



A conceptual framework of sport participation and women's empowerment

So Youn Lim^a and Marlene A. Dixon^b

^aDepartment of Kinesiology, Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS, USA; ^bDepartment of Kinesiology, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, USA

ABSTRACT

Sport has the capacity to generate personal change for girls or women. It could be a place where women become empowered and overcome many of the areas of inequitable perceptions or treatment that impact women across the globe. However, sport is not always empowering, safe, or confidence-building. The inconsistent effects of experiences in sport participation are not ubiquitous, nor do they inherently result in positive outcomes [Chalip (2006). Toward a distinctive sport management discipline. *Journal of Sport Management*, 20, 1–21; Green (2008). Sport as an agent for social and personal change. In V. Girginov (Ed.), *Management of sports development* (pp. 129–145). Oxford: Elsevier]. However, we know little about how and why some sport experiences are empowering and others are not and what contextual elements of sport and of women's lives affect the empowerment experience through sport. Toward that end, this conceptual study presents a three-tiered framework that integrates psychological empowerment theory into existing literature on sport structure and culture to present new avenues of exploration and analysis regarding the design and implementation of sport programs for girls and women.

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In spite of many advances, women across the globe are often subject to inequitable perceptions and treatment compared to men. For example, in a number of countries women are prohibited in certain public spaces including sport fields (Brady, 2005; Cesari, 2012). Around the world, women lag behind men in access to affordable and quality health care (Women and Gender Equity Knowledge Network, 2007). While women continue to increase access toward equal opportunities and access in many western countries, the ways they are disadvantaged in social practices has become more subtle and hidden (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Kaufman & Wolff, 2010; Kay, 2009; Shaw & Frisby, 2006). The gendered social practices

are sustained because many social structures are built by men and for men. While changing the gendered culture of social structures is necessary (Ely & Meyerson, 2000), it is also important for women to gain control over their lives in order to make a change in gendered social practices and to keep from being disadvantaged (Hancock, Lyras, & Ha, 2013; Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). Then they can take action, not only of their personal choices but also over the politics and structure of the society in which they live. Sport could be a powerful means of gaining such control (Blinde, Taub, & Han, 2001; Brady, 2005; Kaufman & Wolff, 2010; Kay, 2009; Schulenkorf, 2017).

Several studies have demonstrated that sport has the capacity to be a tool to generate personal change for girls or women. Studies on women's sport participation have suggested that females who actively participate in sport have gained a sense of competence, confidence, independence, and control over their bodies and lives. Evidence supports that participation in sport can empower women across a variety of settings and demographic categories (e.g. college athletes, amateur athletes, women and girls in developing countries) in both mainstream and sport for development programs (e.g. Blinde et al., 2001; Brady, 2005; Kaufman & Wolff, 2010; Schulenkorf, 2017; Schulenkorf, Sherry, & Rowe, 2016; Theberge, 1987; Velija, Mierzewski, & Fortune, 2013; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). The women's sport experiences, whether in Western countries or developing countries, provided them a safe place to be themselves (Brady, 2005; Green, 2001; Hancock et al., 2013; Reid, Frisby, & Ponc, 2002), especially if their activity is contrary to existing gender norms and expectations. *Conversely, sport is not always empowering, safe, or confidence-building.* Sport experiences can reinforce the traditional gender roles and expectations and make women feel powerless. In some contexts, especially those without any intentionality toward empowerment, female participants who became aware of gender roles and expectations conformed to the social expectations by either quitting the sport (Brace-Govan, 2004), or feminizing themselves (Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2009; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998), instead of resisting, attempting to change other people's perception, or persuading them not to stereotype all women.

The inconsistent effects of women's sport experience highlight that sport experiences are not all same, nor do they "naturally" result in positive outcomes (Chalip, 2006; Green, 2008; Schulenkorf et al., 2016). A growing stream of empirical studies have examined empowerment in women's sport and how

sport experiences are empowering or disempowering (e.g. Kaufman & Wolff, 2010; Kay, 2009; Röger, Rütten, Frahsa, Abu-Omar, & Morgan, 2011; Samie, Johnson, Huffman, & Hillyer, 2015; Velija et al., 2013). While this builds a beginning point for exploration, most of these studies are based on a single program or single sport case, but lack a comprehensive framework for explaining both process and outcome of the experiences. There is much to learn about how the empowerment is processed during sport experiences, what contextual elements of the sport and the women's lives affect the empowerment, and how sport can be such a catalyst for change. Therefore, in order further develop theory in this area, this paper presents a framework that integrates psychological empowerment theory into the design and implementation of sport programs for girls and women (see Figure 1). This framework will bring provide a basis for further empirical study in that will support, refute, provide boundary conditions, and eventually provide guidance for both policy makers and programmers in women's sport (Whetten, 1989).

Theories of empowerment

The empowerment construct is used pervasively in various fields, including community psychology, public health, and management. Among the various manifestations, two that have been predominantly utilized are Rappaport's concept of empowerment (1987) and Zimmerman's framework (1995). Rappaport (1987) defined empowerment as the process by which people, organizations, and communities gain control over issues that they are concerned with.

Zimmerman and his colleagues investigated the construct further, and developed a framework (e.g. Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; ; Zimmerman, 1995, 2000; Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992). According to these scholars, empowerment is a construct

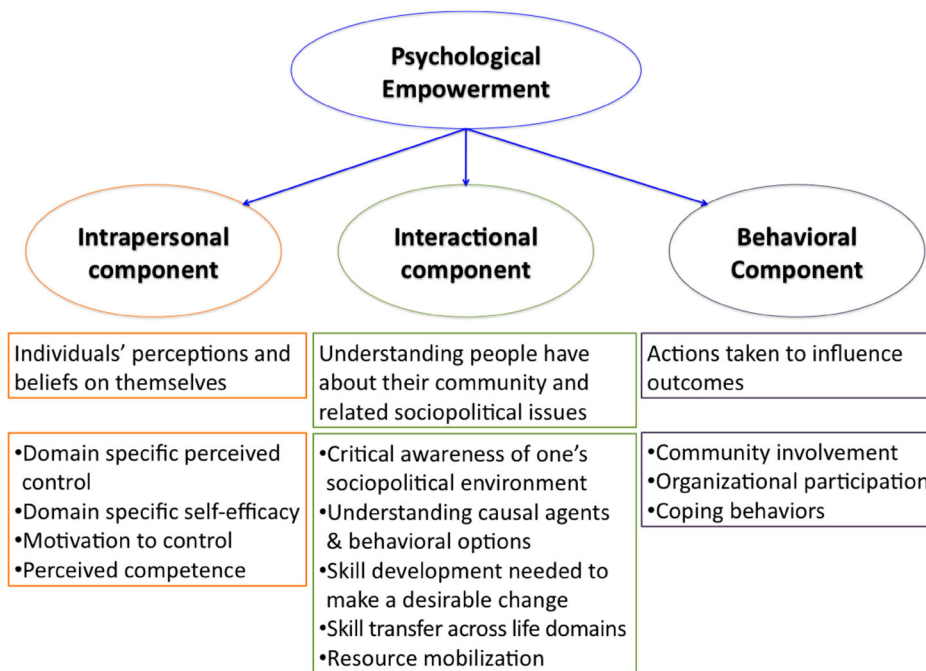


Figure 1. Nomological network for psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 588).

consisting of three levels – individual, organizational, and community. All the levels are inter-related, but individual level empowerment can be fundamental to achieving organizational or community empowerment (in a bottom-up process).

Psychological empowerment framework

According to Zimmerman (1990), empowerment at the individual level of analysis is referred to as psychological empowerment. He argued that empowerment at the individual level calls for an individual to have a critical understanding of her environment and participatory behaviors in the life or community beyond the psychological intrapersonal constructs (Zimmerman, 1990). His psychological empowerment framework (1995) provides useful insights into the processes through which individuals are empowered, the variations of experience that empower individuals,

and outcomes of empowering experiences. Psychological empowerment, empowerment at the individual level, is defined as a process by which individuals (1) perceive and gain control over personal issues, (2) understand their environment critically, and (3) take actions to influence the issues in their lives or communities (Zimmerman, 1990).

Zimmerman's framework (1995) for individual level empowerment consists of three components (see Figure 1): (1) intrapersonal (domain-specific perceived control, motivation to control, and perceived competence), (2) interactional (a critical awareness of sociopolitical environment, understanding of causal agents and options, and developing needed skills), and (3) behavioral (participatory or coping behaviors). Based on the three components of psychological empowerment, an empowered person may believe that she has the capability to influence a given context, understand how the system works in that

context, and engage in behaviors to exert control in the context (Zimmerman, 1995).

According to studies from various fields (e.g. Anderson & Funnell, 2010; Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007; Kar, Pascual, & Chickering, 1999; Schutt & Rogers, 2009; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, Rosa, & Castro, 1997; Zimmerman, Stewart, Morrel-Samuels, Franzen, & Reischl, 2011), empowerment is not gained naturally. An empowering process can occur when a program provides participants with a safe space and an experience that can increase perceived control and competence, yield knowledge and skills, and allow one to engage in collective activities (Zimmerman, 1995). A sport program is empowering when it nurtures the empowering process and helps participants gain the cognitive and behavioral skills necessary to critically understand social environments and become independent problem solvers and decision makers. To enhance empowerment, program organizers need to deliberately implement and provide the empowering experiences in a program (Zimmerman, 2000).

An assumption of psychological empowerment is that it may vary for different groups of people, across different life domains (e.g. family, work, or recreation), and over time. The importance of each component can also vary. For women, radical feminists have argued the process of critical awareness of gendered practice in society is important (Carr, 2003). Through consciousness-raising, women can connect their disadvantaged experiences with those of other women, and thus see the sociopolitical dimensions of their personal problems (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010; Röger et al., 2011; Stromquist, 2002).

Because psychological empowerment can vary in different settings, it is necessary to investigate and add more cases in order to understand the process in-depth and obtain measurements or evaluation that can be more generally used (Zimmerman, 2000). Therefore, we need to examine and identify what are the

psychologically empowering process and outcomes in the context of sport participation. Even in the sport participation context, psychological empowerment can vary in different sports, settings, or demographics of participants. Furthermore, because psychological empowerment is variable across different life domains (Zimmerman, 1995), the empowerment that is gained in a sport setting may not naturally transit to other domains of participants' lives. In fact, Zimmerman argued that the high level of psychological empowerment could be expected when a person can generalize skills across life domains. Therefore, in order to maximize psychological empowerment, it is necessary to catalyze the transfer of skills across life domains. In the following section, we propose a model for applying the psychological empowerment framework to sport participation.

Sport and psychological empowerment framework

Intrapersonal component

Proposition 1: Sport has the capacity to promote the intrapersonal component for active female participants by physical, educational and socializing experiences and commitment-centered subculture.

Sport, by developing skills and attitudes women need in their lives, has helped some women gain personal empowerment. Researchers have argued that sport facilitates the development of female athletes' physical and life skills and led to personal empowerment in spite of a male-dominated system and environment (e.g. Blinde et al., 2001; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2009). Blinde and her colleagues found that participating in certain elite sports could empower women individually by developing life skills and qualities that some women have traditionally lacked: bodily competence, competence of self, and a proactive approach to life (2001). Other studies on women's sport

participation (Brace-Govan, 2004; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2009; Theberge, 1987; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998) supported the notion that females who actively participated in sport were able to gain a sense of competence, confidence, independence, and control over their bodies and lives. These positive psychological outcomes were found in the studies of elite-level or serious leisure female athletes.

The empowering experiences that made female athletes feel more confident or independent were shown mainly to be the physicality and bodily competence, and goal-achieving and committing aspects of sport. Studies (Blinde et al., 2001; Brace-Govan, 2004; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2009; Theberge, 1987, 2000; Velija et al., 2013) have argued that female athletes gained positive self-perceptions and control over their bodies and lives by using their bodies consistently and gaining physical strength through sport. For example, martial arts participants in Velija and her colleagues' study (2013) reported that they felt physically and mentally stronger and empowered by developing physical strength and exercising force, which enabled those women to reject physical and mental weakness. Besides the physicality of sport, the hard-working and goal-achieving aspects of sport also have enabled active female participants to gain a sense of confidence, independence, and control (Blinde et al., 2001; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). Commitment-centered subcultures have also facilitated committed women to feel more independent and empowered as they were treated based on proficiency and commitment in the sport, not based on gender (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998).

Thus, while we have some knowledge of what sport components are needed to affect empowerment; we need to explore the specific components of a sport sub-culture and *how* they impact women's empowerment within sport. We also need to explore how these various components may impact women differently based on their needs, goals, and life

stage (Schulenkorf et al., 2016). It is possible that empowerment manifests differently among different groups of women and possibly among various sport contexts (e.g. elite, amateur, mainstream, sport for development) and therefore impacts the optimal design and implementation of sport programs.

Interactional component

Proposition 2: Sport can provide a space to become aware of gendered culture of sport and society by experiencing conflict of gender expectations between being women and being athletes particularly when they participate in traditionally masculine sport.

For the empowerment of women, certain feminist scholars (e.g. radical feminists, physical feminists) argued that the process of critical awareness is considered to play an important part (Carr, 2003; Velija et al., 2013). They have claimed that becoming critically conscious of one's reality and power inequalities is a key to empowering women (Stromquist, 2002). They suggested through consciousness-raising, women would be able to connect their disadvantaged experiences with those of other women, and thus see the sociopolitical dimensions of their personal problems (Carr, 2003). On the contrary, liberal feminists emphasize personal empowerment, arguing that women can achieve individual empowerment by physical and mental empowerment (e.g. feeling strong, confident, and independent) without questioning and challenging gendered embodiment and other social practices.

Sport can also provide a space to promote a person's awareness and interpretation of the sociopolitical environment surrounding participants. Indeed, sport fields can reflect other aspects of culture and society (Coakley, 2001). Particularly, sport can be a space for participants to become aware of the gendered culture in sport fields and broader societies (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). Many organized sports considered traditional sports (e.g. football, baseball, and

hockey) have been dominated by males and emphasized masculinity (Messner, 2007). Women who venture into these sports can have their eyes opened, through their interactions, to the gendered culture of sport and also of society.

This kind of women's experience can occur in a wide range of sports, particularly often in those perceived as traditionally masculine (e.g. weightlifting, martial arts). For example, women weightlifters had "epiphanic moments" (Brace-Govan, 2004, p. 506) in that they recognized the conflict of gender expectations of women and the sport (i.e. weightlifting). What was revealed to them was the fact that strong and powerful physicality was expected to be male and was associated with domination over others (Brace-Govan, 2004). These illuminative moments, brought on by the effect of reactions from their friends and families, raised their awareness that strength and muscularity was not suitable for women. Moreover, by experiencing interactions with other men and women at the gyms, they recognized that certain gyms were male spaces and they needed to pretend to be masculine to fit in there.

In a martial arts setting, scholars found that women were aware of the public view of women as weak and victimized (Velija et al., 2013). The women rejected the notion of gendered embodiment by gaining physical strength and accepting the violent aspects of the sport. However, although these women were aware and avoided the gendered embodiment in martial arts, they were often not critical about it nor problematized the construction of the gendered embodiment that positions women as less physical or less serious than male peers.

Based on these examples of weight training and martial arts, we find that the process of gaining critical awareness of gendered practice in sport and society is complex and varies by experience. Therefore, we need further investigation of the specific process experiences in different cases, sports, and groups of women.

We need a better understanding of how these sport experiences impact women's empowerment in various subgroups and how nuances in the sport design, implementation, and demographic make-up of the participation experience can alter how empowerment is perceived and manifest in women's lives.

Proposition 3: Experience of conflict and its awareness may occur not only in traditionally masculine sport but also non-competitive, gender-neutral sport or other settings.

Alternative sports, such as windsurfing, are considered postmodern and have a differentiated culture from traditionally masculine sports, emphasizing values such as individuality, freedom, or hedonism instead of masculine values such as aggression or toughness. Therefore, it is assumed that the gender relations and structure will be different here (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). Nonetheless, even in these sports, female participants sensed gendered expectation and treatment from other female and male members (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). They were expected to be feminine in appearance and inferior in performance.

There is very little exploration in this area regarding how women gain empowerment in these alternative settings and if the mechanisms are similar/different to participation in traditionally masculine sports. Do these sports open new avenues for empowerment that could inform the design of sport for women? These factors need to be uncovered and mapped in order to further inform the psychological empowerment model.

According to a study of physical activity promotion project for women with low SES in Germany (Röger et al., 2011), raising critical awareness can be achieved while participating in the planning and implementing process of the activity programs. While women who participated merely in exercise and swimming classes did not show the evidence of critical awareness, those who participated both in planning and implementing the activities achieved the outcome. The planning participants were

able to become critically aware of what the target population wanted and needed, and learned the potentiality of their influence on the target group issues by involvement in sport program organization. This organizational participation experiences enabled the women with low-SES to gain what would be considered the interactional component of psychological empowerment. Whether this kind of experience produces same outcomes to other groups of women, and what are other attributes that facilitate this interactional component for other women should be investigated further.

Proposition 4: While women's sport participation may promote awareness and challenge the traditional notion of women's capabilities, it may not encourage critical consciousness of women's and gendered issues.

Depending on their involvement or experience in a sport, women may vary in how they react to the gendered expectation and treatment. For example, they might exhibit resistance or perhaps reaffirmation (Brace-Govan, 2004; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2009; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). The women in Velija and colleagues' study (2013) confirmed that they gained physical empowerment from participating in martial arts; however, they did not problematize or challenge a normative view of gendered embodiment. Female participants who become aware of gender roles and expectations of women may conform to those expectations, for example quitting the sport, or feminizing themselves, instead of resisting, attempting to change other people's perceptions, or persuading the naysayers to refrain from stereotyping women. Studies also found that while some women's lack of involvement and passivity conformed to traditional gender roles and expectations, actively participating women were more conscious of the gendered circumstances and resisted the social expectations. Even athletes who were critically conscious about gendered expectations and social practices showed conformity, revealing different ways the athletes were "doing"

femininity (Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2009; Velija et al., 2013).

As we design sport programs, particularly those that challenge traditional gendered assumptions, we need to understand the specific elements of the sport experience that tend to trigger each response. How do we design sport that will enable more consciousness? How do we keep women involved when they encounter resistance to gendered expectations? We may be able to find a possibility in the general empowerment literature. Hipolito-Delgado and Lee (2007) argued that "oppressed people who have not developed critical consciousness have limited perception, enough to survive in an oppressive system, but insufficient to realize the systemic barriers that entrap them" (p. 329). They proposed several strategies for educational counselors on how to facilitate critical consciousness: developing standards for curricula that embrace social inequity issues, creating consciousness-raising groups to engage in dialogue surrounding issues of oppression, developing positive identity, and encouraging social actions. Sport programs, particularly for marginalized population, may be able to utilize these strategies to foster critical consciousness of their surroundings.

Proposition 5: Sport-based programs can be effective for developing life skills that are essential in empowerment such as decision-making and leadership, which can be transferred to other life domains such as school, work and home.

Sport has been used to develop a myriad of pro-social behaviors and life skills (Eley & Kirk, 2002; Petitpas, Van Raalte, Cornelius, & Presbrey, 2003; Schulenkorf, 2017; Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Weiss, 2008; Wright & Côté, 2003). In research in developmental psychology, for example, participating in a sport program that was intentionally designed to enhance certain life skills achieved the intended positive outcomes (e.g. engagement in school and community activities, improvement of academic performance and graduation rate) (Petitpas

et al., 2003). Sport, in another intentionally organized program, was shown to facilitate the development of emotional regulation, personal/social responsibility, and self-efficacy for risk resistance (Weiss, 2008). Studies also have suggested that sport participation experience can foster leadership skills through gaining citizenship and positive peer relationships (Eley & Kirk, 2002; Wright & Côté, 2003). Moreover, participating in sport has been shown to develop social skills such as cooperation, assertion, responsibility, competence, and self-control (Blinde et al., 2001; Cote, 2002).

However, in neither mainstream nor sport for development contexts, sport participation does not seem to generate pro-social behaviors automatically (Brady, 2005; Huggins & Randell, 2007; Schulenkorf, 2017). For example, student athletes who participated in any Division I collegiate sport do not necessarily perform as well as other students in academic classes (Maloney & McCormick, 1993). Furthermore, even though studies have demonstrated participating in any school sport improves academic performance, the improvement is often trivial or temporary (Taras, 2005; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008). Some researchers have also suggested that good academic performance of student athletes might not be the result of sport participation (Rees, Howell, & Miracle, 1990). Rather, high academic achievers could be more likely to be involved in sport. Therefore, it is not certain that sport participation necessarily leads to high academic performance.

Furthermore, certain female participants, specifically those with low economic or social status, can feel empowered simply by gaining access to sport. Opportunities for accessible leisure sport programs have enabled low-income women to gain a sense of inclusion and involvement in their community (Reid et al., 2002; Röger et al., 2011). For girls in some developing countries (e.g. Egypt, Kenya), having access to sport programs may be perceived as gaining more mobility and access to public spaces, otherwise they were not socially

allowed in public spaces (Brady, 2005; Huggins & Randell, 2007). Participating in sport programs can provide females in these contexts opportunities to gain more accessibility and exposure to public spaces, which further contribute to changing perceptions of boys, their family members, and of females' general mobility and capability.

This is an area that clearly needs further theoretical and empirical development. We need more investigation to disentangle the contextual contingencies surrounding the various pathways toward empowerment. When is simply gaining access deemed as empowering, and what does that empowerment look like vs. when does a program need specific social and life connections to make it empowering? These factors will help understanding of the mechanisms between sport and broader life empowerment.

Behavioral component

Proposition 6: Although sport has a capacity to facilitate behavioral component of psychological empowerment, individuals' actual behaviors can vary: conforming to social expectation, resisting against the expectation or coping between two behaviors.

Through participating in sport, women have resisted male-dominant aspect of sport and society (Henderson & Hickerson, 2007; Kane, 1995; Shaw, 2001). Resistance is often considered an act of a minority group to challenge the power relations of social stratifications such as gender. The resistance of women is also deemed "to occur when women adopt behaviors or express themselves through activities which provide personal empowerment and which, at the same time, reflect a challenge to dominant, restrictive or constraining views of femininity, sexuality, or motherhood" (Shaw, 2001, p. 191).

Women in sport may, by participating, resist the male dominance of the sport itself. Female participants have not been welcomed in

masculine sports because the expectation of them (i.e. femininity) is contradictory to the culture of the sport (i.e. masculinity). However, women in some studies (Green, 2001; Noad & James, 2003; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2009; Theberge, 2000; Velija et al. 2013) have challenged such constraints and pursued what they desired. Female participants in male-dominated sports have had to struggle for their equal opportunity, access, and systematic or social support to play. They challenged the notion that the sports were for men and that women were unwelcome.

The studies on women's sport such as Green (2001), Theberge (2000), and Velija et al. (2013) did not specify the women's participation in traditionally masculine sport as resistance. Their results, however, imply that female participants challenged society's perceptions of women in masculine sports. Not identified as resisting, these women challenged society's notion by continuing their participation and developing their own identity as female football, ice hockey players, or martial artists.

In addition to persisting in a masculine sport, women may resist by transforming its culture (Kane, 1995). Women in some studies rejected the emphasis on masculine values (e.g. competition, winning) and integrated feminine values (e.g. process-oriented, collective, inclusive, supportive). A female group also constructed their own group culture to continue the participation because the masculine culture of the sport was one of the constraints to their participation (Wood & Danylchuk, 2012).

Women's resistance against a male-dominated attitude and culture in sport can also be extended beyond sport fields. One woman's resistance influences other women's resisting behaviors or inspires other women to challenge traditional assumptions regarding femininity and masculinity in daily life (Shaw, 2001). For example, the resistance can be extended to challenging gendered behaviors, gendered treatments, appearance expectations, and gendered inequality in the provision of

opportunities and activities. Women's resistance through sport and leisure activities may result in personal empowerment and psychological and developmental benefits—enhanced sense of self, development of new self-affirming identities, and increased feelings of self-worth (Shaw, 2001).

Understanding under which conditions women tend to respond one way or another is critical to our modeling of the relationship between sport and empowerment. Factors that affect the reaction or behaviors could include participants' level of involvement in sport or social support from others. These factors would need to be part of any study designed to explore this relationship.

Proposition 7: Even though sport has a capacity to promote participants to involve themselves in active citizenship, female participants may not be encouraged to initiate or involve in activism on women's issues as a group.

Feminists often emphasize its significance, but social change or empowerment of women generated through sport has received scant attention. This might be because it is difficult to document social change and to observe over time the actual change of people's behaviors (Blinde, Taub, & Han, 1994; Shaw, 2001). Moreover, many sport programs for development have focused on personal change and social integration, not social change or revolution (Röger et al., 2011; Theberge, 2000). Women's participation in sport is believed to help enhance society's perception of women's capability and physical skills. Female athletes do seem aware of the unfairness of women's sport within their particular context, yet such awareness seems to stop short of recognizing the differential treatment of women in broader social contexts (Blinde et al., 1994; Velija et al., 2013). Even women who play traditionally masculine sports, such as ice hockey, football, or martial arts (Green, 2001; Theberge, 2000; Velija et al., 2013), and are aware they are not following the expected gender norms did

not seem to try to convert or transform the gender norms to broader society. "They are about playing hockey not 'social transformation'" (Theberge, 2000, p. 91). The sport programs were not intended to bring about social change.

Many feminist researchers argue that social resistance or collective actions are more salient and effective at delivering social change to gender differentiations and women's disadvantages. However, gaining personal empowerment and awareness are also essential to contributing to a positive change in individuals. People who become aware of gender inequality may try to make a subtle change in their daily lives, which may contribute to altering gender distortion in society (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Furthermore, social resistance and radical social actions to change the current gender norms and expected roles can cause a backlash for the men and women who want to keep and conform them in society. Making a personal change can be an effective small step to achieving social change. However, leaving empowerment only to personal choice and personal action can also be problematic (Caudwell, 2011; Velija et al., 2013). Over-emphasizing individual aspects of empowerment may cost broader changes such as deconstructing gendered embodiment and experiences, and reinforcing biological views on gendered bodies (Messner, 2011).

Examination of the factors that lead toward the spectrum of reactions needs to be examined. These include both sport design factors and personal/demographic factors of the participants, as well as the interplay between. Although many suggest that social action is required to truly demonstrate empowerment, it may be that there are inhibitors or problems associated with that level of empowerment and that other levels/manifestations may be desirable as well. Investigations of the behavioral outcomes of psychological empowerment must include both aspects.

Discussion and contribution

This model presents a useful conceptual framework for examining women's personal empowerment through sport. A research agenda based on this framework could be utilized to design, implement, and evaluate sport programs for women with regard to their capacity for creating, building, or maintaining personal empowerment. It is also necessary for future research to investigate how the empowering components and variables can be differentiated among women by social status, age, race, or culture. This research can contribute to sport academia by providing a framework from a holistic approach of the sport experience that can be tested in various populations underserved in sport. By focusing on women, the research can inform how to organize sport to help women gain control over their bodies and lives and ultimately liberate them from damaging gender norms and expectations.

Liberating women may have different meanings and emphasize different components of psychological empowerment. Neoliberal feminists emphasize individual choices and actions, respecting individual differences (Samie et al., 2015). Radical feminists and physical feminists emphasize taking social actions such as making policies to alleviate damaging gender norms and expectations (Carr, 2003; Velija et al., 2013). They have claimed that becoming critically conscious of one's reality and power inequalities is a key to empowering women (Stromquist, 2002). They suggested through consciousness-raising, women would be able to connect their disadvantaged experiences with those of other women, and thus see the sociopolitical dimensions of their personal problems (Carr, 2003). Focusing on individual aspects can be dangerous without questioning and challenging socialization, shifting sociopolitical issues to individual ones. Oppressed people who have not developed critical consciousness have limited perception to realize the systemic barriers (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007).

These tensions between various literature bases demonstrate the need for a comprehensive theoretical framework that will address various pathways and outcomes of empowerment. It may be that these perspectives need not compete with each other, but compliment each other toward a more comprehensive understanding of women's empowerment in sport.

While it is difficult to predict specific outcomes and program design elements without empirical investigation, we can theorize some initial uses of the framework for practitioners, enabling them to acknowledge and implement elements that lead positive change and benefits for participants. The concept of empowerment can often be vague and broad, which may have various meanings to different people. Therefore, when program organizers attempt to implement empowering programs, the broadness of the concept can make it difficult to discern what kinds of experience they need to provide to "empower" participants. By specifying components and elements of empowerment, this framework will allow the organizers to identify and create specific experiences targeting to provide each component and element. For example, to facilitate psychological empowerment, the strategies for educational counselors (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007) might be effective particularly for marginalized populations: developing standards for curricula that embrace social inequity issues, creating consciousness-raising groups to engage in dialogue surrounding issues of oppression, developing positive identity, and encouraging social actions. Policy makers may need to consider how to apply these strategies to encourage critical consciousness and challenge gendered social practices.

Sport can be tailored toward specific outcomes, to reduce barriers to access, and/or to create more inclusive cultures (Schulenkorf, 2017; Schulenkorf et al., 2016). To provide a program suitable to specific group of participants, practitioners first need to understand

what kinds of empowerment the participants want by asking questions or providing a simple survey when they show interest in a program. Then, using the components of the empowerment framework, sport can be tailored to that group. (Again, we use caution in suggesting implications without empirical support, but provide some basic examples of how the framework could be used in a practical way). For example, if sport managers notice their participants consider the masculine culture of the sport (e.g. golf) as one of the constraints to participation, they can provide coping strategies, for example, by helping them develop their own subculture, which is more acceptable and enjoyable to female participants.

Further, if managers or participants seek a particular outcome, they can use the empowerment framework to guide program designs toward that end. For example, as a part of empowerment, organizers may focus on Intrapersonal components and provide activities that can boost the feeling of control and independence. Emphasizing physical, hard-working, and goal achieving aspect of sports allows participants to gain those components. Similarly, if sport managers want to target the Interactional component of empowerment, they can add more activities that can develop life skills, such as leadership or communication skills, both within sport and in ways that can be transferred to other life domains. More specifically, instructors can provide team-setting sport activities to promote communication skills, which is useful in other life domains, such as at work.

Identifying empowering components in sport may provide enhancements to other intervention or prevention programs (e.g. leadership programs, intervention programs for victims of domestic violence) that give organizers an opportunity to consider utilizing sport to enhance other empowering services in the programs. Sport activities in those programs that are intentionally implemented to achieve

certain types of empowerment will add value to the intervention programs.

Thus, the empowerment framework for women in sport contributes strongly to both theory and practice, illuminating and explaining ways that sport can be empowering for women in ways that are meaningful to them. Future empirical and field-based studies grounded in this framework can serve to increase the positive impacts of women's sport participation, uncover how empowerment develops during sport, what contextual and individual correlates affect empowerment processes and outcomes, and how sport can be a catalyst for positive change.

Disclosure statement

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