related. The most frequent among them are such judgments as "unwomanly kind of sport" (34.3 % of those surveyed), "disfigures female body" (32.8 %), "suited rather for males" (26.9 %), "bad for female's health" (17.9 %), "I wouldn't have my daughter pursue this sport" (16.4 %).

With girls, too, the bulk (62.9 %) of negative statements is gender-related, including: "sport unsuitable for/incompatible with women" (29.9 % of the surveyed girls), "mainly men's sport" (29.9 %),

“unwomanly kind of sport” (28.2 %), “deteriorates female beauty” (8.5 %), “spoils a woman’s body shape” (6.8 %), “sport for manlike girls” (4.3 % of respondents). Another part of the girls’ negative statements (37.1 %) characterizes women’s weightlifting as “a sport dangerous for and harmful to health” (24.8 % of those surveyed), “sophisticated” (19.6 %), “associated with great physical stresses” (10.2 %), “traumatic” (4.3 %), “unsightly” (5.1 %) and “boring” (5.1 % of male students) kind of sport.

As for positive statements, the boys point out that weightlifting “puts a woman on a par with man” (11.9 % of those surveyed), “helps women fulfill themselves” (8.9 %), “develops strength, willpower, insistence” (10.4 %) and “moral and volitional assets of women” (6.0 %). Also, 7.4 % of boys believe that women pursuing weightlifting “provoke respect”, 3.0 % of the participants of the survey indicated that “a woman herself chooses what she wants to do.” From the boys’ total positive statements about the women’s weightlifting 60 % are associated with the gender-related factor; the remaining 40 % of judgments characterize “the usefulness” of this kind of sport and “the respect” for its enthusiasts.

Among the girls’ positive statements about women’s weightlifting, only 7.4 % are gender-related, including the arguments that weightlifting “develops a woman as a person” (3.4 % of female students), “puts women on a par with men” (2.6 %), “it’s fashionable today to pursue men’s sports” (0.8 %) of those surveyed. The remaining 92.6 % of judgments characterize women’s weightlifting as: a) rather “useful”, “helping to develop groups of muscles, endurance, strength, coordination, agility” (22.2 % of girls), “disciplining”, “inspiring self-control and concentration” (9.4 %), helping acquire “a beautiful body shape” (3.4 %) and “strengthening health” (1.7 %); b) as a sport that evokes “respect and admiration” (11.1 % of respondents), “pride” (8.5 %), “positive attitude” (6.0 %) and interest (2.5 %); c) as “worthy, serious, important” (6.8 % of girls), “Olympic” (6.0 %) kind of sport in which “many contests are organized” (2.6 % female participants of the survey).

The questionnaire processing results have shown that the answer to the question “What is your attitude to women’s weightlifting?” is as follows: 7.5 % of male students described their attitude as “excellent”, 17.9 % as “good”, 29.8 % as “neutral”, 34.3 % as “negative” and 10.4 % as “very negative”. As for the girls, 9.4 % of respondents pointed to their “excellent” attitude, 17.9 % to “good”, 47.8 % “neutral”, 19.6 % “negative”, and 5.1 % “very negative”. Thus, it is obvious that the male students’ attitude to women’s weightlifting is more negative than that of female students.

Answering the question “If you had a daughter, you would ...” 43.3 % of boys and 27.3 % of girls indicated that they “absolutely, definitely not let her” pursue weightlifting, 35.8 % of boys and 36.0 % of girls “definitely not let her”, 3.0 % of boys and 3.4 % of girls “definitely let her” and only 1.5 % of boys and 0.9 % of girls “definitely, absolutely let her” pursue weightlifting. The answer “I don’t know” was given by 16.4 % of boys and 32.4 % of girls. Thus, today’s teenagers on the whole negatively take to the idea of their future daughter pursuing weightlifting. The comparison of the boys’ and the girls’ answers shows that among the boys prevail those who are categorically against and, on the contrary, fewer are those who are still undecided about whether to let their future daughter pursue weightlifting.

## 7. Conclusion

Today’s teenagers regard weightlifting as a masculine kind of sport. 34.3 % of boys and 29.9 % of girls consider this sport unsuitable for females.

The attitude of today's teenagers to women's weightlifting can be on the whole characterized as negative. Besides, the boys demonstrate a more pronounced negativism to this sport than girls do. This is corroborated by the following fact: the total of negative statements about women's weightlifting exceeds the number of positive ones 2.8 times in case of boys and 2.1 times - in case of girls. 44.7 % of boys and only 24.7 % of girls stated their negative attitude to women's weightlifting. 79.1 % of boys and 63.3 % of girls would not have their daughter pursue this sport.

Stating their negative attitude to women's weightlifting, boys employ exclusively gender-related epithets, the bulk of which are discriminatory, i.e. "it suits men more", "girls become manlike", "I wouldn't let my daughter pursue this sport", "women pursue weightlifting because they envy men", "women's weightlifting ought to be removed from the Olympic events", etc.

Among girls, only 62.9 % negative statements are gender-related. These include "sport unsuitable for/incompatible with women", "unwomanly kind of sport", "deteriorates female beauty", "spoils a woman's body shape", and "a sport for manlike girls". The remaining 37.1 % of the girls' negative statements characterize women's weightlifting as "dangerous for and harmful to health", "sophisticated", "associated with large physical stress", "traumatic", "unsightly", and "boring" kind of sport.

The obtained data show that the role of gender-related stereotypes in teenagers' perception of women's weightlifting is critically essential. It is particularly pronounced in boys. Anyway, the survey results have shown that girls themselves tend to create a framework that restricts their freedom of choice and action.

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