Annette R. Hofmann/Elisabeth Seitz

**From Skirts to Full-Body Suits: The Fight against Sexualization in Gymnastics**

At the European Championships 22 and the Tokyo Olympic Games, the German National Team in Women´s Gymnastics surprised their opponents and the public by wearing full-body suits instead of skimpy-cut leotards. The aim of the team was to demonstrate that every gymnast should decide what to wear; thus the team wanted to take a stand against the sexualization of their sport.

When girls and women started to participate in sports and physical exercise in the mid-nineteenth century, they first wore their everyday clothes, sometimes even a corset underneath. Only at the turn of the 20th century did the clothes change by and by, a process often criticized by the public and male sport officials. One of the better known examples is the discussion about female cyclists wearing trousers; another involves women skiers.

From the very beginning in women´s sports, aesthetics were of great importance, not only in  how women participated in their discipline, but also what clothes they wore and their appearance. Thus, in many sports, how they dressed and their body image – make-up, hair style – became a kind of self-staging. **This trend also contributed to the sexualiziation of certain sports which is especially obvious in the dress requirements influenced by the media covering certain sports on TV.**

This paper will show the development of sport clothes for female athletes throughout history and discuss the background of the sexualization. Although the main focus will be on gymnastics, we will also relate to other sports. The arguments will be supported by qualitative interviews with gymnasts of Team Germany.