

‘I Can Be So Much More Than I Think of Myself’:
Girls’ Sport Participation and Discourses of Power and Agency in Windhoek, Namibia

by

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of sport on the lives of 15-19 year old female participants in the Physically Active Youth program in Namibia by examining how they reinforce or resist dominant gender discourses in their lives through their reflections and conversations on sport and by highlighting discourses of agency that emerge from their perceptions of the role sport may play in their economic and educational futures and their own personal growth and development through sport. In the struggle to resist multiple oppressions within intersecting frameworks of race, gender, class, and age, this exploration of girls' reflections on sports reveals the normalization of dominant discourses of gender and heterosexism through sport, but also evidence of emerging critical consciousnesses and questioning of the broader processes influencing girls' participation in sport.

List of Abbreviations Used

ACT	AIDS Care Trust
CGC	Commonwealth Games Canada
IDEALS	International Development through Excellence and Leadership in Sport
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PAY	Physically Active Youth
SADC	South African Development Community
SCORE	Sports Coaches' Outreach
SDP	Sport for Development and Peace
SDP IWG	Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organization

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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of Problem

In recent years sport has been promoted as an almost universal tool to achieve various development goals, at the individual, community and national levels. Sport has been credited with improving school attendance and educational attainment of youth (Bailey, 2006), community development (Lawson, 2005; Keim, n.d.), peace, reconciliation, and human rights (Kidd, 2008; Höglund & Sundberg, 2008; Donnelly, 2008), and fostering psycho-social qualities of leadership, teamwork, self-confidence, peaceful conflict resolution, and other life skills (Beutler, 2008; Bruening, Dover, & Clark, 2009). The potential of sport for the empowerment of women and girls has also received an increasing amount of attention (Brady, 1998, 2005; Hargreaves, 2000; Saavedra, n.d.). In most cultures, women's opportunities, experiences and expectations are circumscribed based on their sex. Sport is frequently framed as an invaluable tool with which to challenge traditional gender norms and power relations and provide women and girls with the social assets and the social and discursive spaces to grapple with the unique challenges facing them. Evaluation of sport and development programs and research into the actual mechanisms of sport's alleged beneficence has been remarkably limited, however, despite a burgeoning multiplicity of sport-related development initiatives in developing countries (Levermore, 2008). While an increasing amount of research on gender and sport is being conducted in the Western world, there is a significant gap in the literature on the experiences of girls in sport in Africa specifically and in developing countries in general.

As with any development tool or cultural practice, sport is not free from oppressive power relations and dominant discourses which silence or marginalize the less powerful. Sport in its modern, globalized form is defined by Western, colonialist origins, characterized by inequalities based on race, class, disability, sexual orientation, and gender, and shaped by the consumer-driven, capitalist regime of globalization. Sport has been essentially depoliticized through characterizations of sport as a ‘universal language’ and a ‘level playing field’, and thus it has been widely adopted with very little critical attention to its racist, sexist and neo-colonial underpinnings.

However, these discourses are not universal, uniform or immutable. Sport has become a site for the contestation, legitimization and reshaping of intersecting gender, class, and race discourses and power relations. Every day, marginalized and oppressed groups manoeuvre, manipulate, and interact with the dominant discourses in their lives. Through their words and actions, silences and inactions, individual actors reinforce or resist hegemonic discourses or struggle to create a space where they can forge a new path, an alternate discourse with which to challenge oppressive power relations in their lives. These identities and discourses thus created are frequently ambiguous and contradictory, yet they are also a window of agency and resistance, potential stepping stones of both individual empowerment and broad-based change in oppressive power relations.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how female students between the ages of 15-19 participating in the Physically Active Youth (PAY) program in Namibia perceive and respond to discourses of culture, gender, heterosexism, and Western neoliberal values

as experienced through sport. I explore and analyze emergent discourses of agency in girls' reflections and conversations on sport in order to answer the following questions: how do girls in the PAY program in Namibia challenge or reinforce existing power relations and dominant discourses in their lives through their perceptions and opinions on their experiences in sport?

- a) How do the girls perceive the dominant discourses of hegemonic femininity and masculinity within their particular socio-cultural context? How do their perceptions and attitudes towards their participation in sport challenge or reinforce cultural gender norms, roles and power relations?
- b) How do girls perceive their participation in sport within the dominant discourse of heteronormativity and how do they manoeuvre and interpret these discourses within an atmosphere of political homophobia?
- c) Within discourses of sport for development and Namibia's particular socio-cultural and economic context, how do the girls perceive and interpret their participation in sport as a factor in their education, personal development and their futures in a developing country?

Scope of Study

This research is a micro-level study of the individual experiences and attitudes of girls in the PAY program. The impacts of sport tend to be personal and social in nature and therefore cannot be easily measured or generalized by empirical or macro-level methods which would not be able to capture the complex and subjective nature of how these impacts are lived and experienced. However, from the analysis of individual experiences in a particular social and cultural context, it is hoped that this study will

provide more insight into the relationship between girls' participation in sports and the unique challenges, constraints, and socio-cultural conditions faced by girls in Namibia and how they link to broader discourses.

Situating the Researcher

I have long been interested by the benefits and the tensions inherent in sport, especially youth sport. Both as a player and as a coach I noted the diversity of experiences and the distinctly gendered nature of sport. While my personal and observed experiences with sport have been largely positive and empowering, even as a young player I was aware of inequalities and the negative effects of dominant discourses in sport such as the greater resources, attention and status given to boys' sports, the homophobic teasing that maintained and reinforced conceptions of hegemonic femininities and masculinities, and the many young girls who quit sports upon reaching high school often due to the increased emphasis on competition and performance rather than participation and fun. As a Masters' student in International Development Studies, I was introduced to the 'sport for development and peace' (SDP) movement and became interested in expanding the research on the gendered nature of sport and the nebulous area where sport's potential for empowerment interacts with structures of inequality and oppression.

Thesis Outline

In the next chapter I map out my theoretical framework. I lay out some of the major theoretical approaches to Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) especially in reference to the gendered aspect of sport. I contrast the dominant functionalist and interactionist approaches, outline different feminist lenses used to study sport in development, and explore conceptualizations of structure, agency and empowerment and

how they have been applied to sport. I lay out my theoretical framework with emphasis on my positionality as researcher and on the anti-oppression nature of my approach.

In the third chapter I critically examine the literature on sport's potential role in youth development, before focusing on some of the problematic discourses and power dynamics within the sport regime such as neo-colonialism and capitalism. Some ambiguities and contradictions within SDP will be outlined. I will also examine some structures and discourses which marginalize and exclude women from the supposed 'level playing field' of sport.

In the fourth chapter I first describe the background and everyday running of the organization I worked with in Katutura. I then set out the general personal and socio-economic characteristics of my research participants and lay out my positionality as a researcher and a foreigner within the PAY context. Next, I outline the research methods I used, the data collection process and my approach to analysis of my findings. Last, I explain some of the limitations of this study.

The fifth chapter outlines some of Namibia's historical background, with a specific look at Katutura, a post-apartheid township in Windhoek and the location of my research. The economic profile explains some of the uncertainties and inequalities facing Namibians today and with the section on Namibia's educational system, past and present, provides a background for my research participants' expectations and hopes for the future. Finally, I seek to demonstrate how the dominant discourses which are the subject of my research are uniquely present in Namibia's economic and political context, providing a rationale for Namibia as a location for this research.

In the sixth chapter, I examine how girls perceive and interact with, confirm or challenge gender discourses within a sporting context. I explore the ways girls describe perceived gender differences and examine comments regarding girls' social roles and cultural expectations of their activities and behaviour. I also investigate a discourse of age which emerged from the interviews, exploring what it means to be a 'grown-up girl' playing sport in Namibia and the structural and economic forces that reinforce this discourse.

In the seventh chapter I explore discourses of heteronormativity in Namibian society, examining how they emerge in girls' conceptions of sport. In the context of incidences of political homophobia in Namibia, the consequences for nonconformity to gender ideals and pushing the boundaries of gender norms through participation in sport take on a new significance. I also examine how themes of sex and sexuality emerge from girls' conversations on sport, within the context of Namibia's high rate of HIV/AIDS.

In the eighth chapter I examine how girls perceive and interpret their participation in sport as a factor in their education, personal development and their futures in a developing country. I explore how girls navigate economic uncertainties, educational challenges and goals, and their personal changes, by highlighting the discourses of agency that emerge from their reflections on sport.

In the final chapter I summarize and conclude some of my findings in regards to girls' perceptions of and interactions with some of the dominant discourses in their lives through the examination of their sense of agency. I also present possible areas for future research and explain the significance of this study.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I map out some of the major theoretical approaches to Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) especially in reference to the gendered aspect of sport. I contrast the dominant functionalist and interactionist approaches, outline different feminist lenses used to study sport in development, and explore conceptualizations of structure, agency and empowerment and how they have been applied to sport. I lay out my theoretical framework with emphasis on my positionality as researcher and on the anti-oppression nature of my approach.

Functionalism vs Interactionism

The predominant discourse of sport in development is centered in the functionalist tradition where sport is seen as a tool to achieve specific development outcomes. This instrumentalist approach dominates much of the academic literature concerning sport in development (Brady, 1998; Beutler, 2008; Höglund & Sundberg, 2008; Kidd, 2008; Levermore, 2008) in which sport is evaluated in terms of its ability to achieve positive outcomes in peace and reconciliation, gender empowerment, improved mental and physical health, AIDS education, and/or community development. Functionalism tends to focus on policy and implementation which allows for the more effective and accountable delivery of programs. However, an emphasis on instrumentalism also tends to depoliticize underlying issues (Kabeer, 1999) and frames historical, cultural, and political processes as relevant primarily as forces which might impact the effectiveness of sport for development programs, resulting in a neglect of ‘the cultural, symbolic and intangible’ (Black, 2008, p. 469). One of the primary difficulties with the functionalist approach is that while the quantitative data can indicate trends, they cannot ‘prove’ a

causal link between two phenomena nor can they produce a fully dimensional picture about the complex and layered realities of the people involved.

Interactionism or interpretivism has been used as an alternative to the functionalist approach, especially by feminists and researchers working with marginalized groups such as aboriginal or ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and gays and lesbians (Hargreaves, 2000; Pelak, 2005; Lorway, 2008; Eng, 2008; Bourgeois, 2009). Interactionism proposes that:

The social world must be understood from within, rather than explained from without. Instead of seeking the causes of behavior, we are to seek the meaning of action. Actions derive their meaning from the shared ideas and rules of social life, and are performed by actors who mean something by them (Hollis, 1998, p. 17).

This approach explores the meanings assigned to social actions and gives a voice to those who might be otherwise marginalized. As used by Hargreaves (1997) in her study of women and sport in South Africa, the interactionist approach “is an attempt to acquire an authentic understanding of the needs, desires, opportunities and constraints of women in sport” (p. 192) through the examination of the complex processes and interactions of individuals and societies and cultures and the meanings assigned to social actions both individually and collectively.

By valuing subjective experiences and meanings over any claim to objective reality (as in the functionalist approach), interactionism holds liberatory potential for oppressed and marginalized groups. Hooks (1989) argues that:

Every liberatory struggle initiated by groups of people who have been seen as objects begins with a revolutionary process wherein they assert that they are subjects... Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story (p. 43).

The interactionist approach attempts to assist in this struggle by valuing the voices of the marginalized, emphasizing the complexity and ambiguity of lived experiences, and focusing not on observable, measurable actions but on the meanings assigned to the actions to gain more nuanced insights into political, social, cultural and historical processes, discourses and interactions and the multiple oppressions they can engender.

The immediate issue with the interactionist approach is who is doing the interpretation, analysis, and editing of other people's voices and stories. Any attempt at writing about or representing the 'other' is fraught with difficulty and the potential for domination and further oppression, an issue writers and researchers have long grappled with. However, hooks (1989) argues that it is the assumption of authority that is the problem and suggests that "learning about other groups and writing about what we learn can be a way to unlearn racism, to challenge structures of domination" (p. 46). Hargreaves (2000) agrees with hooks that those from privileged groups have a responsibility to support, facilitate and engage with those from oppressed and marginalized groups, while recognizing that the researcher is embedded in the political and social context of the work and not separate from it.

Structure, Agency and Empowerment

The role of structure and agency in the study of sport and gender has been at the heart of many theoretical debates. The structural argument, heavily influenced by Marxism, contends that participation in the sport regime is defined by structures of capital relations which legitimize competition, consumerism, and an ethos of 'survival of the fittest' (Andrews, 2008; Smart, 2007; Messner, 1988). Redeker (2008) argues that "sport is something entirely different than a tool or means that wouldn't alter whoever

used it; it is a total system, a planetary machine that profoundly transforms men and women as well as their relation to the world” (p. 499). To underscore his point, he compares sport to a global religion which has virtually no opposition, but one in which “no spiritual or intellectual message is conveyed, no hope for humanity, no promise for the human condition will come from this ceremony, where only the *cult of brand names* and *the law of the strongest* are celebrated” (p. 495, original emphasis). He strongly rejects the instrumentalist notion of sport as a neutral tool and goes a step further than just explicating the underlying historical, political and social structures of sport; he argues that sport itself is a social, political structure which spreads its capitalist, neo-liberal values in a manner which receives little opposition because it is framed paradoxically as “below (‘not serious’, play) and above (‘showcasing everything that is good and hopeful about humanity’) the sordid world of politics” (Black, 2008, p. 469).

When taken to its extreme, the structural argument leaves little space for the agency of individuals. Messner (1988) argues for the consideration of culture as relatively autonomous from the economy. This would help balance the structural argument by accounting for human subjectivities within the context of historical power relations and the constraints of economic and social inequalities. Cooky (2009) highlights the importance of power in the relationship between structure and agency, arguing that even subordinate groups have some degree of power to bring about change or transformation of their circumstances, while acknowledging that this power may also be used to reproduce social structures rather than resisting or transforming them. The formation of identities both reinforces and challenges dominant systems of power relations by either legitimizing and supporting the dominant system, or by resisting and

struggling against it, or by creating a new identity in order to transform social structures (Harris, 2009). Theories of hegemony assert that “dominant meanings and interests...are continually defended and new meanings and oppositional interests are continually negotiated” (Pelak, 2005, p. 54). Sport, as a social and cultural practice, becomes a social space where unequal power relations can be challenged, contested, or reproduced through individual and collective agency (Cooky, 2009).

Examining discourses of agency is one way to better understand how power relations are contested or reproduced and empowerment realized. The term empowerment has been used in many different ways until its use becomes more than a little ambiguous. For the purpose of this study I will use Kabeer’s (1999) definition of empowerment: “the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability” (p. 437). Kabeer (1999) notes that poverty is logically associated with disempowerment as the lack of resources to provide for basic human needs would often negate the possibility for choice; in this vein, systemic inequalities and oppressions based on race, age, gender, and class would also limit and constrain the ability of people to make “strategic life choices which are critical for people to live the lives they want” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). Thus empowerment involves a process of change from a condition of disempowerment, a process which involves three indivisible components: resources, agency and achievements. For the process of empowerment to take place the pre-conditions must be in place; the individual or collectivity must have the material, social and human resources to exercise meaningful agency. Agency does not have to be only ‘observable action’ or decision-making but can also “take the form of bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance as

well as more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). This process of agency then results in achievements or well-being outcomes.

Azzarito and Katzew (2010) argue that gender identities are fluid and based on dominant discourses of culture, gender, race and socioeconomic class and that these identities are negotiated and constituted constantly in an ongoing process of identity formation, especially among young people. The overlap and inherent tensions of opposing roles and expectations placed on girls and women by external structures and internalized factors such as culture can either narrow their options or create spaces to explore new options. Often these spaces are evident only in the attitudes of the women themselves, rendering it essential to explore individuals’ perceptions of the range of their own agency and empowerment.

Sport and Feminisms

Hall (1988) defines feminism as “a point of view that sees women as exploited, devalued, and often oppressed, and that is committed to changing their condition” (p. 337). There are many competing bodies of feminism and multiple points of entry into analysis of gender and sport, and changing the condition of female athletes and sportswomen would require a multi-faceted approach accounting for race, class, age, etc. Mohanty’s (1991) critique of the Western-dominated focus of feminism has led to an increasing acknowledgement and inclusion of different feminisms, particularly of the Third World, in an effort to avoid homogenizing the diverse experiences of women in different cultural, religious, geographic and historical contexts. Multiracial analyses of women in sport by authors like Pelak (2005) and Hargreaves (1997) have also

contributed to expanding the research on intersections between historical, cultural and local factors in the multiple oppressions women may face.

Among the varying types of feminisms, liberal feminism is the dominant model in sport literature. The pragmatic tendencies of liberal feminist agendas, while arguably more effective for garnering positive attention and achieving incremental change, has also been frequently subverted by the development industry through unequal power relations (Mama, 2007). Liberal feminism tends to seek removal of 'social impediments' to women's equal participation in sport but does not challenge the sport regime itself (Hargreaves, 2000) which is characteristic of the 'add women and stir' mentality which has co-opted other feminist discourses and often converted them into neo-liberal arguments for increased economic efficiency (hooks, 1989; Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2007). Radical feminism, on the other hand, rejects the androcentric model of destructive individual competitiveness of sport altogether and emphasizes the political and ethical in sport and advocates a more positive and holistic model of sport (Lenskyj, 1990). However, because it resists the dominant models of neo-liberalism, consumerism, and capitalist values, it is marginalized by these hegemonic discourses.

Marxist feminism emphasizes the need for comprehensive societal and ideological change to free both men and women from oppressive class and power relations within a capitalist society (Marcuse, 2006; Bryson, 2004). Modern sport disguises its inherently capitalist relations and ideals through the creation a new elite of millionaire (male) sports players who have risen ostensibly through meritocratic means, so that those who seek to succeed in this framework, especially women, are co-opted into a specifically capitalist, male- and class-dominated structure. The postmodernist

approach, on the other hand, rejects meta-narratives and the hierarchical valuation of one discourse over another and emphasizes instead diversity and difference. It highlights the ambiguities and contradictions in the interplay of structure, culture and agency (Lenskyj, 1990) and creates a space to explore the sometimes undefined and conflicting identities and subjectivities experienced by female athletes (Pelak, 2005).

Hooks (1989) argues that the purpose of feminism is to educate the masses and develop a critical consciousness, a reminder that after theorizing and analysis are over, the end goal is always social change. The formation of identities through sport is a way “to counter a sense of anonymity and marginalization; a way in which individuals and groups may assert their social existence and the meanings and values which they represent” (Harris & Parker, 2009, p. 8). Despite its largely white, colonial origins, sport has been used to resist white domination and other oppressions (Hargreaves, 2000).

Kabeer (1999) argues that sometimes the mere awareness of an alternative can be the catalyst for social change:

The passage from 'doxa' to discourse, a more critical consciousness, only becomes possible when competing ways of 'being and doing' become available as material and cultural possibilities, so that 'common sense' propositions of culture begin to lose their 'naturalized' character, revealing the underlying arbitrariness of the given social order. The availability of alternatives at the discursive level, of being able to at least imagine the possibility of having chosen differently, is thus crucial to the emergence of a critical consciousness, the process by which people move from a position of unquestioning acceptance of the social order to a critical perspective on it (p. 441).

Thus, within the shifting, changing discourses of sport, gender and development may be revealed the possibilities of empowerment, equality and social justice through the development of a critical consciousness. One cannot lose sight of the fact that SDP is just one aspect of the broader struggle for social justice (Jarvie, 2009).

Theoretical Approach

I will use a feminist interactionist approach in order to analyze how girls who participate in sport in Namibia challenge or reinforce dominant discourses and power relations in their lives. Using Kabeer's definition of empowerment, I seek to highlight the discourses of agency that emerge from girls' conversations and reflections on sport and to analyze how these discourses may contest or legitimize dominant discourses. With their current condition of 'power' constrained by unequal relations in the personal, social, and economic spheres, an analysis of their perceptions of agency within these shifting discourses could provide a clearer picture of how sport may affect girls' ability to make their own strategic life choices. By valuing the subjective meanings and experiences of the participants and privileging the voices of the marginalized (in this case, black African girls within a male-dominated society where most of the resources are still controlled by a small, white elite), this approach is an effort to support the struggle against everyday oppression through the recognition of the myriad ways that agents resist and legitimize dominant discourses and power relations or work to create new alternatives (Cooky, 2009; Harris, 2009; Pelak, 2005).

Given that the purpose of feminism and of SDP is ultimately social change (hooks, 1989; Jarvie, 2009; Hall, 1988), I use Kabeer's (1999) argument that the presence of alternative discourses might encourage the development of a critical consciousness—the first step to social change—in order to examine how shifting cultural, political and economic discourses within a post-independence Namibia are framed within girls' reflections on gender and sport. How these young women perceive the dominant discourses that shape their lives impacts the way they interact with and shape these

discourses in turn. Within this context, sport may represent Kabeer's 'alternate' discourse, offering new opportunities and adding new dimensions to traditional gender roles, potentially influencing the development of a more critical consciousness; alternatively, sport may serve to reinforce existing, oppressive discourses of heteronormativity, racism, and sexism. It is the purpose of my thesis to explore and find out whether girls' perceptions of sport reinforce dominant discourses or offer alternative empowering discourses.

In acknowledgment of the diversity of experience of girls and women around the world (Hargreaves, 2000; Mohanty, 1991), this study is situated firmly within the particular economic, political, historical and social setting of Namibia in order to better contextualize the responses of the participants. I situate myself as a white, North American female in the relatively privileged position of researcher, acknowledging my own embedded positionality and participation in the research process. In order to mitigate as far as possible the potential for oppression in the gathering, interpretation, and editing of others' voices and stories, I present this research not as an authoritative description or analysis of girls' perspectives on sport and gender in Namibia, but as an exploratory study and an attempt to gain a better understanding of the multiple oppressions faced by girls in Namibia. By using their own words as much as possible, I seek to emphasize the ways girls assert their own agency, identify themselves as subjects, define their own reality, and tell their own stories (hooks, 1989). In this way I hope to add to existing knowledge and to support the continuing struggle against all forms of oppression.

The theoretical frameworks thus outlined provide broad lenses within which to conceptualize and understand the nature of SDP and the role of gendered and anti-oppression discourses. The next chapter will explore some of the literature on SDP and seek to problematize some of the dominant discourses of neo-liberalism, neo-colonialism, heteronormativity and gender while also setting out the sometimes contradictory findings of studies on the benefits of sport for youth.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

This literature review will first critically examine the literature on sport's potential role in youth development—one of sport's most popular and widely accepted applications—before focusing on some of the problematic discourses and power dynamics within the sport regime. I will explore the argument of modern sport as a racialized and oppressive Western cultural practice imposed as a form of neo-colonialism and contrast it with the assertion that sport is a 'universal language' and a common feature of most world cultures. Whatever its origins, sport's current dominant form is shaped and influenced by globalization, capitalism and a culture of consumerism but also by a discourse of human rights. Some ambiguities and contradictions within SDP will be outlined. Next, I will examine some structures and discourses which marginalize and exclude women from the supposed 'level playing field' of sport, while also highlighting how individual agents are challenging and reshaping dominant discourses and finding in sport a source of hope, opportunity and empowerment.

Sport as a Tool for Development: Problems and Potential

In recent years, a movement has begun to use sport for development and peace (SDP). The United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace found that sport was a practical and cost-effective way to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Beutler, 2008). Sport has been promoted as a useful tool for everything from improving health to gender empowerment, combating HIV/AIDS, promoting universal education, poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, community development and peace and reconciliation efforts in areas of war and conflict. The Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group

(SDP IWG) and the organization Right to Play define sport as “all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organized or competitive sport, and indigenous sports and games” (Donnelly, 2007, p. 12). However, my respondents referred primarily to recreational or organized sport, which are also the focus of most studies on sport and development.

Sport has been adopted with an enthusiastic abandon which has resulted in a multitude of sport related development projects which are often uncoordinated, vague in their aims, and largely lacking any systematic evaluations (Levermore, 2008). What literature does exist tends to focus on the mechanisms by which sport produces positive or negative development outcomes. Critiques revolve around how the structure and delivery of sport programs might be made more effective and equitable, on how to incorporate marginalized groups and how to adapt programs to local contexts and how to measure and evaluate the complex range of impacts related to participation in sport. The widespread perception and discourse of sport as a ‘tool’, however, serves to depoliticize sport, framing it as neutral and value-free. The instrumental emphasis on how to make sport for development more effective obscures and ignores the underpinning assumptions, dominant discourses, and power relations which characterize the institution of sport in its modern Western form.

Positive Potential: Benefits of Sport for Youth

Among the macro-level benefits attributed to sport, such as nation-building and peace and reconciliation, are the more ubiquitous claims of personally and socially positive outcomes. The physical benefits of sport and physical activity have been well documented, but sport has also been credited with boosting children’s self-esteem and

self-efficacy, reinforcing a healthier body image, teaching leadership and teamwork, improving academic attendance and performance, and reducing involvement in high-risk behaviours. While some studies support these claims, others caution against assuming too simplistic a connection between involvement in sport/physical activity and positive outcomes.

Studies of schools that have incorporated increased time for physical education and sport seem to show that even when academic time is reduced and replaced with physical education and sport (PES), academic results have not suffered or have even improved and resulted in better attendance, attentiveness, and fewer discipline problems (Bailey, 2006; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008). Participation in sport and physical activity may increase feelings of connectedness and integration for youth in school, possibly resulting in greater engagement in the classroom (Faulkner et al, 2009); for girls, both physical activity and sport team participation were independently associated with a higher GPA (Fox et al, 2010) as well as an increased likeliness of taking advanced courses in the historically male fields of sciences and maths, perhaps due the confidence gained from participation in the traditionally male realm of sports (Pearson et al, 2009). Sport participation may instil drive and confidence, increase feelings of belonging and integration, perceptions of physical competency, and achievement orientation. Physical processes such as improving blood circulation and higher levels of norepinephrine and endorphins may lead to better concentration, lower stress, and calmer moods (Taras, 2005; Pearson et al, 2009). However, it is also possible that students who choose to participate in sports already possess the personal and socio-economic attributes associated with academic success such as confidence and drive and a privileged class

background (Pearson et al, 2009; Eitle, 2005). While some studies show a positive relationship between sport participation and academic success, others show no or a trivial relationship (Bailey et al, 2009; Eitle, 2005), and it is difficult to determine any explicit causal links within the complex interplay of factors and correlates in young people's participation in sport.

Multiple studies show positive results in self esteem—a perception of increased physical competency or adequacy to achieve—for children involved in sport or physical activity (Bailey, 2006; Breuning et al, 2009). A higher self esteem allows a person to deal with failure more functionally, leading to higher performance, increased happiness and less anxiety (Cassidy & Conroy, 2006). Perceptions of peer acceptance mediates adolescents' sport participation and the development of self-esteem, especially among boys, highlighting the importance of sport in the formation of hegemonic masculine identities (Daniels & Leaper, 2006). Among girls, sport participation may displace and mediate the negative effect the media can have on girls' body image (Bissel & Birchall, 2008) as well as increase girls' interpersonal skills and sociability (Ward, 2009).

Some studies have shown a decrease of high risk behaviours among youth involved in sport or regular physical activity, although results tend to be less than conclusive. Sport and physical activity have been associated with decreased stress, depression, anxiety and tension (Bailey, 2006; Taliaferro et al, 2008), and students who participated in sports are less likely to feel hopeless or entertain suicidal thoughts (Chioqueta & Stiles, 2007), but no clear links have been made to suicide rates (Bovard, 2008; Brown et al, 2007). A relationship between involvement in sport and substance use is also inconclusive. Alcohol and drug use varies widely across different sports and

genders. Male athletes tend to use more alcohol and engage in more unsafe sexual practices than non-athletes (Bovard, 2008) but are less likely to report drinking before the age of 12. Female athletes were far less likely than their non-athletic counterparts to report alcohol consumption (Mays & Thompson, 2009). Cohen et al (2007) found that schools with more sports programs had lower juvenile arrest rates than schools with fewer sports programs. Fields and Collins (2007) point out, however, that sports-related interpersonal violence, such as brawling, hazing, and foul play, is too commonplace and should not be tolerated just because it takes place in the context of sport as it does result in physical and psychological damage. Most of the studies cited were conducted in North America, Europe or Australia, and so it is unclear how positive, negative, or indifferent outcomes might play out in a developing country context.

Sport as Neo-colonialism? Beyond the ‘Universal Language’

Nelson Mandela reportedly described sport as being able to “[speak] to people in a language they can understand” and former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called sport “a global language capable of bridging social, cultural, and religious divides” (Donnelly, 2008, p. 382). While this popular and dominant discourse of sport may be completely true, Donnelly (2008) points out that the opposite can be true as well. Sport can just as easily be divisive, exclusionary, and elitist. Like any language, sport in its modern, global form originated in a specific socio-cultural context, was spread by economic, military, political, and religious means, and may displace local traditions and homogenize cultures.

The Western version of sport originated in industrial Europe, where it became a form of social control by employers and the landowning class. Leisure time served to

further regulate workers' activities and prepare them for work-time. For these reasons sport became increasingly structured and rule-bound (Budd, 2001). In America, blue-collar sport was used to alleviate labour unrest and facilitate acceptance of a capitalist economy as well as to assimilate workers from various ethnicities into a more homogenized American culture (Gems, 2001). Organized sport requires intensive training, competition, discipline, the pursuit of excellence, and willingness to play by the rules and abide by the decisions of the officials—all qualities employers would desire in employees. The discourse of sport as a 'universal language' implies that there are meanings found in sport which are recognizable and valued across cultures; this is likely true, but as Budd (2001) warns, sport is "too heavily laden with competition, routine, success and failure to be equated with the playful pursuit of pleasure" (p. 1). Redeker (2008) contends that sport transformed traditional values into the 'obligation to *perform* at all levels of society' (p. 495, original emphasis).

A strong religious influence also shaped sport. In Britain, sport was the avenue for creating the 'muscular Christian' ideal of young men. School institutions were meant to create good Christians, but combined with the demands of imperialism the physical aspect became even more important with the necessity for hardy, disciplined soldiers, administrators, colonists and missionaries (Arnold, 1984). Sport was frequently used by missionaries to deliberately stamp out indigenous body cultures and turn the native peoples into 'civilized', preferably Christian proto-Europeans (Giulianotti, 2004). In America, as companies formed sports teams for their workers, so did churches and religious organizations, notably the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) (Gems, 2001). An examination of the

historical context of sport suggests that the foundational meanings of sport, far from universal and common to all cultures, are rooted in very specific social, political and economic ideologies, many of which were then transferred to other world cultures either through the forcible process of colonization, the cooptation of country elites, or through the cultural imperialism of the globalization process.

The wide-spread diffusion of modern sport is both a product and a means of globalization. Indigenous sports and games existed in nearly all cultures but were wiped out, displaced or marginalized both by oppressive forms of colonialism and later by the privileging of modern, globalized forms of sport over all others until today most of the major global sports are Western in origin (Hargreaves, 2000; Giulianotti, 2004). Andrews (2008) argues that the ‘aggressive corporatization’, ‘spectacularization’, and ‘commodification’ of sport “have confirmed the global uniformity of sport’s institutional infrastructure to the degree that there is no longer any viable alternative to the corporate sport model” (p. 45). As a globe-spanning network of professional sport, corporate sponsorship, the media and consumer culture, sport has become the purveyor of capitalist values of consumerism and neo-liberal free-market policies (Smart, 2007). The neo-colonial power that multinational companies and sporting agencies (e.g. Nike, Adidas, FIFA, IOC) possess is significant. As event sponsors and organizers, they are able to dictate the terms of major sporting events and even influence foreign policy. The implications for human welfare are worrisome as often event sponsors demonstrate little interest in “softer’ focuses such as community inclusion and empowerment” (Black, 2008, p. 490). Also the emphasis tends to remain on the development of high performance, elite sport rather than on broad-based, grassroots participation, maintaining

a hierarchy of power and wealth that remains out of reach to the vast majority (Donnelly, 2008). Formal colonization may no longer be practiced, but in its place are deeply entrenched power relations (especially that held by supranational organizations like the IMF and the World Bank and multinational corporations) and value systems which continue to exert largely Western dominance over socio-cultural processes such as sport. The history of both ‘development’ and the dominant form of sport is decidedly Western in origin and a reflection of elite, male-dominated, capitalist ideology—a context that is hard to reconcile with the supposedly equalizing, neutral and universal qualities of sport which are often promoted by the SDP movement.

Ambiguities and Contradictions

The ‘myth of autonomy’ that surrounds sport can serve to deflect, deemphasize and depoliticize otherwise problematic relations and issues. Darnell (2007) argues that development through sport essentializes the racialized ‘other’ as grateful, appreciative recipients of sport aid and shifts the focus from problems with the whole development paradigm. While acknowledging the ambiguities of development and sport’s place within it, Black (2010) argues that as a relative newcomer to the field of development the SDP movement may be able to learn from the mistakes and successes of past development efforts and thus make a meaningful contribution to development as a whole.

Sport has been a site of human rights violations from child labour used in sporting goods factories to the abuse of athletes by coaches and the international exploitation of young elite players, but it has also been used to fight for human rights for marginalized and oppressed groups such as women, gay and lesbian communities, persons with disabilities, and aboriginal peoples (Giulianotti, 2004; Donnelly, 2008; Hargreaves,

2000). Most notably, the international ban on sporting contacts with apartheid South Africa is credited with contributing to the eventual downfall of the oppressive apartheid system (Donnelly, 2008; Höglund & Sundberg, 2008).

Elite sport and major sporting events are a convenient way for a country's elite to distract the population from inequalities and poverty. The popular emphasis on sport for development is largely Western-driven (although the popularity of elite sport is undeniably massive all over the globe), while the priority for the majority of the world is day-to-day survival (Hargreaves, 1997; Black, 2008). As Hargreaves (1997) points out, however, "it should not exclude programmes which would improve the quality of life for others who are less seriously deprived" (p. 199).

Beyond the 'Level Playing Field': Gendered Discourses in Sport

Girls and women in the field of sports and physical activity experience uniquely gendered challenges, constraints, assumptions and expectations. Despite the often-heard claims of sport as a 'level playing field' for everyone, it is important to situate this claim in its historical context where insofar as sport was indeed a 'level playing field', this was the case primarily for men, and only men of certain class (Arnold, 1984). Women have been involved in sports throughout history, but their presence has been limited and marginalized. Sport has been a domain of hegemonic masculinity, where women athletes face ridicule, harassment, hostility, objectification, and unequal access to resources, where female athletes' sexual orientation and even their biological sex may be brought into question.

Lenskyj (1990) suggests that since sport concerns "physical ability and body comportment, [it] provides an appropriate site for instruction in masculinity and femininity" (p. 240), particularly since social constructions of masculinity and femininity

are usually biologically based on the perceived characteristics of the male or female body. In the Western world, sport as a bodily performance remains one of the few remaining areas where men and women are still separated based on ostensibly 'natural' differences (Cooky, 2009; Lenskyj, 1990). This discourse of essentialized gender differences frequently serves as a justification for social and institutional inequalities and the maintenance of existing power balances. Clasen (2001) argues that dualism in Western thought not only constructs femininity and masculinity as opposite poles, but values one and devalues the other. Messner (1988) has described sport as the last bastion of masculinity, and if masculinity is valued over femininity, then the very idea of a female athlete is a paradox (Clasen, 2001), rendering the female athlete 'contested ideological terrain' (Messner, 1988).

Hegemonic notions of ideal femininity impose discipline on women's bodies by fostering conflicting ideas of female beauty and attractiveness. In the Western world, for example, societal pressure for a woman to be thin clashes with an athlete's need to be strong and healthy (Krane et al, 2004; Bissell & Birchall, 2008). Physical appearance is an important aspect of hegemonic femininity and part of the 'performance of gender'. In today's elite sports, where competition levels are higher than ever, it is essential for athletes to be powerful and strong and in peak physical fitness. In a study of 21 American female college athletes (Krane et al, 2004), the athletes repeatedly referred to the contradiction between the necessity for (and their pride in) strong muscles and the clash with popular notions of femininity, commenting on how they did not fit into 'normal' clothes or did not look 'good' in those clothes because of their muscles. Krane et al (2004) describe how these athletes tended to separate their 'athletic selves' and

‘feminine selves’ as if these were irreconcilable concepts. Gender performance of femininity is not always a ‘choice’ since there are “social retributions for not performing one’s gender ‘correctly’...[I]f the only women privileged are those who conform to ideal femininity, and a woman wants to garner social acceptance, then the only ‘choice’ seems to be conformity with the ideal” (Krane et al, 2004, p. 316).

In hegemonic conceptions of both masculinity and femininity, there is no room for any non-heterosexual identity. Hargreaves (2000) describes heterosexism as “an oppressive system of dominance based on the pivotal idea that heterosexuality is the only ‘natural’ and valid sexual orientation and that homosexuality, in contrast, is ‘abnormal’, ‘unnatural’, ‘deviant’ and ‘sinful’” (p. 134). Brackenridge, Rivers, Gough and Llewellyn (2007) argue that “the impact of heterosexism and homophobia is so pervasive that anyone opting out of hegemonic gender prescriptions attracts questions about their sexual orientation” (p. 131). Any woman who strays too far from the feminine ideal may have her sexual orientation or even her sex questioned and this is even more so the case for men. Eng (2008) describes how homophobia and homo-negativism manifests in two different ways in sports: one is harassment of gay and lesbian sportspeople; the other is harassment of heterosexuals who display characteristics or traits outside hegemonic gender ideals and thus may be labelled gay or lesbian.

Many sports are ‘typed’ as feminine or masculine, where ‘women’s sports’ often emphasize ‘feminine’ traits of beauty or grace (such as gymnastics or synchronized swimming) and ‘men’s sports’ often include and even encourage ‘masculine traits’ of aggressiveness and combative physical contact (such as rugby or ice hockey) (Koivula, 2001). While women have successfully entered even the most masculine of sports (e.g.

boxing, bodybuilding), men's participation in the 'feminine' sports (e.g. figure skating, netball) has lagged behind. Elling and Knoppers (2005) show that teasing related to gender and sexuality strongly influence boys' decisions to participate or continue participating in female-identified sports, working as a mechanism for self-exclusion from certain sports. They also present the interesting question of whether girls of an ethnic minority in a Western country would identify more with sports that represent white femininities (e.g. horseback riding or figure skating) or with more masculine sports (e.g. boxing, soccer) in which ethnic minority men are well represented.

The sense of ownership and belonging that boys are taught to feel in sport is strongly rooted in the definition of sport as masculine and therefore not feminine. Thus girls and women remain outsiders and intruders. Even at a young age on the playground, the language and actions of young boys are often designed to symbolically exclude both girls and non-sporty boys (Clark & Paechter, 2007; Elling & Knoppers, 2005). Because in most Western countries it is commonly perceived that ample opportunity is provided for girls to play sports, girls' relative lack of participation is often attributed to a 'lack of interest'. Cooky (2009) argues that sexist and racist ideologies continue to limit girls' full participation and that it is not enough to include women in sport; critical attention must be directed at *how* women are included in the structures of sport.

Despite the conflicted terrain of women in sport, sport has always represented a transgressive potential for women to contest notions of women's weakness and 'fragility' (Adelman & Ruggi, 2008; Roth & Basow, 2004). Sports may allow girls "the opportunity to develop an identity unrelated to sexuality and experience their physicality in a nonsexual way, allowing them more control and autonomy over their bodies" (Brady,

1998, p. 80). Female athletes have claimed feelings of empowerment, independence, reduced feelings of vulnerability, increased confidence, and leadership from participation in sports (Krane et al, 2004; Roth & Basow, 2004; Hargreaves, 2000). In more traditional cultures, participation in sports allows girls to build social networks, claim public spaces and begin to change gender norms (Brady, 2005). Despite sport's role in developing self-esteem in participants, however, the benefits for a woman might be limited according to the depth of her concern over the non-traditionality of her behaviour and the negative reactions of others (Richman & Shaffer, 2000). Despite progress made, women's participation in sports continues to test the limits of acceptable femininity.

The majority of the studies referenced were conducted in North America, Europe or Australia. Studies of the experiences of women and sport in the developing world, particularly Africa, have been limited, with a few exceptions (Pelak, 2005; Hargreaves, 1997). This gap in the literature is significant as the cultural, historical, racial, socioeconomic and gendered contexts of developing countries often vary considerably from the experiences of Western countries. Women and girls in developing countries face unique challenges, expectations and transformative opportunities in sport, and these differences (and similarities) need to be explored to gain a more inclusive and holistic understanding of the experiences of women and girls in sport.

This literature review provides an important background contextualization for the forthcoming analysis and discussion and demonstrates how my research will help address some of the gaps in the literature. The next section will lay out the details of the research process and the methods used, provide information on participants and the organization I worked with and outline a few of the limitations of this study.

Chapter Four: Research Methods

In this chapter I first describe the background and everyday running of the organization I worked with in Katutura. I then set out the general personal and socio-economic characteristics of my research participants and lay out my positionality as a researcher and a foreigner within the PAY context. Next, I outline the research methods I used, the data collection process and my approach to analysis of my findings. Last, I explain some of the limitations of this study.

The Physically Active Youth Program

Research for this thesis was carried out in conjunction with the Physically Active Youth Program (PAY) which operates in Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia. PAY is a registered Namibian NGO which partners with Commonwealth Games Canada, UK Sport, and the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sport. It also is a part of the Kicking AIDS Out network. PAY was begun in 2003 by Dr. Donovan Zealand from the University of Namibia in response to the low pass rates on the national examinations in the low-income community of Katutura in Windhoek. It began with 35 tenth grade students identified by their teachers as being at risk of failing the national grade ten exams. With an approach combining academic tutoring and sports programming, PAY participants achieved a 92% pass rate in 2003. While originally the students may have been specifically identified as those most at risk of failing, today word-of-mouth has swelled PAY's attendance with a diversity of students eager to avail themselves of the extra academic assistance or attracted by the promise of sports and games and a daily snack. Today the program has a regular attendance of 80-100 students from Grades 7-12 with a roughly equal split

between girls and boys. PAY continues to achieve a consistently high pass rate for its Grade 10 participants every year.

PAY is a community-based after-school program for youth from low-income areas of Windhoek. According to PAY's profile, the program's objectives include improving academic performance, developing sports skills, providing a safe and comfortable atmosphere to develop as a person, encouraging a healthy and physically active lifestyle, developing leadership and life skills, creating an environment of gender equality and positive interaction between males and females, increasing HIV/AIDS knowledge and awareness, and decreasing the involvement of youth in criminal activities through a holistic approach which incorporates academic assistance, sport and physical activity and life skills training. In reference to HIV/AIDS prevention, PAY seeks to address some of the underlying factors that increase the risk of HIV and AIDS such as poverty, poor education, low self-esteem and unequal gender dynamics in the hopes that PAY youth will attain the skills, information and self-confidence necessary to reduce one's personal risk of contracting HIV and AIDS. Sports became the foundation of the program for its ability to attract participants to the program, increase physical activity, develop self-confidence and leadership skills and to act as a platform to discuss HIV and AIDS and other health related topics (unpublished PAY document).

Every day after school, participants receive academic tutoring from volunteers from the University of Namibia and the Polytechnic of Namibia and participate in sports and games. One day of the week is reserved for life skills activities including Kicking AIDS Out games, guest speakers, field trips, and often incorporating elements of art, music, dance and drama. Participants also take part in community service such as

community cleanups or volunteering at orphanages and have the opportunity to attend several annual camps hosted by the program.

PAY has two full-time staff members, the program coordinator and the life skills coordinator, as well as four part-time staff members (all former PAY participants) who administer the day-to-day program activities. At the time of my research, all staff members were male and Namibian (with the exception of the life skills coordinator who is Zambian). The four part-time staff were all former PAY participants; two of them were engaged in post-secondary studies. Many of the volunteers with the program were also former PAY participants, and most were students at either the University of Namibia or the Polytechnic of Namibia. While there is no formal training for volunteers (perhaps because they are so often former participants), staff members, regular volunteers and student peer leaders have the opportunity to attend occasional training workshops and seminars aimed at building capacity and leadership skills and HIV/AIDS knowledge. Every year between June and August, PAY hosts two Sport Development students from Liverpool John Moore's University through the IDEALS (International Development through Excellence and Leadership in Sport) program organized by UK Sport and two students from the Physical Education and Health Department at the University of Toronto through Commonwealth Games Canada. This allows for a mutual exchange of skills, culture, and ideas; while the UK and Canadian students learn about sport-for-development outcomes, PAY staff and volunteers have the chance to expand their sport development and coaching skills. At the time of my research, all four interns were female. They assisted in tutoring, but their primary responsibility during their 8-week placement was to organize and run the sport sessions in collaboration with PAY staff and

volunteers, incorporating a variety of sports, games, and Kicking AIDS Out activities. They also organized a 'mini-Olympics' sports day which included participants from the Namibian Special Olympics organization and SCORE (Sports Coaches' Outreach).

Rather than conducting my research with a school or a sports team or a solely sport-based organization, I chose to conduct my research with PAY participants for a number of reasons. First, within the program they have regular involvement in a variety of sports and physical activity, which lends itself well to comparisons and analysis of themes which may emerge. Second, the program provided a safe and non-threatening environment within which to carry out the research. Third, sports at PAY are usually carried out in mixed-gender groups allowing for observation and analysis of gender relations carried out in sport. Fourth, participants come to PAY from a variety of schools and backgrounds, allowing for a wider sampling than a single school or sports team would have provided. Also, because most participants attend PAY primarily in order to improve their grades, this sampling includes girls with a wide range of sport experiences rather than being biased towards girls who are already passionate and skilled in sports.

The program takes place in the Katutura Multi-Purpose Youth Center and the recently opened PAY Resource Center; the sport programming uses the adjacent sports arena and field. Sport and physical activity are a central component of the program. The three core sports are basketball, soccer and cycling, but numerous other games and fitness activities including Kicking AIDS Out games are also included. Participants play together in mixed-age, mixed-gender groups regardless of ability as the emphasis is on participation rather than competition.

The use of competitive sports like basketball or soccer, however, may not seem entirely conducive to the central goals of participation, learning and fun. In Evans' study (2005) of girls' participation rates in UK Physical Education (PE) classes, it was evident that the competitive nature of the sports used were a factor in girls' reduced enjoyment of the classes. Students already suffering from low self-esteem or feelings of inadequacy often disliked team sports because of perceived pressure from their teammates to perform and not let the team down. Others preferred team sports due to the extra anonymity and support provided by a team. Comments supporting both sides of this argument were evident in my interviews. While at PAY there would not be the critically evaluative gaze of a teacher as there would be in a PE class, the internalized perception of the 'male' gaze as well as that of other females and of themselves would increase the pressure felt by girls to prove their physical competence and increasing the fear of inadequacy. Another factor in Evans' study which was also mentioned in my interviews and focus groups is the lack of choice of sports; at PAY sports and activities are generally planned by the staff member in charge. A few girls expressed the desire to try 'different sports' rather than the standard games usually played at PAY; one said, "we must also do girlish sports; we only do guys' sports". Others also suggested that they should play netball sometimes, indicating that while netball may still be a competitive sport, it is at least one where they would feel a greater sense of competency and confidence.

The use of competitive sports, especially when those sports are considered male-typed like soccer, can be problematic even if they also hold the potential for girls' empowerment by claiming public space for girls and in pushing the boundaries of gender norms. However, in my observations PAY staff members attempted to de-emphasize the

competitive nature of these sports by adjustments such as decreasing the size of the court/field, increasing the number of players to include as many people as possible, and adjusting rules to maximize participation (for example: no one can shoot the ball until everyone has touched it or until a certain number of passes have been made). The use of less competitive activities such as games, relays, fitness, and dance also helped to reduce the pressure of competition and allow enjoyment for all, especially for those less inclined towards sports. It is important to note that all of these activities were referred to collectively as ‘sport’ by everyone in the PAY organization and this is how I also refer to the sport and physical activity component at PAY. However, the interviews and focus groups largely referred to competitive team sports although individual sports such as cycling and tennis and fitness activities like walking and weight-lifting were also brought up.

Role of the Researcher

In early 2009, I heard about PAY from someone who had recently been working with a sport and development organization in southern Africa. Its holistic, sport-based, mixed-gender approach seemed to suit the direction of my research, and as yet very little research on sport and development has been conducted in Namibia. I contacted Marie-Jeanne Ndimbira who was managing PAY at that time. I explained my research proposal and offered to volunteer for PAY as well; she was welcoming of both propositions and through email helped me arrange the details for the trip. Upon arrival she and Patrick Sam, program coordinator, assisted me in settling into Namibia, gave suggestions for carrying out my research most effectively and incorporated me as a regular volunteer into the program. I assisted in all aspects of the program especially in the academic tutoring; I

often participated in sport sessions but was not responsible for organizing or managing these sessions. I also helped with special projects such as writing articles and funding proposals, setting up and organizing the PAY Resource Centre, as well as managing logistical and administrative duties.

In order to be as reflexive as possible, it was necessary to be aware of my various positionalities and roles while in Namibia and any influence or bias they might have upon my research. Dualities such as white Westerner/Namibian, researcher/researched, PAY volunteer/PAY participants all had to be considered and put in context. I made a particular effort to learn about and participate in local culture; I also learned enough Oshiwambo to be able to communicate at a basic conversational level which helped establish rapport.

My role as a volunteer with PAY as well as an independent researcher had to be approached carefully to minimize any potential power differential between myself and the participants. However, as my role was primarily to tutor and mentor students and to help out in any way necessary with the organization albeit without any formal authority, it actually aided in establishing rapport with participants. Participants became accustomed to my presence and were comfortable talking to and spending time with me and this translated noticeably into the degree of candidness and volubility displayed in their interviews. Being a woman also contributed to the degree of comfort participants demonstrated with me in the interviews and focus groups when speaking about gender differences or body issues.

During interviews I probed for both positive and negative attitudes and perceptions of sport. My background in sports as well as frequent observation and

participation in PAY sports activities allowed me to ask knowledgeable and relevant questions. As I frequently played basketball not only with PAY participants and staff, but outside of PAY with community members, I was able to gain an illuminating, firsthand perspective on the gendered dimension of sport in Namibia which contributed to my understanding and contextual analysis.

The Participants

This study includes twenty-three participants from the PAY program. I conducted three focus groups with fifteen participants altogether. Of these, seven participants were involved in both the focus groups and an interview. I conducted fifteen individual interviews. I did not gather any personal information from the eight girls who participated in the focus groups but not the interviews. Therefore, any participant background information given in this thesis includes only the fifteen interviewed girls. For supplementary data, I also interviewed four PAY staff members and four former PAY participants who are currently volunteers for PAY.

The primary participants in the study were girls between the ages of 15 and 19 in grades 8-12. Of the girls interviewed, eight self-identified as Owambo, Namibia's predominant ethnic group; the others identified as Damara, Angolan, Tsembe, Damara/Herero, and Owambo/Angolan. All spoke English, Namibia's official language, with sufficient fluency for the purposes of my research. Half of the interviewed girls came from single-parent/guardian households. It appears in several of these cases the other parent was employed in another part of the country. Average household size was six members with as many as thirteen and as few as three, including parents, siblings and often cousins.

Participants were asked to estimate their household's financial security by indicating whether there was 'never', 'sometimes', 'usually', or 'always' enough money. Ten responded as having 'never' or 'sometimes' enough money while five stated that their household 'usually' or 'always' had enough money. Of the less financially secure households, parental occupations ranged from self-employed (food-seller, seamstress, odd jobs) to domestic worker, soldier, game-keeper, or police officer. The better-off households included occupations such as customs officer, business, pastor, mine worker. Only six participants had a parent educated to grade 12 or beyond. Four of these households were among the five households identified as having 'usually' or 'always' enough money, reinforcing the importance of education and skills for employment in the Namibian context.

The girls' sports participation varied widely. Some participated only in PAY sports and games; others also played for school teams or events. Some indicated that they had been more involved in sport when they were younger while others said they had never played any sports until their participation in PAY. Everyone spoke positively about sport, and some were clearly passionate and skilled in sports. From my observations and through the tone of their comments, however, it was also evident that others participated primarily because it was a required part of the program and because they were aware of the benefits of sport even if they might not be overly enthusiastic or interested in sport otherwise. This provided an interesting mix of attitudes towards sport. The primary sports of interest/involvement were basketball and soccer, closely followed by athletics and netball. Cycling and volleyball were also mentioned.

Data Collection

Ethical Considerations

A university-based ethics committee approved this study. All participants were given an information letter which was also verbally explained to them prior to the focus groups and interviews. All participants signed consent forms. The voluntary nature of the study was emphasized including the option to withdraw at any time without penalty. Prior to each interview, I reminded each participant that they did not have to answer any question they were not comfortable with.

Recruitment

Prior to data collection, I spent six weeks building relationships and establishing familiarity and rapport with PAY students by attending the program every day. I helped tutor students in the academic portion of the program and participated in the sports sessions. As I met the students I would explain the purpose of my presence at PAY. After about six weeks, I held an informal information session for female PAY participants who fell within my target age group to explain the purpose and outline of my research. I recorded the names of everyone who expressed interest in participating and over the following three months conducted focus groups and interviews. My only criteria for inclusion was that the participant had to be female, 15 years old or older, and a PAY participant. Everyone who fit this criteria and wanted to participate was included. Parental consent was not required; participants' own informed consent was considered sufficient due to the less sensitive nature of the research. The minimum age for participants was 15 to ensure that maturity, literacy, and language skills were at a sufficient level to understand the research, make an informed decision to participate, and

engage with the research. Participants were exclusively female as the focus of my research is specifically upon the perspectives and challenges of female involvement in sport and physical activity. Due to sometimes erratic and unreliable attendance by some girls, however, I was not able to interview all of the girls who had initially indicated interest. In the end, fifteen girls participated in the focus groups; of these I was able to interview seven. I also interviewed an additional eight girls who had not been a part of the focus groups.

The Collection Process

I conducted *focus groups* with fifteen girls prior to the individual interviews. The focus groups allowed for the introduction of themes and issues and provided a safe and supportive structure to encourage group discussions for participants who may have been initially intimidated by the research process. The focus groups explored four main themes of sport: experiences and motivations, challenges, gender perceptions, and the perceived importance and impact of sports. Most of the participants appeared to enjoy the focus groups, answering thoughtfully and openly. Others were shy and less responsive. Everyone was eager to hear the recorded focus groups after they were completed.

Individual semi-structured *interviews* were held with fifteen girls at the PAY Resource Centre, lasting on average 30 minutes. The interviews explored in greater depth the themes introduced in the focus groups and allowed participants to speak in more detail about their personal experiences and thoughts regarding sport. Like the focus groups, interviews were digitally recorded.

According to Creswell (2009), a key element of ethnography is to “observe participants’ behaviours by engaging in their activities” (p. 16). *Participant observation* of PAY’s sports program was carried out on a weekly, sometimes daily basis during the first three months to maintain my familiarity with the participants and to deepen my understanding of the issues, particularly within the context of PAY’s mixed-gender sports program. This allowed me to verify and authenticate information given during interviews and provided insights into the lived experiences of girls in sport. The ethnographic approach is particularly appropriate because it is “flexible and typically evolves contextually in response to the lived realities encountered in the field setting” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). *Field notes* were recorded after interviews and focus groups and some sports sessions, including observations, reflections and emergent issues and themes.

Data Analysis

Interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim. I read through the transcripts numerous times, and responses were categorized and grouped according to the themes that emerged. Notable responses were highlighted and used to illustrate more general points. Important themes were drawn out and analyzed within a contextualized framework in order to situate the research economically, culturally and historically.

Discourse analysis was an important part of my study. Hall (1988) describes discourse as:

“daily conversation and the ordinary things people talk about. Our social reality is in many ways our discourse. But discourse...can also mean the way in which a particular topic or subject area is approached, the assumptions surrounding its investigation, the ways in which new knowledge is generated, and how this knowledge fits with the zeitgeist of a specific discipline or field” (p. 330).

My research examines the way particular themes emerged from girls’ conversations about sport and how these discussions, these ordinary discourses, represent the social

reality of girls in Namibia. As everyday conversations and personal interactions do not take place within a vacuum, I seek to analyze how girls' conversations reflect and engage with broader social discourses present in the Namibian context. In exploring these discourses I highlight how themes of gender and culture are approached within the context of sport and attempt to draw out the underlying assumptions embedded within ordinary conversations. These insights may then be used to illuminate points of ambiguity, contradiction, resistance, and reinforcement between dominant cultural discourses and individual discourses and illustrate ways in which agency is expressed and utilized within these spaces.

Trustworthiness

Data triangulation was used to ensure the trustworthiness of the gathered data by collecting information from different sources such as books and journal articles as well as primary data from interviews, focus groups and participant observation. While the focus of the research was on girls aged 15-19, I also interviewed two other groups: four PAY staff members and four former female PAY participants. Their insights provided an important contextual layering to the current experiences of the girls, and offered the more mature perspective of adults who have had time to reflect upon their own experiences and observe possible impacts and influences of sport. As well, my observation of the girls' sports activities allowed me to question, probe, interpret and confirm emerging themes during interviews and focus groups. Finally, my six months of living and working in Windhoek allowed me to experience the socio-economic, political and cultural fabric of Namibian life. I would frequently discuss questions and observations with my Namibian friends and coworkers, who helped clarify important points of background.

Limitations

It is important to recognize the limits of this study. The respondents were mostly of the Owambo ethnic group from the low-income urban community of Katutura within the capital city of Windhoek. Exploring how responses might differ in rural areas, across ethnic groups, race and/or socio-economic status would require further research. This study does not evaluate the efficacy of development-through-sport initiatives or provide any quantitative data on the impacts of sports on girls' lives. Instead it is an examination of how discourses of agency emerge in girls' conversations and reflections on sport within a particular cultural and socio-economic context and how girls interact with dominant discourses of gender and heteronormativity. There is also a possibility that some participants may have responded according to what they believed they were expected to say or were perhaps influenced by their desire to portray the PAY organization in a positive light or to provide the answers they thought I wanted.

Namibia's economic and educational history, the nature of the Physically Active Youth program, and the socio-economic backgrounds of the participants help to contextualize the responses given in the focus groups and interviews. The next chapter will lay out the more specific context of Namibia's historical, economic and educational background as well as the rationale for situating this research in Namibia.

Chapter Five: The Namibian Context

This chapter outlines some of Namibia's historical background, with a specific look at Katutura, a post-apartheid township in Windhoek and the location of my research. The economic profile explains some of the uncertainties and inequalities facing Namibians today and with the section on Namibia's educational system, past and present, provides a background for my research participants' expectations and hopes for the future. Finally, I seek to demonstrate how the dominant discourses which are the subject of my research are uniquely present in Namibia's economic and political context, providing a rationale for Namibia as a location for this research.

Namibia: A Background

Namibia, formerly known as South West Africa, is one of the least densely populated countries in the world and home to the world's oldest desert, the Namib, as well as the Kalahari Desert. The majority of the population lives in central or northern Namibia. Despite its small population, Namibia holds a diversity of ethnic and cultural groups with the Owambo group making up close to half of the population; other ethnic groups include the Kavango groups, Herero, Damara, Nama, Caprivians, San, and Himba. About 6% of the population is white, the third highest percentage in Africa after South Africa and Botswana (CIA World Factbook). Another 6.5% is 'coloured', a designation that under apartheid was used to refer to persons of mixed race and is still widely in use in Namibia today.

Namibia was colonized by the Germans in the late 1800s after a brutal series of wars which resulted in devastating losses to the Africans. The Herero population was

nearly wiped out during this time and the Nama and Damara were also decimated. After Germany's defeat in World War I, Namibia (then known as South West Africa) was placed under a South African mandate by the League of Nations. From the 1940s onward, Namibia was closely integrated into South Africa's economic and political structures, which ensured that the profits from Namibia's considerable mineral wealth accrued to the white elite while the black African population suffered from the oppressive and dehumanizing system of apartheid. United Nations pressure and an internal war for independence led by the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) in the 1980s finally resulted in the withdrawal of South African troops, the election of SWAPO's Sam Nujoma in 1989, and official independence in 1990.

Katutura: A Post-Apartheid Township in Windhoek

My research takes place within Katutura, a former apartheid township in the capital city of Windhoek. During the apartheid era, townships, also known as locations or 'lokasie', were urban living areas reserved for non-whites usually at the periphery of cities. In many cases black Africans, whether in Namibia or South Africa, were forcibly relocated to townships to separate them from 'white' areas. While post-apartheid townships in both Namibia and South Africa have diversified tremendously in terms of socio-economic status and culture, the racial characteristic of townships has not changed greatly. Many parts of Katutura no longer reflect the extreme poverty once associated with townships, but it is still unheard of for white Namibians to live, work or even visit in Katutura.

The name Katutura means "we do not have a permanent habitation" (Pendleton, 1996, p. 33), reflecting the frustration of black Namibians who were repeatedly forced to

move according to the whim of their white colonizers. In the 1950s, the government decided to move the city's black population from the 'Old Location' within the city farther out of town to make way for white residential areas. This move was strongly resisted by Old Location residents, culminating in a confrontation on December 10, 1959, when police shot and killed eleven people and injured forty-four. Ultimately, however, the move was completed by 1968, physically separating the black and coloured populations from the white and fulfilling the purpose of apartheid. The new township of Katutura was far enough out of town to make transportation to work expensive for its residents and rather than owning their own houses like in the Old Location, residents had to rent them from the government. The township was organized according to ethnic group, achieving not only racial but ethnic segregation (Pendleton, 1996).

Following the abolition of apartheid legislation in 1981 and independence in 1990, Pendleton (1996) notes a dramatic expansion to Katutura and increasing integration of former white areas, including the 'Old Location.' My observations nearly fifteen years after Pendleton's confirm this trend; while certain areas such as Klein Windhoek are still predominantly white, the former 'Old Location' (now Hochland Park) appears almost fully integrated with black, coloured and white residents, as a growing middle class moves out of Katutura. However, the reverse is far from true as Katutura remains exclusively the domain of black Namibians. In five months of working in Katutura, the only whites I observed there, aside from the occasional tourist, were a few North Americans or Europeans, either volunteering or employed with an NGO or UN organization. Few of these, if any, actually lived in Katutura. I myself lived first in

Klein Windhoek then in Hochland Park, which, combined with my work in Katutura, allowed for some interesting comparisons of these very different neighbourhoods.

During apartheid, Katutura was strictly organized according to ethnic group with the Owambos, Damara, Herero, Nama, etc. all living in their own parts of the township and attending their own schools. New migrants were assigned housing based on ethnicity. Upon the abolishment of apartheid, migration to Windhoek increased dramatically, particularly from the Owambo group; most sought employment but many also sought better educational opportunities for their children (Pendleton, 1996). With the expansion and diversification of Katutura after independence and the increase of migration to Windhoek, greater mixing of ethnic groups occurred although Old Katutura still remains laid out according to ethnic lines. Pendleton (1996) cites a pre-independence study which evaluated relations between ethnic groups in Namibia through the examinations of ethnic stereotypes. This study reveals that the least favourable stereotypes were of the Afrikaner and Damara groups; the most favourable were of the Herero and English, with the Nama, Owambo and coloured groups falling in between. In my own observations, despite definite ethnicity-based stereotypes and a tendency to form friendships within one's own ethnic group (due at least in part to schools and neighbourhoods which are still largely defined by ethnicity), relations between ethnic groups appear largely tolerant and even cordial.

While Katutura may still be synonymous with race, its economic profile has diversified dramatically since independence. Prior to independence, the socio-economic status of Katutura residents was uniformly low. Those who benefited from post-independence educational and economic opportunities formed a new elite, many of whom

moved out of Katutura to better residential areas. Others remained in Katutura.

Differentiation of residence, household type and economic status within Katutura has resulted in increasing stratification. The informal market has also expanded from virtual non-existence during apartheid to an important source of income for many Katutura households, as the same opportunities and freedom that have benefited some have in turn marginalized others who are unable to compete in the formal sector (Pendleton, 1996).

A Story of Stratification: Namibia's Post-Independence Economy

Namibia won its independence from South Africa in 1990, but inherited a society of deep social inequality and economic dependence on its former colonial masters. Under German colonialism and the South African mandate Namibia's economy was designed to facilitate migrant labour for the white-dominated mining, commercial farming and manufacturing sectors and to maintain ethnic and racial divisions (Mwilima, 2004). Namibia has a limited agricultural sector and a small internal market; it depends almost entirely on imports, and its exports tend to be low value-added goods. Namibia needs a 4% growth rate just to maintain current levels of employment, so must expand its manufacturing sector, but its current industries are largely constructed as enclaves with few linkages within the country (Klerck, 2008). After independence, the new government was faced with the potentially contradictory needs of alleviating severe social inequalities and attracting foreign investment; like most developing nations, Namibia's large pool of unemployed labour, low wages, and less restrictive labour laws would be the biggest attractors for foreign investors. The result was a somewhat contradictory policy aimed at building up industrial capacity to open the economy to the world market while also attempting to improve labour relations and conditions.

With little regulation or unionization it is easier for management to cut costs by paying low wages or laying off workers. Hierarchical and racial divisions of labour left over from colonialism and apartheid make participatory, more equitable arrangements difficult. As business techniques and equipment are upgraded and core, skilled workers fight for better benefits, employers cut costs primarily in the less powerful, unskilled sector. This sector becomes increasingly marginalized as the modernization process requires more skills and education, resulting in a widening gap between skilled, unionized labour and unskilled, unorganized or informal labour (Klerck, 2008). Klerck (2008) shows that 45% of national household income comes from wage labour in the formal sector; the informal and rural sectors make up most of the remaining 55%, including unskilled labourers, domestic workers, communal farmers, farm labourers and small-scale business activities such as selling food on the street, guarding cars in public parking lots or hairdressing. As 60% of households do not have a secondary source of income, this reliance on wage labour and the lack of a viable subsistence economy or welfare system together demonstrate the high socio-economic price of unemployment. In 2004, Namibia had an unemployment rate of 36.7% with nearly half (43.5%) of all economically active females without work and thus dependent on someone else (Klerck, 2008). Namibia's degree of inequality between rich and poor remains one of the highest in the world; the wealthiest one fifth of the population account for 78.7% of national income while the poorest one fifth live on a mere 1.4% (Jauch et al, 2009).

Women face discrimination and other challenges in the Namibian labour market. Colonialism entrenched patriarchal forms of oppression for women. The migrant system of labour left women with the burden of care and responsibility for subsistence and

household maintenance. Of Namibia's economically inactive population, 43% are classified as 'homemakers' and 70% of this figure are women (Jauch et al, 2009). Women continue to be primary caregivers in a country with the fifth highest rate of HIV/AIDS prevalence in the world (UNAIDS). As 40% of all households are female-headed, it is significant that female-headed households earn an average of N\$7, 528 (\$995 USD) compared to the N\$12, 248 (\$1, 618 USD) earned by male-headed households (Jauch et al, 2009). This illustrates the extreme gender disparity in the labour market. Women tend to be employed in the casual and informal sector in areas such as domestic work and are vulnerable to long hours, low wages, no benefits, dangerous working conditions and abuse. Occupations that employ predominantly women such as retail and domestic work are also far less likely to be unionized than male-dominated work such as mining and manufacturing (Klerck, 2008). Clearly, broad structural, economic, political and cultural changes will be required for this situation to improve.

Race, Resources and Examinations: Namibia's Education Systems

Racial and socio-economic inequality extends to Namibia's educational system. During apartheid, primary schools were provided for each ethnic group, effectively limiting children to interaction with only others in their ethnic group. Languages such as Oshiwambo, Otjiherero, and Damara>Nama were used for instruction with Afrikaans being used after the fifth year. The dropout rate among black and coloured students was extremely high compared to white students. Only 25% of black students stayed in school until eighth grade. In 1968, in the capital city of Windhoek, 13% of black students (only 2% from Windhoek itself), 14% of coloureds and 62% of whites continued from primary to high school demonstrating a dramatic racial disparity in education opportunities and

outcomes (Pendleton, 1996). In 1986, the government spent nearly ten times the money on each white student as on a black student in 'Owamboland' of Namibia's northern region. In addition, at that time only 2% of teachers in the north were fully qualified compared to 92% of teachers in white schools (Jauch, 1999). The 'bantu' education system of the apartheid era and the lack of occupational training effectively trapped most black Namibians in the insecure, unskilled sector of the labour market. In contrast, the majority of Namibian whites have post-secondary qualifications and constitute the majority of those who have attained higher education (Klerck, 2008).

Prior to independence, educational systems for blacks in Namibia were designed to serve others, from the missionaries who sought to 'civilize' the 'savages', to the German colonists who wanted a subservient labour force, to the South African occupiers who used the Bantu Education System to institutionalize segregation and repress resistance (Meyer, 2002). A far cry from hooks' (1989) declaration that education should be 'the practice of freedom', pre-independence education in Namibia only strengthened authoritarian structures and kept civil society weak through hierarchical power relations, rote learning and lack of applicability of learning material (Gonzales, 2000).

After independence in 1990, the government instituted a national system of universal, compulsory education up to the tenth grade. New schools were built and former white schools were opened to black students. The Bantu Education System was abolished and English replaced Afrikaans, seen by many as the language of the oppressors, as the language of instruction (although Afrikaans remains the *lingua franca* in Namibia today) (Pendleton, 1996). The government made a concerted effort to radically change both curriculum and pedagogical approach to facilitate 'learner-centrism', democracy, and the

development of critical consciousness and to engage students with relevant and applicable material (Gonzales, 2000). Despite these and other steps taken to address continuing inequalities, significant gaps between rural and urban schools and between former white schools and former township schools are evident in the annual examination results, in part due to a continuing lack of human and physical resources in former township schools. Compulsory, national examinations determine whether tenth grade students may advance to the next grade and have a very high fail rate, particularly in rural and former township schools. It is this alarming fail rate, as high as 50% in Katutura, that precipitated the founding of the organization I worked with, Physically Active Youth (PAY).

Discourses of Gender, Homophobia and Hope for the Future in Namibia

With its unique history and recent independence, its relative stability and hopeful future, Namibia is an interesting case study for development as well as SDP. Discourses of gender and political homophobia and today's economic uncertainties have a strong presence in Namibia, rendering it a particularly useful case study for my research.

In August 2008, the *Protocol for Gender and Development* was signed by Namibia and the countries of the South African Development Community (SADC) with the goal of 50/50 male/female representation in member parliaments by 2015 (Magadza, 2008). It is a victory for lobbying by women's organizations in southern Africa and indicative of the discursive prominence of gender issues in present-day Namibia.

Women used the independence struggle to advocate for women's rights, situating their argument within a liberal feminist, modernist discourse which framed sexist oppression as the result of 'outdated' and 'traditional' values; in post-colonial Namibia, gender

equality has remained a prominent part of human rights and democracy discourses (Becker, 2006). However, high unemployment, severe inequalities, and an uncertain global economy has in some cases resulted in reactionary discourses and an intensification of gender oppression. Becker (2006) suggests that, particularly in the Owambo areas, a strengthening of male domination in traditional authority may be a reaction to discourses of gender equality and to structural factors like high levels of male labour migrancy and economic pressures. Modernist discourses of gender equality intersect with economic pressures and uncertainties and reactionary discourses of traditionality, making Namibia an important site for the examination of how girls navigate shifting and conflicting gender discourses as seen through the lens of sport within a context of rapid globalization.

Political homophobia presents a different kind of gender discourse but one that has potential to impact strongly on the popular perception of gender roles. Explicitly homophobic rhetoric by former President Sam Nujoma and several top ministers has brought the discourse of heterosexism to the fore in Namibia and similar situations have arisen in other parts of southern Africa (Currier, 2010; Lorway, 2008). Frequently these kinds of discourses have been framed in relation to nationalism and Africanism, with homosexuality vilified not just as a 'deviant' sexual practice but as exclusively Western and a marker of neo-colonialist domination. Thus sexuality becomes explicitly linked to loyalty to the state, African identity and relations with the West. As sport has traditionally been an arena for both the construction and the challenging of heterosexist discourses, it becomes an important site for the investigation of how girls perceive and frame their sport participation in relation to dominant discourses of homophobia.

Following independence, the new majority government was forced to balance the need to address social inequalities and to attract foreign investment. Strong, global, neo-liberal discourses demand the reduction of the public sector and social spending (such as health and education), the opening of markets to the global economy, and decreased regulation. This economic dynamic has exacerbated Namibia's already high unemployment rate, low wages and low job security, inequality in educational resources and outcomes, and discrimination against women. Neo-liberal values emphasize individualism, competitiveness, and performance, all values present in the modern institution of sport. Implicitly, they de-emphasize the influence of structural and systemic inequalities such as sexism, racism, and neo-colonial domination, and attribute success to individual effort as if hard work and determination are the only requirements to succeed. Namibia allows for the exploration of how girls manoeuvre economic uncertainties and their own personal development and identity formation within a context of shifting processes of globalization, educational challenges, and sport participation.

The background provided in this chapter offers an important contextual framework within which to consider discourses and power relations addressed in my research and outlines the rationale for choosing Namibia as a research site. In the next chapter I will begin analysis of my research findings by exploring some of the gender discourses that arose during interviews and examine how girls' perceptions and opinions interacted with dominant gender and cultural discourses in Namibia.

Chapter Six: Culture and Gender Discourses

In this chapter, I examine how girls perceive and interact with, confirm or challenge gender discourses within a Namibian context. First I explore the ways girls describe perceived gender differences; these conversations illuminate the presence of hegemonic discourses and common perceptions of what it means to be a boy or a girl in Namibia. Next, I examine comments regarding girls' social roles and cultural expectations of their activities and behaviour; girls' expressed opinions and remarks reveal to varying degrees both acceptance of and disagreement with dominant discourses of women's 'place' in sport and society. Last, I investigate a discourse of age which emerged from the interviews, exploring what it means to be a 'grown-up girl' playing sport in Namibia and the structural and economic forces that reinforce this discourse.

Cultural expectations and attitudes regarding women vary across ethnicity, class, and age; thus it should be recalled that the majority of my observations concern the Owambo ethnic group which composes the majority of my research participants and is the predominant ethnic group in Namibia. The fact that my research takes place within the urban setting of Katutura in Windhoek would also influence findings compared to cultural norms and socio-economic conditions found in more rural areas.

'Boys Play Serious; Girls Play for Fun': Perceptions of Gender Difference

In Owambo culture, women are subject to men domestically and are expected to be 'shy' and 'quiet' and respect men in part by not talking a lot (Becker, 2006). How 'traditional' this attitude is, is debatable. Becker notes that "the notion of a highly patriarchal tradition, where domesticity became the defining characteristic of femininity, is prominent among the Christian cultural forms that Owambo today consider

indigenous” (p. 34). Thus, whatever role and voice women may have had in pre-colonial times, largely disappeared with the introduction of Christianity and the institution of patriarchal colonialism which combined to marginalize women. While gender equality discourses have become more widespread, economic uncertainty undermines the strides women have made. The erosion of the job market and the rise of gender equality discourses leads to tensions in gender relations (Becker, 2006). Socioeconomic change has led to a ‘masculinity crisis’: “Although men benefit from patriarchy and have formal authority, socioeconomic change has ensured that many lack employment and have insufficient income. This prevents them from fulfilling their expected roles and undermines their authority” (Mufune, 2009, p. 236). Girls must negotiate these shifting discourses to determine what it means to be a girl especially a girl who plays sport.

Girls’ perceptions of what it meant to be a girl or a boy in the context of sport revealed some clear themes. Boys were described as ‘rough’, ‘more motivated’, more intense and competitive, and ‘more aggressive’ than girls. Girls were described as ‘girly’, ‘not vicious’, thinking ‘safety first’ while boys would think ‘winning first’. According to Georgina, “Boys take risks, and girls are scared of taking risks.” Boys were framed as possessing more talent and being more interested in sports while “the high school girls and all that they just want to be in the beauty thing... and not participate in sports” (Rachel). Boys were thought to play sports to keep fit and build muscle, while girls’ motivations were described as playing sport to ‘lose weight [and] look good’ (Sylvia), marking the difference of motivation between the desire for health and better performance and societal pressure to fit standards of ‘passive, ornamental’ beauty. For boys sports was considered ‘normal’: “[boys] do [sports] every day, everywhere, but for

girls it's more rare and different" (Rachel). Boys were said to be 'confident' to do sport at any time unlike girls (Hatline). Anna summed up the prevailing discourse as "guys like balls, they are made for boys; and we are made for dolls."

These descriptions provide rather essentialized views of differences between boys and girls and appear to confirm and legitimize hegemonic discourses of femininity and masculinity. These perceived differences were stated as general truths even when girls' actions and personalities seemed to contradict their words. Former PAY participant Ndahafa stated that "girls think of themselves as soft people which is not wrong", but in my observations, she was a fierce competitor with a very assertive style of play which seemed to contradict her statement. Georgina said that, "Girls can be afraid to break a nail or break a hip; ... girls are scared of taking risks", but she herself played numerous sports and was planning to start the extremely physical sport of rugby which has a high rate of injury. Some of the girls may have been expressing cultural stereotypes of gender rather than opinions based on their own experiences. Elizabeth, for example, said that 'some girls think that soccer is just for boys', but made it clear that she did not share this opinion, declaring that when it came to style of play, there was no difference between boys and girls. Hatline expressed the opinion that differences in sport were individual rather than gender based:

"It is a game, same rules, same everything; it's just that the intensity that a person puts in to sports... or the way they look at it... but the game still stays the game. The way the person takes it is probably different."

Amelia's comment also indicates an opinion that differences are more constructed than 'real':

"Mentally we think it's different, [that] most of the sports it's just made for guys, but I don't think it's different. Even wrestling, we can do it; boxing, women can do it."

When asked if sport was different for girls and boys, eleven of the fifteen girls answered no, insisting ‘sport is the same.’

“I think it’s more or less the same nowadays; [for a] long time it was girls who were banned to do certain sports like soccer, basketball and other type of sports; but nowadays it’s becoming more or less equal.” (Focus Group)

These kind of responses illuminate a belief that sport itself is neutral:

“the same sports that guys are doing is the same sports that girls are doing...sport is for everyone” (Hilda).

However, when asked more specifically if attitudes or styles of play differed according to gender, nearly all of them could think of differences, indicating that while they believed that sport ‘should’ be the same regardless of gender, they were aware that it was not.

Most of the differences mentioned were essentialized descriptions of supposedly natural distinctions between genders with little reference made to unequal power relations within Namibian society. Their comments presented dominant constructions of femininity and masculinity as the norm and implicitly framed whatever ‘un-feminine’ traits or behaviour they displayed (such as aggressiveness or participation in a male-typed sport like rugby) as transgressive. However, these distinctions were not necessarily considered immutable; Georgina described how she had taken on ‘masculine’ traits when she became involved in sports:

“I [used to be] much more girlier... I’ve changed the way I am; I am much more than average girl, not too girly; but because the different sports I do they are men’s sports...on the court you have to act like a man, you have to play like a man; and that has kind of reflected on my girliness; I can kind of be a boyish/girlish kind of person.”

In this statement, Georgina is clearly stating her ability to form her own gender identity.

‘I’ve changed the way I am’ is a powerful declaration of agency, implying a deliberate decision to become ‘not too girly’ although she does not specify what it means to be ‘girly’ or ‘boyish’. While the traits she refers to are still identified with gender which

reinforces the normalization of dominant masculinity and femininity discourses, she is also insisting that these gendered categories are flexible and can be adopted or modified to create a combination identity, a 'boyish/girlish kind of person'. As Azzarito and Katzew (2010) discussed, Georgina is negotiating dominant discourses of gender and culture (among others) in order to shape a fluid and shifting gender identity.

When talking about differences in style of play between boys and girls, the general consensus seemed to be that "boys play serious; girls play for fun." One participant of the focus groups said that boys might go so far as to bet on games or pool funds which would be collected by the winner.¹ Former PAY participant Iris described the difference in terms of competitiveness and participation:

"Men like more physical games and more competitive games while us ladies just love participatory games... Boys will beat themselves up because they didn't win a match... The girls will go, 'oh, we lost but life goes on,' or go like 'oh, at least we got ice cream' or ...but the guys are always like 'no, I can't believe I lost the game....' And they'll all be angry and all...upset about it."

According to her, boys would take a loss in sports personally while girls would value the chance to participate more than winning itself. Amelia also noted that "For [boys], sports is more than just a game; they relate it to their lives." These comments suggest that sport is far more central in the formation of boys' identities in Namibia than it is for girls, explaining the greater perceived intensity with which boys involve themselves in sport. The remarks show an awareness that boys/men perceive sport to be their domain and a marker of masculinity in Namibian society. However, Iris' comment also demonstrates the construction of an alternate discourse which frames women's participation in sport as emphasizing participation and enjoyment with sport just one aspect of a holistic lifestyle

¹ I did observe this on one occasion while playing basketball outside of PAY with friends and community members.

rather than the primary source of one's identity. Iris makes this point through a comparison with the way men are perceived to play. While this discourse may still fit within dominant conceptions of femininity (participatory/social) and masculinity (competitive/individualistic), it also suggests an alternative discourse to the apparent 'inferiority' of women's sports when compared to men's sports and resonates with Lenskyj's (1990) assertion that women should reject the male-centered perspective of sport and adopt a more holistic and positive approach to sport.

It was a common perception that boys were 'obviously' more skilled in sports especially soccer. Boys would know 'different moves and styles' and 'tricks' while girls "might just run and chase the ball and not know any different" (Caroline).

"[Boys] know they can play and they'll be tricking the girls, trying to win and all that. They know better than the girls maybe if it's like soccer or basketball. And obviously the guy will just... try to defeat the girls." (Rachel)

"Sometimes when [girls] play or when they even cycle you see by the way they hold their bikes, it's such a funny way ... it looks like they will fall off any time... but boys, they know everything I guess." (Judith)

Rachel said that even if both boys and girls were well-skilled, there would be a difference in how they played:

"Girls will be screaming and they don't want to be hurt; but guys... they'll be playing rough and then they'll know how to take over the ball and play tricks and all that."

While most of the girls stated assumptions of boys' superior skills, Judith also spoke about boys' perceptions of girls' skills, her tone indicating some resentment of girls' assumed inferiority in sport:

"A boy would think: this girl won't kick this ball that far, but then when she does he's surprised; it shows an attitude of he thinks... she's a girl so she doesn't know how to do that."

Girls' supposed ignorance and lack of skill in sport was expressed in comparisons to the way boys played, with the girls' game usually framed as inferior. In Harris' (2009) study of female soccer players in the UK, he also notes how the players describe their game as inferior to the men's. Whether in the UK or in Namibia, it appears that women's sports are still viewed, even by the participants, as merely a (lesser) version of the men's game rather than something that might be unique and of value in itself. This reinforces dominant discourses of sport as the natural domain of men, with men setting the standard of what the sport should be and women striving to attain that standard. However, men's 'natural' superiority in sports was not unquestioningly accepted by all of the participants. Judith asserted that girls could also be skilled in sport and should not be discouraged by prevailing views that girls could not play sport at the same level as boys:

“More girls should join sports, and we should keep our spirits up and not think that boys are the only ones that can do better than girls at sports; we can also do better than that.”

Elizabeth also demonstrated a desire to disprove the idea of men's 'natural' superiority, whether in sports or in other areas, saying she participates in sport because she wants “to show other women that not only men can do stuff but also women can.” Amelia described the first time she had witnessed other girls her age who were supremely talented and skilled soccer players:

“We had the first ever soccer tournament... here [at PAY]; it was for girls. It was the most amazing moment... because it was the first time that we played against so many other girls who play soccer and they were so good. They were like real professionals. I didn't know there were girls that played soccer so well.”

This kind of revelation is an example of what Kabeer (1999) referred to as a 'discursive alternative':

The passage from 'doxa' to discourse, a more critical consciousness, only becomes possible when competing ways of 'being and doing' become available as

material and cultural possibilities, so that 'common sense' propositions of culture begin to lose their 'naturalized' character (p. 441). Amelia's realization of how well girls, her own peers, could play a male-dominated sport like soccer was a new way for her to look at her cultural understandings of what it meant to be a Namibian girl playing sport so that it no longer seemed so 'natural' that boys were more skilled in sport. This emerging critical consciousness was also evident when she pinpointed community attitudes as a restrictive factor in girls' participation in sport; she was one of very few girls who referred to gender discourses beyond an individual level and showed an awareness of the underlying power relations in cultural conceptions of what was appropriate for girls.

Girls described themselves as being 'shy' or 'uncomfortable' to approach a group of boys playing a sport to ask to join, claiming that boys would tease them or refuse to let them play. During a focus group, two girls explained:

- Girl 1 Sometimes the boys chase away the girls... 'no, you can't come here, only guys here.'
- Girl 2 yeah, let me say [the guys] are playing... and I'm the girl and I come there and these guys will say 'oh you ugly thing... since when do you do sports?' and stuff like that, and then you feel so embarrassed...and then when you come asking why we aren't doing sports, we'll lie and say, 'oh I'm not feeling well,' just because of the boys.

Sometimes it appeared that just the idea of being the only girl playing with a group of boys would be enough to discourage most of them from even attempting. Several girls, however, when presented with this scenario insisted that they would be willing to approach a group of boys playing a sport and ask to join, even at the risk of teasing or rejection. A girl in a focus group said if it was a sport she knew she could play and was good at, then she would join "as long as you know you are there [to] play not for fun." Evans' (2005) study of girls in mixed-gender physical education classrooms in the UK

notes that girls' anxieties seemed largely based on a fear of not 'performing' to the standard required, of not being able to match the skills of the boys or more athletically talented girls rather than a fear of trespassing hegemonic conceptions of femininity by participating in sport. To a certain extent, this may hold true within the Namibian context as well, as it is evident that girls framed boys as having superior sporting skills, suggesting that they would be more willing to play with boys if they believed they could match the boys' skill level. In describing why she would prefer not to play most team sports with boys, Amelia stated:

“Only if I'm at their level I can play with guys... In cycling both guys and girls can do it; even girls can be much more better than guys, so in cycling I think that's where I belong.”

Her comment demonstrates a perception that if she played any other sport with boys she would be made out to be inferior in skill because of her gender, and therefore she was more comfortable cycling because she felt her gender was less likely to be a factor in how her performance was judged.

Boys' commonplace teasing of girls and girls' perceived lack of skill in comparison to boys were corroborated by Joseph, one of the PAY staff members:

Joseph: [Girls] tend to be more reserved, afraid to make mistakes...
V.F.: Why would they be afraid of making mistakes?
Joseph: I don't know, maybe it's because ...if they go up against guys; boys are more physically stronger and stuff so [girls] feel more inferior to this and because the guys will obviously laugh and stuff...

This comment reveals an ambivalent space between discourse and practice. Joseph and the other male PAY staff members and volunteers supported the participation of girls in sport by including them in all sport activities, as well as creating spaces for girls-only sport and attempting to maintain a sporting environment that was inclusive of all. Aside from the fact that sport was a required aspect of the program and therefore girls were

expected to participate as a matter of course, I also observed staff members taking the time outside of PAY of their own initiative to individually coach girls who wanted extra help or to teach girls to ride bicycles, a non-traditional activity for girls in Namibia.

When staff and volunteers played informal games of basketball after program hours, any lingering students would be included to make up the teams regardless of gender or skill.

However, while any of the staff members, volunteers or peer leaders would have insisted that girls could and should play sports, these modernist discourses of gender equality clash with the taken-for-granted assumption within Joseph's remark that it was natural for boys to tease girls playing sports. It seems that while girls' ability and right to play sports may be acknowledged and even encouraged, dominant discourses, evident through boys' teasing, still emphasize that girls who play sport are on male territory and do not truly belong there.

'Balls Are for Boys; We Are Made for Dolls': Girls' Social Roles and Expectations

Expectations of girls still place them more in the home than boys. Girls do a greater percentage of the household chores and usually have less liberty to leave the home, although this may be for very valid safety reasons. Several girls confirmed that household chores were a factor in their sport participation:

“The guys... have more liberty, they don't have all these things they need to do; they don't have all these chores... Guys are more prone to do sports than girls are.” (Hatline)

“[Boys] don't have those much chores as us. You see, sometimes our chores disturb us [from doing] sports; and sometimes when we come to sports we come lazy, [because we] just think about dishes.” (Caroline)

“Deducing from the general way that parents or guardians would treat their female children I think they would expect them to do things other than sports, for example helping around the house, babysitting and that sort of thing while boys are easily loitering around; ...you drive around Katutura, you will hardly find [girls] just hanging out and doing nothing...” (George, PAY staff member)

Joseph, a staff member similar in age and background to the research participants, confirmed George's observation:

“Guys usually go out at a young age; guys usually go out and play, and this is where the sports character builds. And ladies are usually at home cooking or cleaning so... they're not exposed to sports in general.”

His comment illustrates why it is not surprising that boys show more skill and passion for sports than girls, a perceived difference my research participants frequently mentioned.

Boys have both the time and the opportunity to play sports from a young age where girls do not. Former PAY participant Rosa supported this conclusion as well:

“Not many women are encouraged to participate in sports unlike men; [men] can play soccer any time they want, while women have our different roles in the community and... having to carry out this girly thing, cooking, cleaning, all those girly things.”

While the difference in household expectations for girls and boys was mentioned several times, no one openly questioned this 'natural' state of affairs or suggested ways this inequality might be addressed or at least mitigated to make sport participation for girls easier.

As girls' social spheres tend to be more constricted than boys', sports was often perceived as a way of spending time with friends and other girls. Judith and Amelia, the two girls who specifically made this point were 17 and 18 years old, both with several younger siblings. It seems reasonable to assume that both girls would have significant responsibilities in the home and would find their leisure time limited, making sports a particularly valued opportunity to spend time with their friends. Amelia indicated that she would be more likely to train regularly if she had girl friends who cycled as well:

“I don't have girl friends who cycle; ... all of them are just guys and whenever they go practicing they do it every day; I'll maybe go with them once in a while when they go for their races, but they do it every day... I can't spend all the time

with guys. If there were girls who are cycling, yeah I would love to cycle with them every day but not with guys.” (Amelia)

Her comment underscores the importance for girls to have female companionship and support in sport as well in life. One girl in a focus group pointed out simply, “If you’re...doing it alone, who will laugh with you?” The creation of social networks of friends is especially important for girls who tend to spend more of their time in the home than boys, whether due to household chores or for safety reasons. Participation in sports also allows for a broader network of support than just the friendship of peers. George illustrated this point:

“We [PAY participants and I] sort of developed or cultivated a relationship where we can talk almost as friends and joke around and that sort of thing and because of that we can be more open towards each other and understanding. So if for some reason they either don’t want to come to PAY or someone is bothering them, it opens up channels of communication... So yeah, they can approach me.” Through the medium of sports, his position as a trusted adult provided the girls with an extended network of support and communication outside of their families. The importance of coaches as confidantes, counsellors and role models to young people has been noted by several studies (Akhbari, 2009; Meier, 2005). Where girls are often limited to their roles within the home and have less recourse to external resources, sports offers an important arena for establishing an emotionally supportive relationship with trusted adults. This position is of course also open to abuse and would require careful monitoring and training of coaches and volunteers who occupy this position of trust and relative power among young people.

The difference in the social roles of boys and girls was described by George who explained:

“If you’re a guy...chances are you play basketball or soccer or you’re a *kwaito* [hip-hop/rap] artist. If you’re a girl you’re a netball player, which is not played by guys at all, so you’ll either do girls’ sports or you’ll be a model or just a brainiac

that just sits down and watches other people participate. That would be the status quo.”

There would, of course, often be considerable overlap in these roles, but the general categories resonate with my own observations where girls seemed to emphasize either their studiousness and the role of background observer, or their looks and the personality to interact socially especially with boys. Yet, while girls’ roles seem limited and constrained by domestic responsibilities, it appears that boys’ roles are also limited with perhaps less flexibility to change. While girls have some space to take on new roles such as that of sportswoman and ‘masculine’ traits such as competitiveness and aggressiveness, it is still far less acceptable for a man to take on more traditionally female roles.

When asked if their parents/guardians considered their participation in sport as important, about a third of the interviewed girls said that yes, their parent(s) supported and encouraged their sport participation. A few comments seemed to suggest that parental support was at least partially dependent on sporting achievement:

“Sometimes the parents will be proud of you [because] at the end of the time you might be the fast runner and stuff and break the records and stuff.” (Focus Group)

“My mom thinks [sport is] very important. My father, however, sees it as a waste of time...unless I make it really far like the national team; that’s when he’s really supportive, but my parents do think it’s beneficial.” (Georgina)

“Maybe you are like just playing sports right now; [sport can] take you to a high position, travel to other countries and stuff, getting to know different places, and then [my mother will] think that ‘oh my child can do it,’ stuff like that, ‘it’s necessary for her to do sport.’” (Eva)

These kind of remarks suggest that there is an attitude (possibly cultural but also possibly due to economic imperatives) that sport is not very important unless it holds the potential of economic gain or status. Most of the other girls either did not know what their parent(s) thought of their sport participation or assumed that as their parent(s) had not

said or done anything to prevent them from participating, they did not mind: “if [my mother] didn’t want [me to participate] she would have already said something” (Anna). During the focus groups one girl said her mother would want her to spend more time on schoolwork rather than sports. Another said that her parents would support her if it was a school sport; however, “my dad he will support you, but when it comes to traveling, going outside the country, he won’t allow that.” Diana said her mother did not want her to play netball; she did not know why. Sylvia said her father did not want her to play due to her heart condition, but insisted that her health was the only reason for his opposition as every other member of her family was involved in sports. Ndahafa, one of the former PAY participants whom I interviewed, noted that although she [Ndahafa] displayed a passion and talent for sports, her mother was more likely to encourage her brother to play sports:

“When my little brother watches soccer my mom would always say, like at school maybe he could like join up for soccer team and become a soccer player but for me I’ve never heard her say I can turn up [join] a soccer team.”

Her comments reflected her awareness of the unfairness that sport was considered a legitimate activity for boys but not necessarily for her despite her love and aptitude for sport. Amelia pointed out that at school coaches tended to put more time and effort into the boys’ teams, give them more attention and organize more games for them than they did for the girls. Iris, another former PAY participant, described the teasing she had received from her brother when playing soccer:

“When I started playing soccer my little brother used to tease me...He would teach me how to stop the ball and stuff like that and he would laugh at me. So if... I didn’t love sports so much probably I would have stopped playing it because sometimes it wasn’t good because he was always teasing me. Like ‘ha you even have a soccer ball that you can’t kick’ and stuff but yeah, I didn’t let that get me down because after all it’s my soccer ball and if he wanted to play with my

soccer ball, he'd have to teach me how to play soccer first because nobody uses it other than me." (Iris)

These findings suggest that there is, if not overt support of girls playing sports, at least a certain level of acceptance most often displayed as lack of opposition. That conclusion, however, cannot be assumed to be representative, as any girls whose parents were strongly opposed to their sport participation would be unlikely to join PAY. It is interesting to note that seven of the participants stated positively that their mothers had been involved in sports in the past, usually netball. Would this history predispose those women to be more supportive or at least accepting of their daughters' sport participation? Would the mothers' previous participation in sport have influenced their daughters to play in the first place? Caroline says about her mother's support:

"She likes sports so she also wants us to follow her footsteps; she also told us once she ran for the...marathon; ...she came first. She also...wants us to train for sports."

The possible relationship between girls playing sports whose mothers once played sports and the impact of a related female role model warrants further research. In any case, parents' perceived attitudes of indifference, acceptance or support of girls playing sports must be contextualized by the girls' age. As will be discussed in the next section, sports is generally considered more suitable for children and youth and it is possible that parental attitudes would change as the girls grew older.

Only a few girls mentioned broader community attitudes as a possible impediment to girls' participation in sports. It is not surprising, especially given their youth, that the participants would have given little thought to how the wide-ranging, overlapping processes of economics, politics, history and culture might specifically influence their individual experiences in sport. Similarly, little mention was made of structural issues such as safety, transportation, access, availability of sports leagues

outside of school, and the differences of opportunity between economic and racial classes in Namibia. With the present-day emphasis on discourses of non-discrimination whether based on gender or race, continuing systemic inequalities may go overlooked.

Participants tended to speak only about their own experiences or what they perceived to be the general experience of girls from their background. However, there were a few girls who did demonstrate an awareness of how broader cultural and political processes impacted girls' experiences in sport. The general disregard for women's sport and the influence on girls and women was expressed by one participant:

“When girls do sports, people don't really take it seriously... They're like ‘ach, it's just girls doing sports.’ ...People wouldn't want to watch female soccer [because] mainly they think they're just playing around so that's different from the way they watch when guys play soccer.” (Sylvia)

When asked if she thought this situation could be changed, Sylvia replied:

“That policy of... gender equality or 50/50², stuff like that, it's just there but it's not being enforced so I don't think it will ever change. They just degrade women instead of upgrading them. It could be changed if... we women stand up and at least, how can I put it, be more confident and... showcase it more [because] when we women do a sport and people don't take it seriously, obviously you won't take it seriously yourself; you'll be like, ‘ach, nobody is taking me seriously, so why should I?’”

Sylvia displayed a critical awareness of how political processes could influence and shape popular perceptions of gender roles and relations, suggesting that if policies of gender equality were better enforced then attitudes towards women's sports might change. She expresses pessimism that the government would do its part; she places women in the role of agents for change, to advocate for more equality, but does not refer to the necessity of changing men's attitudes or actions as well. Her insightful comment at the end relates society's devaluing of women's sports to women's own attitudes and

² She is referring here to the *Protocol for Gender and Development* signed by Namibia and the countries of the South African Development Community (SADC) with the goal of 50/50 male/female representation in member parliaments by 2015.

suggests a ‘vicious cycle’ at work: society does not take women’s sports seriously, therefore women do not take it seriously themselves and thus do not ‘stand up’ to demand notice, and so society continues to disregard women’s sport. Amelia also spoke about discouragement from the community as a challenge that girls faced when playing sport:

“It’s the discrimination from people... If a girl in my community starts playing rugby... the people will be like, ‘you will never make it; when you are out of that field your legs will be broken or your ribs will be broken; you will never make it.’ So I think it’s the discrimination that we get from outside and from our relatives, the people who are around us.” (Amelia)

Her comment shows an awareness that the individual challenges girls face in playing sport can be connected to wider processes of cultural discourses. She relates cultural attitudes at a societal level to girls’ decisions to play sport (and what type of sport) at an individual level.

‘Can’t You See You Are a Grown-up Now?’: Discourses of Gender and Age

Through the interviews and focus groups a common perception emerged of sport as a realm for children or youth and not for ‘old girls’. This discourse was evident only indirectly. When asked directly if sport was appropriate for older girls and women, all participants insisted that sport was for everybody, not just the young. When asked if they would continue to play sports as they grew older, all participants responded that yes they would, some emphatically so, and one can hope that this will indeed be the case.

However, a number of comments in different contexts suggest that there are indeed cultural, structural, and economic barriers to the continued sport participation of girls and women after graduation from secondary school.

Age as a barrier to playing sport was usually presented in terms of the bodily changes during the physical transition from a girl into a woman. Caroline explained:

“Sometimes... when the girl sees that she’s big [old], she’s on the period cycle, she’s having boobs, she’s having... physical changes, [she will] start saying ‘no, I’m big; I’m not going to do sports.’ That’s what some people say.”

This internalization of sport as being for children and youth and not grown women is culturally reinforced by the community and by peers, both male and female. Girls frequently alluded to age, being ‘old’ or ‘big’, as a cause for teasing.

“Sometimes some people say ‘no, look, this old girl is playing soccer,’ those teasing things; [it’s] hard to play, because sometimes you are the only old girl.”
(Hilda)

When asked for their opinions on why many girls don’t play sports, girls brought up age as a factor along with the idea that sport was inappropriate or at least uncommon for older girls.

“Sometimes [girls] think that they are big, like they’re grown up, they can’t do any more sports so they try to [act] mature.” (Focus Group)

“You’ll find a 5 year old boy playing soccer and all that, but it’s different with a girl. Maybe I’d play soccer when I’m in primary school, but when you’re in high school it’s kind of weird when you’re in the soccer field playing soccer.” (Rachel)

This reference to playing sports as children was common; many of the girls indicated that they had been far more actively involved in sports in primary school than they were currently. (Conversely, a few of the girls said they had never been interested or involved in sport until they joined PAY). This tendency to view sports as an activity for children and youth is not unique to Namibia; studies of sport in Africa indicate that most women stop sports upon marriage or childbirth (Massao & Fasting, 2003; Corlett & Mokgwathi, 1989). Pelak (2005) argues that “the experiences of suddenly being exiled from those sporting worlds during one’s teenage years” are common to women across the world. She notes in her study (2005) that most female soccer players in South Africa were single (96.4%) and without children (91.5%). Either the economic and household responsibilities of being a wife and mother become too onerous to allow for extensive

sport participation, or cultural expectations put pressure on women to adjust their dress and behaviour to conform to the hegemonic ideal of female comportment.

As well as cultural factors, it was also evident that there were far more prosaic, economic reasons for the reduced participation of older girls and women. I asked most of the girls if either of their parents played or had played any sports. Some did not know, but of the girls who responded affirmatively, seven said their mothers had once played sports in school, usually netball, but soccer, running and athletics were also mentioned. None were currently involved in any sports. Anna explained this bluntly:

“Work takes [my mother’s] whole day and time and every year. Monday to Sunday, she is working, so there is no time for her to do sports.”
When asked if she would continue playing sports after high school, Anna answered that she would like to, but she emphasized that it would depend on her future job:

“It depends on what I’m going to do. Maybe I’m going to be a teacher then there won’t be time for sports.”
Amelia echoed this response, saying, “Yes, if I have time I will do [sports].” These two girls, both in Grade 12, demonstrated an awareness of the economic realities facing them upon graduation and the priority of survival over ‘having fun’. Faced with a bleak job market and the overwhelming necessity of performing well in school, sport was relegated to a much lower priority despite their acknowledgement of its benefits. They understood that if they were fortunate enough to join the ranks of the employed, their leisure time might well become limited particularly when combined with their household responsibilities.

Structural factors such as transportation, safety, access to facilities and the availability of sports clubs or leagues for women were not often mentioned in the interviews and focus groups. This is not very surprising as my participants were all

students and therefore these factors were not immediate issues. They would have access to their schools' sports facilities through physical education classes and the possibility of joining school teams. As PAY participants they also had access to the community facilities used by the program and another outlet to participate in sports. Most would walk to PAY directly from school and home again before dark in groups with other participants, allowing for greater safety. Even the four former PAY participants whom I interviewed insisted that access to facilities was not an issue; but all four of them were students at the University of Namibia or the Polytechnic of Namibia and thus would have access to university facilities. However, for out-of-school youth and for women, safety, transportation and access to facilities would be far more relevant issues. Since women walking alone risk rape or robbery, especially at night, transportation and safety become supreme concerns. Not all women would be able to afford even the small cost of a taxi to go to and from games and training sessions. The extent of women's sports clubs and leagues that were available to all women (i.e. not just the privileged elite) was not included within the scope of my research, but I was aware of at least a women's hockey league and a women's basketball league which appeared to be open to all interested women. The only two adult female basketball players I met were young, black university students and it seems probable that in these respects they were representative of the rest of the players, but as I did not observe any of the games or training sessions, I could not make any generalizations on the age or background of the women who played. While it is encouraging that these leagues exist, the feasibility of participation for a broad spectrum of women remains questionable at best.

Whether or not girls and young women do continue to play sport into adulthood is dependent on economic and structural factors and influenced by culture and social expectations. However, the girls in my research had all been exposed to sport on some level, but what about women who had never been involved in any sports as girls? Alena, one of the former PAY participants, drew attention to how vital it was for girls to become involved in sport while they were still young:

“We are all grown up; we’re too big to start with any sport. When you’re a little child it’s easy to adapt to anything; but now it’s even harder because... you are starting with the little kids about the basic values [skills]. You [the adult] are supposed to know the basics of any type of sports; that’s why it’s kind of difficult to start now. But I know it’s never too late to start with anything.”

Young people are exposed to a variety of sport experiences through school and programs like PAY, which gives them some basic skills and knowledge which would allow them to continue in sport as adults. However, the girls who did not or could not participate in sports during school are then disadvantaged as adults. As they were not exposed to sport’s benefits and pleasures as girls, they might be less likely to try sports at all as adults. Even if they were so inclined, it would be difficult without clubs, leagues, or programs aimed at teaching adults the rudiments of sports.

Cultural, economic, and structural factors notwithstanding, all participants said that they would like to continue to play sports as adults. None of the participants admitted to being influenced by the idea that sport was not for older girls. Age was invariably portrayed as something that might prevent *other* girls from participating. Several girls not only explicitly disagreed with this discourse of age and gender but declared their personal willingness to challenge it.

“Now I’m a grown up girl; I don’t need to do sports and stuff like that, the others say; but to me... I’m still the same person as [when] I was a small child; I’m just the same girl; there’s no need for me to change this and this.” (Eva)

“Nothing can stop me from doing sports; there are even old people who are doing sports in this world.” (Hilda)

Hilda challenges the idea that older people are not capable of doing sport, pointing out that many older people play sports, thus invalidating age as a reason for her to stop doing sports. In her comment, Eva insists that it is her prerogative alone to decide if and how she will change and who she will become. She asserts her agency to determine her own identity despite community pressure to conform to the culturally appropriate role for a ‘grown up girl’ which in this case means ending or limiting her participation in sport. It is the determination and dedication of girls like these who will continue to push to change cultural attitudes, but until economic and structural barriers are also addressed, the broad-based participation of women remains uncertain.

Conclusions

Girls’ descriptions of gender differences largely confirmed hegemonic conceptions of femininity and masculinity, but these gender discourses were not without contradictions and ambiguities and were not unquestioningly accepted by all of the participants. It was not always clear if participants subscribed to their own essentialized descriptions of what it meant to be a boy or a girl, particularly when their own personality, behaviour or sport participation seemed to contradict the dominant discourse. Occasionally a participant would explicitly state their disagreement with dominant discourses such as the idea that certain sports were for boys and not for girls. Modernist discourses of gender equality and sport’s supposed neutrality revealed contradictions when contrasted with more traditional cultural attitudes and when contextualized with Namibia’s economic situation. Despite comments of ‘sport is the same’, nearly all participants could list perceived differences in the attitudes and style of play of boys and

girls with girls being framed as having inferior skills to boys, but this was not accepted without challenge. Girls asserted their agency to create their own identities by adopting 'masculine' traits, and challenged dominant gender discourses to redefine women's sport as 'different from' men's sport rather than 'inferior to', and demonstrated a nascent awareness of the potential for empowerment for girls in sport.

Social roles and cultural expectations still place girls in the home with the lion's share of the household chores, a discourse that received little overt challenge or even acknowledgment, although it was linked to the differing rates of participation for boys and girls as boys would have more opportunities to leave the house and play than girls would. Parental attitudes were generally represented as either supportive or indifferent with some emphasis on whether the girls could achieve a high level in their sport, possibly due to economic pressures which would prioritize the activities that might accrue money, status or other rewards. Only a few girls referred to broader cultural discourses displayed through community attitudes and political processes and linked them as factors in girls' participation in sport. Their insights reflected the development of a critical consciousness and a growing awareness of how larger structures and processes impacted their individual experiences.

Gender discourses held a distinct dimension of age which emerged indirectly from the girls' conversations. Sport was presented as culturally appropriate for young people, thus acceptable for young girls. However, community pressure to conform to age and gender norms constrains the sport participation of older girls and women. All participants declared their disagreement with the idea that sport was just for children, but even girls who were clearly passionate and talented in sport spoke about the discomfort

of being an older girl playing sport. While girls might have been ready to challenge the cultural idea that sport was not for older women, it is also clear that however ‘traditional’ this gender norm is, it is reinforced by economic realities and lack of structural support for the sport participation of out-of-school girls and women. Issues of facility access, transportation, safety, club fees and the economic priority of earning a livelihood or succeeding in school all combine to make sport participation very difficult for girls after they leave school, regardless of their dedication and love of sport.

This chapter explores the way girls perceive and describe gender differences, girls’ social roles and expectations, and the way age intersects with gender to shape the way girls and women participate in and think about sport. Girls’ conversation reveals both the confirmation and contestation of hegemonic discourses and highlights the ways they assert agency and seek to define their own identities and realities. The next section will explore the ways girls perceive and negotiate discourses of heteronormativity, sex and sexuality, especially in relation to incidences of political homophobia, Namibia’s high rate of HIV/AIDS infection, and the tensions between cultural gender norms and modernist discourses of gender equality.

Chapter Seven: Discourses of Heteronormativity, Sex and Sexuality in Sport

In this chapter I explore discourses of heteronormativity in Namibian society, examining how they emerge in girls' conceptions of sport. In the context of incidences of political homophobia in Namibia, the consequences for nonconformity to gender ideals and pushing the boundaries of gender norms through participation in sport take on a new significance. I also examine how themes of sex and sexuality emerge from girls' conversations on sport, within the context of Namibia's high rate of HIV/AIDS.

'Tomboy and Not a Girl': Heterosexism in Namibia

In hegemonic conceptions of both masculinity and femininity, there is no room for any non-heterosexual identity. Brackenridge, Rivers, Gough and Llewellyn (2007) argue that "the impact of heterosexism and homophobia is so pervasive that anyone opting out of hegemonic gender prescriptions attracts questions about their sexual orientation" (p. 131). Any woman who strays too far from the feminine ideal may be accused of not even being a woman, from which it is only a small step to allegations of homosexuality. This appears to hold true in Namibia, for both men and women. While homosexuality meets with societal disapproval and sanctions in many cultures, in Namibia this disapproval has been publicly sanctioned by the country's leadership. Explicitly homophobic rhetoric has been uttered by former President Sam Nujoma and several top ministers (Currier, 2010; Lorway, 2008) including a threat to deport all homosexuals and a description of homosexuality as "alien to Namibian society...western, evil and destructive" (quoted in Currier, 2010, p. 119).

Lewis (2008) argues that the rise of nationalism is being driven by patriarchal discourses of sexuality in which South Africa, and African states in general, have cast the

nation-state in the role of a biological family. In so doing, they have created a powerful heterosexist discourse which frames homosexuality as a betrayal not only of one's family but of the nation. Lewis (2008, p. 107) explains:

Discourses of national belonging have been anchored in familial scripts and the invention of nations as biological families. In constructing sexuality, the family and personality in terms of a familial frame, the 'natural' reproduction of communities, and the 'rightful' belonging of individuals within collectivities are assured. On one level, therefore, homosexuality, whether as 'fact' or as 'possibility' drastically confounds the 'natural' binaries, identities and relationships central to fictions of nation: to belong as citizens, we have legitimate and 'natural' sexual roles to play. When we step out of these roles, we become unnatural, 'westernized' and traitorous.

Currier (2010) argues that the ruling party, SWAPO, uses political homophobia as a gendered strategy to maintain their masculinist control of the state. On an individual level, Lorway (2008) describes how these public declarations impacted Namibia's LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/gendered) community. While a small part of the LGBT community proudly asserted their status and with international support fiercely protested political homophobia, the majority of the LGBT population became more marginalized than ever, suffering verbal and physical harassment from the police, family and community members (Lorway, 2008). Society maintains a heteronormative discourse both through the harassment, 'othering', and disciplining of those who identify as LGBT and through everyday discourses which reinforce homophobic attitudes and confirm heterosexuality as the norm through manner of dress, conversation, media images, teasing, and relations with the opposite sex.

Because sport concerns the physical expression of a person, it is often related directly or indirectly to sex and sexuality and the enforcement of hegemonic masculinity and femininity (Lenskyj, 1990). This discourse emerged from the interviews and focus groups, expressed in terms of what type of sports and what kinds of behaviour were

acceptable for boys and girls and the societal price of nonconformity to these gender norms.

There is often discontinuity between what is presented as appropriate or typical for males or females and what actually occurs. To be 'rough' or competitive or even overly passionate about a sport, to cause or receive injury, or to play sports often was considered to be masculine behaviour. Most of the participants agreed that boys took sports far more seriously than girls. To probe this conclusion further, I reminded them of a PAY sports session where the girls (including some of the research participants) were playing a girls-only basketball game which became very competitive and heated. This apparent contradiction gave the participants some pause until Rachel attempted to explain:

“...in their own way, maybe their own sports, [girls could be competitive] but not sports that involve more guys. Like netball, yeah we can be competitive when it comes to netball, but basketball and soccer I don't think so, with girls.”

Her explanation suggests that in a girls-only setting or in a 'women's' sport like netball, displaying 'masculine' behaviour like aggressiveness and a strong desire to win is less of a direct threat to established gender relations. This again demonstrates that what the participants described as 'typical' male or female behaviour or attitudes might actually overlap considerably in practice leading to paradoxes; cultural discourses define acceptable masculinity and femininity, but actual lived experiences are far more complex and difficult to generalize (Clasen, 2001). It also suggests that when girls are either playing with boys or playing a male-typed sport, both of which would constitute intrusion into a male-dominated domain, displaying behaviour and attitudes that are too 'masculine' would highlight girls' already transgressive participation and possibly result

in reactionary discourses (such as homophobic teasing) which would exert social pressure to exclude girls altogether.

The tension between a desire to play sports at an elite or at least competitive level and hegemonic prescriptions of female appearance surfaced in my research as well. Theresa described how girls might not want to be too involved in sport for fear of building up too much muscle and no longer looking 'like a girl': "once muscles start to build up on their body, girls lose their girls' shape, body shape... turns into something that you wouldn't want to imagine being a girl." Georgina illustrated how society/the community reinforced these notions of appropriate physical appearance: "if you are an athlete and you have a built up body they usually tease you because of the way you look." Muscularity is presented as the very antithesis of acceptable female appearance and incompatible with hegemonic femininity, perhaps in part because girls' bodies must 'change' to become muscular (therefore not natural) while "guys don't face that because they remain the same way" (Georgina). Combined with girls' transgressive participation in male-typed sport like soccer or rugby, this may provoke community reactions aimed at disciplining female bodies in order to maintain heterosexist discourses: "they usually refer to you as a tomboy and not a girl" (Georgina). Theresa and Georgina offered these comments as examples of challenges that girls faced when playing sport. While neither offered an outright opinion or even referred to homosexuality or homophobia in any way, their remarks show an awareness that girls' participation in sport could result in their femininity being called into question and that the fear of this possibility could be a significant constraint on girls' participation. Georgina at least appears prepared to brave that risk as she is planning to start playing the strongly male-dominated sport of rugby. If

she does indeed follow through on her plans, her decision, made with the awareness of the teasing she might receive, would constitute resistance to dominant discourses of femininity and heteronormativity.

Gender-typing of sports happens everywhere to some extent, but which sports are typed as being appropriate for which gender varies according to culture (Koivula, 2001). When asked directly, most of the participants insisted that girls could play any sport they wanted to, 'even' boxing, rugby, or wrestling. Conversely, they asserted that boys could not or would never want to play netball. However, in response to other questions and topics, it would emerge that even though girls were perceived as capable of playing all sports, some sports were clearly considered to be men's domain with women framed as intruders or outsiders. Soccer in particular, and to a lesser extent basketball, were presented as sports for boys. Hilda asserted,

“[You] cannot put together a boy and a girl in soccer and expect the girl... to win; only if a girl is better than the boy, then the girl will win; [soccer is] a boys' game...made for boys.”

Nonconformity was perceived as a challenge to the heterosexual norm. A girl playing a male-typed sport such as soccer or rugby could be called 'gay', a tomboy or 'not a girl.'

“Some boys when they see maybe a girl playing soccer, they will be like, 'she's gay' and things like that.” (Rachel)

It was also perceived that any boy who would play netball, an overwhelmingly female-dominated sport in Namibia, would be labelled 'moffie' or 'gay'. During the focus groups it was clear that the girls found the idea of boys playing netball laughable, even bizarre. Some girls suggested that even just playing sports with girls might earn boys teasing from their peers.

“Maybe [boys] think they will be laughed [at]...they’ll be called moffies if they’re playing soccer in the street with the girls. Maybe if it’s just a guy playing soccer with girls maybe he’ll be teased by his friends.” (Rachel)

That even playing sports with the opposite sex on an equal basis might be grounds for teasing demonstrates how deeply embedded the heterosexist discourse is in Namibian culture. However, girls would use this example to offset the gendered constraints they themselves faced. The idea that ‘girls can play any sport, but boys can’t play netball’ was voiced several times; a girl in a focus group pointed out: “girls can wear trousers but guys cannot wear skirts.” These statements are a powerful example of how girls can define their own realities through their attitudes and words. Rather than emphasizing the constraints women face in sport, these girls chose to focus on the possibility for change. Most of the girls were aware that as women they faced challenges men did not, but their comments also displayed a belief that they had more space to push and challenge gender norms and that for this reason boys were more limited in their choices than girls were. Their words reveal a discursive alternative by shifting the emphasis from the constraints girls face in playing male-typed sports to the fact that, thanks to discourses of gender equality, at least they have the discursive space to play at all, while boys in gender-transgressive sports (such as netball) enjoy far less societal tolerance. Although girls’ conversations reveal spaces of agency and potential for transformation of dominant discourses, both girls’ and boys’ choice of sport is still policed by cultural perceptions of what is appropriate within prescribed norms of masculinity and femininity and enforced through allegations of deviant sexuality.

Publicly homophobic rhetoric in Namibia has turned the label of homosexuality into more than an indicator of social disapproval or cultural deviance; it has been presented as ‘un-African’ and a leftover of colonialism and racialized as the domain of

‘whites’ and Europeans. Homosexuals were not just framed as ‘sexual deviants’ but as threats to Namibia’s independence and African (read: non-Western) identity. Although no overt political action has been taken against the LGBT community, the fear and insecurity engendered by the President’s public remarks can only serve to reinforce hegemonic masculinity and femininity and rigidify social expectations, rendering gender norms, including those in the sports arena, far more difficult to challenge or defy.³

Sex, HIV/AIDS, and Girls’ Bodies

Namibia holds one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in the world, with an estimated 19.6% of people aged 15 and older infected with HIV in 2005 (Chinsembu et al, 2008; Mufune, 2009). HIV/AIDS education is an integral part of national school curriculum and is promulgated by various AIDS organizations and NGOs, yet the use of contraception such as condoms is not as widespread as one might expect. Mufune (2009) reports that many Namibian women do not use contraception for fear of their male partners’ reactions. Particularly in the Owambo culture, masculinity is strongly based on having multiple partners and fathering many children, while women are expected to be ‘shy’, quiet and obedient (Mufune, 2009; Becker, 2006). In a patriarchal society, this allows women little space to negotiate when they have sex and with whom, contraceptive use and the size of the sexual networks they are a part of, all of which leaves them vulnerable to STIs, HIV infection, and unwanted pregnancies.

With the increasing cost of *lobola* (bridewealth), traditional marriages are on the decline in favour of cohabitation and more casual relationships (Thomas, 2008).

³ Cultural acceptance of homosexuality varies across ethnic groups. Lorway (2008) observes that the Damara ethnic group appears to be more open to sexual nonconformity than the more patriarchal Owambo group. He also notes that the more affluent white and coloured gays and lesbians in Namibia were largely ‘protected’ by the international rights community from the fallout of political homophobia unlike the black youth of Katutura.

Pendleton (1996) found that 20% of households in Katutura were 'living together' arrangements rather than formal marriage and that there were few social sanctions against this type of arrangement although marriage held a higher social status. Within 'living together' relationships, both men and women had more freedom to conduct their public and private life as they chose without interference from outsiders or even their partner, and women held the right to keep the children if a union was terminated. Some Damara women indicated they preferred to remain unmarried as otherwise their husbands would have the right to beat them; at the time of Pendleton's research (1991-1993), 50% of Damara households in Katutura were 'living together' arrangements. The Owambo group seemed to have the strongest disapproval of this kind of relationship and the lowest rates of unmarried cohabitation but it is unclear how this impacts gender relations and power dynamics within 'living together' and formally married households (Pendleton, 1996). Pendleton's findings suggest that women enjoy more rights and autonomy within 'living together' relationships as opposed to formal marriages, but it is hard to know how the changing economy, shifting cultural attitudes and socio-economic stratification may have affected this dynamic in the present-day. While unmarried cohabitation may be mutually beneficial for men and women and even allow for greater equality, similar relationships for young girls may be far more harmful. Thomas, 2008, notes that:

[s]ocial pressures placed on young people to conform to modernist ideals and the economic need to get by were reported to have resulted in a breakdown of generational hierarchies and, among young girls, an increase in more casual relationships that offer reward and support (p. 232).

This kind of relationship, often with older men (sugar daddies), gives girls less control over the use of contraception and increases their risk for STIs, HIV/AIDS, abuse, and early pregnancy.

Chinsembu et al (2008) found in a survey of Namibian students aged 13-15 that even at this young age, 44% of boys and 24% of girls have had sexual intercourse. These percentages would only increase with age. Twenty-two percent of girls aged 15-19 (the same age range as my participants) are already mothers (Mufune, 2009). In Namibia pregnant girls are dismissed from school or they drop out (Chinsembu et al, 2008), as reflected in Caroline's comment:

“Like teenage pregnancy, sometimes you can't go back to school. The school won't take you because you have a child and stuff like that.”
Within this context, girls' control over their own bodies and their empowerment to dictate the terms of their sexual activity are shown to be vital aspects of their healthy development and an indicator of their future success and well-being.

Koivula (2001) discusses how the female body is still perceived as an object in male-dominated culture: “Females are...socialized to use their bodies to please others, value themselves based on their passive ornamental qualities through the masculine eyes of others, and to compare their appearance with that of the dominant feminine ideal” (p. 378). Girls' awareness or internalization of this 'feminine ideal' was evident from their references to sports as a way to lose weight and 'look good': “Girls need to do sport to keep themselves fit, sexy” (Judith). Caroline said that “those fat girls, they have to take part in sports, not just to sit down; [they] can lose a little bit weight.” Anna indicated that sport was good because it could give her a “nice body for the guys to see.” Rachel frames girls' perceived preoccupation with appearance as incompatible with sports: “High school girls...they just want to be in the beauty thing, all the beauty, and not participate in sports.”

The pressure of societal expectations of femininity is compounded by the perception of the male gaze and the sexualization of girls' bodies playing sports. The discomfort of playing sport in front of boys was mentioned a few times.

“Guys... they love looking at girls when they do sports... They have to mind their eyes; they like looking at ladies' parts which is not good; it's kind of very uncomfortable.” (Sylvia)

“Sometimes [boys] say ‘ah look at the big breasts, can't you see you are a grown up now?’” (Hilda)

As was mentioned previously, a discourse of age and maturity as precluding participation in sport is often perceived in terms of physical changes:

“Sometimes... when the girl sees that she's big [old], she's on the period cycle, she's having boobs, she's having... physical changes, [she will] start saying ‘no, I'm big; I'm not going to do sports.’ That's what some people say.” (Caroline)

Awareness of their changing bodies would make girls even more self-conscious playing sport as it is the expression of physicality, especially when combined with the perception of being watched by males in a sexual way. Girls in the focus groups when speaking about what they did not like about sport or what challenges girls faced often spoke about physical issues.

“About girls, I think why they're not playing sports is that sometimes they're on their periods and I think sometimes they feel like when they run and their pad fell out and they'd be embarrassed.” (Elizabeth)

“One thing I hate about sports is when the people are choosing each other, you are the only one which is fat and you are useless in sports and then it's like no one would want to choose you.” (Focus group)

Anna and Elizabeth mentioned that having big breasts could make running uncomfortable for girls. Judith referred to the potential for embarrassment if playing sport in a skirt; this was also mentioned in a focus group: “if you fall, then your skirt go up.” Hilda insisted however that it did not need to be a limiting factor: “I don't think that's a disadvantage

[because] even though you're wearing a skirt still you can do other sports." One girl in a focus group said determinedly:

"You shouldn't be scared of embarrassment. ...If they laugh at you, then you ignore them. Don't be scared, because if you get embarrassed [and] then you don't play, then the boys would [win]."

Her remark that boys would 'win' if girls stopped playing sport because of their teasing hints at an awareness of the larger struggle for equality and the importance of girls' continued participation of sport. But most of all, her words are a statement of defiance against discourses that would seek to restrict girls' active expression of their physical selves. Sport allows girls to experience and express their bodies in a nonsexual, pleasurable way; in male-dominated societies, where women's reproductive role is emphasized, sport can be a way for girls to gain some autonomy and a feeling of control over their own bodies including their reproductive capacity (Brady, 1998).

Studies in the United States suggest a relationship between participation in sports and decreased risk of pregnancy among adolescent girls; researchers are investigating the physical, personal and social processes that could explain this link, but it has been theorized that elevated self-esteem gained through sport may impact girls' sexual decision-making and ability to negotiate contraceptive use (Brady, 1998). This relationship bears further study in a developing nation context such as Namibia. While the participants in my research often referred directly or indirectly to the self-esteem they had gained through sport, how this might relate to their sexual decision-making is as yet unknown.

Conclusions

Discourses of political homophobia in Namibia emphasize the price of nonconformity to dominant gender norms. Girls' comments revealed that homophobic teasing was often used against girls displaying 'masculine' behavior like competitiveness, developing 'unfeminine' muscularity, or participating in male-typed sports like rugby or soccer. Girls negotiated these restrictive discourses by contrasting their position to that of boys who were framed as being even more limited in their gender roles. Girls asserted that they had the power and the discursive space to push gender boundaries and change gender norms, whereas boys did not have the same ability to enter more 'feminine' gender roles such as playing netball.

With the high rate of HIV/AIDS infection in Namibia today, the relatively low use of contraceptives, high rates of sexual intercourse among young teens and the corresponding high rate of pregnancy among teenage girls, girls' bodies become the subject of discourses of sex, physicality, and control over one's own body. Discourses that frame girls' bodies as ornamental objects were evident in girls' references to 'sexiness' and 'looking good' as motivations for girls' sport participation. The sexualization of girls' bodies through participation in sport also emerged through perceptions of the male gaze on girls' bodies and girls' discomfort over the visibility of their physical development in sport participation.

This chapter examined the ways in which heterosexist discourses were framed within girls' conceptions of appropriate femininity and masculinity and how these discourses are enforced through homophobic teasing and attitudes. Girls' perceptions of the degree of their ownership and comfort with their own bodies reflected themes of

sexualization and the disciplining of girls' bodies through sport. In the next chapter I will explore discourses of agency that emerge from girls' reflections on their participation in sport and how they perceive sport to impact their economic hopes and educational goals.

Chapter Eight: Discourses of Employment, Education and Self

In this chapter I examine how girls perceive and interpret their participation in sport as a factor in their education, personal development and their futures in a developing country. I explore how girls navigate economic uncertainties, educational challenges and goals, and their personal changes, by highlighting the discourses of agency that emerge from their reflections on sport.

‘Great Opportunities Might Come If You Play Sports’

The girls who participated in my research face an unwelcoming job market, deep social inequities, and difficulty attaining the quality of education necessary to successfully complete their secondary schooling with high enough grades to gain entrance to any kind of post-secondary institutions. It is thus easier to understand why many of the girls spoke very practically about the economic benefits of sports. Eleven of the fifteen girls at some point during the interviews specifically mentioned the possibility of employment or financial gain (e.g. scholarships, sponsorships) through sport, and the subject also came up in one of the focus groups. It seems while the girls enjoy the fun and social aspect of sport and appreciate its health benefits, their thoughts concerning the future are heavily shaped by economic concerns.

Possessing skills is one of the most significant factors for employment in Namibia and yet with its history of colonialism and apartheid, there are distinct inequalities between Namibia’s white and black population. Whites make up about 6% of the population but hold the majority of post-secondary qualifications and most management and skilled positions (Klerck, 2008). Employment in the skilled and semi-skilled sectors

in Namibia is relatively stable and commands salaries on par with those in South Africa, but the unskilled and informal sector is increasingly insecure and underpaid.

With the high unemployment and school dropout rate in Namibia, it is not surprising that even at a young age the participants were already considering on a practical level the direct economic opportunities that sport might offer. They presented it as an alternative to more conventional jobs or careers. Hilda stated that she could “become someone, a coach, a leader of some sports.” Elizabeth said that she wanted to be a sportswoman one day, indicating a hope that sports might be a viable economic option. Georgina brought up the financial and networking potential of sports:

“Great opportunities might come along the line if you play sports; nowadays it can get scholarships, and people can assist you in things you need, essential things.”

Judith and Caroline referred to the possibility that someone might be forced to drop out of school and suggested that sports offered an alternative to conventional jobs which have educational requirements. Sport was also perceived as holding the possibilities of ascending to elite levels, of achieving a ‘high position’, of representing Namibia, or even reaching the Olympics. The potential for travel, sport scholarships, or sponsorships were also mentioned. Hatline pointed out that being involved in sports also allowed for a wider range of volunteer opportunities, always a good way to increase employability in any field. It is not clear how realistic or attainable these perceived opportunities actually are. The PAY cycling team, for example, is indeed sponsored by local businesses. However, this kind of sponsorship appears to be limited to race fees, transportation costs and the purchase and maintenance of cycling gear and equipment rather than a source of livelihood (M. Nghilifavali, personal communication, May 16, 2010). Another example is PAY itself: five of PAY’s current staff members are former participants, recognized for

their academic and sports achievements and leadership skills; the core group of volunteers at PAY are also former participants. One of my research participants, Theresa, suggested that the training and games she had learned through the Kicking AIDS Out program at PAY might help her find employment with an AIDS organization or NGO. Indeed, Ndahafa, one of the former PAY participants whom I interviewed, is currently employed by AIDS Care Trust (ACT) in Windhoek along with several other former PAY participants.

‘If I Drop Out of School’: Navigating Educational Challenges

After independence one of the first acts of the new government was to provide universal, compulsory education for all. However, the quality of education remains extremely unequal as is evidenced by the examination results of grades 10 and 12, with the best results being achieved by private, elite (primarily white) schools and significantly worse results by the rural and urban, primarily black schools (Jauch et al, 2009). Lack of qualified teachers and physical facilities such as libraries and laboratories in rural and township schools contributes to the significant disparities in results (Jauch, 1999). Elizabeth spoke about some of the difficulties she and other students face in the classroom:

“At school, our teachers, they don’t teach us exactly the books we need to be taught. Sometimes they don’t come to class or they just don’t teach; like every day they read the same stuff; you don’t get the new topics.”

She frames this kind of situation as an obstacle to her academic and future success. It is this situation that precipitated the founding of the Physically Active Youth organization with whom I carried out my research. Through their combination of academic tutoring, physical activity and life skills training, the organization has achieved a 92% pass rate

among its grade ten participants, most of whom come from the low income community of Katutura in Windhoek, a community which usually averages a 50% pass rate.

As the Namibian government only provides free education until grade ten, all the students I interviewed would have been well aware of the financial cost to their parents to continue sending them to school. The possibility of having to drop out of school was not only dependent on their grades but on their family's continued ability to pay the fees. Caroline was all too aware of how uncertain her continued school attendance was. Two of her siblings had dropped out of school for financial reasons and she said her twin sister might be forced to drop out as well. However, she maintained a determinedly positive demeanour in the face of daunting odds: "I'm the one if I can study hard I can do it for all of us. ...Everyone is hoping for me." Caroline seized on sport as a potential resource in an uncertain future:

"For example, if I drop out of school... there's a little bit of hope to play sports, to earn money out of sports, run, break the records and stuff." (Caroline)
Anna also was well aware of the challenges facing her if she wished to continue her education after Grade 12:

"First I want to work next year to save money [because] my mom, I know she won't be able to afford for [the Polytechnic] or U Nam [University of Namibia] because they're expensive so I want to save up first then go. But if I stay [out of school] maybe I won't have the energy to go back, go there. I don't know but I'm thinking of saving money first."
Speaking about the skills and values they had learned through sport, girls often referred to how these skills could potentially benefit them when they entered the job force, whether they were forced to drop out of school or not. Ndahafa described how the road to success required teamwork, whether in life or in sport:

"I'll team up myself with some other people that are already in the field or some people that have more knowledge than I. Then I can just learn from them. And this is the same as sports; like in sport when you don't know how, when you are not able

to score in a goal, like in soccer, you pass it to the next person who is good at scoring.”

Some of the girls described themselves as ‘loners’ who disliked working with people prior to their participation in sports; for them sport appears to provide a vital arena within which to develop the social skills required for their future economic participation. These social skills also increase adaptability and flexibility in new situations with new people.

“We play a lot of games, sporty sort of games... Working in a group there is very important because you have to work together and trust each other so that you can win. So teamwork is very important, that’s mostly what I learned from sports. ...It’s actually very easy to adapt to different environments. For example, if you’re in different workshops and you’re divided into groups with strangers it’s quite easy to adapt to the whole environment.” (Rosa)

Sport has also been linked with improved mental health and reduced depression, stress, and anxiety (Bailey, 2006). Responses from my participants support this conclusion. Over half of the girls made some mention of the mental health benefits of participating in sport, describing how they felt more ‘relaxed’, ‘energized’, ‘refreshed’, and less stressed when participating in sport. Several linked this to their performance in school:

“Exercise releases stress. Most of the time when it’s exam time we study for much time, then we do exercises to relax and it helps.” (Judith)

“We are studying every day, ... then we go to sport; then we relax—the brain gets that freshness... then you go back to books again” (Anna).

“For school, performances at school, your brain is functioning well if you do more sports, if you exercise more.” (Rachel)

These participants felt that the relaxation and reduced stress they gained from sport allowed them to focus better on their schoolwork, benefiting them academically. Once again sport is framed as a resource for academic and economic purposes. Former PAY participant Iris also referred to the emotional benefits of sport:

“It’s made me think that no I don’t need to be stressed or be mad at anyone. All it takes [is] a good jog down the street then I’m all right. It made me realize that you don’t bottle up emotions, you simply run them out.”

The mental health benefits of sport seem particularly important as a protective buffer for girls living in a setting of extreme social inequality and poverty, high crime rates, alcoholism and violence against women.

‘I Changed the Way I Am’: Discourses of Agency through Sport

The fluidity of identity and the complex processes of the formation of identity in young people was evident in the girls’ responses as was a sense of agency and a positive perception of change and growth. Georgina declared her own agency in her own development, “Since I started doing sports...I’ve changed the way I am.” Caroline said, “Now I’m starting to change; now I’m all right” implying that at a previous time she had not been ‘all right’ but that through her experiences in sport and with PAY she had grown and changed into a more capable and complete person. This nascent self-awareness of the processes of change and their agency in their own social development is potentially empowering.

While the words self-esteem and self-confidence were only mentioned a few times, the idea was evident in many of the girls’ responses. ‘I believe in myself’, said Caroline; ‘I can achieve whatever I want,’ said Sylvia who linked self-esteem gained from sport to interactions with people in one’s life:

“You’ll have a high self-esteem as well [because] when you’re doing sports... obviously your aim is to win and to be first and now that makes you have a high self-esteem... So if somebody breaks you down at home, you’ll feel that yes, nobody can break me down, obviously I can do better than that.”

According to her, having a high self-esteem would help her stand up to those who would put her down and try to impose limitations on her. Eva described how her skill in sports afforded her respect and recognition among her peers:

“When I was at primary school... I got diploma of sports that I was the best soccer girl player... I was the best. ...I always like to feel so high [because] everybody got to know me, ‘oh that girl can play soccer,’ stuff like that.”

Shining clearly through her words is the pride at being recognized for being the best at something. Other participants spoke about increased confidence and less self-consciousness in front of people:

“[Sport] made me feel more better and feel more comfortable being in my own skin.” (Sylvia)

“I would never play soccer in front of other people or I wouldn’t get on a bike and ride. [Before] I started sports I couldn’t even go in front of a crowd and start dancing, so it boosted my self-confidence and I started believing in myself.” (Amelia)

Both comments by Sylvia and Amelia suggest that participation in sport gave them an increased sense of control over their bodies and an increased comfort in their physicality which reduced their feelings of self-consciousness.

The theme of self-esteem through accomplishment was also evident. Participants were asked to describe their favourite memory related to sport. Of the fifteen participants, thirteen were able to respond unhesitatingly, needing no more than a few moments to think of an answer. Clearly, the memory each of them chose was significant in their lives. Six of the thirteen responses involved winning a trophy or a medal or placing in a race, demonstrating the pride these public, measurable accomplishments had brought them. Anna recalled a netball game where she had played particularly well:

“That day I thought I played myself out! I was good; even the teacher said, ‘oh girl, you were so good!’ That made me proud. Then we came back with the cup for my school. Oh, I was so proud that day.” (Anna)

Three others described accomplishments which did not involve winning but which clearly gave them a sense of pride and satisfaction. Eva spoke about the first ever goal she had scored in primary school, ‘which reminds me I can still do it.’ Hatline described an occasion when playing Bump (a basketball shooting game) when she had eliminated four or five of the best male basketball players at PAY: “all the people who said I couldn’t do it because I was short, were out all because of moi!” Theresa described a national sports day that PAY had organized:

“I kind of took charge of it and I was running up and down, everything, organizing and I felt on top of the world... It was really fun you know. At the end of the day it was a great achievement. People didn’t really know they could organize something like that so big.”

The overall accomplishment as well as the initiative, leadership, and recognition involved were clearly a source of pride for her. These kinds of remarks reveal a sense of pride, accomplishment and agency. Through their actions, decisions, and personal growth (agency), they had achieved outcomes of confidence, self-esteem, and recognition (achievements), and realizing a degree of empowerment through sport.

Even for girls who displayed no particular talent or passion for sports, just the act of participating was a revelation of the things they were capable of accomplishing if they simply tried.

“I learned that I have to believe in myself and whatever people say that ‘ah you are thin, you are what, you don’t deserve to do sports and stuff’; I must not back down, just go forward.” (Caroline)

“I can be so much more than I think of myself; I think of myself as very little and I’m too small for this and that and I’m too weak but just when I tried it I found out that I can do much better.” (Judith)

“I can actually do sports. I’d always thought sports was not my thing but once you start doing it you actually know that you can do it.” (Hatline)

Girls are often socialized to believe that they are physically weak or at least weaker than boys (Roth & Basow, 2004) and thus less capable of physical pursuits. It is eye-opening to discover that one’s body is, in fact, capable of physical feats and skills that one would never have imagined. For Hatline, who would readily admit that she is not a very sporty person, just knowing that she does have the capacity to play sport is a potentially empowering revelation. Judith’s comment shows that discovering that she can play sports well despite her small size and perceived weakness is also a realization that limitations of any kind are not as set in stone as they may seem. Judith’s statement that ‘I can be so much more than I think of myself’ is a declaration of her own power to do, to accomplish, to change, and to take ownership over her own destiny, a discovery of her own agency.

The ability to interact with different people in order to make friends or to strengthen existing relationships is a necessary skill for the healthy social development of young people. Growing up in conditions of poverty and social inequalities, girls must cope with both systemic and interpersonal violence and a culture that has suffered from decades of socially and spiritually damaging racial ideologies. A PAY staff member gives his perception of Katutura residents:

“There’s a general low level of self-respect amongst the people. So then respecting each other is very difficult so they would... just not be very considerate when dealing with other people. And that also affects the girls and that causes them to be very hard or trying to build a very strong character to counter the negativity that they face. ...If it’s something they don’t really like, the natural inclination would be to resist, because that’s what they have to do pretty much every day, just...resist all the negativity that comes their way.” (George)

Lawson (2005) argues that participation in sport programs helps create or reinforce social networks which allows for conditions conducive to trust and cooperation. Several

participants described a perceived change in themselves through their participation in sport:

“I am a loner; I like doing things on my own... so I think teamwork is one of the most important things I’ve learned from sports.” (Hatline)

“I never wanted to work with anyone, but...since I joined PAY everything of mine has changed, like I work with people... I didn’t want to be with anyone, that’s just how I was. But now I’m starting to change; now I’m all right.” (Caroline)

“I wasn’t much of a team worker; I usually liked doing things on my own but then since I started doing sports..., I started participating in groups at school and in group projects and... I’ve changed the way I am.” (Georgina)

“Now, I’m a friendly person; ...those years, I didn’t like anyone talking to me; ...it’s me with the mask on my face, angry all the time. When I went to sports, start playing sports, I became friendly, liking people and stuff, things like that; ...you also get to know different people.” (Eva)

Their descriptions of their former selves show a degree of individualism, isolation and lack of social skills. In contrast they presented their current selves positively in the context of learned skills like teamwork, friendship and a greater openness towards people. Eva’s evocative description of ‘mask on my face’ suggests that she found it difficult to be open or trustful of others. While it is not clear what exactly was the mechanism for change, Eva perceived a direct connection between her participation in sport and her increased social skills, ‘friendliness’ and ability to relate with others. These girls reveal their exercise of agency through their reflections on their participation in sport and analysis of how they had changed and developed.

Conclusions

Economic uncertainties and financial realities strongly influenced girls’ perceptions of sport participation. Sport was frequently portrayed as an employment alternative, a possible source of income, skills, and financial support. Girls’ concerns

over their education also emerged as worries over finances, failing examinations, or not receiving the quality of education necessary for success. Sport was attributed with providing stress relief and relaxation which in turn was seen to benefit their school performance. The possibility of being forced to drop out of school for financial reasons was ever-present and sport was framed as an alternative economic option. Girls thus portrayed sport instrumentally as a potential tool and resource to find employment or succeed educationally which in turn would allow them to make the ‘strategic life choices’ for the life they desired; this demonstrates a potential process of empowerment, although what the achievements or outcomes of this process will be is still unknown (Kabeer, 1999).

On a personal and social level, girls’ sense of agency emerged clearly through their perceptions of what they had learned or how they had changed through their participation in sport. They claimed greater confidence and self-esteem and revealed perceptions of self-efficacy through descriptions of their accomplishments and proudest moments in sport. A perceived increase in social skills, friendship, and teamwork was a strong theme in several girls’ comments, in which they portrayed a striking contrast between their previous identity and their current conception of self, a perception of growth and development through sport.

In this chapter I analyzed how economic and educational factors impacted or were influenced by girls’ perceptions of their participation in sport. Girls’ reflections on how they had personally grown and changed through their participation in sport also revealed processes of empowerment and discourses of agency. The next chapter will lay out my overall conclusions and outline some potential areas for future research.

Chapter Nine: Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore how girls in Namibia perceive and respond to dominant discourses through their participation in sport. Using a feminist interactionist, anti-oppression framework and Kabeer's conception of agency and empowerment, I explored emergent discourses of agency in girls' reflections and conversations on sport to discover how girls in the PAY program in Namibia challenge or reinforce existing power relations and dominant discourses in their lives through their perceptions and opinions on their experiences in sport.

Kabeer (1999) describes empowerment as a process requiring resources, agency and outcomes. If sport can be a factor in this process, then some of the material, social, and human resources required are access to sports, time, money, equipment, and facilitators like coaches. Through PAY, the girls have access to these resources, the pre-conditions for the empowerment process. Agency is the process, which Kabeer (1999) defines as:

“The ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Agency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or ‘the power within’” (p. 438).

The exploration of the meanings and motivations that girls bring to sport in Namibia reveal both the strength of dominant discourses and the ways in which girls challenge, reflect on and analyze these discourses. In some cases narratives of agency emerge clearly in declarative statements; in others, tone, attitude, ambiguities, and behaviour contribute to more subtle discourses of agency and empowerment through the “more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438).

I sought to find out how girls perceive the dominant discourses of hegemonic femininity and masculinity within their particular socio-cultural context and how their perceptions and attitudes towards their participation in sport challenged or reinforced cultural gender norms, roles and power relations. Participants' perceptions of cultural attitudes regarding traditional gender roles, girls' responsibilities in the home, and the place of older women's participation in sport often seemed only to affirm existing discourses of hegemonic masculinity and femininity. Their sometimes contradictory responses might reinforce certain essentialist perceptions on the differences between boys and girls, for example, while also asserting that girls were capable of playing any sport that boys could. Despite (or because of) the ambivalence in some of their responses, the girls displayed an optimistic perception of having the space and the agency to challenge gender norms and shape their own personal development.

I also explored how girls perceived their participation in sport within the dominant discourse of heteronormativity and how they manoeuvred and interpreted these discourses within an atmosphere of political homophobia. This atmosphere of political homophobia contextualized girls' perceptions that challenging gender norms in or through sport could result in labels of homosexuality, rendering the expansion of gender roles more difficult. In this case, girls' responses seemed to reinforce and legitimize dominant homophobic discourses and restrictive cultural stereotypes and yet through their continued participation in sport and their insistence on the capability of girls to play even 'men's' sports, the participants resisted the limitations imposed on them by these dominant discourses by pushing and even defying accepted gender norms. Unequal gender relations and Namibia's high HIV/AIDS rate contextualizes themes of

sexualisation and disciplining of girls' bodies in sports and raises the issue of girls' control over their own bodies and the level of comfort they feel experiencing their physicality through sport.

Within Namibia's particular socio-cultural and economic context, strong concerns over future employment and the ability to stay in school despite financial pressures shaped girls' perceptions of sport. Girls perceived their participation in sport as a resource and a tool in their economic futures, educational success, and personal development and thus as a potential tool for the achievement of empowerment, the ability to make their strategic life choices. Despite the concerns voiced, girls also showed optimism, hope and a positive attitude in the face of sometimes daunting odds. Girls revealed a strong sense of agency through their perceptions of how they had personally changed and grown through their participation in sport. Confidence, self-esteem and social skills were frequently referred to as positive outcomes from their participation in sport.

In the struggle to resist multiple oppressions within intersecting frameworks of race, gender, class, and age, this exploration of girls' reflections on sports reveals the normalization of dominant discourses of gender and heterosexism through sport, but also evidence of emerging critical consciousnesses and questioning of the broader processes influencing girls' participation in sport. Girls' strong belief in their personal change and growth through sport, their occasional outright challenges of dominant discourses and their multiple interpretations of the meanings of sport in their lives demonstrates how individuals assert their agency, resist oppressive discourses and relations, and shape their own realities. Despite the many challenges facing them economically, socially and

personally, girls displayed optimism, determination and defiance of the odds. Summing up and encapsulating this theme of hope, agency and the potential for change is Judith's simple statement: "I can be so much more than I think of myself."

Future Research

As an exploratory study, my research has raised many new questions and avenues for further research. It is evident that an examination of discourses, both at a personal level and at a broader socio-cultural level, can reveal the spaces that sport creates for the exercise of agency and the challenging of gender norms while also highlighting the areas where dominant discourses are most strongly reinforced. Further research of this kind in other parts of Namibia and in other developing countries would establish a better knowledge base for sport-led interventions and allow for better-targeted educational efforts, particularly in addressing community attitudes towards girls in sport and also in using girls' participation in sport to engage with broader social processes and cultural gender norms.

An exploration of how gender norms are challenged or reinforced through sport would not be complete until boys' perspectives on gender and sport were also examined. My research shows that girls' perceive boys' teasing as a significant factor in their participation in sport; clearly, for any change to occur in cultural and gender norms, the perceptions and attitudes of males must also be understood and addressed. Girls' comments also reveal that hegemonic conceptions of masculinity and femininity may create even more rigid constraints for boys than for girls. Future research should examine the role of sports in reinforcing male identity and power and how this dynamic

might be challenged to allow for more fluid and empowering gender identities for both boys and girls.

Continued engagement with the research participants over the following years would also provide valuable insights into how attitudes and perceptions change over time and with experience. It would be useful to do a follow up study of the participants to evaluate the long-term involvement, effects, and impacts of sport in the girls' lives. In the context of high HIV/AIDS prevalence rates and teenage pregnancies in countries such as Namibia, it would be interesting to find out what kind of relationship, if any, exists between girls' participation in sport and their sexual decision-making. Based upon participant responses and given the rates of unemployment of many developing countries, it would also be valuable to explore the economic possibilities of sport to determine the relevance of the skills and opportunities available to sport participants. For this small-scale study to be of greater usefulness it would also have to be expanded to a wider population and replicated in other countries and cultural settings in order to better compare and contrast results.

Significance of Study

The gendered nature of sport and sport-related development initiatives is a particularly vital area for research particularly as these programs are proliferating with minimal research or evaluation to back up their claims for increased gender empowerment. Very little culture- or area-specific research has yet addressed the experience of girls in sport in African and other developing countries. This study will help address a significant gap in the literature and perhaps shed light on some of the

unique challenges and the transformative potential of sport for girls in developing countries.

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Appendix 1

Participant Background Information

Name	Age	Grade	Household Members (including participant)	Ethnic group	Household financial security (enough money?)
Hilda	17	9	4	Tsemba	Sometimes enough
Jessica	15	9	8	Oshiwambo	Always enough
Hatline	18	12	6	Oshiwambo – Angolan - Mozambican	Usually enough
Sylvia	16	10	7	Oshiwambo	Always enough
Judith	18	12	8	Damara - Herero	Sometimes enough
Caroline	15	8	3	Oshiwambo	Never enough
Elizabeth	16	11	5	Oshiwambo	Never enough
Theresa	19	12	13	Oshiwambo – Angolan - German	Never enough
Amelia	17	12	8	Damara	Sometimes enough
Diana	16	8	6	Oshiwambo	Sometimes enough
Eva	17	10	5	Oshiwambo	Sometimes enough
Isabel	15	9	5	Oshiwambo	Sometimes enough
Rachel	16	10	3	Angolan	Usually enough
Anna	18	12	6	Damara	Never enough
Georgina	15	10	4	Oshiwambo	Usually enough

Appendix 2: Focus Group Questions

Focus Group 1 A and B

What are some different kinds of sport and physical activity?

How are sports and physical activity good for you?

What do you enjoy about sports and physical activity?

What don't you enjoy about sports and physical activity?

Why is it that before program starts at PAY it is usually just the boys playing and not the girls?

What are some things that make it difficult for you to play sports?

What would you change about the way you play sports to make it more enjoyable?

Focus Group 2

Is sport different for boys and girls? Why or why not?

Are some sports more for boys and sports that are more for girls?

Do boys and girls have different attitudes towards sports?

Do boys and girls play differently? If so, how?

If a group of boys was playing a sport, would you feel comfortable going over to join them? What if it was a group of girls? Would a boy feel the same way?

What would your family say about you playing sports?

Should girls continue to play sports when they are older?

Appendix 3: Interview Questions

Current PAY Participants

Household and Socioeconomic Data

How old are you?

What grade are you in?

Who do you live with? What are their relationships to you?

Who earns money in your household? (Alt: who works/has a job in your household?)

Do you earn money/work/have a job?

How much school have your parents/caretakers completed? Your older siblings?

What is your ethnic group?

What do your parents/caretakers do? (Alt: What are their jobs?)

How financially secure would you say your household is? (Never enough money; sometimes enough money; always enough or more than enough money)

Do your parents think it is important that you finish high school?

Participation in Sports/Physical Activity

What types of sports or physical activity do you participate in (at school, PAY, other)?

How often do you play/practice?

For how long have you been participating?

Why do you participate in sport/physical activity?

Is there anything that makes it difficult to participate? If so, what?

How did you overcome these difficulties?

Do you think it is important for you to participate in sport/physical activity? Why or why not?

Do your parents think it is important for you to participate in sports or physical activity?

Experiences

What do you enjoy about sport/physical activity?

How does playing sport/physical activity make you feel?

What don't you enjoy about sport/physical activity?

Tell me about your favorite memory/experience related to sport.

What would you change about sport/physical activity to make it more enjoyable or meaningful?

Personal Development

What have you learned from sport/physical activity that you have used at home or at school?

Has participating in sport/physical activity changed anything in the way you act or think? If so, how?

What have you learned about yourself by participating in sport/physical activity?

Future

What do you want to be/do after you finish high school/college?

What will you have to do to achieve this goal?

What things could make it difficult to achieve this goal?

Is there anything you have learned from sport/physical activity that could help you achieve your goals (Alt: help you in the future)?

Will you continue playing sport/physical activity in the future? Why or why not?

Gender

Do you think sport/physical activity is different for boys and girls?

If so, how do boys and girls think about sport/physical activity differently?

How do boys and girls play/practice differently?

In your experience, do adults (such as coaches, teachers or parents) treat male athletes differently from female athletes? If so, how?

What challenges do girls face in playing sport that boys don't face?

Do you think it is good for girls to participate in sport/physical activity? Why or why not?

Do you think participating in sport/physical activity would help girls after they finish school (Alt: when they grow up)? If so, how?

Wrap Up

Do you have anything else you want to say about the topics we have discussed?

Do you have any questions for me?

Interview Questions Former PAY Participants

Household and Socioeconomic Data

How old are you?

What is your current occupation?

How much school have you completed?

Who do you live with? What are their relationships to you?

Who earns money in your household?

How much school have your parents/caretakers completed? Your other siblings?

What is your ethnic group?

What do your parents/caretakers do? (Alt: What are their jobs?)

How financially secure would you say your household was during the time you participated in PAY? How financially secure is it currently? (Never enough money; sometimes enough money; always enough or more than enough money)

Participation in Sports/Physical Activity

What types of sports or physical activity did you participate in up until completing high school (at school, PAY, other)? Currently?

How often did you play/practice? Currently?

Why did you participate in sport/physical activity at that time? And now?

Was there anything that made it difficult to participate? If so, what? Currently?

How did you overcome these difficulties?

At that time did you think it was important for you to participate in sport/physical activity? Why or why not? And now?

At that time did your parents think it was important for you to participate in sports or physical activity?

What do your friends/family/significant other think about your current participation in sport/physical activity?

Experiences

What do you enjoy about sport/physical activity?

How does playing sport/physical activity make you feel?

What don't you enjoy about sport/physical activity?

Tell me about your favorite memory/experience related to sport.

What would you change about sport/physical activity to make it more enjoyable or meaningful?

Personal Development

What have you learned from sport/physical activity that you have used at home, school, or work?

Has participating in sport/physical activity changed anything in the way you act or think? If so, how?

What have you learned about yourself by participating in sport/physical activity?

Future

Where do you see yourself in five years? In ten years?
What will you have to do to achieve your goals?
What could make it difficult to achieve your goals?
Is there anything you have learned from sport/physical activity that could (or has already) help you achieve your goals (Alt: help you in the future)?
Will you continue playing sport/physical activity in the future? Why or why not?

Gender

Do you think sport/physical activity is different for males and females?
If so, how do males and females think about sport/physical activity differently?
How do males and females play/practice differently?
In your experience, do people (such as coaches, teachers or parents) treat male athletes differently from female athletes? If so, how?
What challenges do females face in playing sport that males don't face?
Do you think it is good for girls and women to participate in sport/physical activity? Why or why not?
Do you think participating in sport/physical activity would help girls after they finish school (Alt: when they grow up)? If so, how?

Wrap Up

Do you have anything else you want to say about the topics we have discussed?
Do you have any questions for me?

Interview Questions PAY Staff and Volunteers

Personal background

How long have you worked/volunteered for PAY?

What are some of your responsibilities/duties with PAY?

What is your personal interest or background in sport and physical activity (if any)?

Socioeconomic background

How would you describe the general social and economic characteristics of the girls who participate in PAY?

How do these characteristics impact girls' participation in sport and physical activity?

How would you describe parental attitudes towards girls' academics? Towards girls playing sport and physical activity?

How do these attitudes impact girls' participation in sport and physical activity?

Sport experiences

What sorts of sports and physical activity do the girls enjoy/participate in the most?

Why?

What sorts of sports and physical activity do the girls not enjoy or participate in? Why?

In your experience, what are some of the challenges and constraints that girls face when participating in sport and physical activity?

Sport benefits

In your experience, what are the primary benefits (physical, social, personal) of regular involvement in sports and physical activity for girls?

Have you observed any changes in attitudes, behaviors, personality, gender relations of girls who begin participation in sport and physical activity? What can these changes be primarily attributed to?

What is it about sport/physical activity that brings about these changes/benefits in girls?

Sport and gender

Do you think males and females experience/think about sport and physical activity differently? Why or why not?

Do people treat male athletes and female athletes differently? If so, how and why?

Do you think participation in sport/physical activity would help girls succeed in school, work or at home? If so, how?

How important is it for girls to participate in sport and physical activity?

Wrap Up

Do you have anything else you want to say about the topics we have discussed?

Do you have any questions for me?