"You have to play like a man, but still be a woman":
Young Female Colombians Negotiating Gender
Through Participation in a Sport for Development and
Peace (SDP) Organization

'You have to play like a man, but still be a woman': young female Colombians negotiating gender through participation in a sport for development organization

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Abstract

Colombian girls are not encouraged from playing sport due to gendered roles that idealize girls as 'delicate' and reserve sport as an activity for boys. Since the early and mid-2000s girls living in two marginalized communities in Colombia have had the unique opportunity to participate in a sport for development organization. Drawing on six months of ethnographic research, this paper explores how these young women are negotiating gender through their complex and limited participation in the organization. We argue these young women display an ambivalent position towards femininity and practice implicit feminism, which challenges gender norms. However, despite their feelings of agency and a creation of a 'new' normal within their social bubble, evidence reveals traditional social structures continue to maintain the gender status quo.

Introduction: stepping into the field

Blaring music competed with rain drops, and water began to flood the caged court that overlooks the neighborhood, Chévere. A dog lapped circles around laughing children who pulled cotton hoods over their heads as they kicked a football through puddles. Valentina and Felipe, two youth leaders, reasoned that penalty kicks would end the game and then we would all run for cover. Eighteen boys and two girls momentarily resisted with smiles before complying and lining up.

A few weeks before, Valentina led a football practice on another field in Chévere – a field where a staff member, Julio, felt uncomfortable because of "gangs, lack of community trust, and

more machismo." That day, Valentina entered through the fence gate, closing it behind her. The teenage boys stopped and waited for her signal. In her mature husky voice, she commanded their attention, asking them to line up and warm-up.

The authority and confidence Valentina demonstrated on the field transformed into contextually radical statements when discussing gender in Colombia. She described Colombian women as "brave, daring, and adventurous" and men as "sexist, cowards" before explaining the injustice of customary gender roles: "if we have children we could not abandon them. Not like the men, the men have a baby and they leave them. They just say goodbye. We do not, we always stay there."

Felipe refused to acknowledge common terms used to stigmatize female participants such as tomboy, butch, and dyke, indignantly saying he did not want to be associated as a man who uses those terms. He argued that girls are included and equal in all aspects of his life, and that his participation in the organization had changed him: "if they played, I played, but it was not the same as it is now [in VIDA] where the boys will say, *I want that girl for my team.* Before everyone said girls don't play football."

As the rain persisted, Felipe, Valentina, and a handful of young men and I ran down a steep hill, dodging growling dogs, towards the office.[i] I unlocked the door and raced to turn off the alarm. The group stumbled into the entrance. Recognizing that Valentina and I were the only women in the office, I imitated the young men's posture and actions. Cold and wet, we sat around a table swapping laughs. Felipe, speaking in full vibrato said, "Valentina, make us coffee." Without question, she complied. We drank coffee as Valentina proceeded to mop the muddy floors. The young men sat relaxed at the table and made jokes until it was time to go to school, never once

acknowledging Valentina or her efforts. Once alone, I asked Felipe why he told Valentina to make everyone coffee. Without hesitation, he said "she's a woman, it's her role" (field notes, June).

Gender in Colombia

The story above provides insight into the complications and nuances surrounding gender relations and social change in Colombia. Colombian stereotypes frame and limit men as violent and machismo and women as beauty-obsessed. Although Colombian gender relations include these elements, like elsewhere, these gender roles are not essential characteristics determined by biological sex, rather they are performed (Butler, 1990). And following Connell (1987), gender in Colombia can be interpreted as a social construction that is (re)produced in and through individual embodiment (identity and presentation), social interaction and social structures (history and locality), and is shaped and constrained by a complex working of social relations imbued with power.

To unpack female subjectivity and agency in Colombia, gender must also be considered within an entanglement of multiple, intersecting social and cultural forces as the interplay of each (e.g., sexuality, race) influences a person's lived experience and agency (Vuola, 2012). Class is a critical factor in Colombia. The government class system impacts where a person lives, works and with whom and where they socialize.[ii] Ultimately, it engenders social stratification and stigmatization. As Rodriguez Pizzaro and Ibarra Melo (2013) note, a Colombian woman's socio-economic positioning affects her "living conditions, obstacles, opportunities, knowledge, and choices" (p. 27). The reach of these social markers is profound, as they become a complex (re)production of culture, embodied and re-enacted through everyday interactions. Individual

experiences overlap with the experiences of many, creating a process of socialization and reproducing a cultural consciousness.

These social and cultural 'ways of being' are historical – which means they have been shaped by macro forces like religion and politics. For example, colonialism and the Catholic Church established the dominant forms of gender as practiced in the 21st century. Male-centric, hetero-sexual domination became the pillar of social organizing, and the hegemonic performance of masculinity and femininity became intertwined with individual and family reputation (Sanabria, 2007). Consequently, a central tenet to the socialization process from birth is adhering to the strict gender binary. For example, before a baby girl leaves the hospital her ears are pierced and her gendered path defined. On the other hand, like elsewhere, gender roles and norms in Colombia are not static and have changed over time. For example, an economic crisis in the 1980s created a shift in gender relations, as many families needed two incomes to survive (Viveros and Guttman, 2005). This shift led to spaces formerly reserved for men (i.e., cafes and sporting facilities) having an increased presence of women. However, even with this shift, Viveros and Guttman (2005, p. 118) argue the ingrained supremacy of masculinity continues to reign through the reproduction of relations grounded in hegemonic masculinity that tend "to ignore or subordinate women."

Although gender roles slightly changed with globalization (mostly in cities), much of Colombian society continues to endorse gender division where men have more options, and arguably, power (e.g., care vs. leisure time, public space, roles in the workforce and politics). Rodriguez (2001) and Thomas (1995) argue the influence from the Catholic Church resulted in a biblical categorization of women as "asexual Mary's or oversexualized Eve's", resulting in women becoming "decentered subjects, subjects who lack being, subjects diluted in the goals, needs, and desires of others" (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 485). Through either role, in their argument, women

become 'symbolic mothers' whose existence in the private realm (e.g., maids, secretaries, homemakers) and public sphere (e.g., policy makers in the fields of health and education) limits them to serve others (Rodriguez, 2001 drawing from Lagarde, 1990).

In the 1990s, the illicit drug industry shaped beauty standards, resulting in the creation of the term *narco-estetica*. In pursuit of escaping poverty, young women coupled with narco-traffickers, and their femininity became a form of cultural capital. As a result, Colombia became an international hotspot for plastic surgery and a woman's body became an instrument to potentially improve her status. Yet, the reality remained that femininity did not transform power, but allowed certain women to be valued higher by men in power (Skeggs, 1997). The *narco-estetica* of voluptuous bodies was married with the American and European racialized image of beauty, "blonde, tall and hav[ing] light eyes"; this resulted in women participating in extreme bodily practices (Ochoa, 2011, p. 344). For an example, consider the mainstay stereotype of Colombian women in the media (e.g., The character of Gloria in Modern Family, Miss Universe) is a woman with "large breasts, a thin abdomen, and large firm buttocks and legs" (Forero-Peña, 2015; Ochoa, 2011, p. 344). The idealized female image is so normative that advertisements sell plastic surgery to improve teenagers "low self-esteem" (Ochoa, 2011, p. 352). Discussing this phenomenon, a Colombian academic argued the most important aspect of being a woman in Colombia is constant beautification:

A woman must do three things: wear makeup and have long hair, wear tight clothes and heels, and most importantly always be trying to make herself more beautiful. Will we ever have a female footballer more famous than Miss Universe? (Field notes, September)[iii]

The image of the sexualized beautiful Colombian woman juxtaposes the asexual Mary that Colombian girls are taught to epitomize. Mary is the guardian of the home where she follows 'moral code'; whereas, Eve, is an independent woman moving freely in public space. Her position as a free woman outside the home signifies that she is seductive and "available to address men's needs" (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 486). Early gendered socialization encourages boys to objectify and abuse women as a part of their masculine identity, and thus the performance of extreme femininity, including the adoption of *narco-estetica,* is a method of survival for many women in popular classes (Forero-Peña, 2015). Stanfield argues that this uneven power relationship between masculinity and femininity reflects larger social issues, "The masculine beast is the alter ego and engaged partner of feminine beauty in Colombia. That beast represents many of the historical and structural problems unresolved in the nation" (2013, p. 2). Image and gender relations are connected to larger institutions of power organized by men, institutions that women cannot challenge and can only enter from a subordinate role (Stanfield, 2013; Paternostro,1999).

For decades, gender scholars have been calling for a deeper understanding of the Colombian gender order, which is needed to combat the shallow and problematic discourse that renders women as passive agents 'serving others.' For this reason, among others, it is essential to reveal, describe and analyze examples of people who are not conforming to the reproduction of gender roles, such as young women participating in sports.

Women's participation in sport in Colombia

Sport is a social construction that reflects, reinforces and (re)produces social issues like inclusion, access, equity, and power. Levermore and Beacom (2009) discuss sport in the global context in two arguments: sport continues "to replicate the characteristics of the societies from which they

are situated"; or, sport is "succumb to more homogenized traits because of the processes of colonialization, post-colonialism and globalization." (p.5). With these two perspectives in mind, they question if sport can be the agent of change, or if sport reflects wider social and cultural change.

In 1991, obligated to follow an international standard, FIFA mandated that Colombia include women in professional football. However, a gap existed between regulation and implementation at the elite level. Gender equity was not enforced and the movement was slow to gain traction both in terms of infrastructural support and in securing players. In the mid 1990s, in response to the murder of professional soccer player Andrés Escobar, grassroots and multi-sectorial Football for Peace programs were implemented in Colombia with the aim of using sport as a vehicle for positive social change, especially combating violence. [iv] A trend for using sport as a development tool was occurring outside of Colombia as well and soon became labeled the Sport for Development and Peace movement (SDP). Independently, grassroots NGOs began using sport as a mechanism to attract youth participants. Similarities between these organizations include small-scale programming, a focus on community participation, and an added educational component confronting a localized social issue. To date, there are numerous SDP organizations within Colombia, but VIDA remains one of the strongest, working with thousands of children throughout the nation.

A key component of the SDP movement in Colombia was the inclusion of girls (Cardenas, 2013). The Football for Peace methodology contradicts gendered social norms as each team is required to include at-least two girls. To encourage boys to pass to girls, a girl must score the first goal of each half (Cardenas, 2015). Although this methodology is controversial and this paper

lacks space to explore it, the generic mandate for social inclusion of girls and young women in sport was radical because football in Colombia is socially reserved for boys and men (Velez, 2009).

The development of the national team and the SDP movement have provided young women with (limited) access to sport in the wealthy and poorest neighborhoods[v]; middle class girls and young women remain less involved.[vi] Addressing women's participation in football in the city of Medellin, Colombian authors Cardona Alvarez, Arango, and Garcia (2012) write:

> Sports practices, from the beginning, were only permitted for men. Through sport men could develop characteristics such as aggression, competitiveness, and facing danger 'without flinching'. Contrastingly, in societies governed by patriarchal culture, women were prohibited from playing. Women's roles were relegated to the home, to procreation and to care for children. Historically women were to express themselves by being delicate, performing as a doll and therefore incapable of participating in rough activities such as football…This has differentiated the development of physical skills of women compared to men. Each is conditioned and consequently benefits have been provided to the latter. As a result, women who practice certain sports, including football, experience rejection, censorship, marking and discrimination because they are not performing the stereotype of femininity that is privileged in this society.[vii]

A confusing paradox arises and challenges the gender binary as young women's participation in sport places young women in a male classification as they are performing masculinity by using their body in 'indelicate' ways. The inclusion of girls in sport then became more than a method of assembly or a leisure activity; it manifested as a tool to potentially break down gender stereotypes and sensitize communities to the capabilities of girls and women.

Sport, Gender and Development (SGD)

Brady & Banu Khan's (2002) report on the Mathare Youth Sports Association, titled *Letting Girls Play,* laid the foundation for exploring the relationship between Sport for Development (SDP) and gender, which is now labelled Sport, Gender and Development (SGD). Assumptions of gender transformation emerged after several changes that took place when girls were included in sport: gendered public spaces began to be redefined to include female athletes (Brady, 2005); female role models outside of the home were created (Meier & Saavedra, 2009); and, female social networks were expanded (Brady et al., 2007). These observations led Saavedra (2009, p.127) to argue that female participation in gender-sensitive SDP organizations "has the power to upend what is seen/presented as 'normal' and [has] become a major force to social change beyond sport by challenging gender norms."

Top-down donors and SDP organizations have been quick to note, or assume, progressive gender-related outcomes. For example, Read and Bingham, respectively representing Right to Play and UK Sport, point to anecdotal evidence of SDP contributing to the Millennium Development Goal of "promoting gender equality and empowering women" (Levermore and Beacom, 2009, p. xvi). But researchers have been more cautionary and propose research that explores how circumstances and specific sports result in positive gender related outcomes (Kidd and Donnelly, 2000). Kidd (2008) requests data concerning female empowerment, the culture of predatory male sexuality, and how to teach boys and men to embrace sexual responsibility. With concern, Chawansky (2011) posits the SDP movement may draw heavily from Third Wave feminism and

post-feminist critiques, resulting in a generic and limited conceptualization of gender and thus gender equality.

The current SDP paradigm includes the 'girling of SDP', whereby there is an increased presence of female participants, specific SGD agenda's targeting how girls' lives can be improved and more research addressing the complexities of gender relations within sport and SDP as a global industry (see, Chawanksy and Hayhurst, 2015). Providing a critical review of SDP literature, Chawansky (2011) exposes how girls within SDP fall into two categories: organizations either 'allow' girls to play in a co-ed environment, or 'empower' girls in a single-sex program. She argues SDP takes a Western ontological perspective whereby girls either need to be altered or improved (e.g., be given access or be empowered), and consequently, she argues, the SDP movement is missing an opportunity to make concrete social change. She suggests researchers and practitioners look beyond the Western hegemonic framing of gender to consider the structural restrictions and realities of engendering change through sport when girls' involvement is positioned within boys' social privilege and a masculine-oriented SDP structure. She calls for a reimagining of gender relations within mixed-SDP programming. Through empirical research, Hayhurst et al (2014, p.165) question how gender relations are influenced by girls' participation in a self-defense SGD organization in Uganda. They suggest female participants challenge gender norms, but at the cost of experiencing emotional abuse. As such, the cost attached to participants' "increased self-esteem, confidence and self-defense skills" that assisted them in challenging gender-based stereotypes is questioned.

The root of this research is to understand how young women envision and represent themselves as participants of an SDP organization; to question how their gendered performativity may positively or negatively alter their life; to find out if their participation can transform gender

relations in the community; or, even if their physical presence can challenge or change the assumed limited capabilities of girls and young women. This paper will explore gender within Colombia, but more specifically, how young women participating in a Sport for Development organization negotiate gender.

Theoretical framework

In the 1960s, the Combahee River Collective, an active lesbian black feminist group from Boston confirmed "the personal is political" by demonstrating the connections between politics, theory, methodology and orientation which laid the grounds for the intersectional paradigm (Viveros Vigoya, 2016 p. 4). Intersectionality also has roots in indigenous theories from peripheral research areas such as Brazil (Roberts and Connell, 2016; Viveros Vigoya, 2016). However, Kimberlé Crenshaw is credited for coining the term intersectionality as a sociological theory. In a shift in feminist research, she explained variances in the lived experiences between white Americans and black Americans that had been overlooked by the feminist movement (Vuola, 2012).

> Her gender may become more prominent when she is a mother, her race when she searches for housing, her social class when she applies for credit, her sexual orientation when she is walking with her lover, and her citizenship status when she is applying for a job (Collins, 2000 p. 274).

Collins' description clarifies the need for considering how and to what extent agency is shaped and constrained depending on various social variables.

This research context includes a strict Christian based gender order, where women are relegated to subordinate positions; an entrenched class system based on diversity of labor, but explicitly linked to racial hierarchies that privilege white/European people over non-white peoples; the exclusion of non-gender binary peoples in society enabling heteronormativity; and, powerful violent/military systems organized by men that maintain and reproduce these structures (Grosfoguel, 2009). Intersectionality is greatly at play in Colombia, a place marred by years of violent conflict; "Displacement mainly affects Afro and indigenous women. Sexual violence against women is a weapon of war. Indigenous and black communities are sights of everyday conflict and where we see the installation of neoliberal megaprojects" (Curiel, 2011, p. 21).[viii] To clarify and give structure to a multi-ethnic population within a class-divided nation without dividing or categorizing socials issues, we will draw from the theory of intersectionality (Vuola, 2012).

Methodology

This paper draws from a study that aimed to understand the extent an SDP organization has transformed gender relations in the community. In this instance, community – as understood by our respondents – refers to residents who regularly have contact (direct or indirect) with the organization and its participants. In 2015, ethnographic research was undertaken within specific zones in two marginalized neighborhoods located on the outskirts of two major cities in Colombia, which will be called Chévere and Bacano. To protect the identity of the organization and interlocutors, pseudonyms will be used and identifying information withheld. Referenced documents that provide critical details on the communities have also been de-identified.

Fieldwork included the first author spending six months (three months per location) at the two field offices coaching, playing sports, and assisting in daily programming. Research methods

included 60 semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted in Spanish, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Drawing from the life-history method, interview participants were asked to answer questions and share stories about their upbringing, family relations, gender roles and expectations, association with sport, and their opinions on young women's participation in sport. The researchers employed a purposive sampling strategy, interviewing participants comprised of a range of community members (aged 18-81), such as coaches, social workers, youth leaders, parents, and residents not associated with the organization. By interviewing younger and older adults, we were offered insight into the local social context: how the community views young women's participation and how these views have changed over time. The diversity of interlocutors offered a rich picture of gender roles and relations, and what young women's participation in the sport means to the local community and its significance in the participant's life.

To experience daily processes and social practices the first author conducted participant observation, which took place at the field, in the office, on public transportation and in public spaces. This included many informal conversations and observances of the role of young women in sport. Document analysis included analyzing the organization's internal and external reports, marketing documents, as well as the organization's website and social media accounts. Initially, all data was systematically analyzed and compared based on (theoretically informed) themes identified prior to collecting fieldwork. In addition, themes were identified inductively through a second analysis using NVivo 11 software. Full human ethics approval was obtained from the authors' University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Colombia and VIDA

Lasting nearly 60 years, Colombia's internal conflict, which included government forces, guerrillas, and paramilitary groups, was the longest running armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere. Since 1985, more than 5.5 million Colombians have registered with the national government as victims of conflict (Revista Semana, 2016). The World Bank (2016) reports 27.8% of Colombia's population lives below national poverty lines. The two case study locations are home to some of Colombia's most vulnerable citizens. In the specific neighborhoods where this research was conducted, sexual and domestic violence and teen pregnancy are critical issues that contribute to the poverty cycle (Pallitto and O'Campo, 2005).[ix] Moreover, residents live in insecure overcrowded houses and regularly experience chronic stress, which leads to high levels of depression.

The first location is one of the poorest zones within a neighborhood in the city of Chévere. Chévere houses almost half of the city's Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) population. Many residents are demobilized members of illegal armed groups. The neighborhood's unplanned establishment has resulted in little infrastructure: more than 58% of the population lives in insecure housing, and schools are economically disadvantaged and overcrowded (report withheld). Furthermore, violence is normalized as paramilitary groups, guerrillas, and gangs organize the neighborhood into contested territories, aggressively recruit young men into their circles, and demand citizens to follow their commands.

The second location has important similarities, such as rampant violence and endemic poverty. A local policy report, withheld for anonymity, reads that more than 53% of its residents subsist on less than two dollars a day and 51.9% report feeling insecure. A major difference is Bacano's proximity to beaches, sweltering heat, and colonial history: qualities that make the

surrounding areas a major tourist attraction. Tourist demands coupled with extreme poverty has led to underage prostitution becoming a lucrative business.

The NGO that participated in this research, which we will call VIDA, manages sport-based community programs in these (and other) locations. The VIDA staff are cognizant of the problems these citizens encounter (Oxford and Spaaij, 2017). Their presence in the community is on an insider/outsider spectrum as this consideration depends on who is asked. Participants and their families considered VIDA staff to be 'family' and most community members appreciated VIDA's efforts (Field notes, Chévere and Bacano). But a few community members' responses were slightly colder including a man in Bacano who complained of VIDA's 'outsider methodology' (field notes, Bacano). VIDA employees, although not considered wealthy, are from more stable social classes and most have university degrees; they tend to have lighter skin than participants and be able-bodied. They also do not live in the neighborhoods where they work. Local volunteers (adults and youth leaders) work closely with VIDA staff, however, and together they work to employ a horizontal power structure (Oxford and Spaaij, 2017). It should be explicitly noted that many community members were also not raised in the neighborhoods where they currently reside and the insider/outsider status as well as power dynamics within these neighborhoods is complex and ever-changing (Source withheld). VIDA's staff is comprised of men and women, however, the coaching roles were all occupied by men and women worked in the psycho-social roles. At the same time, the founder directors of the organization are female.

VIDA draws on multiple methodologies to create their own pedagogical approach. In VIDA children play together on a regular basis (at least two days a week) and are taught values such as tolerance and respect. Coaches, social workers, and psychologists support participants on and off the field. Parents are required to register their children, but VIDA does not regulate

attendance. Through their programming, the organization aims to combat violence, discourage drug use and encourage social inclusion; a key component of their mission is enrolling and supporting children in school. All participants have access to after-school tutoring facilitated by youth leaders and after one year of participation, young participants qualify to participate in a school support program that includes school supplies (e.g., notebooks, book bag) and academic scholarships. In addition, parents are invited to monthly seminars that relate to the topics the children are studying.

The organization employs sport as a strategy to recruit participants, but also to encourage ludic play in their routine schedule. A variety of sports or games are offered at each location depending on what is popular, socially acceptable, and suggested by participants. Sometimes players are organized by sex or age, but often, players are integrated. Due to the organization's stability in relation to the local context and extensive community networks, it lends itself to support the community in a variety of ways beyond their stated mission, such as improving basic infrastructure (e.g., phone lines, field), providing access to medical specialists, and hosting clothing sales. Although the organization welcomes all children to participate (regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation), it does not cater to the social inclusion of young women and significantly fewer girls participate. It is to the question of gender negotiation we now turn.

Discussion

Beauty, sexuality, and female participation

Colombia hosts more beauty pageants than any other country in the world (BBC calculates more than 10 per day) and all female interlocutors noted they had experienced derogatory comments (outside of VIDA) because of their participation in sport. This may be one of many reasons why girls' participation at VIDA in Bacano looms around 10%. In an interview, a young woman who

has played most of her life giggled and tossed her long thick hair back and forth with her hand. As she addressed stereotypes and stigmas surrounding her participation, her giggle turned into frustration:

> Well, when I began to play it was something strange. I mean, I said to other people, *I play football* and they answered me, *do you play football? I mean like what! You are a girl.* They would also say, *you were beautiful when you were little.* So, it was something strange. When I told my friends, they were like, *you play football?* Sometimes, when I went to play with the girls at school, they wouldn't choose me for anything, it was something a little bit weird. Now, the women are starting to change their thinking. (Bacano, participant, Sandra Milena)

Without a prompt and in a defensive manner, she began to address her femininity:

> I always have been feminine and football and my feminine side have always been there. I mean, I have not changed anything. Of course, my physical appearance has changed because now I practice a bit more, but my feminine side has nothing to do with that.

Addressing femininity was less about gender performativity for Sandra Milena, and more about defending her heterosexuality coupled with a subtle condemnation of homosexuality. Although gay and lesbian rights have become more progressive in recent years, local stigma surrounding homosexual practices frequently leads to shame and ostracism:

> I think some girls [football players] get confused and they change their personalities. So they think that because you play football, you have to behave in a different way. Some even ended up being attracted to women. Maybe it is because the girls do not have support

from their families, so they have really low self-esteem…I have always been like expressive, I mean, always happy. I have never felt the weakness of being alone, and having to submit to these kinds of changes. I think that it is what happens with girls from here…. they become braver because they are playing football, and they adopt a different way to speak…But I think that more than anything these changes are mental.

A focus on physical beauty and heteronormativity exists in Chévere as well, but these topics were less stressed among players. However, it was clear that staff members presented themselves very differently from local mothers who dressed in t-shirts, track pants, and running shoes, compelling us to question the intersection between beautification and socio-economic status (or survival). The topic of beauty and sport frustrated Valentina, who presented herself sans makeup and usually with a collared shirt and track pants or jeans:

Well, the thing that happens over time, women don't see the logic in playing a match or a game, we who play are few. The girls currently are thinking about mirrors, physical appearance, one thing or another, makeup. *I used makeup and the handsome boy looked at me*, so they abandon soccer and they forget about it. (Chévere, participant, Valentina)

Valentina's comment is validated by female participation numbers that plummet around age 13. However, the root cause of this decline is unclear as factors beyond self-image such as neighborhood security and parental supervision also prevent female teenagers from participating (Oxford, in press).

A 'delicate' negotiation

In almost every interview, the term 'delicate' was used to describe the ideal Colombian woman. Female participants, such as Gabriela in Chévere, displayed internal strife in their responses concerning how girls can participate in sport and become an ideal woman, "Well, it is said that the women who do not play soccer are more delicate but soccer doesn't make someone less delicate" (Chévere, participant, Gabriela). At the same location, Ana Maria did not use delicate to describe women or herself. Sitting on the field in her faux leather jacket and adorned with red lipstick and hoop earrings, she discussed her ability to play micro-football with pride, but confessed pregnancy ended her participation. In her opinion, strong female footballers do not 'stop to be a woman', or in other words, they do not consider themselves to be weaker or act in a weak manner.

> Well I think that all girls are equal. The thing is that some girls are more delicate. There are a lot of girls who think that it is only for men, so they are not playing because they think it is a rough game, but NO! All girls are equal, but the ones who play change a little bit, because they play strong, without stopping to be a woman, it is normal! (Chévere, participant, Ana Maria)

She then broadened the conversation to consider the local socio-cultural context and the role of women within it, "you need more care with the girls, and usually the men don't pay the same attention as the women. Why? I do not know. Because the men are men and the women have more danger" (Chévere, participant, Ana Maria).

Lourdes, who also quit due to pregnancy, has experienced the danger that Ana Maria addressed. She began playing football in Chévere to escape her abusive father. Before she joined VIDA, she played in the street and received regular insults:

My first experience was really hard. I was five years old. At that time, I had some obstacles, so I decide to play with boys, and one day when we were playing at the front of my house and we were playing with a ball, we just created the soccer pitch with some rocks, two goals. They called me 'marimacha' (butch).… I felt bad because I felt strange, but afterwards I did not care about anything. In the end, I did not pay attention to what they said. I even dressed regularly in track pants. I never liked to wear skirts, which is another reason the people called me 'marimacha' (butch). Sometimes I fought with the boys because they treated women differently, and I have never agreed with men treating women with disrespect. (Chévere, previous participant, Lourdes)

Three years later Lourdes observed VIDA cleaning up the football field and watched children playing. She joined and more than a decade later, she discussed the physical differences between girls who participate in VIDA and girls who do not, "the girls who play have a good level of resistance. They run faster, they catch the ball faster. The girls who do not play are more delicate. They do not kick the ball well."

Ana Maria takes Lourdes' point of physical resistance further into mental strength and being okay with performing in typically identified masculine ways:

The girls who play, they called them 'marimachos' (tomboy), 'machorras' (dyke). They say that you look like a man, for example the coach says to us: When you are in the football pitch you have to stop being a woman. I mean you should have a more aggressive attitude so that you do not lose the ball, but when you leave here, you then continue being yourself. But some people say that you are butch, that you look like a man, so sometimes they treat us like that. (Participant, Chévere, Ana Maria)

The striking element of Ana Maria's quotations is the concept of negotiating when she is to be a woman, as if participating in sport requires one to momentarily change their gender. A coach in Bacano made a similar statement, "I always say to the girls playing football, you have to play like men – if he grabs, you grab, if he kicks hard, you kick hard, but off the field you have to behave like normal, like women who are ladies" (Staff member, Bacano, Jhon). Jhon's words demonstrate that even within VIDA's safe environment, female participants must negotiate their gender performance throughout the day to local social standards. Yuliza, a youth leader at Chévere, revealed how gendered comments and double-standards are understood and self-vindicated, "No, we are equal. If not, it is just because we are ladies. Outside football we are equal, but while we are playing, maybe we receive a hit, or a kick, but the rest of time we are equal" (Chévere, participant, Yuliza).

Empowering individuals, or creating social change?

This section illustrates the (sometimes) subtle yet important differences between the transformation of specific individuals and real social change. Through the young women's voices, the challenges in measuring and defining gender equality will be highlighted.   Despite being told by society that they are different and regularly receiving discriminatory labels (outside of the VIDA community), female participants presented themselves with confidence and regularly argued that everyone is equal (although like above there were caveats and double standards to 'equality'). Daniela, a youth leader at Bacano who leads practices and exudes a calm and quiet confidence noted:

at least for me personally, I have demonstrated to men that it's not just them who can play, but we can play as well. And that now it won't just be one person, but two, and we are a team. So, in that way we are equal, we are all equal. (Bacano, participant, Daniela)

Yuliza also hinted at change, although we question the extent of change when considering a new normal:

Well, in the past, before I joined [VIDA], I played in my neighborhood with my neighbors, and they said to me that I am a 'parajo macho' (discriminatory term referring to her being a man). After I joined [VIDA], they treated us, the women, normally. (Chévere, participant, Yuliza)

Valentina argued the road to transformation through girls' participation in the organization is not easy, but that it is worth it because progress has been made as far as the mentality of the individual female participant changing her expectations, but also in terms of community consciousness and the perception of female participants:

the selfishness of men changes, the machismo changes, basically everything changes because women start to have other thoughts and other expectations of sport. They start to think that it is not only for the men. And that sports are for having fun. *Maybe* it is to have a nice time, to integrate yourself, to get together with others. Women start to see that. You as a woman start to see all the things and the good things that you can do, because you sometimes say *ah! What's the point?* But when you are playing you say *No! It is valuable!* The football is everything because you meet new friends, new people, and new things. You

learn so many things playing football. And positive things! (Chévere, participant, Valentina)

Lourdes also associated her participation to her development of confidence, strength, and resistance to gender norms. She demonstrated this when she punched a man who had pushed against her on the bus and when discussing the differences between girls who play and those who do not, "We are brave. We are purposeful. We do not care what they say to us, we keep moving forward" (Chévere, previous participant Lourdes; field notes, June).

Resistance

In the context of VIDA, gender is constantly being negotiated both in terms of individual action and communal perception. This was noted with Sandra Milena's comment regarding a condescending statement that she was beautiful as a little girl, thus hinting that playing football had removed her beauty; and again, with Gabriela's personal conviction of wanting to be delicate and a football player. It was cemented by the numerous double standards interjected into interviews conducted with people who simultaneously support and undermine female participants, such as community members noting they admire female participants' strength, and yet would not let their own daughters play (Field notes, August).

Participants appeared to be able to minimize the impact of social persecution by ignoring or confronting derogatory labels. This may be because of their love of playing, their support from the VIDA community, or because their families are also challenging the mold. The majority of female participants interviewed came from either single-parent (mother) families who had endorsed female participation in sport for generations, or families supported by the mother working outside the home by necessity. In both situations, gender roles had already been

questioned and disrupted in the home. Many participants, especially in Bacano, participated for economic benefits (i.e., school support) and paid little attention to stigma outside of ensuring their security, as survival trumped social denigration.

Although participants did not identify their participation as any form of civic demonstration, in many ways through their daily actions, they were participating in implicit feminism. For example, they actively occupy previously male-dominated spaces and perform previously male-only roles (Oxford, in press). Moreover, the female participants gave little interest to the *narco-estetica* image, with exception of images posted on occasion on their private social media pages showing red glossy lips.

Regardless of implicit resistance, these young women do remain constrained by macro social systems and patriarchal power structures. Power, in this context, is held and organized by men who very often are not held accountable to the law. An ambivalent performance of femininity and thus implicit performance of feminism may be effective for micro, slow change or even personal value; however, it does not appear to have an impact on the larger patriarchal or class structures at play. If nothing else, however, their nuanced and defiant performances of femininity are making them visible members of society; a place where women are both intentionally and casually omitted.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we demonstrated that gender roles in Colombia are being challenged by female participants. However, this was done in subtle and sometimes more overt ways to varying degrees of success and often rife with tensions and contradictions. The paper began with the story of Valentina and Juan, two youth leaders in Chévere who are simultaneously re-working and

reproducing traditional ideas about gender as they navigate early adulthood. Their interaction demonstrated the ease with which gender roles are enacted and reproduced, and simultaneously reflected and reinforced the macro social structures that have shaped them. Although there is no question that both participants fundamentally believe in equality, they validated that performing equality is extremely complex. Through Valentina we also learned that even though her words and many of her actions reveal an ambivalence towards traditional femininity, she remains bound by the structures that pre-dated her birth and continue to shape society.

The young women interviewed in this research first highlighted class as their identifiable social injustice, but after discussion and reflection, they addressed gender – draped by a dogmatic idea of equality for all – as a valid concern. This may have to do with lived experience as interlocutors were only entering adulthood and its imaginable that daily stressors do not permit time for extended macro social reflection; it could also reflect not having the opportunity to experience cultures outside of their community; or, a lack of interest engaging on the topic that connects to many taboo subject matters with a stranger. Whatever the reason, the intersection between class and gender, among other social themes such as hegemonic heterosexuality was apparent.

This research not only offers a nuanced understanding of some of the complex and contradictory workings of gender in a sporting context in Colombia, a rather under-researched area within the sociology of sport, but it also raises some pressing concerns for scholars of gender (and sport) more broadly. Within this Colombian context, the constraints of the broader structure and power systems are quite evident. The empirical data reveals the centrality of gender roles in the lives of young Colombians – the extent that those gender roles are historically-entrenched, rigid, and hierarchical; and, how individuals (even with good intentions) reproduce and enact gender

norms that contradict what they might say about gender 'equality' in interviews. The tension between the way individuals want the world to be, and the way things are in this data is strong. When analyzing and interpreting the data from this study we did not explain this tension as a series of complex, neutral negotiations of contradictory discourses – instead, we made sure to reveal the effects of power in micro and macro social relations; power that works to constrain and limit the opportunities afforded to girls and young women. Rather than concluding that the macro structures in Colombia are more 'powerful' and obvious than in our own local contexts (Australia, New Zealand and USA) it is possible that they are easier for us to see because we are outsiders.

Research on feminism and sport in the Global North over the last ten to fifteen years has focused heavily on subjectivity and experiences of girls and women, and in terms of social change – resistance and empowerment at the level of the individual (see for example Appleby & Fisher (2005); Pavlidis & Fullagar (2012; 2013; 2014); Thorpe (2008); Olive (2013); Roy (2011); McLachlan (2012). Gender and sport research (its contexts, questions and methods) is increasingly being framed in terms of the fluidity of gender performances and the negotiation of identity and desires in new and different spaces. This important work challenges the deterministic, structural way of looking at how gender is organized and maintained in sport and society and constructively transformed the way in which researchers think about gender and 'do' gender work. However, as a consequence, the analysis of long term social change and the constraining aspects of macro structures (in particular economics) in more traditional forms of sport, have not garnered as much attention in our respective contexts, in recent years.

The findings of this research confirm that some changes in terms of individual perceptions and self-awareness can be achieved in sport programs but large scale social change or transformation is much more difficult to achieve. The Colombian research here reminds feminist

scholars to keep working. This research encourages us to look at the limits of post-feminist, neo-liberal, or postmodern thinking and theorizing that ignores or rejects history and structure. Rather than solely focusing on the constructed, fluid aspects of gendered performances it is pivotal to incorporate the systems (not just their effects) that reproduce inequality and do not offer females the opportunities and rewards afforded to males into feminist analyses of sport. To this end, feminist sport research should revisit forms of power that not only shape but constrain opportunities. For us this means taking the 'structural' part of poststructuralism seriously, and continuing to look for, and at, those places where power (even if in the form of contradictions and tensions) is working to maintain the status quo. And if we cannot find it, then perhaps we should invite scholars from the Global South to come and have a look in our backyard.

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Notes

[i] The introduction draws from the first author's ethnographic field notes; 'I' refers to the first author.

[ii] Pockets of Colombia's cities are noticeably contemporary with supermalls, expensive restaurants, and modern infrastructure such as schools and public transportation. But the majority of the population lives outside of these high-security bubbles. The distinction between the Colombian 'haves and have-nots' is starkly clear and reinforced by the systematized class system. The class system, inherited from Spain in the 16th century, was created in the 1980s to organize and redistribute wealth among the urban population; the government reinforced it in 1994 with the Public Service Law, 142 (Uribe-Mallarino, 2008). Through this system, citizens are divided into six categories: one to six, with six being the wealthiest. The majority of citizens are classified in classes one through three (estimated 70% in the capital, Bogota). Anecdotally, class one residents live in insecure housing and financially survive day-by-day; class two citizens have secure housing, but do not have financial savings; and those identified as class three have secure housing and supplemental income for education or holidays; class four and higher have secure housing, second homes, can educate their children in private schools and take international holidays. The law assigns class number through residential property. This typically results in city stratification as neighborhoods become identified as one stratum. Colombia's National Department of Statistics reveals class five and six citizens pay higher taxes to subsidize public services (i.e., water, sewage, garbage collection, transportation) for classes one through three, and class four citizens pay the standard price. The argument for implementing and maintaining the practice of a wealth redistribution system is that the root of social segregation is wealth inequality and the solution to it is wealth redistribution. However, the cultural and social ramifications of the class system are far-reaching as it has influenced the establishment of a hierarchy of power and thus cultural norms that include the stigmatization of the lower social classes. The combination of social segregation and a lack of access to economic and social capital, has resulted in limited class mobility.

[iii] Informal conversation with a Colombian Academic

[iv] Escobar's death was not an isolated incident, but its timing and connection to the World Cup resulted in international attention. In response, German Ph.D. student Jürgen Griesbeck who lived in Medellín and happened to be a family friend of Escobar, was motivated to rebrand football as a tool for peace (Cardenas, 2013). Building from a Colombian physical education methodology labeled Baloncoli, Griesbeck and Alejandro Arenas, then coordinator of peace and co-existence programs for Medellín, developed the Football for Peace methodology (Cardenas, 2013). Griebeck's beginnings in Colombia led to the creation of current SDP umbrella organization, Street Football World.

[v] We cannot comment in depth about young women's opportunities to participate in sport in Colombia outside of SDP or about the nexus between elite sport and SDP. The Colombian women's national football team has gained international recognition but support internally is limited. When asked about their performance in the 2015 World Cup, Chévere interlocutors responded unaware and feigned interest in the team. Contrastingly, Bacano citizens watched the team and were supportive, but commented they were disappointed when Abby Wambach publicly kissed her wife. The lack of media coverage for professional female athletes and the negative stereotypes surrounding female participation in sport maintain a separation between elite sport and

community-focused SDP programming. However, every interlocutor wished their child to become a professional athlete, if they could.

[vi] First hand observations reveal participating in sport is more common among females in the wealthiest classes whose families belong to private sports clubs and regularly travel or study in the United States and Europe. Females born into the middle economic classes participate in physical education in school but common socialization processes include performing a specific form of femininity that denounces female participation in sport. Moreover, because parents do not value sport participation but favor activities like learning English, girls in this class and lower classes often encounter internal barriers. In low socio-economic neighborhoods where SDP organizations operate, girls may have the opportunity to play sport but access remains minimal as gendered space and social barriers are extensive (Oxford, in press).

[vii] Original text in Spanish, quote translated by first author.

[viii] Original text in Spanish, quote translated by first author.

[ix] In both Chévere and Bacano, sexual and domestic violence and teen pregnancy are critical issues that assist in reproducing the poverty cycle. Psychosocial factors such as social pressures for adolescents to be sexually active (Nieto Olivar et al., 2010), masculinity's link to sexism and dominance (Paternostro, 1999) and motherhood being a status symbol of womanhood, hinder efforts to decrease the possibility of breaking the poverty cycle (Pallitto and O'Campo, 2004). DANE (2011) reveals that sexual education is limited, but sexual manipulation and violence is commonplace. Previous research conducted in and around Chévere and Bacano revealed 21% of girls and 14% of boys age 10-17 reported being victims of unwanted sexual touches; 36% of girls noted sexual advances or innuendo such as comments and proposals; and 6% of girls and 2% of boys reported having been raped. The study also reported that around Chévere 12% of children had been given 'something' in exchange for sex whereas 21% had in Bacano. Data from the 2000 Demographic and Health Survey for Colombia using a sample that consisted of 3,431 ever married women aged 15 – 49 who had given birth in the last five years or were currently pregnant found that 55% of respondents had had at least one unintended pregnancy, and 38% had been physically or sexually abused by their current or most recent partner (Pallitto and O'Campo, 2004). The Colombian Family Welfare Institute (2014) reported that one in every five young Colombian women between the ages of 15 and 19 already have a child or are currently pregnant and 64% of these pregnancies were unplanned. More striking, 30% of displaced young women (age 15-19) have been pregnant at least once and 66% of young women living in the poorest economic classes are mothers by age 19 (Profamilia, 2002). Consequently, 50% of teenage girls who dropped out of school sited pregnancy as the reason (Daniels, 2015). In 2010, Colombia's government created the National Commission for the Promotion of Sexual and Reproductive Rights to combat teenage (and childhood) pregnancy, but combating the cultural norm of teenage pregnancy within a culture that is heavily influenced by the Catholic Church and has socially constructed womanhood to coincide with motherhood is no small task. Abortion is legal only under specific circumstances, birth control is becoming more normal but is more commonly used by women in relationships, and casual and formal discussion on sexual activity is rare or, in many places, taboo.