

Touko Vaahtera & Sirpa Lappalainen

Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland

touko.vaahtera@helsinki.fi, sirpa.lappalainen@helsinki.fi

Published in *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* (2018)

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2018.1431689>

Bodies of Latent Potential: Abled Imaginary and National Belonging in Finnish Cultural Texts about Swimming

Drawing on Foucauldian genealogy and the methodological approaches of cultural studies, the authors address the question of how assumptions of citizenship have functioned in Finnish cultural texts on swimming. The analysis is based on texts from the early twentieth century to the present day. Based on a theoretical approach that combines the perspectives of disability studies and post colonialism, the article traces how the ability to swim has been articulated as a common objective, and as latent potential in everyone. It also shows how assumptions of appropriate behaviour in public pools function in a way that reinforces specific visions of Finnishness. These discussions are rearticulated, and an approach is proposed that encapsulates the functioning of ‘latent potential’. The authors further develop theorizations of ableism that facilitate specific investigation of its connections with orientalism.

Keywords: cultural studies; orientalism; ableism; embodiment; citizenship; swimming training

Introduction

The ability to swim is a civic skill for Finns (National Board of Education 2013)¹

The above quotation was taken from the online service ‘Edu.fi’ maintained by the Finnish National Board of Education with a view to supporting teaching and learning at school. The only specified physical skill mentioned in the current Finnish national curriculum (FNBE 2014), which defines learning aims for physical education, is that of swimming. All the other aims and goals are generic qualities such as speed, strength, mobility and endurance. When a national governing body refers to the ability to swim as a civic skill one could argue that an assemblage of cultural meanings concerning capable citizens is involved. Indeed, the educational system has a crucial role in shaping relations between citizens and constructing their relationship with the state (Arnot 2008). Citizenship, which has been used as an exclusive and inclusive principle of social organising, could be understood as a cultural category, referring to contextually, historically and culturally produced membership of a community (Komulainen 2001; Lister 2003; Yuval-Davis 2011). It is assumed in this article that the statement referring to the ability to swim as a civic skill is a specific articulation of citizenship, which as we demonstrate in the following sections emerges from racialized, gendered and ableist views of the body. We show how threats, fears

¹ All the translations from Finnish to English were done by Touko Vaahtera.

and wishes concerning the bodies of ‘proper’² citizens emerge from Finnish cultural texts on swimming.

Indeed, the tremendous cultural importance of swimming is intriguing. One only needs to consider how swimming is associated with being in touch with the natural environment and even with ancient species that lived in the water (Vaahtera 2016b). The ability to swim is often articulated in the frameworks of safety and risks. Considering how the idea of good parenting is at the present moment associated with the ability to minimize possible risks which can put a child in danger (e.g. Furedi 2002), taking care that one’s children learn how to swim is certainly part of assumed good parenting. A multitude of different and complex understandings are embedded in the concept of swimming, and the ideas associated with it are not always interconnected. Rather than attempting to investigate all these nuances, which would be an impossible task, we focus on how national belonging emerges from articulations of bodies in Finnish debates on swimming.

Fiona Kumari Campbell (2009), a scholar in the field of critical disability studies, developed the concept of ‘abled imaginary’ in her seminal work *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Aabledness*, referring to the ‘imagined shared community’ (Campbell 2009, 4) that assumes capability to be the aim of all bodies. Furthermore, according to Campbell (2009, 4, 196), this ‘abled imaginary’ frames “the values of culture, its characterological objects, and secure the transmission of the ‘memory’ of a body of people.” In this respect, if the ability to swim is referred to as a

² By ‘proper’ citizens we mean citizens who are recognized as ‘real’ or ‘true’ citizens in accordance with the changing ideals associated with citizenship. This might include, for example, ideals about economic productivity etc.

civic skill in Finland one might well ask how ‘abled imaginary’ frames the way in which national belonging is articulated in discussions around swimming.

We analyse cultural texts both from the early twentieth century and from the present day. Chosen texts represent various genres, although the aim in all of them – historical and contemporary – is to instruct and guide people about the ability to swim and the use of public swimming pools. Our decision to investigate both historical and contemporary texts relates to our aim to contest present understandings and to imagine a less ableist future. The next section of the article outlines the methodological framework and the data. We then proceed to investigate how understandings that connected proper embodiment with national development appeared in the context of swimming in the early twentieth century. Specifically, drawing on Vike Plock’s (2006) formulation of ‘latent potential’, in other words the assumption that capability can be a hidden albeit existing quality in all bodies, we consider how ‘latent potential’ was connected to the bodies of ‘proper’ citizens in articulations of the ability to swim in the early twentieth century. The notion of ‘latent potential’ contradicted the biological determinism which is often associated with eugenic thinking (Plock 2006). As many scholars have noted, eugenics was a popular mode of thinking during the early twentieth century and it also shaped laws and medical practices (e.g., Mattila 1999; Hietala 1996; Kevles 1985; Meskus 2009). Although challenging biological determinism, the notion of ‘latent potential’ did not contest fears of degeneration or ableist ways of articulating bodies. ‘Latent potential’ enables us to explore the more implicit ways in which popular thinking around eugenics framed the understanding of bodies during that time. After investigating historical texts, we turn our attention to the present and explore how the behaviour of immigrants in Finland’s public swimming pools has been articulated as posing a threat to public hygiene. We scrutinise how the assumptions in contemporary

cases imply that the behaviour of assumed immigrant bodies in public pools implies a lack of citizenship competence, and how orientalist understandings (Said 1978; Puar 2007) are intertwined with these articulations. Finally, we explore how norms associated with swimming have been challenged, and how this interrogation enables us to unpack ‘abled imaginary’ (Campbell 2009).

Current theorization in the field of disability studies associates the term ‘ableism’ with processes that constitute capable or conventional bodies as more real versions of humanity or competent citizenship (Campbell 2009; Snyder & Mitchell 2006). However, less attention has been given to assumptions of behaviour. Our investigation, in first considering how capability emerges from historical texts on swimming as a self-evident object of all bodies, and then tracing how behavioural norms emerge from contemporary understandings of swimming, enables new ways of theorizing ableism.

Methodological approaches

This article explores how national belonging is articulated in the discussion on the ability to swim in a way that utilises ‘abled imaginary’ (Campbell 2009). In tracing how conventional embodiment and behaviour have political dimensions in articulations of citizenship, we also aim further to theorise the complex intertwining of ableist and colonialist assumptions. As Edward Said (1993) pointed out, colonialism functions through the assumption that the Others of European culture need assistance and domination. Although Finland could be considered far from a central agent of colonialism, Finland and the other Nordic Countries have constituted themselves as Westerners through colonial understandings (Mikander 2015). Thus, we investigate how colonial assumptions emerge in contemporary media coverage of immigrants in public

swimming pools, drawing specifically from the analysis of orientalism. According to Said (1978, 2) ‘orientalism is a style of thought’ that highlights the contrast between ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Occident’, and the binary Orient/Occident should not be read as a natural distinction that objectively describes specific groups of people. All in all, orientalism essentializes racialized bodies, identities and practices and operates in a way that makes what is associated with the West appear to be better and more highly developed.

Furthermore, as Robert Aman (2013) notes, according to orientalist thinking the Orient is potentially similar to the Occident, just underdeveloped, and interventions from the Occident can bring it up to the same developmental level of which the cultural norms of the Occident are the yardstick. Thus, we show how orientalism has positioned the Orient as an underdeveloped version of the Occident (Said 1978, 1993; Aman 2013) and as ‘abled imaginary’ (Campbell 2009) assuming that latent abledness eventually frames all bodies. In what follows we explore how such assumptions of sameness, which still assume a hierarchy, frame articulations of national belonging in cases in which swimming and citizenship competences intersect.

Our data constitutes texts from the beginning of the twentieth century until the present day. We decided to focus on print-media material from the early twentieth century because we were interested in how national belonging was articulated through ideas about bodies at a time when a fear of inferiority framed the articulation of Finnish bodies (Hietala 1996).

We first investigated historical journals and periodicals in the National Library of Finland and scrutinised journals that discussed swimming at the beginning of twentieth century. These journals include *Opettajain lehti* (‘Teacher’s Journal’), *Kisakenttä* (‘Playground’), *Suomen Terveystieteiden lehti* (‘The Finnish Health Care

Review'), *Suomen Urheilulehti* ('The Finnish Sports Magazine') and *Yhteishyvä* ('Common Good'). We used the search terms 'swimming' and 'ability to swim' when exploring the data base of the National Library of Finland.

We decided to focus on 'The Finnish Sports Magazine' (founded in 1898), which on a global level is one of the oldest sports magazines, and was one of the main discussion forums in Finland focusing on sports and physical education during the early twentieth century. 'The Finnish Sports Magazine' articulated Finnish embodiment in a positive and instructive tone in an era in which Finns were associated with inferior races. In our exploration of the magazine we specifically trace how ideas of citizenship emerged, focusing on how the ability to swim was articulated, and at the same time on how these articulations helped to constitute ideas about civilisation and national belonging.

The cultural texts from the present day contribute to the public discussion about behaviour in public swimming pools. In the Finnish context this discussion tends to focus on people with an immigrant background and the tone of the debate varies from benevolent guidance to open racism in texts published by far-right-wing media. However, given our aim to enhance understanding of the interaction among ableism, citizenship and national belonging we decided to focus on texts published by established institutions such as the Finnish Broadcasting Company (abbreviated to YLE), various governing bodies (e.g. the National Board of Education) and civic associations (e.g. the Finnish Swimming Teaching and Lifesaving Federation). The following texts are analysed in this article:

Table 1. Analysed texts

1910s	2010s
The Finnish Sports Magazine: ‘The Olympics now and then’ (Pihkala 1912, issue 28–30).	The Finnish Swimming Teaching and Lifesaving Federation: Guidebook entitled ‘Welcome to the swimming hall!’ (2013)
The Finnish Sports Magazine: ‘Can you swim?’ (Aro 1915, issue 35),	The Finnish National Board of Education: the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014)
The Finnish Sports Magazine: ‘About swimming and its significance for women’ (Anonymous 1915, issue 42)	<i>YLE news</i> : ‘Long glances in the pool – teaching manners to asylum seekers’ (Loukasmäki 9 th Dec. 2015)
The Finnish Sports Magazine: ‘The importance of swimming and the ability to swim’ (Aro 1915, issue 42)	<i>YLE news</i> : ‘Swimming pools are stuck in the 1970s’ (Savolainen 18 th Jan. 2016)

We refer to our method as articulation (Hall 1996; Slack 1996), which according to Stuart Hall (1996, 141) means ‘the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions.’ In this article it means that we examine how assumptions about embodiment in the context of swimming enable articulations about civilization and citizenship. Moreover, within the theory of articulation the aim of research is to develop a more precise understanding of contexts in which specific cultural phenomena are articulated (Slack 1996). In this sense, given that we are analysing assumptions about bodies, we also aim to shape perceptions of

bodies through further theorization from the perspectives of disability studies and postcolonial studies.

We draw on Foucauldian genealogy (Foucault 1977; Halperin 1995). According to Foucault (1977), genealogy challenges suprahistorical interpretations and emphasises how bodies and selves might have emerged in different ways. Thus, it also makes it possible to imagine transformations in what is taken as self-evident (Halperin 1995, 105). When we return to the past we do not assume that we will experience history as it really was, and rather understand that our present conceptions frame the way that a specific historical moment now appears to us. Primarily, drawing on the Foucauldian perspective in our approach to history we aim to enable our readers to consider present interactions between bodies and citizenship from new angles while relying on historical data (see Foucault 1991).

National development and ‘latent potential’

The focus in this section is on how the ability to swim was articulated in the early twentieth century as potentially universal. The idea of everyone being able to swim was a novel one at that time, and something that would civilise Finns, who were associated with inferior races according to eugenic scientists of that period (see Hietala 1996 on eugenic understandings). Though many writers discussed the ability to swim in ‘The Finnish Sports Magazine’, Toivo Aro, in particular, was active in the conversation. Aro was a famous diver and sports journalist, who later was active in *the Finnish Swimming Association* (founded in 1906). In the 1930s and 1940s, *The Finnish Swimming Association* promoted the idea that teaching children to swim should be included in the National Core Curriculum (Teräsvirta 1956). In 1915, in an enlightened tone, Aro emphasised how important it was for everyone to learn to swim, noting how ‘the ancient

Hellenes and Romans' thought highly of those who were able to swim and deprecated non-swimmers:

If they wanted to describe an uncivilised man they stated that he was not able read or swim! Indeed, the level of civilization³ among Finns would be very low if we used the yardstick of the ancients. Statistics, as far as it is possible to get any, indicate that approximately only one in ten people in Finland know how to swim. (Aro 1915, 569)

The above extract illustrates how Finnish cultural texts from the early twentieth century did not associate the ability to swim with the physique of Finns in a self-evident way: the rare but potentially universal skill rather reflected the striving for civilization. Given the historical association between a lack of civilisation and poor swimming skills in the context of Finland, it is unsurprising that the ability to swim is currently classified as a civic skill, and is given special attention in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NBE 2014).⁴ Moreover, at the present moment the physical education curriculum requires that swimming is taught in schools, and generally the ability to swim is assumed to be a self-evident ability. For example, a guidebook published by

³ We have translated the Finnish term *sivistys*, which appears in the extract, as 'civilisation'. It emerged in the Finnish language in the early nineteenth century and connoted the developmental level of both the nation and the individual (Kokko 2010).

⁴ One connotation of the term 'civic skill' is a subject called 'civics', which was taught in Finnish schools between the 1960s and 1990s (Vaahtera 2012). The goal was to enhance and develop skills that enabled pupils to form 'a healthy attitude towards life' (Lappalainen 2006, 163).

The Finnish Swimming Teaching and Lifesaving Federation (*Welcome to the swimming hall!* 2013, 2) states: “swimming ability is a skill everyone should have”.

The early twentieth century was a period of physical cultures that emphasised healthiness and fitness according to which, as Vike Plock (2006) points out, a capable body was associated with national progress and development. Underlying these understandings was the assumption that bodies currently exemplifying fitness and health could also degenerate. The term “degeneration” at that time referred to the process of mental and physical deterioration, inherent in which was the potential presence of various social and cultural threats (Pick 1989; Uimonen 1999). The psychiatrist Bénédict Morel introduced the term in the 1850s (Pick 1989; Uimonen 1999), drawing on then current theories of natural history. Such theories were based on the assumption that human beings were created by God and were originally as perfect as God, but deteriorated over the course of time. (Pick 1989; Uimonen 1999) The theory of degeneration represented heterogeneous forms of thinking (Pick 1989; Uimonen 1999). Moreover, according to Daniel Pick (1989), degeneration was articulated at the turn of the twentieth century under the assumption that there were specific degenerates whose bodies exemplified their inferior and dangerous qualities on the one hand, and on the other hand that degeneration as a process of deterioration concerned and therefore potentially threatened everyone. Hence, physical cultures that emphasised the importance of maintaining health and fitness articulated their concerns in a context in which degeneration was considered a potential threat affecting everyone (Plock 2006).

However, physical cultures were not necessarily racist, nor did they agree with the biological determinism. It was rather the case, according to Plock (2006, 136), that there was a shared assumption of ‘latent potential’ in the physical culture, meaning that everyone was capable of bodily development and enhancement. ‘The Finnish Sports

Magazine' highlights many aspects of the international trend among physical cultures, although articulating them in local terms. Eugenic views are recognisable, for example, in the writing of Lauri Pihkala, a leading figure in Finnish sports culture and a right-wing political activist. In 1912, he published an article in 'The Finnish Sports Magazine' reporting on the international eugenics conference and expressing eugenic assumptions that sports could prevent the degeneration of civilised races. In contrast, diver and sports journalist Toivo Aro did not connect his aims to promote the ability to swim with attempts to enhance the life quality only of 'more civilised' groups of people, but rather pointed out how different people could develop similar kinds of abilities.

Plock's (2006) concept of 'latent potential' captures Aro's understanding that regardless of social class, disability or gender everyone could develop their physical bodily skills. More specifically, Aro declared that swimming was physical exercise that was possible and suitable for everyone. 'Virtually no exercise other than swimming accommodates the different skills and strengths of the body' (Aro 1915, 683).

Emphasising the advantages of swimming he refers to disabled swimmers as follows:

Nor do bodily defects hinder movement in the water as they do on terra firma. We all know that there are world-famous swimmers who do not move their legs when they swim [...]. The one-legged and even the legless can take up swimming – even with great success. (Aro 1915, 683)

An anonymous writer published an article about women and swimming in the same issue in which Aro emphasised how everyone could learn to swim. This writer connected the importance of knowing how to swim with women's duty to take good care of their bodies given their role as mothers who give birth to new generations,

which the writer believed was under threat given women's belief in their bodily weakness. 'We cannot emphasise too much to women who are still unable to swim that they should learn. You should not think that you are too weak or too old.' (1915, 693) Although everyone is capable of learning how to swim, this latent potential is under threat given how women have internalised that their bodies are not capable. Thus, the actualisation of 'latent potential', which also facilitates national progress, is threatened by how people understand their bodies. The assumption that everyone should consider themselves capable (rather than weak) resonates with the cultural norms of ableism.

As feminist disability studies scholar Susan Wendell (1996, 91) observes: 'most people learn to identify with their own strengths (by cultural standards) and to hate, fear, and neglect their own weaknesses'. According to Wendell (1989, 1996), ableism restricts people's understanding of their bodies and prioritises identification with capability. The anonymous writer who was concerned that women had internalised weakness and for this reason could not learn how to swim or transmit this skill to their children, would perhaps challenge the sexist assumption that women are weaker than men while still agreeing with the 'abled imaginary' (Campbell 2009, 4).

With respect to articulations of swimming skills, Campbell's (2009) theorization of ableism is productive in focusing disability studies on the larger culture that promotes in different sites the understanding that 'abledness' is the self-evident object of all bodies. She suggests that this kind of view could direct the investigation to various kinds of bodies, including those deemed disabled and non-disabled. We therefore connect our investigation with the theory-building aims of Campbell (2009) in our analysis of how cultural texts about swimming articulate 'abledness' as culturally self-evident.

When Aro connects the ability to swim with the civilisation of the nation, incapability delineates ‘decreased social value’ (Snyder & Mitchell 2006, 18) – an assumption Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell (2006, 18) connect with ableism. Furthermore, here incapability threatens national development. Aro’s concern about ‘the level of civilization among Finns’ hints that his articulation about equality between people reflects the interests of the nation: non-swimmers would threaten the image of Finland as a civilised nation.

Nevertheless, although it is tempting to accept Aro’s idea that everyone is capable of developing physical skills as inclusive and egalitarian, it still includes only those whose embodied comportment can exemplify the idea of ‘latent potential’. Even though Aro points out how disabled people can also actualise their potential, ‘abledness’ (Campbell 2009) still implies national development, and moreover, the latent quality of the body in these texts is abledness rather than weakness or vulnerability. According to Campbell (2009, 4), ableism can function through a mechanism that necessitates the assumption of sameness in assumptions of equality. The way in which writers in ‘The Finnish Sports Magazine’ articulated their views that women and people with disabilities could develop their capabilities if they did not internalise weakness rests on the assumption that bodies participating in national development are ultimately similar. Latent abledness frames bodies that engender the civilisation of the nation.

Inappropriate behaviour in public swimming pools and ‘latent potential’ in orientalist logic

In this section we analyse how ‘latent potential’ functions in contemporary cases about inappropriate behaviour in public swimming pools. As spaces, public swimming pools are associated with the specific need to behave correctly in

accordance with the norms of the dominant culture. The policies applied in Finland's public pools have been under public discussion in recent years, the focus being on the behaviour of immigrants and racialized people. We trace how orientalism and ableism are intertwined with associations of proper behaviour in public pools. We specifically analyse orientalist logic in this discussion, and show how the embodied behaviour of the Orient is assumed to be distinct from the embodiment of the Occident while still latently engaging in embodied occidental behaviour.

Most public swimming pools in Finland have a strict policy that forbids its users from wearing swimming suits in saunas and while having a shower. The Finnish Swimming Teaching and Lifesaving Federation (2013) has even published a guidebook for immigrants about how to behave in public pools entitled *Welcome to the swimming hall!* It emphasises that the policy forbidding swimming suits in shower facilities helps to make swimming pools more hygienic spaces. It also defines acceptable swimming apparel as follows: 'Swimsuits or swimming trunks should be close-fitting [...]. Instead of using a hooded swimsuit, a swimming cap is suitable headgear for swimming.' (The Finnish Swimming Teaching and Lifesaving Federation 2013, 5)

Nothing included in the definition of a swimming suit (burkini) would make it possible for many Muslim women to use a public pool. Further, the way in which the guidebook equates the hood of a swimsuit with a swimming cap assumes a logic in which everyone chooses the most suitable costume in accordance with the norms of the dominant culture.

The way in which the explicit or implicit prohibition of the burkini prevents some Muslim women from using pools is discussed in an article entitled, 'Swimming pools are stuck in the 1970s' (Savolainen 2016), published on January 18, 2016. A

Muslim woman relates how she cannot use swimming pools because her local municipality does not allow burkinis in public pools. The title of the article implies that a policy requiring revealing swimming suits does not necessarily indicate ‘progress’, and it is further noted that the policy that forbids burkinis is justified on the grounds of hygiene. A local sports director interviewed for the article states that those who use burkinis do not take a shower. Thus, the body of a woman wearing a burkini is associated with uncleanliness. Hence, it is assumed that the body clothed in a burkini is dirtier than the body with a revealing swimming suit, and that everyone can wear a revealing swimming suit. In other words, even though the body with a burkini is assumed to be dirty, everyone is assumed to become clean if they behave in accordance with the Occident’s instructions.

An article in *YLE News* entitled ‘Long glances in the pool – teaching manners to asylum seekers’ (Loukasmäki 2015) locates the assumed hygienic threat that immigrants pose to the public pool in the mind of the immigrant. As the manager of the swimming hall states: ‘Because of the sauna culture, we Finns have accepted nudity. However, asylum seekers wish to wear a swimming suit while having a shower, because nudity is a problem for them.’ (Loukasmäki 2015) The implication is thus that the problem is with asylum seekers who cannot ‘accept’ nakedness. In contrast, liberated people who are at ease being naked in public shower facilities guarantee the hygiene of the pool. Here, nakedness is associated with a proper mind set and contrasted with a body with a problem. The text assumes that the ‘problems’ of asylum seekers constitute a threat to public hygiene.

Hygiene is not a neutral concept, however. Historically, in the Finnish context, the connotations have hinted at ‘proper’ citizenship and the notion of hygiene has been used to incite fear of marginalised groups of people (Tuomaala 2004). Moreover, as

Saara Tuomaala (2004) points out, education about hygiene was emphasised in Finland in the early twentieth century via practices aimed at producing ‘proper’ citizens. The *YLE News* article goes on to associate hygiene and ‘proper’ citizenship, insinuating that the apparently inferior mentality of foreigners is detrimental to hygiene.

Indeed, hygiene-related aims have been connected to attempts to keep the filthy or contagious away from the clean. However, given how the public discussion on hygiene in public swimming pools has emerged as a conversation about foreign influences, it is impossible to ignore the symbolic threat the foreign allegedly poses to areas assumed to consist of similar elements. In this sense, drawing on Mary Douglas’ (1991) theorization of purity, Sarah Horton and Judith Barker (2009) suggest that the notional threat to hygiene from immigrants may echo older popular ideas about racial hygiene, and derive its cultural power from the association of national borders with bodily borders, both of which have to be safeguarded from invaders.

Instructions on how to behave in a hygienic way were also inherent in articulations of threatened degeneration at the turn of the twentieth century (Uimonen 1999; Mattila 1999). Although hygienic modes of behaviour were assumed to keep individuals from degenerating, the overall aim was to protect society from the degenerate (Uimonen 1999; Mattila 1999). As we noted in the previous section, the theory of degeneration enabled articulations emphasising that anyone who behaved incautiously could degenerate. This multivalent and complex theory associated degeneration with an urban culture, for instance, and with the different forms of pleasure-oriented behaviour connected with it (Pick 1989). Even though the notion of degeneration was not generally accepted at that time (Mattila 1999, 36), nor is its scientific foundation currently accepted, the popular idea that improper modes of behaviour can ruin the population and bring it back to an earlier and less-developed

state could still stir the popular imagination about embodiment. More specifically, given that Europe is often associated with modernity, which migrants travelling to Europe are understood to be pursuing, in the popular imagination the presence of immigrants in Europe could pose a threat to its assumed modernity (Kolářová & Wiedlack 2016, 137; Aman 2013).

The article in *YLE News* implies that the behaviour of ‘asylum seekers’ threatens the customs of the public pool (Loukasmäki 2015). As one swimming teacher states, the inability to swim influences how asylum seekers behave in the swimming hall. According to her, they socialise with each other there, whereas ‘the native population goes to the swimming pool to get fit’ (Loukasmäki 2015). Here there is a bodily connection with the inability to swim, and the behaviour of asylum seekers is seen as too social and not the kind of behaviour that strengthens the body. The article ends with the words of the swimming teacher: she states that she and her colleagues are ‘willing to guide everyone to act appropriately,’ which implies that asylum seekers are understood to be in need of education because of their behaviour in swimming pools (Loukasmäki 2015). This understanding of the bodily behaviour of asylum seekers echoes orientalist logic: the Occident defines proper modes of behaviour, and becoming an equal with the Occident necessitates similarity with the Occident.

The article entitled ‘Long glances in the pool – teaching manners to asylum seekers’ further enhances understanding of a Finnish culture that ‘accepts’ nudity and thereby appears liberal. However, the acceptance is framed to imply that this ‘liberal’ attitude eventually serves to strengthen public health. Moreover, the connection of nakedness with liberation in this context obscures how specific rules engender a space in which nakedness is not simply welcomed, it is compulsory. At the same time, freedom from constraints is also connected to asylum seekers and their bodies. Even

though asylum seekers appear to have problems and to be unable to be publicly naked with ease, they also appear to be ‘too’ relaxed in a space that is reserved for physical exercise. Indeed, even if their behaviour implies repression and inhibition, it is also connected with sociality and inappropriate enjoyment in the pool area. The text reiterates an orientalist assumption that connects rationality with forms of behaviour of the Occident, and pleasure-seeking with the bodies of the Orient (cf. Said 1978; see also Puar 2007, 75). Indeed, as cultural theorist and scholar in the field of queer studies Jasbir Puar (2007) remarks, the orientalist fantasy in the contemporary imagination could also perceive the Orient as both repressed and pleasure-oriented.

The cases analysed above necessitate a sharp distinction between the embodiment of the Orient and of the Occident and, simultaneously, assume that the Orient can be taught to resemble the Occident. The body of the Orient is assumed to be an undeveloped version of that of the Occident, and the embodied behaviour of the Orient is assumed to express repression. Given the inherent assumption in the concept of repression that there could eventually be a state with no repression (Vaahtera 2016a), the understandings of bodies and behaviour in this context invite the assumption that the ‘latent potential’ for more appropriate, normal or hygienic behaviour exists in bodies that threaten the conventions of the public swimming pool. Thus, ‘latent potential’ here is part of orientalist logic: there is ‘latent potential’ for appropriate behaviour in bodies that are strongly articulated to be distinct from those that ostensibly naturally constitute the substance of ‘latent potential’.

However, the norms of the public swimming pool have not remained entirely unquestioned. As pointed out in the article, ‘Swimming pools are stuck in the 1970s’, immigrants, people with disabilities and transgender people experience somewhat similar problems in the pools even though in another context they would not necessarily

have similar interests. The author, who relates how burkinis have been forbidden based on a dubious argument about hygiene, also notes that the custom of being naked in the shower and sauna prevents the access of various potential users of the public pool. She quotes a manager responsible for two swimming pools in Helsinki, who suggests that all public pools could change their regulations to enable more people to use the space:

‘People can live with various disabilities, and people who go through the gender-reassignment process may not want to appear naked’. (Savolainen 2016) The text articulates perhaps surprising commonalities between immigrants, people with disabilities and transgender people in contesting the assumption that legitimate users of public pools are at ease appearing naked in shower facilities. Furthermore, in doing so it shows that there is not a consensus among bodies connected with Finnishness about the culture of public swimming pools. Fractures in these articulations begin to emerge, which contest homogenizing ways of articulating bodies.

Latent potential and homogenizing ‘abled imaginary’

The right to use public spaces has been associated with citizenship (e.g. Edelman 2014). Tobin Siebers (2008) suggests, in the context of disability studies, that the understandings of what kind of bodily behaviour meets the criteria of what it means to be a proper adult human being is central to the questions of the accessibility of public spaces. In the cases analysed thus far, ‘proper’ citizenship is connected to bodies displaying apparently appropriate behaviour, which in the context of a public swimming pool means focusing on exercise rather than socialising, and conforming to rules that require one to reveal one’s naked body regardless of how uncomfortable it feels. Given that people with disabilities have been deemed unfit for citizenship because of being unable to comply with behavioural norms (e.g. Siebers 2008), one could argue that ableism as a form of reasoning serves to define national belonging: it frames statements

on appropriate behaviour in the public swimming pool, thereby excluding specific groups from ‘proper’ citizenship. The question of who has legitimate access to the public space is approached in this discussion through focusing on behaviour.

The case of immigrants in public swimming pools appears to rest on the assumption that the embodied behaviour of immigrants threatens general hygiene and at the same time challenges culturally meaningful embodied practices connected with the “national”. Are immigrants, then, assumed to need instruction because their embodied behaviour in the space could engender a change in the conventions of public pools and thereby challenge the assumed homogeneity of the national culture? At the same time, concerns that immigrants do not use the swimming pool for physical exercise raise questions concerning why swimming is associated with the strengthening of the body, what counts as swimming, and how the policies of the public pool not only restrict access to it but also homogenise embodied behaviour.

At this point we cannot help but ask why the expectation that everyone wants and is able to learn how to swim sustains its cultural power so strongly. One way of addressing this question is to consider the assumption in the idea of ‘latent potential’ (Plock 2006) that people are similar in the end, and that this similarity means ‘abledness’. Indeed, the disappearance of limitations, which are also inherent in human bodies, reinforces the idea of ‘latent potential’ (Plock 2006). In the ableist culture, bodies that do not conform to contingent ideals of capability and behaviour contest the homogenizing ‘abled imaginary’ (see Campbell 2009). According to Kafer (2013, 144–145), who studied how ableism frames the way that nature and bodies are articulated, ‘ableist ideology’, the aim of which is to homogenize bodies and behaviour, also rests on the assumption that ‘everyone interacts with nature in the same way’. By way of explanation Kafer (2013, 145) draws attention to how this ableist assumption of being

capable of functioning uniformly operates in the articulation of swimming as an important and meaningful activity: ‘... Only certain kinds of interactions with the environment are recognized as such: swimming in the ocean and wading in mountain streams are more likely to be understood as meaningful ways to interact with nature, while running one’s fingers under a faucet is not.’ Kafer’s analysis sheds light on the ableist assumption that human beings should interact with water in such a way that they can thoroughly experience it.

Conclusions

We have explored how assumptions of ability, behaviour and citizenship intersect in Finnish cultural texts about swimming. We suggest in this article that assumptions about the national culture and specific local embodiment emerge in the current media discussion on immigrants in Finland’s public swimming pools. Moreover, hygiene and the ability to be naked with ease are connected with Finnishness, and the embodied behaviour of immigrants is assumed to be detrimental to hygiene. This discussion should be read as a form of orientalist logic, based on the assumed specificity of oriental behaviour and a structure in which the Occident observes the Orient (Said 1978). Moreover, although the discussion maintains the assumption of a distinction between the Orient and the Occident, it is also assumed that the Orient may resemble the Occident if it behaves according to its instructions. We have also explored how the ableist view of bodies also exploits the wish for uniformity. To draw attention to this mechanism we developed Plock’s (2006) notion of ‘latent potential’, connecting it with the work of scholars engaged in research on disability who have highlighted the primacy of ability in cultural articulations of bodies.

Our account of the functioning of ‘latent potential’ implies that the very idea can blur the division between capability and incapability, thereby enabling a non-deterministic approach to bodies. However, as we have shown, if the assumption is that a capable body latently exists in all bodies, the idea does not contest ableist views of the body. Our approach focuses on the cultural mechanisms that operate in the specific contexts in which multivalent and seemingly universalizing assumptions about bodies emerge. Although the notion of ‘latent potential’ ostensibly articulates bodies without making sharp distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, its seemingly flexible model of the body may still function in a way that constructs hierarchies. In this respect, we would suggest that analysing the assumption of ‘latent potential’ allows for a more specific investigation into ableist articulations of bodies. Such an assumption emerges in this article as an idea that challenges hierarchical views of the body while still engendering the priority of capability. What is more to the point, ‘latent potential’ is also a presumption in orientalist styles. Qualities associated with the Occident latently exist in the Orient, but the Orient is still differentiated from the Occident. Thus, in this article we articulate a connection between orientalism and assumptions of ‘latent potential’.

The articulation of the ability to swim as a civic skill in Finland turned our attention to the political dimensions of conventional embodiment. Given that the Finnish National Core Curriculum (2014) ostensibly supports equality, stating that ‘being equal does not mean being similar’ (2014, 28), our analysis implies that from Finnish cultural texts of swimming emerges an assumption that the bodies of ‘proper’ citizens should act uniformly. Although the primary aim of the article has not been to make suggestions for new practices in physical education, we can still ask, how the pedagogy of physical education could emerge without assumptions that bodies develop already-known abilities and function in a similar manner.

Our article provides a specific cultural analysis of interactions in which ableism frames cultural values – an approach suggested by Campbell (2009) – and analyses the complex dynamics whereby the ideal of similarity functions to engender national belonging. In this sense, we contribute to addressing the problem of how ableism frames ‘the way we think about *all*⁵ bodies’ (Campbell 2009, 198), including those that are so close to complying with cultural standards that they are usually ignored in research that scrutinises ableism. Finally, we suggest that when tracing how the idea of a capable body emerges in tandem with specific articulations it is also possible to ‘imagine human be-ingness differently’ (Campbell 2009, 4), and to re-articulate ableist views of the body.

Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank Jenni Helakorpi, Aarno Kauppila and Minna Uimonen for their comments on previous versions of the manuscript.

For funding, we wish to thank the Academy of Finland, the Faculty of Educational Sciences, and the Finnish Doctoral Programme in Education.

⁵ Italics in the original.

References:

Aman, Robert. 2013. "Bridging the gap to those who lack: Intercultural education in the light of modernity and the shadow of coloniality." *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* (21)2: 279–297. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2012.759139>.

Anonymous. 1915. "Vähän uinnista ja sen merkityksestä naisille." [About swimming and its significance for women]. *Suomen Urheilulehti* (18)42: 690–692.

Arnot, Madeleine. 2008. *Educating the Gendered Citizen: Sociological Engagements with National and Global Agendas*. London: Routledge.

Aro, Toivo. 1915. "Osaatko uida?" [Can you swim?]. *Suomen Urheilulehti* (18)35: 569–570.

Aro, Toivo. 1915. "Uinnin ja uimataidon merkityksestä?" [The importance of swimming and the ability to swim]. *Suomen Urheilulehti* (18)42: 679–683

Campbell, Fiona Kumari. 2009. *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Aabledness*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Douglas, Mary. 1991 [1966]. *Purity and Danger: An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*. London: Routledge.

Edelman, Elijah Adiv. 2014. “‘Walking while transgender’: necropolitical regulations of trans feminine bodies of colour in the US nation’s capital”. In *Queer Necropolitics*, edited by Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman, and Silvia Posocco, 172–190. London: Routledge.

Finnish National Board of Education. 2013.

http://edu.fi/perusopetus/liikunta/opetusmateriaalit_eri_lajeista/uinti_ja-vesipelastus.

Accessed 17 Aug 2017.

Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education. 2014.

http://www.oph.fi/download/163777_perusopetuksen_opetussuunnitelman_perusteet_2014.pdf. Accessed 17 Aug 2017.

Foucault, Michel. 1977. “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.” In *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by D.F. Bouchard, 139–164. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1991. *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*. New York: Semiotext(e).

Furedi, Frank. 2002. *Paranoid Parenting: Why Ignoring the Experts May Be Best for Your Child*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.

Hall, Stuart. 1996. "On Postmodernism and Articulation. An Interview with Stuart Hall". In *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, edited by David Morley, and Kuan-Hsing Chen, 131–150. New York: Routledge.

Halperin, David M. 1995. *Saint=Foucault. Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hietala, Marjatta. 1996. "From Race Hygiene to Sterilization: The Eugenics Movement in Finland." In *Eugenics and the Welfare State: Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland*, edited by Gunnar Broberg, and Nils Roll-Hansen, 195–258. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Horton, Sarah and Judith C. Barker. 2009. "'Stains' on their self-discipline: Public health, hygiene, and the disciplining of undocumented immigrant parents in the nation's internal borderlands". *American Ethnologist* (36) 4: 784–789. doi: 10.1111/j.1548-1425.2009.01210.x

Kafer, Alison. 2013. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kevles, Daniel J. 1985. *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*. New York: Knopf.

Kokko, Heikki. 2010. "Sivistyksen varhaista käsitehistoriaa." [On the early conceptual history of civilization]. *Kasvatus & Aika* 13:7–23. Accessed October 17, 2017. http://www.kasvatus-ja-aika.fi/dokumentit/artikkeli_kokko_0712100043.pdf

Kolářová, Kateřina, and M. Katharina Wiedlack. 2016. "Crip Notes on the Idea of Development." *Somatechnics* 12: 125–141. doi:
<https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2016.0187>

Komulainen, Katri. 2001. "1930-luvun suomalainen oppikoulu kansallisuuden näyttämönä" [Finnish language secondary schools as a stage for nationality: the national pedagogy of the 1930s in the school memories of Russian, Swedish and Finnish speaking pupils]. *Nuorisotutkimus [Finnish Journal of Youth Research]*, 1: 39–54.

Lappalainen, Antti. 2006. "Kansalaistaidon lyhyt historia." [A short history of civics] In *J. V. Snellmanin mietteistä koulutuksen kehittämiseen* [The ideas of J.V. Snellman about the development of education], edited by Antti Lappalainen, 161–171. Helsinki: Kouluhistoriallinen seura ry.

Lister, Ruth 2003. *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Loukasmäki, Arto. 2015. "Pitkiä katseita uimahallissa – turvapaikanhakijoille opetetaan käytöstapoja". [Long glances in the pool – teaching manners to asylum seekers]. *YLE news*. 9.12.2015. <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-8515563>. Retrieved 17 Aug 2017.

Mattila, Markku. 1999. *Kansamme parhaaksi: Rotuhygieniä Suomessa vuoden 1935 sterilointilakiin asti* [For the Best of Our Nation: Race Hygiene in Finland before the Sterilization Law of 1935]. Helsinki: Suomen historiallinen seura.

Meskus, Mianna. 2009. *Elämän tiede. Tutkimus lääketieteellisestä teknologiasta, Vanhemmuudesta Ja perimän hallinnasta [Science of Life: A Study on Medical Technology, Parenthood and the Government of Heredity]*. Tampere: Vastapaino.

Mikander, Pia. 2015. "Colonialist 'discoveries' in Finnish school textbooks". *Nordidactica: Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 4, 48–65.

Pick, Daniel. 1989. *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848–1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pihkala, Lauri. 1912. "Olympialaiset ennen ja nyt". [The Olympics now and then]. *Suomen Urheilulehti*, (15)28–30: 258–259.

Plock, Vike Martina. 2006. "A Feat of Strength in 'Ithaca': Eugen Sandow and Physical Culture in Joyce's Ulysses." *Journal of Modern Literature* 30:1: 129–139. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jml.2006.0064>

Puar, Jasbir K. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages. Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Penguin Books.

Said, Edward W. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage.

Savolainen, Laura. 2016. "Uimahallit ovat jämähtäneet 1970-luvulle" [The swimming pools are stuck in the 1970s] *YLE news*. 18.1.2016. <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-8599247>. Accessed 17 Aug 2017.

Siebers, Tobin. 2008. *Disability Theory*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Slack, Jennifer Daryl. 1996. "The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies." In *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, edited by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, 112–127. New York: Routledge.

Snyder, Sharon L. & Mitchell, David T. 2006. *Cultural Locations of Disability*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Teräsvirta, Paavo. 1956. *Suomen Uimaliitto 1906–1956* [Finnish Swimming Association 1906–1956]. Hämeenlinna: Arvi A. Karisto.

Tuomaala, Saara. 2004. *Työätekevistä käsistä puhtaiksi ja kirjoittaviksi. Suomalaisen oppivelvollisuuskoulun ja maalaislasten kohtaaminen 1921–1939* [From Labouring Hands to Clean and Writing Ones: The Encounter of Compulsory Educational Attendance and Rural Children 1921–1939]. Helsinki: SKS.

Uimonen, Minna. 1999. *Hermostumisen aikakausi: Neuroosit 1800- ja 1900-lukujen vaihteen suomalaisessa lääketieteessä* [The Age of Nervousness: The Neuroses in the Late Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Century Finnish Medicine]. Helsinki: Suomen historiallinen seura.

Vaahtera, E. [Touko]. 2012. "Compulsory able-bodiedness and the stigmatised forms of Nondisability." *Lambda Nordica* (17)1–2: 77–101.

Vaahtera, E. [Touko]. 2016a. "Biopolitics and the repressive hypothesis of the body: The case of swimming training in Finland." *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* (18)2: 142–153. doi: 10.1080/15017419.2015.1063538.

Vaahtera, Touko. 2016b. "'We swam before we breathed or walked': abled-bodied belonging in popular stories of evolutionary biology." *Disability & Society* (31)5: 591–603. doi: 10.1080/09687599.2016.1188767

Welcome to the Swimming hall! 2013.

http://www.suh.fi/files/764/Tule_uimahalliin_opas_-_englanti.pdf. Accessed 17 Aug 2017.

Wendell, Susan. 1989. "Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability". *Hypatia* (4) 2: 104–124. doi: 10.1111/j.1527-2001.1989.tb00576.x

Wendell, Susan. 1996. *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*. Routledge: New York.

Yuval Davis, N. 2011. *Politics of belonging: Intersectional contestations*. London: Sage.