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The organization of diversity in a boxing club: Governmentality and entangled rationalities

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This study answers a recent call for research on the complexity, locality, and use of power in the governing of diversity in organizations. We used the concepts of governmentally and of governing sameness and difference to explore multiple and heterogeneous ways of regulating gender diversity in organizations. Governmentally was defined as interrelated ways of reasoning and of using technologies of power within a boxing organization. We found that in their management of the full participation of women, participants used both sport and gender rationalities, each of which relied on different technologies of power in specific settings. Ambiguous meanings were strategically used to manage the participation of women in boxing and to maintain heroic masculine practices.

Keywords: governmentality; diversity; gender; rationalities; technologies of power; boxing

Introduction

In surveying the research on diversity in organizations, many scholars have called for the further development of and/or new directions in such research (Zanoni et al. 2010; Ghorashi and Sabelis 2013; Ahonen et al. 2014; Gotsis and Kortezi 2015). They argue that critical diversity research – driven by social justice concerns over domination, coercion, and hierarchy, and often focused on evaluating policy outcomes, a practice shaped by a business rationale – is inadequate for addressing the regulation of diversity. They contend that such research fails to address or conceptualize power and context, and propose that an objective of diversity research should be to explore how power operates in the production of knowledge about diversity and how location plays a role in how diversity is managed. Zanoni et al. (2010, 17) argue for more empirical investigations of organizational diversity ‘because discursive micro-analyses are important to shed light on interstitial, every-day forms of resistance’.

This study investigates how power works in the regulation of gender diversity at the micro level. Specifically, we analyse a sport organization – a boxing club – where gender diversity is explicitly managed, and we discuss the ways of reasoning (rationalities) about sport and gender that are manifest in this setting and how they become intertwined. These partly entangled rationalities give rise to a particular regulation of gender diversity. To demonstrate this, we first explore the concept of governmentality and constructions of sameness and difference, and describe the social organization of boxing. We then introduce the study site, the Boxing Club Gym (BCG) and its

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context and clarify the methodology used. In the results and in the discussion section, we describe and discuss the rationalities that govern diversity in BCG and show how trainers and boxers deal with ambiguous and conflicting rationalities.

Governmentality and the negotiation of sameness and differences

In this study, we use a broad meaning of the term ‘governmentality’ to refer to that which deals with the art of government. We also draw upon Dean’s (2010, 27) research on governmentality, which explores how thought works in ways of organizing and within regimes of practice, and the effects that are produced. Specifically, this research explores how various forms of thought employ particular techniques and tactics to direct the conduct of the governed (Dean 2010, 24–30). Studies of governmentality focus mainly on society- and state-level issues (see e.g. Miller and Rose 2008 ; Bröckling, Krasmann, and Lemke 2011), whereas we use this concept to analyse the use of power in negotiating sameness and differences at the micro level. Dean’s work provides an analytic framework for untangling the multiple and heterogeneous practices of management, control, and resistance in organizations. We analyse multiple ways of thinking and doing within an organization, conceptualized as interrelated rationalities and technologies of (self-)government.

Dean (2010, 27) explains that ‘studies of governmentality are more concerned with how thought operates within our organized ways of doing things, our regimes of practices, and with its ambitions and effects’. Such ‘regimes of practice’ are institutional practices, that is, they comprise the routinized and ritualized way that things are done in certain places and at certain times. These regimes can be analysed along the interrelated dimensions of technologies (*techne*) and thought (*episteme*), through which governing operates (Dean 2010). *Techne* of government asks, according to Dean (2010, 42), ‘by what means, mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies, and vocabularies is authority constituted and rule accomplished’. Thoughts, or rationalities, are the forms of thinking, knowledge, expertise, strategies, and calculations that are employed in practices of government. A ‘thought’ or ‘rationality’, then, is ‘any way of reasoning, or way of thinking about, calculating and responding to a problem, which is more or less systematic, and which may draw upon formal bodies of knowledge or expertise’ (Dean 2010, 24). In the current study, ‘rationalities’ pertain to ‘the truths of boxing’, meaning the forms of knowledge or reasoning about the ‘real’ art of boxing upon which trainers and boxers model themselves and base their rhetoric.

Rationalities (thinking) and technologies (doing) are related. Rationalities become operable when they have become instrumental (Miller and Rose 2008, 16). Trainers tend to have a privileged position in the hierarchical controlled gym, based on their experience; they claim that their knowledge or rationalities about boxing have the status of ‘the truth’. Others may resist those claims. Power struggles concern which rationalities and accompanying technologies are leading in this hierarchical controlled boxing gym, including the relevance of certain constructions of sameness and difference.

We link the concept of governmentality to the regulation of diversity by focusing on how ‘truth’ about gender diversity is regulated with the use of technologies of power in boxing gyms. New truths that assume boxing is a sport for both women and men spur negotiations over sameness and difference inside the organization. These meanings are

contested, creating inclusion and exclusion, since there are always competing understandings of what should define an organization (Parker 2000). The manner in which diversity is regulated may be unique for any specific (boxing) organization, but, at the same time, it may also share features with other (boxing) organizations. Each gym has its specific manifestation of these influences on the construction of meanings. What becomes relevant for constructions of sameness and difference can be contested and therefore negotiated.

Combining the concept of governmentality with a recognition of constructions of sameness and difference enables us to analyse multiple and heterogeneous ways of regulating diversity in the gym, including different types of agency and authority that shape how trainers and boxers deal with diversity. Boxing gyms are suited for diversity research for two reasons. First, martial arts organizations, including the gym studied, assume that mechanisms for regulating diversity are embedded within the historical-cultural routines of their sport. Wacquant (2004, 10), for example, shows that diversity in boxing gyms is regulated by a purported egalitarian ethos, based on ‘the so called colour-blindness of pugilistic culture . . . such that everyone is fully accepted into it as long as he submits to the common discipline and “pays his dues” in the ring’. He describes the culture of the gym as ostensibly egalitarian in the sense that all participants are treated alike:

whatever their status and their ambitions, they all enjoy the same rights and must acquit themselves of the same duties, particularly that of ‘working’ hard at their craft and displaying a modicum of bravery between the ropes when the time comes. (53)

Similarly, research on boxing in the Netherlands suggests that constructions of sameness and difference often associated with diversity, such as ethnicity, religion, and social background, are understood as irrelevant within the setting of boxing gyms (Anthonissen and Dortants 2006; Dortants and Knoppers 2013). Underlying this rationality of equality seems to be the assumption that meanings given to sociocultural/demographic characteristics are stable, unequivocal, and consistent. This ‘egalitarian ethos’ is not as straightforward or equal as it seems; however, since, until recently, it generally has excluded women.

Second, the question of gender and the boxing gym is intriguing. Although women’s participation in competitive boxing is not new (see Van Ingen 2013; Gems and Pfister 2014 for a history of women’s boxing), the full integration of women into boxing is. While gender inclusiveness in martial arts is growing (see e.g. Channon 2013 ; Woodward 2014), women’s participation in boxing, especially in mixed training and sparring, continues to be unusual. Boxing is a sport in which men traditionally have been seen as heroes. Based on their research on boxing, Woodward (2007) and Wacquant (2004, 2005) conclude that boxing continues to be a place where practices of masculinity that are characterized by corporal contact, courage, danger, and, sometimes, violence are lionized. Such practices have been labelled as ‘heroic masculinity’. At the same time, the involvement of women in boxing continues to grow. Women’s boxing as an Olympic altered the attractiveness of boxing not only for women but also for trainers with the ambition to produce champions. Although Lindner (2012) concludes that women’s participation in boxing at the Olympics is imbued with contradictions and ambiguities, female competitive boxers seem to have become attractive to and lucrative for boxing clubs. Women have become full-

fledged participants in boxing and are competing at national and international levels. This suggests that a change must have occurred in the routines of regulating diversity in boxing gyms that were, and still are, considered bastions of masculinity.

The integration of women into boxing seems to be a process of negotiating meanings given to gender in the sport. Mennesson (2000), studying the social histories and identifications of women entering into this ‘man’s world’, concluded that women occupy a paradoxical position, in that they are both challenging and reinforcing a traditional gender order. Although permitting diversity seems to be part of boxing practices, and is congruent with its egalitarian ethos, the full participation of women in boxing requires new routines and practices to regulate sameness and difference in the gym (see also Paradis 2012). Although scholars have investigated the entry of women into boxing, most have focused on issues such as clothes (e.g. Paradis 2012; Van Ingen and Kovacs 2012) and how women negotiate the sport (e.g. Mennesson 2000; Lafferty and McKay 2004; Woodward 2007, 2008). We, however, take a more institutional approach, focusing on the boxing gym, and applying the concept of governmentality to discover how gendered constructions of sameness and difference are negotiated and how they influence the regulation of diversity.

We assume diversity to be ‘dynamic, situational and a site of contestation’ (Ahonen et al. 2014, 266), and thus specific to a given setting. In our study, we distinguish between setting and context. A ‘setting’ is a situation in which interactions occur at a certain place and time, and in which certain meanings dominate as the result of power being exerted on and by every individual in acts of negotiation. Settings can be understood, thus, as arenas, where meanings given to diversity by all involved are governed, negotiated, and established through technologies of power. ‘Context’ is the larger sociocultural environment that is shaped by discourses that influence thinking and doing in taken-for-granted practices and in specific settings.

The purpose of this study, in the broad sense, is therefore to explore how a focus on regimes of practice and constructions of sameness and difference could serve as an analytical tool for revealing how power is used to govern diversity in organizations. We use the concept of governmentality to focus on how power works in relationships and interactions, and to trace how it regulates diversity in an organization, in this case, the boxing gym. Specifically, we analyse how historically –culturally determined rationalities direct the use of technologies of power at the micro level and the consequences this has for managing diversity.

Boxing and the social organization of the regulation of violence

We mentioned earlier that one form of the regulation of diversity in the gym is the routinized ways of managing a gym. However, the regulation of diversity has an additional specific feature in this context, namely that it also regulates the physical violence that is inherent to boxing. Boxing requires athletes to enact violence upon each other, which necessitates a unique regulation of behaviour. Collins (2008, 9) describes fights as ‘typically stylized and limited [. . .], violence is socially organized as fair fights, limited to certain kinds of appropriately matched opponents’. Strict regulation of boxing techniques in the gym and during fights in the ring is needed to make this sport safe and socially acceptable. Although sparring is a part of training sessions and allows the boxer to practise skills (Paradis 2012), it is similar to a real fight because of its intensity, boxers’ concentration and eagerness to score, and perhaps also because others in the gym are watching. So, sparring involves prestige in the

gym, as fighters are assigned status by both opponent and audience (Collins 2008, 207–208). Sparring also provokes rivalry between boxers and must be regulated carefully to prevent injuries.

Comradeship plays an important part in this regulation. Norms of equality and masculinity shape male relationships inside the gym (De Garis 2000; Wacquant 2005). De Garis (2000, 104) explains that the culture of the gym ‘promotes sparring practices that avoid injuries, treats the “opponent” as a partner, and is often characterized by a shared intimacy’. Both boxers must control and guide their behaviour in a sparring session, maintaining an ultimate goal of learning from each other instead of dominating and hurting each other. Sparring partners must deal with differences in technique level, skill, body weight, and strength. Tensions due to constructed meanings about differences (othering) and conflicts between sparring partners can lead to rivalry and uncontrolled fights. This could be dangerous especially because sparring partners are rarely appropriately matched due to differences in skill level and weight. So, feelings of sameness and partnership evoked by sparring not only stimulate intimacy and allow for strong relationships, but they also minimize differences that could provoke conflict and misuse of fighting techniques. Safe sparring requires respect and dealing with differences in strength and skill. This respect is challenged when men and women in the gym do not consider each other to be equal partners. Notions of heroic masculinity in the gym could be contested when women and men become sparring partners, especially if a female boxer defeats a male boxer in front of other male boxers. Such challenges to definitions of masculinity may complicate the integration or normalization of this relatively new group of boxers in boxing organizations.

BCG in context

BCG, the subject of this case study, is a new, small and growing club with 40–50 members, ranging in age from 10 to 40. It is one of six registered gyms in a large city in the Netherlands, located in an area that struggles with drug dealing and related criminal activity. The membership of BCG is made up of women and men from Dutch or mixed ethnic backgrounds, and varies from month to month. Gym membership is usually paid monthly, often by cash, making the exact number of people who regularly box at BCG difficult to determine. This is not an unusual phenomenon in the Netherlands.

Training of adult members is led by three men: a senior trainer (who is also a well-known referee), a head trainer, and a part-time trainer. They all have a long history of boxing in the Netherlands, having boxed in national or international matches as both amateurs and professionals. This history gives them status both in the larger Dutch boxing context and in this particular gym. Typically, both male and female members lead parts of the training session, such as the warm-up or the strength training, under the supervision of a trainer. Mixed sparring is also common.

In order to survive as a business, and gain respect from people outside the gym, BCG must become a full-fledged, successful club, preferably with a few members who are national or even international champions. Five of the eight competitive fighters are male, and are between the ages of 18 and 30. Three of the fighters are female, and on average a little bit older, between the ages of 23 and 30. These women are more successful in their fights than the men (see Dortants and Knoppers 2013 for a more detailed description of BCG). In 2011, one of BCG’s female boxers participated at the 2011

European Cup held in the Netherlands. This is the context in which BCG's trainers regulate the presence of women in the gym.

Methodology

Analyses of governmentality focus on how rationalities and technologies of power operate in a routinized way in regimes of practice. This paper, focused on governmentality within a boxing organization, focuses on how members and trainers impose on others their version of what boxing is and ought to be. We used observations and interviews to understand how and why constructions of sameness and differences are governed in different micro-level settings through relations of power.

We conducted 30 observations along with many informal conversations before, during, and after training sessions, competitions, and boxing events between 2008 and 2010. We were present in the gym about once a month in order to follow the developments of this gym over time. There, we observed daily practices and interactions – including training, sparring, and one-on-one and small-group conversations, between trainers and boxers and amongst boxers. As power is visible in its effects (Clegg, Courpasson, and Philips 2006, 213), we were able to observe manifestations of power (control over time, place, activities, and behaviour) and moments when trainers and boxers tried to influence the thinking and activities of others.

The first author did not participate in training sessions, but observed while sitting on a bench, often with people beside her, or stood beside boxers and trainers while they were talking about daily affairs. This proximity enabled her to ask questions about events as they happened. Her presence in the gym (usually between three and five hours per visit) provided opportunities to see daily practices and struggles in the gym and to talk informally about what boxing is and the impact it has on athletes. She observed how different technologies of power were used by trainers and boxers, and how these informed negotiations over the 'truth' of boxing and what was considered 'normal' in the gym. She noted how people talked about sameness and difference, and how differences were made relevant or irrelevant during trainings, competitions, and in informal conversations between boxers and trainers and amongst boxers. Particular attention was paid to how they practised gender (Martin 2003, 19). Mental and jotted notes were taken quickly during observations (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995), and were transcribed while returning home by train.

In addition to many informal interactions, the researchers interviewed the three competitive female boxers and the three competitive male boxers who were frequently in the gym and served as sparring partners for female boxers in preparation for fights. In addition, we conducted three formal interviews with each of the three trainers and two with the sport consultant who was involved in BCG. In the interviews, we focused on how they talk about boxing, what it means to them, how they construct sameness and difference, and how they reason about differences within the boxing setting. We also asked them to explain why they did things they had done. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

In our study, we assume that meanings given to sociocultural/demographic characteristics in boxing are contested, ambiguous, and situational. In analysing the data, we first explored the constructions of sameness and difference that seemed to be relevant for the boxers and trainers we interviewed and observed. We then analysed their reasoning about boxing, the rationalities that underpinned the use of technologies of power in the gym, and the technologies of power that trainers and boxers used in their

interactions. We analysed constructions and practices of sameness and differences by trainers and boxers, specifically those related to boxing, gender, and practices of masculinity as they pertained to boxing in general and BCG in particular. In addition, we looked at how constructions of boxers were negotiated, became dominant, and were maintained or contested. Towards the end of our research, the first author discussed our findings with the boxers and trainers in a debriefing session, which provided additional information, especially regarding the ambiguity of gendered practices in boxing.

Two different rationalities inform the governing of difference in BCG

The results reveal that both a sport and a gender rationality are relevant in this gym, and that these together regulate the full participation of female boxers.

Boxing as a competitive discipline: the sport rationality

The dominant style of thinking about and practising boxing in BCG is that boxers must be disciplined to become real and successful boxers. The boxers construct themselves as disciplined (elite) athletes who focus on learning, achieving, and reaching set goals, like other athletes. A male boxer explains how this works for him:

According to the core trainer ‘boxers don’t smoke’, so I’m not going to smoke. ‘Boxers don’t drink’, so I don’t drink. You have to be fit; you have to sleep, so you can’t go out on the town, you know, so you live by a certain code.

Observations show that strict and demanding training sessions encourage an eagerness to perform as a boxer. A female boxer explains that she feels comfortable with the culture in the club because everyone there is a fanatic about boxing, and remarks, ‘Otherwise, you don’t do it’. Only ‘real’ boxers stay in this gym; a female boxer defines a ‘real boxer’ as someone who ‘doesn’t complain, doesn’t moan about how hard the training is, but just gets on with it’. Boxers explain that they are ‘in love with the sport’, develop a passion for it, and increasingly live like a boxer. Illustrative of the way sport is constructed at BCG is a comment by a female boxer: ‘Boxing is all or nothing’. Even those who box only recreationally must be in shape, as you ‘need the passion to throw your punches’.

This sport rationality means a boxer’s body is evidence of how disciplined he or she is. A female boxer explains how this works: ‘Naturally, I think of a real boxer as an athlete who is dry [(s)he has no visible fat] and has beautiful, long muscles. They’ve trained hard and they’re disciplined’. Boxers become self-disciplined ‘through a set of routine practices and mechanisms’ (Woodward 2008, 541). The boxers at BCG see themselves and other boxers as (self-)disciplined and dedicated athletes whose lives, thoughts, and actions are characterized by their striving to exemplify the ideal image of a boxer. This way of thinking about boxing as a disciplined, high-level, competitive sport constitutes the sport rationality of BCG, creating notions of sameness that bind the boxers of BCG (see also De Garis 2000). It also shapes the use of technologies of power to ‘normalize’ behaviour that enables boxers to become champions.

Trainers use a seemingly gender-neutral sport rationality in thinking about and practising boxing. Trainers explain the irrelevance of gender difference: ‘You come here to box, and here you are simply a boxer’. This is in line with what Wacquant (2004)

describes as an egalitarian ethos. BCG trainers also apply this egalitarian ethos in their normalization of gender as irrelevant. It is accepted as common sense in BCG that women and men train together, and that successful boxers, who must prepare for fights, get more attention from trainers, especially during sparring sessions. During observations of sparring sessions, we noticed that trainers do not distinguish between male or female boxers when preparing boxers for fights. One trainer explained that what counts in this preparation is ‘finding appropriate sparring partners before an upcoming fight’, even when this places male fighters in a subordinate role compared to women. This way of reasoning is congruent with the sport rationality characterized by newly constructed meanings of boxing in which both men and women can be ‘real’ boxers.

The trainers also use this sport rationality to explain that boxing is a well-regulated and safe sport. They compare boxing with the less regulated and commercialized sport of kickboxing, asserting that ‘We are civilized, and we are an Olympic sport’. Trainers are sensitive to social norms and have discussions among themselves about the boxers with whom they want to work, and even whom to admit to the gym, especially when there are suspicions about the use of fighting techniques outside the gym and criminality. They want BCG to have a positive image. However, the image of boxing as well regulated and safe makes this sport less attractive to those who seek a sport where they can be seen as heroic. One female boxer compared boxing to kickboxing, saying ‘Kickboxing makes you look tougher among your mates than boxing does, because you’re not such a sissy, but with a punch on – yeah, the public wants to see blood, doesn’t it?’ In this quote, she employs the sport rationality to suggest that kickboxing might be more strongly associated with masculinity than boxing.

Gender rationality in boxing

The ideal of the well-disciplined boxer is congruent with the pugilist culture described by Wacquant (2004). However, our data show that meanings within the pugilist construct, and especially those concerning gender, are diverse, ambiguous, and contested.

The cultural norms and routinized practices that are part of boxing’s tradition of erasing socio-demographic categories make it easier for trainers to use a ‘norm of equality’. They do not tolerate a distinction between men and women at BCG because they construct gender as irrelevant. They therefore do not tolerate public differentiations of gender during training. Statements by boxers suggest that they have internalized this definition and consider it normal that women want to box. A male boxer explains: ‘Boxing is also a sport for girls. If you can do it, why shouldn’t you? And girls certainly should be able to manage it. If they’re motivated, they should be able to do so’. Another male boxer articulates the gender-neutral norm associated with becoming a real boxer: ‘It’s the same for boys as well as girls. If a boy comes here expecting to become a professional boxer without doing anything, he won’t get anywhere’. Here, in both statements, the sport rationality is in operation: you can only be a serious athlete if you train. At the same time, a distinction is made, as they explain how women can meet the (traditional male) norms to become real boxers. Such statements reveal how the sport rationality in boxing is saturated with norms about masculinity, and remains so. Nevertheless, the application of this sport rationality, with its implicit norms of masculinity, influences the women in BCG. In interviews, female boxers emphasized that they feel they are taken seriously as athletes, especially because they think they fulfil the image of the disciplined boxer. A female boxer explains:

I'm a woman but I'm not the girlie type, so that, I think, they see me as one of them. I train just as hard, maybe even harder. But I am really disciplined and I don't complain. I never ask them to go easy on me, I just do everything. I think that's why I just completely fit in.

Although professing gender neutrality, she emphasizes that she is not the 'girlie type' and that a real (female) boxer does not complain (see also Sisjord and Kristiansen 2009). This implies she thinks women are perceived as complainers; her statement suggests constructions of other differences, namely those of 'tough women' who do not complain and are dedicated, and of 'girlie women' who ask for special treatment. She thinks that only tough women are really fit for boxing and only these women will be accepted into this culture. Toughness seems therefore to be associated with heroic masculinity.

Our study shows that boxers and trainers assign meanings to gender and boxing that can be contradictory or ambiguous. This reflects Mennesson's (2000) finding about the ambiguous meanings women boxers assign to their bodies. Although all the women involved in this study defined themselves as 'tough' women, they differed in the importance they assigned to 'women's stuff' such as make-up and feminine clothes. Some emphasized their femininity by wearing tight shirts and shorts during trainings and competitions, while other women preferred to wear the loose-fitting ensembles that the men wore (see also Van Ingen and Kovacs 2012). This ambiguity is notable in how trainers talk about outfits for fights. One trainer explained that he would like women to wear skirts because 'then you can see that this is a woman', but he adapts to the women's preferences by having the competition outfit accommodate their individual wishes. These arrangements are made before or after training in one-on-one conversations or in small-group discussions. The trainers construct this differentiation as 'coaching the individual' in which they pay attention to each boxer individually regardless of gender. The women boxers explained in interviews that they felt these choices mean that they are taken seriously as boxers and as individual athletes, in contrast to the authoritarian style and 'equality' that prevail during public training sessions.

Complexity of overlapping and interacting rationalities

Men and women train and spar together, and define themselves as 'real' disciplined boxers in line with the sport rationality that seems to fit both male and female boxers. On the other hand, our observations and interviews also reveal that male and female boxers are constructed as having different physiques, mentalities or levels of dedication, and ways they wish to be trained and coached. For example, female boxers in BCG remark that women are not as strong as men: 'because we aren't exactly the same. If it's a man, he's much heavier than you [female boxer], you're just not the same. [...] Yes, sure, yes, yes, you're a lot more powerful if you're a lot heavier'. Dealing in a disciplined manner with differences in strength and training potential is part of the dominant cultural norm in boxing. A male boxer explains how differences in strength are taken into account: 'Of course you do not go at full strength when sparring with girls, that is why a trainer never places a newcomer in a sparring match with a girl'. Lafferty and McKay (2004) also found evidence of the primary coach's protective, paternalistic attitude towards women in the gym, indicating that boxing gyms have not become as gender neutral as the sport rationality suggests. The data show too that female boxers themselves manage their sparring sessions with men, especially novices, by explaining to the opponent that he has to adapt his style and strength to hers.

Male boxers help prepare women for fights by sparring with them. Observations found this was generally considered a normal procedure in this gym. Some male boxers, however, needed to be disciplined explicitly into this position as helper of female boxers. A female boxer explains:

Well, mostly I just try to be more cautious [in mixed sparring]. But recently there was a boy, he weighed 80 kilo or so, all muscle – and I saw him becoming more and more aggressive, and I said at a given moment, ‘let’s just relax otherwise we won’t learn anything’. [. . .] I saw that he was a bit annoyed. Often they do not see that they hit very hard.

She made clear that she wants to change the mindset of male sparring partners:

I explained to him that I know he is strong and that I do not necessarily want to be better [than him], but we both have to learn something. I think if you talk about this with them, then they will try to think differently.

Besides constructing and regulating these physical differences, she went on to suggest that women rely less on strength and more on tactics:

It’s a completely different experience [for women]. Yes, perhaps men get involved in boxing because they say ‘I want to fight and I just want to put that bloke on the canvas’. But I think that women play the game differently. There are more ways to play a game.

This is comparable to research that finds women footballers presenting themselves as playing a game based on strategy and technique rather than on physical strength (Mennesson 2000) and constructing alternative discourses about fire fighting (Ainsworth, Batty, and Burchielli 2014). This emphasis on skill over strength may therefore be a common strategy for self-presentation or survival used by women in male-dominated activities or occupations that require physical strength.

Besides revealing how bodies and tactics become gendered, the data also reveal how boxers and trainers construct gender differences related to mentality. In an interview, a female boxer explains that there are differences in training men and women:

My mental state fluctuates, as happens with most women. I think a guy, or a male trainer, or anyway just a trainer, would greatly benefit from knowing how women learn and how they view things, umm, how things are received. There’s a difference. They [trainers] say, ‘Yes, but you are all emancipated, and men and women are equal’, but that’s just not so.

She also wants her trainer to be careful when he gives her feedback, because, she says, ‘I take every word he says more seriously than a male boxer does’. In this way, she uses a gender rationality to argue that, to become successful (gender-neutral) boxer, she should be trained and coached differently from men. The trainer was a bit surprised when he heard this during a feedback session after a training, and repeated his assertion that ‘everyone is equal and should be trained like equals’ (field notes 15 June 2010). This example illustrates how trainers work to make the gender-neutral sport rationality dominant at BCG. The different perspectives of the athlete and the trainer about gender reveal how the two rationalities coexist at BCG.

Although trainers use a sport rationality to argue that all boxers are equal, they also assert that women train more seriously, are less involved in criminal activities, and are

more disciplined than men (field notes 9 April 2009). The trainers construct these women as easier to train, a difference that means, at least according to trainers, that women develop into real boxers much faster than many men do. This construction of gendered mentalities favours female boxers in this gym where the sport rationality dominates. Women in BCG achieve an equal and even privileged position because they are seen as potential contenders for the Olympic Games. Female boxers experience the BCG as a place where they have the same, and even more possibilities and opportunities than men, especially when preparing for their competitions. Most trainers dream of taking a boxer to the Olympic Games; it represents the highest level of achievement for a trainer. In informal talks with the researchers, trainers asserted that it is easier for female boxers to achieve this level of competitiveness because women's boxing is a relatively young sport and at the moment there is less competition compared with men's boxing. This may explain why women at BCG have become important vehicles for trainers to realize personal ambitions to be regarded as successful trainers. Lafferty and McKay (2004) point to similar findings and suggest that 'outstanding' women may be granted access to the hard-core boxing clubs primarily to enrich the lives and opportunities of male boxers. This may also be true for the trainers of women.

The combination of the gender rationality and the sport rationality often results in unstable, situational, and ambiguous meanings, though these also present opportunities to influence and negotiate alternatives to the idealized norm for boxers. Trainers and boxers both use technologies, directed by overlapping or conflicting rationalities in gender and boxing. Both strive to fulfil their ambitions in boxing by making their constructions of relevance of constructions of sameness and difference dominant.

Micro politics: dealing with ambiguous and conflicting rationalities

Although ambiguous, the ideal image of a 'real', disciplined (gender-neutral) boxer in BCG seems clear to all those we interviewed. Observations showed that this constructed norm of equality is visible and managed with different technologies of power in daily practices during training sessions in the gym. The behaviour of those who entered the gym for the first time – who might not share these constructed norms – was regulated to be congruent with the dominant sport rationality. Trainers repeatedly urge young people to choose and commit to this idealized image of a boxer. This process of disciplining members to self-discipline begins the moment the newcomers arrive. They are greeted with comments like 'If you want to be a real boxer, then you have to ...' and 'Here in this gym, we ...'. They are presented with a long list of rules by which they have to train and live. These are repeated time and time again, as disciplinary technologies of power that encompass the culture of the gym. By using such disciplinary technologies, trainers try to convince boxers to think and act as real boxers. Such indoctrination, persuasion, and hierarchical control have consequences, including the acceptance of female boxers as full participants. For example, every new male boxer has to accept the presence of women in the gym, even if they do not agree and think that boxing is only for males. Although conflicts concerning mixed sparring are scarce in this gym, they do happen and are told as a story that reinforces the rationality that gender is irrelevant. Violations of this norm during training sessions provoke heated discussions and conclude without negotiation. One male boxer related the following story:

we had a guy here who said, ‘I think it’s ridiculous that you have to train with girls here’. The trainer said to him ‘You know what? If you feel so good about yourself then you don’t belong here’. The boy started a row with a girl and the other trainer said, ‘I don’t want to see you here again’. We simply don’t allow that here. (field notes 21 April 2008)

Woodward (2007, 3) contends that ‘boxing is not just about men; it is about masculinity, although not reserved for men only’. Access for (tough) women into this ‘bastion of masculinity’ means, as mentioned earlier, that they can identify with practices of masculinity associated with a traditional desirable masculine boxer. This identification may be diminished for some men. Male boxers who use a gender rationality of heroic masculinity in boxing sometimes have a difficult time coping with this new truth about boxers. Acker (2009, 213) explains that new norms of gender equality and participation of women in male-identified activities can be problematic for some men because ‘increasing equality with devalued groups can be seen and felt as an assault on dignity and masculinity’. Trainers are also affected, since their status is determined by their boxers’ success, and the most successful boxers at BCG are often women. Trainers may experience this situation as uncharted territory, and experience discomfort being defined as a ‘trainer of female boxers’ rather than of men (field notes 15 June 2010). Boxers and trainers who want to practise heroic masculinity do not always feel at home in this club. Making space for women as equals in what was originally conceived as masculine place may result in conflict; the ultimate consequence of such conflict may be that trainers and members leave the gym. Because trainers strive to develop a full-fledged gym of champions, successful boxers create a legacy that is used as a powerful technique in negotiations about what is ‘normal’ in the gym. We saw that those who think differently from the head trainer do not return while like-minded boxers and trainers continue to be involved in the gym for a long time.

Different technologies of power in different settings within the same context

Our observations revealed that different technologies of power are used in the context of BCG. Trainers shape and normalize the conduct, thought, decisions, and aspirations of others in order to achieve the objectives they consider desirable (see also Miller and Rose 2008, 32). The disciplinary techniques of command and control dominate the training sessions because discipline is assumed to create uniformity. Once uniformity is achieved, all differences between boxers can purportedly be neutralized with everyone doing the same activity at the same time. Most importantly, these technologies, what they call ‘discipline’, mean everyone, even senior boxers, can be penalized publicly (see also Dortants and Knoppers 2013). In this more public setting, negotiations and conflicts are quite intense to ensure that boxers submit to the required discipline. Trainers use their capacity, authority, and status to make their truth claims about boxing dominant. This truth includes the normality of women’s full participation in boxing. Through this regime of discipline, trainers strive to shape the conduct of boxers, creating an internalized self-discipline in thinking, making decisions, and doing.

The data reveal that this sport rationality shapes the thinking, practising, and governing of trainers and boxers in more informal interactions before and after training sessions. It is at these times that a more differentiated truth about real boxers becomes visible and is permitted in negotiations. In these interactions, all kinds of attributed

sociocultural characteristics were allowed to be discussed by trainers and boxers and constructed as relevant. Topics include concerns regarding ethnically associated eating habits (and thus weight), relations to immigrant parents and problematic situations with parents and (boy)friends, (gendered) outfits, or menstruation. For example, one trainer visibly enjoyed helping boxers choose an outfit for a fight, explaining that he wants to please boxers, and that he pays special attention to outfits for one female boxer who dresses well because 'This is a woman, after all' (field notes 9 July 2008). In such moments, gender rationalities are allowed, discussed, and negotiated because not all women want to wear feminine outfits. This can result in slight adaptations to allow for individual (gendered) preferences, which run counter to the sport rationality.

Trainers and boxers use additional techniques in these face-to-face interactions than those described above during 'public' training sessions. Trainers use subtle persuasion, seductive statements like 'you can become a champion', satisfy certain personal preferences, and employ a more friendly way of negotiation and inducement than during training sessions. Boxers reciprocate by using strategies such as regular attendance, commitment to training, and adhering to trainer preferences in negotiations that are available to them to meet their ambitions as a boxer. The trainer explains that he personalizes his strategy for each boxer; the senior trainer says he chooses his words more carefully in coaching one of the female boxers because otherwise 'she falls silent' (field notes 23 June 2008). There is more room for the negotiation of individual (gendered) preferences for dedicated and successful boxers. For example, the trainer is very pleased with the disciplined attitude and weight loss of a female boxer, and gives her earrings as a present to show his appreciation for her effort (field notes 8 June 2010). The gendered nature of the present is noteworthy.

Female boxers are also perceived by these trainers to be more dedicated than men. This means the trainer trust female boxers even when they do not follow all the rules and come late to a practice because, as one surmises, 'she will have a good reason'. Yet, a trainer also complains about a female boxer who, according to him, is less dedicated 'than other women' and just 'complains and whines and does not push herself' (field notes 7 October 2008). But since she was the first woman to be successful in this club, trainers continue to support her.

Thus, the individual regulation and guidance of boxers occur not only through the public affirmation of equality, or through punishment and rewards in regimes of discipline during training, but also in a subtler manner in informal interactions. Here, meanings about boxing are negotiated between trainers and boxers. Trainers' guidance through the use of technologies of persuasion is tailored to meet individual needs, but also to discipline and normalize behaviour. In this way, trainers try to build a bridge between the individual and the development of a real boxer consistent with the sport rationality.

Discussion and conclusions

In this study, we have demonstrated how different rationalities regarding boxing and gender are manifest and become intertwined in a boxing club. We have shown how two rationalities, partly entangled, give rise to a particular regulation of gender diversity in boxing. By using Dean's conceptualization of governmentality and the concept of constructions of sameness and difference as a power-sensitive framework, we were able to unravel the regulation of (gender) diversity in this case. We found that two

rationalities became relevant to the regulation of gender diversity that is, to the regulation of full participation of women in boxing. The sport rationality was dominant and justified the presence of women in the gym, an attitude that must be adopted by those who want to or will become real boxers. The sport rationality seemingly includes clear and unambiguous constructions of a gender-neutral, idealized 'real boxer'. This rationality also links the truth about successful, competitive boxers to safety (Collins 2008) and reflects the ambitions of the majority of the boxers and trainers in this gym. The boxers produce and reproduce what is considered normal and abnormal in BCG. At the same time, the gender rationality is used to differentiate between women and men outside of training sessions, allowing every BCG member to construct their own meanings about masculinity and femininity in boxing. This results in an ambiguity of meanings about gender in boxing that are 'invisible' during trainings, but relevant in informal interactions.

Both rationalities direct the use of historically –culturally accepted hierarchical, disciplinary techniques during training sessions and the use of negotiating individualized technologies in informal settings. In both settings, constructions create differences regarding femininity and masculinity. During trainings, the suggestion of difference is suppressed by the dominant routines of hierarchy; the authority of trainers is not to be challenged. This hierarchical conduct is perceived and accepted as being in line with the traditions governing boxing. In less public, informal interactions, the same rationalities are negotiated through technologies of power. 'Resistance' of such rationalities may mean trainers and boxers discuss and negotiate a more complex and layered construction of an ideal boxer. Where needed, gender can be constructed as a relevant difference to meet individual preferences and gendered subjectivities, especially those pertaining to dominant constructions of femininity and masculinity in this gym.

In summary, these trainers used different technologies of power in different settings to bridge a coercive, unambiguous form of governing diversity with a way of conduct that negotiated meanings assigned to femininity and masculinity. A combination of hierarchy and negotiation technologies can prevent boxers from leaving the gym. However, trainers are alert because too much deviation from the dominant sport rationality to meet gendered preferences may undermine the application of unambiguous rules in formal settings, including those of equality. On the other hand, trainers strive for success by recruiting and keeping boxers in their gym, especially the most talented ones. Losing boxers is always painful, but too many compromises mean the credibility of trainers may be diminished. Regulating diversity in different settings with different technologies of power enables trainers and boxers to deal with these contradictions. This study shows also that trainers or managers can use technologies of power to create a culture where women feel welcome. While the authoritarian approach used by the trainers in this case study may not be feasible for use in many organizations, the unconditional support given to these women may go long way in ensuring that they do not drop out.

We used Dean's concept of governmentality to show how a norm of equality, described by Wacquant (2004) as an egalitarian ethos, exists in BCG, but not all the time, not in all settings, and not consistently in the rationalities or practices at BCG. Since women are constructed as real boxers, gender has, to a certain extent, become relevant in negotiations about what real boxers are and should do. The traditional sport rationality in boxing was imbued with constructions of masculinity, which explains why gender was originally not an issue because, within the egalitarian ethos, it was obvious that boxing was a sport for men only. The acceptance of

women in boxing disrupted this unambiguous way of thinking about boxing as a sport for men, but it has not fully displaced such beliefs (see also Paradis 2012). Our use of Dean's concept of governmentality gives further insight into this way of thinking about boxing and gender and how it is managed. It shows in more depth how the complexity of how power works in the regulation of gender diversity at the micro level.

Although meanings of gender are still ambiguous in boxing, mixed gyms break with the perhaps automatic association of boxing with men and heroic masculinity (see also Channon 2013). In some mixed gyms, this may be seen as a feminization of boxing. This newly constructed image may not be attractive to some men because it is incongruent with their desired masculine identification. This conclusion cannot be generalized for all boxing organizations, however. There are gyms where routines have not been changed to facilitate the full participation of women. Male boxers who refuse to spar with women can still 'escape' to gyms where mixed sparring is not the norm. So, each boxing organization can construct a new unique connection between gender and sport rationalities. This reconstruction is a negotiation process in which context-appropriate and accepted technologies of power are used in ways that are congruent with ambitions in line with the sport rationale.

We used these concepts of governmentality and constructions of sameness and difference in a specific case, the study of a boxing organization, where diversity exists and needs to be managed. We contend, however, that this framework also could be applied to the research of non-sport organizations and in other contexts to unravel the use of power in governing diversity in organizations. The use of governmentality as an analytical tool can help to reveal different ways of reasoning, leading to an understanding of the ambiguous and situational meanings given to diversity in organizations. Furthermore, the use of this concept can serve as an analytic tool to enable researchers to differentiate between multi-level relations of power, something that has been lacking in much of the research on organizational diversity (Ahonen et al. 2014). The findings of our study suggest that the governmentality concept as described by Dean (2010) can be used to discern the complexity of strategic power plays in organizations in different settings, how they are used to negotiate constructions of gender, and how the governing of diversity may be unique to each setting.

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