

Dilemmas of Gender and Global Sports Governance: An Invitation to Southern Theory

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Most research on global sports policy either negates or underappreciate perspectives from the Global South. This article incorporates Southern Theory to examine how Northern worldviews profoundly shape gender-specific sports policy. It highlights two dilemmas that emerge, using illustrative case studies. First, it considers questions of gender and regulation, as evidenced in the gender verification regimes of track-and-field. Then, it addresses the limits of gender and empowerment in relation to sport for development and peace initiatives' engagement with the diverse experiences and perspectives in non-Western contexts, considering them in relation to programming for women in Pacific Island countries. The article concludes with a reflection on possible contributions of Southern theory to sport sociological scholarship.

While research on gender and sports governance is not new (e.g., [Adriaanese & Schofield, 2013](#); [Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008](#)), recent studies point to new avenues for feminist inquiry. Work by [Palmer \(2013, p. 15\)](#) underscores how sports policy takes shape amid governance relations in which “interconnected organizations and agencies”—many of them governmental, nonstate, private, and hybrid entities—interact across local, national, and global levels (p. 14). Since policy is “created by some and implemented by others,” its study requires careful consideration of “who is involved, how, where, when, and why,” as well as the globalized conditions that inform them (p. 40). In drawing attention to these issues, [Palmer \(2013\)](#) points to growing scholarly interest in sports and policy in the Global South,¹ while acknowledging there is little research that draws upon Southern knowledges. Postcolonial feminist scholarship on sport demonstrates many of the challenges that come with this kind of engagement, as well as the value of grappling with the influence of colonial dynamics, past and present (e.g., [Carney & Chawansky, 2016](#); [Hayhurst, MacNeill, & Frisby, 2011](#); [Sykes, 2017](#)). Here, we reflect on how these feminist insights can—and should—inform scholarship on sports policy and governance.

In this article, we examine gender-specific sports policies as a lens through which to highlight how Northern worldviews are embedded in contemporary global sports governance, thereby limiting opportunities for perspectives from the Global South to inform policy and its analysis. We focus on dilemmas that emerge during sports policymaking and implementation. While feminist scholars acknowledge a range of possible dilemmas ([Avishai, Gerber, & Randles, 2012](#); [Scott, 1988](#)), most relevant for our purposes is the dilemma posed by [Spivak \(1988\)](#): that is, despite attempts by Northern actors—in this case, those involved in governance or research—to support progressive agendas, (post) colonial discourse undermines the representation of subaltern

experiences and perspectives, often foreclosing the possibility of such voices being heard or understood.² We look to Southern theory, to date underutilized in sport studies, as a way to illuminate this dilemma in sports policy.

Southern theory draws critical attention to global periphery-center relations, with a focus on the power relationships underpinning knowledge. It aids in unveiling how the epistemologies of the Global North profoundly shape global knowledge production; the structures and institutions supporting academic research often ignore, subordinate, and discredit epistemologies from other parts of the world, including those of Indigenous peoples living alongside and within settler colonial states ([Connell, 2009](#)). [Connell \(2009\)](#) contends that Northern theory often posits universal claims even though it evokes distinctly Eurocentric worldviews, values, and biases. In doing so, it negates theories from the global periphery that offer alternative conceptualizations and explanations, thus perpetuating the colonial structures from which contemporary knowledge relations derive.

Consider sociology: the birth of discipline took place in the “centers of the major imperial powers at the high tide of modern imperialism. They were the ‘metropole’ . . . to the larger colonial world” ([Connell, 2009, p. 9](#)). Canonical social theories may seek to explain global change but do so from the position of the metropole, yielding a skewed vision of the world. As [Connell \(2011, p. 288\)](#) explains, “Much of current sociological thought is based on a great fantasy—that the world of the metropole is all there is, or all that matters, so that theories developed from the social experience of the metropole are all that sociology needs.” Claims buttressed by Northern beliefs are thus likely to serve hegemonic rather than liberatory agendas (p. x). Southern theory, as a counter-hegemonic project, challenges the supremacy of the Northern intellectual thought by revealing how knowledge from the metropole reflects

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a position of privilege and by drawing on knowledges from other parts of the world.

The relegation of knowledges from the global periphery poses a problem for governance (Basu, 2016). Reflecting on global sports policy, Palmer (2013) acknowledges the lack of Southern theory informing practice and research, a shortcoming that may have far-reaching implications for the diverse peoples living in the global South. Without their perspectives, we have a limited understanding of what they are or might be. This article is an initial step in promoting a larger sport-specific agenda that takes seriously the tenets of Southern theory, using two illustrative case studies. First, we analyze the relationship of women from the Global South to the gender verification regimes of track-and-field. We then interrogate assumptions of gender empowerment within sport for development and peace (SDP) initiatives for women in Pacific Island nations. Although distinctly different case studies, both are instances in which Northern entities and actors exercise gendered forms of biopower in the global South—that is, techniques of power leveraged through the coercive and productive management of Southern women's bodies (Foucault, 2007).

In illuminating dilemmas that emerge in each case, this paper does not aim to provide a comprehensive picture of gender-specific sports policy, nor does it offer a model for a Southern theoretical agenda. Since we, as two Northern, White feminist researchers, are arguably incapable of such an analysis, we offer what we can: grounded analyses of the Northern assumptions embedded within the universalist claims asserted through governance practices, and reflections on the challenges of overcoming them. We conclude with a discussion of how sport sociologists might embrace tenets of Southern theory by taking steps outlined by Santos (2012) to support and learn from epistemologies of the South. Our analysis is therefore an invitation to consider how Southern theory might refigure analyses of gender in sports governance, as well as the limits of such endeavors when carried out by researchers from the Global North.

Methods

This analysis is based on two separate qualitative projects addressing questions of gender and global sports policy through an intersectional lens, using subsets of data from each. In each case, we independently collected different forms of qualitative data as we sought to capture the different sides and angles of the issues at hand (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008). As each author had previously completed open coding and fine-grained analyses independently, the analysis for this paper builds upon our earlier immersion in the data and benefits from our in-depth knowledge of each case study.

The first empirical section draws upon interview and textual materials to analyze the regulation of eligibility in elite women's track-and-field. Our analysis stems from two key moments: first, a 2015 appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), which saw the suspension of the most recent International Olympic Committee (IOC) and International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) policies aimed at prohibiting the participation of women with so-called "unfair" biological advantages; and second, the reaction of the elite track-and-field community to this suspension, particularly in light of results at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. We excavate the knowledge politics embedded in the *content* and *context* of these regulations, as revealed in the CAS assessment of their scientific legitimacy, procedures for informed consent, and semi-structured interviews with 42 stakeholders in elite track-and-field.³

The second empirical section relies on ethnographic findings on the development and implementation of gender-specific SDP programming in Oceania.⁴ In addition to 26 interviews with SDP practitioners and policymakers, the data are distinct from the first case study in that they come from "micro-ethnographies," which offer in-depth insights when combined with other data (Silk, 2005). They entailed participant observation of individual workshops dedicated to SDP programming in the region, policy meetings and stakeholder outreach, work conducted in development organizations, as well as analysis of relevant SDP policy documents and program evaluations. Existing collaborations with Pacific scholars who are experts in transnational migration, health, and community change (since 2010), and work with SDP programs serving Pacific peoples (2012–2015), helped in capturing the nuances of these perspectives during the research. The process revealed dilemmas that emerged when considering Southern perspectives in both the *design* and *delivery* of programs.

To build the analysis, we revisited our existing thematic codes and focused specifically on the gendered dimensions of policy practices in each case. We isolated relevant data by considering the following: when and how Northern perspectives contributed to policy, instances where Southern voices had limited to no opportunity to weigh in on policy issues, and challenges or tensions arising from their inclusion. This approach enabled us to systematically tease out dilemmas of regulation and empowerment, informing the structure and argument of the article.

Dilemmas of Regulation

The fraught regulation of female athletes with intersex characteristics is a high-profile dilemma in Olympic sports, particularly track-and-field. Sometimes described as gender verification or sex testing, such practices aim to ensure that female athletes with differences of sexual development do not benefit from a "male-like" (thus unfair) athletic advantage. Feminist scholars have critiqued these practices for policing women's bodies and imposing binary sex categories in ways that deny human biological complexity (Henne, 2014; Pieper, 2016). In the wake of several recent high-profile cases in track-and-field, featuring exclusively women of Color from the Global South, many more scholars have asked how the politics of race and imperialism intersect with these gender dynamics (Bohoun, 2015; Cooky, Dycus, & Dworkin, 2013; Nyong'o, 2010). Such concerns, combined with the centrality of scientific and clinical knowledge in justifications for these regulations, render this issue a productive site to illustrate Palmer's assertion that policy is not a "neutral or value-free exercise" (2013, p. 82).

To briefly summarize recent events,⁵ the Hyperandrogenism Regulations of the IAAF and IOC were introduced in 2011 to regulate the participation of women whose testosterone levels were considered higher than "normal" due to differences of sexual development.⁶ In 2015, the CAS suspended these Regulations following an appeal by Indian sprinter Dutee Chand, citing inconclusive evidence that women with elevated testosterone gain a male-like advantage over their competitors (CAS, 2015). Caster Semenya, a South African athlete whose gender was questioned in 2009, subsequently returned to world-leading form leading up to the Rio Olympic Games, prompting a renewed international debate that escalated when two other leading 800 m athletes (both women of Color from African nations) were accused of having similar biological advantages. The three athletes went on to become the Olympic medallists in the women's 800 m. In April 2018, the IAAF

announced new Eligibility Regulations to be applied only to specific women's middle-distance events, including the 800 m.

As articulated by Rebecca Jordan-Young and Katrina (2012; see also Karkazis & Jordan-Young, 2018), a key claim among feminist scholars is that the Hyperandrogenism Regulations disproportionately target women of color from the Global South.⁷ Historical analyses suggest that there is a longstanding preoccupation with the transgressive bodies of non-Western "Others" (Henne, 2014; Pieper, 2016), which has focused on muscular women athletes from the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War, turning more recently to a racialized "North/South antagonism" (Bohuon, 2015). In this section, we introduce new empirical material to consider how contemporary Hyperandrogenism Regulations are racialized and imperialist. We focus our analysis on two dimensions that sports governing bodies claim as objective and value-free: the expert and procedural *content* of the regulations themselves and the *context* within which they are implemented. Both contribute to constructing the bodies of women of Color from the Global South as deviant and suspect.

Content: Value-Free Experts and "Informed" Consent

The Hyperandrogenism Regulations stipulate only the selective testing of female athletes. In the case of the IAAF, an athlete may be investigated if the Medical Manager has "reasonable grounds" for suspecting hyperandrogenism, with sources described as including *any* information received by IAAF medical officials (IAAF, 2011, p. 3). Similarly vague, the IOC states that only certain officials can request an investigation but without specifying how they might come to suspect a case of hyperandrogenism. The considerable room for subjective interpretation goes unproblematized by governing bodies, evoking the tacit assumption that the clinical gaze is impartial with respect to race and nation. The projection of this knowledge as universal conceals its role in Northern projects of Whiteness and the association of deviance with the bodies of women of Color.

In addition to definitions of intersex being "context specific" (Dreger & Herndon, 2009, p. 200), the history of intersex as an object of clinical and scientific knowledge is tied to the colonial production of racial difference. As Magubane (2014) demonstrates, the emergence of intersex as a clinical condition entailed its construction as a predominantly non-Western defect (see also Fausto-Sterling, 1995). For example, medical texts from the 19th century to the 1980s alleged the over-representation of sex-based abnormalities among people of Color in non-Western contexts and the absence or rarity of intersex characteristics among White populations (Magubane, 2014). Thus, expert knowledge of intersex variation has long cast Black women as suspect in their embodiment of femininity.

Experts from these and other presumed impartial scientific fields were centrally involved in drafting the Hyperandrogenism Regulations and justifying them before the CAS (see Pape, 2017). While Chand's appeal emphasized the partiality of clinical expertise, including its geopolitical dimensions, the adjudicating CAS Panel dismissed such claims as "sociological opinion" (CAS, 2015, p. 134). The limited diversity of expert voices involved in the development of the IAAF's Hyperandrogenism Regulations was also not considered a cause for concern.⁸ As stated, the CAS adjudicators were satisfied "that the IAAF has diligently sought to create a system of rules that are fair, objective and founded on the best available science" (p. 145). Although favorable to Chand in

the short term, the CAS decision endorsed the objectivity of the IAAF and its experts, defining hyperandrogenism in sport as a scientific matter and science—as the basis of this sports policy—as neutral with respect to race and geopolitics. As warned by Palmer (2013), we see the paradoxical embrace of evidence as value-free at the same time that Northern actors in this sphere of sports governance are actively constructing what counts as evidence. It takes Chand—a Southern actor with alternative experts—to reveal this interpretive power, subsequently denied by the CAS.

A second problematic aspect of the Hyperandrogenism Regulations is the consent process for initial diagnosis and subsequent medical interventions, which states that an athlete must give informed consent before undergoing any diagnosis or treatment. The alleged neutrality of informed consent deserves scrutiny, as the gendered worldviews of physicians can influence the preferences of patients (or their guardians), encouraging patients with intersex characteristics to consent to unnecessary procedures (Hester, 2004). During the Chand appeal, a witness "cited examples of athletes being forced to undergo surgery without clear information about what the treatment involved" (CAS, 2015, p. 110). An IAAF witness conceded "that it was 'questionable at best' whether young women in that position can give informed consent for medical interventions within the current procedures" (p. 97).

Such concerns are exacerbated in the case of athletes from the Global South. For instance, there are only six "IAAF Approved Specialist Reference Centres" where athletes can undergo diagnosis and plan any subsequent course of action. With the exception of Rio de Janeiro, these centers are located in OECD countries and primarily the home countries of key individuals involved in drafting the Regulations.⁹ This raises questions of independence – both professional and cultural – with respect to the "treatment" options presented to athletes. Consequences of these arrangements are captured in an article written by IAAF experts, which details the treatment of four women athletes diagnosed with hyperandrogenism, all aged 21 or younger and from "rural or mountainous regions of developing countries" (Fenichel et al., 2013, p. 2). They consented to a gonadectomy, clitoral surgery, and a "feminizing vaginoplasty" (pp. 3–4), none of which are required under the Regulations for an athlete to return to competition. In the absence of health-related risks, these actions reflect the heteronormative panic over ambiguous genitalia undergirding the accepted Northern clinical management of intersex bodies (Chase, 1998), which prioritizes a so-called "normal" appearance and the capacity to engage in heterosexual sex over the life-long discomfort that such surgeries can cause (Chase, 1998; Grabham, 2012).¹⁰

We know little about what information these women received or how they came to make these so-called choices. The power dynamics underpinning consent reflect longstanding concerns of postcolonial scholars about the possibility of subaltern resistance—of being able to speak and be heard—in the context of Northern imperialist interventions (Spivak, 1988; Swartz, 2005). The guise of informed consent conceals the severely constrained choices facing athletes in this situation, which are between complying with a treatment plan, never competing again, or attempting an appeal with limited resources, which risks revealing one's identity to the world. Witnesses for Chand described risks faced by "outed" female athletes in countries like India with a culture of "misogyny and violence against women" (CAS, 2015, p. 111). The CAS panel defined these as peripheral concerns, with the key question being whether the IAAF's Hyperandrogenism Regulations were scientifically supported (Pape, 2017). Amidst these complications, an appeal to "informed consent" serves to protect international sports governing bodies from liability

while legitimizing clinical interventions on the bodies of women with limited ability to pursue other courses of action.

Context: Constructing “Suspect” Athletes and Nations

Beyond the politics of expertise and consent, it is important to consider the social context within which an athlete may be distinguished as “suspect.” According to the IAAF, the “community of athletes” supports the Hyperandrogenism Regulations and should be allowed to determine the boundaries of fairness in their own sport (CAS, 2015, p. 27). Thus, the justification of the Regulations is directly linked to views within the broader track-and-field community on this issue, which have rarely been addressed within academic research (Wells & Darnell, 2014). Our interview data, collected following the 2016 Olympic Games, suggest that members of the international track-and-field community do view certain women from the Global South as suspect, a finding that not only reflects the gaze of the Regulations but is also constitutively linked to colonial histories and contemporary policy.

Echoing the historical association of intersex with Black African women found in medical texts and practices, interviewees conveyed that White female athletes are less likely to be “suspected” of being intersex. For example, as a media commentator and administrator stated, “If there’s a [white] female athlete who’s very muscular and has a strong jaw, it’s not about her gender as a man, it’s more that she’s butch. Whereas, I feel when people talk about Caster [Semena] or [Margaret] Wambui or [Maria] Mutola,¹¹ it’s more that ‘she is a man,’ so she is deceiving someone [and] has internal testes at the very least.” Although not using the language of suspicion, a female athlete similarly suggested that the athletics community would be more “sympathetic” to “a woman from London, who was White” than a Black woman from “a remote faraway place” in rural Africa where “people just think they live in villages and don’t have electricity.” Indeed, across the interviews, we identified a racialized discourse in which African nations were depicted as “tribal,” more prone to the “illness” of intersex variation, economically impoverished, and more likely to exploit their athletes, rendering them less morally upright than countries in the Global North.

Two rumors were particularly revealing. First, several interviewees referred to women with intersex characteristics being over-represented within African “tribal” contexts, such as a female 800m athlete who spoke of “certain tribes in Africa where there are larger populations of hyperandrogenous women.” The second rumor, which arose frequently in interviews, was that coaches and managers were “going off [to Africa] looking for people with [intersex] conditions specifically to make money out of them [female athletes].” A team administrator had heard of “talent scouts that go to Africa looking for girls who have gender discrepancies.” One athlete described a manager as saying, “they’re coming from everywhere, there’s going to be one on every African team.”¹² Such rumors were accompanied by descriptions that such women were vulnerable to exploitation because of their impoverished living conditions and limited life experience (according to one athlete, “some probably have never left their town”). A more general view of African nations as morally corrupt was evident in comments that “the developed world” would be “more concerned with protecting a girl than with winning medals . . . more concerned with the social impact or consequences.”

Our interviews evidence a racialized moral discourse circulating in the track-and-field community that constructs women of

Color—and from African nations in particular—as suspect not only in terms of the perceived greater likelihood of intersex variation, but also in terms of their desperation to escape poverty, their vulnerability to exploitation by corrupt national coaches or greedy managers from the Global North, and the greater willingness of African nations and their athletics federations to pursue winning at any cost. Although these women are imagined as exploited, they are still considered individually suspect and culpable for their transgressions. Given the relationship between the context and content of regulation, as well as the vague process by which an athlete may be singled out for investigation, the presence of this discourse further challenges the alleged geopolitical neutrality of the Hyperandrogenism Regulations.

What remains unexplored here and in other research is how perspectives of sex difference and fairness from outside the metropole might inform these debates. For example, an interviewee suggested that Black female athletes in one African nation supported the Hyperandrogenism Regulations and lobbied their national federation to prevent certain athletes from competing. Similarly, Chand allegedly came to the attention of Indian authorities via the complaints of her domestic competitors (CAS, 2015). Such insights add complexity to the view that gender verification is a contemporary form of Northern imperialism, highlighting how colonialism may still inform notions of gender and sex(uality) in the Global South. McClintock (1995), for example, illustrates how imperialism did not simply shape race and racial difference, but also actively recruited Northern ideologies of sex and gender in its service, the vicissitudes of which are still present. Understanding how and why competitors in the Global South might subscribe to these beliefs—as well as how others have refuted them—is part of a larger agenda to which Southern theorists would be integral.

Dilemmas of Empowerment

Feminist scholars have critically examined gender empowerment as a development objective, expressing concern about how ideologies and institutions can undermine its pursuit (Kabeer, 2005). Neoliberal development models popular in Oceania offer a case in point in that they fail to address the concerns of women in the region (Underhill-Sem, 2012). They can reiterate tacit assumptions that women in the Global South need Northern “modernizing” to become empowered—what J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006, p. 177) refers to as “the metaphorical ladder of evolutionary development.” As such, many women in Pacific Island nations must navigate “the legacy of colonial conquest and hyper-commodification,” both of which contribute to their misrepresentation in policy (Hall, 2009, p. 16). Here, we examine the impact of tensions manifest in SDP policy targeting Pacific women, pointing to Northern misrepresentations of Southern perspectives and experiences. Since formal policy-level decisions often take place outside the local context of service delivery, we account for perspectives of policymakers, many of whom are White men of European descent, as well as participants of Pacific heritage, only some of whom were involved in consultation and policymaking processes.

SDP initiatives intended to empower women and promote better health outcomes in the Pacific fit within broader development agendas. A notable portion of SDP funding in Oceania comes from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), which supports other gender and development initiatives in the Pacific. For instance, government funding backs Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women), a ten-year, \$320-million program that works with the governments of 14 Pacific

countries, United Nations (UN) and regional agencies, civil society, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and private-sector actors to promote objectives laid out in the 2012 Pacific Island Forum Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration. They include aims to enhance women's leadership and decision-making at different levels of governance, encourage economic participation, reduce gender violence, advance educational access for marginalized women, improve health outcomes, and commit to regular monitoring and evaluation.¹³ Here the hope, as stated in an interview with an Australian policymaker, is that SDP programs targeting Pacific women "would support our [DFAT's] development targets in the region."

Sport, according to DFAT, has the capacity to support several development aims, including women's leadership, non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention, community cohesion, and "life skills" for children, such as "teamwork, respecting rules, discipline, and perseverance" (Australian Government, 2015, p. 5). Although formal agendas endorse the transformative potential of SDP, their embedded assumptions of individuality, autonomy, and choice are not necessarily congruent with Pacific worldviews (Lepani, 2012). Northern notions that "value the *individuated* person" are often at odds with how many Pacific peoples see themselves—that is, as part of a network bound together by kinship, spiritual, ethnic, and communal ties (Jolly, 1996, p. 18). Thus, well-intended programs can uphold Eurocentric values and biases, which can have long-standing consequences for communities. Pacific scholars, for instance, make compelling critiques that foreign aid and development contribute to the undermining and erasure of Pacific histories and values (Hau'ofa, 1983). They warn that efforts to empower Pacific women often fail to address the cultural norms underpinning gender roles and inequality (Chattier, 2013). Our analysis considers how Northern ideologies inform the *design* and the *delivery* of SDP policy, sometimes negating Pacific perspectives even after actively soliciting them. One outcome of these dynamics is an incomplete—and sometimes misguided—construction of the challenges facing Pacific communities.

Design: Policy Development and Politics of Consultation

When developing guidelines for SDP programs targeting women in the Pacific, policymakers navigate a range of institutionalized governance demands. Key among them is the need to demonstrate clear and measurable results. The strategic choices made against this backdrop yield policies that tend to reflect governmental priorities and accountability metrics (see Henne, 2017), not necessarily the lived conditions that SDP participants navigate on the ground. The problems targeted by policy are thus largely framed by Northern worldviews, as are the mechanisms to ensure compliance with policy objectives.

During the research, value judgments and tacit assumptions surfaced in how policymakers presented women in the Pacific as a target population during discussions around the use of sport to support development objectives. Women's empowerment was a central concern, as was their health. Recognizing that NCDs contribute to most deaths in the Pacific (Friel et al., 2011, p. 248), they pursued policies to support programs that would contribute to reducing women's NCD risk, framing their SDP as an anti-obesity intervention that could make Pacific women "more active and fit." In meetings and interviews, policymakers recounted how weight loss measures were necessary to counteract pressing health threats. As exemplified by one interviewee's statement, there

are "troubling and unacceptable statistics, which show the vast majority of these women are physically not healthy." Those lobbying for SDP would often emphasize this point, citing population statistics about women—for example, that 93 percent of Tongan women are overweight or obese (Scanlon, 2014)—alongside particular claims about their bodies, such as the oft-repeated assertion that "the average weight of a Tongan woman is 97 kilograms" or that "[Pacific] women should not be so large." Their statements about female bodies emerged as self-evidently alarming, a tendency observed by others writing on the gendered dimensions of the "obesity epidemic" (Murray, 2008). When probed for more information, however, the same participants provided little, if any, detail about why the issue was particularly distressing in relation to women.

Despite the individuated focus on the body, there was an absence of disaggregated data on specific groups of women, negating the diversity of women who live in the region. The gap often became filled by ideological assumptions, particularly around gendered relations in Pacific contexts, and presumptions that the pursuit of fitness promotes health and female empowerment. In explaining how and why women become less physically active through the life course, most interviewees acknowledged that women have more household and familial responsibilities—a point that resonates well beyond the Pacific. Careful not to blame women for the high rates of obesity, many policymakers explicitly acknowledged patriarchal traditions as the reason why women were sedentary. As observed in other contexts (Eskes, Duncan, & Miller, 1998), participants co-opted female empowerment rhetoric to encourage physical activity. While some stated that SDP would "give women opportunities to do something together on their own without the men," others were more forthright, with one even saying it would "get the women out of the house and away from controlling families." Some also saw the strong role of religion in many Pacific Island nations as an obstacle, claiming that it encourages norms that undermine both physical activity and female independence by encouraging women to attend to familial obligations over their (individual) selves.

The supposition that Pacific women are inactive—and presumably obese as a result—overlooks the fact that many women have disproportionate household and care-giving obligations, which require significant labor and time and also extend well beyond Eurocentric notions of the nuclear family. Preoccupied with the goal of promoting change by making women more active through sport, policymakers often lost sight of the issue that many women negotiate communal dynamics and responsibilities. They also negated how families, communities, and Church provide forms of social protection that weaker state institutions often cannot (Jolly et al., 2015). These connections are also central to many Pacific peoples' relational sense of self and their wellbeing (Manuela & Sibley, 2012). As one female participant of Pacific heritage explained in an interview, "We don't see things like you. We are part of something bigger . . . We all have a place and have obligations that are part of it. My family, Church, community, they are part who I am and what I do. It wouldn't make sense another way." While policymakers acknowledged women's demanding responsibilities, they did not consider the more complicated point: that women's roles might be integral to their and their communities' wellbeing, not simply sources of female marginalization or isolation.

Disconnects between policymakers' understandings of Pacific communities and lived experiences on the ground shaped SDP agenda setting, becoming manifest in the commitment to

“evidence” within policy development and evaluation (Henne, 2017). Although policymakers spoke of the importance of consulting Pacific peoples, they usually did so after identifying desired—and usually measurable—outcomes. Northern priorities thus informed the core elements of policy, with engagement serving to demonstrate that interventions were not imposed top-down (or North-South). However, as one Pacific respondent conveyed, “at least it’s something.” But, as scholars have observed in other contexts (Reardon, 2006), consultation can serve to legitimize Northern projects rather than ensure marginalized or underrepresented groups are genuinely enabled to shape the process or redress embedded Northern biases. Consultation in the context of SDP policy design did not always go smoothly. For instance, to secure support for a program targeting women in Tonga, policymakers consulted male leaders since few women hold political positions, even though they are influential in family networks (Jolly et al., 2015, p. 21). In recounting the meeting, policymakers expressed frustration over their Tongan counterparts’ initial “resistance to programs that would benefit women, even though it’s clear they [women] need their own spaces.” When Tongan leaders stated concerns about disrupting familial and communal networks, policymakers doubted the potential negative consequences, describing some of their language as “clearly patriarchal” and citing the absence of women in attendance as evidence that women had been excluded from consultation.

Follow-up discussions with two Pacific female interlocutors yielded alternative interpretations. When asked about securing local support for SDP targeting women, they highlighted (Northern) policymakers’ failure to take seriously the relational aspects of personhood, something they explained was essential for getting community members on board.

They acknowledged the stigma around adult women participating in sport, saying it was essential to work on getting support from community members and institutions, including the Church, because “they will affect whether women actually participate [in programs].” Rather than condemn men’s “patriarchal talk,” their primary concern was that policymakers’ characterizations would be used to keep local stakeholders out of planning discussions rather than to ensure the inclusion of women. As one stated, “So now these [White] men are worried about Tongan women being disrespected?” She continued, “Do they realize we how long Tonga has been a matriarchal society and that it’s colonialism that changed that?” While there was “still a ways to go” in terms of gender equity, she pointed to Tongan women’s influential roles as sisters and the additional responsibilities that come with men migrating overseas for work. Her words pointed to the multiple ways that European beliefs about gender have influenced different areas of the Pacific, including through engagement with Christian missionaries, traders, and other settlers (Jolly & Macintyre, 1989), as have ongoing changes linked to the globalized movements of people and ideas across the region (Teaiwa, 2008). Thus, any effort to encourage women’s empowerment must attend to these complexities, which instrumentalized outcome measures fail to address.

Delivery: Unintended Consequences of Empowerment

Although women from the region were not present in many SDP policymaking contexts, it did not mean that programs planning and implementation failed to involve Pacific women. In fact, Pacific interlocutors suggested that discussions between leaders and women likely occurred through alternative modes of engagement.

As observed during SDP planning meetings, a Pacific man of high status might, for example, make an authoritative statement that would go unchallenged by other Pacific men or women in the room. In follow-up interviews, though, it became clear that the other participants had conveyed different sentiments. As one woman said, “That wasn’t the place [in front of White policymakers] to challenge [him]. There are other ways to handle them [the matters discussed].” Another reiterated that the priority was to ensure funding for local programs, as “women will decide how it’s implemented” in communities. In contrast, policymakers made judgements and decisions based on what they could observe in public spaces, and, as revealed through interviews, their perceived absence of women’s voices increased the likelihood that they would dismiss Pacific viewpoints on grounds they were not fully representative. However, many Pacific women’s conversations and modes of engagement, for various reasons, remained beyond the observation of a *pālagi* (here, a Northern policymaker or researcher).

Nearly all interviewees, irrespective of background, contended that the strongest SDP programs relied on women and their understanding of distinct Pacific values and contexts. One program that policymakers referred to as “best practice” received praise for its promotion of women’s health and empowerment, because its organizers, including women of Pacific heritage, worked closely with local groups to identify barriers to participation among women ages 15 to 45 and to develop outreach strategies to assuage community concerns and counteract social stigma around adult, particularly married, women’s participation (Australian Government, 2011). Media campaigns included participants, church representatives, and doctors to reinforce messages about the benefits of sport activity. “Community Mobilizers” at the grassroots level encouraged participation, and the program supported tournaments, coaching training, and equipment provisions. Pursuing the policy objective of promoting weight loss, the program requires women to be weighed at annual tournaments, offering prizes to participants who lose the most weight (Sherry, Schulenkorf, Nicholson, & Hoyle, 2014). Formal evaluations maintain a focus on individual change, providing no insight into community-level change or the broader effects of disciplinary messages focused on weight loss, such as possible lower self-esteem or negative body image perceptions.

Other funded programs, such as the Pacific Volleyball Partnership in Fiji, received positive endorsements from a variety of interviewees for empowering women and conducting outreach with village headmen to encourage local support for women’s physical activity. Additionally, the Pacific Women’s Sport Leadership Forum, a weeklong program held in Papua New Guinea, involved 20 women from across the region. Supporting the goal of gender empowerment, it encouraged Pacific women’s participation in sport governance by facilitating new professional opportunities, networks, and presumably adjoining forms of social capital. Although the overwhelming majority of participants framed the Forum in positive terms, two interviewees questioned whether the umbrella “Pacific women” negated the diversity of women and gender ideologies across the Pacific. Moreover, analyses of educational outreach suggest that access to such training does not necessarily ensure empowerment, especially if broader inequalities are not addressed (Chattier, 2013). However, to dismiss such programs as merely essentialist and thus not productive fails to consider how the subjectivity of different actors in development can be “fluid, contradictory and multiple,” partnering in ways that can yield “alternatives to hegemonic neoliberal policy and

practice” (Underhill-Sem, 2012, p. 1110). For example, as Yvonne Underhill-Sem (2012) acknowledges, feminist activists in the Pacific, despite being few in numbers, have made notable in-roads in political domains where women are rare, with some leading UN agencies and prominent NGOs.¹⁴

Despite the diversity of women in the Pacific, intersections between ethnicity, gender, and sexuality often remain outside the discourse and formal SDP agendas in the region. Women, including, but not limited to, those participating in traditionally male-dominated sports (e.g., rugby in Fiji), occupy and navigate a double bind. Their participation can require them to navigate, transgress, and sometimes actively resist not only gendered inequalities, but also the broader norms that sport traditionally reinforces (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017). Consider Fiji, where there is significant racial diversity and inequality and where homosexual activity was criminalized until 2010. Can sport provide a space to express and protect non-normative gender and sexual identities? How might SDP better address the benefits and risks posed by sport participation?

Instead of being formally attentive to intersectional subjectivities, the SDP discourse analyzed here tends to reify static notions of Pacific women struggling under forms of patriarchy rooted in traditional local norms. Such characterizations minimize the implications of colonialism and global capitalism and render Pacific cultures as homogenous and static. They persist even though all Pacific participants interviewed for this study expressed strong feelings about colonialism’s enduring effects, the vitality of Pacific cultures, and the complexities of promoting traditional agendas, especially when simplistic narrations and rhetoric might marginalize women. Also rendered invisible in discourse is the gender diversity across Pacific Island countries, which exceeds Northern constructions of binary sex (male/female), such as Tongan *fakaleiti* and Samoan *fa’afafine* (both of which are considered male at birth but have masculine and feminine traits). Work concerned with gender and development often fails to attend to their experiences and needs, even though Pacific communities have long recognized these identities and their shifting contours under colonial conditions. Northern categories of binary gender, even with good intentions, tend to either negate or misunderstand them. In doing so, the development objective of women’s empowerment threatens to become a mechanism for buttressing heteronormative beliefs, continuing the longer history of colonial and neoliberal economic interventions that misrecognize—yet still try to intervene in—the Pacific Island nations and communities.

Discussion and Concluding Considerations

Southern theory is an important reminder that hegemonic forces can prevent the inclusion of knowledges from outside the metropole. The case studies presented here offer only partial accounts of such barriers in sports governance; however, they illuminate two distinct dilemmas for consideration: (1) the problematic nature of rules reliant upon universalist claims around women’s bodies, even those that purport to be scientifically informed and therefore value-free, and (2) the impossibility of Northern perspectives being able to fully grasp the postcolonial dynamics that contribute to the development and reception of policy. Because Northern values are embedded in governance practices, they are difficult to identify at first. Concealed within allegedly universal, rational, and objective structures of global sports governance, they are dynamics that Southern theory can bring to the surface. Santos’ notion of a “sociology of absences” is therefore particularly relevant, defined

as “research that aims to show that what does not exist is actually actively produced as non-existent . . . as an unbelievable alternative to what exists” (2012, p. 52). If Southern critiques of Northern bias within systems of sports governance appear *incredible*, it is because Northern systems actively produce them as irrelevant—even invisible. This practice of obscuring is part of Northern politics, whether intentional or not. A situated approach to Southern theory offers a corrective lens that aids in illuminating them, as seen in both cases presented here.

In the case of the Hyperandrogenism Regulations, race and nation are actively produced as irrelevant to the regulatory practices of sports governing bodies. Consistent with a broader push towards evidence-based policy in international sport (Palmer, 2013), the IAAF (and CAS) claim to be deferent to the “best available science.” Despite the expertise that underpins these regulations projecting objectivity and universality, women from the Global South are disproportionately cast as suspect. Applying the insights of Santos, the apparent absence of an association between the IAAF’s regulatory regime and Northern imperialism relies on institutional arrangements that shore up and conceal the hegemony of the metropole as a site for the production and application of gendered knowledge.

In the SDP case, dilemmas emerge in relation to Northern influences on policymaking and perceptions of Pacific contexts. Although governance arrangements create spaces for consulting Pacific communities, they limit the scope of engagement, presenting seemingly self-evident solutions that fail to fully hear or value Pacific perspectives. Coincidentally, initiatives echo shortcomings of colonial interventions; that is, as in the case of gender verification, there are no meaningful mechanisms for including Southern knowledges. In another parallel, the governance of SDP—and arguably aid and development more generally—reinforces certain kinds of absences, erasing the historical and contemporary role of the Global North in shaping conditions in the Pacific (Hau’ofa, 1983). While Northern researchers may understand these dynamics in a general sense, the depth of knowledge necessary to fully engage them can exceed Western feminist sensibilities—a limitation that even the most reflexive practices may not account for.

Connell (2009, 2011) encourages the inclusion of Southern perspectives in academic knowledge, but Santos provides clear advice on how to do so. Fostering Southern epistemologies, according to Santos (2012), demands moving beyond the excavation of absences—that is, locating the invisible, discredited, and non-intelligible. It requires recognizing the capacities and possibilities of the South, the plurality of these knowledges, and the need for horizontal translations of experience and ideas between South and North. This approach poses a challenge for Northern governance systems, which often institutionalize hierarchies that preserve metropolitan worldviews. As gender inequality pervades structures of sport governance beyond questions of policy, feminists from the Global North cannot fully deconstruct or develop strategies for refiguring sport as a gendered institution without Southern partners. Although there is important sociological scholarship on sport that embraces feminist postcolonial thought and critically engages the privileges afforded to stakeholders in the Global North (e.g., Hayhurst, 2011; Hayhurst & Giles, 2013; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017; Magubane, 2014; Sykes, 2017), most work in the field does not query how these dynamics are rooted in unequal global knowledge flows—a core prescriptive consideration of Southern theory.

This article contributes to what Santos (2012, p. 58) calls the “deconstructive challenge” of identifying where and how Northern

biases persist within two areas of sports policy. The “reconstructive challenge” is in large part the task of Southern scholars, since it involves revitalizing subaltern knowledges that have been interrupted and discredited by the metropolitan worldviews. As Connell (2009) reminds us, Northern scholars can be critical allies in facilitating the dissemination of these much-needed knowledges. We thus invite fellow scholars of sport to not only more deeply engage with the tenets of Southern theory in their research, but to also strategically consider how their positionality can be used to promote knowledge produced outside the metropole.

Notes

1. We acknowledge that many scholars prefer “Two-Thirds World” or “Three-Fourths World”, because it rejects binary constructs and their ideological assumptions (Hayhurst & Giles, 2013). Since we are engaging with Southern theory, we use “Global South” to avoid confusion.
2. The subaltern, according to Spivak (1988), occupies a subject position in which discourse prevents the accurate representation of their experience or expressions.
3. Interviews for this first study were conducted in late 2016 and early 2017. 28 interviewees were directly connected to the Rio Olympic Games. The remaining 14 participated in other Olympic Games, World Championships, or Commonwealth Games. The sample includes 26 athletes, 12 coaches, 4 media personnel, and 3 team staff, representing nine, primarily English-speaking countries. The sensitivity of the topic at the time of interviewing prohibited a broadly representative sample; however, a combination of purposive and snowball sampling ensured various perspectives and arguments were reflected, with follow-up questions used to elicit them as fully as possible. Interviewing continued until reaching saturation, which became evident when no new information or distinct thematic codes were emerging in the data.
4. Keeping with an ethnographic approach, interviews for the second study were unstructured to generate more information about the participants’ experiences and perspectives (Briggs, 1986). Doing so required establishing rapport—which was especially important when interviewing participants of Pacific heritage and usually required introductions from one of their trusted colleagues. Collected between late 2012 and 2015, the data come from a sample that includes 9 SDP advocates and practitioners, 6 development workers in the Pacific, 7 Pacific community representatives, and 4 policy-makers. Interviews sought an in-depth understanding of observed contexts and conditions, thus requiring purposive sampling to ensure that the sample reflected different gendered perspectives and did not over-represent the accounts of close interlocutors.
5. For an extended historical account of gender verification, see Pieper (2016).
6. Regulations stipulate that any female athlete found to have functional testosterone levels above 10nmol/L—defined as the beginning of the “male range”—must undergo “normalizing” treatment before returning to competition (IAAF, 2011).
7. Similarly, an IAAF official claimed that the Hyperandrogenism Regulations “were ensnaring athletes from developing countries with little . . . means to contest the rules” (Leicester, 2016).
8. Fourteen experts, including ten from Western Europe, North America, and Australia, developed the IAAF’s Hyperandrogenism Regulations. A 2015 review of the IOC Hyperandrogenism Regulations and Transgender Guidelines involved 20 experts, with 16 from Western Europe and North America.

9. Centres are in Melbourne (Australia), Nice (France), Stockholm (Sweden), Hershey (USA), Tokyo (Japan), and Sao Paolo (Brazil).
10. It was reported that the IAAF cancelled a press conference promoting this research because of concerns regarding legal action (Bouchez, 2016).
11. Multiple interviewees identified Mutola, a retired Black female 800m runner from Mozambique whose successes spanned the 1990s and 2000s, as suspect. Other successful competitors from this same period were not. One such British athlete, also a woman of Color, was described by a coach as “not as identifiable as a Black athlete as Semenya or Mutola.”
12. Karkazis and Jordan-Young (forthcoming) have identified similar rumors circulating among policy-makers and elected officials of the IAAF and IOC (see also Pieper, 2016).
13. More information is available via the Pacific Women website: <http://www.pacificwomen.org/>
14. Examples include the head of UNIFEM Pacific (2005 to 2011), Fiji Women’s Rights Movement and Punanga Tauturu in the Cook Islands (Underhill-Sem, 2012, p. 1111).

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