

# Levelling the playing field: Human capability approach and lived realities for sport and gender in the West Indies

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding the role of gender in sport for development and peace (SDP) has sparked new and critical research recently, aligning with the focus on gender equality in the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Researchers tend to explore gender in terms of how girls and women access and experience sport. The academic literature often describes sport participation for girls as a form of empowerment, but fails to critically examine the masculinised, heteronormative framework of sport and rarely includes the voices of girls and boys together.<sup>1</sup> This unique study is the first to apply the human capability approach (HCA) to explicitly investigate gender role attitudes from the perspective of boy and girl participants in SDP. We believe it is vital to include voices of all participants to more critically examine how SDP might both challenge and reinforce restrictive gender norms.

This paper is drawn from a research project for a doctoral thesis in Development Studies and focuses on adolescent participants, youth coaching trainees, programme facilitators and government administrators involved in SDP programmes in Barbados and St. Lucia (n=104).<sup>2</sup> The primary author conducted surveys, focus group discussions, interviews and journaling to gather the data presented here and in the thesis. Using the HCA as a theoretical framework, we argue that these SDP programmes tend to integrate participants into masculinised, heteronormative forms of sport that may unwittingly reinforce restrictive gender norms for both boys and girls. In order to better

support the capability development of all participants, SDP leaders must actively challenge restrictive gender role attitudes of masculinity and femininity.

## INTRODUCTION

### Levelling the global playing field: Human capability theory and lived realities for sport and gender in the West Indies

#### *An Illustration*

Cricket ovals across the West Indies are often considered hallowed grounds. Upon these pitches, legendary men have bowled, batted and sprinted their way to glory. Cricket champions such as Sir Garfield Sobers are lauded and memorialized with statues and roundabouts named in their honour. Missing amongst these sporting heroes are the names of women cricketers. Women in the West Indies were excluded from regional and international competitions for decades and only recently rose to international success. First brought by the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cricket is an iconic masculine sport and a vivid legacy of colonialism in the region, rooted in a history of exclusivity by race, class and gender.<sup>3,4</sup>

Against this historic backdrop, the following story unfolded. Children from the Sport for Life (SFL) programme gathered on the pitch at Kensington Oval, Barbados' premier cricket grounds. SFL is designed to support adolescent children in developing their academic, computer, life and sporting skills. Children from ages 12-17

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were spread across the pitch on this day. In one area, about ten children arranged themselves in a circle around a coach. The coach, a male volunteer, conducted a drill by batting each player a ball so that he or she could catch it and toss it back. Only two out of the participants in this drill were girls. The goal of the drill was to catch it ten times consecutively as a team. However, each time the group had built momentum, catching it several times in a row, someone dropped it. Most often, the person who dropped it was a girl. The boys began to grumble and complain, without overtly blaming the girls for the errors. Eventually, both girls abandoned the drill and drifted off to the margins of the pitch. There, they began turning cartwheels, danced and laughed.

What can this story tell us about sport, development and gender in the West Indies and beyond? It illustrates the imbedded inequalities when a game such as cricket is passed down from father to son for generations, but daughters are rarely invited to play.<sup>3,4</sup> Can SDP work effectively to challenge restrictive gender role attitudes within such a rigidly gendered context? Many SDP scholars are now asking this question.<sup>1,5-8</sup> This problem was present throughout the study and is reflective of a growing concern in SDP research that “integrating girls and women into patriarchal sport structures can diminish the impact of sport benefits or even reinforce gender norms by requiring female participants to adapt to programmes designed for males.”<sup>9</sup> (p.1921) In this illustration, the girls adapted by leaving the structured sport and creating their own space to play.

### *Purpose of The Study*

The purpose of this study is to better understand how gender role attitudes are experienced, challenged and reinforced within the context of SDP in Barbados and St. Lucia. Using the HCA and applying a gender lens across our study, we critically examine SDP from the perspective of both boy and girl participants, peer mentors/coaches and programme leaders. In doing so, this study contributes original research to the growing body of critical literature on gender in SDP by applying an HCA model for the first time in this field. SDP is a version of development in which sport and related physical activities are used to help support specific development objectives, such as the UN SDGs. SDP programmes can be found across the globe and focus on engaging with participants on issues of health, sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), economic development, academic support, social inclusion, employability skills and more.<sup>10,11</sup> While much of the existing research on SPD highlights the positive development benefits gleaned from participation in sport

programmes, critical scholars describe such SDP literature as overstating these positive effects and are now calling for more in-depth and critical research to challenge such claims.<sup>1, 10-13</sup> According to Coalter and Taylor, sport for development programmes that reduce social and economic ills are often “vague and lack theoretical and policy coherence . . . and [are] overly romanticized.”<sup>11</sup> (p.1374)

### **Examining Gender**

#### *Conceptualising Gender in SDP*

In this study, we have built upon the work of feminist theorists from the fields of philosophy, gender studies, development studies, sport studies and SDP. Recently, a wave of SDP research has called for a more critical approach to examining gender, claiming that the field is rooted in a binary-based, heteronormative framework that overlooks ways in which sport reinforces restrictive gender norms and roles.<sup>1, 5-9, 14-17</sup>

This debate unfolded in the field of development studies over the past decades, as many feminist theorists (e.g., Ester Boserup) argued that development efforts focused on integrating girls and women into existing male-dominated structures. Such an integrative (gender *in* development, GID) approach has been largely abandoned by development scholars and replaced with a more complex gender *and* development (GAD) approach. A GAD perspective recognizes that without fundamental and transformative change to existing hegemonic systems and structures, true progress toward gender equality is limited.<sup>18-20</sup> This study draws from research in SDP and development studies and answers the call to examine gender role attitudes in SDP with a more critical eye.

We conceptualise gender as a social construct, developed through social practice and governed by a power dynamic that privileges men and subjugates women<sup>21</sup> Gender is fluid, relational and non-binary.<sup>1</sup> It is not determined by biological sex nor does it function as a fixed reality, but rather a social process experienced, performed and interpreted.<sup>8,22,23</sup> We posit that the utilitarian notions of gender as fixed and binary are harmful in SDP, marginalising girls, women and those who are non-gender-conforming while also constructing a restrictive ideal masculinity.<sup>24</sup> This paradigm prevents boys and men from working together with girls and women to promote gender equality for all. Further, we examine the heteronormative culture of sport, which positions heterosexuality, traditional gender roles and sexual division of labour as the normal or natural way of being.<sup>23-26</sup>

This study questions how sexual divisions of labour in sport were and are generated and how they are practiced today in the context of SDP in the West Indies. In the cases studied here, we explore a West Indies masculinity based on heteronormative, machismo expectations of boys and men in sport and the domestic sphere. Sport in the West Indies has a long tradition of representing an iconic masculinity expressed as strength and aggression with rigid gender divisions.<sup>27</sup> For example, the “Windies,” (West Indies unified men’s cricket team) has historically represented a challenge to the colonial past with speed bowlers and strong batsman cheered on as they faced the English and other Commonwealth foes. Yet the Windies women’s team did not compete in the cricket World Cup until 1988, 15 years after the first women’s cup was held.<sup>28</sup>

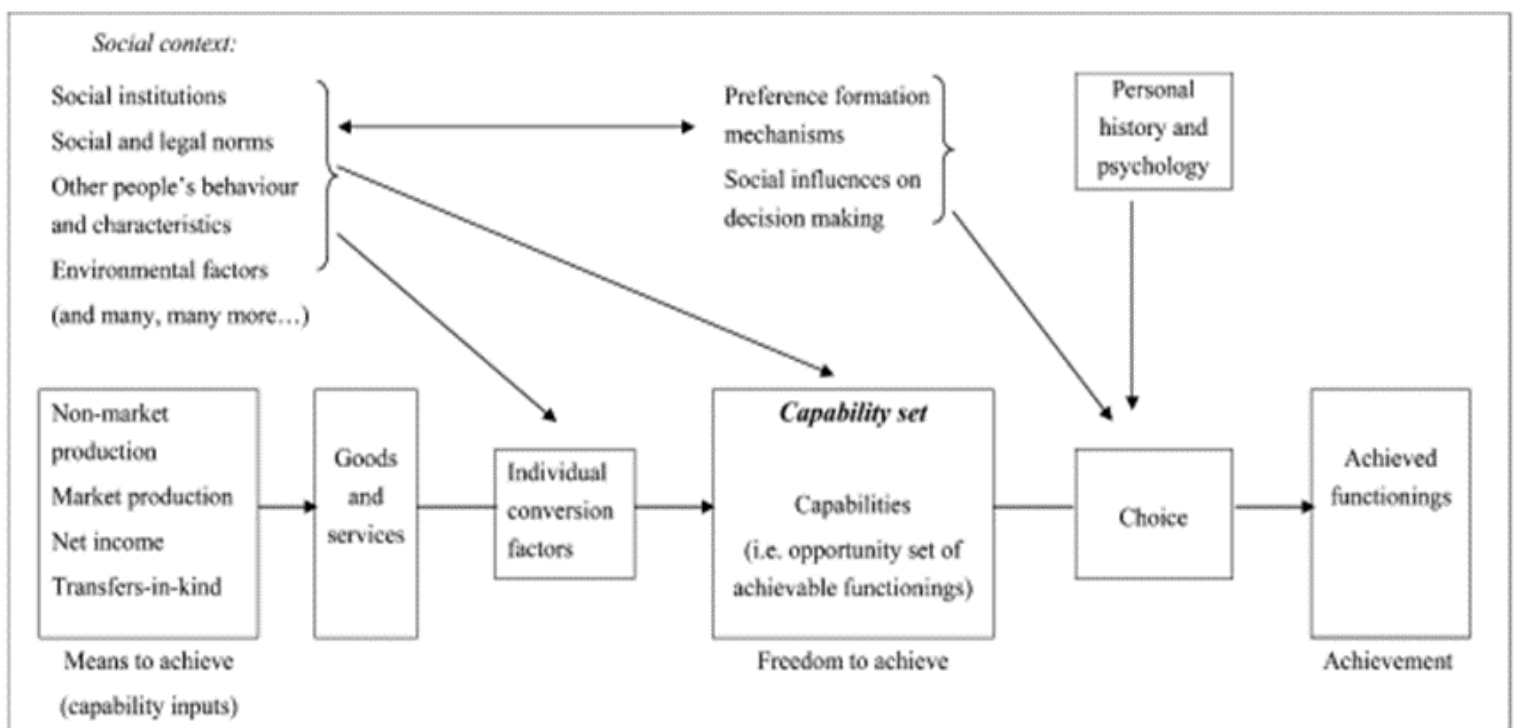
### Applying the Human Capability Framework

The HCA was drawn from amongst Amartya Sen’s pivotal work<sup>29</sup> and built upon by Martha Nussbaum<sup>30</sup> and Ingrid Robeyns.<sup>31</sup> In particular, the HCA explicitly focuses on capabilities, or possibilities, rather than functionings, or outcomes. A person’s capabilities, or “real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value,” are the core of this approach.<sup>31</sup> (p. 1) In 2017, SDP scholars Darnell and Dao<sup>32</sup> and Svensson and Levine<sup>33</sup> examined various SDP programmes and contexts through the HCA framework. In

2016, SDP scholars gathered for a research symposium. Amongst the outcomes was a call for research built out of development studies, using theoretical concepts such as the HCA.<sup>32</sup> However, to date, no SDP research using the HCA has explicitly focused on gender.

This study, rooted in development studies theory, is a timely contribution to the research trends in SDP. The HCA, as a theoretical framework, provides a useful platform to critically examine the experience of SDP participants without relying on outcomes based monitoring and evaluation techniques; such techniques tend to mask or de-emphasise limitations, risks and challenges of traditional SDP programming.<sup>32</sup> To better define how the HCA is applied to our study, we have built upon the work of Ingrid Robeyns, a development studies, philosophy and ethics scholar. Robeyns’ dynamic model of the HCA (see figure 1) helps to define how *capability inputs* are converted to *capability sets* and *achieved functionings*, the main elements of the HCA framework.<sup>31</sup> (p.98) In this specific study, we examined “positive gender role attitudes” as the capability set and “taking and accepting non-stereotypical gender roles” as the “achieved functioning.” Across this model, we applied a gender lens, questioning how larger social norms and institutions support challenge or mitigate the capability developments of positive gender role attitudes.

Figure 1 – Robeyns’ HCA model<sup>31</sup> (p.98)



A key concept of the HCA is preference formation or adapted preferences. Sen contends that preferences are formulated by formal and informal social and cultural influences as underlying factors that govern behaviour in unforeseen ways.<sup>29</sup> In this study, we apply the HCA to explicitly examine how gender roles and norms influence capability development and preference formation. We unpack how specific elements of each programme and its setting influence the capability development of positive gender role attitudes.

The HCA is uniquely situated to examine the process of converting resources into opportunities within the context of complicated social influences and personal preference informed by macro-environmental factors. Therefore, another advantage of this approach is that it looks at specific aspects of social contexts such as social institutions, social and legal norms, etc.<sup>31</sup> With its emphasis on macro and micro-environmental conversion factors, the HCA framework is ideal for examining the formal and informal norms of neo-liberal societies. We follow a definition of neo-liberalism from SDP scholar Mary McDonald who argues that SDP is often misguided by the belief that with the right kind of intervention and support, girls and women will overcome everything from poverty to gender inequality to poor health if they are able to develop their economic abilities and cultural competencies. She defines neo-liberalism as follows:<sup>6(p.911)</sup>

*Used here neoliberalism refers not just to economic principles which privilege free markets and privatization while eroding state expenditures related to social services for the poor and marginalized communities. Rather, neoliberalism also signifies a shifting regime of thought and action, which produces subjectivities dedicated to promoting self-reliance, personal transformation, individualism, and economic efficiency as ways to solve broader social ills.*

As an explicit challenge to neo-liberalism, the HCA framework supports the kind of holistic research called upon to by SDP scholars such as McDonald, criticising the neo-liberal influences that often deny or overlook the systematic and structural inequalities that disadvantage and subjugate groups of people.<sup>6</sup> Such influences include inequalities within the education system and curricula that commodifies education, often at the expense of health and physical education classes.<sup>34</sup> Historically, international SDP has been a Global North to Global South movement with athletes, NGOs and sport organisations from Europe and North America developing sport-based interventions in impoverished countries and communities (most often in

sub-Saharan Africa). These relationships reflect deeply troubling colonial histories and may reinforce long-standing dependencies whilst overlooking important socio-cultural norms, such as gender roles.<sup>6,12,13</sup>

### The West Indies Context

Studies in the field of SDP often omit the complex social and economic environment in the postcolonial West Indies. Beyond programme monitoring and evaluation projects, few studies on SDP in the West Indies exist. As one long-time practitioner of SDP claimed, the Caribbean region is the “forgotten child” of the sport for development field.<sup>35</sup> (p.44) Still, as in the larger field, SDP in the West Indies has grown dramatically over the past 20 years. Early efforts to use sport as a development tool began in the late 1990s. The Commonwealth Heads of Government sought to include sport in larger development initiatives to combat poverty and promote youth development. Such directives were discussed over several years at the Council for Human and Social Development in Sport and were eventually integrated into youth and health policies by the regional government, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). While individual countries took their own paths, region-wide support from CARICOM, the Commonwealth Games and the Australian Sports Outreach Programme (ASOP) provided funding and guidance to the Caribbean Sport for Development Agency (CSDA). They work in partnership on local, regional and international programmes using sport-based interventions toward development goals.<sup>36</sup>

Such initiatives were deeply rooted in traditional Commonwealth sports such as cricket and football. These two sports are the centrepieces of West Indies’ sport culture today. Cricket, a quintessentially British sport, is king in the English-speaking Caribbean with football as prince. British colonial rule extended until 1967 in St. Lucia and until 1966 in Barbados. Historically, cricket in the Commonwealth represents the male, white and colonial elite. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cricket clubs for wealthy whites were the epitome of exclusivity. C.L.R. James’ seminal work on cricket in 1963, *Beyond a Boundary*, describes how the sport served as a platform for challenging colonial rule.<sup>37,38</sup>

In confronting a white, elitist and colonial legacy, the sport of cricket seemingly reinforced traditional, restrictive and machismo gender norms in the West Indies. Cricket grounds, historically and today, tend to serve as platforms for the performance of traditional gender roles. Men play the sport, while women surround them in supportive roles, such as preparing meals, cheering or scorekeeping.<sup>39</sup> West Indian feminist scholars, such as Professor Eudine Barriteau

from the University of the West Indies<sup>ii</sup>, consider gender roles in the West Indies as rigidly defined and imposed, built upon male hegemonic ideals, heteronormative values and patriarchal social norms.<sup>34</sup> Cricket, in particular, vividly represents gendered divisions and identities within larger social contexts.<sup>9,40</sup> We contend that integrating girls into such sport frameworks without explicitly challenging restrictive gender norms falls short of the transformational GAD approach to development.

Today, West Indies sport is still mired in many of the same concerns about race, ethnicity and gender. Neo-liberal influences have created a tension between sport and education with an expanded black middle-class that prioritises education at the expense of supporting sport initiatives.<sup>4</sup> Other scholars conclude that sport, across the West Indies, has somewhat less cultural and economic significance than in larger, North American and European countries.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the decline of cricket success in international competition during the 1990s and 2000s has somewhat dampened enthusiasm for the sport.<sup>4,40</sup> Although the very recent success of the men's and women's Twenty20 teams may again reinvigorate cricket as a sport of national and regional identity.

## METHODOLOGY

### Methods

This paper examines gender role attitudes discussed in focus group discussions (FGDs), interviews and journal activities from amongst five (5) of the SDP programmes included in the larger doctoral study. A total of 104 participants are included in this analysis; 84 joined the 15 FGD sessions and 22 were interviewed. The programmes were selected because they were primarily focused on

development efforts such as education, health and employability skills; yet they also used sport as a mechanism by which to engage participants. They can be classified as “sport-plus” according to Levermore and Beacom's descriptions rather than “plus sport” programmes, which focus on sport over development aims.<sup>10</sup> The fieldwork design and instruments were drawn from Coalter and Taylor's 2010 SDP.<sup>11</sup>

The programmes in Barbados were A Ganar and Sport for Life (SFL). In St. Lucia, the programmes were the National Skills Development Centre (NSDC), the Court Diversion Programme (CDP) and the Junior Visionaries (JV). Four of the five programmes worked exclusively with adolescents aged 11-17, while the other (NSDC) was a sport coaches training programme for unemployed youth between 16-25 years old. The programmes varied in many ways, including their attendance requirements and gender makeup, but were all intended to serve “at risk” adolescents and youth in their communities. 61 of these participants identified as boys or men whilst 23 identified as girls or women, reflecting gender imbalances common in West Indies SDP.<sup>9</sup> Nearly all participants identified themselves as “black” or “Afro.” We have tried to further describe and explain the context of participants' statements in the findings and conclusions sections.

Furthermore, the 22 adult participants interviewed in this study provide a different view. They were programme leaders (coaches, directors, etc.) and educators/government officials working in sport development (at national youth sports organisations). Through these participants, we can understand multiple perspectives of how sport, development and gender intersect. Additionally, 22 adult programme leaders, coaches, educators and youth sports administrators were interviewed (12 female, 10 male).

*Table 1 – Programme Participants in FGDs, Surveys and Journals*

Programme	Male	Female	Total
A Ganar (Barbados)	9	11	20
Sport for Life (Barbados)	18	8	26
Court Diversion (St. Lucia)	8	3	11
NSDC (St. Lucia)	11	1	12
Junior Visionaries (St. Lucia)	15	0	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>84</b>

ii Professor Barribeau provided research guidance on gender in the West Indies for this study

Table 2 – Adult Interview Participants

Affiliation	Male	Female	Total
Sport for Life (Barbados)	0	4	4
A Ganar (Barbados)	0	3	3
National Sports Council (Barbados)*	2	1	3
Barbados Vocational Training Board (Barbados)	0	1	1
National Skills Development Centre (St. Lucia)	2	1	3
Upton Gardens Girls Centre (St. Lucia)	0	1	1
Physical Education and School Sport (St. Lucia)	3	1	4
Sacred Sport Foundation (St. Lucia)*	2	0	2
Government Official (St. Lucia)	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>22</b>
*some participants were interviewed multiple times			

Interviews and FGDs were recorded, transcribed and analysed using Atlas.ti qualitative research software. Journal entries were analysed directly and coded into themes on spreadsheets. Data was organised into various themes. First order themes over the larger doctoral study included support systems, self-efficacy and social affiliation, gender role attitudes, physical activity, and body image/lived body experience. In this article, we will focus on the theme of gender role attitudes, which was coded into secondary themes of challenging traditional gender roles and reinforcing traditional gender roles.

### *Ethics and Limitations*

Research with children calls for specific attention to ethical issues in methodology. Researchers working with children must be aware of imposing adult perspectives on children's experiences, building rapport, validity and reliability of responses, clarity of language, research context and setting.<sup>42</sup> Many steps were taken to address these concerns. Informed consent was obtained through all programme directors, school principals and teachers whilst the children themselves provided informed assent. In conjunction with programme leaders, children were reminded that their participation was voluntary and there were no consequences for non-participation. All identities were kept confidential and names used in this article are pseudonyms. This study was designed to be participant-centred with varied and enjoyable activities. A mixed methods approach included verbal, written and abstract (drawing) data collection techniques, which allowed for students with varied communication skills to participate.

Conducting age and culturally appropriate research with children posed a limitation to this study. We were not

permitted to discuss certain sensitive topics, such as sex and dating, with the participants. Lack of female participants was another limitation, although the limited number of girls and women were able to attest to challenges of gender roles in male-dominated programmes and structures. The researcher position may also be considered a limitation, since the primary researcher is a white, adult female from the United States. It is likely that participants provided socially desirable responses and/or evaded certain topics.<sup>43,44</sup> In particular, boys may have felt obligated to express supportive views of girls in sport to a woman researcher. Although there was no explicit discussion on racial diversity amongst the participants, the unspoken racial dynamic between researcher and participants is a concern when interpreting the data collected. We addressed these limitations by participating in activities, building rapport and encouraging open discussion. We contend that the robust data demonstrates that the participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences and beliefs. Finally, we recognise that our research perspective is influenced by the Global North to Global South dynamic common in SDP.<sup>45</sup> In response, we have grounded our work on input from West Indies scholars.

## **FINDINGS ON GENDER ROLE ATTITUDES**

### **Challenging Gender Roles**

*“Girls can play any sport; girls are skilled in sport”*

Boys and girls' focus groups at all programmes agreed that girls should have the opportunity to play sport. With a few exceptions (discussed in the next section), they agreed that girls should be able to play any sport that boys can play.

Across FGDs, interviews, journals and surveys, participants confirmed that everyone should have equal access to sports. In a focus group of four adolescent girls (12-14 years old) in SFL, gender roles in sport were discussed. First, the girls made it clear that they felt it was acceptable and even good for girls to have the opportunity to play any sport they choose. "I think every sport is for girls to play too," said "Cora." However, they agreed that many people in Barbados felt differently and the social norm was for boys to play cricket, but not girls. Although SFL was focused on the sport of cricket and was held in the nation's premier cricket stadium, only one of the girls was very interested in cricket. Cora stated, "I don't like cricket, but that's just because I don't like it," not because it was a boys' sport. They all agreed that the primary draw to this programme was not sport at all, and definitely not cricket. These participants were attracted to SFL primarily to access the on-site computer lab. Across all of the programmes girls were less interested in sport, considered it less of a draw to the SDP programmes, or mentioned sport less frequently in their journals than their boy counterparts.

A focus group of boys at SFL agreed (n=5, 12-14 years old), noting that girls should have access to sports just the same as boys. "A girl can play a 'man's sport,' it's all the same," one boy stated. Although they still assigned a gender role to some sports (e.g., cricket is a "man's sport"), they rejected the notion that any sport was off limits for girls. During one SFL session, the women's national team from England was training at the same cricket grounds in preparation for a match against the Windies. The women bowlers drew the attention of two FGDs with boys and both groups claimed that women could and should play cricket. They also agreed that these women were highly skilled and that they would like to watch them play a match. In a different SFL group, one boy stated, "Whatever the boys are playing the girls can play. If a boy play a girls' sport then he would get a bad name, but a girl wouldn't really get a bad name." In this statement, the social pressures that restrict boys' access to all sports is clear (discussed below).

Other mixed gender groups had similar attitudes. At the co-ed JV programme in St. Lucia, a boys' focus group (n=5, 12-14 years old) felt that girls should be able to play football and that some girls were good players while some were not good, just the same as boys. When asked if they liked playing football with the two girls in their programme, they replied positively. One boy noted that "we can teach them new things and they can teach us new things." He reiterated this concept again later in the discussion. These groups generally felt that sport should be equally accessible

to girls and boys. A different focus group at JV later disagreed, as discussed below. Another all-boy group at A Ganar felt the same. Namely, they said that girls could play any sport and some could be good at it. One boy noted that they saw girls playing basketball on TV and that this kind of sport activity for girls was acceptable. At CDP, participants did not explicitly comment on gender roles in sport. These programmes, like the SFL groups, have contradictory statements regarding gender roles for boys in sport that will be discussed below.

"Jackie" was the only female football coach in the study. She explained how she earned "respect" from her male teammates and community over years of football competition. "They used to call me Beckham (after famous English footballer, David Beckham), but now they say I'm better than Beckham. Like him, he's real creative. That's how I play. I'm a creator . . . I give them the ball . . . if they can't do it, then I'll do it," she said. Her story shows that she, and her male teammates, took and accepted the non-typical role of a woman as an elite level footballer.

Situating this data in our theoretical context and in Robeyns' model (see Figure 1), several aspects become clear. First, we see that although gendered social norms in sport influence the capability set, the participants have overwhelmingly rejected those influences and developed positive gender role attitudes about participation of girls and women in sport across all methods (the capability set). Secondly, we see evidence of gendered choice formation, reflecting Sen's adapted preferences concept. The girls were less interested in sport, particularly the masculinised sport of cricket. We contend that their preferences represent social influences on decision making, which is why they might develop the capability set of positive gender role attitudes, but not demonstrate the achieved functioning (taking and accepting non-stereotypical gender roles; e.g., playing cricket). By contrast, the boys commonly played cricket (and other sports) in their daily lives and overwhelmingly considered sport the primary draw to the SDP programmes. Further demonstrating the power of social norms on adapted preferences, the boy from SFL thought boys would get "a bad name" for playing a "girl's sport." This statement, and other comments delineating sports by gender, reflect the hegemonic and heteronormative frame of sport in the West Indies. The boys' concern about appearing feminine for playing netball limits their capability to develop less restricted attitudes about gender roles.

*“Girls playing tough against boys”*

Another theme that came through strongly as a challenge to traditional gender role attitudes was girls “playing tough” against boys. Girls and women displaying physical strength and aggression on the pitch against boys is a challenge to machismo gender roles. Many coaches and programme leaders described girls as being “tough” or “aggressive.” Several statements in focus group discussions from both boys and girls, alongside their journal entries describe girls playing sport against boys with aggression and physicality, not shying away from contact. Such statements were coded as “girls playing tough against boys” and grouped under the first order theme of challenging gender roles.

Coach Jackie explained how she spent her childhood and adolescence proving herself to be just as skilled and strong as the boys she played football against. She felt they were trying to intimidate her by being especially tough and trying to “break” her legs. But she endured and believed that she earned their respect, eventually. For Jackie, playing tough was especially important because she felt it was the only way she could fit in and be respected amongst the boys. Some of the adolescent girls in SFL had similar stories, reflecting on how important it was to play aggressively and not shy away from contact. A coach at JV described the only girl that consistently attended as “aggressive,” noting that she was a skilled footballer who seemed to embrace challenging the boys. Boys at SFL, JV and A Ganar all described girls as playing tough or aggressive against boys. However, many of them felt this toughness was actually a display of poor skill.

Overall, there are conflicting aspects within this sub-theme. It seems that playing “tough” is empowering to the girls, demonstrating a rejection of gender roles and achieving the function of taking/accepting non-typical roles. However, the act of challenging these norms seems to reinforce restrictive gender role attitudes amongst some of the boys. Transformational social change is unlikely or limited because of the integrative approach (GID) of these programmes.

**Reinforcing Gender Roles***“Boys are better at sport than girls”*

Across all programmes, many boys felt that girls were either too aggressive, complained or yelled too much or were too “soft” in their style of play. The common thread among these concerns is that boys did not like playing sport with girls, a view underlined by the belief that the way girls

played was inferior. During a focus group of four adult men (18-24 years old) who had just completed the NSDC training certification in St. Lucia and were then serving as football coaches in their communities, the discussion turned to how boys and girls interact during football play. The coaches talked about how the few girls that attend play very “rough” and that the boys react negatively. The boys tended to adjust their play to the girls’ aggressiveness. One coach noted that the boys treated their girl teammates like “sisters.” Another coach stated:

*[The boys] do their training with the guys, but when they play, I have them to play with the girls. The guys cry a lot. The guys cry a lot. Coach, coach! Some girls will just look, like if they cannot get the ball they will just slide tackle you. That’s, the girls are aggressive. They are really aggressive. ... It’s not like [the boys] don’t know how to handle it. Because they play aggressive as well. They just bear in mind that it’s a girl. So sometimes, some of them get angry. And they say, ‘So they playing, don’t worry, don’t worry, I’ll play like that too ya know.’*

In this description, some conflicting elements emerge. First, the girls seem to demonstrate a challenge to gender norms by playing aggressively, such as instigating physical contact (slide tackling). In response, the boys “cry,” however the meaning of crying here was explained as complaining, rather than shedding tears. The boys also respond to the masculinised style of play from the girls by also playing aggressively. However, the coach implies that they hold back or temper their play with their “sisters” because they do not want to hurt the girls. This response then reinforces the traditional gender roles of stronger males and weaker, more fragile females.

The boys at JV in St. Lucia had some similar discussions. While they only had one girl, “Iris,” who consistently attended their football programme, they all played together without any outward tensions or disputes. But when a focus group of all boys was asked whether or not they would like more girls to join JV and play, they issued their complaints about girls playing football. “Less... it depends. They can be bossy and tell us what to do. ‘Pass the ball, pass the ball.’ If you have the ball and they want it even before you have the ball they are saying ‘pass it, pass it,’ and they are calling you.... if you don’t . . . oh, it’s a problem! . . . But if she has the ball, she won’t pass it.” The other boys in this group agreed to this description.

Another focus group of adolescent boys at SFL was asked if they liked playing cricket with girls (n=5). They responded with; “No. They’re too soft. And I like a man to do his



work and hit the ball hard.” This boy claimed he was afraid to hit the ball hard when the girls were playing. Although he was serious in his response, the group laughed a bit and joked that he maybe he wasn’t able to hit the ball any harder and that he was using the presence of girls as his excuse.

At JV, several boys stated that the girls did not pass or score as well as them. Some argued that the girls were “slower,” but others contended that it depends on which girl. They mostly agreed that girls played “softer.” But one boy countered that some girls were more “aggressive” than the boys. “Because they don’t know how to play it right,” he continued. They collectively agreed that they would prefer for the girls to play separately from the boys and that they would rather have a male coach than a female coach. When asked if they felt it was ok for girls to play football or if they thought girls should play different sports, they responded that girls should play different sports, particularly netball and volleyball.

These stories reflect the rigid gender role divisions present in sport in the West Indies and the boys’ experiences in sport seem to undermine their development of positive gender role attitudes. The girls’ play is incorrect or less skilled in their eyes. The integrative approach leaves girls marginalised, whether they adopt masculine attributes (playing “tough,” being “bossy”) or play in a more feminine way (“too soft”). The boys do not accept their non-traditional gender role, therefore the functioning is not achieved within the HCA model. Again, we argue that the positioning of girls into masculinised sport contexts is an integrative GID approach rather than the transformative GAD approach.

#### *Lack of Female Players, Coaches*

The overall lack of female participants and leaders in the SDP programmes also reinforces gender role norms. The common perception that boys are better at sports than girls is often reinforced by a lack of female role models in sport.<sup>15</sup> This notion is caught in a feedback loop – girls have less access to sport and are therefore less present as players, which, in turn, leads to fewer females evolving from players to coaches and serving as role models for future generations. This problem was talked about at length by coaching trainees, coaches, facilitators and other administrators in Barbados and St. Lucia. One coach explained that only three to five girls participate regularly in his group of 65 children. One story, from “Randall” at NSDC illustrates the problem:

*Recently, I was training a set of little boys and out of the blue this little girl, skinny as ever, coming on to the field.*

*And she was telling me, sometimes I raise my pants to my waist and when I raise my pants to my waist, they call me Coach Billygoat. So, she’s coming to me and telling me, ‘Coach Billygoat, I want to play.’ So I said, ‘where are your shoes?’ And she says, ‘I don’t have any shoes.’ ‘And you want to play? You think you can handle these guys?’ (he asked her). I asked for them to come look at their shoes and they’ve got these long studs (cleats), but she said, ‘I want to play. I want to play.’ So I had to readjust the drills I was doing to accommodate her playing.*

In order to incorporate her into the play, he had her serve as the referee. He went on to explain that she called many fouls and the boys were growing frustrated. But Randall used it as a learning point, teaching the boys that it was their role as players to adjust to how a referee calls a game. The fundamental point of this story is that there are so few girls playing, and often with fewer resources, that it may become difficult to incorporate them into normal play.

The same challenge was echoed by many of the programme leaders, coaches, youth sport administrators and educators interviewed. “Melly,” a youth sports leader in Barbados, described her efforts to create more opportunities for girls in sport as “pushing molasses up a hill.” Melly was frustrated with the lack of effort to support sport for girls and women in Barbados. She felt that structural differences in how sport is offered to males and females is likely to be both a reflection of the cultural attitudes regarding sport and gender. A male coach for the JV, CDP and NSDC programmes in St. Lucia noted that he felt a primary school he worked with actively encouraged boys to join JV, but “steered girls towards other programmes,” such as art and music.

The challenge to *transform* the playing field is made clear by this particular problem. The framework for SDP continues to be masculinised in large part because it is male-dominated. Such a GID framework discourages girls and women from joining, a reflection of their adapted preferences rooted in gender role divisions.

#### *“Boys do not play netball or gendered sport”*

By far, the most rigid gender restriction discussed across all programmes was a restriction for boys. Boys do not, or should not, play netball. Netball is a non-contact sport similar to basketball that is common in the British Commonwealth and is traditionally reserved for females.<sup>46</sup> Several coaches and sport administrators explained that opportunities for boys to play competitive netball do not exist. Adolescent boys in this study felt that

playing netball would jeopardize a boy's masculinity and call his sexuality into question. The systematic exclusion of boys from netball represents the hegemonic, heteronormative framework of sport in the West Indies that remains unchallenged by the SDP movement.

As many adolescent participants described it - basketball is for boys and netball is for girls. This restriction against boys playing netball was widely held, although some girls defended the right of boys to play. When girls from SFL (n=3, 12-14 years old) were asked if netball was ok for everyone to play, they replied, "No, no, no not for boys. Boys can't play netball. It's only for girls." When probed for the rationale behind this restriction, they struggled to articulate why netball was unacceptable for males. Here, and in other groups, they just laughed and said it was a "girls' sport."

In the same SFL programme, a focus group of five adolescent boys (12-14 years old) responded to the question, "Why can't a boy or man play netball?" One boy said, "It's a girls' sport. You can't get no man that can flip (hands) jump and catch the ball and wear a skirt to play. A man can't jump and catch the ball and do that thing (he motions a flipping of his hand, leaving his fingers dangling)." The group agreed with laughter. In another SFL focus group, this one containing three adolescent boys, they referred to boys and men who play netball as "bullas." "Bulla" is a slang term in Barbados that most closely translates to "fag," a slur for homosexual male. These boys noted that a male playing netball would get a "bad reputation" and be considered a "bulla." At the same time, a girl playing a contact sport like rugby would not be mocked in the same way. In a separate all-boy discussion group, one participant called boys who play netball "she-males."

A discussion group in A Ganar agreed that boys do not play netball (n=8, ages 12-16 years) boys (n=5) and girls (n=3). The boys agreed that they had never heard of a boy playing netball. They explained that boys play basketball, while girls play netball. When asked why, one boy said that boys will "feel funny" playing netball and girls "feel weird" playing basketball. "It's (netball) a girls' sport. You have to wear a skirt. They would say he's gay," remarked one boy. The boys in particular, insisted that the movements in netball were not acceptable for boys to do. "The sport itself looks girly, because you're jumping about," another boy stated. When asked to demonstrate these "girly" movements, this group of boys refused to do so. I asked them to describe a boy playing netball, they responded with, "gay," "fishy," "funny boy," "not in his right mind," and "gay" again. The girls in this group contended the boys'

restrictions, noting that everyone should get to play a sport they like and claiming that netball is not that different from basketball.

The intense and sometimes homophobic reaction to netball exposes the heteronormative frame by which sport is experienced and perceived. The sport of netball is integrated into this frame, making it an unlikely platform for transforming or challenging these restrictive gender role attitudes. Within Robeyns' model, the capability set is undermined by these social influences and the boys' preferences to avoid playing netball is rooted in a heteronormative masculinity. Boys and most girls are unwilling to accept or take on a gender role that violates this rigid social norm.

*"Girls playing sport are too masculine"*

Another code present under the theme of reinforcing gender roles was the notion that girls playing sport are too masculine. Both boy and girl participants indicated this concern. At the mixed gender A Ganar focus group, one girl described girls playing football as "mannish" and "tomboy." A boy responded by saying that if she were good at playing, then it would be fine for her to play. Boys in several FGDs at SFL felt similarly. They said a girl who played football well would seem more like a boy, but if she was "really good," then that would be "ok." This notion aligns with Jackie's experience as an elite footballer. Another boy noted that girls who play contact sports are often girls that "strut," implying they behave in an overly masculine way. They also noted that girls should not play sports like rugby because they are "too rough."

All coaches and administrators agreed that it was beneficial for girls to play sport. However, some believed that when females started playing at higher levels, they were considered increasingly masculine. A male administrator from the Barbados Sports Council explained that girls get stigmatised as manly or even homosexual as they compete at higher levels. As she gets better, others will have "the perception that she is like a boy." He added that "some of these girls are dressing in football in a "manly" style. Some of the girls may not be that way. Some may." Being "that way" was a reference to these girls potentially being homosexual. Another coach described a high level female footballer, who was coaching youth programmes, as too "manly." He explained how she had recently adopted a more "feminine" style to her hair, dress and how she "carried" herself (citing a less "aggressive" communication style). He was pleased with her changes and felt she could be a better role model for girls this way.

Each of these accounts, from youth participants and coaches, describes how girls and women in sport are trapped within a heteronormative, masculinised framework for SDP. These restrictive social influences mediate both the development of positive gender role attitudes and the choices girls and women make. With a lack of women role models in sport, the crux of the problem described here is how to develop the talent of girls and women in sport within the confines of this integrative, GID model?

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We conclude that the SDP programmes in this study generally take an integrative approach (GID) rather than a transformative one (GAD). That is, they incorporate girls into existing masculinised, heteronormative, neo-liberal sport models with the hopes that this will inherently challenge restrictive gender norms and attitudes. This integrative approach undermines the development of positive gender role attitudes, as reflected in Robeyn's model.<sup>31</sup> Gendered role restrictions in sport negatively influence preference formation, guiding boys toward socially appropriate masculine roles (e.g., basketball over netball) and girls towards the same (e.g., away from cricket). The integrative approach tends to reinforce the belief that girls are inferior to boys in the sporting context, as it dismisses the profound influence of cultural norms and accessibility to sport that may limit the opportunity for girls to develop skills to stay on par with their boy counterparts. Our conclusions align with researchers such as Bruce Kidd, who argues the following:

*...rather than being an 'innocent' pastime, modern sports reinforce the sexual division of labour, thereby perpetuating the great inequality between the sexes and contributing to the exploitation and repression of both males and females.*

The story of the girls at SFL struggling to keep up with the cricket drills, but happily and skilfully engaging in gymnastics on the side lines, reflects our analysis. The vision of the girls, unable or unwilling to fit in to the form of sport offered at SFL (cricket) and exiting the lesson to make their own space to explore sport, movement and their kinetic bodies, is a small rejection of the established hegemonic structure. It was emblematic of the larger problem of trying to challenge gender norms in an inherently gendered system. The boys' whole-hearted rejection of netball, and the girls' agreement on the issue, clearly illustrates this problem as well. Although the sport programmes fell short of wholly rejecting many gender role attitudes in sport, they did succeed in other ways. They explicitly expanded the opportunities for girls to function outside of typical gender

roles by giving them the opportunity to play cricket and football, which is an empowering experience for the girls.

For the most part, both the boys and girls seem to have adapted their life choice preferences to take roles that conform to social expectations, even though they are generally willing to accept non-traditional roles in theory. One explanation, which demands further research, is the lack of role models available to demonstrate non-typical roles. Lack of female role models is a common problem in SDP, yet critical research on this topic is lacking.<sup>15</sup> We found that efforts to create more women coaches flounder under the existing social and structural constraints. Women sporting role models may also be held to heteronormative ideals, with pressure to balance their leadership in sport with a "feminine" appearance and approach. The discord lies in the fact that the sport systems are led by and designed for men functioning in traditional gender roles. Within these systems, true and effective transformation of gender norms is difficult.

Challenging gender norms in SDP must not rely solely on expanding femininity in a way that includes sport. Just as importantly, SDP organisers must consider how they can challenge hyper-masculinity in sport. For example, we found that hope lies in the experience of the NSDC coaching trainees. As these young men discussed their experiences coaching, they emphasised how important it was for them to encourage girls and boys to respect each other as teammates and learn from each other. Engaging with and supporting men to coach as allies to promote positive gender role attitudes can help transform the hegemonic framework of sport for development. We found the HCA model a useful tool in better understanding the intersection of sport, gender and development and call for more research using the HCA model to critically examine gender roles, masculinities and role modelling.

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