

REVIEW

Candidate/author: Eva Soares Moura

Dissertation: **Sport for development: A gendered perspective**

University: Charles University

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Annelies Knoppers

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This is a very nuanced and well developed dissertation about a combination of contested concepts: Empowerment, gender relations, and sport for development (SfD) and how these were embedded in the results of an ethnographic study of two SfD football projects in Brazil. The main focus was on how young people engage in/with such SfD projects and the potential of such projects to shift gender relations. This assumption of relationality means the study included a focus on boys/men as well and a focus on how the projects under study provided temporary safe spaces for those self-identified as nonheterosexual. Both of these inclusions strengthened the robustness and uniqueness of the study. The researcher's ability to speak Portuguese and to live in the community definitely strengthened and enriched the credibility of the findings. Her point about the role of language in such ethnographic research is well taken.

The dissertation began with a thorough discussion/critique of many concepts critical to the analysis (Brazil's historical context including religion, empowerment, sport for development, agency, power, gender relations, queer/ heteronormativity in sport, reflexivity as a tool of privilege). The author shows a good command of the relevant literature and consistently uses it well in arguing the complexity of each of these subjects.

Dominant ideas about female empowerment through sport were thoroughly deconstructed in part by arguments about the complexity of empowerment and that sport participation does not take place in a vacuum. Participants bring their past and the context in which they live with them to their football involvement. Many examples were given to underscore this point as the author moves through the two projects and also interacted with those directly involved, as well as their family members and others. The dissertation offered a rich description of how the author negotiated her insider/outsider status to uncover the complexity of meanings surrounding two projects.

The author rightly points to the difference between a project being a primary vehicle or being an indicator of change. Her results suggest the latter is more likely than the former. Participants do not come to such projects as a blank slate. Their involvement also takes place in a gendered activity and society and within a specific time and space. The attention paid to religion and the point that those who analyze SfD projects need to reflect on which voices need to be heard are also insights that are often missing from SfD analyses. These are points that are often ignored in scholarship describing/analyzing SfD projects. I commend the author for taking them on.

Several relatively minor concerns

I am concerned that although the author points to concepts such as queer and masculinity as pertaining to practice rather than to fixed identities, she also uses the words to point to individuals, suggesting identity. This is confusing at times. Also, why choose 'hegemonic

masculinity' as a way of framing discussions about practices of masculinity? This choice for this concept was explained, the concept was deconstructed and subsequently used throughout the dissertation as a fixed notion! In contrast, the analysis points more to fluid and complex forms of practices of masculinity than to hegemonic masculinity that seems to be more fixed (see for example, Pringle's (2018) critique of this concept and Bridges and Pascoe (2014) on hybrid masculinities.

The author justifies her choice for the word queer rather than the word LGBTQ+ as a way of avoiding reifying nonheterosexual as a fixed identity. Yet the author does use the word queer to point to identities. She describes episodes about queer individuals for example, and this is described as using a queer lens or queer theory. Similarly, although the points made about heteronormativity in such projects was a plus in this study since it seldom receives attention, I am a bit concerned that it primarily became a topic when the author discusses the ways those identified as queer can use the projects as a safe place. The author could have drawn on the concept of heteronormativity as shaping gender relations throughout the analysis. This restriction narrowed the concept of queer considerably. In contrast, the use of a queer perspective throughout a project would have meant consistently challenging "what is considered socially, culturally, biologically normal or natural, essential, stable or fixed and unproblematic" (De Souza, 2017, p. 6/7).

I would have liked to have seen a diagram of the physical set up for each of the two locations of the study.

How did the projects benefit from this research and/or how could they (continue to) use the findings?

In conclusion:

All in all, this is an excellent ethnographic study that should be read by all those thinking about taking up a SfD project and those interested in fluidity of gender relations and other relations of power and postcolonialism. The wide range of literature used, the continual emphasis on complexity, the inclusion of a focus on boys/men and those positioned as queer enriches this unique study. I not only enjoyed reading this dissertation but also learned a great deal from it.

I strongly recommend that the author be permitted to defend this thesis!

References used

Bridges, T and Pascoe, C. (2014). Hybrid masculinities: New directions in the sociology of men and masculinities. *Sociology Compass* 8 (3), 246-258

De Souza E. (2017). Where is queer theory in organizational studies? *Sociology International Journal* 1(4), 1-10.

Pringle, R. (2018) On the development of sport and masculinities research: Feminism as a discourse of inspiration and theoretical legitimation. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Feminism and Sport, Leisure and Physical Education* (pp. 73-93). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

External examiner:

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