

Managing Gender in English Collegiate Soccer

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Association Football (Soccer) is the national sport of England and has, for more than a century, been positioned as a sort of male preserve where dominant notions of hegemonic masculinity are promoted and celebrated. Yet alongside this, over the past decade, women's soccer has consistently been one of the fastest growing sports in the country (Football Association, 2001). Whilst there has been much research exploring the social positioning of the game there has been scant consideration of management issues related to the sport. There is also little research based upon comparative data that can give a measured analysis of particular sporting environments and the experiences of athletes within these.

This research critically reflects upon the gendering of soccer through drawing upon data collected in two ethnographic studies at a College in the South of England. Data was collected through (participant) observation and semi-structured interviews with members of the male and female soccer teams. The first of these studies examined the experiences of female soccer players and the way(s) in which the women made sense of their participation in a perceived 'masculine' game. The second study, building upon the methodological framework of the first, examined the experiences of male soccer players within the same institution. Both studies look at the way(s) in which the soccer players 'do gender' and how this relates to the management and administration of the sport within the College.

Within this work we critically assess how gendered ideologies are (re)produced and (re)presented in soccer. It reflects upon the role of males within the organization and administration of women's soccer where they serve as coaches, spectators and referees. It also examines the role of women within the men's game where females have traditionally only been present/visible in subordinate and sexualized roles (Clayton and Harris, 2004). It locates and problematizes these issues within the surrounds of a Higher Education establishment and the distinctive issues that may impact upon student sport (Harris, 2004).

This study provides insights into the gendering of a sport at the collegiate level and the tensions inherent within the competing discourses and ideologies that shape these environments. It shows how women's soccer, through its modelling of the male game, struggles to find a distinct identity. The women who play the game are ridiculed by female athletes from other sports and have to really battle for funding and other forms of assistance. It shows how male soccer teams receive better funding and support ranging from the allocation of pitches and transportation to matches. The study also offers some broader reflections of how the game is being developed at the national level and highlights some of the main issues facing managers and administrators working within the game.

References

Clayton, B. and Harris, J. (2004) 'Footballers' wives: The role of the soccer player's partner in the construction of idealised masculinity', *Soccer and Society*, 5,3, pp.316-334.

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