

Abstract

Title: Empowering Young Female Athletes – A Possible Challenge to the Male Hegemony in Sport: A Descriptive and Interventional Study.

Language: English

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While sport promotes health and well-being, organised sport remains strongly structured, which reinforces patterns of gender inequality. There is, therefore, a need to challenge and question the present situation.

The general aim of this dissertation was two-fold; to gain an insight into the influence of male hegemony on young females in sport as well as to ascertain whether or not a self-strengthening programme had an empowering effect on young sportswomen.

The thesis consists of four separate studies and an integrative essay. In two of the studies, the data were collected by means of interviews; in Study I with 12 non-physically active young females and in Study II with 17 young female athletes, and analysed using the grounded theory method. In Study III, 14 young female athletes were interviewed concerning how they perceived the influences of a self-strengthening programme, and the study methodology used was based on a phenomenographic approach. In Study IV, the benefits of a self-strengthening programme were evaluated (3- and 18-month follow-up). The study involved a participating group (n=123) and a non-participating group (n=56). The quantitative data were analysed by descriptive and analytical statistics.

In the integrative essay, reflexive interpretations of the results of the four studies were made, based on the theoretical framework — male hegemony and empowerment — for the purpose of placing the descriptions in a wider context and linking the four studies into a whole.

The findings showed that non-physically active young women considered that enjoyment, a feeling of belongingness and learning a particular skill during the exercise sessions would motivate them to start a physical activity. In order to enable them to exercise regularly, several kinds of support were necessary, e.g. child-care and cheaper fees. Involvement in sport was regarded as promoting psychological well-being and health as well as improving one's social network. However, young female athletes, who did not wish to be put under pressure when participating in sport, or who felt that they did not fit in, were therefore forced to exercise by themselves or join a fitness club. Young female athletes considered that they had a lower status in sport and society generally than young males, yet approximately 2/3 of them perceived that the sports club or sports federation was making an effort to provide support for young sportswomen to assume commissions of trust and become coaches and that young females enjoyed equal opportunities in sports clubs. Furthermore, self-strengthening programmes can empower young female athletes by enhancing their feelings of self-efficacy, awareness of women's issues, and coaching skills as well as generating feelings of belongingness, being seen and confirmed. To empower young female athletes is meaningful because it increases the potential to challenge male hegemony within sport in the future.