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Sporting Equality and Gender Neutrality in Korfball

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This paper explores the extent to which korfball can be considered egalitarian. The intention of this research was to use ethnographic methods to discover the ways in which gender was negotiated, challenged or recreated in a junior korfball setting and examine to what extent korfball provided an opportunity to promote gender egalitarianism. Analysis of the data incorporated a broad Foucauldian lens and subsequently revealed that sex equality was visible to some degree in the junior korfball space. From observations and interviews it was clear that male domination was rarely evident when considering the vocal nature of the game, the physicality and competitiveness of players, or their general ability and skill, yet when interviewed players still constructed gender in traditional ways. Nevertheless, korfball was seen to offer a space where there were possibilities for sporting equality although the influence that the sport had beyond the court was less apparent.

5 key words: Korfball, Equality, Gender, Mixed-sex, Foucault

Introduction

While general opportunities for women to engage in sport have clearly improved in recent years, it would be difficult to argue that women are treated equally in all aspects of sport, whether at professional or recreational level. However, while claims that sport remains a predominantly male dominated arena are valid, it is still misleading to assume that all men automatically experience sport positively and all women will invariably have negative experiences. Consequently, one of the central issues at the heart of the gender debate (not only in sport) is the continued approach to treating women and men as completely separate and that their experiences will always be different. What is needed is a more nuanced approach that takes into consideration the complex forms of power operating between and around those that take part in any sporting activity. A Foucauldian lens is a useful starting point when investigating complex and multiple relationships of power. Unlike the binary understandings of power relationships often recognised through hegemony (Connell 2005), Foucault (1978: 94) suggests that power is not 'a system of domination exerted by one group over another'. Subsequently, many writers exploring the field of sport have utilised Foucault to investigate the complex power relations and multiple discourses that reside within sport or physical activity. For instance, Markula and Pringle (2006) in their research into rugby in

New Zealand highlight the influence of sport on the gendering of bodies where there is a presumption that the discourse of sport aids the production of contemporary gendered identities where 'masculine and feminine bodies are both docile, yet different' (Markula and Pringle, 2006: 100).

By acknowledging these complex relationships of power, further insight can be made into why there remains a lack of appeal for sport by girls (and many boys). While it can be argued that there still remains a disparity between boys and girls levels of participation in sport (Bailey et al 2004) rather than concentrate on traditional sports and offer suggestions about how girls might 'fit in' it is worthwhile to explore examples of sports that have been formulated to cater to both sexes in order to provide opportunities to look beyond simple distinctions read purely through gender. 'Traditional' sports can be seen to have a different history, one developed in the nineteenth century in the United Kingdom and heavily influenced by ideologies of Muscular Christianity (Hargreaves, 1986). However, a sport such as korfbal, which was created in a socially and politically different context to traditional sports, could be considered as an alternative to high profile sports such as rugby and football. In this particular case, the example of Korfbal, which was originally invented as an activity that could be played by mixed-sex teams, is explored in order to develop a more informed understanding of the complex factors that operate within the context of sports that seek to promote inclusive practices.

What is Korfbal?

Korfbal was developed in 1902 by a Dutch Primary School teacher (IKF, 2006; Summerfield and White, 1989). The main catalyst for the development of korfbal was a perceived need for a competitive mixed sport that relied on cooperation, where rules were designed to encourage boys and girls to participate on a level playing field, refute violence and form an egalitarian game (Summerfield and White, 1989). Within this context, Korfbal offered an innovative and quite radical alternative to single-sex team sports that had been introduced to and developed in, schools around the same time (IKF, 2006).

Korfbal is a team sport that comprises elements of basketball and netball. The aim of the game is to score goals by shooting the ball through the basket, known as the korf (IKF 2006; Emmerik et al. undated), which is situated high enough that 'dunking' is not possible (Crum 2003). To do this, players must escape from their personal opponent with skills of passing the ball and moving quickly and efficiently (IKF 2006). Winning a korfbal match comes

from successfully scoring goals whilst also inhibiting the other teams scoring (Crum 2003). Teams are made up of eight players, with four women and four men on each team (Crum 1988; IKF 2006). To ensure this equality and eliminate unfairness, women only mark women and men only mark men, so players are only playing directly opposite their own sex. This arguably weakens traditional sporting advantages of height, muscular strength and speed (IKF 2006). To limit probable contact, players have protected possession of the ball, meaning that whilst a player has possession no other player can take possession without the ball leaving their hands (Emmerik, et al. undated). To add to the promotion of equality and teamwork, solo play is forbidden (IKF 2006), this would include dribbling the ball and running with the ball. The concept of playing together is a key constituent and the rules make teamwork obligatory (Emmerik, et al. undated). During a korfbal match two men and two women from one team attack, whilst the other two men and women from that team defend in the opposite section (Summerfield and White 1989). In essence, due to the splitting of the playing area into 2 halves, a four on four 'duel' takes place within each rectangle (Crum 2003). As soon as two goals have been scored (by either team, or a combination of the two teams) the defenders and attackers swap ends, and in doing so they also swap roles, so attackers become defenders and vice versa (IKF 2006; Emmerik et al. undated). An important structural element of the korfbal game is the need to be vocal. As players mark their opponents closely, often facing them, their teammates inform them of the play going on around them. Being vocal is embedded deeply into the way korfbal is played, with players calling shots by opponents, and informing their teammates if opponents have a good position to feed the ball out for shots.

Gender and Sports Participation

Messner (1992) argues that sports have remained constant in terms of promoting accepted notions of heterosexuality and a space to emphasise masculinity, which is arguably a contributory factor to the underrepresentation of women in sport (Wachs 2003). It can still be argued that in the 21st Century sport is still an arena predominantly for men (Wellard 2009) and continues to contribute to a situation where there are less activities made available for girls to participate in (Azzarito and Solmon 2006).

Sports can also be seen to provide a space for the demonstration of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005) and expected embodied masculinities (Wellard 2009), while modern day competitive sports continue to reinforce male (heterosexual) physical superiority, and simultaneously oppress women through the objectification of their physicality and

sexuality (Mansfield 2006). In particular, female athletes are sexualised, infantilised, trivialised and familiarised by the media (Brookes 2002), which, in turn, plays a significant role in objectifying and sexualising female athletes with an unspoken accent on heterosexuality, whilst underplaying women's sporting expertise (Azzarito 2010).

Fuelling the gender debate is the continued belief that biological difference is the 'fundamental reason for segregating men and women' (Foddy and Savulescu 2011: 1184). 'Sex' and the physical disparity between men and women have historically been used to rationalise the limited access that women have to sport (Mansfield 2006). Biological determinism has been used as an ideology that serves to portray men as innately possessing characteristics that conform to sporting traits, such as aggression, physical power and competitiveness, whilst assuming that women do not (Mansfield 2006). Consequently, sport serves to condone, honour and uphold the dominance of an embodied performance of heterosexual, masculinity male (Wellard 2009), while notions of femininity are interpreted through presentations of fragility, docility, elegance and a maternal caring attitude (Mansfield 2006; Clark and Paetcher 2007; Woodward 2015).

However, while general theoretical debate supports the view that sport remains a predominantly male preserve, the rates of participation for women in sport have increased and opportunities are more visible than they have been historically (Hargreaves 2000; Mansfield 2006). Nevertheless, this does not mean to say that male dominance within sport will inevitably become a thing of the past (Clark and Paetcher 2007). Continued maintenance and reaffirmation of a hegemonic gender structure, and the disparity between the opportunities available to women and non-heteronormative men is somewhat reliant upon the consent and complicity of those that take part. In this respect, women as well as men can be seen to maintain the status quo through engagement with more complex discourses, such as consumerism and neo-liberalism, operating through and beyond gender (Phipps 2014). Nevertheless, the degree to which men and women experience sports as restrictive or emancipatory is dependent upon the socially specific situation of an individual (Mansfield 2006) and their political 'visibility' (Woodward 2015). Diverse and splintered identities need to be acknowledged and factors that may influence individual experience and opportunity include race, ethnicity and religion, as well as age, economic status, political climate, and level of physical (dis)ability (Wellard 2007).

Where gender separation normally exists within sports, male versions of sport are often the main focus and have a larger cultural following (Tolvhed 2013). However, there is a common problem when comparing the sporting performances of men and women, because of the way that gender segregation is normalised, and that there are relatively few opportunities for men and women to play directly against each other. Consequently, general comparisons are made when considering directly measurable units, such as time and distance, where men often perform better than women (Chalabaev, et al. 2013). The idea of a ‘natural’ superiority of the male physique fails to be challenged on a regular basis, in part because of the limited opportunities women have had historically to perform directly against men. Equality in sport has all too often concentrated on giving women equal opportunities whilst keeping them separate from men. Perceived disparity between the sexes has meant that different sports are more readily accessible to different sexes, and rules and equipment difference are reflected in sex-specific formulations of games (Wachs 2002; Cahn 1994). Nonetheless, Azzarito (2010) describes how female athletes do portray strong athletic identities, something she recognises as ‘alpha femininities’ and suggests that girls can develop fit identities focused on success and physical accomplishments. Additionally, it could be claimed that women who participate in sport are able to contest essentialist ideas which associate women with weakness and submissiveness and further challenge taken for granted ‘natural’ gender differences (Butler 1998).

While Foucault did not look specifically at either gender or sport, his ideas are nevertheless important when applied to sporting contexts, especially when considering gendered relationships of power. A Foucauldian analysis not only allows us to research bodies and power within sport, but it also allows us to investigate connections between sport and other power networks (Smith Maguire, 2002), for example masculinities and femininities.

One useful disciplinary technique to consider is Foucault’s (1979) concept of normalisation and normalising judgement, which aims to homogenise individuals through the acknowledgement of hierarchized difference. Drury (2011) applies this concept to explain how particular spaces, specifically sporting spaces, provide the opportunity for normalisation of identities that are not normalised within wider society. Drury’s (2011) research findings from a study into women’s football demonstrated how there were “greater opportunities for the discursive subversion of normative sexuality than those available in mainstream football. Indeed, many players referred to the importance of being able to socialise with other non-

heterosexual women in a context in which lesbian sexuality was normalised” (2011:431). This demonstrates how normalisation occurs through the influence of discourses relevant to specific times and places.

A number of studies into gender and sport have utilised Foucault’s explanations and applications of discourse in order to explain relationships of power. For example, Pringle and Markula (2005) demonstrate how discourses of masculinities are unified systems of thought that recognise specific bodies as male and specific practices as masculine, and “in the process, help constitute multiple and fragmented masculine subjectivities” (Pringle and Markula, 2005: 477). Discourses have also been seen to marginalise ‘the other’ or those that do not fit the accepted norm. This was evident in Brown and Macdonald’s (2007) study into physical recreation where they suggested that physical recreation students used homophobic discourses, and various discourses of masculinity to understand situations within a physical recreation setting. Sexist and homophobic discourses allowed students to ridicule each other in order to “exclude and marginalise female students and less stereotypically athletic male students” (2007:33). Consequently, discourses within sport, like any discourses, can be viewed as unwritten rules that form specific practices and gender relations in particular times and places (Markula and Pringle, 2006). For example, Light and Kirk (2010) explained how hegemonic masculinity helped maintain and reproduce rugby training at a school they were researching, they explained how “practice was surrounded by a discourse of domination, aggression, ruthless competitiveness and giving all for the school” (2010:167). These forms of knowledge were reproduced from generation to the next through coaches and teachers, Old Boys and family members who had previously attended the school.

Foucault’s acknowledgement of the influence of surveillance has also been applied in research seeking to explain power within physical activity and gender. For instance, Azzarito (2009) in her exploration of physical education in the USA demonstrated how girls within the physical education environment projected a gaze and classified other girls’ bodies within the boundaries as broader social gendered discourse. For instance, through self-surveillance ‘the gendered discourse of the body prevents the development of conceptions of muscularity as an ‘attractive’ trait for females’ (Azzarito 2009: 29).

Methods

The material for this paper was taken from a larger PhD study exploring the history of korfbal and the experiences of young people taking part in the sport. Ethnographic fieldwork

was incorporated, including interviews and observation, conducted within a korfbal team based in South East England. Data were collected by the first author who participated as a 'helper' for the under 13s team (which had players ranging from 11-13 years old) and also a senior player within the same club. This 'insider' role allowed for a greater access to the other participants and provided opportunities to observe, engage in informal conversations as well as conduct interviews with individuals and groups (Kvale, 2007; Thorpe, 2012). Active participation enabled the researcher to gain a greater understanding of the 'whole package' (Wellard 2013) of korfbal through travelling to games and tournaments on coaches with the players, spending match and tournament time cheering the team and joining in team talks, and even dressing up in the team colours and letting the juniors paint her face in supporting colours. The researcher also had previous experience of korfbal as a junior player herself which enabled a greater sense of shared understanding with the young participants. Indeed, prior knowledge as someone who had played korfbal in both junior and adult capacities meant that she had a deeper understanding of the game, the rules, and techniques. It could be claimed that a key to successful participant observation is to accept the paradox that one must understand the community as a participant, yet have the ability to observe the culture as a researcher (Sands, 2002; Quinn-Patton, 2002). The fieldwork was conducted for a full year with the junior team, thus incorporating participation throughout the korfbal season as well as summer tournaments and summer training. In practical terms, participant observation was completed for 2 hours per week during training and took place for approximately 2 hours during the weekend when in-season games were played, and for approximately 6 – 16 hours a weekend when summer tournaments were being played.

Informal conversations took place throughout the fieldwork and many opportunities arose during 'downtime' at summer tournaments when players were in-between games, effectively having free time and often away from the adult gaze. In addition, 9 semi-structured interviews were conducted, with 4 boys and 5 girls who were regular attendees of the sessions. These interviews lasted between half an hour and forty five minutes, and took place during the time between matches at tournaments. The questions for the semi-structured interviews were developed from questions that arose during participant observation and also from gender literature and research within the sport sociology field.

Field notes were maintained throughout the research process in the form of a diary. Interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and then transcribed. Transcribed field notes and interviews were coded into reoccurring themes, and these main themes then became the main topics of discussion, drawing on relevant gender literature. A reflexive approach was

incorporated, not only through the use of field-notes and diary entries, but in conversations with the second (male) author about the interpretations of the material. Consequently, reflexivity was seen as an integral part of the research in that it incorporated awareness of practical methodological considerations (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson 1995) as well as the personal and emotional elements of 'doing' research in the field (Burkitt 2012). For the purpose of this paper, the discussion concentrates on interview data, although, as with any ethnographic study, experiences within the field have influenced the way that the data has been analysed.

Consent was obtained from all participants and steps were taken to protect confidentiality including assigning both places and people's names with pseudonyms (Fontana and Frey, 2008). As minors were involved, parents or legal guardians were provided with written consent for the junior players to take part in the research project.

Performances of Gender on the Korfball Court

The discussion that follows focuses upon the presentation of the gendered body in korfball, in particular the young player's considerations of how korfball players should look, how masculinity and femininity should be enacted, and the significance of physical differences. Consequently, the focus of the discussion in this paper is to assess the extent to which gender, within the context of korfball, is considered an issue or not. The relevance of gender will be assessed alongside other issues that arose during the research which relate to sporting ability and performance, and the influence of broader, external gendered expectations. Despite it being clear from observations and interviews that male domination was rarely evident when considering the vocal nature of the game, the physicality and competitiveness of players, or their general ability and skill, notions of gender norms or understandings frequently occurred in interview data, and the way in which players used their gendered bodies was also sometimes apparent during observation. When interviewed, the junior korfball players demonstrated conflicting perceptions of masculinity and femininity, and often used their bodies in ways which would conform with, or resist, gender norms.

Skorts and Shorts

At the start of the research, it was apparent that the korfball uniform played a significant part, not only in creating a korfball 'identity' but as a marker of gender. Consequently, from the outset, wearing the designated korfball kit presented a clear indicator of gendered roles. The

korfball uniform separated players' sex by having boys wear shorts, whilst girls wore skorts (a one-piece skirt-shorts combination with shorts sewn in underneath a skirt which is the outward facing component).

Despite several male and female players explaining that they did not even consider how they looked when they played korfbal, they still described the importance of everyone having a specific kit to wear during matches and that standard fitness clothing was worn by all during training. However, some of the other female players did demonstrate more conscious concern for how they looked when they played korfbal. Louise explained how she tried to make sure her hair looked nice, and even made efforts to put it right again immediately after a match,

Yeah, I sort of make it look nice, I get a comb, start brushing it and make it all nice and thick... I always try and make my hair look nice so it's just a natural thing... but my hair don't look nice now because I was just in the middle of a game, I'll have a chance to sort it out in a minute (Louise).

Louise clearly cared how she looked when playing korfbal and found it important to look a certain way within korfbal spaces. She went on to explain how she took time to look at herself in a mirror and assess how she looked,

I like the clothes we wear, and before a game I'll go in to a mirror and do my hair and everything. I don't normally put on make-up for korfbal unless it's stayed on from like the night before or something. Erm, but I don't usually put on make-up at all (Louise).

Boys were also aware of the significance of gendered dress and Chris explained that girls wore skorts because they were more feminine, and that girls that wore boy's clothing and boys that wear girl's clothing were susceptible to being teased.

Erm I think it's because, really it wouldn't be right if the girls were just wearing shorts because it's not really feminine, kind of thing, for a girl to wear shorts...erm, well kind of, it wouldn't seem right if a girl walked in, and then like they were wearing shorts and all boys stuff, and then the girls, and then a boy walks in to a room wearing all girls stuff, wearing girls perfume and looking like a girl [laughs], wearing makeup... I don't know I think just people would like start taking the Mickey out of them (Chris).

Chris explained how gender transgression “wouldn’t be right”, which suggested evidence of judgement when individuals transgress from social norms (Foucault, 1978). In doing so, Chris gives the impression of the abnormal being individualised (Foucault, 1988) while, at the same time, presenting himself as an actor in the reinforcement of gender norms. Scott ventured that girls look better in skorts, by suggesting that they looked ‘gorgeous’ in skorts rather than shorts, and that people could see their legs. Although this observation could be interpreted as a sexualised view coming from a male player, in a subsequent group discussion, Georgie joked that one of the reasons she wore a skort was ‘to show off my legs, my tanned legs’. To which a number of other girls either agreed or disagreed, and the conversation developed into light-hearted banter about the paleness of some girls’ legs, demonstrating that the influence of wider youth cultural discourses relating to body image, in this case having tanned legs. This demonstrated how the girls were both subjects and objects of power (Foucault, 1994), complying with social accepted gender norms themselves, and also judging others who did not comply.

Georgie and Daniel described the way in which it did not matter if the boys wore skorts, but both recognised that it would not be normal when they suggested that it would look ‘weird’ (Daniel) or ‘silly’ (Georgie). Consequently, whereas the young players found the wearing of the korfbal uniform unproblematic, their justifications were based upon their knowledge of the rules of the game, where clear indications of the specific gendered roles were required. Players tended to demonstrate normalised views of gendered dress and actions, having seemingly internalised wider accepted gender norms (Foucault, 1978, 1979).

Presenting Masculinity and Femininity

During discussions some players employed the terms ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ to explain certain bodily attributes or actions, and others inferred or subtly made reference to accepted gender norms. Despite some players giving very clear views regarding gendered stereotypes and assumptions, Sarah made it clear that her thoughts were more open to critical understanding.

No I don’t, I think it depends, like you can’t say, that would be stereotypical you can’t say like all the boys are really really muscley because that’s not true, and all the girls have got flimsy arms because that’s not true (Sarah).

For Sarah, it could be claimed that she had not internalised societal gender norms and did not demonstrate a docile body, trained to obey bodily gender appropriateness (Foucault, 1979). However, conversely, most players did deliver stereotypical gender understandings, for example:

Yeah like girls are more delicate and then they try and like fancy themselves up, and then boys are walking around going like [makes a fist] (Louise).

yeah I guess because its fashion really... whereas the girls have to wear something to show their legs off, boys should have something to show that their male muscular for instance... girls always want to look beautiful and I don't blame them (Scott).

It was apparent that the young players were attempting to make sense of the contrasting performances that they experienced on court that did not necessarily fit in with the broader discourses of gender that they were exposed to in everyday life. For example, Louise and Scott attributed muscles and aggression to boys, whilst girls were generally stereotyped with wanting to present themselves beautifully. They clearly both had understandings of gender difference related to bodies and the presentation of gendered bodies. Both Louise and Scott demonstrated normalised views regarding appropriate gendered ways for boys and girls to present their bodies, while Louise appeared to have internalised societal values (Foucault, 1979). In addition to grappling with what a gendered body should look like, there were occasions when social interactions were explained as being uniquely male or female. For example, a social practice that was considered a 'girl thing' was discussed by a group of girls during a break at a tournament. They argued that girls simply cannot go to the toilet by themselves, 'because that's just not right, you can't go to the toilets on your own' (Georgie). This notion that girls only go to the toilet in pairs was clearly evident here, and when the players were questioned about boys going to the toilets in pairs, the reaction demonstrated that it was not readily accepted as Rachel retorted with, 'to the feminine loos' (Rachel), and Georgie explained that 'yeah, some boys, if they're feminine boys then yes' (Georgie). The action of visiting the toilets in pairs was associated with girls, and boys that performed the same action were considered feminine. As a concept, the idea of feminine boys provoked laughing from female players, demonstrating that this was not an accepted norm, and instead it was a laughable notion.

In one group conversation, Georgie explained that some people had called her masculine, and Scott jumped in, seemingly to defend her, and stated, 'Georgie you're not masculine, you're

not masculine' (Scott), like it was a bad thing and he wanted to reassure her. Georgie then explained that people had accused her of being masculine because of her reputation of being physically assertive, 'because loads of people at my primary school were scared of me, because I could probably take them down in like a few seconds' (Georgie). Scott agreed in this respect and invited Georgie to pinch him to prove his point, 'No look at her pinch, her pinch is like so deadly, look... I'm used to it now' (Scott). Scott let Georgie pinch her until his skin was quite badly marked, but he did not noticeably react, which could, in itself, be interpreted as a performance of masculinity in that he was able to demonstrate his ability to withstand pain in front of the girls and was not hurt by a girl. A competition then broke out between the girls, where they described how physically capable they were of hurting others, which might suggest not only the adoption of heteronormative 'masculine' behaviours but also more complex forms of relationships of power that are not necessarily based upon the dominance of one group over another (Foucault 1985). Rachel asserted, 'But I know where all the pressure points on someone's body' (Rachel), and Georgie retorted, 'give me a second, because my uncles in the army' (Georgie). Again, Scott 'defended' the girls and asserted that 'they're not masculine but they've got masculine things' (Scott), such as not being worried about getting dirty. At the point that Scott suggested the girls had some masculine attributes, Rachel responded with 'like a willy!' which, by using both humour and references to the biological reaffirmed the notion of difference between the sexes.

A specific term that also came into conversation when interviewing the junior players was the 'tomboy'. Although it was not as significant in this research as other issues, such as physicality, it is worth considering the understanding and judgement of the term when used. A number of the female players discussed 'tomboys', either referring to themselves as tomboys, or talking about tomboys in a more negative or undesirable sense. Sarah described herself quite positively as a tomboy, 'Yeah like I'm a tomboy so, and I didn't want to play, and I like football but I didn't want to play for the boys' team and I didn't want to play for the girls' team' (Sarah). When asked for some further explanation regarding why she considered herself to be a tomboy, she argued, 'I don't like to do girl things, yeah sports, and I don't like going to like beauty pageants [laughs]' (Sarah). Players also labelled others as tomboys, for example Georgie described Jess as a tomboy in a rather indifferent way,

I don't think it matters it just like, they cos for some reason like Jessica because she's a tomboy she doesn't like wearing a skirt a skort and she wants to wear shorts. And I

don't think it matters but then when Danny said oh you have to she like, I think she got a bit upset only because like she had to (Georgie)

In this case, although Georgie was not obviously demonstrating evidence of normalising judgement, or evidence of repression due to transgression (Foucault, 1988) she did, however acknowledge that Jess could be considered a tomboy, and despite not seeming to cast a judgement, she did infer a difference between Jess and the other female korfbal players. Georgie discussed 'girly' things that Jess did not like, implying that the normal things enjoyed by girls were not enjoyed by Jess as she was a tomboy. In this instance, Jess could be seen as "the other" (Foucault, 1988), and different to the rest of the 'correctly' gendered girls.

Scott also directly referred to the term 'tomboy' but not with reference to a specific player,

I just think it doesn't make a difference really, but I reckon, I would prefer if girls wore like skirts to shorts to show that, to show off that they're nice, good looking [laughs]... you want to show that you're, you're good at it but you're not one of those tomboys for instance, I'm not saying that's bad or anything' (Scott).

Despite his insistence that being a tomboy was not a negative thing, he did state a preference for girls wearing skirts in order to prove that they were not tomboys. Seen in this light, tomboys were considered as 'the other' (Foucault, 1988), separate and explained as different. In general, players frequently argued that male players would want to demonstrate masculine traits, and that female players would not want to be labelled as masculine, although there were often conversations around this idea that meant that players did not always think very uncritically about the terms and what they stood for, such as Scott and Rachel.

Difference

Throughout conversations with the players, the topic of 'difference' arose often, and comparisons were frequently made between the perceived physicality of boys and girls as well as the sporting experiences of boys and girls outside of korfbal. Observation during participation also provided opportunities to watch and understand how the boys and girls acted differently and whether they complied with traditional gender norms or whether there were examples of resistance and contestation within korfbal spaces.

Interviews demonstrated that boys and girls were perceived as being different to some players and no different to others. Scott explained that girls and boys were very similar and described how they all got on with little acknowledgement of difference, 'No I really don't see it because we have a laugh so yeah' (Scott). Despite this, when asked who the best player was, Daniel presumed his response should include both best male and female player. In doing so, Daniel demonstrated his understanding of difference, whilst at the same time also highlighted his awareness of the need to consider both sexes and display recognition for equality. Occasionally, within the training space, boys and girls were separated in practices, for example boys on one post and girls on the other. This was only seen occasionally as, in the main, girls and boys were split evenly on the posts, or divided in relation to ability. When players were within the 'no ball' times of training they did usually seem to congregate with the same sex. Reasons for this could relate to the format of the game, whereby during training matches girls marked each other and boys marked each other, which led to easy communications with the same sex player that they were partnered with. In general, however, after training and in water breaks, the girls tended to socialise with girls and boys with boys. This could suggest that broader gender discourses contributed to a prevailing invisible and omnipresent social surveillance which ultimately influenced the players to become principles of their own subjection through their permanent visibility (Foucault 1979) and therefore act in normalised gendered ways. Despite the division of the sexes which was not apparent all of the time, there were many times when the team were together as a whole group, or a boy and girl could be seen talking together on the bench.

Physical difference was something that players acknowledged, and Louise, Sarah, Rachel and Georgie described physical differences between girls and boys:

Erm cos like girls have got more privatey areas [laughs] (Louise)

No because normally the boys are like taller than the girls so if the girls, if the boys marking the girls they wouldn't be able to get to shoot or stuff like that (Sarah)

Like size and physical things because erm like, either because most boys are quite like not faster but like they are a bit stronger so like if girls were going to jump with a ball it's like quite a few times I'll get it but if it was against a boy they'll probably get it every time... and I wouldn't feel as good because normally I'll get it and it wouldn't make me feel as good (Georgie)

Erm I think that's quite a good thing because I know some boys they are a little bit, like some boys are stronger than some girls so they might be a bit tougher on them. So I reckon it's quite a good that girls can mark girls because they're sort of like the same ability (Georgie)

because boys have more ability of like, like being strong and thing like that but like, being in the rebound and being strong where the girls have more like skills at shooting and stuff like that (Rachel)

Physical differences of boys and girls, which were seen to give boys an advantage included strength, height, speed, and less delicate body parts. These attributes were deemed to make boys less prone to pain or injury during contact, good at defending shots, and better at collecting balls after shots. Rachel was the only player here who suggested that girls were better than boys at skilled roles such as shooting. With these different physical attributes, boys and girls were deemed to act in different ways. Girls were seen to be much less physical than boys, 'I mean like girls as they're like girls they don't really like to punch and kick each other in football and all that so they're much more gentle and yeah' (Chris). Louise agreed,

sometimes the girls get a bit bitchy if like you don't do it right or get all stroppy whereas boys ... when they get aggressive so they will like hurt you and girls don't really like pull you on the floor or anything (Louise).

Boys were not only seen to have physical advantages such as strength, but they were assumed to be more physical than the girls; more aggressive. There seemed to be a discretion to the norm (Foucault 1978) regarding boys and violence; it was normal and acceptable for boys to be perceived as violent or aggressive. Louise continued by explaining that it was hard playing korfbal sometimes as the boys held shirts and girls did not, the boys shoved into players and girls did not, and the boys were more likely to pull players to the floor or hit. She also explained how the boys also naturally threw the ball harder than the girls, apart from Jess who was tall and therefore also threw with a lot of power. Louise discussed the boys in a general way, and then named Jess specifically as the only girl with a lot of power, and in doing so individualised the non-normal (Foucault, 1979).

Traditional sports were also seen to require physical performances that were different to korfbal. Sarah considered football to be 'rough', but did not see korfbal in the same way.

Callum also believed that korfball was 'less aggressive' than rugby and when Daniel was asked what non-players thought about korfball he described how his [male] friends 'call it a wussy sport because it's non-contact, because they do, like, football or rugby. But yeah, I think they just think it's a wussy sport but it's something I enjoy so I don't really care'. The non-contact aspect of korfball rules was a clear factor in the players understanding of the sport to be physically less aggressive than many others. That it was considered less aggressive, and had explicit non-contact rules, could be why Louise suggested that 'boys think korfball is more girly than boy-y'. The player's perception of korfball in comparison to what they might consider as 'real sports' underlines research which asserts that korfball is perceived as a 'sissy's sport' (Crum 1988: 239). There are obviously preconceptions from 'korfball outsiders' that assume a non-contact, non-traditional, non-male oriented sport must be 'wussy'" (Lucy), suggesting that the fact it is not perceived as a masculine sport means it is perceived as a lesser sport than the likes of football or rugby.

Korfball was also regarded as different to the traditional sports that were on offer to the young players in school. Daniel commented how football and rugby dominated PE classes, despite the fact that sports such as korfball provide a great opportunity for girls and boys within PE lessons to play together. Rachel believed that korfball provided opportunities to make it easier to organise PE lessons 'so you haven't got to have, like, an all girls' lesson or only girls lesson, or only boys lesson, so you can play it throughout so both two sexes can join in'. She explained how, in her experience, PE teachers did not try to get girls equally involved in football, even though they had to play it, and they did not try to get boys equally involved in netball, even though they had to play that within PE. However, in trying to explain this further, she suggested more stereotypical gendered explanations relating to girls not liking football in the first place and that boys cannot play netball anyway 'because it is only a girls' sport'. Lucy further upheld gender stereotypes by suggesting that when girls play single sex sport they tend to be 'wussy', and therefore it was better to play mixed sport so that it emulated what she considered to be 'proper' sport.

It was clear from observation and interviews that a number of players had beliefs and understandings that complied with more traditional gender norms. Although not all, a number of players believed that boys had physical advantages in sport, and were likely to be more physically assertive or aggressive than girls in the same situation. Some players also problematized sports outside of korfball, or physical education classes, deeming them to be

predominantly directed at boys, and discouraging girls from sport in the process. In this light, korfbal was seen as a potential answer to the problem.

Conclusion

The research revealed that korfbal was clearly performed and experienced in ways that were both different to and similar to traditional sports. At face value the format of the game seemed to encourage a level of equality between the sexes on the korfbal court. For the young people taking part, reflections upon their experiences of korfbal highlighted the extent to which sex equality and gender neutrality were evident on or off the court. This paper has shown how the junior korfbal players in this study still held understandings of gender that were often based on societal norms. It would appear that korfbal, as a sport, could not eliminate these understandings within its own space, let alone within wider society. Yet, there were exceptions to a solely uncritical gendered understanding and certain players, at certain times, displayed evidence of this on various occasions. Interviews and informal conversations demonstrated both compliance to, and deviation from 'normal' gender actions at different times, with some confusion about key gender terms including masculinity, femininity and the term 'tomboy'. Players were often reluctant to think critically about accepted gender norms and on many occasions players would seem uncomfortable when prompted to explain their views, or when encouraged to consider normalised gender discourse. Yet, the findings from this study were more positive regarding equality within korfbal, than previous studies displayed (Crum 1988; Thompson and Finnigan 1990; Summerfield and White 1989).

Players could also clearly be seen to be both subject and object of observation within the complex network of gazes (Foucault, 1979, 1994) which exist in both the korfbal spaces and wider society. Players demonstrated the use of social taboo as a judgement of transgression (Foucault 1978), for example when Chris explained that if boys wore girls clothes they would be subject to teasing. However, when some players referred to a few of the girls as 'tomboys' there could be considered an individualisation of the non-normal (Foucault 1979). In this case, it was apparent that the players sometimes found it difficult to align to the gender-neutral discourses that were expected from the players within the context of the korfbal

rules, whilst at the same time balancing their constructed understandings of gender, learnt through wider social discourse. Thus, the problematic issue of performing non-conventional gender, such as in the case of a 'tomboy' supports existing critical theory relating to the prevalence of performative gender (Butler 1990; Jackson 2006; Renold 2009). So, whereas the positive aspects of playing together were considered favourably, it was equally difficult for the young people to leave behind their restricted formulations of how to 'do gender' that had been developed in everyday social reality. At the same time, the rules of korfbal could be considered equally restrictive in that they had been (historically) shaped from an initial premise of gender difference.

Nevertheless, in comparison to traditional sports, korfbal could be seen to provide greater opportunities for girls and boys to play sport together. Particularly in PE lessons, where both sexes have the potential to mutually enjoy a sport that was created so that girls and boys could play in unison as a mixed sex game within an educational setting (Broekhuysen 1949, cited in Crum 2003). Summerfield and White (1989) explain how korfbal was invented as a competitive mixed sport that relied on cooperation, where rules were designed to encourage boys and girls to participate on a level playing field, refute violence and form an egalitarian game. The suggestion from this research is that, despite a lack of gender critique from players, there were more opportunities for equality between the sexes during the game of korfbal, in comparison to other more popular traditional team sports, precisely because they were able to play together in the first place.

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