

Johannes Müller: „Marginalised youths` constructions of identity in the context of informal physical activities. A qualitative study on the football pitch” (e-Diss, Göttingen 2017)

Structure of thesis

1. Preface	1
2. Current state of research	9
2.1 Physical activities of marginalised youths	9
2.2 Identity development in the context of physical activities	12
2.3 Self-concept development in the context of physical activities	14
2.4 Development of male gender identity in the context of physical activities	14
3. Theoretical Framework	18
3.1 Fundamental terms and conceptual foundations	18
3.2 Theoretical framework: Theories of Identity	22
4. Methodological framework	49
4.1 Empirical approach	49
4.2 Ethnography and ethnographic approach	52
4.3 Semi-structured interviews	60
4.4 Gaining access and entering the field	67
4.5 Describing the field: Sports and leisure facilities	71
4.6 Analysis of the data	73
5. Compensation for deficits in the context of school: „I’m a good football player. Everybody is talented in one thing or another...my father also says that I’m an excellent football player.”	78
5.1 Negative (self-)perception in school	79
5.2 Structures enabling experiences of competence	84
6. Experiencing the symbolic capital „respect“ and „honour“: „Now people in our neighbourhood say that we are nearly the best here.”	99
6.1 A lack of recognition in the context of school	100
6.2 Strategies for protecting identity	107
6.3 Informal physical activities as a possibility to present competences	111
6.4 „Respect“ and „honour“ as a bet	118
7. Adhering to an implicit appointments as a possibility of experiencing the feeling of belonging: „We didn’t make an appointment...we constantly know that somebody is here.“	128
7.1 Informal physical activities as point of contact	130
7.2 Informal physical activities as a biographical constant activity in social contexts	132
7.3 Informal physical activities as an exclusive community space	133
7.4 Coming together as a result of a habitual appointment	134
7.5 Non-participation as a threat to identity	141
8. Reproduction of dominance-oriented models of masculinity and hierarchical gender relations: „The biggest fun factor is the possibility to shoot at losers with full force.”	143
8.1 Gender relations in the family	145
8.2 Physical toughness as a constitutive element of masculinity	147
8.3 Informal physical activities as an exclusive male space	149

8.4 Exclusion of and delineation against girls	154
8.5 Negotiation and demonstration of hierarchy	159
9. Experiencing excitement in a dreary everyday life: „Whenever I play anything, for example a warlike computer game...or when I´m on facebook or something similar, exciting things just do not happen.“	166
9.1 „Gambling“ and watching tv as negatively connoted alternative activities	168
9.2 The search for excitement	169
9.3 Initiating excitement	171
10. Conclusion	176
11. Literature	187

Summary

In public and political debates young ethnic minority men are commonly labelled as a ‘problem group’ and in scientific discourses researchers attest them difficulties with identity development. Taking into account that young ethnic minority men are primarily keen on physical activities in informal contexts, this dissertation focuses on the informal football and basketball activities of underprivileged young men from culturally traditional migrant families. The qualitative study examines the following question: which meaning do the informal physical activities have for the youths with regard to their construction of identity (including gender identity)? Based on semi-structured interviews as well as ethnographic conversations and observations the study investigates the narrative and (unintentional) nonverbal constructions and presentations of identity. Furthermore, the study aims at exploring the structure of this small ‘lifeworld’. Findings show that the 13 interviewed and observed young men, who underachieve in school experience the informal physical activities as a ‘counter world’ to the lifeworld of school; here they have the possibility to experience competence and to generate the relevant symbolic capital „respect“ and „honour“. The possibility of making identity-strengthening experiences is associated with the particular structure of the informal activities; due to that structure, they can determine the purpose of the games autonomously and e.g. resume the role of the trainer. In addition, it is shown that especially the boys from Muslim families use the informal activities to reproduce dominance-oriented models of masculinity and hierarchical gender relations that are common in their families. Therefore, on the one hand, the informal physical activities can be described as a stabiliser of identity but on the other hand, the activities contribute to passing on traditional models of masculinity.