Gender Relations and Sport for Development in Colombia: A Decolonial Feminist Analysis

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Abstract

Playing sports has long been a taboo for women in Colombia; yet, new spaces for female participation have emerged in recent decades. This paper critically explores the gendered nature of sport in Colombia through the lived experiences of female participants involved in a local Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) organization. Building on ethnographic fieldwork and a decolonial feminist perspective, the authors examine how cultural experiences of physicality are gendered, but are potentially changing in the context of leisure practices and how this may shape power relations. Although more girls and women are participating in masculine leisure pursuits, there are critical limitations to social change and female participants demonstrate the coloniality of gender in action.

Introduction

Leisure studies scholars' engagement with various feminist theories, waves, and "ripples" has generated multiple theoretical trajectories (Parry & Fullagar, 2013). Debates and narratives within physical cultural studies (PCS) are evolving and resisting boundaries while further engaging with the politics of bodies in leisure and sport (Carrington, 2017; Chawanksy & Itani, 2017). Building on Chawanksy and Itani's (2017) suggestion for more diverse research on the colonial power matrix in contemporary physical culture, this paper will explore the gendered nature of sport in Colombia through the embodied and relational experiences of young women who play football with a prominent Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) organization.

Football (soccer) is considered a patriotic symbol of Colombian culture, an obsession that unifies the population. But sport, like home and work life in Colombia, is gendered (Velez, 2009; Viveros Vigoya, 2016). The economic crisis in the 1980s allowed for a shift in gender relations, as many families needed two incomes to survive (Gutmann & Viveros, 2005). This shift led to spaces formerly predominantly reserved for men (for example, cafes and sporting facilities) suddenly having an increased presence of women. Yet, the ingrained supremacy of masculinity continues to reign in these spaces through the reproduction of social relations grounded in hegemonic masculinity (Gutmann & Viveros, 2005); that is, relational forces that ignore or subordinate women.

Whereas men's participation in sport in Colombia demonstrates idealized masculinity, young women's participation contradicts the idealized "delicate" and "feminine" role to be performed by girls and women (Cardona Alvarez, Arango & Garcia, 2012) – a role which has resulted in women figuratively becoming "decentered subjects, subjects who lack being, subjects

diluted in the goals, needs, and desires of others" (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 485). A confusing paradox arises and challenges the gender binary as young women's participation in sport places them in a male classification as they are performing femininity in a way that challenges the association of women with fragility and are actively challenging sport as an exclusively male domain (Oxford & McLachlan, 2017). The inclusion of girls in sport becomes more than a method of assembly or a leisure activity; it became manifested as a way to potentially break down gender stereotypes and sensitize communities to the capabilities of girls and women.

Through ethnographic fieldwork and a decolonial feminist perspective, we will critically examine how cultural experiences of physicality are gendered, but are potentially changing in the context of leisure practices and how this may shape power relations within the specific context of Colombia. We will address who can play and why they can play, hence exploring the multiple relations that shape subject formation in contradictory ways and thus drawing attention to the complex interplay between agency and structure. We will begin by explaining how the SDP movement has sought to address gender inequities.

SDP and gender

In the mid-1990s, a trend for using sport as a development tool emerged. Independently, grassroots NGOs began using sport as a mechanism to recruit youth living in marginalized communities. Similarities between these organizations include small-scale programming, a focus on community participation, and an educational component confronting a localized social issue. The diversity and broadness of the field led to assorted definitions of SDP and various implementation strategies (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011; Oxford & Spaaij, 2017).

Brady and Banu Khan (2002) laid the foundation for exploring the relationship between SDP and gender, which is now labeled Sport, Gender and Development (SGD). Assumptions of gender transformation emerged after several changes were recorded with regard to girls' inclusion: gendered public spaces began to be redefined to include female athletes (Brady, 2005); opportunities for 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) to question if female participation in gender-sensitive SDP organizations may "upend what is seen/presented as 'normal' and become a major force to social change beyond sport by challenging gender norms" (p. 127). 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. Darnell (2012) questions if this application of Third Wave feminism is not a post-colonial notion of one group saving the "other."

The current SDP paradigm includes the "girling of SDP," whereby there is an increased presence of female participants, specific SGD agendas targeting how girls' lives can be improved, and research addressing the complexities of gender relations within sport and SDP as a global industry (Chawanksy & Hayhurst, 2015). Chawansky (2011) exposes how female participants are either "allowed" to play in a co-ed environment, or "empowered" in a single-sex program. She suggests that researchers and practitioners should 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 (Chawanksy, 2011).

Research concerning mixed-gender SDP contexts and transforming gender relations is scant (Chawanksy, 2011; Hayhurst et al., 2014; Meier, 2005), but the data stemming from this area of research can add important voices to PCS debates, especially when questioning how our cultural experiences of physicality are gendered in the context of changing leisure practices, social formations and relations of power. In this paper, we seek to add to this debate by drawing upon a decolonial feminist framework that is particularly well suited to make sense of leisure and gender in Colombia, in order to demonstrate how coloniality of gender (Lugones, 2010) operates in this SDP context.

Decolonial feminism

Decolonial thought questions the colonial legacies that "shape development, globalization, and modern subjectivity" (Asher, 2013, p. 839). Grosfoguel (2009) argues "one of the most powerful myths of the 20th century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world," leading to the "misconceptualization" of a post-colonial world (p. 21). In other words, the global structures built over a 500-year period did not automatically disappear when the political and judicial systems were ceremoniously handed over to non-European powers in the mid-20th century (Grosfoguel, 2009). From a Eurocentric historical perspective, the capitalist world system implicitly privileged economic relations over social relations; yet, from a non-Eurocentric position, economics was but one element of a "complex package" that included a "European/capitalist/military/Christian/patriarchal/white/ heterosexual/male" global hierarchical world system (Grosfoguel, 2009, pp. 17-18). Quijano and Ennis (2000) label the sweeping organizing force that continues to affect (exploit and dominate)

the many dimensions of social existence, the colonial power matrix. The colonial power matrix is the living legacy of colonialism that continues to shape contemporary society in forms of social discrimination (e.g., race, class and gender-based/heteronormative social hierarchies) and economic structures (e.g., capitalism, neoliberalism).

While colonizers were exploiting land and people outside Europe, Europeans in Europe were reaping the material and economic benefits which bolstered the renaissance and enlightenment periods that resulted in modernity. Modernity became the hegemonic status quo world system which included the notion of the civilized human versus the uncivilized (or subhuman) dichotomy defined by those in power (Grosfoguel, 2014). Humans outside the metropole (and racialized people within) were organized de facto in the latter category and thus automatically assumed to be in need of being saved, governed, and emancipated by the powerful civilized (Grosfoguel, 2014). In our current world system, this translates to "sexual, political, epistemic, economic, spiritual, linguistic and racial forms of domination and exploitation where the racial/ethnic hierarchy (of the European/non-European divide) transversally reconfigures all of the other global power structures" (Grosfoguel, 2009, p. 20). Mignolo (2000) argues the development of the colonial power matrix must be the basis for any discussion regarding inequality.

The term used to capture the continuities of these processes and structures of domination is coloniality. Coloniality is of critical import in decoloniality as it refers to "the invisible threads of power that emerge in colonial situations but extend well beyond a strictly colonial setting and period" (Giraldo, 2016a, p. 161). Coloniality is a powerful tool, one Giraldo (2016a) identifies as "symbolic, invisible, and indelible" (p. 161). To overcome questions of legitimacy of knowledge and representing peoples from the Global South/periphery/zone of non-being as "incapable of

conceptualizing their own realities," Grosfoquel (2009, p. 12) suggests adopting radical decolonial critical theory.

There is a staggering problem within the foundation of decolonial thought: the exclusion of women's voices. Lugones (2007, 2010) challenges this issue by extending Quijano and Mignolo's arguments to highlight the junction of coloniality and social constructs, namely gender and race, noting that a normalized racial logic renders the colonial/raced woman invisible and moreover, the bifurcated concepts of masculinity and femininity are also ramifications of European colonial force (Bhambra, 2014). In her work, she pushes the relationship between colonialism and gender to argue that feminism and gender studies, as movements and subjects in and of themselves, are a repercussion of colonial rule, noting the "fictionality" of gender as a principle of social organizing pre-contact (Lugones, 2007). Henceforth, she created the term coloniality of gender and defined decolonial feminism as "the possibility of overcoming coloniality of gender" (Lugones, 2010, p. 747).

Giving praise to Lugones' ideas, Giraldo (2016ab) urges a discourse revision where the focus becomes the historical present and female subjectivity rather than the past. The aim of decolonizing gender is to end the static Western gender binaries that trap non-Western women in a double bind of being represented as either empowered in the Western sense (e.g., "modern, neoliberal, capitalist") or "the perpetual victim" needing to be rescued (Giraldo, 2016b, p. 65).

Ontologically grounded in peripheral philosophy (e.g., Global South, zone of non-being), decolonial feminism can be applied as a theoretical tool to unpack the complexities and nuances of lived experiences within the respective context (place and time). This is a critical tool when looking at the geopolitical context of Colombia, where there is a "narrow understanding of female beauty…that operates within and outside of the Colombian nation" and is represented by

a specific, "spectacularly feminine" look (e.g., Sofía Vergara and Shakira) (Giraldo, 2016b, p. 65). As the focus in this paper is on female subjectivity and gender relations, we will apply Giraldo's definition of coloniality of gender to employ a decolonial feminist framework. The objective being that the application of a decolonial framework will assist with analyzing individual experiences within the geopolitical context with the intention of contributing to broader agendas about equity and inclusion in sport and leisure.

Decoloniality is operationalized here in two ways: first, in practical terms as an "epistemological displacement of postcoloniality as it has been established in mainstream academia" which is done by drawing from Latino/a thinkers (Giraldo, 2016a, p. 160); second, we pay close attention to the multiple relations that shape subject formation in contradictory ways. In other words, following Lugones (2007, 2010), we unpack how coloniality shapes individuals and how the coloniality of gender plays out through everyday interactions and social processes. By examining micro and meso social relations, we explore the contemporary entanglements of social oppressions that reflect and reproduce restrictions constructed by macro social forces that delimit girls and women's participation in leisure pursuits. In our analysis, we consider not only the words and actions of the participants and their families, but also her position and the SDP organization's placement within local and global politics.

Methods

In 2015, the first author conducted six months of ethnographic research on the outskirts of two cities in Colombia, which will be called Chévere and Bacano (three months per location). In

order to protect the identity of the organization and interlocutors, pseudonyms will be used and identifying information withheld.

Research methods specifically used for this paper include in-depth interviews with female participants (n=9) and their parents (n=9), and participant observation. Parents were interviewed to better understand situational context, and the enablers and constraints of social resources. A purposive sampling strategy was implemented. Interviews were conducted in Spanish, audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Drawing from the life-history method, respondents were asked to answer questions and share stories about their upbringing, family relations, gender roles and expectations, association with sport and opinion on young women's participation in sport. Participant observation included travelling to the field location four days a week to play, coach and assist in the field offices. The first author's level of active participation varied by staff requests and scheduled interviews. On some days, she strictly took notes, observing interactions in the office, on the field and public transit; whereas on another occasion, she managed the office for a week while the staff attended a conference. Participant observation allowed for constant reflection not only about the researcher's social positioning but about the interactions and relationships between participants, employees, and community members in various public and private spaces across time. This method offered opportunities for moving beyond some of the "limits of language" (Fullagar & Pavlidis, 2016) inherent in the interview method, by exploring the affective and cognitive dimensions of gender relations and embodied subjectivities as they unfolded "on the ground" in everyday practice.

Initially, all data were systematically analyzed based on themes drawn from decolonial feminist theory, such as internalized oppression (e.g., consent to the performance of coloniality), gendered language and its relationship to history, and the hegemonic narrative that

accepts/tolerates/justifies subordination in relation to access to space and gender roles. In addition, themes were identified inductively during data collection and analysis including homophobic language and the entanglements of class, religion and gender. Identifying the critical importance of situational context and enablers and constraints of social resources, interviews and observations were analyzed through narrative analysis (Chase, 2005). Narrative analysis is employed in this paper with the aim to provide the reader with explanatory stories of the interplay of agency and structure within this specific context (Polkinghorne, 1995). This analysis allows us to elicit rich information from the interviews and observations and organize it in a way that provides the reader with context and interconnections occurring within the community.

Researcher reflexivity

The attention that PCS scholars have drawn to the messy practices of reflexivity and empirical vulnerability in embodied research similarly applies to the present study (Giardina & Newman, 2011). Experiencing local social pressures was critical to understand participants' lived experiences, but working in these communities required flexibility and vulnerability. By conducting ethnographic fieldwork, the first author could be flexible in her daily routine, but also pay attention to local knowledge and processes. She could not pretend to be ignorant of Colombia's colonial past or its complex relations with the United States (her country of birth). Moreover, her middle-class neo-liberal academic experience influenced by Western feminism and her white skin color are elements embedded in her habitus. Although she identifies as cis-gendered and heterosexual, due to her outsider status and vocal acceptance of homosexuality, and because female athletes are assumed to be lesbians, upon recommendation from Colombians,

she feminized herself according to local standards with pink nails and mascara. These embodied actions facilitated social acceptance.

Undoubtedly the first author's privileged status as a white, Western academic impinged on the research. Following the security protocol required by her research institution and the SDP organization, which we will call VIDA, she lived in wealthier (safer) neighborhoods distanced from the research sites, could only access the communities during select hours (8am-4pm) four days a week, and had to be accompanied by local leaders while in public. The leaders' escorts bolstered the research in many ways, however. When with them, the first author momentarily became a legitimized, but superficial "insider" with secure access to many areas of the neighborhood. Because of regular interaction with leaders, she developed a comfortable rapport whereby they would discuss everyday mundane situations in their lives. Although her connection with leaders did superficially legitimize her presence in local spaces, her connection to them – although unlikely – may have influenced interlocutors who were indirectly involved with VIDA. Participant observation coupled with regular interaction allowed her to question and compare what she observed to what she heard in relaxed conversation and interviews, which was often vivid contradictions laced with double standards and implicit sexism. In the remainder of this paper, we discuss the main research findings. First, however, we outline the local context within which the research was conducted.

Research sites and VIDA

The two research sites are home to some of Colombia's most vulnerable citizens. In the neighborhoods where this research was conducted, sexual and domestic violence and teen

pregnancy are critical issues that contribute to the poverty cycle (Pallitto & O'Campo, 2005). Moreover, residents live in insecure, overcrowded housing and regularly experience chronic stress, which leads to high levels of depression. The first research location, Chévere, houses almost half of the city's internally displaced persons. Many residents are demobilized members of illegal armed groups. 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, Bacano, 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 52% 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, VIDA, manages sport-based community programs in these (and other) locations. VIDA staff are cognizant of the problems these citizens encounter (Oxford & Spaaij, 2017). Their presence in the community is on an insider/outsider spectrum. Participants and their families considered VIDA staff to be "family" and most community members appreciated VIDA's efforts, but a few community members' responses were slightly colder including a man in Bacano who complained of VIDA's "outsider methodology." 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 positions; head office responsibilities were predominantly held by women of white-Spanish descent.

At VIDA, children play together on a regular basis and are taught values such as tolerance and respect. 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.

VIDA employs sport as a strategy to recruit participants, but also to encourage play in their everyday life. A variety of sports or games are offered at each location depending on what is popular and suggested by participants, but football is the dominant activity. VIDA does not encourage competition and teams are typically determined by body size and ability, rather than gender or age. Although the organization welcomes all children to participate, it does not cater to the social inclusion of young women and significantly fewer girls participate. In the next section, we consider the complex social elements that constrain or enable girls' participation in SDP in Chévere and Bacano.

Findings

The young women participating at VIDA are among the first generation of women in their community to participate in organized sport. They are a minority of young women expanding the definition of socially acceptable activities for girls and women. The low numbers of female participants reflect the difficulty of performing a role outside of the social norm – one that is

complex and contradictory. In Chévere only 20% of the participants were female and in Bacano 10%. Although these numbers fluctuate by field location and local politics, the reality is that female participation is generally discouraged and these young women experience negative labeling and social stigma on a regular basis. Becoming the example is arduous, and the first step in this act is the personal decision to enter the field to play.

Three themes emerged regarding the questions who can play and why can they play. These include to escape violence experienced at home, because the traditional male/female gender roles were not practiced at home, and because their parents believed the opportunity trumped social denigration. To give the reader insight into the complex social and affective relations that have shaped and continue to shape female participants' lives, young women's stories will be explored through narratives using their words and actions, and the words and experiences of those who surround them.

Escaping violence

Lourdes

Lourdes was waiting on the steps of VIDA. She wore her usual running shoes, three-quarters length football pants and a sweatshirt, signifiers that identified her to the community as a footballer. Her long brown thick hair was slicked back and wrapped into a tight bun at the nape of her neck. While walking, Lourdes explained her battle with "basuco", a cheap by-product of cocaine that is more potent than crack due to its unrefined, unpurified mixture that may include brick dust, chalk, and even lead, sulfuric acid and kerosene or gasoline. Since the 1980s it has wreaked havoc across class lines in Colombia. "I'm ten days free now," she asserted, "and I want to play in a football tournament in Cali."

Lourdes spoke of the past and present as if she had nothing to lose. Her small frame, mischievous grin, and brown eyes held a lot of pain, but she was not afraid to talk about her pain or her experiences with violence. After hearing her speak of witnessing her friend's death in a mix-up that took place when she was outside her house after the customary 9pm curfew, she expressed, "I'm not afraid, because I have practically lived in the street." Like many participants in Chévere, she embodied characteristics that exuded a unique combination of immaturity and resilience.

Together the first author and Lourdes walked up dozens of concrete steps to enter her childhood home, a disheveled space with three concrete walls, electricity, and running water. In the place where a fourth wall would be, a footpath cut into a steep hill. Daniela Maria, Lourdes mother, sat on a waist-high concrete barrier with her back to the football field located 60 or more meters below. She had recently kicked Lourdes out of this house for not paying rent in addition to her on-and-off again anti-social behavior.

Communication was not free flowing. It seemed that rarely is Daniela Maria asked how she is feeling or her opinion on subjects beyond laundry. Her responses were short and literal; her Spanish direct yet laden with slang. Mid-response Lourdes frequently interjected from inside yelling "No Mami," adding details to her mother's responses. The first author would yell back asking her to stop listening, but also asking for help in deciphering local vernacular; they laughed at each other throughout the process. Although kind hearted, Daniela Maria seemed too exhausted for laughter. Twenty-five years ago, when she arrived, all the houses were tents made of "black cloth" and she had to walk long distances to get water; "there was nothing, no pastures, no houses, no nothing." She has never played football and when asked why not, she noted recent changes: "Because there was no atmosphere, at that time there was not the atmosphere there is

now. For example, all the children, from little ones, are going to play and saying – *I'm going to play football!* – In that time, there was not that." She also noted girls who played football were called "marimacha" (tomboy/dyke) or "gaminas" (street urchins), but she claimed she does not hear those terms like she did ten years ago.[i]

Daniela Maria's brown skin has been worn by the harsh elements of living at high altitude. She washes clothes for a living and is semi-literate. When asked about the expectations of a woman in Chévere, she responded "to maintain your husband." Lourdes cackled. Her mother's response mirrored not only her answer, but her life. Daniela Maria continued: "women get pregnant and the husbands don't help. It's been a hard life for me." She appreciated how VIDA has supported her daughter for more than a decade and noted that children in the program benefit because "their time is occupied, they learn to not hit and the boys learn to respect girls because they play together." Although she appreciated and saw value in VIDA for reasons concerning micro and meso social relations, Daniela Maria could not connect VIDA to macro-social change. When asked if machismo has changed, she emphatically responded, "No."

Lourdes and her mother are both single mothers who support their families through gendered labor. Until her recent stint with basuco, Lourdes cleaned houses three days a week in a wealthy neighborhood, 90 minutes by bus from Chévere. Lourdes explained that her parents were not a direct barrier for her participation in the typical way. In her opinion, many girls cannot play because of their fathers' religious leanings: "there are the religious Christians, evangelicals, who say their law does not allow girls to play, no playing football, that the girls are to be in the house, they need to learn to cook to maintain their husband and children." The connection between Christianity (particularly Catholicism but also the recently rising Evangelical Church which aligns with comparable conservative values) and gender roles subtly

underpins gender relations throughout this project; and through the lives of Lourdes and Daniela Maria, the coloniality of gender is explicit. However, religion did not impact Lourdes' participation. Lourdes began playing as an escape from her abusive father:

> My dad always came back drunk and if I saw him on the street he would hit me. Every time I saw him I used to go and run because he hit me. My mom was never there because she worked and everything...My parents were never with me so I made my decisions...

After a few years of playing in the street with boys in avoidance of her home life, she found VIDA. VIDA became her refuge. When referring to the organization and VIDA's psychologist, she said "this is my family and she is my mom." Although Lourdes recognizes the limitations ascribed by local social pressures such as guerillas and gangs, but also structural institutions such as the Church, she believes everyone has agency in their decisions: "Girls who play are not more free, girls can choose what they want and in an equal manner, I can choose what I want, I look for what will benefit me, and everyone can look for what will benefit them."

The notion of individual agency within a social setting that has countless restrictions on its locals (e.g., guerilla tax, curfew) is confusing as multiple relations are shaping subject formation in contradictory ways. Yet, as we see in Daniela's story below, these contradictions are normal for these young women and in conversation they regularly justify the space between idealized agency and their restricted daily experiences by addressing self-control and personal responsibility.

Daniela

The golden child of VIDA's Bacano program, Daniela exuded stability and order; she was clean, calm, and organized. Even though her demeanor displayed control, she also exuded kindness which was regularly exposed through her shy grin and soft words. Daniela led the first author across a highway and through a middle-class neighborhood to find a green grass field lit by large lights and encompassed by a fence. It was Wednesday evening and she wanted the first author to see her team practice, to show her that girls were playing in other neighborhoods. During their walk, she explained she was new to this team. She had been given a scholarship and was one of the older players. Her team practiced twice a week and played matches on weekends. Thirty plus teenagers lined up and participated in two separate drills; Daniela was focused, putting all her energy into the exercises.

The following day, in Bacano, Daniela led the afternoon football practices with organized precision and execution. She never hesitated to blow her whistle or give commands. When the methodological trainings for leaders took place, she outshined the coaches with her creativity, cool control, and presentation skills. Like Lourdes, Daniela spoke often about personal responsibility in decision making and personal choices. She noted that she had chosen to change and that VIDA had influenced her path:

> I arrived here during a very hard stage. There was a lot of violence. I paid no attention to my mother and made her stress a lot. I did not go to school. I did nothing. Then I started thinking. I saw the foundation. I don't know if it was God. I went in and asked what I had to bring, what I needed to do to be here. The teacher said to me – relax, here, return with these papers. I came and started training and that was how I started. Perhaps I joined at a time that was not so easy in my life. I was looking for something, I fought everything, I was a very rude girl and here I learned to handle that.

Although Lourdes and Daniela lived in different social and geographical climates, both young women came to VIDA to escape home life in search of pleasure and stability. For them, playing and finding communal support outside their immediate family overrode and continues to supersede the social denigration they had and continue to experience. Through their words and actions, they brought the concepts of control and stability to the forefront and both women regularly addressed the concept of agency.

Swapping gender roles

Yuliza

Yuliza said that women are beginning to work outside the home "because women were bored in the house and because there was no money for food." She considers girls' and boys' roles as equal because her father is at home and her mother works outside the home. The change of social norms in Yuliza's house happens due to necessity, not by choice. Yuliza is one of twelve children. Like Lourdes and Daniela, she dressed in football pants and sweatshirts, but unlike them, she always had a beanie covering her long brown hair that draped her shoulders and back. Every day she came to VIDA, mostly to linger, but after soft suggestion, she would help with tasks or lead practices.

Yuliza began playing football in the street with her neighbor. It was not until a VIDA representative went to her church and her father, Fabian, heard them speak about values that she joined VIDA. Fabian is now in his 60s. He explained that five years ago he was diagnosed with a heart condition that affects his spine and his mobility. As a result, he became the "housekeeper, looking after the kids, and taking care of activities." In her interview, Yuliza talked about the

normalcy of being a part of a family where her mom works and her dad is at home. She has fun with her dad in the kitchen and laughed while explaining that she finds their joint messiness amusing. When asked if, in fact, this gender arrangement had become normative in Chévere, Fabian responded like a loving grandpa who realized that patriarchy exists only because he had lost his position of power as an able-bodied man, "It is not in my case, as I say, because of my illness I have had to take a nearly 180 degree turn for work, I am mostly disabled." He spoke of gendered roles and gendered labor unlike others in the neighborhood. To him, gendered social divisions seemed nonsensical and the interview questions outdated. However, he admitted before he fell sick he did not believe that boys should play with girls' toys or games. Now Fabian feels it is important that jobs are not categorized by gender:

> I am accustomed to doing the work of women too. My sons are accustomed to doing women's work, because it is important for them too.… I have taught my kids to wash dishes, to make food... it does not matter if it's a boy or a girl using the shovel. Let's dig a hole! It's the same, for me it's the same.

For Fabian, his view on gender roles in public space has also changed, which he noted when speaking about being inspired by his daughter's passion and skill for football:

> Well to me it is good, excellent. Because I feel admiration for her, because previously women were discriminated against a lot on the issue of contact sport, contact work. Now women have now taken a very important step [by playing] sport.

Although his reasons for transforming his thinking seemed clear to the first author, they were not to him. He fumbled and paused trying to answer why he changed his way of thinking, noting that society had changed too and now boys and girls have more social interaction. This is a common response, which in other cases included a discussion about access to the Internet. What he likes most is that Yuliza has positive male role models at VIDA. He hopes this will positively influence her expectations of men.

His newfound personal conviction regarding Yuliza's participation and how gender roles are negotiated is limited, however. Mid-way through the interview the first author asked if everyone in his community knows of VIDA. In his response, his personal beliefs uncomfortably contrasted with communal social relations, as he clarified that he does not tell people that Yuliza participates because he feels not everyone will understand:

> Yes, they know them. I say that yes, they know them. What happens is that some people have a bad impression of VIDA and maybe they are enemies of VIDA, and these people don't want good things for VIDA, for the organization to grow, because it doesn't meet their interests! They do not understand the damage they do to the community, because as I say, my child when she goes there in her free time, she is learning! But, they do not understand it like that.

Diving deeper into conversation, he explained that society "always see women as a weak sex." When asked if there are people who disagree with his opinions, Fabian replied:

> Well, I think that for the minute at least, there are parents who do not agree with their children going out [of the house] [pause] because the first thing they say is that the [girls

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playing] are machorras (offensive term for lesbian/dyke), which they are, Yes! They have more style of man than of [pause] and then I think they suddenly accept it, but they do not share or support it.

Discussing negative comments people say to him because of Yuliza's participation, he said: "Her mother sometimes believes in her, but sometimes she doesn't, but in my case I and her sister, we support her a lot. We say to her that [social pressure] is not important." As he continued to demonstrate his exalted support for Yuliza, his voice grew louder. He spoke of internal strife, noting that he disregards her mother's negative sentiments. He then compared her joy for playing like someone "lost in time." After saying an endearing nickname referring to her, he proclaimed "if you do this, HAGALO!" This translates to *go for it!* Through grand hand gestures he reassured that she will play with his support and without having extra difficulty from the family.

Although laden with heteronormative responses, Fabian's endorsement and pride in his daughter did reveal a micro-transformation in thinking in terms of social, gendered relations that was a product of primary and secondary experiences. When speaking of "enemies" he verbally recognized that Yuliza's participation is not isolated from the communal gaze and that power is held within multiple parties, including some who do not gain from VIDA's activities.

Opportunity trumps stigma

Valery's girls

Sitting on the front stoop of a house directly facing the field, Alejandra spoke about her grandmother's lack of opportunities: "No, she didn't study, she couldn't do anything, this is an

opportunity for me…girls' football has even changed in my lifetime. There were times when I couldn't play [because of health] and I felt bad. I missed it." Mid-way through the interview, she was asked a few gender-specific questions, such as "what are the expectations of women here?" Moments later, she responded that the majority of parents in Bacano do not allow their daughters to play football because they think it is for men.

Unlike many female participants interviewed, there was no sign of a suppressed activist hiding within Alejandra. "Playing gives me opportunities to travel locally, it occupies my attention," she said. On the day of the interview, she was playing for the neighborhood team that competes on the weekend and shares the field with VIDA. Tomorrow she would practice with VIDA. The team's Facebook page is managed by their coach. He alternates social media posts with images of the girls' playing in tournaments and barely clad women on motorcycles. Before his interview, two young teenagers sat on his lap, hugging him. The first author requested that they leave to conduct the interview. The girls giggled and left.

Few girls regularly played football at VIDA in Bacano. Valery's daughters, including Alejandra, however, were always there among the boys. Valery was restricted to her house and her husband financially supports the family. "I do not work, my husband works. He is selling coffee [downtown] at night, risking his life to sell… But if he does not work one day, we do not eat." Valery labeled her neighborhood "dangerous" and spoke of regular crime that results in her family spending most of their time indoors:

Sometimes there are days that I get bored of the confinement, I cannot go out because of attacks (robbing), I have to keep my children safe because of this. The fun for them is

here [VIDA], sometimes they are in school and they say that there is a robbery or a fight and they run home.

To maintain their security, she walks her children to and from school and to attend church twice a week.

Valery learned about VIDA at church and went to the VIDA office to learn more. The idea to register their children was not welcomed by her husband:

Their father told me that if the girl played she could break a foot, and it would be my fault. He was furious with me, but I did not pay attention, I came and I registered them. Thank God they are happy.

Later in the interview she returned to the tension in their household and how it has transformed:

Well before my husband did not want them to play, but he does not tell them anything now. They are going to play. Then he says they are spending money on shoes and I tell him that they are given by [VIDA], so that he does not say anything. They love playing. They would like to go [play] elsewhere, but my children could not go to the [next city] for not having money, but they love it.

Although Valery took a stand against her husband to register her children, she said before her daughters showed interest, she negatively judged girls and women who played:

There are girls that I see out there who do not know how to play. Before I scolded them because they played ball in the street. I told them they look like males playing, that's for

men. But I remembered that before [referencing childhood] I liked to play football and my parents never wanted me to play.

Valery is aware of the stigma denoted to girls who play, but because she spends her time at home, she says she is not confronted by it; Alejandra, on the other hand, says she "hears negative things on the street, it makes her feel bad, but it's okay." Stigmas and stereotypes do not threaten Valery's decision, as her goal is to provide her children with more opportunities than she had, and she sees VIDA as a mechanism to do this.

Valery entered the workforce at age 14. She became pregnant at 18. "I hardly enjoyed life because my dad was very complicated. He did not let us go to a party or anything, I was kept there in the house." She wants her three daughters and son to go to school, but the cost of "uniform, shoes, stockings, bag" among other things is taxing on the family:

> I give them everything so that they take advantage of the study. We never had support like I give my daughters, that is why I tell them to study, do not to fall in love, fall when you have already studied. That's why they enter here at [VIDA] to distract their minds.

The concepts of agency and distraction were frequently addressed in interviews. Female participants continuing with the program into early adulthood identified that their participation helped them regulate and occupy their time. They regarded this as a positive outcome as they connected this occupancy with helping them maintain a life "out of trouble." Trouble referred to illicit drug consumption and out of wed-lock sexual relations. They played into the modern, neoliberal paradigm of having agency, when the reality is that the "invisible threads" that connect them to those in power have been delimiting their paths since before their births.

The three themes drawn from the data can be narrowed into two points that answer the questions who is playing and why they can play. First, the narratives revealed young women who valued their potential gain from participating with VIDA as more important than the risk of social stigma (and potential threat to their family). Essentially, Lourdes, Daniela and young women in similar scenarios can play because they feel they have nothing to lose. The final scenario is like the first, but it was the mother who initiated having her daughters play. Second, in Yuliza's case, her nuclear family had already experienced a monumental shift in gender roles within the home. Therefore, in her family, women's participation in leisure activities socially reserved for men is no longer taboo, and thus the fear of being different is not an explicit threat.

Discussion and conclusion

Invisible threads that trace back to colonialism create multiple exclusions for people in this research (Giraldo, 2016a). The majority of female participants although aware of structures and barriers that prevent girls from participating, were adamant that they have choice in their everyday decisions. While local powers that explicitly shape and constrain their lives – namely, the Catholic Church, their parents and local gangs – they reveal the extension of religion, patriarchy and violence in these young women's everyday lives. Their false sense of agency exposes the entanglement of diverse oppressions that lie at the junction of the coloniality of gender. In other words, these young women, to various degrees, have accepted a multitude of socially constructed restrictions as normal. And yet by playing football and performing ambivalent femininity (Oxford & McLachlan, 2017), these young women are physically engaging with the tension of resistance that exists between subjectification and active

subjectivity (Lugones, 2010). For example, Lourdes argues that she makes her own decisions despite the fact that her most promising option for employment (economic stability) is through unregulated gendered manual labor (or prostitution); and that she needed the program to begin with to escape her abusive father. Yuliza believes it was her choice to participate in VIDA, but as her father noted, if he had not become disabled (an experience which altered his thinking) she likely would not have been permitted to play. Her father explicitly notes that his wife and community of friends do not accept Yuliza's physical rejection of heteronormative femininity. Valery ignored her husband's instruction disallowing their daughters to participate, but even with his newfound approval and her hope for more opportunities, her family's day to day existence continues to be constrained by their indigenous identity, low-socio economic class status, and violence. Everyday these "live, historical and fully described beings" are without choice actively participating in (and to some degree resisting) the complex entanglement of economics, race and gender (sexuality) imposed by colonialism (Lugones, 2010, p. 747).

By examining the coloniality of gender in action in this particular SDP context, our paper reveals an evident tension between the way these young women want the world to be, and the reality of the way things are in the world that is heard throughout their narratives. These young women do not appear to be buying into spectacular femininity in physical representation and they also challenge heteronormative gender expectations by playing football in public spaces. The common focus on values relating to individual change and becoming "self-reliant/individual", "good", "active citizens" reveals their subordinate place as controlled subjects within neoliberal modernity. In what seemed to be automated and cursory responses, VIDA employees and participants alike proudly asserted that VIDA is positively transforming the community because of values. The spaces between these words are their personal goals,

rather than values. Whether they were sold to them by an organization that provides them with food, a sense of purpose and security remains unclear and questionable. Underpinning these statements is a conceptual dichotomy between good and bad behaviour and an assumption that following the "good" path will result in opportunity, if not a life-changing trajectory. Only when discussing personal and sometimes painful experiences did these young women bypass the argument that values remedy social inequalities such as racism, sexism and classism to address the double standards and social stigmas frequently accepted as normal.

Giraldo (2016b) argues, "the coloniality of gender operates as a by-product of a local history – the struggle for women's rights in the advanced-capitalist and neoliberal West, where liberal feminism is hegemonic – projected as global design" (p. 65). It is at this junction that we begin to understand the subjective positioning of these young women within the global SDP industry which promotes and enforces an agenda that commits to the hegemonic Western liberal feminist global design (Chawanksy & Schlenker, 2017; McDonald, 2015, 2017). This positioning reveals the double-bind of coloniality as the female participants can afford to "either comply with Western – modern, neoliberal, capitalist – understandings of being an emancipated woman, or play the role of perpetual victim in need of rescue" (Giraldo, 2016b, p. 65).

By unpacking narratives bolstered by observations of the "interwoven social life of people not acting as representatives or officials", we can better understand and contextualize local lived experiences and the nuances between the agency and structure debate (Lugones, 2010, p. 743). We see that institutionalized racism underpinned by the rigid class system, violence, patriarchy and religion (e.g., Catholicism), continues to maintain and shape heteronormative gender roles. These diverse oppressions shape and constrain the opportunities and daily routines of citizens within Chévere and Bacano, and reveal the coloniality of gender in

action. Through exploring how cultural experiences of physicality are gendered, we begin to discover the obstacles that hinder girls from participation and the structural barriers that delimit female participants. When probing deeper into life histories and comparing social constraints, similarities arose that revealed the complexities of living and accessing leisure pursuits in the zone of non-being and the tension between the dichotomous hierarchies of modern (human) and non-modern (sub-human) as propagated in colonial-modernity (Lugones, 2010).

In this paper, we have critically explored the gendered nature of leisure through the lived experiences of participants and community members involved in a local SDP organization in Colombia. We found that while SDP in Colombia appears to open up a space for women to embody gender in resistant ways, it also continues to be limited for girls and is entangled with heteronormative practices that exclude different identities. Suggestions to begin to decolonize the SDP industry include the creation of a program culture that does not place girls within boys' social privilege and a masculine-orientated structure (Chawansky, 2011), which may further allow female participants to explore gender and sexuality in diverse ways and to reject the traditional expectations of female/femininity. It would also benefit the SDP community to re-imagine the power relations between donor and recipient, as the ongoing relationship between these two actors is explicitly and implicitly reproducing the coloniality of gender (Oxford & Spaaij, 2017)

Currently, women's sport is globally being heralded as experiencing unprecedented growth and visibility, and SDP programs have become increasingly "girled" (Chawansky, 2011; Chawanksy & Hayhurst, 2015) and committed to following neoliberal/modern trends (McDonald, 2015, 2017). When participants adopt specific values and embody qualities of the "good, active citizen," we must ask, will they then be capable and equipped to change the

oppressive and entangled structures (e.g. patriarchy, class system, structural racism, poor educational system) that caused a need for them to participate in the program to begin with? The decolonial feminist perspective employed in this paper enables us to better understand and critique historical continuities whilst also foregrounding the possibility of overcoming the coloniality of gender on and off the football field.

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Note

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[i] Although still minimal, female footballers are becoming a more common presence on television and older interlocutors are seeing more girls participate with VIDA on local fields. This has led many interlocutors to believe (or to try to sell to us) that stigmas and gendered barriers for female athletes are an issue of the past.