

# Physical education and sports for the physically disabled in terms of body sociology

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## ABSTRACT

Body sociology is a branch of sociology that studies the human body's relationship with the factors that make up society. It also investigates the position of disabled individuals in society. Because according to the sociology of the body, the body is a phenomenon that has a meaning in society. Therefore, the dynamics, norms and values of the society directly affect people's body perception. This study aims to explain the importance of physical education and sports for disabled people according to the basic principles and theories of physical education sociology. For this study, data compiled from different sources in sports and sociology related to the subject of physical education and disabilities were collated. Therefore, the study's limitation conducted using the analytical method is that it is a compilation study conducted in a theoretical framework.

**Keywords:** Sociology, disabled, physical education, sport, body sociology.

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the remarkable intellectual developments of recent years has been the increase in interest in social sciences. Although it is not the broadest discipline of social sciences, perhaps the fastest growing science is sociology (Worsley, 1980). The reason for this might be that sociology is a branch of science that deals with the functioning and types of human behavior that occur in all areas of social life such as economics, politics and psychology (Lundberg et al., 1968). The science of sociology, which studies social life, is not only interested in basic subjects such as family, village, city, education, sports and the industry, but has also started to show a growing interest in new subjects such as the body. Considering the diversity of social life, it is possible to mention many branches of sociology such as the sociology of the family, education, sport, rural-village sociology, urban sociology, industrial sociology and the sociology of the body. The sociology of the body studies the bodies of people who constitute the society from a sociological perspective and some of these people are disabled. The relationship of these disabled people with physical education and sports activities is one of its areas

of interest.

As a sub-branch of the science of sociology, the sociology of the body has started to attract attention as a field of discussion and research since the 1980s. In this context, it started to be taught in undergraduate and graduate programs as a separate course in many universities. The real importance of body sociology in terms of sociology is that it has the effect of renewing, revitalizing and transforming existing theoretical trends in sociology. Today, body sociology has come to the point where it has reached the power to reform and reconstruct the variables, concepts and assumptions of basic sociological thought (Çakı, 2011). The change in the sociological view of the body has occurred thanks to the publication of books such as *The Body and Society*, published by Bryan Turner in 1984, and *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory* by Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner in 1991. This has paved the way for the emergence of body sociology (Cregan, 2006). Benefiting from a discipline with such a ground and domain of influence will positively affect the place and value of disabled people in society since the emergence and

development of the discipline of body sociology contributed to the acceptance of disability as a sociological phenomenon.

The body is very much on the sociological agenda, and the emphasis on it is increasingly emerging in various fields. Therefore, two main questions should be considered:

1. Why was there only little interest in the sociological view of the body until recently?
2. Why has this recent interest in the subject not been limited to sociological writings, but has rather created a wide social science interest? (Morgan and Scott, 1993)

Body sociology is a sociology that examines how the body is affected by social factors and the people who constitute the society are bodily beings. This body is not solely a physical phenomenon that is ours and exists outside the society. Our bodies are not only affected by our social experiences, but also the norms and values of the group we live in (Giddens, 2009). For instance, for an athlete the performance of the body is at the center of sports, exercise and physical entertainment. In addition, physical educators and sports scientists want to know their bodies professionally (Kirk, 2002). The same can be said for the disabled. Disabled people want to know both the limits of their bodies in terms of exercise and physical entertainment, and the performance of their body when they want to do a professional sport.

Traditionally, the study of the body has been neglected in terms of sociology, yet institutional and structural theories are equally guilty of it. The sociological trend was to treat the individual either as a disembodied decision-making tool or as a cultural deception reflecting external structures. One consequence of this neglect of the body was that instead of overcoming the dilemmas that characterize the social sciences, it strengthened much of our sociological legacy. These dilemmas include the mind-body, nature-nutrition, individual-society, sexuality-gender, and race-ethnicity debate (Maguire, 1993). Within these discussions, while the fields of philosophy, psychology, anthropology and neurology focused on the subject of the mind, the subject of the body was only limited to the fields of medicine and anatomy.

The body is defined as the part that includes organs other than organs such as the head, arms and legs, that is, the torso (Bakırcıoğlu, 2012). The body is one of the most important phenomena for humans. The body, which varies in terms of appearance, size and color, may not always be fully sufficient. One of the insufficient conditions of the body is the disability that restricts the physical activity of the individual. People with disabilities who continue their lives in such a condition are among the important segments of society. Being a social phenomenon with this condition, the human body, has four elements:

- a. Body techniques and the way movements such as walking, running, jumping, swimming are traditionally performed in a society.
- b. Expressive body movements such as posture, gestures, facial expressions that serve as symbolic forms of self-expression and non-verbal communication as body language.
- c. Body morality, or attitude towards one's own body that fits his/her personal and social identity.
- d. Impulse and need control (Heinemann, 1980).

The body is an important ground for living and institutionalizing various social relationships. Every individual socializes with his body and forms various social units through socialization. According to this, the body constitutes one of the smallest parts of society as it is equivalent to the social individual itself. Therefore, the body is a whole with social individuals and structures, in that it is biological and it also has a cultural character. Hence, sociology without the body is out of question (Bingöl, 2017). In this sense, we can express that a person's subsistence is a social situation. In other words, the body is a significant indicator for the individual in terms of not being excluded and knowing where he/she stands in the society compared to others.

People living in tribal or traditional communities have a fundamentally different understanding of their bodies and their embodied relationships with their community when compared to modern societies. Differences occur within a specific culture and at a specific time (Cregan, 2006). Disability, like femininity and homosexuality, is included as a labeled bodily identity within these differences. However, the 'gifted' body is a structure that recognizes status, power, and privilege (Bundon, 2019). Thus, the body always carries social meanings for a person. In this respect, the sociology of the body is an important branch of sociology in order to reveal the connections between physically disabled people and physical education and sports activities.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS IN THE PHYSICALLY DISABLED**

The number of people who regularly do sports and exercise in societies is increasing. As the links between regular physical education and physical and mental health become stronger, and the role of professional sports as entertainment increases, people's interest in recreation also increases (Hagger and Chatzisarantis, 2005). This increase in interest helps to increase recreational activities. Outdoor and indoor recreation activities are one of the primary subjects of physical education and sports.

Physical education and sport can affect how people feel, and there are several reasons for this. Firstly, it has positive effects on mental health. Secondly, it helps

people regulate various unhealthy lifestyles. The third reason is that people's low interest in physical education is considered as an important public health problem (Eklund and Tenenbaum, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to develop an accepted concept and understanding of physical education and sports. The development of notion and comprehension starts with definition, yet there is a disagreement about the definition of sport. Everyone knows what sport means, but there is confusion. For example, "Is fishing, hunting, skiing or hiking a sport?" Such questions are still under discussion (McComb, 2004). Under these discussions, we can give a definition for sport. Sport can be defined as competitions and encounters that occur under formal and organized situations (Coakley, 1986). Sports people participating in these competitions and encounters are people who are skilled in the multi-featured forms of movement and the use of objects necessary for sports. The use of skills requires individuals to develop a sensory intelligence spectrum. This intelligence enables to use movements skillfully to apply in sportive activities (Hockey and Collinson, 2007). In addition to these basic features of sports, physical education includes all kinds of voluntary physical movements that are different from sports. However, physical activity is not at the same for every person. In addition to variables such as age, weight, height and time, whether or not the person is disabled determines how the individual will be involved in physical education and sports activities.

Physical education and sport is a health element that is beneficial not only for competition or as activity, but also in the treatment and prevention of various physical diseases. For example, apart from having physical benefits, exercise is a public health tool used in the treatment of some psychiatric diseases such as depression and anxiety disorders. However, some studies show that, in addition to its beneficial effects, physical activity may also be associated with impaired mental health related to disorders such as excessive exercise and excessive exercise syndrome (Peluso and Andrade, 2005). The fact that physical education and sports are physical activities raises many issues about how disabled people should participate in these activities.

Adapted physical education and sport is an important term in the physical education and sport of disabled people. Adapted physical education is defined as a diversified program of developmental activities, games, sports and rhythms in accordance with the interests, capacities and limitations of individuals with disabilities who cannot participate safely and successfully in the active activities of a normal physical education program. Therefore, the term disabled physical education is used as the most comprehensive term in physical education and sports for the disabled (Winnick and Porretta, 2016). Just as it is the case in all areas of life, the terms body and disability are also used together in sports. To illustrate, standard physical education programs can be

adapted to the special situation of a disabled person to train their body. This is called adapted physical education.

Physical disability is defined as the distinctly abnormal or poor development of some parts of the body, namely, a physical disorder (Bakırcıoğlu, 2012). Physical disorders are disorders that occur for various reasons in body structures such as skeleton, muscle and cartilage.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) of 1995 defined a disabled person as someone who "has a physical or mental disability that has a significant and long-term negative impact on the ability to perform normal daily activities" (Stanley, 2005). In this context, a disabled person is defined as a person with a disability that is not specific to a particular individual, and that causes a deficiency or disorder between the individual and the society (Bakırcıoğlu, 2012). The disabled are intended to be explained with the help of this definition. The aim here is to emphasize the phenomenon of disability not only on the disabled individual but also on society.

Disability is considered as a minority problem affecting a certain group of people. The truth is that disability is a condition specific to the human. Disability can occur in all stages of our live, from birth to death, in childhood, old age, pregnancy, as parents with children, as a result of an accident or illness, congenital disorder or hereditary trait (Foster and Nuttgens, 1997). The body is as affected by biological knowledge as it is affected by sociological and physical conditions. In other words, every healthy person is a candidate for being disabled.

The profession of coaching has an important place in physical education and sports for physically disabled people since sport coaching is above all a social effort and a social practice. Therefore, coaches should manage the physical environment carefully and decisively and constantly improve themselves to better convey their sport-specific expertise to their athletes (Jones et al., 2010). In this context, coaches and physical education teachers working with the disabled should receive specialized training in the field and have pedagogical competence.

The critical perspective comes to the fore when it is critical pedagogy. After all, political issues and globalization have an impact on physical education and sports. Therefore, a coach should be sufficient enough to discuss the relationship between sport, education and culture as all of these concepts are intertwined. Education sustains and improves our culture while sport is a part of our education and culture together. Therefore, these concepts are very important for our lifestyles and they directly affect our lives (Laker, 2002). In this context, we can express that the relationship between the coach and the athlete is a unique interpersonal relationship that is mutually characterized because it contains interconnected thoughts, emotions and points of view (Eklund and Tenenbaum, 2014: 130). For this reason, physical education and sports for physically disabled

people can be discussed not only by the athlete but also by the coach. Despite the excessive emphasis on appearance and disorder in society, it was observed that paralympic swimming athletes stated that when they removed the prosthesis before the competition, it provided them with the opportunity to identify their ego by revealing the relationship between the body and self. Removing the prosthesis enables the release of power, reparation and reintegration of the ego (Pack et al., 2017). Therefore, how people who do sports perceive their bodies and present them as means of expression, how they use and control them in sports environments can be seen as a result of education and culture. For disabled people, the discovery of their talents and achieving a better feeling of freedom and competence can be stated as results of this situation.

### **PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS FOR THE PHYSICALLY DISABLED IN TERMS OF PHYSICAL SOCIOLOGY**

Since the body passed from the field of philosophy to the science of sociology, it has been discussed within the social dimension on a socio-cultural ground. Changing economic and social organizations increased the importance of the body. In the new social order, the body has become an important tool and intermediary as new identities, new consumption patterns, new beauty ideals, new images and new types of power have been created through the body. Thus, the human body has become a project of the modern world (Timurturkan, 2008). Therefore, new thoughts on the body began to be put forward. These thoughts inspire studies in many scientific fields, especially in medicine.

In the past twenty or thirty years, the body has taken the form of a reflection of a theoretical thought: it has been rationalized, isolated, and restructured as a sociological object. At the same time, the experience of incarnation has been the subject of intensification of the expansion, isolation and restructuring of the individual's body by technological and bio-technological means. The returning to the body as a theoretical object of reflection indicate both, moments of intensification, and also participation in and shaping of this intensification (Cregan, 2006). However, despite all this, most people do not see themselves as a candidate for disability since they are currently not bound to the recognizable features (wheelchair, walking aid, white cane or hearing aid) of physically disabled people. These people need to understand that the aging process will go slowly and unnoticed (Foster and Nuttgens, 1997). In other words, disability is not limited to specific people, yet everyone can be exposed to this in their family or at a certain stage in their lives (Mokiwa, 2018). Therefore, people should review their perceptions of being a disabled person.

Today, the body is a field of identity. People reveal their

identity with their bodies, the way they relate to other bodies, the way they respond to the interventions of other bodies, their own interventions in their own bodies, and who they are different from, namely their nominal identity. In this sense, the body is one of the ways of expressing oneself (Okumuş, 2009). The same is true not only for people without disabilities but also for people with disabilities. As a result, one of the ways disabled people express themselves physically in society is physical education and sports.

The expression of the athletes in sports environments is called competition. Competition in sports takes many forms and is related to the topics of many fields of sport. Although it has some common aspects such as economic, political, biological, historical, each competitive element has unique features (Eklund and Tenenbaum, 2014). Because of these unique features, many disciplines, including the science of sociology, approach sports with their own theories and concepts.

Sociology's view of sports is multidimensional. One of these is a trend called interpretive sociology. This sociology trend, which goes back to Max Weber, is based on the Neo-Kantian philosophy led by the German philosopher Heinrich Rickert. For Weber, the meaning of sociology was to interpret human action as biased for understanding. According to this trend, sports is an alternative reflection of the modern age. For this reason, it is possible to see the characteristics of modern society, which is a macro universe, in modern sports (Scambler, 2005). Sociologists in the field of sociology and especially sports sociologists do sports research and evaluation.

Sociologists deal with the characteristics of social arrangements including statuses, roles, sanctions, norms, values, and goals. By analyzing the interrelationship of such characteristics, sociologists investigate the regular and irregular ways in which individuals and groups interact with each other (Lundberg et al., 1968). In this context, sociologists examine the roles, values, goals and their associated sports culture of sports people in certain positions in sports environments. This study is carried out not only in the field of sports sociology but also in the field of body sociology.

In order to address the subject of physically disabled people in terms of physical sociology, the social model approach should be mentioned first. The main basis of the social model is the fact that factors other than biological existence of the human being also have the potential to cause disability. According to this model, the experience of disability is an individual-specific experience with biological, social, political, legal and economic aspects as a product of the intersection between the individual and his social environment (Meşe, 2014). Therefore, the concept of disability is worth researching in terms of body sociology. The social model reveals the difference between disability, which includes the experience of pressure caused by the society, and physical, cognitive, and sensory impairment (Berghs,

2017). Therefore, according to the social model, people with disabilities are considered not only as biological entity but also as a social entity. The sociological perspective requires this. The social model suggests that disability is the result of socio-structural barriers that exclude and restrict people with disabilities. For example, in this model, inaccessible sports facilities or negative attitudes of coaches can cause the disability, rather than the individual disability (Eklund and Tenenbaum, 2014). This new paradigm focuses on the physical limitations of certain individuals and the way physical and social environments impose restrictions on certain groups or categories of people. This social model on disability, like all paradigms, fundamentally affects the worldview of a society and how certain problems are seen within it (Oliver and Sapey, 1999). The social model examines the human body within the framework of the concepts and theories of the sociology of the body. In this examination process, the human body is also evaluated according to disability status.

The social model has become effective in promoting disability rights in recent years. This model views disability as a product of society's failure to address the needs of a person with disability as a result of discrimination. In other words, because society excludes a person efforts should focus on combating discrimination (Stanley, 2005). Disability according to the social environment is experienced as an inability to respond to a strong body and a purposeful environment created to meet needs independently. This effectively constrains our own independence, deprives us of the friendship of others, and eliminates the concept of the equality of opportunity (Foster and Nuttgens, 1997). This shows how important the body is for disabled person, and the variable features it provides.

The body comes in a variety of shapes, sizes and colors. Some bodies are healthy while others are sick. Some bodies perform better than others in physical activities such as sports and some are disabled. In fact, the body is an integral part of our experiences of being human. We can understand that we know a lot about our body just by living in and with our body. Physical educators and sports scientists, for example, become intuitively aware of their bodies every day. Noticing their bodies in this way is rarely in their professional business. The performance of the body is at the center of sport, exercise and physical entertainment, and besides, the desire understands their bodies professionally (Kirk, 2002). Sports environments are the places where knowing and recognizing the body is done in the healthiest way.

Taken as a whole, sports environments consist of the lives of communities and nations that are interlocked and structured as a series, but not through equal processes (Maguire, 2014). For example, when a group of friends meet and start playing football in a park, a social system, or in other words communication, emerges. While

continuing to play football, the majority of communication is bodily due to elements such as movements and game skills. The game can be played thanks to discussions about the actions that occur, such as rules, fouls and goals, and a joint agreement on the continuation of the game (Havang and Ronglan, 2011). Media coverage of the games played would be a useful promotion element. Disability becomes the focal point when it appears in the media, especially when we see people with disabilities, with or without sporting characteristics, because it is a picture modelled in our minds. Sportive features are different in that they increase the likelihood of people with disabilities to be seen as individuals rather than as anonymous representatives of the group (Apelmo, 2016). For example, in tennis, which is an individual sport, a disabled athlete with a wheelchair increases the possibility of being seen and recognized more individually and, as a result, getting social acceptance.

Wheelchairs, white canes or crutches refer to bodies we often call 'disabled', meaning they do not function normally. If people have missing organs, debilitating chronic diseases, or if they cannot see or hear, they may expect to be grouped with others whose bodies and bodily behavior appear to be different. That's when they belong to the disabled class (Thomas, 2002). The same categorization is made in sports. For example, when it comes to wheelchair basketball team, non-healthy legs come to mind. In other words, we think of a disorder in the body.

The change or deterioration of the body shape, the formation of dysmorphic body disorder, being overweight or underweight can negatively affect the social relations of the individual and the individual may due to this avoid social environments (Öngören, 2015). Disability is not just like femininity and homosexuality, three social categories intersect in the non-normative, disabled body. In contrast, well-being, masculinity, and heterosexuality are jointly formed in relation to strength, a muscular build and skill, which are the characteristics of an athletic body. For this reason, it can be understood that sports give disabled individuals the opportunity to gain a sportive identity and at the same time serve to distance them from their worthless disabled identity (Bundon, 2019). This not only provides a highly analytical stance on embodiment, but also provides the possibilities to question the concepts of interacting bodies such as socially located, socially related and gendered, sexualized, sexually 'oriented', 'racist', 'disabled' (Hockey and Collinson, 2007). In this context, participation of disabled individuals in physical education and sports activities contributes positively to socialization. In addition, attitudes based on love and respect, such as planned work habits, development of teamwork predisposition, satisfaction of the will to compete with other people, and tolerant attitudes towards others' thoughts and beliefs, are among the positive effects of physical education and sports activities on individuals with physical disabilities.

According to DePauw, there is a three tiered typology about the visibility of disability in sports. This classification provided a different perspective on the issue of disability and elite sports. According to this typology:

1. Individuals with disabilities have been invisible or excluded from sports due to obstacles and difficulties in participation in sports (invisibility of disability in sports).
2. Disability is visible but is considered inferior to the position that non-disabled people have. An example could be the position that the Paralympic Games have relative to the Olympics. At this stage, athletes with disabilities begin to become visible in sports (visibility of disability in sports).
3. Disabled people are visible in sports as athletes. In other words, people with disabilities are becoming more visible as athletes in sports settings [(In)Visibility of Disability in Sports] (DePauw, 1997).

## CONCLUSION

According to body sociology, the human is a social being. For this reason, it is necessary to accept each individual with his body since every individual, regardless of his age, lives the socialization process with his body.

Especially with the Enlightenment Period that started in the Western Civilizations, the human body began to be considered in every aspect of culture. The basis of this consideration is the idea that the human body does not belong to nature from a biological point of view but rather to society from a sociological point of view. In this context, a mutual control mechanism emerged from social interaction. In other words, the individual started to care and value not only his own body but also the bodies of other individuals. This caused the subject and object relationship to be seen as a relationship between individual and body. Thus, the meanings ascribed to the body, which is the object, led the subject, the individual, to either adapt to society and therefore to culture, or to conflict with it. This has also started to be the case for disabled individuals in sports environments.

In contrast to the sports and sports events that are common for people with no disabilities, relatively less attention is paid to sports events called sports for the disabled, sports for disabled athletes or Paralympic sports. The heterogeneous nomenclature of the existing limited literature reveals the conceptual, ethical and political dimensions of the debates for the disabled (Edwards and McNamee, 2015). People with disabilities, who constitute the disadvantaged group of the society, try to continue their lives with the many problems they face. The existence and value of the disabled individual in the society is one of the important issues in terms of increasing the development of the society. Therefore, it is an important issue in terms of physical sociology whether an individual with a disability participates in physical

education and sports activities. The disabled individual, who has a more meaningful place in the society by participating in physical education and sports activities, can also continue his life as a psychologically peaceful and happy person.

Physical education and sports activities are one of the ways to prevent people with disabilities from being defined by most people in society with negative expressions such as helpless, in need of care and inadequate. These activities also increase public awareness on the topic disability. In this sense, physical education and sports activities are ways to prevent individuals with disabilities, who are defined negatively by most people in the society, from perceiving themselves as abnormal and weak.

Physical education and sports activities, the main target of which is rehabilitation for individuals with disabilities, also motivate the disabled individual to strengthen their social identity. Those who participate in physical education and sports activities will move to the stage of being more comfortable in social life and socialization, and more self-confident in meeting the social roles expected of them. The negative perception they have regarding their disability is possible to change in a positive direction as their self-esteem level increases and they will feel mentally stronger.

Today, physical education and sports activities for the disabled are important not only for their well-being or rehabilitation, but also for providing a competitive environment based on performance. When a disabled individual participates in a competition, he/she will stand out with his/her athlete identity instead of the physically disabled identity. The spectators watching that individual will see an athlete who is struggling on the field, not the disorder or deficiency in his body. The physically disabled athlete, on the other hand, will get rid of the feeling of discomfort he/she feels from the disorder or deficiency in his/her body and transfer his/her physical potential to the game. If the transfer of this game comes to a professional level, the performance of the physically disabled athlete will reveal a social vertical mobility in both material and spiritual terms.

## SUGGESTIONS

First of all, studies investigating the relationships between disability and society within the framework of the social model should increase. In terms of Physical Sociology, increasing the research and studies conducted on the basis of social model on the participation of individuals with disabilities in physical education and sports activities will enrich the literature and positively affect social perspective.

The policies of the states on this issue should become widespread. To be able to do this, both educational and entertaining festivals for disabled individuals should be organized to encourage participation in physical

education and sportive activities as a hobby. For the disabled individuals participating as a competitor, necessary sportive conditions should be created. The founding of sports clubs is the most important step to be taken. Increasing the number of clubs suitable for disabled athletes means that more people with disabilities can do sports.

Municipalities and non-governmental organizations should also take all kinds of precautions for disabled individuals to reach sports facilities and to benefit from them ergonomically. In addition, municipalities and non-governmental organizations should work more effectively to increase the number of people who will voluntarily help people with disabilities while doing sports or participating in physical education activities.

Physical education and sports activities adapted for the disabled should be featured frequently in the media. People with disabilities who participate in competitions that have an important place in sports activities should be featured in print and visual media and social media as much as possible. For example, watching an interview of a disabled athlete might motivate a disabled individual to participate in physical education and sports activities.

Many things can be done in order to increase the awareness of the society on disability. Children with and without disabilities should be brought together at an early age in physical education and sports activities. In that way, children begin to get to know people with disabilities closely from an early age, and communication between families improves. In addition, the habit of sympathy for disability becomes widespread in the society.

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