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EMERALD STUDIES IN SPORT AND GENDER



**SPORT, GENDER
AND DEVELOPMENT**

Intersections, Innovations and Future Trajectories

**LYNDSAY M.C. HAYHURST, HOLLY THORPE
AND MEGAN CHAWANSKY**

 OPEN ACCESS
BOOK

Sport, Gender and Development

This is a much anticipated and welcomed text, and widely exciting because of the nuanced coalescing of three subject matters: development, gender and sport, which are deeply important to me. I know I would simply pick the book up and look to read it, based on the bringing together of Hayhurst, Thorpe and Chawansky in one space. All brilliant feminist scholars in their own right. This book will undoubtedly hold significant appeal to many of us working in the sport for development, gender, space and will become a must have resource. Those new to thinking about sport for development through a gender lens would do well to make this text their start point! I look forward to having my own well handled, marked up copy and for years to come I have no doubt I will be regularly lifting it off my book shelf and saying to research students, 'this is a seminal text, make sure you are familiar with it, and the broader work of those who have contributed'.

–Rochelle Stewart-Withers,
Senior Lecturer at Massey University, New Zealand

Sport for development must urgently move beyond its missionary phase, especially after the exacerbating inequalities of COVID. For those who deploy sports to empower girls and young women and educate boys and men, this book is essential. The authors and their collaborators offer both caution and encouragement through frank theoretical insights and instructive case studies from the Global South. I found it learned, honest and extremely informative.

–Bruce Kidd, OC, OLY, PhD, LLD, Ombudsperson and
Professor Emeritus, University of Toronto

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Sport, Gender and Development: Intersections, Innovations and Future Trajectories

BY

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List of Abbreviations

AGYW	Adolescent girls and young women
ASDP	Action sports for development and peace
GAD	Gender and development
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
M&E	Monitoring & evaluation
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
PFPE	Postcolonial feminist political ecology
PFPAR	Postcolonial feminist participatory action research
SDP	Sport for development and peace
SDGs	Sustainable development goals
SFD	Sport for development
SGD	Sport, gender and development
WAD	Women and development
WID	Women in development

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About the Authors

Lyndsay M.C. Hayhurst is a York Research Chair (Tier 2) in Sport, Gender & Development and Digital Participatory Research, and an Assistant Professor in the School of Kinesiology and Health Science at York University in Toronto, Canada. Her research focuses on gender issues in/through sport for development and peace (SDP); gender-based violence prevention and sexual and reproductive health rights promotion; bicycle justice; gender and mobility studies; cultural studies of 'girlhood,' postcolonial and decolonial feminist theory, global governance, international relations and corporate social responsibility. Her current research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI). Her publications have appeared in *Women's Studies International Forum*; *Gender, Place & Culture*; *Third World Quarterly* and *Sociology of Sport Journal*. She is co-editor of three edited books. She has previously worked for the United Nations Development Programme and Right to Play. Her goal is to re-envision new, community-oriented and socially just approaches to SGD initiatives.

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Chapter 1

Introducing Sport, Gender and Development: A Critical Intersection

In recent years, sport has demonstrated its enormous capacity to propel women and girls' empowerment. It mobilizes the global community and speaks to youth. It unites across national barriers and cultural differences. It is a powerful tool to convey important messages in a positive and celebratory environment – often to mass audiences. In addition, it teaches women and girls the values of teamwork, self-reliance and resilience; has a multiplier effect on their health, education and leadership development; contributes to self-esteem, builds social connections, and challenges harmful gender norms.

(UN Women, 2021b)

Gender emerges at the intersection of the physical and the social, and this is precisely where sport also resides. The embodied nature of both gender and sport suggests possibilities for intertwining the two for development interventions [...] Seeking to empower females through sport is somewhat paradoxical given that the world of sport can be a bastion for male privilege and power, an important arena for asserting a particular kind of male dominance over women (and some men), as well as furthering Euro-American hegemony vis-à-vis the Global South.

(Saavedra, 2009, p. 124)

The abovementioned quotes – excerpts drawn from publications written almost 10 years apart – tell part of the sport, gender and development “story” since the sport for development (SFD) field was formally institutionalized in the 1990s (Darnell, Field, & Kidd, 2019). Despite recent claims by the UN Women (2021b,

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para. 4) that “sport has demonstrated its enormous capacity to propel women and girls’ empowerment,” the development sector has not yet provided a multifaceted understanding of the relationship between sport and gender. Our book responds to this lacuna with the goal of carving out, and unpacking, the sport/gender/development nexus. We do this by critically investigating the use of sport as a tool to achieve local, domestic and international GAD objectives – a term we refer to throughout this book as sport, gender and development (SGD).

SGD is part and parcel of the broader sport for development and peace (SDP) “movement” – a coalescence of entities, activists, practitioners, volunteers, policy-makers and scholars who identify/question/(critically) examine sport as a (potential) contributor to development on a variety of levels – including within and across local, national and global scales (Kidd, 2008; Wilson, 2012). However, over the last decade, there have been considerable debates about the scope, coherency and significance of SDP (Lindsey & Grattan, 2012; Sherry, Schulenkorf, Seal, Nicholson, & Hoye, 2017). Questions abound as to whether, in fact, SDP is a “cohesive” social movement; and if so, whether this “movement” utilizes *sport* – or rather, and more loosely, takes up play, movement, leisure, recreation and/or physical culture (Hayhurst & McSweeney, 2020). Crucially – and for the purposes of our book – it seems particularly apt to contemplate the ways that “gender” and “sex” have been taken up by, exploited and/or (re)produced by the SDP movement. Indeed, we contend a more textured and nuanced understanding of SDP is necessary; and in this book, we suggest that a parsed out and increasingly institutionalized SGD movement is indeed on the rise, one that compels its very own field of scholarly inquiry. This book is our response to this need to critically explore the rise of SGD within the broader SDP and development movements, and to offer feminist theoretical, methodological and practical interventions across local, regional, national, and global scales.

This introductory chapter consists of five parts. Firstly, we offer a brief history of the relationship between gender and development. Following this, we detail the rise of SGD, and the impact of the “Girl Effect” on scholarship, policy and practice in the field. Thirdly, we introduce the book project and clarify our use of key concepts that run throughout. Fourthly, we provide an overview of the book, detailing the seven chapters that explore a range of issues across five different countries, including gender-based violence (GBV), environmental degradation, economic sustainability, the rise of informal, action sports for gender development, the politics of knowledge production in Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL), the embodied experiences of women working in SGD, and the ethics and risks of SGD campaigns featuring girls and young women from the Global South. Finally, we conclude by offering suggestions for future possibilities and challenges for feminist research, programming, policy and practice in SGD.

Gender and Development: A Brief History

From the early 1970s to mid-1980s, “Women in Development” (WID) was positioned as various actions taken – vis-à-vis policy, programming, and other mechanisms – through which to include women in the development sector. This era was primarily focused on promoting women’s economic contributions and income-generating activities (Sweetman, 2015). Here, Ester Boserup’s infamous

book, *Woman's Role in Economic Development* (1970), demonstrated how technological advances (e.g., the plow) contributed to the marginalization of women's labor, leaving them with low productivity and marginal status subsistence farming, opposing the view that modernization was beneficial for women. However, the limitations of this approach were clearly evident by the inability of WID to directly challenge patriarchy.

Hereafter, Women and Development (WAD) emerged, a slightly more radical approach which highlighted the challenges involved in integrating women into patriarchal institutions and practices, and centered more on women-only projects. However, the WAD approach failed to account for the productive and reproductive roles of WID (Marchand, 2009). Programs targeting women exclusively, particularly those that were economically driven, suddenly meant that WAD "became nearly synonymous with microcredit programs, which fit the pro-market approach and had the added advantage that, as studies showed, women spent more of the money they earned on children's nutrition, health, and education than men" (Jaquette, 2017, p. 246). Said differently, this era was marked by a consistent instrumentalist purview grounded by the "market logic" that equated economic activity with women's empowerment (Shepherd, 2016).

In the late 1980s, the field shifted again to focus more on gender and development (GAD) – whereby "women" was replaced with "gender" – in order to broaden and incorporate women of color and feminists based in the Global South, who felt that there were notable distinctions between the classifications of "woman" and "man" (Harcourt, 2018; Marchand, 2009). This move to "gender" was meant to result in an overall reframing of the field in terms of recognizing the social construction of gender and was critical in pushing the GAD field toward "intersectionality" in the late 1990s/early 2000s.

This period in development also included "gender and the environment" (GED) – supporting ecofeminist perspectives that essentially problematized presumed functionalist connections between women and nature embedded in the notion that "women were responsible for managing the environment" (Harcourt, 2018, p. 3). GAD and GED standpoints, when taken together, were both critical for diversifying the experiences of gendered identities incorporated into power relations. That is, such viewpoints embraced gender as one spoke of a larger "identity wheelhouse" to be considered along the wider helm of gender(ed) power relations. In many ways, GED helped to ensure GAD upheld more intersectional approaches that stress the importance of relations among various categories of difference – including race, class, ethnic differences and religion – and aim to locate how these categories overlap on both structural and relational levels. Still, and as Mason (2017) points out, the intersectional approach taken up by GAD approaches remained grounded in heteronormative perspectives, with transgender and queer bodies overlooked or excluded altogether.

Following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, GAD frameworks promoted "gender mainstreaming" and urged multilateral agencies to move from WID to "gender equality" (Eyben, 2018, p. 519; United Nations, 1995). Gender mainstreaming involved "both a strategy for infusing mainstream policy agendas with a gender perspective and for transforming the institutions associated with these agendas" (Eyben, 2018, p. 519). And yet, a backlash emerged

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as gender mainstreaming became routinely automated, depoliticized and “bureaucratized” (Eyben, 2018, p. 519).

The failures of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) in the mid-1990s ushered in enthusiasm for more participatory, democratic and “good governance”-focused approaches to GAD. The push for international development targets (see Merry, 2016) – later taken up in the form of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – resulted in a focus on poverty reduction (2000s) leading to an agreement to provide debt relief to highly indebted poor countries. Honing in on poverty reduction resulted in gender equality objectives being overlooked. In 2005, the UN Foundation and Nike Foundation, in partnership with the NoVo Foundation, commenced the “Girl Effect” campaign – continued the focus on poverty alleviation, but began positioning girls as the “new panaceas” of development (Girl Effect, 2021). This emphasis on investing in the efficiency of girls and women as financially responsible was similarly taken up by the World Bank, framing gender equality as “smart economics” (Eyben, 2018, p. 521).

However, the Girl Effect and related campaigns have been heavily critiqued by feminist development scholars for a number of reasons. Of particular concern are the ways such campaigns often perpetuate a “feminization of responsibility and/or obligation” focused on the economization of girl-oriented initiatives (e.g., conditional cash transfer programs, microfinance activities, etc.) that end up validating naturalized and essentialist representations of girls (Chant, 2016; Roberts, 2015). The result is a “cocktail of celebratory girlafestoes” (Koffman, Orgad, & Gill, 2015, p. 157) that tend to overlook the structural and historical causes of poverty and gender inequality by legitimizing, reproducing and even revering corporate-led neoliberal and global capitalist frameworks to lay claim to girls’ empowerment and economic fortitude (Roberts, 2015). As Chant (2016, p. 26) remarks

Rationales for female involvement in conditional cash transfers, microfinance, and “Girl Effect”-type initiatives appear to be deeply rooted in a range of reactive gendered essentialisms, in which there seems to be insufficient political will to transform inegalitarian gendered responsibilities for livelihoods, to challenge male power and privilege, or to destabilize socially and geographically inequitable macroeconomic structures.

Critics also contend that conflating girls’ empowerment with economic vitality simply frames women and girls as more efficient and responsible, thereby underlining their compliance with normative expectations (Cornwall, Correa, & Susie, 2008; Wilson, 2011). Other scholars have voiced the perilous techniques used by girl-focused development initiatives that all-too-often use the active bodies of racialized girls – for example, a Black girl using a shovel to dig a hole for a water well or a Brown girl bicycling to school (Khoja-Moolji, 2019). In turn, the economization of girls under this “new” approach to gender (equality) and development used “the bodies of black and brown girls” and made them “hyper-visible in humanitarian and international development discourses” (Khoja-Moolji, 2019, p. 3). As Wilson (2011, p. 322) asks, “what are the implications of the kinds of ‘positive’ images of women [and, we would add, girls] which are produced” and “in

what ways are these images gendered and racialized?” Indeed, the Girl Effect campaign largely paralleled previous efforts by Nike to “set the tone for popular feminism’s marshaling of injury and capacity as twinned discourses in an economy of visibility” (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 50) (also see [Chapter 7](#)).

The Girl Effect was just one strand of a broader response toward the various challenges faced by the international community – including the UN system – in promoting a “single recognized driver to direct UN activities on gender equality issues.” UN Women was subsequently established in 2010 – formally known as the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women, 2021d). Alongside the UN, other international organizations such as Plan International also started to focus more exclusively on gender equality, specifically, through their seminal “Because I am a Girl” campaign, which ran from 2012 to 2018. In partnership with a number of organizations, Plan International, the UN and the Girl Effect launched a number of initiatives, such as “International Day of the Girl” in 2011 and turning various landmarks (e.g., the Pyramids in Egypt) pink to “raise public awareness of the importance of girls’ education” in 2012 (Plan International, 2021).

Importantly, in 2015, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emerged as part of the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” established during the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (or Rio+20) with gender equality and women’s empowerment being essential to the achievement of each goal. The framework aims to “provid[e] a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future” with “17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership” (UN, 2021b). SDG Goal 5 “achieve gender equality and empower all girls and women” (UN, 2021a) is, of course, of particular relevance for the SGD realm. Some feminist development scholars suggest that the SDGs represented a new opportunity to reinvigorate the stagnating MDGs; with great concern that the MDGs were far too simplistic, measureable, reductionist and largely based on “the power of numbers to communicate a development agenda with a sense of scientific certitude and serious intent with potential for accountability” (Fukuda-Parr, 2016, p. 49). While the MDGs placed most of the onus on Global South countries with poverty-centric objectives; the SDGs have still been lauded for embodying “a truly We The Peoples Agenda,” with a sharpened focus on the operationalization and procedures for achieving development for all countries through social, economic and environmental tenets of development (Senit, 2020, p. 693). At the same time, the SDGs have also been denounced for lacking built-in accountability mechanisms to ensure they are realized (Fukuda-Parr, 2016).

Despite the “pros” and “cons” of the SDGs, they remain a mainstay on the SDP landscape. Over the last five years, a major focus of the SDP movement has been solidifying the link to the UN SDGs, resulting in the increasing institutionalization and professionalization of the SDP sector (McSweeney et al., forthcoming). For example, The International Platform on Sport and Development, The Commonwealth, and Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: “Sport for Sustainable Development: Designing Effective Policies and Programmes” set up to explore how sport can contribute to achieving the SDGs through specific procedures and approaches. Indeed, a key contribution

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of SDP to the SDGs is the focus on gender equality, an issue to which we further dissect in the next section.

The Rise of Sport, Gender, and Development

Of all the [Mathare Youth Sports Association's] initiatives, perhaps the inclusion of girls into soccer leagues has been the most interesting and courageous [...] Given that sport has traditionally been seen as reinforcing patriarchy, the question is whether it [sport] can provide a unique opportunity to break down patriarchal structures, leading towards more equality.

(Willis, 2000, p. 845)

In 2000, Owen Willis wrote what was one of the first scholarly articles (to our knowledge) about one of the most established SDP NGOs – the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), in Nairobi, Kenya – and its programming for young women and girls. In the 20 years since this article was written, we estimate that thousands of SDP programs with an explicit focus on gender have emerged, many driven by large international NGOs such as “Women Win” – but some programming created by other smaller, more locally-focused entities too (e.g., Asociación Movimiento de Jóvenes de la Isla de Ometepe – AMOJO, in Nicaragua). Even still, many women and girls who participate in sport, leisure, recreation and physical activity on a day-to-day basis, outside the formalities of structured SGD programs, seem to be overlooked by accounts of SGD, at least in scholarly work.

Researchers have demonstrated that sport is a useful tool to contribute to GAD in various ways, particularly as a means to enhance girls' and women's health and well-being, facilitating their self-esteem and self-empowerment, fostering social inclusion and social integration, challenging and transforming gender norms, educating women and girls about HIV/AIDS prevention, and providing them with opportunities for leadership and achievement (Forde, 2009; Hayhurst, 2014b; Jeanes & Magee, 2013; Larkin, Razack, & Moola, 2007; Nicholls & Giles, 2007; Oxford & McLachlan, 2018; Saavedra, 2005; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013; Willis, 2000; Zipp, 2017). Indeed, some of the early SGD research emerging in the late 1990s explored “unstructured” forms of SGD. For example, Jennifer Hargreaves examined the challenges facing the development of women's sports in South Africa, pointing to the multifaceted ways that the legacy of apartheid-shaped South African women's sporting experiences (Hargreaves, 1997). Martha Brady was perhaps one of the first scholars to draw attention to the SGD “field,” particularly through her work at the Population Council that considered how sport may be utilized to address gender inequalities and improve the lives of girls and women around the world (Brady, 2005; Brady & Banu-Khan, 2002). Brady's work focused on two mixed-sex programs in Kenya and Egypt, where she highlighted the importance of safe mobility and public spaces for young

women to participate in SGD programming (Brady, 2005). Notably, the question guiding her research remains salient today: can sport “serve as a mechanism for building social networks and bringing girls into the public sphere, and by doing so begin to transform gender norms” (Brady, 2005, p. 36)? Here, Brady asserts that SGD may be located at the crux of two “types” of female activists realizing the possible potential of sport in different ways. First, she contends that development activists and feminist development theorists need to focus on sport as a tool to enhance international women’s health and rights. Second, sportswomen and feminist sport theorists must “reach beyond their traditional scope to incorporate broader health and development objectives onto their agenda” (Brady, 2005, p. 35).

Brady (2005) and Willis (2000) define sport as a tool to contribute toward “development” using language from the United Nations Development Program. More specifically, Willis defines development as “enlarging people’s choices” (2000, p. 840), and Brady frames development using the UN MDGs, arguing that sport is a pertinent tool to “promote education, development, health and peace” (2005, p. 37). Hargreaves discusses how development is often equated with “progress and liberation” where a “backward, usually agrarian, non-industrialized economy” is transformed into “an industrialized economy” (1997, p. 198). Today, the definition of development accesses varied understandings of “empowerment” and “progress” for girls and women.

What a number of early SGD-focused articles confer is that an effective sports structure may contribute toward social, economic, and cultural development objectives for women and girls (Brady, 2005; Pelak, 2005). Brady (2005) and Walseth and Fasting (2003) argue that the secular organization of sport may serve as a barrier to the social development of women and girls. Such studies emphasize the importance of religion, social order, different understandings of sexuality, and women’s “lack of autonomy” (from a Western perspective), suggesting that women and girls may not experience the same development “benefits” through sport as those from other countries and cultures. The assumption that sport will “fix” and distract young women by discouraging them from participating in crime, gangs, or mingling with boys is put forth by both Willis (2000) and Brady (2005).

Burnett (2001) examines a program where sport is positioned as a tool to promote social inclusion for youth of low socioeconomic status. Here, she suggests sport is framed as a tool to promote participation and fun, not just “exclusivity and competition” (Burnett, 2001, p. 52). Burnett’s (2001) findings also support the notion that sports development programs provide “important building blocks and the nurturing of sports talent” (p. 52). Similarly, Hargreaves notes that “a comprehensive sports structure is also an index of development” (1997, p. 198). Whereas gender-based SDP programs might target disadvantaged women and girls, high-performance sport programs tend to create training programs for promising young females who have been fortunate enough to have opportunities to get to that level (Brady, 2005; Burnett, 2001). In many ways, then, the programs for girls and women discussed in these articles often interweave program content to include *both* social and elite sport development goals. Regardless of whether earlier SGD scholars positioned sport as a tool to promote social development (e.g., Brady,

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2005; Willis, 2000), high-performance sport development (e.g., Pelak, 2005), or both realms together (Burnett, 2001; Hargreaves, 1997), SGD programming to this day tends to rely heavily on the belief that the lives of women and girls in the Global South (and in marginalized communities in the Global North) will be somehow “enhanced” (i.e., improved health, self-esteem, inclusion, social mobility, integration, and empowerment) through access to sporting and physical activity opportunities.

However, and despite Hargreaves conducting research 20 years ago, it still seems that “women who c[ame] from minority groups and from countries outside the West have been marginalized, and their experiences, problems, struggles and achievements have been excluded from mainstream history and practice” (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 6). Sport feminists have increasingly moved toward exploring social inclusion and prioritizing the perspectives and needs of women from multiple ethnic and social backgrounds to build a unified front that aims to use sport to improve the opportunities for all women’s participation (Hargreaves, 2000). Nevertheless, the focus on “sameness” and cohesion risks upholding essentialist claims that ignore the diverse experiences of gender and feminism across race, age, patriarchy and capitalism. Indeed, Pelak (2005) stresses the importance of actively avoiding universalizing women’s sporting experiences by considering categories of difference as they influence sport and physical activity; and encourages those studying SGD to view culture as hybrid, fluid, and inherently dynamic. Put differently, she suggests we must be mindful of how “gender intersects with other systems of power, namely race and class” (Pelak, 2005, p. 55), while also being attentive to ways in which scholarship on women’s sporting experiences has long focused on the White, middle-class, Western woman (Hargreaves, 2004). As Shehu (2010, p. x) attests:

Despite the pressures created by feminists and other social movements to open up the sport arena to women and other previously excluded groups, the age-old patriarchal principles embedded in sport, reinforced at every turn by the mass media and gendered socialization, remain a major obstacle to personal fulfillment and advance in sport for many African women...[African] women, perceived as a threat to the male system of power relations in sport, become targets of toxic myths, stigmas, and harassment in sport spaces to perpetuate the domination of these spaces by heterosexual, masculine males.

Over the past decade, feminist sport scholars have drawn from different strands of critical race and feminist theory – i.e., transnational feminisms, Indigenous feminisms, postcolonial and decolonial feminisms, intersectional feminisms – to reveal the politics of race, ethnicity, culture and religion in women’s experiences of sport and physical culture both in organized sport and everyday forms of physical activity, fitness and recreation (e.g., Azzarito, 2019; McGuire-Adams, 2020; Palmer, 2016; Ratna, 2018; see Ratna & Samie, 2018 for an excellent overview). Such important writings on difference as it is lived, felt,