

PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY AND ATTITUDES TOWARD EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN SCHOOL SPORT AMONG BOTSWANA ADOLESCENTS

Jimoh SHEHU*, Lobone KASALE* & Amanda B. MORERI**

**Physical Education Department, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Republic of Botswana*

***Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Republic of Botswana*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explain consciousness of gender inequality in school sport and predict pro-equality attitudes among 1580 respondents (934 girls and 646 boys) from 45 Botswana secondary schools. Results of separate multiple regression models indicate that girls' sport participation is negatively correlated with pro-equality attitudes and boys' grade level is negatively related to perception of gender inequality. Pro-equality attitudes could not be predicted from the students' grade level, regardless of gender. The coefficient on sport participation in relation to pro-equality attitudes among boys is expectedly negative but not statistically insignificant ($p=0.084$). The implications of these preliminary findings for policy and programmes include the need to monitor and redress gender disparities in the school sport space.

Key words: Gender differences; School sport; Attitudes; Equal opportunity.

INTRODUCTION

In Botswana as elsewhere, the school sport system is not only value-laden; it is also political in the sense that it reflects specific norms, interests and relations of power. Politics is intrinsic to any sport enterprise within and outside the educational system, since the choice of goals, structures, processes and programmes (what should be or *not* be on the sport agenda) entails ideological contestations and relations of power, even among youngsters. Consequently, the commonsensical notion that the school sport terrain is neutral, innocent, apolitical and insulated from the dominant social relations is misleading (Messner & Sabo, 1990; Stoll & Beller, 2000). Socially constructed differences such as gender enhance or constrict people's chances in the sport arena (Theberge, 2000; Harry 2001; Yiannakis & Melnick, 2001). It is for this reason that discussions of sport production and reproduction in the school system must entail considerations of power relations and gender-specific patterns of experiences, orientations and outcomes among student groups. Such considerations enable a critical appraisal of how issues of social justice in relation to gender and other statuses are perceived, received, contested or resisted in the school sport context.

Policy developments in physical education and sport in Botswana over the past decade reflect the Government's commitment to improving access, participation and athletic success of school children and youth and, ultimately reduce social inequities in the playground. For instance, Botswana's social policies such as The Revised National Policy on Education (Republic of Botswana, 1994), the Long Term Vision for Botswana (Presidential Task Group, 1997) and the National Sport and Recreation Policy for Botswana (Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, 2001) reflect faith in the power of sport not only to boost health and productivity (by counteracting unwholesome leisure, addictions, AIDS, obesity and attendant illnesses), but also to instil the ethos of tolerance, unity, inclusion, decorum, productivity, competitiveness, equity and morality.

Initiatives to realise the policy objectives of access and equity in sport for the country's socially diverse youth include elective physical education at the secondary school level and the establishment of specific sport competitions for the tertiary, secondary and primary educational institutions. However, there has been limited research on the extent to which social or gender relations within the school sport system are congruent with the democratic ideals of inclusion, access and equity.

In recent times, it has become clear that school sport resources and opportunities are not equal within and across Botswana districts and regions. At the time of writing, the Botswana Government was grappling not only with teachers' gripes over non-compensation for extra-curricular responsibilities, but also a widespread dissatisfaction over the perennial issues of inadequate sport and recreational facilities and the shortage of sport personnel in the primary, junior and senior secondary schools (Department of Sport and Recreation, 2001).

The dominant discourse about sport in Botswana schools has become narrowed to qualification, selection and preparation of youngsters for international sport engagements by means of age-graded competitions and schools of sports excellence. It has largely ignored the types of issues most crucial to access and equity in sport, namely broad aims, comprehensive and inclusive programmes, choices, opportunities, equal representation, adequate resources and infrastructure, quality physical education, participant empowerment, regular evaluation and proactive structural reform (Shehu & Mokgwathi, 2007).

Shehu (2009) and Motsumi (2011) examined the ways gender impacts on pupil-pupil and teacher-pupil interactions in physical education classes in Botswana, highlighting a number of contextual issues. For instance, young people's gendered positions in terms of physical literacy and level or rate of physical activity are affected by interventions and expectations of teachers. Besides, experiences of subordination, such as male dominance in squad leadership and monopoly of the playing field and equipment, can constrain their female counterparts. The topical issues of bullying/harassment and objectification underscore the need to address the intersections of structural positions, perspectives and pedagogies more systematically (Evans, 1986; Birrell & Cole, 1994).

The strategic issue of engendering equal sport opportunities has given rise to extensive literature aimed at putting on the global cultural and curricula agenda of the issues of access, participation, representation and subjectivity in sport in relation to the wider social relations that inform and shape inequalities in society. For example, women's relative under-

representation at the elite and managerial levels of male-dominated invasion and combat sports, such as soccer, rugby, boxing and basketball have been linked to patriarchal ordering of social space, gender relations and cultural formations (Birrell, 1987; Scraton, 1990; Burnett, 2001). It has been noted that factors of sport participation cannot be assumed to predict for both males and females given the ways structural positions and traditional sex roles define and shape access to sport opportunities, privileges and resources (Lenskyi, 1986; Fasting, 1987; Penney, 2002; Shehu, 2010). Political, economic and normative analyses (Ingham & Loy, 1993; Capel & Piotrowski, 2000; Coakley, 2009) have explored the highly charged issues of equal opportunity, occupational structures and income from sport and demonstrate that women are disadvantaged relative to men. Moreover, sport sociologists analysing the history and culture of sport (Costa & Guthrie, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Birrell, 2000; Messner, 2011) have shown how gender discrimination is legitimised and made to appear natural.

Several researchers have integrated the situated sporting experiences of students into explanations of how school and college sport structures and processes are gendered, gendering and often benefit boys and men disproportionately (Messner, 1990; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Miller *et al.*, 2007). In particular, it has been demonstrated that school sport has a special status in relation to systemic educational inequalities as one of the structures that create social distinctions and hierarchies through qualifying tests, tracking, role expectations and natural meritocracy (Polley, 1998; Landers & Fine, 2001; May, 2008). School sport as a central part of school culture can hardly avoid operating in ways that are congruent with the groundwork laid by the surrounding educational and ideological processes (Connell, 2003; Thorne, 2003). Inequalities produced by the construction and production of school sport are often obscured by the way the entire school valorises winning athletes and teams so as to condition the students to believe that when the school team wins everyone is a winner, and therefore, nobody is marginalised (Folley, 1990; Stoll & Beller, 2000).

Given that studies conducted in the global North reveal that the intersection of gender and sport experiences have implications for inclusion and exclusion, the gendered sport situations in Botswana schools cannot be regarded as unproblematic. Theoretical and empirical explorations of intra-gender and inter-gender differences in young people's perceptions, values and experiences with regard to sport are no less important in a developing country like Botswana. Such explorations are crucial for deconstructing practices that entrench subordination in micro- and macro-sport settings and for constructing conditions that are sensitive and responsive to the gender subtext of youth sport development. Accordingly, this study aimed at examining Botswana secondary school students' consciousness of gender in their school sport programmes and their *pro-equality attitudes*, that is the extent to which respondents will support or oppose measures to equalise sport opportunities for girls and boys

Specifically, the study sought to: (1) determine if there are significant differences in the mean scores on the indices of perceptions of gender inequality in school sport and pro-equality attitudes between girls and boys; (2) test the significance of two separate regression models for girls' and boys' data in which perceptions of gender inequality in school sport were regressed on grade level and sport participation; (3) determine the significance of perceptions of gender inequality in school sport, grade level and sport participation as predictors of pro-

equality attitudes; and (4) evaluate these regression models in light of the *underdog thesis*, *threat hypothesis*, *enlightenment thesis*, and *reproduction thesis*.

ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

Several assumptions were fundamental to this study. Firstly, that gender, like other social statuses, explains what one notices or does not notice in given situations (Rosenblum & Travis, 2000). Indeed, social psychological studies have demonstrated that life experiences and circumstances are central to how socio-structural conditions are perceived (Iyengar & McGuire, 1993). Thus being a boy or a girl affects how a student experiences access, participation, equity, constraints and privileges in a sporting context. Secondly, following Davis and Robinson (1991), it is assumed that “consciousness of inequality includes self-awareness of subordinate groups, as well as awareness of inequality on the part of those who are not disadvantaged” (Davis & Robinson, 1991:72). Thirdly, it draws on theories derived from research on men and women’s awareness of gender inequality in home, higher education and workplace (Robinson, 1983; Plutzer, 1988; Davis & Robinson, 1991; Quinn, 2003), on the assumption that these theories have epistemological relevance for the domain of school sport. Fourthly, it is assumed that using a parsimonious model with few variables and items will provide preliminary snapshots of the factors that shape perceptions of gender inequality in school sport and pro-equality attitudes among secondary school students. Fifthly, it is assumed that understanding the antecedents of students’ support for equity in school sport is crucial for sport managers, coaches and school authorities, as the success and sustainability of any inclusive sport policy depends on the active support of the students.

Given the variety of personal and socio-cultural variables that mediate perceptions of gender inequality and pro-equality attitudes, the researchers did not assume any cause-effect relationships between the dependent and independent variables explored in this study. These assumptions underscore the challenge of conducting a preliminary study on the perceptions of gender inequality and pro-equality attitudes among school sport participants, which is a topic that is relatively under-researched and absent from the sport studies literature.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on the *underdog thesis*, *threat hypothesis*, *enlightenment thesis*, and *reproduction thesis* to explain consciousness of gender inequality and predict attitudes toward policy actions that favour greater gender equality. According to the underdog thesis, those who are most subordinated by the existing institutional arrangements will be more aware of inequality than those who are privileged, and the former are more likely to favour greater equality than those who benefit more from the status quo (Robinson & Bell, 1978; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Previous studies have shown that sport has long been culturally defined as a masculine activity meant to privilege males and the highly skilled (Messner & Sabo, 1990; Hargreaves, 1994; Burnett, 2001; Coakley, 2009).

The threat hypothesis holds that increasing gender equality or advances of minorities and marginalised groups will represent a threat to the dominant group’s identity, privileged status and cultural power (Blalock, 1967; Zuo & Tang, 2000; Pridemore & Freilich, 2005). Consequently, the dominant group is likely to resent and resist equality as the subordinate

group pushes for it. Thus, the threat hypothesis is not only salient in political economic terms, but also in athletic and recreational terms. School sport is not only cultural and structural; it is also relational. It confers statuses and privileges. Its construction, regulation and management are based on assumptions and expectations about rules, roles and power differentials between social statuses. In this regard, boys will be less likely than girls to support gender equity in school sport because girls' increased empowerment will be perceived as a threat to the boys' dominant status in school sport structures.

The enlightenment thesis holds that more years of education and exposure to diverse learning experiences broaden the mind, enabling the individual to develop concern for human values, social welfare, gender equality and removal of structural causes of social problems (Astin, 1993). In other words, education, in broad and graduated terms, contributes to the development of an individual who is critically aware of social issues, such as gender inequality and is willing to support interventions to combat it (Hyman & Wright, 1979). In this context, the varied educative and interactive experiences that are included in the curriculum at various grade levels increasingly strengthen students' cognitive abilities and beliefs about equity. Given that this theory assumes that education correlates with opposition to social inequalities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), the researchers tested the hypothesis that students' grade level will influence perception of gender inequality in school sport and support for interventions to combat it.

Contrary to the enlightenment thesis, the social reproduction thesis posits that school-based education, in the context of wider social relations, not only creates hierarchies of knowledge, competencies and values, but also promotes an unquestioning attitude towards the existing social structures (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Giroux, 1981). A point that is especially relevant here is the role of hegemony in the creation of hierarchies and gender regimes, which are mutable and contestable (Gramsci, 1985; Connell, 1987). Studies have shown that, like other school structures, school sport subculture reproduces inequality by promoting hierarchies and the ideology that access, participation and success are due to prowess (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Foley, 1990). This theory views the school system as socialising pupils to accept social inequalities through selection, classification, examination, promotion, certification and recognition (Messner, 2003; Coakley, 2009). Students thus come to regard privileges, dominance and power as legitimate rewards for individual effort rather than due to discrimination or subordination. In this sense, student-athletes will be more likely to perceive gender inequality in school sport, but will be least supportive of equal sport opportunities.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The quantitative data reported in this study are based on a survey conducted in 45 purposively selected secondary schools. Participants were 1580 students out of the initial stratified random sample of 1700. The response rate was 93%. Of the 1580 participants, 934 (59%) were girls and 646 (41%) were boys. In terms of grade level, 1434 (91%) were from 40 junior secondary schools (JSS) and 146 (9%) were drawn from 5 senior secondary schools (SSS). At the time of this study, Botswana had 207 junior secondary schools and 28 senior secondary

schools. The participating institutions represented 19 and 18% of the school populations respectively. Primary school leavers in Botswana go to a 3-year junior secondary school and those who complete the junior secondary school proceed to a 2-year senior secondary school, which is the main pathway to the university. About 58% of the girls and 63% of the boys were on their school sport teams. Forty percent (40%) of the respondents (394 girls & 241 boys) were non-athletes. The mean age for girls was 15.1 years ($SD=1.21$) and that of boys was 15.6 years ($SD=1.33$). The mean age of the participants was 15.3 years ($SD=1.28$).

Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was granted by the respective school authorities and class teachers. Questionnaires were administered to students in their classrooms after obtaining their informed consent and assuring them that their responses will be treated with anonymity and confidentiality. Students completed the questionnaire in less than 15 minutes. The researchers and/or the research assistants were on hand to explain the items and provide clarifications where required.

Data and measures

Based on the insights from the aforementioned theories regarding the influence of education, involvement and social status on equity predisposition, this study used gender, grade level and sport participation as predictors of students' perception of gender inequality in secondary school sport. These variables were coded as 0 or 1 for gender (1 for girls), sport participants (1 for student athletes) and grade level (1 for senior secondary). In addition to these 3 independent variables, perceptions of gender inequality index were added as a 4th explanatory variable to determine the link between each variable and students' disposition towards equalisation of sport opportunities for girls and boys. The 2 dependent variables were indices of students' perceptions of gender inequality in school sport and attitudes towards equal sport opportunities for both sexes.

Perceptions of Gender Inequality in School Sport (GISS) Scale

The items in the GISS scale stem from the observations by previous researchers (Capel & Piotrowski, 2000; Connell, 2003; Dar & Resh, 2003) that girls and women in sport are usually disadvantaged in 3 policy areas: educative (access to good quality sport instruction and practice opportunities); competitive (access to substantive sport competitions); and redistributive (access to standard sport facilities and equipment and/or rewards). Consequently, the GISS scale was designed to compare how girls and boys fare in these 3 policy arenas (see Notes).

Attitudes towards Gender Equality in School Sport (GESS) Scale

The GESS scale was developed to assess the degree to which students regard extension of greater sport opportunities to boys than girls as un-egalitarian and discriminatory. The 3 items in the GESS scale contain reference to the 3 policy arenas embedded in the GISS scale. The 2 scales were pilot-tested with 40 secondary school students (20 boys and 20 girls) to ensure the items and instructions were clear and measured what they were intended to measure. Inter-item correlations and exploratory factor analyses of the items in the 2-scales were

conducted. Data were analysed using multiple regressions to predict GISS and GESS indices from the selected independent variables. Preliminary analyses for normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity were conducted and results indicated that the assumption for multiple regressions was not violated. All results were tested for significance at an alpha level of 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Item analysis

The GISS and GESS scales demonstrated considerable internal consistency with Cronbach's coefficients of 0.88 and 0.75 respectively. Inter-item correlations for GISS ranged from 0.63 to 0.81 and 0.43 to 0.56 for GESS. Results of exploratory factor analyses using varimax rotations resulted in 2 clear structures with each item loading strongly on only 1 component. Table 1 shows the correlations of the items in each scale, their Cronbach's alphas and the factor scores of each measure with an Eigenvalue greater than 1. All correlations in Table 1 are significant at $p < 0.01$.

TABLE 1: CORRELATION MATRIX OF THE ITEMS FOR GISS & GESS SCALES AND CRONBACH'S ALPHA

Scales & item dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha	Correlation ($p < 0.01$)			Factor scores
		SL	SC	SF	
GISS	0.88				
Sport Learning (SL)		–	0.63	0.68	0.85
Sport Competitions (SC)			–	0.81	0.91
Sport Facilities (SF)				–	0.93
GESS	0.75				
Sport Learning (SL)		–	0.56	0.43	0.81
Sport Competitions (SC)			–	0.51	0.85
Sport Facilities (SF)				–	0.78

Descriptive statistics

The overall means and standard deviations on the 2 scales for the total sample and by respondents' gender are presented in Table 2. The t-test results revealed that girls, in general, perceived significantly higher levels of gender inequality in their school sport programmes ($t(1578) = 3.37, p < 0.01$), and are less likely than boys to support inequitable sport policies ($t(1578) = 4.91, p < 0.01$). These findings support Hypotheses 1 and 2 and previous studies on gendered perceptions of power differentials in the larger sporting contexts (Choi, 1999; Messner, 2005), due to social constraints and normative conceptions of sport performance.

TABLE 2: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR GISS & GESS SCALES RESULTS

Index	Total sample (N=1580)		Girls (n=934)		Boys (n=646)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
GISS	10.34	2.69	10.54	2.52	10.06	2.91
GESS	11.32	2.81	11.61	2.80	10.91	2.79

Bivariate analyses

On the one hand, the bivariate analyses for boys' and girls' data reported in Tables 3 revealed that grade level, sport participation and perception of gender inequality were negatively correlated with pro-equality attitudes among girls.

TABLE 3: GENDER CORRELATION MATRIX BETWEEN INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Variables	Girls (correlations)				Boys (correlations)			
	PI	GL	SP	PII	PI	GL	SP	PII
Pro-equality Index (PI)	–	-0.057 *	-0.064 *	-0.079 **	–	-0.021	-0.072 *	0.103 **
Grade Level (GL)		–	-0.044	-0.030		–	0.014	-0.148 ***
Sport Participation (SP)			–	-0.038			–	-0.042
Perceptions of Inequality Index (PII)				–				–

*p<0.05

** p<0.01

*** p<0.001

On the other hand, sport participation was negatively correlated with pro-equality attitudes among boys. However, their perception of gender inequality was positively correlated with pro-equality attitudes, but negatively correlated with grade level. This confirms studies showing that, like other school structures, school sport subculture reproduces inequality by promoting ideology that access, participation and success are due to prowess tied to gender order (Walker & Barton, 1983; Messner, 2003).

Standard multiple regression

Tables 4 and 5 present separate standard multiple regression equations for girls and boys. The independent variables of grade level and sport participation were simultaneously entered into the equations, and each was evaluated in terms of its predictive power in relation to the dependent variables (Pallant, 2007). The data for girls and boys were desegregated because it was expected that gender would be salient for students' sport experiences at different levels of education and sport (Hall, 1988; Duda, 1991), given the social conditions and expectations that shape participation.

As Table 4 indicates, grade level (entered as 2 dummies instead of a single education variable) was not a significant predictor of girls' perception of gender inequality in school sport as predicted by the enlightenment thesis and reproduction thesis. Among boys, the coefficient for grade level was significantly negative as senior secondary male students were less likely to be conscious of unequal sport opportunities in their school, as predicted by the reproduction thesis. This is because the culture of schooling, its meritocratic ideology, as well as gender role expectations can make inequalities appear natural (Giroux, 1981).

TABLE 4: STANDARD MULTIPLE REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR PERCEPTION OF GENDER INEQUALITY ON GRADE LEVEL AND SPORT PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

Independent variables	Girls F (2, 931) = 1.17, p=0.31					Boys F (3, 642) = 7.79, p<0.001				
	B	SE	β	t	p	B	SE	β	t	p
Grade level	0.322	0.339	0.032	0.981	0.328	-1.261	0.332	0.148	-3.80	0.001*
Sport participation	-0.203	0.167	-0.040	-1.22	0.225	-2.42	.234	-.040	-1.03	.302
Constant	10.30					11.64				
R ²	0.002					0.024				

*p<0.05

Between both gender groups, sport participation had no significant bearing on perceptions of gender inequality, although the negative coefficients would suggest that non-athletes perceive more gender inequality in school sport than student athletes. Contrary to the enlightenment thesis that education leads the individual to support equal opportunities, this data suggest that grade level was not a significant predictor of pro-equality attitudes among the students. One implication of this finding is that a higher level of education might be needed to confirm the enlightenment thesis.

TABLE 5: STANDARD MULTIPLE REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR PRO-EQUALITY ATTITUDES ON GRADE LEVEL, SPORT PARTICIPATION AND PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER INEQUALITY BY GENDER GROUPS

Independent variables	Girls F (3, 930) = 4.18, p<0.001					Boys F (3, 642) = 3.30, p<0.05				
	B	SE	β	t	p	B	SE	β	t	p
Grade level	-0.595	0.376	-0.052	-1.58	0.114	-0.048	0.323	0.006	-0.15	0.882
Sport participation	-0.366	0.185	-0.064	-1.98	0.049*	-0.390	0.226	-0.068	-1.73	0.084
Perceptions	-0.089	0.036	-0.080	-2.44	0.015*	0.95	0.038	0.099	2.50	0.013*
Constant	13.39					10.26				
R ²	0.013					0.123				

*p<0.05

The results in Table 5 illustrate that sport participation was negatively related to pro-equality attitudes among girls as expected. Although the coefficient for boys in this regard was not significant, it was also in the negative direction in accordance with the reproduction thesis that emphasis on striving and performance lessens support for equity in sport participation, compensation and access to equipment and facilities (Shields, 2008).

The estimates in Table 5 demonstrate that perceptions of gender inequality constituted a significant predictor of pro-equality attitudes among the students. After accounting for the influence of grade level and sport participation, perceptions of the gender inequality index

was positively related to pro-equality attitudes among the boys. The reverse was noted among the girls. Girls who were relatively more aware of gender inequality in their school sport and had dramatically lower pro-equality scores than the rest. This finding may well imply that the underdog thesis applies only when the girls are non-athletes.

It may be that the significant negative relationship between sport participation and pro-equality attitudes among the girls is indicative of disagreements regarding the extent of specific inequalities and what should be done about them. Understanding why perceptions of greater gender inequality may not result in significant support for equal sport opportunities is crucial to effective cognitive interventions to engender equity, access and respect in school sport settings (Kay, 1995).

Viewing the overall mean scores in Table 2, most students seemed to acknowledge some kinds of gender inequality in their school sport system and were somewhat against the maintenance of inequitable status quo. However, the standard deviations would seem to suggest the students in this study would have different views about ways to balance different values and trade-offs about how school sport should be regulated in relation to the gendered social identity of students. Results from the preliminary t-tests generally indicate that girls were more likely than boys to perceive gender inequality in school sport and less likely than boys to support sport programmes or policies designed to privilege boys at the expense of girls. This group differences suggest that perceptions of school sport activities and equity policies are shaped by the gendered orientation and structured expectations that girls and boys bring to sport contexts, and to the process of deciding on the kind of policy options that will bring about specific sport benefits or equity (Reynold, 1997).

Further studies are needed to examine the meanings, expectations and values that school girls and school boys associate with school sport, how they construct their notion of equal or unequal sport opportunities and how these vary by students' ethnicity, class, religion, race, gender and other social positions (Lee, 1983). As Lentinon *et al.* (2006) have noted, perception of social injustice and sensitivity to gender inequalities are related to self-concept, school effects, as well as gender stereotyping of sporting activities. This requires cognitive and structural interventions to change perceptions, attitudes and material disadvantages.

Standard multiple regressions were used to predict factors that influence perceptions of gender inequality and pro-equality attitudes in the context of school sport. Age was not included in the models because the differentials were close to zero. Results of separate analyses for girls and boys presented in Table 4 suggest that perceptions of gender inequality in school sport were negatively correlated with boy's grade level. The coefficient for girls on this variable was positive but statistically insignificant. This finding indicates that there were within-group variations in perceptions of unequal sport opportunities among secondary school students influenced in part by gender.

In the second model, pro-equality attitudes could not be predicted from the students' grade level. The coefficients for this variable were, however, negative. This finding suggests the need to look beyond grade levels to fully understand what shapes propensity to support or oppose equal sport opportunities. The coefficient on sport participation in relation to pro-equality attitudes was negative for girls but insignificant for boys. Thus, girls on school sport

teams responded according to the reproduction thesis, indicating that the underdog thesis is confounded in part by gender, as well as athletic status, such as differing athletic skills and differential participation in sporting activity. Perhaps the student-athletes among the girls, given their privileged roles and/or greater athletic skills, were more opposed to attempts to dismantle a school sport policy regime based on efforts, performance, selection and competitiveness, as predicted by the reproduction thesis (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Contrary to the threat hypothesis, girls' pro-equality index was negatively and significantly correlated with perceptions of unequal sport opportunities. The positive link between perceptions and pro-equality attitudes noted among boys might be due to a sense of fair play and a commitment to ideals of gender parity. Perhaps, the boys also saw gender equity in sport as a two-way street that facilitates the removal of barriers that *both* girls and boys face in having a fair access to school sport resources (Anderson, 1999).

On the whole, boys' overall R^2 were higher than those of girls in the sample, suggesting that 'boyness' contributed much to the estimates in the models. This indicates that gender can be expected to matter when it comes to students' constitutive interests in sport matter, considering that girls and boys are constrained by different social norms regarding competitive physical activities (Harrison *et al.*, 1999).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

In this preliminary study, perceptions of gender inequality in school sport and support for equal sport opportunities among a cross-section of Botswana secondary school students were examined. Under the logic of the reproduction thesis, the relations between students at different grade and sport skills levels may increase the individual's resistance to substantive equal opportunities. Results of the multiple regression equations in this study indicate that the impact of girls' sport participation on pro-equality attitudes is negative and boys' grade level is negatively related to perception of gender inequality. After taking the students' grade level and sport participation into consideration, findings did not support the threat hypothesis. A key conclusion from the study is that support for equal sport opportunities in the school system depends on an awareness of gender disparities and norms of competition and hierarchy.

One implication of this study for school sport policy in Botswana is the need to carry out periodic gender analyses and attend to situations where egalitarian sport arrangements are needed. The outcomes of such a gender analysis will give school authorities and sport administrators the much-needed data for reframing and addressing equality issues within the context of school and collegiate sport programmes in Botswana. It will also have salutary effects on any politics of privilege that are played out in out-of-school sport programmes organised by the Botswana Sports Council affiliates.

In particular, Women and Sport Botswana (WASBO), Botswana Primary Schools Sports Association (BOPSSA) and Botswana Integrated Sports Association (BISA) have a critical role to play in deepening students' understanding of gender equality issues and mobilising sport to serve the needs of socially diverse students in government schools in the context of forging 'a moral and tolerant nation' (Presidential Task Group, 1997). A pedagogical or

didactic pathway to addressing gender bias or sexist attitudes among students is to create ample space and time for group discussions on the impact/outcomes of equitable sport programmes with the teachers or coaches acting as authoritative rather than authoritarian facilitators. Such peer group discussions will enable students to voice their views, values and beliefs about sport and gender equality, discover new facts in the desired direction, identify with the ideas generated by the group and hence accept pro-equality attitudes as the group norm.

The official rhetoric in Botswana, as elsewhere in Africa, is to democratise sport and promote equality of opportunity for all students in the sport sphere. On this ethical ground, comparative studies are needed to further understand the complex socio-demographic factors influencing students' perceptions of relational inequalities in school sport, what egalitarian school sport policy comprises from the perspectives of students and school authorities, the contradictions at the heart of these perspectives, and how the individually lived experiences of structural limitations and unequal relations in school sport contexts are contested by students.

Notes

The *GISS Scale* contained three items:

- a) Are opportunities to learn how to play sport in your school better or worse for girls than for boys?;
- b) How about chances for girls to participate in school sport competitions– are these chances better or worse than the chances for boys?; and
- c) Are opportunities for girls to use the school sports facilities better or worse than the opportunities for boys to use these facilities?

The items were scored on a 5-point scale (1=Much better for girls; 2=Better for girls; 3=About the same; 4=Worse for girls; 5=Much worse for girls).

The *GESS Scale* requested students to rate the degree to which they favour the following policies:

1. Opportunities to learn how to play sport should be higher for boys than for girls;
2. Opportunities to participate in school sport competitions should be increased for boys rather than for girls; and
3. Compared to girls, boys should have more opportunities to use the school sport facilities.

The three items were scored on a 5-point scale (1= Strongly in favour; 2= In favour; 3= Neither for nor against; 4= Against; 5= Strongly against).

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Prof. Jimoh SHEHU: Physical Education Department, University of Botswana, Private Bag 0022 Gaborone, Botswana. Tel.: +267 3555220/72942226, Fax.: +267 3185096, E-mail: shehu@mopipi.ub.bw

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