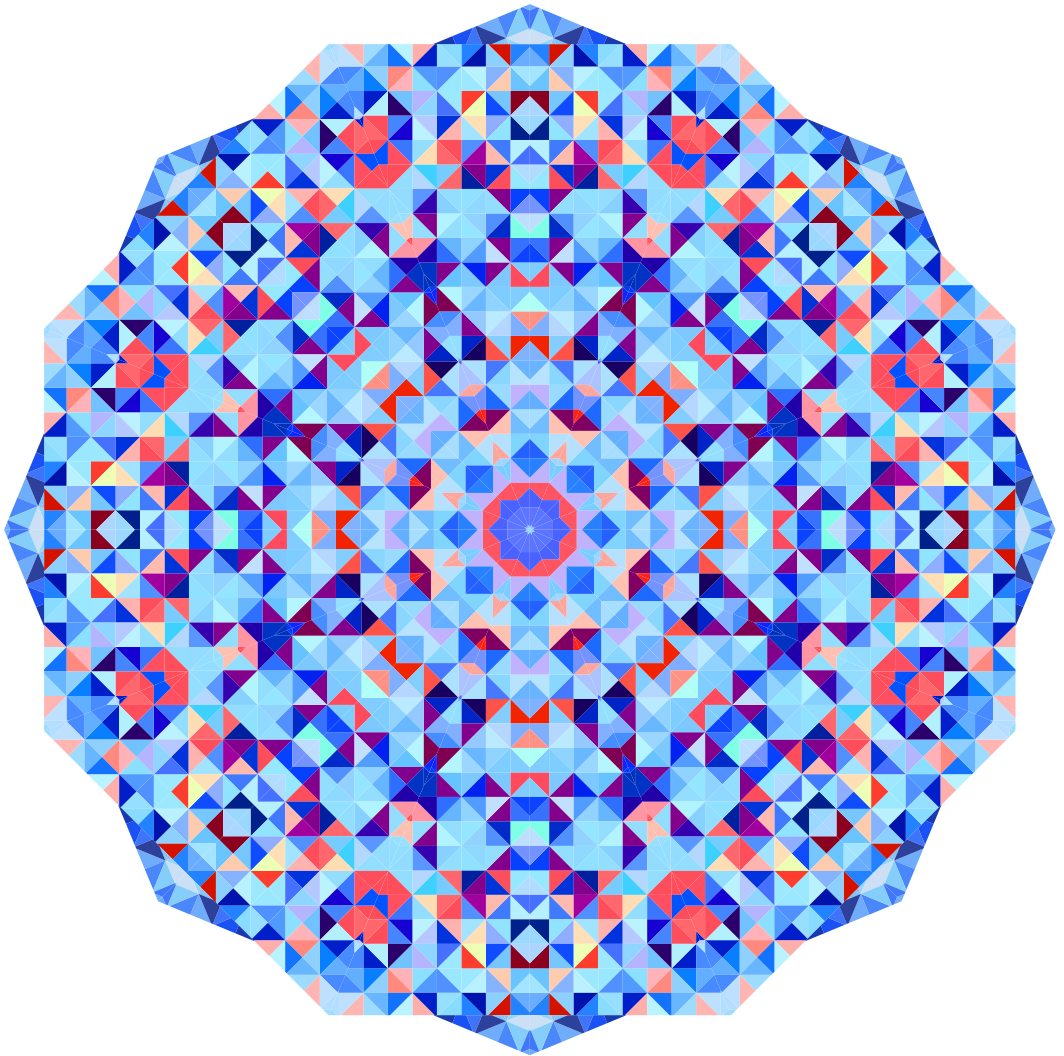# Understanding youth in sport

A Foucauldian lens on power, discourse and knowledge in youth sports

Froukje Smits

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discourse and knowledge in youth sports

De complexiteit van jeugdsport

Een Foucaultiaanse lens op macht, discoursen en kennis in jeugdsport

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

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Table of contents

1

Introduction

Sports are activities enjoyed by many across the globe, regardless of age. The existence and promotion of youth sports has often been based on various assumptions about its value and role in society. Sports participation is assumed to be fun and good and is assumed to contribute to the development of young people. As a result, sports are often seen as an essential part of life for youth. Participation in sports and physical activity is assumed to help young people to develop in a context in which they are able to learn important positive societal values (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Holt, 2008). Although there is a widespread belief in the positive dimensions of sports participation for young people, there is a need for research and theory that identifies and critically looks at the processes through which sports participation by youth is experienced and shapes their lives (Coakley, 2011). I return to this critical perspective after I elaborate on the ways sports are viewed as important effective activities for positive youth development.

A positivist perspective assumes youth sport is a domain in which pleasure/enjoyment, physical and social development and learning to perform, improve and win, are emphasised (Bedard et al., 2020; Coakley & Pike, 2014; Coalter, 2007; Varghese et al., 2022; Vella 2019; Wilson et al., 2022). Fun and pleasure are assumed to form the basic dimension underlying youth sports. They are seen as necessary ingredients that enable children to learn valued physical and social skills that contribute in a positive manner to their social and physical wellbeing and development as adults-to-be (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Kay, 2009; Petitpas et al., 2005).

This results in youth sports being assigned an important and special role in many countries. Sport is widely believed to be especially beneficial for the positive development of young people. Youth involvement in sports and physical activity is, for example, assumed to contribute to mental wellbeing (Faulkner & Tamminen, 2016; Vella, 2019), to reduce the prevalence of obesity among youth (Andersen et al., 2008), to enhance the integration of immigrant youth into their current context (Hudson et al., 2023; Luguetti et al., 2022), to prevent juvenile crime (Kelly, 2013; Meek, 2014; Norman, & Smith, 2022), to contribute to the development of values purportedly needed to be 'good' citizens such as self-discipline, obedience, and teamwork (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Riffi et al., 2023), to develop physical literacy (Warner et al., 2021; Whitehead, 2010), and to teach sports and physical fitness skills (Vanreusel & Scheerder, 2016). These possible contributions that youth sports bring and their positive (as well as negative) outcomes have been explored in research in many ways with a great deal of research has been devoted to finding (primarily psychological) factors that influence participation such as predictors, mediators and outcomes of motivation, attrition/drop out and burn out (Balish et al. 2014; Battaglia et al., 2022; Harris & Watson, 2014; Weiss, 2019).

The presence of adults, serving as coaches, volunteers and administrators in youth sports, has meant that attention has also been paid to their role in youth sports. Here too, the emphasis is on outcomes that are congruent with or approximate the desired outcomes for young people participating in sports. For example, Furusa et al. (2020) studied parental

involvement in youth sports and concluded that youth need parents to provide tangible support to facilitate their sports engagement. However, providing opportunities for children is not always easy for parents, and is dependent on factors such as their support network, financial resources, work commitments, and/or where they lived (Knight et al., 2020).

Sport involvement is often promoted as a way to increase the well-being of young people, specifically those designated as being 'vulnerable' (Hermens et al., 2018). Super et al. (2018) examined the relationship between sports participation and youth developmental outcomes for socially vulnerable youth. They used questionnaires to measure the developmental outcomes and sports participation rates of socially vulnerable Dutch youth. They found that sports participation was positively related to pro-social behaviour, subjective health, well-being, and sense of coherence. Super et al. (2018) found no evidence of a significant relationship between sports participation on the one hand and problem behaviour and self-regulatory skills on the other. Super et al. (2018) concluded that there are positive relationships between sports participation and several youth developmental outcomes. Additionally, they argued that, given the focus of policymakers and health professionals in the Netherlands as well as abroad on sports as a means to achieve wider social and educational outcomes for young people, further research is needed to shed light on the relationship between sports participation and developmental outcomes of socially vulnerable youth.

Youth sport programmes involve not only youth but also adults in their roles as parents, coaches, referees, or otherwise (Jacobs et al., 2017; Knight, 2019). Similar to the research cited above, the sport research on parents and adults involved focuses on outcomes and tends to pay attention to barriers and obstacles (Edwards & Kulczycki, 2022; Harman & Doherty, 2019; Zanin et al., 2022).

The above suggests that the emphasis of both youth sport itself and research on youth sport programmes is often on how to ensure positive results of youth involvement. I argue that youth sport is more than its outcomes. It is a heterogenous domain, organised by type of sport (individual, dual and team and combinations thereof), by level of skill and competitions (recreational, competitive and elite), by (lack of) organisational control (action sports, sport clubs/organisations), by age (involving not only youth but also adults who coach, support and control/direct them), by gender and by access (opportunity, affordability, place and tradition). There is a need for critical theoretically-informed explanations of the ways sports and sport participation are experienced by youth. Explanations that, by virtue of focusing on processes instead of outcomes, may contribute to a better understanding of how this participation shapes the lives of participants. I will elaborate on this point in the next paragraph.

1.1.   Theoretical approaches studying youth sports

Research that focuses on outcomes, obstacles and barriers is often based on a post-positivist approach. Post-positivism assumes society is made up of a system of interrelated parts that contribute to the fulfilment of system needs and a balanced social order. In this way, youth sport is assumed to contribute towards meeting post-positivist prerequisites of society, since it has the potential to contribute to the health and wellbeing of young people (Maguire, 2014). A post-positivist approach leads people to ask research questions about ways that sport participation contributes to and enhances the stability of organisations, communities, societies and other social systems. In other words, a post-positivist approach to both sport and research on sport is often used by those who understand sport as an activity that contributes to a healthy society. As a consequence, it seems that there is a post-positivism legacy in youth sports policy and research grants and funding for applied research questions. Such research, policy and calls for funding therefore tend to focus on outcomes such as barriers and obstacles to participation (Faber & Schipper-Van Veldhoven, 2023; Nederlandse Sportraad, 2023; Singh et al., 2023;).

However, according to Coakley & Pike, (2014) a post-positivist approach has several major weaknesses. First, post-positivist perspectives may overemphasise the positive effects of sports in society and understate its negative effects. A post-positivist lens may ignore how sports can disrupt the smooth functioning of society such as riots that accompany some sporting events, lack of athlete safety, gambling, and the use of doping/drugs by athletes. Secondly, those who use a post-positivist approach tend to ignore the social construction of sports[1] and the diversity of sport forms and practices. Thirdly, post-positivism is based on the assumption that groups within society have similar needs. It overlooks societal differences and conflicts of interest and cases when sports benefit some people or groups more than others (Coakley & Pike, 2014). A post-positivist approach may ignore the extent to which youth sports participation is part of the problem or part of the solution when it concerns the health and wellbeing of youth.

Post-positivist sport scholars have mostly failed to study the ways in which sport is so often an important and meaningful part of the larger landscape of the lives of young people, positively or negatively (Messner & Musto, 2016). According to Messner and Musto (2016), a post-positivist approach may ignore the complexity, resulting in the under-theorising of youth sport, as youth sport is a very complex assemblage. Messner and Musto (2016) argue that by framing studies of young people in terms of their 'development', misses important

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[1]   Post-Positivism does 'not acknowledge that sports are social constructions that take diverse forms because they are created and defined by people as they interact with one another', post-positivism sees 'sport as a relatively stable social institution that always serves specific functions in societies. Such an approach overlooks the diversity of sport, the extent to which sports promote the interests of powerful and wealthy people more than others, and the possibility that sports may reproduce social outcomes that actually disrupt the smooth function of society' (Coakley & Pike, 2014, p. 36).

opportunities to theorise how youth actively construct and negotiate their lives together, as part of group-based interactions that occur within their peer cultures. More scholarly attention is needed to study how youth sport is experienced when that experience is not related specifically to outcome. Battaglia et al. (2022) have argued that there is a need to study the social as well as the psychological domain, since youth sport is also a dynamic area shaped by social forces such as coach-athlete interactions and parental involvement. In this dissertation, I focus on social aspects of youth sport and draw on theoretical frameworks that transcend post-positivist perspectives. I do so to gain insight into (an understanding of) social forces that shape youth sport in its many facets.

By taking young people and youth sport cultures seriously, this dissertation can, in part, reveal how aspects of youth involvement are part of processes that maintain power relationships and create inequality, exclusion, and may detract from wellbeing. Dominant patterns of social relations are created, maintained and potentially challenged within many aspects of youth sport, but remain under-theorised in the existing sport literature (Messner & Musto, 2016).

Spaaij (2009) cautioned it is important to 'avoid naive and unrealistic generalisations about the transformative capacity of sport' (pp. 1266). At the same time, there is a need for theoretically-informed explanations of the ways that sports and sport participation can be organised and combined with other activities for the purpose of empowering young people in making choices about change-oriented civic engagement based on a critical awareness of the factors that negatively affect their lives (Coakley, 2011). This complexity requires a large *theoretical toolbox* that includes critical theories.

Critical theoretical lenses look at society as a whole as reflected in the context of an activity, i.e. the diversity, complexity, contradictions and changes that characterise social life as it is lived and experienced by people. A critical lens can be used to focus on processes through which culture, including sport, is produced, reproduced and changed, the dynamics of power and social inequalities in cultural processes, and how people make sense of the world. This dissertation is situated primarily within such a critical social perspective, to explore youth sport as part of youth studies.

1.2.   Youth studies

Youth studies are constituted by disciplines such as psychology, pedagogical sciences, cultural studies, urban studies, sociology and criminology. This means that youth studies is a multidisciplinary field within social sciences that seeks to understand the lives of young people and the context in which those lives are situated. Sociology has developed a wide range of tools and theories that can enable a holistic analysis of how social processes in societies intersect and shape individual experiences of youth (France et al., 2020). In other words, a critical sociological approach assumes that youths are constituted by a series

of processes, structures and representations that give meaning to the concept of youth. However, there is no one set way of defining youth, as what is means to be a young person will depend on the circumstances of time and place. In Western societies, youth tend to be involved in forms of schooling through the age of 24. This age range suggests that this stage is not a fixed category that can be defined by age, but is a phase people pass through from childhood, through youth, to young adult, middle age and old age. These stages do not have exact boundaries but are social constructions (France et al., 2020). 'Youth' can therefore be seen as a fluid category that is shaped by a wide range of external forces, including historical, cultural, economic and political dimensions. In this dissertation I define *youth* and *youths* as those between the ages of 10 to 25, since some people such as young gymnasts are expected to behave maturely at a very young age. They practice up to 20 hours a week at the age of 10, may have to negotiate public transportation on their own and be very disciplined in order to keep up with their schoolwork. In contrast, others need more time to explore their identity such as those who self-identify as gay and who come out of the closet at a later age.

I did not set this as a parameter at the beginning of the various studies; I encountered this variation in age range when conducting the various studies comprising this dissertation. Moreover, France et al (2020) asserts: 'As youth sociologists, we believe there is no universal (or essential) definition of youth: rather, we recognize that "youth" is contingent on our time and place and the socio-cultural norms within it' (pp. 3). The experiences of Dutch youths and the adults involved in youth sports who live in Western society, play a central role in this dissertation. Further details are given in de following chapters.

1.3.   Research questions

The two main research questions of this dissertation are:

How do power, discourse and knowledge circulate and constitute youth sports and shape its participants (youths, parents, coaches)?

and;

Which methodologies can be used to understand how reproduction and resistance shape discursive practices and experience in youth sports?

1.4.   Theoretical framework

1.4.1.   Post-structuralism

Sports sociology shines a sociological spotlight on sport, an area of social life that many people routinely refer to as important, harmless, fun and/or common. There are multiple ways to study socio-cultural aspects of sport, to peel away the facades and to see and learn about the way the power of discourses or ways of knowing manifests itself on the field and beyond. Critical theory assumes that social processes are not linear nor binary nor straightforward but complex. Post-structuralism is a critical theoretical framework that provides a way to explore this complexity and can be understood as a 'theory of social meaning and power' (Weedon, 1987, pp. 27). It understands power as being relational, non-hierarchical, fluid and inseparable from the production of knowledge, truth and reality (Avner et al., 2014; King, 2015; Shaw, 2015). In other words, post-structuralism can be used as a productive theoretical lens and tool to map, critique and understand processes that occur in the context of youth sports. Findings can be used to initiate social change in various sporting contexts, including in youth sport and physical cultures.

Michael Foucault has been the most used and referenced post-structuralist scholar in the sociology of sport (King, 2015). Foucault applied his complex way of critical thinking to the emergence and development of a range of medical and social sciences. He took a historical and institutional approach to describing genealogies of the modern prison and of sexualities (Markula & Pringle, 2006). His genealogies revealed how constructions in and the management of prisons and sexualities have become subject to social and moral regulation over time, shifting from formal regulation to the self-discipline of individuals (Foucault, 1978; 1979). In this dissertation, I draw on several of the concepts of Foucault that he described as theoretical tools: 'I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area... I write for users, not readers' (Foucault, 1974, pp. 523-524).

In this process, I first explain various conceptual umbrellas based on the work of Foucault: discourse, power/knowledge, disciplining and resistance; following this, I explain Foucauldian notions of governmentality, regimes of truth, normalisation, space and time, labour as dressage, and pastoral power as I use them in this dissertation

1.4.2.   Discourse

The concept of discourse is central to the Foucauldian toolbox and provides a way to understand the resources that are available to individuals as they make sense of the world and themselves in the world. Foucault (1979, 1984) used *discourse* to refer to ways of thinking, doing and speaking about aspects of reality and articulating what is assumed to be normal. Specifically, discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Discourses are not about objects; they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own intervention' (Foucault, 1972, pp. 49). Sources for discourses

include science/scholarship such as research that defines the concept of youth and explains/theorises the behaviour of youths, governmental announcements such as those made during the pandemic, media such as publications made to announce winning/losing in sports, and those assumed to be authorities such as parents, teachers, sport managers/ coaches, and government officials. Repetition may strengthen a discourse. For example: if government officials and policy papers, local sport consultants, physical education teachers, elite athletes all emphasise the importance of sport participation and do this often, this may mean that sport participation by youth is seen as a necessary and normal part of their development. The discourse about the benefits of youth participation in sports becomes common sense (Avner et al., 2014; King, 2015; Shaw, 2015).

Discourses are not static, however, but are constantly renegotiated. They exist in a state of flux. For example, prior to the nineties, it was not common for girls and women to participate in football, because a dominant discourse constructed it to be a sport for boys and men and not suitable for females. This discourse has shifted over time. Currently, football for and by girls and women has become more common/popular so that its practice by girls and women is becoming normalised in many countries (Van den Bogert, 2019). However, although part of this discourse about who can play football has changed to include girls/women, the discourse about male superiority in football is still considered common sense and a 'truth' (Knoppers et al., 2021).

In other words, a discourse is a way of thinking, which shapes perceptions of reality and constitutes individuals. For example, a dominant discourse about high-performance sports is that becoming an elite athlete requires obeying the coach, putting in many hours of practice or exercise and being fully dedicated and motivated to win (Jacobs et al., 2017). The participants themselves and others will likely label those who meet such requirements *elite athletes*. Someone who does not show these qualities nor engage in these practices will likely not be considered to be an elite athlete. These requirements for youths to be labelled an elite athlete can be called discursive practices, since they put a discourse into practice. Therefore, this discourse describes or constitutes an elite athlete and may in turn shape the identity of many youth.

Society is constituted by many discourses. They circulate among people and normalise ways of doing, thinking, being silent, and speaking. This is why Foucault (1998) asserts that 'power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' (pp. 63).

1.4.3.   Power/knowledge, regimes of truth and normalisation

Foucault did not study *power* per se; he studied the history of how humans were made into subjects. As a result, Foucault did not focus on the questions about sovereign or positional power such as *who holds the power and how is it used*, but instead on *how power functions in society* (Miller, 2017). For example, a researcher who draws on Foucauldian notions in studying youth sports would not look at how elite coaches embed their positional power in

authority, but how the power of knowledge (i.e. what comes to be seen as 'truth' or common sense) functions to produce both compliance and resistance in youth sport contexts.

This connection between what counts as knowledge that is assumed to be true and as discourse is what Foucault referred to as power. Power/knowledge or ways of knowing circulates among people and institutions as it accompanies discourses. When gymnastic coaches use a longitudinal plan for the development of gymnasts and assume that plan is the only or only proper way to develop elite gymnasts, this plan becomes powerful since it shapes the routines/ways of learning of gymnasts. The knowledge (plan) exerts power on gymnasts and coaches because it is seen as true (Dowling et al., 2020).

> Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, 1974, pp. 131).

Power therefore is not the property of an individual but of discourses: 'There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (Foucault, 1979, pp. 27)

This conceptualisation of power relations based on knowledge/discourse assumes that everyone is subjected to power and can comply with it and/or resist it. Foucault described different modalities of power. The Foucauldian toolbox can be used to show how power operates, concretely and historically, in the form of strategic relations aimed at producing compliance through the self-governing of individuals: 'Power means relations, a more or less organised, hierarchical coordinated cluster of relations' (Foucault, 1980, pp. 198). In other words, power only exists when relationships of power come into play, since relationships circulate around knowledge/discourse (Avner et al., 2017).

Post-structuralism therefore understands power as relational, fluid and as being inseparable from the production of knowledge, truth and reality. This understanding of power positions all individuals as inevitably implicated in the (re)production of discourses or 'ways of knowing' (Markula & Pringle, 2006). In the various studies that comprise this dissertation I use a post-structuralist informed lens to focus on youth sport and use it to map and critique the workings of power/knowledge within various sport contexts.

Discourse, power/knowledge, seen through a Foucauldian lens, are therefore embedded in *regimes of truth* that become normalised and are renegotiated, reinforced and resisted. The interconnection between discourse and power/knowledge can therefore, be used as a method to peel away the layers of the common-sense, taken-for-granted and obvious in

youth sports. In this dissertation I therefore, do not search for 'the truth' but try to expand understandings of power/knowledge and control, i.e. one that goes beyond understanding youth sports as a source of motivation and outcomes; understanding youth sports as a place where 'truths' are created, reproduced and resisted.

1.4.4.   Governmentality

Power, besides shaping discursive practices, is also a major source of the development of social discipline and conformity. It often takes shape in the form of *disciplinary power* exercised in various ways through assessment and surveillance so that individuals learn to engage in self-discipline and behave in proscribed ways. In other words, instead of only formal regulations governing people, Foucault identified a shift to self-regulation or self-disciplining. He argued that discourses exert power on individuals to conform. For Foucault, this use of power/knowledge was part of *governmentality*. Foucault's (2003) writings on governmentality are part of his attempt to develop an analytic tool that could account for the complex workings of power in modern society that shape the governing of oneself and others, the so called *conducts of conducts* (Dean, 2010). The notion of governmentality can therefore be used to study how humans are produced as subjects, i.e. become subjects of and/or subject themselves to discourses/regimes of truth.

Since the concept of governmentality was not entirely clear and well-defined before Foucault's death in 1984, scholars have used it in a number of ways. In this dissertation, I draw on the work of Dean (2010) work on governmentality (see Chapter 2). Dean detailed the Foucauldian concept by introducing four dimensions to study governmentality in an empirical manner: rationalities (the thinking), history (background), culture (context) and technologies (the doing). He argued that these dimensions create subjects when combined. For example, a rationality used to promote football to youths constructs it as being fun and healthy (Van den Bogert, 2019). Historically, football is seen as a sport for boys where they learn what it means to be hetero-masculine (Knoppers, 2016). Nowadays however, more and more girls are participating; their participation is more accepted than in the past. Their participation can be seen as resistance to the dominant discourse that girls cannot play football. However, the dominant culture in football is still based on hetero-masculinity and male dominance. Technologies such as the media and the distribution of financial resources enforce this through their emphasis on football by boys and men. Thus, a discourse can be resisted and may shift slightly but still support the message that football is primarily a male dominated sport.

The concept of governmentality can also be used as an analytic tool that focuses on the shaping or governing of individuals, by studying power that emerges from dimensions of rationality and technology that are embedded in discourses. Individuals can have a great deal of influence not just because of a position they hold, such as being the chair of a sport club, but more because of the strategic ways they draw on current discourses. An example of this strategic use of governmentality in youth sports can occur for example when a club

does not have a team for girls. The exclusion of girls from the boys' football team becomes normalised and common sense through a process of governmentality. The rationality (the thinking) in this example is that most girls are not interested in playing football and that this exclusion cannot be resolved by letting a few girls play with the boys. The chair of the club (a well as other board members and coaches) can circulate this discourse of justified exclusion during an annual meeting of the club by defining/arguing his point (technologies, the doing). He may argue that girls are too fragile to play with boys, girls are not as skilled as the boys, and boys may not go all out for fear of hurting the girls. In this way the chair uses the power of discourse to exclude. Whereas the concept of governmentality can be used to analyse how populations are disciplined, the notion of pastoral power can be used to analyse how disciplinary power leads individuals and encourages them to follow.

1.4.5.   Pastoral power

Foucault (2007) contends that modern societies are characterised by governmentality when pastoral power is administered and construed as a productive force that disciplines individuals into self-regulation (see also McNay, 1994). His notion of pastoral power stems from the Christian ideal of the shepherd and the flock. Foucault (1994) argues that pastoral power underwent a number of mutations as it spread from religious contexts into the wider and increasingly secular society. This development of the Christian ideal meant that the religious pastorate became a secular pastorate; public and private institutions such as the school and family provided a host of new pastoral officials and experts, who were/are charged with *shepherding* the health and happiness of the population as a means of securing state wealth and security (Nadesan, 2008; Rose, 2001). In youth sports, pastoral power is exerted through the guidance of coaches (the shepherds) who are responsible for the training and wellbeing of their young athletes (the flock) in the preparation for an important tournament. Guidance by the coaches can be viewed as a central 'technology of governing' (Usher & Edwards, 2005, pp. 404) that operates through processes of surveillance and normalisation such as diet habits and restrictions prescribed by coaches for elite athletes. The shepherds-cum-coaches manipulate and shape the behaviour of individuals (their flock, i.e. young athletes), ensuring the athletes internalise social norms and discourses (Foucault, 1982; McNay, 1994). To illustrate: a social norm and discourse in elite rowing is that rowers in the lightweight class should be as light as possibly. This means that rowers must be under a certain weight. Coaches may discipline the athletes to internalise this norm by weighing them regularly and/or by publicly praising those who have lost weight or are underweight. Compliance with this norm can however result in eating disorders among athletes who discipline themselves in an attempt to be as light as possible using whatever means they can (Chapman, 1997; Schofield et al., 2022). Compliance with such norms involves both space and time. I elaborate on this in the next section, to explain how space and time can constrain individuals in both limiting and enabling individuals.

1.4.6.   Space and time

Shogan (1999) drew on Foucauldian notions of *space and time* to explore how their use can produce a normalised elite or high-performance athlete. I expand the work of Shogan (1999) who explored how high-performance athletes are produced through mechanisms of disciplinary power. Shogan showed how technologies of a sport act as constraints that produce or 'make' (discipline) athletic bodies that can perform the skills of sport. What constitutes skilled action in sport is circumscribed by game rules that frame the possibilities for athletes to act and, therefore, their options to exercise agency. Being skilled involves complying with other constraints besides game rules. The constraints that actually make or produce skilled actions are technologies that make up the discipline of sport and that organise elements such and space and time to homogenise athletes.

Modern sport can be seen as a rule-bound, ordered, enclosed and predictably segmented forms of landscape. For example, an Olympic-size swimming pool is 50 metres long, is minimally 2 metres deep, has ten lanes that are 2,5 metres wide and has a volume of 2.500.000 litres for water. High-performance athletes are taught (disciplined) to excel in this space. They train for example on how far and deep they need to dive into the water before they start swimming during their races. Shogan showed how the ordering of space contributes to the production of disciplined bodies. According to Shogan, coaches must not only organise training spaces to create optimal possibilities for movement, but must also understand the ways in which boundary lines, target dimensions and equipment constrain the use of space and, consequently, how skills are then enabled and limited by these constraints.

Athletes need to understand the spatial constraints of their sport if they are to become disciplined in their movements. For example, a gymnast must know the contours of a mat before she performs a floor exercise. However, this disciplining in the use of space remains discrete and separate with no relation to other activities unless there is a specification about the time element that is part of the exercise. A gymnast must complete the exercise in a certain amount of time. In other words, there is a relationship between the spatial limitations and options and the temporal limits and possibilities that circumscribe skill execution. Athletes often learn these temporal limits and spatial constraints in relation to each other. For example, elite swimmers who swim the 100-metre freestyle are trained to turn at the end of their lane at 50 metres with a so-called flip-turn. Coaches manipulate limitations and possibilities by making use of time constraints, such as the embodiment of tempo at which skills are to be performed, the tempo of a team in practice sessions of repetitions, timetables, seasons of sport competition, etcetera. Shogan concluded that time and space are part of skill and training and thus central to the disciplining of athletes in their skill performance. Whereas time and space discipline athletes, the Foucauldian notion of *labour as dressage* can be used to analyse how individuals are disciplined through training, schooling or education in work-related contexts.

1.4.7.   Labour as dressage

A way to examine the control and/or disciplining of populations at the micro level is through the use of the Foucauldian notion of *labour as dressage*. Dressage involves the use of non-violent force for the production of 'normal', conforming, skilled individuals. For Foucault (1995), labour is both productive and symbolic. He used the less familiar term of *dressage*, which refers to work that is exclusively used to create and sustain the docility of, obedience of and control over the subjects. In other words, Foucault used the notion of labour as dressage to explain how individuals are disciplined to work in the way they do. For example, the Municipality of Utrecht formulated objectives in their policy for sports for adolescent girls (Municipality of Utrecht, 2021). In this policy, they assigned a specific role for youth workers who have been trained in social work. Youth workers use their educational training to conform to these policy objectives and to the notion of *girl* implicit in these objectives. They organise activities centred around healthy habits and lifestyles such as cooking, but which ignore sport activities. Their meetings with the girls are indoors and include courses about BMI, nutrition, thinking about healthy habits, make-up. This construction of *girl* means youth workers rarely integrate sport activities into the structure of the programme, thus limiting physical activities. Their work with the girls can be seen as an example of labour as dressage. Since social workers have learned how to instil social and accepted behaviour in youth in their social work training, they are able to support girls in a socially and culturally accepted way. However, they may not have learned to integrate the *physically active girl* in their ways of disciplining girls to become 'acceptable' girls.

In summary, then, the Foucauldian toolkit described in this dissertation and which is based on the nexus of power/discourse and knowledge, consists of various tools. The use of each tool highlights a modality of disciplinary power, i.e. a specific way in which subjects are disciplined into particular ways of thinking and doing and their resistance to this discursive disciplining. In the following section I describe the various methods I used to explore this thinking and doing.

1.5.   Methods

I borrow heavily from the work of Foucault to explore how power, discourse and knowledge circulate in the sphere of youth sports. In doing so, I shifted from the dominant positivist paradigmatic approach in the study of youth sport (Coakley & Pike, 2014) to post-structuralism. Researchers who use post-positivist approaches consider knowledge, reality and truth as objective and singular, and consequently regard their role or purpose as being to uncover reality and truth through the linear application of scientific methods, e.g. surveys (Shaw, 2015). As I explained in the previous section, post-structural researchers understand knowledge to be contextual and reality and truth to be multiple, complex and subjective. Post-structuralism assumes subjectivity is produced in and through specific discursive

practices and arrangements (Green & Reid, 2008). The use of a Foucauldian approach requires an analysis of how discourse is shaped and of how discourse shapes everyday existence (Foucault, 1978). Therefore, I emphasised practices in the various studies rather than language. Despite highlighting the connection between discourse, power and knowledge, Foucault never articulated specific methods for the sociological analysis of discourses using empirical data (McLaren, 2009). I used a variety of qualitative methods to conduct the various analyses[2]. By using qualitative methods to explore social forces that shape youth sport in its many facets, I was able to study personal experiences and anchor their use in discourses. In Chapters 2 through 7, I examined the ways the respondents drew on discourses to legitimate the ways in which sport practices were conducted and understood.

1.5.1.   Semi-structured interviews

The most common method I used consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews. Interviews are particularly valuable sources of knowledge about experience and meaning (Hoeber & Shaw, 2017; Markula & Silk, 2011; Smith & Sparks, 2016). During the various individual semi-structured interviews, I used interview guides to ask respondents relatively focused but open-ended questions about different aspects of youth sports, often followed by probing follow-up questions on their answers. In this way, I encouraged the respondents to describe their experiences in rich and detailed ways, and give their perspectives and interpretations of these experiences. I assumed they drew on discourses from society and/ or their specific youth sports context to build and understand their experiences. I believed these discourses situated in sociocultural and youth sport contexts were, therefore, crucial resources for the respondents in constituting their experiences (Hoeber & Shaw, 2017; Markula & Silk, 2011; Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Because stories, descriptions, reports and suchlike as told in interviews are never truly formed inside a person, but rather are shaped by the discursive resources made available by society/the social world and context the respondents inhabit, I assumed the content of these interviews revealed various sociocultural dynamics of human life in youth sports. The content of the semi-structured interviews exposed ways in which youth sports culture shaped the personal experiences of the respondents, their meanings, their thinking, their doing, decisions, values, motivations and so on.

1.5.2.   Focus groups

In addition to interviewing respondents individually, I also organised focus groups (Adler et al., 2019; Fontana & Frey, 2000). The purpose of focus groups is for individuals to interact

2   These were situated within the Dutch code of conduct for research integrity (VSNU, 2018) as well the research code of the Research Centre for Social Innovation of Utrecht University of Applied Sciences. In conformity with European privacy regulations (General Data Protection Regulation), all data have been stored in a protected environment.

and discuss a topic with each other rather than individually with an interviewer. A facilitator ensures everyone has their voice heard and can ask probing follow-up questions to keep a discussion going. I organised focus groups in the same semi-structured way as the individual interviews. Specifically, rather than interviewing one person at the time, I invited multiple participants to discuss a topic together. Again, I assumed that the discussions were shaped by available discursive resources circulating in society and in the context the respondents inhabit and that these interviews revealed sociocultural dynamics of human life in youth sports (Fontana & Frey, 2000). I facilitated the focus groups in ways that I hoped would create a supportive atmosphere in which interactions could take place among the respondents so that their expression of the personal, varied, and sometimes conflicting viewpoints on the topic of focus could be expressed. In doing so, I focused on the level of micro-practices of lived experiences such as in practices in women's gymnastics, and in the Orthodox Reformed Christian (ORC) context. Foucault assumed a focus on lived experiences was a way to identify regularities or themes of specific and particular times and places (Olsen, 2003).

1.5.3.   Solicited diaries, diary logs and observations

Solicited diaries or diary logs were also used as a method to uncover discursive practices. These methods are useful in developing an understanding of the setting or group studied, by enabling individuals to record their daily lived experiences (Filep et al., 2018). Their use enabled me to engage in an in-depth exploration of routines and rituals of behaviour (Latham, 2016) that were observed and experienced in mainstream young men's team sports. I used this method to collect speech acts from young male team athletes. I analysed the observations in an iterative process, including both inductive and deductive coding based on a theoretical framework that assumes that what is said is both descriptive and constitutive (Butler, 1993, 1997).

Similar to solicited diaries, observations and reflections by respondents can reveal contextualised interpretation. Having respondents write about their observations and reflections allows language and meanings to emerge (Hodder, 2000). In Chapter 4, Social Work students (SWs) completed observations forms to report what they saw, their experiences and their interactions. Each student individually also described their own reflections on working with refugees and on the development of their professional skills during the project.

1.5.4.   Desk research

Although all investigations rely on desk research to situate a study in the scholarly literature, desk research may in some cases also be part of data collection (Glesne, 2011). The review of documents can be used as a non-intrusive method to portray respondent values and beliefs in a setting and possibly, how individuals, groups, cultures and institutions construct realities and with what effects (Wright, 2003). The documents showed culturally standardised discourses associated with the value systems of people and organisations

(Edwards & Skinner, 2009). I used desk research especially in Chapter 2 and 3 to elicit data about the Orthodox Reformed Christians and to obtain current news about kitesurfing. This information consisted of articles in daily newspapers, political pamphlets, magazines, websites, school policy documents, etcetera.

1.6.   Dissertation outline

In the chapters that follow, I present six studies that have all been published in international peer-reviewed journals and books. Each chapter can therefore be read as an independent article. Together, the studies reveal ways various Foucauldian concepts can be used to investigate experiences of athletes, parents and coaches in youth sports. All studies are empirical and use a variety of qualitative methods that draw data from different groups of participants[3].

In **Chapter 2**, I focus on youths of the approximately 250,000 Orthodox Reformed Christians (ORC) in the Netherlands, who purport to live according to a strict adherence to the Bible. The ORC formally disassociates itself from the mainstream competitive sports discourse in the Netherlands, a society that regards sport as a societal good. I explore how processes of governmentality enable these Dutch ORC youths to resist dominant/popular societal discourses about sport. I use four dimensions, namely: rationality, history, culture and technology, to examine how governmentality acts on individuals (Dean, 2010). I analyse publications that concern themselves specifically with sport within the denomination of the ORC and also conduct a combination of semi-structured interviews and focus groups with ORC youths. A total of 32 young people with an ORC background participated in this study.

Kite surfers also distance themselves from mainstream organised sports, but are confronted in their participation in this action sport with other dominant discourses such as that of freedom. In **Chapter 3**, I examine how sponsored male adolescent kite surfers experienced freedom in this self-directed and non-institutionalised action sport activity. I explore the opportunities they have for self-direction, and the various ways in which they are subjected to control. The notion and practice of freedom of young commercially sponsored kite surfers may be more complex than the popular discourses about freedom within action sport cultures suggest (Wheaton, 2003). I use a Foucauldian framework (1972) to explore how disciplinary power, embedded in time and space, produce athletic skill and identity in commercially sponsored male kite surfers and inform their practices of freedom (Shogan, 1999). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 young males, between the ages of 11 and 17.

In the next chapter, I studied the discursive practices of leadership in an action sport in a Sport for Development (SfD) project. Competent leadership that focuses on relationship building can contribute to the pleasure participants experience during their involvement in sport and physical activity. This pleasure or enjoyment is often considered to contribute

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3   See chapter 8, Table 8.1 for an overview

to the wellbeing of participants (Spaaij et al., 2019). A project, *U on Board*, was developed to contribute to the wellbeing of youth living in a refugee centre. Since relationship building between leaders and participants plays a major role in the 'success' of Sport for Development projects (Spaaij & Jeanes, 2013), I examine how social work students attempt to enact social work principles to engage in relationship building with young refugees during such a project.

The purpose of the study described in **Chapter 4** was to explore how social work students used their social work knowledge to build relationships with young refugees to ensure they participated and enjoyed longboarding activities. I drew on Foucauldian (1995; 2007) notions of pastoral power and dressage to analyse how these students applied social work principles to engage in relationship building with participating refugees. The focus of the study was primarily on the leadership skills of the SWs who provided the data. Specifically, the analysis was based on data from 28 adults (18 women and 10 men) SWs, aged 18-26, who were in their second year of study. The study describes what the SWs saw, did, felt and heard and their reflections on these experiences. This study focuses on the ways leaders engage in relationship building and interact with participants. Participants in sport also interact with each other, however, not only with leaders. These interactions may contribute to abusive practices.

Sport organisations are recognising that participants in youth sports may engage in or be subjected to abusive behaviour (Brackenridge et al., 2010; Kerr & Stirling, 2008; Stirling & Kerr, 2009). Such reports and remedies to minimise that behaviour often address the role of administrators and coaches. Relatively little attention has been paid to how athletes engage in abuse themselves in their interactions with teammates. Although the acceptance of gay or non-heterosexual males in sport is growing in various western countries, research also suggests that young men, including athletes, tend to engage in abusive or homo-negative speech acts (Magrath, 2018). The presence of homo-negative speech acts, often called micro-aggressions, make it difficult for both heterosexual and non-heterosexual young male team sport athletes to navigate the dominant practices of masculinity in their sport. In **Chapter 5**, I explore how heterosexual and non-heterosexual young male team sport athletes experience and hear expressions of homo-negative and heteronormative micro-aggressive speech acts. I draw on Foucault's notion of discourse (1980), Butler's (1997) conceptualisation of performativity of heteronormativity and Sue's (2010) work on microaggressions to examine how microaggressive speech acts by young male athletes reflect current sexual and gender-cultural norms. I use solicited diaries or diary logs written by heterosexual and non-heterosexual young male team sport athletes (aged 16–25) as sources of data. I supplement this written data with semi-structured interviews.

As I indicated above, various sport organisations have been working to reduce abusive behaviours by coaches in sport. Gymnastics in particular is a sport that has been very visible in the acknowledgement that such abusive practices occur. Abusive practices in elite women's artistic gymnastics (WAG) have been the focus of discussions about how to

eliminate or reduce them. Parents of athletes are often held responsible for safeguarding the interests and bodily integrity of their children. Both coaches and parents have been named as key actors in bringing about change. Parents are not independent actors, however, but are part of a larger web consisting of an entanglement of emotions and technologies and rationalities used by their children, staff, other parents, and athletes, bounded by skill development plans and by coaching expertise and authority. This complex entanglement may limit the ability of parents to bring about change.

In **Chapter 6**, I focus on emotional abusive behaviours by coaches of elite women gymnasts and the grooming processes Dutch elite women gymnasts are subjected to so that they come to (seemingly) tolerate and normalise systematic emotional abuse. I use a multilevel model to examine practices that play out in the grooming of elite women gymnastics for emotional abuse at macro, meso and micro levels. I drew on notions of discourses and discursive practices (Foucault, 1977) to explore how athletes, parents, coaches and directors legitimated their ways of thinking and doing concerning elite gymnastics. I conducted semi-structured interviews to discover how 14 elite women gymnasts (aged 14–30 at the time of interviews) experienced elite gymnastics. I also held 12 interviews with parents of these athletes. In addition to this data collected at the micro level, I conducted semi-structured interviews to explore the discourses and discursive practices used by five coaches and five members of the boards of directors of the National Gymnastics Federation (macro level) and of local sport clubs (meso level) that produce elite female gymnasts. This process of legitimisation of practices created *regimes of truth* that normalised abusive practices at micro, meso and macro levels.

In an attempt to disrupt abusive practices in WAG, I examined in **Chapter 7** the ability of parents of elite gymnasts to safeguard their daughters in women's artistic gymnastics (WAG). I draw on Buchanan's (2015) notion of assemblage, Foucauldian (1974, 1991, 2003) concepts of discourse and governmentality and Ahmed's (2010) assertion about the entanglement of discourses and emotions, to explore how parents are disciplined into accepting dominant discursive practices of sport clubs for elite athletes. The data were drawn from a project called the Parental Awareness Program (PAP). The purpose of the PAP groups was to enable parents to discuss issues/concerns they wanted to raise and to discuss with others the participation of their daughter in elite gymnastics. The discussions in the PAP groups allowed me to identify the elements comprising an assemblage of elite gymnastics practice that enhanced the possibility of the occurrence of abuse. Participants in the PAP program were parents of young gymnasts who had been deemed 'talented' and who were members of an elite gymnastics club. The data analysis was based on focus group discussions with a total of 22 parents participating and was supplemented with semi-structured interviews with 8 parents.

In **Chapter 8,** I present the conclusion and discussion of this PhD dissertation by providing a summary of the key findings and answers to the two research questions, theoretical and methodological reflections and future directions for research.

2

'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport': Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal and alternative Reformed sport discourses

Froukje Smits, Annelies Knoppers and Corina van Doodewaard

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   30
                   Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
                   and alternative Reformed sport discourses

Abstract

There are approximately 250,000 Orthodox Reformed Christians (ORC) in the Netherlands, who live according to a strict adherence to the Bible. The ORC dissociate themselves from the mainstream sport discourse in the Netherlands that regards sport as a societal good. We draw on post-structural perspectives to explore how governmentality enables Dutch ORC youths to resist dominant societal discourses about sport. We used four dimensions to examine how governmentality acts on individuals in: rationality, history, culture and technology. We analyzed publications that concern themselves specifically with sport within the denomination of the ORC church and also conducted a combination of semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 32 ORC youths. The results show the power of governmentality and also how ambiguity enables moments of resistance to emerge.

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   31
                   Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
                   and alternative Reformed sport discourses

Introduction

Sport is generally regarded as an essential and important aspect of Western societies. National and local governments encourage sports participation, specifically amongst youths. As a consequence, three-quarters of Dutch youths aged between 12 and 19 years are members of at least one sports club (Tiessen-Raaphorst & Van den Dool, 2014). The high involvement of youths in sport originated in the West in part within religious contexts and motives. The ideology of muscular Christianity emerged in the nineteenth century and was based on the assumption that sport could be used to transform Protestant boys into Christian gentlemen through the development of physical and emotional strength, discipline, loyalty and respect (Parker & Watson, 2015). Sport has also been used as a way to bring youths to faith in Christ in evangelical circles (Jirásek, 2015). However, Christianity has not only served as a motivator that legitimates sports participation, but can also play a restrictive role. In the current study, we attempt to gain insight into the dynamics operating in an Orthodox Protestant religious community that disciplines youths to resist sports involvement. Members of this Christian Protestant denomination use religious arguments to self-exclude themselves and their communities from most forms of sports participation and in so doing separate themselves from the dominant societal discourses described above. Explanations for this resistance to sports involvement form the rationale for the current study.

The Dutch ORC community

Currently, there are about 250,000 ORC in the Netherlands – The Reformed Church of America and the Christian Reformed Church of North America are 'daughters' of the ORC. The ORC form a semi-closed community within Dutch society. They live in an area, known as the 'Bible-belt' (Oomen, 2011), stretching from the north-east of the Netherlands to the south-west. The label 'Orthodox Reformed' describes people who visit Protestant churches that preach a strict adherence to the Bible as presented in the seventeenth-century translation[4]. The ORC believe that everything that is written in the Bible is literally true (Oomen, 2011). They have their own churches, schools, newspaper (Reformatorich Dagblad [*Reformed Daily*], *RD*) and are represented by their own political party, the SGP (Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij), that holds traditional conservative views on social issues, such as emancipation of women, LGBT rights and abortion. (Oomen, 2011). Orthodox Reformed churchgoers live according to what they perceive as the original Calvinist/Biblical moral intent, rooted in the Reformation. They perceive themselves not only as citizens of this world, but more importantly as citizens of 'the Promised Land'. Whilst earthly citizenship is ephemeral, later life in heaven is eternal: life on earth is but a route to their eternal home (Oomen, 2011). This belief results in strict compliance with ethical norms and a generally

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4   This is similar to the King James' Version, called the 'Statenvertaling'.

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   32
                    Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
                    and alternative Reformed sport discourses

critical attitude towards the ways of the world in eluding, amongst other things, the media, personal ambition and sport (Baars-Blom, 2006).

This creates a distance between the ORC and the rest of Dutch society. Church members are expected to avoid watching television and participating in sports clubs, and must attend church twice on Sundays wearing dark clothing. Women and girls are expected to wear skirts and dresses throughout the week (no trousers or shorts) and must also wear hats in Church. Heterosexual marriage plays an important role in ORC life, with a preference for large families and an emphasis on traditional values, for instance: 'Man and woman are equivalent but not each other's equal. They have distinctive roles, whereby that of the man is leading' (Baars-Blom, 2006, p. 117, based on Genesis 2:18). In part, this gender distinctiveness is enforced through clothing norms. The rationality used to prevent women from wearing trousers is based on the Bible text that says: 'The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God' (Deuteronomy 22:5).

ORC youth culture and sport

Research has shown that ORC youths are conscious that they are surrounded by a secularized environment that endorses other values and norms that are sometimes at odds with those that organize daily life and leisure practices in their own communities (Baars-Blom, 2006; Oomen, 2011; Watling, 2006). However, these studies of ORC youth culture have paid little attention to sport. Relatively little is known about the sports participation of these young people, but it is estimated that about 85 per cent do not take part in any organized sports activity (Van Doodewaard & Smits, 2011).

ORC communities permit recreational activities but frown on involvement in all forms of competitive sport. Participation in recreational activities means involvement in sport must primarily be for relaxation and pleasure, outside of an organized, competitive and institutionalized context. Competitive activities are those that require joining a sports club and engaging in scheduled/organized competition.

Theoretical framework

Post-structural perspectives were drawn upon in the current study to explore how ORC youths legitimate their practices and ways of thinking regarding sport, physical activity and health. In the following sections, we summarize Foucault's (1977) ideas about discourses and the panopticon; Barton's (2012) concept of the 'Bible-belt panopticon'; Foucault's (1977) ideas about surveillance and normalization as disciplinary technologies; Dean's (2010) suggestions for exploring these concepts through empirical research; and Brockling et al.'s (2011) notions of 'breaches and dislocations' that can emerge from ambiguous practices.

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   33
                    Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
                    and alternative Reformed sport discourses

We use Foucault's concept of the panopticon to understand how discursive power disciplines these youths. Foucault (1977) used the panopticon as a way to illustrate the proclivity of disciplinary societies to subjugate their citizens, by arguing that individuals are enmeshed in a web of disciplinary power created by discourses. Foucault's metaphor for modern surveillance comes from Jeremy Bentham's architectural design of the ideal prison whereby occupants suspect continual surveillance and therefore become disciplined in their behaviour. The panopticon therefore suggests a system of visible and invisible controls over those under observation, to the extent that individuals begin to discipline themselves to ensure that actions and tasks are carried out accurately according to a desired norm (Ransom, 1997). Scholars have subsequently paid more attention to the power of dominant discourses than to resistance to them, especially by youths (Raby, 2005). We draw on Foucault's notion of the panopticon to understand how ORC youths are disciplined to resist dominant Western discourse about sports involvement.

In addition, we use Barton's (2012) conception of the Bible-belt panopticon to understand how discursive power works to govern ORC youths. Barton (2012, p. 29) describes the Bible-belt panopticon as 'an important element of Bible-belt Christianity', which 'manifests through tight social networks of family, neighbors, church, and community members, and a plethora of Christian signs and symbols sprinkled throughout the region'. We draw on these ideas to explore how networks and symbols govern or discipline ORC youths into non-involvement in competitive sport.

Normalization and surveillance are disciplinary techniques that function as panoptic systems of control over individuals. Foucault's (1977) contribution towards the theorizing of surveillance and normalization and the application of the idea of the panopticon has provided a basis on which to discuss issues associated with discipline and control in institutional and wider social settings (Manley et al., 2012). Discourses produce and establish messages about what is considered the norm and normal. We use the term 'normalization' to refer to a web of normalizing practices that disciplines people to follow a discursive regime. For example, if females in a community always wear dresses or skirts, few people (if any) will ask why they do so. This way of dressing is the norm. We use the term 'surveillance' to refer to governance through the panopticon. Men and women in small communities that are based on certain rules and ways of living are aware they are watched or may be watched. They may internalize 'the panoptic gaze' and regulate their behaviors to be congruent with accepted norms.

Foucault introduced the term governmentality to understand the beginning of liberalism and power in early modern Europe (Rose et al., 2006). The notion of governmentality is not limited to formal governmental actions but defines the 'art of governing' (Foucault, 2007), more extensively as the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 1982, p. 220). Dean (2010) further developed Foucault's concept of governmentality to enable researchers to empirically explore how governmentality acts on individuals. According to Dean (2010, p. 28), the study of governmentality means exploring organized practices that he calls 'regimes of practices

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   34
                   Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
                   and alternative Reformed sport discourses

or regimes of government'. Dean suggested four dimensions could be used to analyse governmentality in an empirical manner: rationalities, history, culture and technologies. *Rationalities* (or thoughts) are ways of thinking, insights, know-how, approaches and planning techniques that can be used to make clear, systematic explanations about how things are or how they ought to be. ORC rationalities tend to be based on texts from the Bible. In the current study, we therefore looked at Bible texts that are used in ORC communities to oppose or support forms of sports involvement. Second, Dean suggests using *history* to explore how practices of governmentality have a distinctive historical trajectory. In the current study, we therefore looked at how the creation of rules over time by the Synod (the ruling body of the ORC who meet annually) shaped practices of governmentality with respect to sport. Third, Dean names *culture* as a regime that contributes to governmentality. He defines culture as the routinized and ritualized way things are done in certain places and times. For example, classes in ORC schools begin every morning with prayers and reading the Bible together; in this way, students learn desired norms and values. We explored how Bible-belt norms are produced and reproduced, especially pertaining to sports participation. In our analysis, we combine history and culture since we found that the two are inextricably intertwined in the ORC communities. Finally, *technologies*, such as newspapers, radio, television, Internet and magazines, also strengthen governmentality according to Dean (2010). We therefore investigated how technologies, especially those using communication/media, produce and convey ORC standpoints.

We expand on Dean's notions to study how religion as a practice of governmentality in ORC communities informs technologies and rationalities and how these are embedded in historical and cultural practices of ORC youths with respect to sport. We wanted to understand how ORC youths resist dominant discourses about the positive value of sports participation. We did so by exploring how the Bible-belt panopticon governs or disciplines ORC youths enabling them to resist dominant societal discourses.

We also looked at forms of resistance and challenges to the Bible-belt panopticon in what Brockling et al. (2011, p. 17) call 'breaches and dislocations' that may emerge from ambiguous practices, unanticipated outcomes and moments of failure. ORC youths, for example, are not only subjected to the Bible-belt panopticon but also to the technologies of power that the Dutch Government uses to create educated and 'good' citizens through curriculum requirements. Regardless of religious affiliation, each school must comply with these requirements in order to be certified and stay open. Physical Education (PE) is a compulsory subject in all Dutch schools. Its presence in the curriculum of ORC schools, as well as its content, may therefore also be a source of ambiguity.

This study focuses on the way ORC youths (a minority amongst Dutch youths) negotiate between dominant societal discourses about the value of sports participation and the alternative discourses from their broader ORC community (Raby, 2005), which actively warn against involvement in competitive/organized sport. We seek to demonstrate how religion is used to create an alternative discourse about sport, health and physical activity.

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   35
                   Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
                   and alternative Reformed sport discourses

Methods

Design and rationale

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used in this study in order to explore thoughts and practices in relation to sports participation of a sample of 32 ORC youths. The use of semi-structured open-ended interviews and focus groups provided data that gave insight into ways of thinking and doing, such as normalizing and judging and how these youths took on various discourses that circulate in the Netherlands more broadly and in the ORC more specifically. The use of this approach has helped us understand the complexity of a context without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fontana & Frey, 2000). The content of the interviews and focus groups (what youths said) was compared with content from the following relevant ORC community texts: Dutch orthodox newspaper, *RD*; a ORC youths magazine, *Daniel*; a magazine for parents of ORC adolescents, *Eigenwijs*; publications of the SGP (a Dutch ORC political party); letters sent to the editor of the national ORC newspaper; and posts on Internet forums that concern themselves specifically with sport and physical exercise within the ORC denomination. We found the texts by conducting Google searches on the topics 'ORC' and 'Sport' until saturation occurred. The use of multiple methods of data collection (also known as 'triangulation') allowed for investigation of this social phenomenon from different angles (Boeije, 2010).

Participants

Via our own networks in Dutch ORC communities (specifically with regard to PE), the authors were able to access three of the seven ORC secondary schools in the Netherlands. PE teachers at these three schools identified possible participants who did not participate in organized sports and might be willing to participate in our research. We defined lack of sports involvement as not participating in sport in an organized setting such as a club and team. None of the students declined participation in our study. We continued interviewing until thematic saturation was reached and nothing new appeared in the interviews. We conducted 16 semi-structured interviews and also two focus groups (each consisting of eight students) with ORC youths between the ages of 12 and 18 years old, resulting in a total of 32 participants. From the 32 students, 14 were male and 18 female. All interviews and focus groups took place in regular classrooms after classes were finished. Interviews ranged from 45 to 60 min in length whilst the focus groups took 75–90 min. Data gathering took place between 2015 and 2016. The participants were all white students. According to Watling (2003), the ORC is predominantly white and middle class. This means such schools are generally homogenous with respect to race, ethnicity and religion.

The research team consisted of four white middle-class women of whom two were doctoral students (Smits and Van Doodewaard), one was an intern (Colsters) and the fourth a professor (Knoppers). Despite the fact that the authors (Smits, Knoppers and Van

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   36
Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
and alternative Reformed sport discourses

Doodewaard) did not grow up in an ORC community, they were familiar with the ORC norms, habits and ideologies through family and professional relations. Therefore, although we were outsiders at the school, we dressed in ways that conformed to school/ORC standards when we conducted the interviews and focus groups. This outsider status may have enabled participants to speak more freely than if the interviewers were staff from the school and members of the ORC community. In the discussion of findings section below, we identify respondents by gender only since the ORC emphasizes gender as an essential part of God's creation (Genesis 1:27). We chose not to use pseudonyms for the interview and focus group participants because the emphasis in the analyses is on what was said and not who said it. We do not compare the voices with each other or within an interview. The use of pseudonyms may result in comparisons that are not part of the purpose of the paper and are at cross-purpose to that objective.

Procedure and data analysis

The semi-structured interview schedule involved the following questions:

• What do you think about (elite) sport?
• What does sport mean to you?
• Do you think that sport and faith can go together?
• Is there a difference between girls and boys who want to participate in sports or during PE?
• Is there something that stops you from participating in organized sport?
• Is there something that could change sport to allow you to participate?

We used clarification and elaboration probes as a follow-up to initial questions depending on how respondents answered. This approach helped us look for a true understanding of what is happening (Boeije, 2010). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

We used iterative methods to analyse the interview and focus group transcripts as well as the textual data mentioned above using Dean's (2010) dimensions as the framework to sort the data and to move from codes to themes. We first used axial coding to sort the data according to the dimension that they illustrated (Boeije, 2010). We then used selective coding for each dimension looking for emerging themes referring to a specific discourse on sport and physical activity (Boeije, 2010). This thematic analysis involved reading and rereading data several times to check and confirm the relationship of various coding categories to emerging themes and their placement within Dean's dimensions. The research team then discussed, and at times revised, the results of the sorting process. This process of clarifying the themes underlying dimensions took several iterations. When agreement was reached on these themes and their placement within Dean's dimensions, we discussed the discourses in which the resulting themes were embedded. We continued this process until all three authors were in agreement with the final placement of the data as they pertained to Dean's (2010) dimensions and breaches as described by Brockling et al. (2011). In our discussion of findings below, we chose quotes and texts that best illustrate each of the

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   37
Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
and alternative Reformed sport discourses

following themes: rationalities, history/culture, technologies and breaches. Although Dean's (2010) dimensions of governmentality overlap, we present them as separate dimensions in our findings.

Discussion of findings

Rationalities: 'Rules are part of faith'

Rationalities or thoughts can be used to clarify how things are or how they ought to be. The ORC situate their lives squarely and solely in a literal reading of the Bible; the Bible therefore forms the basis for ORC rationalities. In this section, we give examples of how these rationalities based on Biblical texts strengthen and (re)produce governmentality that normalizes lack of competitive sports involvement.

The ORC's portrayal of humanity and their hierarchical dualist notion of the body and the soul play a significant role in their daily lives. The ORC community bases its attitudes about behaviour on the belief that human beings are created in God's image but with a sinful nature (Baars-Blom, 2006). God's mercy and grace may, however, redeem individuals from hell in their afterlife. Members of the ORC therefore try to devote their lives to glorifying God and to show they are worthy of God's mercy. They do so by grounding their way of living in the Bible and doing what they see as God's will. Core Biblical values are translated into norms for everyday life. An article in an ORC magazine for parents of adolescents explains:

> God wants us to place Him above everything else in our lives, everything we do in life must be done in His honour. Everything we do (including active and sporting pursuits) we must see in the light of eternity and the purpose of our creation. (Jeugdbond Gereformeerde Gemeenten, 2014, pp. 1-5, referring to 2 Thess. 1:11–12)

Members of the ORC community reject 'the way of this world' based on Romans 12:2: 'And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God'. They must live an obedient earthly life in order to live in His mercy in the afterlife. This results in strict compliance with dominant ORC ethical norms and a critical attitude towards mainstream societal discourses.

The rules of conduct for the ORC, including those about sport, are legitimized and explained with the use of various passages from the Bible. For example, a well-known example about the negative aspect of sport is the Apostle Paul's admonition that: 'For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come' (1 Timothy 4:8). Physical activity is therefore seen as the opposite of godliness by the ORC. Only the latter is regarded as of significance as it pertains to eternal life. The ORC regards prizes won in sports events as worldly and

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   38
                  Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
                  and alternative Reformed sport discourses

meaningless (referring to 1 Corinthians 9:24–27). The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) describe the rules for a godly life. The fourth commandment is especially pertinent to ORC discussions about sport since it describes ways in which Sunday is to be celebrated/ observed (Exodus 20:10). Sunday is defined as a day of rest, a holy day in which time and space are devoted to worshipping God. Many sports competitions in the Netherlands are on Sunday. The respondents in this study considered the rule and tradition about Sunday as a day of rest to be very important. A boy explained this rule and tradition as follows: 'When you believe, you go to church. You can't do that when you want to engage in sport on that day. Sunday is God's day; you have to do other things then [besides sport].'

Another rationality that emerged pertains to gender and clothing dimensions. In everyday practice, the clothing norm that requires females to wear skirts and dresses means girls and women in ORC communities are expected to refrain from wearing shorts, even though this is very common in the mainstream sporting world. One of the girls explained, referring to Deuteronomy 22:5:

> Usually, when you engage in sports activities you wear shorts, and we don't really wear shorts. Some people in our community strongly object to women wearing shorts and that's why a lot of them [girls] don't engage in any sports activity.

In interviews and focus groups, girls tended to use the same words to express themselves saying things like it is 'out of respect for others' that they do not wear shorts. Consequently, the idea that they might be seen in shorts meant they did not actively participate in sporting activities. Many also stated that for similar reasons they did not like to jog in a skirt. The concerns regarding appropriate sports clothing for the girls also mean parents rarely give permission for their daughters to become members of a sports club. A combination of normalization and surveillance therefore limits their sports participation.

As is evident above, obedience of the ORC community norms is reinforced through surveillance exercised by parents, church members, teachers and other youths. Youth we interviewed behaved according to what they professed to be the expected norms and manners of the ORC community. The 'clothing dilemma' illustrates this surveillance and how distinctiveness between men and women is normalized.

History and culture: 'faster, higher, stronger'?

The above-mentioned rationalities prescribe strict rules of ORC conduct for all (including youths) to serve God. This conduct requires a responsible form of Christian recreation. The rules are set by the Synod, the ruling body of the ORC that meets once a year. In 1953, the Synod ruled that a responsible Reformed way of life is one that has little time for leisure and warned parents to keep a close eye on the lifestyle of their children. The ORC youth union interpreted the motto of the Olympic Games, 'faster, higher, stronger', to conflict with synodical rules and therefore with ORC norms and values. Participation in organized sport

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   39
                  Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
                  and alternative Reformed sport discourses

is therefore out of the question. Such yearly meetings of the Synod and its rulings become part of a historical governmental technology that is used in the ORC community. Besides rationalities and history serving as conduits for governmentality, Dean (2010) also points to the role of culture. Dean characterized culture as the routinized and ritualized way of doing things in certain places and at certain times. According to the ORC, the 'worldly' sports culture that has developed in secular society conflicts with the Reformed way of thinking (rationalities) and history (by synodical decisions). The ways in which Reformed culture and the 'secular world' construct sport are therefore assumed to be diametrically opposed to one another. The ORC's way of thinking views 'worldly' entertainment and habits as wrong and sinful. Sport and games go against the ORC rules of living. In comments posted on an Internet forum for ORC youths, a minister explained the following (referring to 1 Cor. 5:10, 11):

> As soon as sport and physical activity become an organised game for enjoyment, with the aim of satisfying and promoting bodily pleasures and the feeling of achievement … then this falls in the category of 'the way of this world'. (Burggraaf, 2016)

Organized sport is thus constructed as a worldly pleasure that must be avoided. The members of the ORC community consider sports culture to be a force that can tempt people into sin since it is based on norms and values that contradict the commandments of the Lord they follow. Accounts of the prevalence of alcohol abuse and coarse language in sporting contexts are cited as examples of undesirable practices (e.g., Baar, 2012; Hart, 2016). ORC adherents must hold a critical attitude towards these practices of the dominant sports culture.

This disapproval of dominant sports culture means ORC youths are taught that membership of a sports club is associated with behaviours that are in conflict with God's Word and that sport is practised in an atmosphere in which Reformed Christians do not feel at home. An article in *Eigenwijs* (the ORC magazine for parents) states:

> A sports club is a community. Non-religious club- and team-mates typically determine the atmosphere. A worldly atmosphere often permeates the practice sessions and the matches. Stress and irritation are expressed through cursing and swearing. Matches and practices are followed by drinking beer. Organized sport is all about achievement or winning. (Eigenwijs, 2014, pp. 1-2)

Various media not only condemn organized sports participation but some individual churches go a step further. They do not allow youths to become formal adult members of the church (profession of faith) if they are members of a sports club. A PE teacher described such situations in the ORC newspaper:

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   40
                  Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
                  and alternative Reformed sport discourses

I know of a group of youths that wanted to organise a basketball tournament, with the proceeds going to a church youth campaign. They were given a good talking to by the minister who said 'we have no need for sport, applause or cheering'. (Dijkhuizen, 2002a, p. 15)

Organized sport is constructed as not fitting within ORC norms because it is regularly accompanied by the serving of alcohol, coarse language, the 'blind glorification' of sport and body worship. This means ORC communities often discount sport as a whole and see it as a sinful activity.

In sum, the ORC culture justifies their objections to membership of a sports club because involvement in sport disturbs the notion of Sunday as a day of rest, sports participants engage in unacceptable behaviour during and after matches and sport and the winners are worshipped instead of God. These objections are disseminated through the use of technologies.

Technologies

Technologies form another dimension of Dean's analytic framework for research into governmentality. We therefore look at the communication channels used by the ORC communities. Orthodox believers try to create coherent communities to ensure that the necessary internalization of Reformed viewpoints and the required self-discipline occurs (Watling 2003). Their commitment to the system of doctrine set out in the Reformed confessions creates a distance between Orthodox Reformed and the rest of society (Watling 2003). We identified several instruments that support this ORC system.

The SGP party that represents the ORC community in Dutch parliament holds traditionalist views on gender and social issues, including sport. As we showed above, the ORC, and therefore its political party, are not positive about sports participation. According to the SGP, time must be spent on work, family and faith, not on sports participation. Young SGP politicians organize debates throughout the Bible-belt about this topic, and ask youths to reflect on the question: 'Do you participate in sport, or do you say NO?' (SGP Jongeren Veenendaal, 2004). These debates serve as a technology that informs youths about what is expected of them.

Another instrument that is used in ORC circles to minimize the influence of sport is to make it invisible. Sports news and topics do not play a significant part in the ORC national daily newspaper *RD*. The *RD* does not contain a separate sports supplement or section. Whilst other papers may be filled with articles on the European Football Championships, the Tour de France and the Olympic Games, the reader of the *RD* will search in vain for reports on sports events. The senior editor of RD is convinced that this is a good thing and should continue: 'As editor in chief I will not accept [and publish] reports on sport matches. Publicity has the wrong effect. You should not give any attention to it [sport], articles on sport only feed the emotions even more' (Dijkhuizen & Haveman, 2002, p. 5).

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   41
                  Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
                  and alternative Reformed sport discourses

Church members are also expected to ignore television. ORC youths often grow up without television at home. Whilst having a television is frowned upon, ORC uses the Internet to supply members with information. Numerous examples we found on the Internet make it clear that the Internet is a technology used as a source of information to teach ORC youths about the proper way to live. For example, ministers are active on Reformed Internet forums that hold discussions about sport, advising young people who want to know whether or not they are allowed to take part in sport and where the boundary lies concerning sinful behaviour in this area. This advice is also repeated in the ORC schools.

ORC schools are used as a technology to teach youths about the evils of competitive and elite sport. If sport is mentioned in general non-ORC authored curriculum materials, those parts of the materials are skipped. For example, at schools where standard teaching methods are used with regular textbooks, a girl explained in the RD: 'Our French teacher will skip a chapter if it's about sport, but for the rest we get French lessons, just like at any other school' (Dijkhuizen, 2011, p. 2).

Baars-Blom (2006) describes the secondary ORC school as one in which 'the sport culture and the corresponding blind glorification of sport are condemned'. ORC schools organize debates to make youths more aware of the dangers of sport and to distinguish unacceptable competitive sport from acceptable recreational activities.

Similar to the schools, the ORC church and its Reformed youth union also use brochures and magazines as a technology to discipline ORC youths. These brochures are meant to be used by ORC youths in catechism classes and in their preparation for profession of faith (becoming full-fledged church members). An article in an issue of Daniel, the magazine of the Reformed youth union, discusses the Olympic Games and states (by referring to Job 29: 12–16) that: 'We may ask ourselves whether the motto of the Olympic Games is a Christian one. Is it not striking that the Bible focuses much attention on the weak, the crippled, the needy and the oppressed?' (Jeugdbond Gereformeerde Gemeenten, 2009, pp. 6-13).

Together these technologies create and strengthen the Bible-belt panopticon that enables youths to resist the societal discourse that presents sports involvement as an important societal activity. This Bible-belt panopticon shapes the foundation of the Reformed way of thinking and leaves its mark on contemporary Reformed youths who consistently defended their ways of seeing sport to the researchers as the forgoing results suggest.

Breaches: permission to participate in sport?

Similar to any other panopticon, the Bible-belt panopticon is not total but can be disrupted. Although it may seem as if the Bible-belt panopticon has normalized ORC youths 'successfully' through its technologies in accordance with its rationalities about the evils of competitive and elite sport, disruptions do occur. Governmentality is not all encompassing (Raby, 2005). We found examples of ambiguous practices and resistance in what Brockling et al. (2011, p. 17) call 'breaches and dislocations'. In the following, we show how the Bible-belt panopticon contains ambiguities that enable breaches to occur. These breaches emerge

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   42
Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
and alternative Reformed sport discourses

from issues about health, in the required PE lessons at Dutch schools, from the use of modern media and in recreational sport that also includes Dutch ice-skating culture.

One such moment of ambiguity or resistance to ORC governmentality pertains to physical health. During the interviews, we repeatedly heard ORC youths saying that 'God allows you to be healthily active'. They defended having to be physically active by drawing on global discourses about positive values of sport and physical exercise, such as: 'developing stamina', 'being physically fit so that you are better protected against disease' and when necessary, 'for losing weight if you're overweight and your health is suffering from your extra kilos so that you develop, for example type II diabetes'. One girl summarized it as follows (referring to 1 Cor. 6:19 and Eph. 5:29): 'It is written in the Bible that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and that you must therefore take good care of it.'

These youths understand that the Bible requires them to 'look after their bodies'. Therefore, ORC youths used a health perspective as a reason to be physically active in a responsible manner. If health motives such as avoidance of being overweight make it necessary to become more physically active, then unorganized forms of sport are seen as alternative options instead of being a member of a sports club. Here too, normalization and surveillance contribute to rationalities about the right way of taking care of one's personal health and body. At school, however, youths have to be physically active in PE.

Not only health issues can produce breaches in ORC governmentality but also PE as part of the obligatory national curriculum. PE is a required subject in the Dutch curriculum and offered at all the schools that we visited. ORC schools have to comply with nationally defined goals and levels, although they are exempt from curriculum sections that require movement to music because the texts of the songs often refer to objectionable ideas such as sexual desires. PE is seen as a subject that teaches youths skills that they can use in recreation, although they should not be used for competition. By making the distinction between competitive and recreational sport, the ORC shapes the 'secular' curriculum of PE in a direction that is congruent with the basics tenets of its faith and can justify its content.

In addition to PE being a place where ORC youths learn sports skills, the presence of a Panna cage on a school playground and the intensively used table tennis tables in the main hall also suggest that sports involvement in certain forms is accepted[5]. Yet, even such leisure pursuits and physical education classes are not without their detractors. A PE teacher revealed in the *RD* that some parents and pupils try to use religious objections to obtain an exemption from attending the PE lessons 'because parents are against PE in principle' (Dijkhuizen, 2002a, p. 15). PE teachers try to fight this, by citing not only health reasons, but also pedagogical arguments to require youth to take part in the lessons:

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5   A Panna cage is a small soccer court, designed to play one against one. The first to score five goals or shoot between the opponent legs is the winner of the match.

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   43
Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
and alternative Reformed sport discourses

In addition to health, there are also numerous other educational goals, such as learning discipline, [and developing] willpower, muscle power, self-confidence, collaboration, dependence. And even more: a Christian has to learn to control the body and to teach it compliance. Physical activity can play an important role in this. (Dijkhuizen, 2002b, p. 25)

An ambiguity in the ORC clothing regulations that require women to wear skirts therefore becomes visible in PE. The interviews revealed that families differ in giving permission for girls to wear shorts for physical activity. A girl describes what she may and may not wear: 'My parents allow me to wear shorts during physical education lessons, but not in the football cage for example. That's [a girl in shorts in a Panna cage] not a very charming sight.'

In general, however, PE classes offer an example of a breach that enables ORC girls to deviate from prevailing clothing practices in the Bible-belt and wear 'breeches'.

Modern social media devices were occasionally used as tools of resistance, especially those that enabled youths to watch broadcasted sports matches, whilst not having a television at home. Interestingly, instead of soccer, the ORC has its own popular sport of tractor pulling. This sport is popular in ORC circles possibly due to the ORC community's strong agricultural traditions. Modern communication devices can therefore ensure access to watch competitive sport. A preference for motor sports such as tractor pulling may be part of the alternative and resistance strategies used by some young ORC to the Bible-belt panopticon that discourages involvement in competitive sport. By not labelling tractor pulling as a 'real' sport, the ORC allows those watching it to meet their guidelines about sport. Discussions about what is or is not a 'real' sport and distinctions between competitive and recreational sports enable such breaches to occur.

The categorization of sport into three types provides a possible breach in the ORC governmentality. The health argument, the Dutch tradition of canal skating and the rationality that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit mean that some sporting forms are permitted. The ORC has divided sport into the three types of sport we described earlier in this paper (see introduction): recreational, competitive and elite sport. Recreational sport is not seen as a problem, but competitive and elite sports form a dilemma. ORC youths then legitimize engaging in sports activities and prefer using their own, Orthodox Reformed framework. Several boys and girls used the same expression to describe the ethical choices they make with regard to sport by 'engaging responsibly in sports activities'. According to the respondents, the competitive nature of sport and the swearing that can accompany it are incongruent with the discursive regime of Bible-belt culture. A girl said (referring to 1 Cor. 6:12): 'A game of football as such is not a problem, but it [the club] is often a place where people swear – I have difficulties with that.'

In other words, playing a match for pleasure purposes does not constitute a real problem for them and does not prevent them from engaging in sport.

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   44
Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
and alternative Reformed sport discourses

Conclusion

The findings of this exploratory study illustrate how Orthodox Reformed youths give meaning to sport by drawing on several conflicting cultural, religious and social discourses regarding sport, the body and health that circulate via various technologies and are rooted in historical traditions. Consequently, these youths both reproduce and resist dominant sport discourses and form their ideas about sport in relation to their position in Dutch society as religious minorities. In the introduction to this paper, we described the secular governmental discourse that sees sport as a site for development of healthy bodies. This government discourse is woven into the Bible-belt panopticon with the use of rationalities or Bible texts that are assumed to be congruent with the need to take care of the body. In this case, ORC can ignore negative texts about the body. The ORC as understood by these youths and as described in various documents does not relate this fitness discourse to appearance or competitive sport as they claim secular society does. However, ORC youths relate it to wellness and health. In this way, the various discourses of the government can be woven into the assemblage of discourses of the ORC instead of being oppositional.

A breach that is most difficult to weave into the fabric of the Bible-belt panopticon is ironically tied to 'breeches', that is clothing, especially that of females. Ice-skating in the Netherlands often occurs outside on frozen canals and the canals can be used to skate from village to village. Both PE and recreational sports such as ice-skating are easiest and safest to do in shorts or trousers whilst as we showed previously, rationalities, technologies, history and culture together enforce the discourse that women and men must differentiate themselves by the clothes they wear. The findings suggest there is a tacit understanding that the wearing of trousers (breeches) by girls and women is acceptable in PE and for such activities as ice-skating. These breeches seem to receive relatively little if any formal attention and are not addressed in formal rationalities. Here again, similar to the curtailment of involvement in competitive sport, surveillance and normalization occur in these communities and possibly ensure that this wearing of trousers is confined to circumscribed activities at certain places.

Although ORC communities may for a large part place themselves outside of the discourses of society, the results gave no indication that this was detrimental to their health or weakened their position as citizens in Dutch society, as seems to happen with girls who are marked as ethnic and religious minorities (Maliepaard & Alba, 2015). Youth in our study came from communities that reflected Christian roots that were considered to be an essential part of the development of white Dutch society. These roots may result in societal acceptance of practices that are deemed to be inappropriate for other religious minorities.

In this paper, we analysed the ways in which governmentality acts upon Orthodox Reformed youths and enables them to resist a dominant societal discourse about sport. We found that ORC youths are governed and disciplined by a non-sport panopticon. Our use of Dean's (2010) four dimensions of governmentality enabled us to show that

Chapter 2   'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport':   45
Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal
and alternative Reformed sport discourses

the governmentality that enforces this is embedded in rationalities, history, culture and technologies that are used in their communities, schools and churches. The use of this analytical framework allowed the complexity of governmentality to emerge. The results suggest that researchers who want to understand the power of a discourse and resistance to it need to explore how rationalities, technologies, history and culture reproduce the discourse and also enable breaches to occur. Moments of resistance can occur in places where ambiguities are allowed to emerge or become visible.

3

Young Dutch commercially sponsored kite surfers: free as a bird?

Froukje Smits
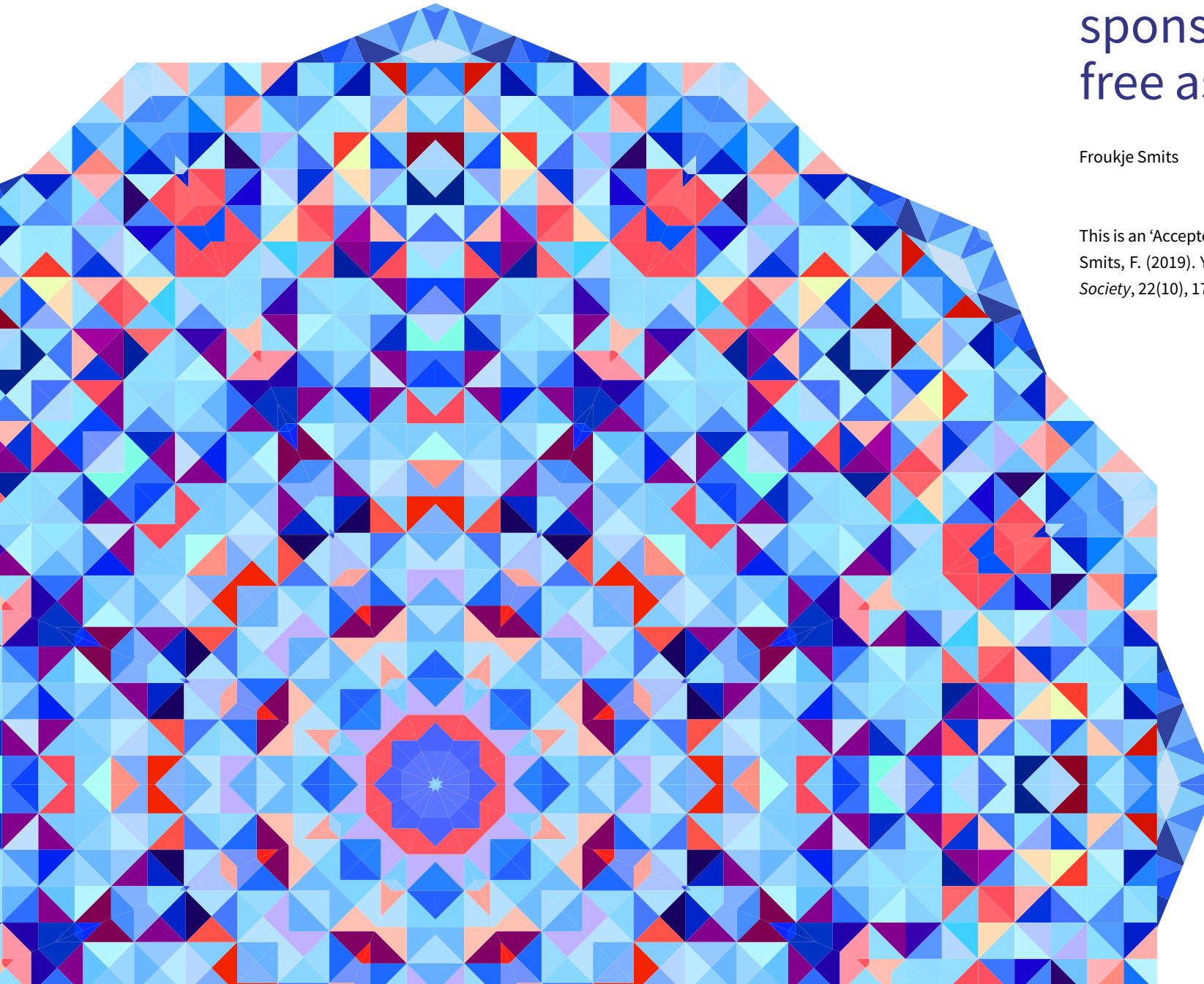
Abstract

While coaches and organizational structures play a pivotal role in the disciplining of young athletes in traditional mainstream organized sports, young kite surfers seem to be free to develop their own skills and create their own identity and subcultures. However, the feeling of freedom of young commercially sponsored kite surfers may be more complex than the popular discourses within action sport cultures suggest. I use a Foucauldian framework to explore how disciplinary power, embedded in time and space, produces athletic skill and identity in adolescent kite surfers and informs their practices of freedom. In this paper, I show how young kite surfers negotiate constraints of space and time that are shaped by relationships with their parents, their kite surfing peers and their commercial sponsors. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven commercially sponsored male kite surfers, between 11 and 17 years old. In so doing, I found that although the discourse of freedom associated with kite surfing acts on their experiences, these young athletes were also subjected to disciplinary power produced by temporal and spatial limitations and capabilities, their subculture, digital media and commercialization.

Introduction

Kite surfing is a wind powered surface water sport, using a kite and a board to move across the water and jump in the air. This action sport has increased in popularity from the beginning of the twenty-first century since the first commercialized kites and kite surfboards were manufactured. Kite surfing has been confirmed as an official event for the 2018 Youth Olympics in Buenos Aires, and discussions continue as to the possibility of it being included in future Olympic Games. It is the fastest growing water sport in the Netherlands, although the exact numbers of participants is missing because the sport is not formally organized. An important marker of action sports is the representation of freedom that is glorified in niche media, such as magazines, videos, social media and websites. Likewise, the image of freedom is perpetuated in stories of travel and the lifestyles of professional kite surfers. Although scholars have studied action sports (e.g. Thorpe, 2008; Tomlinson et al., 2005; Wheaton, 2010), there is little available scholarly research on kite surfing on the experiences and participation of young commercially sponsored athletes in action sport. Hence, this paper will examine the experiences of young Dutch commercially sponsored boys and how they navigate constraints and discourses of freedom.

Freedom in action sports

A number of scholars have studied action sports extensively (see e.g., Beal & Wilson, 2004; Booth, 2008; Rinehart & Sydor, 2003; Thorpe, 2011; Wheaton, 2013). In so doing, some have noted that the seemingly anti-competitive and anti-regulatory nature of these sports contributes to an image of freedom. Wheaton (2003) contends that in contrast to mainstream sports, action sports are characterized by the values of freedom, thrill seeking and a relative lack of regulation, competition and control although outstanding performance is respected. Brymer (2005) found that participants and those who wish to exploit the image of freedom associated with these sports have claimed this freedom as an essential element of action sports. The surfers studied by Booth (2008) defined feeling carefree as synonymous with freedom. Beal (1995) found that skateboarders attributed their sense of freedom to the absence of formal rules and regulation. Coates et al. (2010) suggest, however, that it is not so much the absence of rules and regulations, but the escape from everyday time and space that contributes to the feeling of freedom experienced by snowboarders. Freedom in action sports is therefore a contested term, influenced by time and space that enable and restrict these sporting practices.

   Action sports have historically been considered as self-directed, autonomous and non-institutionalized activities allowing participants to define themselves using time and space and create subcultural activities. This self-focused definition of freedom may contribute to the discourse of 'freedom' that prevails about action sports, including kite surfing. Scholars have however, shown that this freedom has discursive limits. For example, Thorpe (2008)

used a Foucauldian framework to illustrate how action sports are also activities where subcultural discourses operate to influence the practices and experiences of participants.

The inclusion of action sports into the Youth and Olympic Games can also contribute to the continued emergence of processes of institutionalization and commercialization. This means professional high-performance action sport athletes increasingly work with coaches and trainers to improve their performances (Ojala & Thorpe, 2015). Edwards and Corte (2010) found that processes of commercialization in BMX had evolved to a point that organizers of contests and sponsors placed increasing pressure on riders to perform newer and bigger tricks. Friendly competitions took on a more professionalized edge, in which younger highly talented BMX riders seized the opportunity to cooperate with sponsors. These younger riders pushed the sport to new heights of difficulty and physical risk. As a consequence, many other BMX riders began to drop out because they could or would not perform these difficult and dangerous skills. The process of commercialization of action sports is also embedded in the use of social media. In general, young people value and use social media extensively. Sponsors use this affinity with the social media to place pressure on athletes, especially those athletes they sponsor. For example, Snyder (2012) explained how professional street skateboarders need to engage in documentation and dissemination of skateboard tricks, as well in designing and distributing this in their subculture media. Professional street skateboarders share their best tricks on obstacles in the urban environment with other members of the subculture in prestigious subcultural journals. Sponsorship, money, and other profits flow in this process and production of social media content. Likewise, Dumont (2017) found that sponsorship contracts assign responsibility for producing and distributing new media content to action sport athletes while working as brand ambassador's. He concluded that professional climbers besides being continually present on social network sites also spend substantial time and effort in creating, producing and distributing new media. By sharing not just their most recent climbs, but also legendary stories to increase their number of followers on social media and exposure, they demonstrated their value for their sponsors. These examples show how processes of institutionalization and commercialization can influence the characteristics of action sport. Sponsors can make demands that inform the experiences of freedom of sponsored athletes. Although coaches are becoming more popular in action sports, a marker of action sports in a non-professional but high-performance context has long been the absence of coaches and the use of a discourse of freedom.

Young males in action sports
The increasing number of participants in action sports such as kite surfing shows that these sports and the related subcultures attract young people, especially young men and boys. Feelings of freedom are according to Beal (1995) integral to subcultural value systems within many action sport cultures. Young action sports participants often form a subculture where adults, including parents and coaches, are not present. These values and the absence

of coaches may be particularly attractive to adolescents. The absence of adults may, on the surface, suggest independence and autonomy and may also mean a reliance on peer involvement. For example, depending on the sport, participants may help each other learn new skateboarding tricks in the park, help to negotiate obstacles in parkour athletically and artistically, and may practice kite surfing skills with friends. The absence of (older) adults means therefore action sports are often depicted as sites where adolescents, especially males, are free to develop an autonomous and carefree identity and determine their level of competence individually and within the peer group. For example, Kidder (2013) found that the young men participating in his study used parkour as a structural resource for the construction and maintenance of gender identities. Specifically, they spatialized gender and appropriated their 'surroundings with performances of masculinity' (2). Young men therefore, can and do utilize features of action sports to present and project a particular identity that is associated with masculinity and an image of freedom (see also Atencio et al., 2009; Yochim, 2007).

Most of this research focuses on men older than 18. Yet adolescence is a time in which boys try to create their 'masculine' identities; physical appearance and athletic involvement often play an important role in such processes (Green et al., 2015). In addition, in contrast to the practices of freedom described in the previous paragraph, males younger than 18 may face different constraints in their use of time and space than do older boys due to their dependence on parents for both resources and transportation and compulsory school attendance. Such constraints may be different in action sports that require expensive equipment and specific locales for participation such as kite surfing than parkour where no equipment is required and the sport can take place in many settings.

Since relatively little attention has been paid to action sport athletes younger than 18 years old, and how elements of time and space may inform their perceptions of freedom, this empirical study examined dynamics such as being young(er), being sponsored, being school- age and being dependent on parents for transportation. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore how sponsored male adolescent kite surfers experience freedom in this self-directed and non-institutionalized action sport activity, the opportunities they have for self-direction, and the various ways in which they are subjected to control. I draw on Shogan's work (1999, 2002) and further extend her use of Foucauldian concepts of space, time and their relationship to skill and identity and explore how they restrict and enable freedom. The following research question based on Shogan's framework guided this project: how does disciplinary power, embedded in space and time, produce athletic skill and identity in adolescent kite surfers and inform their practices of freedom? In so doing, I show that although control of kite surfing is exercised through the discursive practices by others such as parents, sponsors and other surfers, the young kite surfers also negotiate the constraints of space and time shaped by these relationships. The results provide insights into ways constraints act as disciplinary power that inform identity and skill.

Theoretical framework

Insight into the workings of disciplinary technologies of action sports can add to understandings of how these sports produce disciplined athletic bodies without seemingly restricting the desire for discursive freedom and the identity development processes of adolescents (Beltrán-Carrillo et al., 2018). In this paper, I understand discourses as systems of meaningful practices that form the production and circulation of statements and perceptions of reality (Foucault, 1972). Foucault described how fundamental techniques of discipline using space and the organization of time can be used to create efficient well-disciplined or docile bodies (see also Markula & Pringle, 2006). Shogan used this Foucauldian conceptualization of disciplinary power to explore how sport and leisure practices are constituted by constraints that have both productive and enabling effects, as well as being restrictive in mainstream high performance sports (1999) and leisure activities (2002). In this paper, I draw on Shogan's work to explore the mechanisms of power to which male adolescents are subjected in their kite surfing practices. Shogan (1999) has argued that understanding power as constraints and seeing that these constraints can either enable or inhibit action, opens up ways for scholars to explore how technologies of sport produce athletic bodies that perform. These technologies are 'constraints on action' that by circumscribing space and time produce skilled athletes.

Shogan (2002) showed how space and time constraints on leisure sports participants enabled and restricted their skills and constructed identity. An accurate enactment of a skill such as a jump in kite surfing for example, requires a temporal sequencing. This sequencing means time acts as a constraint in the performance of the skill. Additionally, spatial and temporal constraints inform disciplined repetition of actions, such as ways of greeting each other, or carrying equipment and of expressions and contribute to the production of subcultural identities. Shogan's focus, however, was on mainstream and leisure sports such as basketball. These take place within a specific designated structure in a club that is bounded by time and space, while for kite surfing a club membership is not mandatory, although the participants are in their need for water and wind not only bounded by time and space but also are dependent on economic resources to enable them to learn the sport.

The freedom popularly associated with action sports seems to suggest that participation is not confined to a regulated space or time, and that participants experience few constraints in their skills development. Borden (2016), however, showed that skateboarders are both enabled and restricted by architectural use and design of public skateboarding spaces in London. He contended that certain skills can only be performed when skateboarders are situated in particular skateboarding places. For example, street-based skateboarding requires different spatial objects than what is offered in a skate park-like environment. Street-skateboarders are not permitted to practice everywhere, while stairways and other urban obstacles can enable performing new tricks. Therefore, skateboarders need to negotiate constraints of skill to perform their tricks and develop their skateboard style.

Similarly, youth who are sponsored commercially may be constrained in other ways, for example if their sponsors enable them to train in warmer places during winter months or if their sponsors require them to show up at an event while 'good' wind is blowing that would have allowed them to practice new tricks.

Methodology

Kitesurfing is popular among both girls and boys in the Netherlands, but only few kite surfing girls are sponsored by commercial companies. Thus, I focused on the experiences of sponsored boys. To understand their experiences of being sponsored, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven commercially sponsored boy's younger than eighteen. The primary criterion that led to their inclusion in the study was that they were sponsored by a commercial company and were under eighteen years old. This sponsorship usually included expensive kite surf equipment from companies who produce kites and kite surfboards, clothes (including sunglasses and flip flops), foods and beverages, fees for tournaments and, occasionally, trips to far-away kite surfing spots. The boys were all underage, which means they are of school age. The extent of the sponsorships varied across the participants with some gaining more resources and support from their sponsors than others.

As an experienced recreational kite surfer, I was able to locate potential participants through informal acquaintances in my kite surfing network and via popular Dutch internet kite surfing websites. I continued to recruit participants for the study until data saturation occurred. I invited them to participate and made clear that they could withdraw from the research at any time, and promised them anonymity and confidentiality. I interviewed eleven commercially sponsored kite surfers, 11 to 17 years old. The number of sponsors varied from one to five per boy. Both the youngest (11) and the oldest boy (17) had three sponsors each (see Table 1).

The interviews with the boys were conducted at a location based on their preference, their school schedules and the weather forecast. This meant that nine of the interviews were conducted in the interviewees' homes and two took place at the participants' schools. All of the parents gave permission for their sons to participate in the research; a few were present during interviews. Some parents made comments during the interviews. I include these comments if they contributed to the data about how the boys experience kite surfing, even though parents are not the focus of this study.

Table 3.1: Pseudonyms of respondents

Pseudonym	Age	Number of sponsors
Walt	11	3
Justin	12	3
Simon	13	2
Tyson	13	3
Jake	14	5
Ethan	16	1
James	16	5
Harvey	16	2
Jim	17	1
Virgil	17	2
Gary	17	3

The interviews covered a range of topics, including subcultural practices, risk, commitment, identity and the influence of commerce on kite surfing. Topics and prompts were guided by theory and themes from action sport literature, as well as by the author's own twelve years' experience as a recreational kite surfer. Lines of questioning included how they started kite surfing, how they felt and what they experienced when they are on the water and on shore, how they learned new tricks, how they dealt with (new) media attention, their relationship with their sponsors, participating in kite surf tournaments/trophies won, etc. The duration of the interviews ranged between 45 and 90 min. Each was fully transcribed soon after the interview took place.

The data were analyzed using a computer program for thematic coding (MAXQDA). To make sense of the transcripts, I used Boeije's (2010) approach. This meant I began the process of coding the interviews by reading through the documents and adding labels to thematic fragments that referred to the participants' perception of freedom in kite surfing. I attempted to identify and code how these boys used time and space to describe their experiences, skill development and identity construction. Codes that expressed the same idea were combined. Each combination was given a name that reflected its contents. These became the themes. These themes and their relationships in combination with insights from the literature were used to obtain answers to the research question.

Space and time in kite surfing

In the following sections, I illustrate how kite surfers experience and negotiate freedom and disciplinary power within their kite surfing activities. I explain how space and time, respectively, inform these adolescent kite surfers' experiences of freedom and how the context of kite surfing differs from mainstream sports with respect to these dynamics. The headings in this section reflect the main topics of the theoretical framework. In the first section, I describe how space can enable and restrict skill, in sections two, three and four I show how physical space, virtual space and relational space shape constructions of identity among young male kite surfers. In the fifth section, I present how time enables and restricts skill followed by the final section that describes how time shape constructions of identity.

Space and skill: 'As if you've really been launched'
In the interplay between the water, the kite and the wind, the boys had to consider the limits this space imposed on them and what they could do. There needs to be enough space for the surfer to gain speed, launch the kite, make a jump (possibly using a wave) and to safely land again within that same space. The wind enables and restricts space in various ways. If there is little or no wind at a kite surfing spot, it is impossible to kite surf. Therefore, kite surfers can only use space for their activity where and when there is wind. Furthermore, even when it is windy, the wind has to come from the right direction, that is, it has to blow towards the shore so that if an emergency occurs or when the wind suddenly drops, kite surfers can reach the shore. The force of the wind also plays a role. The harder the wind blows, the faster the boys can sail over the water or jump higher into the air:

> I get the biggest kick from a big kite loop, then you turn the kite right in the power zone so you get a real forward horizontal thrust in front of you. It's as if you've really been launched, that gives you a real adrenaline rush. (Gary, 17)

The experience of freedom was evidenced by a display of the 'huge kick' (Jake, 14) or pleasure they get out of jumping. Jumping can be as high as possible into the air, or over something like a wave or a four-metre-wide breakwater, or over another windsurfer. The boys said that they find these tricks exciting and scary, but that there is something in themselves that compels them to do it. When their jumping is successful, and their level of kite surfing rises, they focus the thrill of doing tricks in the air. These thrills feel 'really free' *(Simon, 13),* and appear to provide what they define as freedom. This style of jumping is known as freestyling, when the boundaries of the space available for performing a trick are explored and challenged.

During the interplay with enabling constraints of the power of the wind, the water and their kite, they experience a sense of 'freedom' and feel the power of their kite in such a way

that they can think of nothing else. All their attention is focused entirely on kite surfing, so that they are completely absorbed in the activity:

> Indescribable, you can't compare it to any other feeling at all. It's such a feeling of freedom and power, standing on the water like that; that's incredible. You're simply sailing as hard as you can and you see everything gliding off of you and the water splashing off of you. If you then steer your kite backwards, you fly into the air at top speed. That's so fantastic, an unimaginable feeling of freedom! (Jim, 17)

This quote is an example of how the boys create optimal possibilities for movement within the available space; they understand how equipment constrains (limits and enables) their use of space and consequently influences the skills they try to execute and develop. The space they use when they are out on the water is represented as 'a totally different world' *(Harvey, 16)*, apart from everyday life and free from regulation.

Coaches organize training spaces in mainstream sports to create optimal possibilities for movement; they understand how lines, target dimensions and equipment constrain (limit and enable) the use of space, and how skills are consequently enabled and limited by these constraints. Kite surfing is practiced on open water that is, in principal, accessible space for everyone; there are no specific locations for practice sessions. Although none of the boys used a prescribed regimen of specific exercises or routines prescribed by a coach in a predetermined area, they felt observed and judged by their peers, parents and sponsors. They are recognized as elite surfers by fellow kiters and by sponsors. This means that these kite surfers have become well known among fellow kiters:

> It's a bit strange, I admit; everyone recognises you, of course, that's what's weird about it. You're walking on the beach and suddenly you hear someone say: 'hey, that's J'. It feels strange that people recognise me. And then usually you get a compliment as well, which motivates me enormously. Something like: 'Oh well done!' Then I try to carry on and work a little bit harder. (Justin, 12)

In situations like this, the space in which they perform their skills inform their experiences. Encouragements can enable young athletes to push boundaries further, but can also restrict their feeling of freedom if they feel too much pressure to perform well, thereby limiting their skill.

When the boys are not on the water, they are often 'surfing' on the internet, to be stimulated to learn new skills and jumps is by viewing films and pictures. Their use of space is therefore not confined to surfing on the water, but also includes the internet. Kite surfing forums on websites like 'hanglos.nl' and 'kithigh.nl' are used to place messages, films and photos, respond to other kite surfers, express support after accidents and to share experiences gained in the surfing sessions. They also exchange information about good

kiting holiday destinations and are used as a platform to protest again the possible closure of kite surfing spots, often related to nature preservation:

> If they want to close a spot because of all that nature stuff, you do your best to find out everything there is to know about it. If someone posts about a problem due to a possible closure, I'll help by thinking things through with them and I'll leave a response. (Ethan, 16)

They make their voices heard via the internet to try to keep the kite surfing spots or spaces open. The examples above have shown how space plays a role in disciplining these athletes in their skill development and both enable and restrict their 'freedom'. Space also shapes their identity development.

Physical space: 'If I'd been on my own I'd never have done it'

Various action sport scholars have discussed the importance of physical performances and risk-taking by participants to gain cultural status, respect or capital (e.g., Kidder, 2013; Thorpe, 2010). The more dangerous the circumstances in kite surfing, the better the performance and the greater the appreciation by other kite surfers. 'Sick tricks' in both the 'Old school' style, whereby one jump is executed at a great height, and the 'New school' style, whereby several technical tricks are rapidly executed one after the other in the air, get high scores in competitions. To master the skills of difficult tricks, the boys need to practice a lot, but it often goes wrong. If they do not steer their kite well or move their body in the right way during a jump, they can fall down hard on the water. This means they have to endure pain while trying risky manoeuvres. These practices reflect Kidder's (2013) argument that action sports participants (re)produce masculine sporting identities by participating in a male dominated sport in which they have to endure pain and embrace risk to practice and excel at the chosen skills. The boys also get to the point where they perform risky manoeuvres, by 'pushing' themselves and the sport to a higher level:

> Sometimes the wind is a little too strong and then I think: 'should I go for the trick or not?' And then along comes that guy, a friend of mine, and we'd talked about it before: we're going to try this or that trick, and he just does it, going for it 100%. So, I'm thinking… I can't let that happen, so I try it too. If I'd been on my own I'd never have done it. Then you'd think about it and … but if you see him do it: I must go too. (Gary, 17)

By observing other kite surfers doing their tricks on the water and by 'pushing' each other to extend their own boundaries, the boys are encouraged to do their very best during a kite session. Although they do their own thing, they know that they are being observed and behave accordingly. The subcultural status of each kite surfer is therefore dependent on the level, the skills, the style of sailing and the taking of risks. This status reflects their masculine

presentations of their self to others. This example illustrates how their feelings of 'freedom' are limited by the social constraints of (kite surf) peers (Kidder, 2013).

By attaching meanings and values to the execution of specific skills and by acknowledging, accepting, and influencing each other, kite surfers create distinctions between core and lower level kite surfers: 'You can tell who the real kiters are because they're good kiters, can perform neat tricks, are very easy to get on with and always ready to lend a helping hand' *(Walt, 11)*. Although the boys did not say anything about girls/women who kite surf, they do create a hierarchy between lower level kite surfers and the core (sponsored) kite surfers. This hierarchy is also used to perform a privileged form of masculinity. Thorpe (2010) examined the practices of youthful hyper masculinity celebrated in snowboarding, and found similar dominant masculine practices and symbols and values. In distinguishing among four different masculinities, she argued that typically young, white, middle and upper-class males, have a leading position in the heart of the culture and thus have the most power to define the current snowboarding styles and tastes. Similarly, the data in this study suggest these boys have a great deal of power due their visibility to define desirable skills and tricks, while girls and women seem to be invisible. The discourse of being a good kite surfer and the boys' social connection with peers enabled by an escape from the restrictions of everyday life is also reflected in the participants' accounts of the notion of 'freedom'.

The boys think the sponsors expect a certain professional attitude from them, as well as to be physically and digitally present in space. For example, sponsors expect the boys to take part in contests, one boy told: 'They [sponsor] want me to ride as much as possible contests, so I'm able to show I ride with X [brand]' *(Justin, 12)*. Besides, sponsors ask the boys to keep their website up to date: 'One of my tasks is to produce video's, blog's and pictures for my website to show my newest tricks, share my stories and rankings in competitions' *(Jake, 14)*.

Additionally, sponsors expect the boys to actively help organize and attend test days: 'During test days at my home spot I'm the one who positively explains potential costumers the good things about the kite and if they want, they can try the kite and board themselves' *(Simon, 13)*.

During test days, future customers of kite surfing materials can try out various kites and boards. Aside from requiring the presence of these kite surfers on often time-consuming test days, the boys think the sponsors want them to be conspicuous and present in the positive and professional sense at their 'home spot.' A boy explains:

> I can talk tough on the beach like all the other kite surfers, but I'm better off doing things on the water they don't expect. And I don't mean running around like a madman shouting: 'Yes! Yes! Yes! I've landed it!', but just staying calm, not showing my emotions, otherwise it looks as though you've been training hard and that this was the first time you succeeded; if you don't say that, you come across as professional. (James, 16)

This boy's experience of 'freedom' is constituted by his commercial-sponsor who supports him in his efforts to progress as a talented kite surfer. Sponsorship contributes to the creation of identities of these adolescents. It enabled them to create and confirm their subcultural status. Sponsorship also can place a lot of pressure on these boys:

> Interviewer: 'Do you ever buy magazines for the posters?'
> T: 'Yes, but then that usually involves another brand and that's tricky, because I sail with brand [X] and then suddenly I've got another brand hanging on my wall. That looks ridiculous. [What] if your sponsor walks in and sees a poster of another brand on the wall of your room??!!…' (Tyson, 13)

This example shows how the private space (his room) of a thirteen-year-old boy was restricted by commercial forces that influence the creation of his identity as a kite surfer and pressures him to be loyal to one sponsor. The feeling of 'freedom' experienced when out on the water contrasts with the restrictions on how he decorates his room with kite surf posters.

Virtual space: ' It's not everything I do on the water'

As mentioned, the internet and specifically kite surfing forums, play a key role for these youths. Many of the respondents dream of a career in the kite surfing world. The sponsored boys pursue their dream partly by developing their personal websites. This involvement with social media by action sport participants has received attention in other literature as well. For example, Dumont (2017) looked at the role of new media in the everyday work and life of professional climbers and found that these action sport athletes use media platforms to show their athletic skills, and to become visible and attract followers by building reputations based on their production of exciting appealing stories about themselves (Dumont, 2018). Dutch 'kite surfing heroes' and those elsewhere all have their own personal websites. They serve as role models for other youths, who want to identify with them. Of the eleven boys taking part in this study, eight have their own personal website or kite surfing website. These young kite surfers attach importance to how they present themselves on the internet. Gary describes how he repeatedly executed a skill/trick until he was satisfied with its presentation:

> I had two full film tapes of my Egypt trip. All my tricks are on them and one trick was filmed eight times and I'd picked the best one. If you watch that Egypt film, it's not exactly everything I do on the water, in reality a lot more goes wrong. (Gary, 17)

In this manner, the internet plays a role in the social construction process through which kite surfers recognise and acknowledge themselves and others (see also MacKay & Dallaire, 2014; Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2014; Thorpe, 2017). Additionally, their use of social media shows how gendered sporting practices can be created in digital space. By engaging online in

practices that are associated with dominant forms of masculinity, these male action athletes can construct themselves as 'masculine' (Kidder, 2013).

According to Gary cited above, the apparent lack of regulation and constraints at far-away kite surfing spots that supposedly add to a kite surfer's sense of 'freedom', were not quite what they seemed to be. Although they are free from coaches who determine and enforce the best training methods, the kite surfers are exposed to methods of executing skill through films that appear on the internet. Moreover, Gary's quote reveals that great care is taken in selecting the images made available to the public in digital space, thereby influencing the discourse about what is 'good' and what is not. This reliance on the internet suggests that the images and forums found on the internet both enable and restrict these boys.

Relational space: 'We also push him a bit'

There is a four-way relationship between the sponsored boys, their sponsors, their peers/friends and parents: 'Because he's sponsored, we also push him a bit to take part in events, because that way we also get a nice discount. Otherwise it's impossible, the [kite surfing] equipment is just terribly expensive' *(mother of Justin, 12)*. It is not only the boys that display loyalty towards their sponsors, but also their parents. One of the sponsored boys *(Jake, 14)* told us, with his mother present, that when he was 11 he won a contest run by a clothing brand. His parents initially had doubts, but eventually he was allowed to accept the prize: a kite surfing trip to Egypt, unaccompanied by his parents. This trip to Egypt enabled Justin to spend more time to (re)create his identity through disciplined repetition within particular spatial and temporal constraints and to improve his skills as well. It was his first time abroad and he did not speak any English. The surf clothing brand provided the supervision. Tyson (13) told me:

> In Egypt I had a photo shoot, that was really terrifying. I had to jump 10 centimetres in front of the camerawoman because she had one of those broadband cameras, and that was really scary… but it was that woman's assignment. I was thinking:' I'll end up jumping on top of her, and that's not nice.'
> Interviewer: 'And then?'
> He: 'I told my mother. She said: 'I understand, but you'll just have to try it'.

Some sponsors ask the parents to take photos that can be used as promotional material for the digital space on the internet; parents tend to comply. The ability of these boys to experience 'freedom' can be circumscribed in such situations. One mother told me that she thought it was a 'bit difficult' to make sure that the sponsored equipment was prominently positioned in the picture. Some parents are willing to go far to make sure the sponsors remain satisfied. They are part of the assessment process in judging whether a jump is good enough for a photo for the sponsors. This makes parents a part of the technologies that enable constraints of space on the internet and that discipline these youths into a subcultural

identity associated with young (male) kite surfing. These results show how parents are involved in various ways in the careers of their commercially sponsored kite surfing sons. This finding seems to mirror intense parental involvement in more traditional youth sports (see for example Clarke et al., 2016; Jeffery-Tosoni et al., 2015). This involvement in the current study might be a result of increasing professionalization of kite surfing. Space is not the only dimension that enables and restricts the freedom these boys experience, however.

Time and skill: 'When I go up in the air, I must have control'

Shogan (1999, 2002) shows how temporal constraints are part of leisure sports. Practices occur at certain times and plans are made to fill that time. This includes season plans and timetables for conditioning, psychological preparation, skill development teamwork and strategy. In contrast, kite surfing has no separate fixed space reserved for training for these sponsored boys, neither is there a fixed time of day on which they train. As mentioned before, the possibilities to train are determined by the wind. Time for kite surfing is also determined by the season, however. There is more wind in the autumn and less during summer in the Netherlands. Kite surfing is impossible without wind; but when the wind does blow, surfers often have other obligations such as school. Temperature and daylight are also contextual factors of nature that can limit kite surfing activities. Nevertheless, the kite surfers try to kite surf whenever possible, so that other activities such as school occasionally suffer. The boys that were interviewed either took part in, or had taken part in, other sports organized by a sport club. They described how they experience kite surfing as being 'more fun' than organized sports, because they get a bigger kick and an adrenaline rush when kite surfing, as well as experiencing a feeling of 'freedom' that they did not experience as members of a sport club. Additionally, they enjoy being able to 'do their own thing' in kite surfing. The fact that nobody obliges them to train at specific times adds to their feeling of 'freedom' and offers a temporary respite from the responsibilities of life outside their kite surf practices. In this way, time serves as an enabler of their skill development; but it also restricts them.

All the interviewed boys were still of compulsory school age. They sometimes view school as a restraint that keeps them from kite surfing and from engaging in the kite surfing culture on windy days. On the other hand, they brought kite surfing into the school by situating their homework and internships in this sport. In this way, school enables and restricts their experience of kite surfing. James informed me that he had deliberately chosen a lower level in high school so that he would have more time for kite surfing. Some boys admitted being truant on occasions:

> Of course I skip school occasionally. I'll then often post a message on Kitehigh.nl or something similar, asking if anyone else is coming. And I'll send out a few WhatsApp's, so there'll always be someone else to go along with. I sometimes insist, persuading them to miss a day at school, you know … (Virgil, 17)

This statement about their use of time underlines the high level of dedication the boys have for their sport and reveals the negotiations around temporal constraints imposed by mandatory school activities. Their dedication to kite surfing compromises their education and future life choices.

Shogan (2002) explains that time is used correctly when the movement to perform the act required has become efficient. The boys become efficient by practicing until they are able to land on the water correctly after performing a difficult jump. That gives them a huge kick:

> When I go up in the air, I must have control, making sure my body doesn't twist, and looking where I want to land. [I ask myself] 'How does my kite respond and can I go higher and further?' And when I'm hanging there in the air, the thrill I feel is amazing! You're simply lifted up high, which is something that's so unnatural really. (Jim, 17)

For these boys, their kite surf activities offer them a treasured opportunity to be 'free'. They understand and use spatial constraints during kite surfing activities. They become disciplined in their movement and knowing how to use their body and kite surf equipment correctly. Becoming efficient in a trick does not happen automatically. These boys spend many hours practicing to embody the speed at which skills are to be performed. During practice, things often go wrong because the surfers lose control over their kite or their jump and then cannot land properly. Practising new tricks is a risky activity; parents regularly warn their sons to be careful.

Kite surfers enjoy the interaction with the elements of wind, water and air at a specific time. The pleasure that arises through the combination of risk and thrills means that these boys are prepared to sacrifice a lot for their sport. It costs them a lot of time on and around the water to practise and watch others until they get better and master the jumps, and then to improve them and extend the range of their skills.

Time and identity: 'I pour all my energy into it'

A kite session, being out on the water for a specific amount of time, instils a state of joy that is described by some of the boys as a form of meditation. For them, it is a way of relaxing, going a bit wild, and becoming detached from other daily tasks, by being able to do whatever they want on the water:

> When I'm standing on the water, I'm completely happy and relaxed. I pour all my energy into it, and then in the evening I'm just like the people who go to a psychiatrist, totally empty in their head. That's what I get with kiting, it clears my head completely and I feel good again. (James, 16)

This is an example how these young kite surfers value the (temporary) experience of escape from internal and external constraints, responsibilities and regulation. Kite surfing

epitomises the feeling of 'freedom' and mental health. James (16) also describes kite surfing as an inner drive and as a personal part of himself:

> It's a really strange feeling, yeah, I don't know how to describe it exactly… If I'm angry, it's not just a hobby or sport for me; it's become a part of myself. That might sound a bit vague, but when I can't go on the water, I get bags under my eyes, get in a really bad mood, become aggressive and a lot more besides.

In this way, kite surfing for these boys is part of a temporary and necessary escape from the mundaneness of 'normal life' and therefore associated with freedom.

Similar to the practice of skills of mainstream sports, practicing the skills associated with a kite surfer identity requires an investment of time, the use of a wide variety of preparations, the mastery of a set of techniques and the acquisition of specialized knowledge (Shogan, 2002). The boys' descriptions of kite surfing suggest they spend a lot of time practicing the skills they associate with kite surfers including gestures, movements and expressions. Virgil (17) describes how on the water:

> I'm a kite surfer with my own individual style. I mean powerful, always busy with lots of power and as stylishly as possible, being creative. You just must have your own unique style; you can't copy what the others are doing. I think it's this uniqueness that makes you really good.

And on shore: 'I like to look a bit like a surf dude: sandals, long hair, shorts, nice shirt and my long hair doesn't get in the way' *(Justin, 12)*. By attaching meaning to specific aspects, influencing each other and acknowledging and accepting each other, they also distinguish between kite surfers and non-kite surfers and reinforce the hierarchy between them. The boys create their own subcultural identity in which the way they behave and look is important. Beal (1996) also found that skateboarders used their subculture to separate themselves from mainstream sport culture and masculine behaviour via a display of symbolic (e.g. clothes and language) and physical (e.g. styles of participation and comprehensive individual expression) practices. For example, having longer hair is not a symbol of masculinity in mainstream youth sport, but is a typical hairstyle for (young) men in kite surf subculture.

The sponsored boys are dependent on the resources that the sponsors make available such as different sizes of kites and type of kite surfboards. This dependency, combined with the constant comparison and competition with other surfers, enables and restricts how these boys experience freedom in kite surfing. They are continually under pressure to perform well. When asked about the sacrifices these boys have to make to invest in the skills of a kite surfers' identity, James (16) told me:

I just want to be myself, have a life of freedom. If I want to leave, I need to feel I can do that, and that's what puts the pressure on. If I take part in a contest, I also get a weird feeling in my gut because of that pressure; it's as though I've got two bricks on my shoulders, causing them to droop. And I have that pressure inside me because I want to prove to myself that I'm worth the sponsoring, because if I mess up, I won't have a life anymore. Because if I don't become a pro, I'll just go to work like everyone else, do something in the harbour, and that'll be my life. All the pressure makes me want to perform well and that's why it goes wrong so often, that I fall and do things I shouldn't really be trying in the heat of the moment.

'Freedom' is constructed as an alternative way of life that is co-produced in kite surfing existence, by these commercially sponsored kite surfers. Apparently, trying to ensure they can live as a professional kite surfer in the future and to experience the 'freedom' they associate with that exerts a lot of pressure on these boys, and requires a large investment of time. Similar to the constraints that emerge from how these boys use space, time also informs their use of the internet and subsequently their subcultural identity.

Discussion and conclusion

In this study, I drew on Shogan's (1999, 2002) concept of time and space as constraining leisure sport activities and applied these concepts to kite surfing. By doing so, I suggest that these concepts can be expanded to analyze freedom in action sports. Although I have separated time and space in the results section, I bring them together in the discussion section.

The results show how young male kite surfers experience and negotiate their perception of freedom within their kite surfing activities and create subculture identities. Although the experiences of these boys and other action sports' findings seem similar, these experiences may vary by action sports. Atencio et al. (2009) used differences between street and ramp skateboarders to show how action sport subcultures have fragmented into multiple scenes, each with their own style of participation. Similarly, these adolescent kite surfers differentiate themselves from mainstream sport athletes. Their subcultural space enables them to create a male identity that they portray as being different from that associated with mainstream sports and with non-sponsored kite surfers.

The constraints that inform the freedom of these boys do not only differ from mainstream sport athletes, but also from adult and recreational action sport athletes. Despite being dependent on the wind and the weather, these boys are also dependent on their parents for transportation to the kite surfing spots. Additionally, since kite surfing is an expensive leisure activity, the boys were initially dependent on their parents who paid for their lessons and equipment. When they were sponsored, they became dependent on their commercial sponsors to provide them with the latest kite surfing materials and to pay for trips to far-

away locations. Yet, these constraints also enable these boys to participate in an activity that they proclaim to love.

The way these kite surfers talk about freedom is a discursive practice that is informed by descriptions of the sport on the internet and related forums, as well as during face-to-face peer interactions. I note that their frame of reference consists primarily of other males (boys and men). This association seems to have framed their construction of their experiences of enjoyment. Although they allegedly have more freedom in their choices regarding space and time than most youth in mainstream sports, the young kite surfers are disciplined in their action sport practices by spatial and temporal constraints. Despite the fact they are not allowed to kite surf everywhere, they have a huge ocean that enables them to practice their kite surfing skills and develop an identity associated with it. They are also restricted. The school schedules seem to provide a major limitation but also enable these adolescents to practice during vacation time and allowing them to work on projects related to kite surfing. Additionally, sponsors and parents restrict and facilitate their transportation and use of equipment. Further study is needed to investigate how sponsorship informs experiences of freedom in various action sports.

The results pertaining to freedom in this study, as well as the results of other studies involving action sports, suggest that constructions of freedom in these sports are not universal but contextual. Freedom in action sport is therefore a contested notion that is enabled and restricted by time and space peculiar to the sport. This contextuality subsequently informs different subcultural identities.

As the results indicate, the notion of almost absolute freedom that these kite surfers (want to) convey may reflect a wish or a way of labelling moments of enjoyment and pleasure. The boys in this study had drawn on discursive constructions of kite surfing as a pursuit of freedom, including a lifestyle free of many social constraints and travel to far away places. They actively reproduce this image for others to consume. This is similar to Ponting's (2009) use of the concept of hermeneutic circle of representation in the surfing tourism industry. Ponting (2009) showed how symbolic elements of surfing touristic space, supplied by media imagery of tourists reproduce exemplary illustrations of destinations through their own choices of images. The notion of 'freedom' may be therefore more complex than the popular discourse of freedom in action sports suggests. The discursive practice of freedom is so powerful for these boys that constraints of space and time are not seen as restrictive (see also Kay & Laberge, 2003). Their use of a discourse of freedom may well form a basic part of the identity that these boys construct, cultivate and reproduce through their 'work' as sponsored athletes.

4

Leaders building relationships with young refugees during a sport project

Froukje Smits & Annelies Knoppers

Abstract

The focus of this paper is to examine how social work students (SWs) attempted to enact social work principles to engage in relationship building with young refugees during a Sport for Development project. The project, 'U on Board' was built on the assumption that pleasure and enjoyment in physical activity could contribute to the wellbeing of participants. The project took place at a refugee centre in a Dutch midsized city. We drew on Foucauldian notions of pastoral power and dressage to analyze how SWs applied social work principles to engage in relationship building with participating refugees. The Foucauldian based analysis revealed the SWs built positive relationships with the refugees by applying principles they had learned in their social work education through the disciplining power of dressage and of pastoral power.

Keywords: Leadership skills; relationship building; refugees; action sport; social work

Introduction

Recent reviews of Sport for Development (SfD) research and sport and forced migration studies found that most of the scholarly attention has focused on the objectives and content of such programs with few if any, focusing specifically on the congruency between the objectives of the program and the skill set of those who offer or lead the sport activities[6] (Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Spaaij et al., 2019). Based on their review and critique of core pedagogical strategies used in SfD initiatives, Spaaij and Jeanes (2013) suggested that establishing and maintaining positive relationships between those offering a project (leaders) and those young people for whom the project is earmarked should be a primary goal of such programs. Scholarly explorations of skills that may enable leaders/workers to engage in relationship building in SfD projects have however, received relatively little scholarly attention[7].

Although those who work in SfD projects may possess the physical expertise to transmit sport skills to participants, leaders may overlook the needs of participants in SfD projects or focus on objectives such as working towards sport club membership and developing competitive sport skills (e.g., Waardenburg et al., 2019). Sport professionals are educated to teach sport skills but may not have the necessary expertise in working with youth such as young refugees. In contrast, relationship building is a core objective of social work and its use is assumed to contribute to the wellbeing and safeguarding of youth positioned as precarious (Newbigging & Thomas, 2011; Tudor, 2020). Similar to arguments made by Welty Peachey and Burton (2017), Newbigging and Thomas (2011) argue that a primary component of relationship building in social work is a clear commitment to a focus on practices that contribute to the wellbeing of children and young people rather than the demands of organizations such as those that organize immigration and sport activities. Similarly, Carroll and Minkler (2000), who discussed the link between such objectives and social work, have suggested that social workers are ideally positioned to enact an approach of care in their work because social work relies on relationship building to enable individual and collective social change. Therefore, in contrast to sport professionals who may often be involved as leaders in SfD projects (e.g., Soares Moura, 2020; Thorpe & Chawansky, 2016; Zipp et al., 2019), social workers may be well suited as professionals who work with young refugees in sport and physical activities during an SfD project. The curriculum of the social work program from which students were drawn to be leaders for this project is built in part on learning and developing skills in relationship building. Consequently, social work students (SWs) were invited to participate in an SfD project for refugees that we describe below.

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6   For the purpose of this paper, we place all sport projects targeting immigrants, refugees, socially disadvantaged and vulnerable youth under the umbrella of the term SfD.

7   In this paper, we refer to those working with participants in these programs as leaders.]

Scholarship focusing on SfD projects, including those for refugees, reveals that the focus of many such projects has often been on the learning of sport skills, on using sport to develop life skills, on empowerment, on guiding youth towards sport club membership, on enhancing the integration of refugees into the country where the refugees hope to live/settle and on contributing to the wellbeing of participants (Kaya et al., 2022; Kidd, 2011; Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Spaaij & Jeanes, 2013; Spaaij et al., 2019; Válková, 2021; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2017; Welty Peachey et al., 2020; Zipp et al., 2019). Kaya et al. (2022) found however, that immigrant and young refugees did not have long term goals for participation in such projects but participated in sport because they viewed it as a fun activity that gave them an opportunity to interact with others in an enjoyable way. SfD programs targeting refugees may often have the same goals as cited above, but also may have been created to offer a respite from boredom, to foster a sense of belonging and to contribute to social inclusion and to wellbeing (Doidge et al., 2020; Kaya et al., 2022; Michelini, 2021; Olliff, 2008; Stone, 2018; Wells & Welty Peachey, 2016). Spaaij et al. (2019) have argued that the emotional aspects of sport participation are a key area requiring more research in SfD and forced migration studies. Jetzke and Mutz (2020) found that noncompetitive forms of physical activity that evoked fun and enjoyment did more for individual wellbeing than competitive sport participation. Similarly, Andrews et al. (2014) have argued that experiences of pleasure, fun, and enjoyment in physical activity act as nutrients, contribute to the wellbeing of participants. The results of an urban SfD program targeting disadvantaged girls revealed how a longboarding project evoked fun and enjoyment in physical activity that was assumed to inform the wellbeing of participants (Smits & Knoppers, 2020). Ley and Barrio (2019) contended that SfD projects for groups such as refugees need to be noncompetitive and pleasurable if they are to contribute to the wellbeing of participants. We note that what constitutes wellbeing of refugees has been contested. For example, Kohl (2020) has noted that Western notions of what constitutes wellbeing may be based on the idea that refugees need activities to help them thrive and/or to forget their situation. These notions may ignore the ways the social environment of the refugee center or the host country shape the psychological wellbeing of refugees, perhaps more so than their experiences and context prior to coming to the center (Ryan et al., 2008). An in-depth exploration of what constitutes well-being for refugees in these centers is however, beyond the scope of this paper/study (see Fennig & Denov, 2019) although the need for leaders of SfD projects to be able to draw on relationship building skills remains.

The goal of the project, U on Board 'actively cultivated' (Chawansky & Carney, 2017, p. 93) fun and enjoyment as a way to alleviate the boredom of youth (as articulated by the administrators of the Refugee Reception Center). Fun and enjoyment in this study was based on the interpretations of SWs. They equated it with joy, laughter, eagerness of refugee youth to participate, the giving of high-fives and smiles.

Theoretical framework

We drew on Foucauldian notions of disciplinary power to understand how specific forms of knowledge about relationship building were produced through discursive practices used by the SWs. Our focus is primarily on how key social work concepts pertaining to relationship building exercise disciplining power on SWs (Garrity, 2010). Epistemologically SWs have been disciplined into specific discourses about what social work is, what social workers do and how they should enact this in practice. Mackay and Zufferey (2015) in a review study, summarized the purpose of social work as it is generally taught and described by social work educators and professionals, as consisting of working to improve the quality of wellbeing of clients. The review study suggested that much of the literature on social work education contends that core values embedded in the curriculum are those pertaining to 'social justice, human dignity and worth, respect for people, integrity and competence' (p. 645). Social work educators/faculty therefore, construct regimes of truth about social work that shape their epistemology about social work and 'provide the "know how" to develop the activities and skills needed to be recognized and accepted within the discourses of social work' (p. 645). We assume the students involved in the current study had been disciplined into this knowledge. A few scholars have used a Foucauldian framework to investigate how social workers engage with discourses about the 'know how' of social work. For example, Tangenberg and Kemp (2002) used a Foucauldian lens to explore how social workers have been disciplined into 'the care and control of bodies, particularly disenfranchised bodies, [this] lies at the heart of social work's disciplinary activities' (p. 9). Others (e.g. Bulley, 2017; Distinto, 2020) have explored how social workers have used pastoral power in their work with immigrants and refugees to purportedly ease their assimilation into the host country. We return to and expand on this work further on.

All those who work in SfD projects, including social workers, do not come to an SfD project with a blank slate. As professionals they have been and are disciplined by techniques of power into specific knowledges and ways of thinking that become regimes of truth associated with their curriculum. Foucault (1995) called this process, dressage. This means students are disciplined into 'the correct practice of duties and all the parts of discipline. So that they all may be like one another' (Foucault, 1995, p. 182). Specifically, dressage is the formation of a subject or individual through knowledge. We use the concept of dressage as a process of power through which SWs are disciplined to behave and modify *their* behavior to enact and embody 'social worker' in a professional manner. The goal of curricular dressage in any discipline is to ensure that individuals, in this case SWs, do what needs to be done when it needs to be done and in prescribed ways.

Although the ways dressage function in social work education has not been the focus of available research, it has been used in research exploring how education disciplines students in various ways. For example, Rutherford et al. (2015) explored how student teachers learned to enact being a teacher and concluded that the concept of dressage aptly described how

student teachers were subject to dressage by their supervisors who disciplined them into the knowledge and truths about enacting a 'teacher'. Dressage therefore, is a concept that describes the regulating and disciplining of the conduct of individuals to accomplish programmatic goals (Foucault, 1995). In the current study, the programmatic goals are those that reify the values, beliefs and practices associated with being a social worker that we described earlier. 'The aim [of dressage] is to render certain activities more efficient, and furthermore to make other activities possible at all, namely the ones that will only function properly when exercised within a disciplinary framework' (Harrer, 2005, p. 80). Dressage therefore is a technique of power that reinforces power/knowledge relations to normalize SWs into a certain 'ideal' way of being and to compel them to self-regulate their own conduct. This disciplinary power can produce a docile subject/SWs who is a knowledgeable professional (Rutherford et al., 2015). We employed Foucault's (1995) notion of dressage to explore how these SWs were disciplined by skills and knowledges learned during their course of study and how they used them to enact 'social worker'. The SWs embedded this curricular knowledge, especially that pertaining to relationship building, into their practice of working with young refugees. The SWs drew on this knowledge so that these youth could enjoy the physical activity. SWs are not only disciplined into theoretical concepts about relationship building through dressage however, but also are involved in practical experiences where they attempted to shape the behavior of these youth using pastoral power.

Tangenberg and Kemp (2002) have argued that 'that the care and control of bodies, particularly disenfranchised bodies, lies at the heart of social work's disciplinary activities' (p. 9). The practice of shaping behavior is a form of pastoral power often used in social work including work with immigrants and refugees. Bulley (2017), for example has described how pastoral power has been used to discipline immigrants into 'suitable' behavior with the goal of them becoming self-governing subjects who follow the 'rules' of the society into which they are situated. Similarly, Distinto (2020) revealed that pastoral power played a significant role in the relationship between workers and refugees at a refugee center. He concluded that pastoral power acted as a covert assimilationist strategy used by social workers to discipline refugees who had been constructed as marginalized subjects requiring integration support.

Pastoral power is a noncoercive technology not only used by social workers but also by teachers and coaches. It consists of shaping the conduct of those who are being taught or coached (Chouliaraki, 1996; McCuaig et al., 2013). Specifically, in the current study, pastoral power refers to SWs drawing on their knowledge about relationship building to lead and enable refugees to be involved and have fun and enjoy the activity. SWs become the equivalent of a shepherd of the refugees, leading them like a shepherd or pastor to their participation in longboarding and simultaneously shepherding them into what the SWs seemed to have defined as 'proper' or orderly Dutch behaviour. The shepherd's role is to take care of the flock; thus it is a 'power of care' as well as control. The relationship between the shepherds (SWs) and the flock (refugee youth) is hierarchical, however (Foucault, 2007). Professionals can use pastoral power to involve or attract refugees to activities, to support

them and to stimulate and encourage to facilitate their interpellation into the activity and ultimately their pleasure and physical wellbeing (Foucault, 2007; McCuaig et al., 2013). We therefore examined how SWs used pastoral techniques to build relationships with the refugees so that they could participate in and enjoy longboarding (Foucault, 2007).

In summary, we draw on two forms of governing subjects, specifically, dressage and pastoral power (Foucault, 1995, 2007) and explore how they were exerted by SWs as they engaged in relationship building with young refugees to produce fun and enjoyment. Dressage shapes or disciplines those who receive knowledge embedded in a curriculum. In the current study, the SWs were assumed to have been disciplined into techniques of relationship building in their course work. In contrast, pastoral power refers to shaping the behaviors of others. In this study the SWs used pastoral power to shape the behavior of participating youth. We recognize that distinguishing pastoral power from dressage is often not clear cut since they may overlap and coexist although the former focuses on the individual and the latter on the group/population. For example, SWs may have been disciplined (dressage) through their course of study into a regime of truth that requires them to create a positive and orderly pedagogical setting when working with youth and/or refugees. This disciplining may result in the use of forms of pastoral power by social workers to create and enforce certain rules for interactions among refugees and between refugees and social workers. We separate dressage and pastoral power in the analysis for heuristic purposes and bring them together in the discussion about how this use of discursive power contributed to participation. The research question that guided this study was: how did SWs use their social work knowledge to build relationships with young refugees to ensure they participated and enjoyed the longboarding activity?

Methods

The focus of the study was primarily on the SWs who provided the data. The study describes what the SWs saw, did, felt and heard and how they reflected on these experiences. Permission to conduct the U on Board project was given by the managing director of the RRC. The SWs that were involved in this project did so as participants in a course that focused on the complexities of realizing social justice in the Netherlands. In this 'social justice' course, students explore various issues that take place at the community level within society. The issues discussed are related to the theme of social justice, whereby students delve into various forms of both justice and injustice in the Netherlands. Themes covered in this course were: human rights, diversity, worldview/religion/philosophy, governance and policy, social class and power. The content of this course and conceptualizations of social justice were determined by the university's Department of Social Work and not the authors. The SWs who participated in U on Board, conducted research on a theme pertaining to the position of refugees in the Netherlands and subsequently, created informational videos for professionals in RRCs about the importance of sport participation and involvement

for those residing in refugee centres. The video included an explanation of the U on Board project. Between September 2019 and March 2020, 33 U on Board workshop sessions were conducted by the project leader assisted by 28 (18 female and 10 male) SWs (ages 18-26), who were in their second year of study. The SWs group consisted of 22 students without an immigrant background and six with an immigrant history coming from Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Serbia, Turkey and Somalia. Aside from their course work on social justice, the SWs received lessons and practices in longboarding by the first author. Three of the SWs showed familiarity with long- and skateboarding at the start of the project.

The SWs who chose to participate in the U on Board project were informed about its research dimension. They were asked for permission to use their observations and reflections as data for a paper with possible publication. They were told they would be cited anonymously and in ways so that the comments could not identify them and that they could withdraw their permission at any time during the course. All agreed to participate and no one withdrew their observations/reflections. In the first five weeks of the project, they were asked to use observations forms to report what they saw, their experiences and their interactions. At the end of the project, all 28 SWs turned in a cumulative observation log. Additionally, each student individually described their own reflections on working with refugees and on the development of their professional skills during the project.

Relevant text fragments from the SWs observations and reflections were sorted into topics and analysed through mutual comparison by the authors using NVivo software. This procedure continued with rearranging and revising new topics or subtopics after discussion until we had full agreement on the topics. The resulting topics were: 'collective and individual affective response', 'relationship building' and 'leading and teaching'.

Context

The refugees who find their way into the Netherlands often move through a series of Refugee Reception Centers (RRCs) while waiting for a decision on their application for asylum. These centers serve to segregate refugees from society. In addition to this segregation, refugees experience processes of displacement, alienation and vulnerability as their legal status restricts their mobility and postpones employment or education opportunities (Dempsey, 2022). RRCs can therefore, be seen as spaces of waiting and as an embodiment of asylum and immigration policies that have been used to control refugees and as such, produce an oppressive and boring environment that may affect young refugees wellbeing (Stepanova, 2013; Waardenburg et al., 2019). The local government called on Citizens of Center City in the Netherlands to organize activities including those in sport for and with refugees who had been placed in local RRCs. The SfD project 'U on Board' was a response to this call. U on Board is an ongoing project that aims to involve youth in physical activity and specifically, targets those defined as 'vulnerable' or 'disadvantaged' youth who do not participate in sports and physical activity. The current project focusing on refugees at a RRC was initiated by the first author who was assisted by SWs.

Young refugees who reside in a Dutch RRC stay until their request to remain in the country is honored after which they must wait for housing, or until their application is rejected after which they must leave the country. We did not assume anything about the (sport) history of the refugees participating in the project or that they needed to be taught sport skills. Instead, we based the purpose of the study on what has been established as a need by those in charge of the center: programs that counter boredom. All refugee programs in the Netherlands including U on Board, have to be approved by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers before they can be implemented. The administrator of a program, in this case the first author, also had to meet specific qualifications that made her responsible for the safety of participants and that required her to have a Certificate of 'Good' Behavior.

Spaaij et al. (2019) criticized the assumed homogeneity that may be inherent in use of the term 'refugees' since this category consists of individuals who have many different reasons for forced migration. The RRC where we conducted the study did this as well since it interchangeably labelled all those residing there as 'refugees' or 'asylum seekers'. Since our focus is on the skill set of the SWs, we do not differentiate among the residents of the RRC. We assumed and appreciated the diversity among the refugees. By diversity we mean gender, age, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, legal status, processes of displacement and resettlement, and personal history. The number and various languages spoken by the refugees often shaped the verbal ability of the SWs to communicate with the residents.

Longboarding was selected as an appropriate project best suited for the RRC based in part on the literature review that recommended noncompetitive physical activities for refugees. Longboarding is a relatively informal leisure activity that can be organised independently of an existing sports club or location and seems to appeal to youth globally although it does not have a global competitive tradition (Thorpe et al., 2018). This category of sport is associated with an emphasis on having fun rather than on competing and being active together outdoors (Smits, 2019; Smits & Knoppers, 2020; Thorpe, 2016). Longboarding has no clothing specifications; participants can wear head scarves. These characteristics makes it easier for girls to participate.

Recent scholarship in both the SfD and forced migration/refugee literature (e.g. Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Spaaij & Jeanes, 2013; Spaaij et al., 2019; Welty et al., 2017) has recommended that participants who are the targets of sport programs be consulted about their wishes for activities and that such programs are based on collaboration between participants and leaders. A drawback of the current project was its temporary nature and its time restrictions. The population of the RRC was transient. Refugees arrived and left. The number of residents at any given time was in a state of flux. There was little time to consult with refugees about the nature of desired activities. The introduction of a longboard project meant however, that the participants began with a similar level of skill, that of beginners, that it was a leisure rather than a competitive activity, that participants were unlikely to have had an affective history of past involvement and that an activity was chosen that did

not have the potential to restrict the participation of girls. The number of participants per session usually consisted of about 25 young refugees. The gender ratio was usually 50–50, but fluctuated session by session. Some young refugees were present for every session, others came to the RRC during the project and some left or moved away.

Results

Collective and individual affective response

Since the purpose of the U on Board project was to enable RRC youth to enjoy a physical activity, the SWs invested in building relationships with the young refugees to ensure this goal was reached. The resulting enjoyment or affective response was described in the reflections and observations of the SWs. Two SWs noted how the participants seemed to look forward to joining U on Board activities:

> The participants couldn't wait to longboard. While we were still in the bicycle cellar collecting and preparing the materials we would need, about 15 participants came to the materials shed to ask what time we would start. The project leader replied that we would need about 10 minutes. The children laughed and went upstairs, and later they followed us around. This really gave me a sense of joy, knowing that they were soon going to be doing what they were really looking forward to.

And:

> When a young person looks at you and asks when you will come again, you know you've had an impact on their day. This gave us the feeling that we are actually making a difference and that we are contributing something of value.

The shared experiences of fun and enjoyment of SWs and participants were visible in the laughter and smiles of the participants.

Various SWs described how others in the RRC community vicariously enjoyed the U on board project. U on Board is accessible and arranged in such a way that parents can be easily involved, thus providing opportunities for shared experiences. Generally, few people living in the RRC ventured outside in the RCC. SWs were not allowed to be inside the center. A student noted: 'Everyone who enters the site immediately goes indoors and there's no one to be seen outside'. A student described how the project transformed the physical area: 'The square [behind the RCC] felt very cold. It was very grey. It didn't evoke any emotions in me. It was a really boring place. But then the square became colorful once we began the activities with all the children'. Another student described this in greater detail:

> When U on Board takes place, the building seems to come alive. Curtains and windows slide open. People hang out of the window to encourage the participants. Sometimes candies are thrown out of the window. A family places a music system in front of the window to provide us with music. Parents also take photos and record videos with their mobile phones. The participants proudly wave to their parents to show how well they can already skate and longboard.

Sometimes parents were also present during the activities. As one student noted in this regard: 'The parents watched their children with pride. This gave me a warm feeling inside. Sometimes they also helped the children with longboarding'. These findings suggest the RRC was temporarily collectively transformed during the presence of U on Board. Those adults who ventured outside or were visibly involved seemed be part of the fun and enjoyment generated by the involvement of youth. Although the current study involved a leisure activity rather than organized sport, the enjoyment of individual participants in the U on Board project was amplified by collective involvement and enjoyment that also went beyond the young participants. This is similar to what occurs in youth sport outside RRCs. Stefansen et al. (2018) found that parents vicariously enjoyed their children's participation in sport. Possibly then the vicarious participation by parents in youth sporting and physical activities may in part, depend not so much on the nature of the activity but on the expressions of enjoyment and pleasure by their children.

Parents were not always in the picture, however, and many refugee children and youth participated on their own. Interactions led to mutual pleasure for refugees and SWs. A student reflected on this enjoyment:

> The whole project has been a meaningful situation for me, because the participants became so enthusiastic and genuinely happy with the activities we organized as U on Board. During the activities, we proved our relevance to the participants in the RRC, because this allowed them to forget reality for a while and just have fun together.

This SWs did not check this assumption of 'forgetting reality' during the project with the refugees and reflects the notion that 'activation' programs are 'good' for refugees because it enables them to temporarily forget their past and present challenges (Kohl, 2020; Ryan et al., 2008). Such unchecked assumptions may also reflect a noncritical dimension of a curriculum, that disciplines students into noncontextual regimes of truth about relationship building (Foucault, 1995; Rutherford et al., 2015).

Relationship building

The SWs gave specific examples of how they tried to create relationships with refugees to ensure the activities were pleasurable for the participants. For example, a student wrote:

There was a girl of around 15 years old who didn't want to participate at first. But I eventually got her to briefly stand on one of the longboards. She almost fell off and was instantly afraid of falling again. She gestured that she didn't want to and couldn't do it again. In the end, together with her friends, I was able to persuade her to participate. From then on, she returned to every session with her friends.

Fear of falling did play a role in how participants responded to invitations by the SWs to engage in longboarding. Some participants were at first afraid to fall and hurt themselves while longboarding. The SWs seemed to be aware of their professional position as being in a supportive role to deal with this and other fears. A student reflected on this:

In practice, it is essential to form trusting relationships with participants. You can only make a difference as a social worker once you know how to gain their trust. During the U on Board activities, I realized how important it is to first establish a sense of trust with a group, if you want to contribute and achieve certain goals.

This is an example of how the students enacted social work principles as dressage. SWs are and have been disciplined into a social work way of thinking that focuses on the need for social work act in ways that are perceived to contribute to social justice. Another student described how she gained (pastoral) trust by giving the participants compliments and positive attention and by using both verbal and non-verbal gestures:

From previous meetings I knew that the participant in question liked to dance. To break the ice, I started singing a melody. The participant responded by starting to dance. Because we were both dancing and singing together, I gained his trust and eventually we got on long-boards together. As a result, I discovered that the language barrier does not have to be a barrier during expressive social activities.

The examples above show that the SWs looked for ways to build relationships, primarily based on nonverbal communication and using pastoral power. The SWs constructed these relationships or temporal encounters as trusting relations. The definitions of trust are however, based solely on the interpretations of the SWs who seem to have based this conclusion on the actions of youth such as their willingness to attempt the activity while coping with a fear of falling and to hold the hand of a SWs.

Communicating

The SWs tried to approach relationship building from the perspective of the other/the refugee. They were disciplined by their social work education that emphasized the need for SWs to develop verbal and nonverbal communication skills in order to be 'present' as the following quotations suggest.

You don't always know what a participant has gone through in his or her country of origin or during their journey to the Netherlands. So, I thought it was very important to take that into account. The participants could be easily confronted with these issues, without even realizing it. For me, it was important to have fun, but also to adopt a professional attitude. Don't get too close, remain sensitive and cautious, wait and see what happens, because you can't predict how they might react. All the while, continue to offer support and help them with the longboard sessions so as to provide them with afternoons of fun.

When verbal communication did not work, the students tried non-verbal methods. A student recounted:

I quickly learned that the language barrier was a problem for me. It caused me to be reserved and wait for the participants to approach me. When I tried to put myself in the position of a female participant, I suddenly realized that it's entirely logical that she didn't approach me, and that I needed to approach her. I tried to imagine living in a foreign country, where you don't speak the language and where you don't know the culture. I myself would not easily interact with someone with whom I may not be able to communicate well. It's really important to be involved with the participants, especially by actively participating with them and communicating with gestures and sounds. That's when I understood why it is so important as a professional to reach out and initiate the interaction.

Similarly, a student explained how he tried to be very careful and sensitive: 'I learned to adopt an approach that suits them best; a careful, calm and gentle approach that made them feel at ease and confident enough to have fun'. Due to the language barrier the SWs were not able to verbally confirm these assumptions. They relied on what they saw: pleasure and enjoyment.

The SWs also took the time to reflect on their way of communicating: 'I observed how a child reacted. I regularly had to stop to think about the appropriate way to proceed, and why. This experience taught me how important it is to regularly reflect on your own actions'. Besides practicing being sensitive, the SWs also discovered they could build relationships based on age.

Peer to peer interaction

A student used what had been taught in course work to explain how peer interaction based on age similarity worked:

It turned out that a refugee and I shared a number of common interests and that we were roughly the same age. This resulted in what is referred to as 'peer to peer' or 'peer activation'. Peer activation stands for making contact with peers of the same age group, thus allowing us to gain access to hard-to-reach target groups.

Another student commented: 'During our conversations, I noticed that they [refugees] became increasingly motivated [to participate]. This is a form of positive 'peer activation'. This reference to peer-to-peer activation suggests these students had internalized what had been taught in social work courses. This internalization illustrates how dressage shaped the knowledge of the SWs.

The SWs used what they perceived to be peer activation, to pastorally 'motivate' the refugees. It is unclear if they checked this assumption with the refugees. While the SWs engaged in what they called peer bonding or peer activation to motivate youth, they also used a form of pastoral power to create a structure that could shape the conduct of the young refugees. Building a stable structure required the SWs to develop their improvisation skills. A student described the challenge of doing so:

> Sometimes it was difficult to provide structure because every day was different, due to weather conditions or the number of participants who showed up for the activities. Knowing how to improvise is an important skill, and I was able to improve in this regard during this practicum.

Constructing improvisation as an important skill mirrors how SWs have been disciplined by their course work. This dressage was visible in other constructs as well, for example in being present.

Being present

In their reflections on relationship building, the SWs often mentioned their use of the 'presence approach'. The SWs had been taught that it means being attentive and committed to the other, to learn to see what is at stake for the other. Two SWs explained that:

> The presence approach means, among other things, that you enter into a conversation without an agenda, that you pay attention to the other person's story and seek to connect with them and empathize with their position. I not only listened carefully but also watched their reactions and took note of the intonation in their voices to better understand their stories.

Another SWs explained:

> For me, the presence approach is simply about being there for someone, so that they feel welcome, seen and heard. I unconditionally accepted the children in the RRC, they were able to experience their own strength and they gained confidence in the activities.

An SWs explained the presence approach in greater detail:

> There are a number of criteria for how to apply the presence approach: 1) 'Attentive involvement' means showing interest in the things people are involved in'. 2) 'Connecting' means that you enter the world of the other and that you adapt to what the other says and does; 3) 'Trust and listening': Despite the language barrier, we always took time to listen to the children. We tried many different ways to comprehend and understand each other. We did this by speaking either Dutch or English, but also by using photos. But more than anything, we communicated using gestures. The participants also saw us as their guides when something went wrong. If certain children were being left out of an activity, they would come to us to voice their frustration. They could count on us at that moment.

Again, we note that these perceptions belong to the SWs who attributed their use of the presence approach to the outcomes or behaviors they saw. They were unable or did not think to confirm the veracity of these constructions of refugee confidence and trust (Sigona, 2014). This is an example of how the objectification of young refugees by SWs may be embedded in the content of dressage and pastoral power that is part of curricular learning.

This power of the curriculum also may create docile subjects (SWs) who do not learn to critically reflect on curricular content. The objectification of refugees was not total however, as the SWs did reflect on their own ways of building relationships with the refugees as we show in the following section.

Leading and teaching
Role modelling
The building of relationships resulted in the participants calling the SWs 'teachers', suggesting they were seen as role models. Role modeling is a disciplinary technology of pastoral power that provides a structure for the conduct of participants (McCuaig et al., 2013). This role modelling was embodied by the SWs. In this sense, SWs became shepherds or benign conductors, who led the flock (participants) (Ekholm & Dahlstedt, 2020). The following is an example of how this relationship building created a certain amount of trust between a role model (student) and a refugee:

> One participant came up to me, calling me 'teacher' and wanted to show how well she could longboard. Then she wanted to hold my hands while longboarding. She couldn't make any turns at first but when I explained (leaning forward on toes and back on heels) she tried this out, while still holding on to my hands. She kept making better turns and she began to get the hang of it. She really wanted to learn and listened to all the suggestions I made; [she became] a real enthusiastic and motivated longboard star!

Although the participants called the SWs 'teachers', suggesting the relationship between refugees and SWs was hierarchical, dialogues based on the presence approach at times created mutual respect between SWs as 'teacher-learners' and participants as 'learner-

teachers'. A student described what she learned from a 10-year-old girl about her life in her home country Afghanistan:

> 'There is always fire, not only today, but also tomorrow and the day after tomorrow'. She told me how fire dominated both her and her mother's life. She shared her fear and gave me a clear picture of life in a war zone.

Another student connected what she had learned from the project to principles that she had been taught:

> Working on this project has helped me realize why the right to leisure and play is so important and that it should be a priority. Children often discover the world through play, and they develop as a result. The importance of play is often not recognized. As social workers, we have to dedicate ourselves to this.

Another student echoed this principle: 'During this project we learned that every young person has the right to play and exercise, but it is difficult for youth at the RRC to gain access to this right. This creates social inequality'.

The ways in which these SWs draw on discourses that reflect what they have been taught such as the discourse of the right to play and the ideal role of social work professionals, shows how they have been disciplined into this professional knowledge and are aware that this RRC did not always engage in practices geared towards social justice. The SWs, however, did not question why this RRC was complicit in denying access to play. Dempsey (2022) has pointed to unavailability of objects that encourage play reflect Dutch policies governing RRCs. This disciplining is an example of Foucauldian (2007) dressage. They accepted what they saw without critical reflection on why this denial of right to play occurred.

In their reflections, SWs noted on how they themselves also changed as they drew on curricular knowledge to build relationships with the young refugees. Two SWs describe this change:

> All in all, I started to think more in terms of the children's potential. I would ask them what they could do themselves, and if there was a language barrier, I made use of gestures and images. As a result, I began to see where the children needed support to do certain things themselves, instead of thinking that I needed to do things for them. As a social worker, you thus contribute to self-reliance so that the children ultimately show initiative and take control of their situation.

And:

> In one of the first lessons we gave, I noticed that I still had to find out how best to explain the assignments, because they did not speak Dutch or English very well. I was faced with the dilemma of whether to keep speaking in Dutch, so that they would learn the language better, or to work with gestures to make the assignment clearer. Eventually, I figured out that sometimes if I explained something in gestures or with simple wording, I could achieve more clarity and then the participants would further explain it to each other. I eventually settled on working with short Dutch words and gestures.

Freire (1990), a defender of critical pedagogy for use in development projects or programs, argued that 'there is a particular pedagogy natural to social work where the social worker is in the forefront in the search for a clear understanding in coming to known certain subject matter' (p. 5). Central to his 'particular pedagogy' is the use of empowering educational methods that respect the individual as an equal. Above examples reveal how the SWs tried to understand the subject matter and to discern how to communicate and treat the participants as equals. When there were conflicts however, the SWs used pastoral care and control to take on a hierarchical position as we show below.

Dealing with conflict

The enthusiasm for using the mini-ramps often meant youth had to wait their turn, which sometimes produced irritation. SWs took the lead, like shepherds, and guided the participants in ways to handle this. A student described how they taught youth to line up to take turns using a ramp:

> Some participants pushed in front [of others]. I and a fellow student indicated to them that they should politely join the back of the line. Because we ended up using the phrase 'back of the line' quite often, the children also started using this phrase when they noticed a child pushing in front [and wanted to stop that].

In this way, the students engaged in a form of pastoral power to encourage the participants to adhere to the rules to make it a fun activity for everyone. The SWs had a guiding and facilitating role, in which they made pedagogical choices and implemented these as professionals.

A student gave another example what happened when the children had to wait their turn when the helmet color of their choice or their preferred type of board (skateboard, longboard or cruiser) was not available at that moment:

> I had to try to explain to a girl that there were no more cruisers and longboards and that we had to wait for the older participants to finish. She was sitting with her hands folded and an angry look on her face. I walked over to her and tried to explain with gestures that they would leave in five minutes and that then she could play. She nodded, but was still not

happy. I had to try to explain to her in a subtle way that she was going to get her chance, because I didn't want her to feel excluded. This is very challenging.

As shown in this paragraph, the use of this form of pastoral power relied on a hierarchy in which the young refugees were seen and treated at times as sheep while the shepherds guided them into what they constructed as proper behavior during the U on Board sessions. Chouliaraki (1996) has argued that the teaching of good habits by teachers serves as a disciplinary technology of pastoral power and may mean that teachers assume behaving 'properly' is more important than teaching or discussing the purpose for these behaviors. This neglect in teaching the purpose of 'orderliness' also occurred in the current study. The young refugees were assumed to need to be changed so they could function in Dutch society (if they are permitted to stay). They were not constructed as individuals able to regulate themselves into behaving according to Dutch norms; they were also not asked to submit ideas about ways to regulate access to the equipment. This finding is also reflected in Distinto's (2020) research on RRCs in the Netherlands. He found that social workers used forms of pastoral power in their attempt to discipline refugees into Dutch norms for behavior.

While these young refugees were regulated through the SWs use of pastoral power, the SWs themselves were regulated or disciplined by the curriculum through the power exerted by dressage. The principles that the SWs used to implement in their use of pastoral power seemed to be based on their compliance with what they had learned in their course work about relationship building and being a professional, more so than becoming champions for social justice. The employment of forms of pastoral power flowed from the dressage that SWs had experienced in their general course work. This possible connection between dressage and pastoral power has thus far received little attention in the available scholarly literature in education and in SfD and similar projects and needs further exploration to add to understandings of their complexity.

Discussion and conclusion

The results reveal how an analysis of power relations, that is, the employment of a Foucauldian framework, may add to understandings of how relationship building and producing enjoyment and fun are intertwined. Although pastoral power may often be construed as primarily being a dynamic of control, the results suggest it can simultaneously be used in a caring and positive manner as occurred in relationship building by SWs with young refugees (Tudor, 2020). The SWs participating in the current study had been disciplined through dressage into 'good' practices such as being present, being attentive and engaging in peer activation that were forms of pastoral care. Specifically, the data suggest young refugees at this RRC were the objects of pastoral care by SWs who had learned how to enact it through forms of social work dressage.

The results suggest the academic curriculum background of the SWs may have disciplined SWs into compliance with social work practices pertaining to relationship building as they worked with refugees during the project. The SWs complied with dominant discourses about doing social work and enacting 'social worker'. The SWs worked on building positive relationships with the refugees using forms of pastoral power to apply principles they had learned in their social work education by way of dressage. These results reflect the findings of Rutherford et al. (2015) who examined how teachers used dressage to enact 'teacher'. Similar to the SWs in our study, teachers drew on 'resources such as reflection, reflexivity in practice and professional norms that are presented by powerful institutional tools. Self-production is the result of interaction and participation, willing or unwilling...' (p. 328). This reflectivity by the SWs was however, primarily based on their own practices in relationship building with the refugees at the RRC. There was limited evidence of SWs engaging in reflexivity about social justice for refugees while this was the rubric under which they were involved in this project.

The reflections of the SWs showed relatively little emotional investment in or affective attachment to sport and physical activity. Their lack of a personal history in physical education or sport coaching courses may have enabled these SWs to focus on relationship building that could produce enjoyment rather than emphasizing achievement in progressions of skill development and competitions as may occur in SfD projects (e.g. Kidd, 2011; Válková, 2021; Zipp et al., 2019). The findings suggest staff members for SfD need to engage in critical self-reflection to grasp how their previous training and curricular background could enhance or detract from relationship building with participants. An understanding of the concepts of dressage and pastoral power may contribute to this critical self-reflection. This critical self-reflection needs to include exploring how relationship building with participants in an SfD project can produce what Tudor (2020) called 'positive power' and may result in enjoyment for those engaging in physical activity.
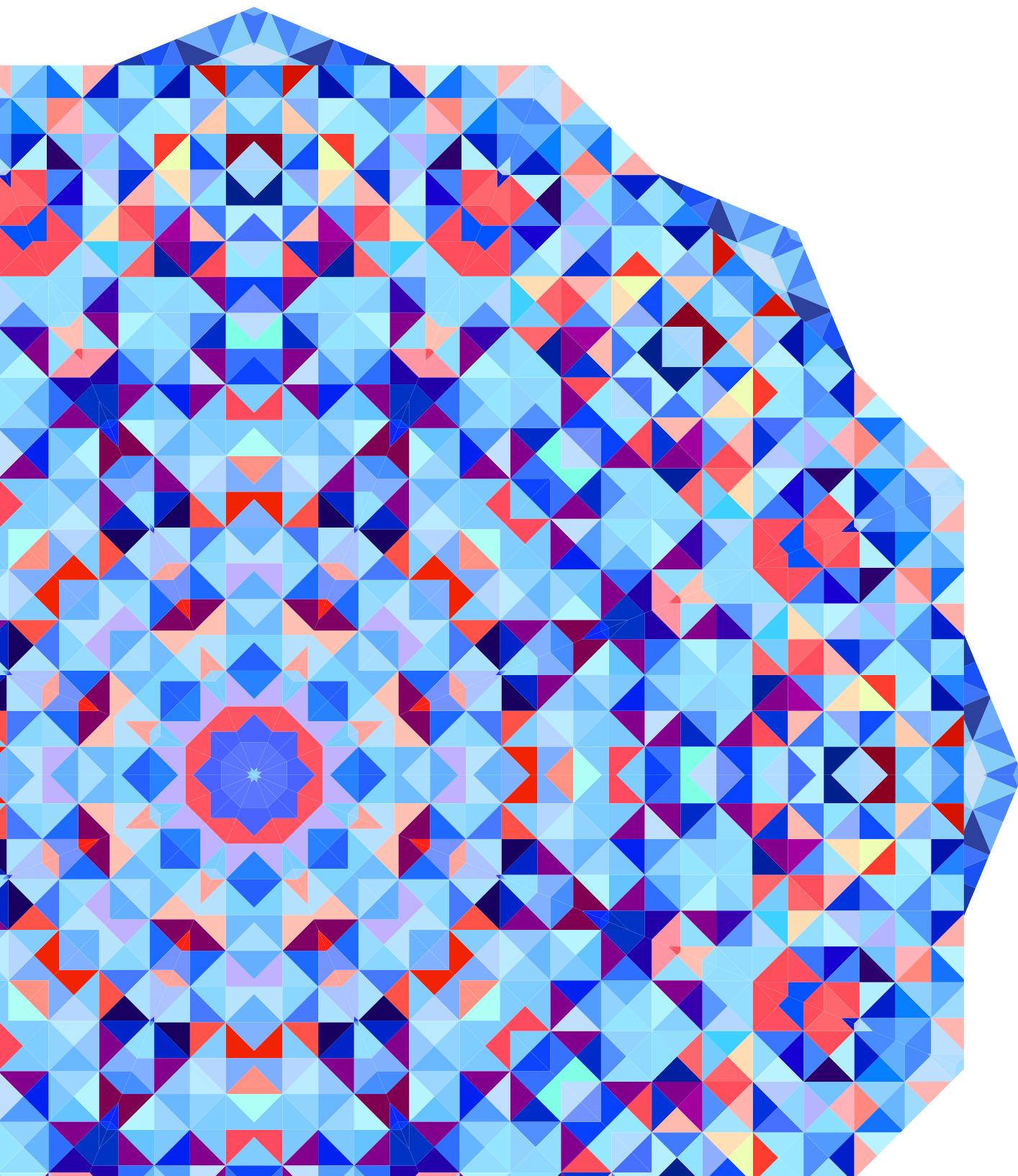
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'Everything is said with a smile': Homonegative speech acts in sport

Froukje Smits, Annelies Knoppers and Agnes Elling-Machartzki

Abstract

The acceptance of gay males in sport is growing in various western countries. However, research also suggests that young males, including athletes, tend to engage in homonegative speech acts, often called microaggressions, that make it difficult for them to navigate practices of masculinity. We used solicited diaries or diary logs written by (non-)heterosexual young male team sport athletes (aged 16–25) to investigate how they experienced and heard expressions of homonegative and heteronormative microaggressive speech acts. We drew on Foucault's notion of discourse, Butler's conceptualization of performativity of heteronormativity and Sue's work on microaggressions to examine how microaggressive speech acts by young male athletes reflect current sexual and gender cultural norms. The results revealed how homonegative speech acts were embedded in a gay aesthetic and abject femininity and used to endorse a desirable heteronormative masculinity. We concluded that homonegative microaggressive speech acts contribute to the preservation of discursive heteronormativity in sport despite growing acceptance of non-heterosexual male athletes.

Keywords: gay aesthetic, homonegative, microaggressions, misogyny, performativity, speech acts, young male athletes

Introduction

A significant body of research has revealed that in many situations gay male athletes are accepted and/or tolerated by peers in their sport (e.g. Anderson, 2009; Anderson & McCormack, 2015, 2018), including research in the Netherlands, known as a relative gay-friendly country (Elling-Machartzki & Janssens, 2009; Elling-Machartzki & Smits, 2012). Anderson and colleagues also found that practices of masculinity in the USA and the UK have become more fluid in football, with players and managers no longer afraid to hug, cuddle and kiss each other. The authors contended that behaviours that would once have led to homosexual suspicion and widespread stigmatization are no longer a threat to heterosexual identities and that the level of homophobia targeting gay male athletes is decreasing.

There are, however, indications that this assumption of inclusiveness ignores complexities of daily practice and speech acts that are embedded in various discourses. Various scholars (Diefendorf & Bridges, 2020; Pascoe, 2013) have suggested that research needs to focus on how social inequalities are institutionally or systematically reproduced and challenged at the interactional or speech level. A considerable amount of research has found that despite the growing tolerance of sexual diversity, young males engage in what Butler (1997) has called injurious speech acts grounded in same-sex sexuality (e.g., Nadal et al., 2011, 2016; Platt & Lenzen, 2013; Rasmussen & Harwood, 2003; Youdell, 2004). Injurious speech acts are those that consist of language that can inflict physical and emotional pain. For example, Elling-Machartzki and Janssens (2009) found that gay men explicitly mentioned avoiding participating in team and contact sports like football and other 'macho' sports because they had to deal with hostile comments, jokes and/or discrimination related to sexual orientation. Pascoe (2007) found that adolescent boys employed homonegative speech acts creating what she called a 'fag discourse' through their use of homonegative and heteronormative language and joking rituals. Students who used homonegative humour have contended that the seemingly discriminatory messages were unintentional or said in jest (McCormack & Anderson, 2010; Platt & Lenzen, 2013). Although some LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning and others) students have been complicit in the use of such homonegative speech acts, in general they have reported difficulty in negotiating this 'humour', even when these speech acts were not directed towards them personally (Nadal et al., 2016). Ironically, these homonegative discursive practices often target heterosexual boys more so than those seen as gay because currently a gay identity is seen as a biological 'fact' and is, in that sense, accepted/tolerated (Bailey, 2016; Pascoe, 2013; Woolley, 2013).

McCormack and colleagues (McCormack, 2011; McCormack & Anderson, 2010; McCormack et al., 2016) have contended that the meanings of the words and phrases that constitute homonegative speech are dependent on the intention of the speaker and the social context. They have argued that there has been an increase in the use of positive gay talk; the authors construct that as a sign of a decreasing use of homophobic discourses. The notion

of discourse and its relation to speech acts differ, however, from that used in the current study. McCormack and colleagues seem to use discourse and speech acts, including positive and negative gay talk, as synonyms, and do not locate the content of these speech acts within underlying discourses. We, however, draw on Foucault's (1980) notion of discourses as constituting power/knowledge. A Foucauldian notion of discourse combined with Sue's (2010) approach to microaggressions suggests that homonegative speech acts constitute microaggressions. These speech acts are not discourses in themselves but draw on them. Homonegative speech acts, therefore, can have subtexts that are embedded in dominant discourses about gender and sexuality.

Nadal et al. (2016), who systematically reviewed the literature on microaggressions and homophobic speech acts, concluded these speech acts can be considered homonegative because the words that are used are attached to negative things and events, and this humour is not gender neutral or sexually neutral. Woolley (2013) found that such homonegative microaggressive speech acts dislocated, constituted and, subsequently, marginalized targeted youth. Pascoe (2013) has argued that the focus of analysis in research should be on the context and the implicit and explicit subtexts of these speech acts and the discourses in which they are embedded. Together these findings suggest that although the acceptance of non-heterosexual male identities inside and outside sport has increased, the occurrence of homonegative speech acts or discursive interactions needs more scholarly attention, especially in sport since their use can be injurious and may act as a barrier for young men to participate (Elling-Machartzki & Janssens, 2009).

The purpose of the current paper is to explore how young men (aged 16–25 years) used homonegative speech acts in the competitive sport context and how self-identified non-heterosexual young men navigated these speech acts. We subsequently address the subtexts embedded in these microaggressive practices. We do so by drawing on Foucault's notion of discourse and power, Butler's conceptualization of the performativity of heteronormativity and of injurious speech acts and Sue's work on microaggressions.

According to Foucault (1980), power is productive, operating in or circulating through everyday discursive practices. Discourse, as described by Foucault, is what can and cannot be said about a specific topic. Discourses create lenses through which individuals understand various knowledges, truths and social realities and reproduce and resist them. Some discourses, such as those about a desirable and celebrated masculinity associated with certain sports, dominate at a certain time and place and become a regime of truth masking their constructed nature and the power and privilege that circulates from it (Connell, 2005). Disciplinary power acts on individuals in part through processes of (ab) normalization (Foucault, 1980). The acceptance of males who identify as gay and the use of homonegative speech acts among male youth described in the previous paragraphs suggest that discourses about the predominance and policing of heteronormative masculinities in sport have shifted to include a greater variation in the practice and acceptance of what are constructed as desirable discursive practices of masculinity (Pascoe, 2013). This acceptance

of sexual diversity may not necessarily mean that heterosexual hegemony has weakened, however.

Butler (1993) suggested that discursive practices pertaining to gender and sexuality occur simultaneously and are performative. Performativity is the word Butler uses to refer to embodied repetition over time. Discourses are performative when they co-produce what they name; that is, performativity is the materialization of norms through the body. They are part of what she has called the heterosexual matrix that produces norms about gender and sexuality. Bodies and their actions often tend to be judged through a heterosexual lens; that is, individuals are assumed to be heterosexual until there is 'evidence' they are not. In other words, gender and sexuality intersect and discursive practices about either one are both repetitive and have the other as subtext.

Butler (1993, 1997) used Foucault's notions about the power of daily discursive practices to constitute individuals, to argue that speech acts reflect what individuals do (the act or the performative) and the consequences of that act. A speech act is performative when it is repetitively used to categorize individuals, behaviours and attitudes and these categorizations are recognized by others. According to Butler (1997), injurious speech acts are illocutionary; that is, the acts themselves are the deed that they effect. They result in injury due to their repetition over time so that their meanings become incorporated and embodied.

Similarly, Sue (2010) and contended that injurious speech acts such as swearing and other subtle homophobic or homonegative verbal and non-verbal, signs and signals are forms of microaggression. Specifically, Sue's work on marginalization moves beyond the concept of acceptance (or not) of gay identities and suggests the focus should be on the content of daily speech acts that he calls microaggressions. These are daily encounters of subtle discrimination and negativity that are experienced by males who are constructed as gay, who are emotionally expressive and/or exhibit behaviours associated with femininity. Woolley (2013, p. 292) has argued that the use of homonegative microaggressions illustrate 'the violence of performative speech acts'. These subtle daily forms of homonegative speech acts tend to be overlooked or ignored when the focus of policies at schools and in sport is on acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals while such acts do occur on a regular and repetitive basis and thus become performative (e.g., Munro et al., 2019; Nadal et al., 2016).

Much of the research on homonegative microaggressions tends to focus on schools and colleges and on types of microaggressions. There is, however, little available research within the context of the competitive sport setting that examines homonegative speech acts as daily microaggressions and the themes their content reflect. We investigated the discursive practices of masculinity that are embedded in homonegative speech acts about gays/queers by young male athletes and how their use may both destabilize and reinforce notions of masculine heteronormativity. Specifically, we explored the content of the homonegative interactions or speech acts occurring in male team sports (aged 16–25 years), during

practices and competitions in Dutch sport[8]. We focused on the possible deployment of homonegative language. The research questions asked were:

1. How do young male team sport athletes deploy homonegative speech acts in their interactions (their talk)?
2. How do self-identified gay athletes navigate this deployment (their walk)?
3. Which discourses do young male athletes draw upon in their use of homonegative speech acts?

Methods

The research on homonegative speech acts cited in the previous sections was based primarily on a combination of interviews and observations. We assumed that a reliance on the use of retrospective interviews about daily interactions could produce vagueness due to problems of recall and could result in generalities like 'sometimes innocent gay jokes are made'. Since our focus was on daily homonegative microaggressions in mainstream young men's sport and on how self-identified gay players made sense of these interactions, we used solicited diaries or diary logs written by gay and straight young male team sport participants in a variety of sports. They described what they heard during their own practices and competitions. We supplemented these observational accounts with interviews of these diary keepers about their logs. The use of solicited diaries enables individuals to record their daily lived experiences (Filep et al., 2018). The collection of data through diary logs or solicited diaries enabled us to engage in an in-depth exploration of the 'mundane interactions' or 'particular routines and rituals of behaviour' (Latham, 2016, p. 158) that were observed and experienced in mainstream young men's team sports.

We recruited young men for our study who were already members of sport teams to log comments made during practices and competitions. Scholars who use participant participation for critical inquiry usually strive to obtain informed consent of all people involved in the study. This may, however, not always be possible, or may even be undesirable, since it may conflict with two other important ethical issues: confidentiality (protecting privacy of observers) and beneficence (not doing harm to anyone) (Calvey, 2008; Roulet et al., 2016). We believe that given the ambiguity and uncertainty of universal acceptance and celebration of sexual diversity, the diary keepers have the right to have their sexual identity protected, including those who are not 'out' to their team. We protected them from potential

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8   This study was part of a larger study on sexual diversity in sport. The entire project was commissioned and sponsored by the Gay Sport Alliance (GSA) and directed by the research institute where the third author is employed. The GSA consisted of five national team sport organisations, the National Olympic Committee (NOC*NSF), the national organisation for LGBT rights (COC Netherlands) and the Foundation of LGBT sport organisations.

harm such as harassment, that could be provoked by disclosing their engagement in the observation of homonegative social interactions. This protection from harm outweighed the importance of informed consent from all members of the observed teams and their opponents. Moreover, by not revealing their role as research-informant, we believe that our diary keepers were able to observe the 'usual' practices related to homonegative microaggressions. Given the policy position of national sport organizations that participants in a sport must accept sexual diversity, we assumed that male athletes might censor themselves if they knew their speech acts were documented. Possibly, too, the awareness that they were part of a study on gay-themed interactions might have produced exaggerated or extra 'gay jokes' and 'fag talk' among team members. We therefore assumed that diary keeping by actual team members would do little or no harm to other team members and opponents while contributing to better understanding of the dynamics of speech acts and experiences of a subordinated and vulnerable group.

This type of embedded ethnography can be emotionally demanding for observers, since they may witness and also participate in microaggressive practices and speech acts. Therefore, we paid extra attention to informed consent procedures and the wellbeing of the diary keepers throughout the study. They all gave informed consent after they were informed in detail about the study's aims, our expectations for them (intake, follow-up and debriefing interviews; number of diary logs; time period), issues of confidentiality and anonymity and the possibility of withdrawing at any time from the study. The diary keepers agreed not to inform their team of their involvement in the study and to respect the privacy of their team members in written logs and in the interviews. Moreover, they agreed to behave in their usual manner and not to provoke comments or ask questions because they were participating in the study. They were asked to register data via logbook reports shortly after training sessions and matches had been completed, but without the presence of team members.

The diaries were supplemented by interviews. Each diary keeper was interviewed three times, usually by telephone. In an intake/instruction interview, they were given details about the study and its methodology. A follow-up interview with each of the diary keepers about their experiences occurred after they had completed the first five logbook observations. Debriefing interviews were held when diaries were complete. In the follow-up and debrief interviews, the diary keepers could supplement their logbook observations with further details and experiences. Additional debriefings were also offered to participants who wanted to reflect on the impact of these speech acts on their lives. This offer was used by two gay observers who had not yet come out to their teammates. Their participation in the study gave them insight as to why they found it so difficult to come out.

Diary keepers/observers
Athletes with diverse self-identified sexual orientations who were active members of a team at mainstream sports clubs were recruited to be diary keepers. We found participants by

using our personal and professional networks, various sport and LGBT-related channels (e.g. social media, LGBT associations), and by snowball sampling. It was especially difficult to recruit an adequate number of self-identified non-heterosexual diary keepers. Seven self-identified heterosexual and four self-identified gay team sport athletes, of whom two were explicitly out to their team, between 16 and 25 years old agreed to participate in the study. They were active in six different men's team sports: handball (one team), baseball (one team), field hockey (one team), korfball (one team), rugby (one team), and football (seven teams). None of the observers had an immigrant background and three of them – including one self-identified gay observer – played on a multi-ethnic team. Diary keepers received a small gift voucher as compensation for participating in the study. The names of the young men mentioned in the results are fictitious.

Data collection

The reporting was based on a semi-structured design. The diary keepers used a simple logbook format with space to register gay-themed language and non-verbal behaviour that they encountered on the pitch during training/practice sessions or matches, in the car or in the locker room. Since microaggressions including gay talk may have become so normalized (Nadal et al., 2016) that such speech acts are not always recognized as such, the first and third author designed a logbook format to enhance the sensitivity towards and awareness of diary keepers for possible homonegative microaggressions. We created three general categories for use in the logbook with several sub-topics as examples/ explanations. These categories were based on literature on microaggressions cited earlier in this paper. We assumed this template would facilitate the registration of observed homonegative language and ensure rigour by assisting diary keepers to respond in ways that were congruent with the aim of the project (Filep et al., 2018).

The logbook template or structure was refined based on the feedback from three athletes who tested the format in a small pilot study. The three main categories were: (a) general gay-themed comments, jokes and non-verbal body language, from which we distilled homonegative remarks; (b) person-directed homonegative comments and (non-)verbal jokes based on appearance or behaviour; and (c) homonegative (non-) verbal jokes and comments about openly gay team members. The 11 diary keepers used the revised logbook to register their comments and incidents after completion of a practice or match. Logbook observations were supplemented with further details and experiences during the interviews.

All of the diary keepers were given the diary log format and detailed instructions. Each diary keeper was asked to engage in at least 10 observations within a period of 2 to 3 months. Since one of the observers wrote diary logs for 2 different teams in different sports of which he was a member and several diary keepers collected data from more than 10 training sessions or competitions, a total of 130 observations were conducted.

Data analysis

We approached our analysis with a queer sensibility; that is, we attempted to avoid the use of a gay/straight binary to describe or categorize the results. In addition, since we only knew those who self-identified as non-heterosexual, we did not want to make assumptions about the other athlete observers since some may have been closeted non-heterosexuals. Consequently, we made no assumptions about or comparisons across sexual identities unless specifically noted by our diary keepers.

The observations were analysed in an iterative process, including both inductive and deductive coding based on our theoretical framework that assumes language is both descriptive and constitutive (Butler, 1993, 1997). This involved reading and rereading the data several times to check and confirm the relationship of various coding themes pertaining to heteronormative and homonegative speech acts and microaggressive practices.

We combined the diary and interview data for our analysis. Initially, all relevant text fragments from the logbook and interview data were sorted into themes that reflected the type of comment. These a priori themes were subsequently rearranged and revised to higher-order themes, new themes or subthemes after discussion/reflection. This process of clarifying the microaggressive practices/speech acts took several iteration cycles until all three researchers agreed with the analysis. Resulting themes were furthermore compared by sport; we found no clear discernible differences across sport.

Results

In the first half of this paper (the talk) we describe the microaggressive speech acts or talk of the team members that diary keepers had recorded or described in the interviews. We illustrate how young male athletes participating in the various sports appropriated the words 'gay' and 'queer', and often linked these words to weakness/mistakes/errors, normalized humour about gays, used physical stereotypes about 'gays' and engaged in antigay physical aggression. We use a gay/straight binary only in the second half of this paper (the walk) where we describe the reactions of those who self-identify as gay and how they navigated or walked through dominant ambiguous heteronormative and homonegative speech acts (Butler, 1993). Throughout the results we point to the discourses in which these speech acts are embedded and discuss the use of those discourses in the discussions.

The talk
Appropriating 'gay' and 'queer'
The words 'gay' and 'queer' were used in various ways, which at times made their use ambiguous and their intended meaning difficult to interpret. These words were frequently used in an intentional and directed manner to address and/or swear at athletes. Diary keepers noted:

After the game had been won a player shouted: 'That was really good, gay boys.'

The trainer enters (the locker room), with the words: 'OK, you queers.'

Saying 'Hi faggot' to a teammate who shows up too late during practice.

Someone yelled in the locker room 'hey, which queer has stolen my shampoo bottle?'

Our first senior team practised while we were also practising; someone said 'See how those queers run!'

The meanings of these forms of address and what they were intended to convey are not entirely clear when seen as isolated speech acts. However, when they are placed alongside the other microaggressive speech acts, then together they strengthen dominant constructions of gender and sexuality, as we show further on.

Associating 'queer'/'fag' with weakness

At times the words 'gay' and 'queer' were used to insult the young men in order to motivate them and to convey perceived weakness. Diary keepers wrote examples of comments made about the opposing team and own team members such as:

Let's get those queers!

'Hey fairy, start defending!' directed at a teammate.

A lad from our team was cursed by calling him a 'queer' when he fouled an opponent.

One of our athletes yelled 'you queer!!' to our goalie when he let in a goal. And he meant it.

Homonegative expressions were used when athletes gave up or had to stop playing during a training session or a match: 'When an opponent lay on the ground after being fouled, athletes said: 'Come on, fag, get up.'' Similarly, when officials were assumed to have made an erroneous call, athletes often engaged in homonegative microaggressions. A linesman, referee or coach of the opposing team was often called a 'queer' if they were perceived to have made mistakes or if they had made a decision with which athletes disagreed. Calling the linesman or referee a 'queer' or addressing them with other comments often occurred in such a way that the referee or coach was unable to hear it since the utterance of such homonegative comments violates the rules. Only one diary keeper reported that an athlete received a yellow card and another athlete a red card for calling the referee a queer.

This association between homonegative speech acts and perceived weakness used by the athletes in the current study is not unique. Others (e.g. Bailey, 2016; Nadal et al., 2016) have reported similar results in non-sport settings. Magrath (2018) reported that in the sport setting, football fans have justified their use of homonegative language to comment on perceived weakness of the opposing team or referees. We return to this point in the discussion. Homonegative speech acts were not only used to motivate and disparage athletes, however, but their use was also framed as humour.

Normalizing homonegative discourse through humour

Comments recorded in the logbooks revealed jokes with a homonegative undertone: 'We became champions in this match. The opponents wanted to keep us from winning the championship, but they didn't succeed. Jokes were made like 'hahaha, what a bunch of queers, they couldn't stop us!'' Several diary keepers pointed out that comments that were crude should not be taken seriously but should be interpreted as a joke. For example, a diary keeper could not imagine a gay teammate having a problem:

The remarks that are made can often come across in a way that's not intended. I can imagine that it can be experienced as offensive because a lot is said with a negative undertone. I've only noticed it since I've been looking for it, but I do expect that a gay team athlete would be accepted in our team.

In contrast, another observer notes: 'I am happy I am not gay because it (being gay) seems difficult; I do not think any of our team members is gay.' The observers, including those self-identified as gay, considered homonegative remarks to be a 'normal' part of sport and interpreted them as reflecting their 'team culture'. In the debriefing interviews, several gay observers mentioned that they sometimes cracked a joke themselves, thereby causing others to make jokes in turn. McCormack (2011) has argued that joking in this manner reflects a gay-friendly environment because it supports inclusion of openly gay men who in the past have been seen as subordinated. Although there has been an increase in gay-inclusive male sport teams, we argue, however, that such comments and jokes should also be situated and interpreted in a larger context in which microaggressions are part of discursive practices that strengthen and reproduce an institutional gendered sexual hierarchy. We expand on this in the next section.

Enacting non-conforming embodiment

The logbooks and the young men who were interviewed described what happened when an athlete's appearance and behaviour were incongruent with dominant discursive practices of masculinity. Their microaggressions contained discursive assumptions used as regimes of truth about the embodiment of gay men such as their appearance and interests and their enactment of bodily dispositions. This gay embodiment and enactment was seen as performing a sexual aesthetic regime of truth associated with femininity (Bridges, 2014; Bridges & Ota, 2019). A tight pair of shorts, for example, was described as 'queer shorts'. A diary keeper noted that his teammates expressed disapproval and contempt of the goalkeeper of the opponent's team who used a blow-dryer to dry his hair and said 'He's a gay boy.'

The manner in which athletes moved their bodies was also at times constructed in a derogatory manner, such as 'Look at the way you chase the ball, what a queer!' Also:

I was sitting on the bench with a few other teammates. One of the opponents had a gay posture; the way he walked accentuated his ass, the way he played the ball, and how he showed a loose wrist. It looked really gay. My teammates said, 'that's a faggot', 'sure he's gay.' They then looked at me and said: 'He looks a lot like you, should we also start worrying about you?'

The comments were not only produced verbally, but were occasionally accompanied by gestures such as an exaggerated loose wrist:

(A statement was made) (a)bout a young boy playing in a junior team in our club: 'It's obvious he's going to turn out to be a real faggot later, just look at his limp wrists'. They then acted out the gestures in a really exaggerated way.

According to Sue's (2010) description of microaggressions, these critical microaggressive speech acts pertaining to appearance and enactment of gender and sexuality are microinsults because they rely on stereotypes to normalize or abnormalize a person's appearance. In this way, these speech acts constituted gay men in a specific manner and revealed the performativity of homonegative speech acts. Bridges and Ota (2019) contend that the use of such sexual aesthetics erroneously suggests there are universal elements of gay identity and culture. These speech acts or microinsults may not reflect reality, but those engaging in these microaggressions believe these behaviors and appearance reflect what Foucault (1980) calls a normalized regime of truth about gay men. The young men participating in these sports constructed a gay aesthetic based on an intersection of dominant discourses about femininity and gay sexuality. This aesthetic includes a focus on specific sexual acts.

Constructing non-heterosexuality in terms of physical desire

Several scholars (e.g. Buijs et al., 2011; Youdell, 2004) have found that a homophobic regime of truth about gay physicality and physical desire defines it in terms of anal sex. Popular homophobic discourse suggests that if a man or boy who is constituted as gay bends over, then he is preparing for/inviting anal penetration (Youdell, 2004). Several observers noted use of this discourse. Specific sexually oriented content was often embedded in microaggressive discursive speech acts. A diary keeper described an incident in which '(an) athlete bends over after a jumping exercise. He then is asked if his boyfriend likes that a lot.' Another diary keeper noted a joke that was passed on: 'What's the difference between a chef and a poof? A fag stirs around in yesterday's meal.' Gay observers who were 'out' also noted jokes that were made about them, such as 'Are you off to the shower? Then I'll wait a bit.' Laughing, and then 'Ha, no, I actually enjoy being in the shower with you . . . pick up the shampoo bottle, will you?'

The logbook reports gave an example of how gay identification was reduced to physical sexuality. A gay athlete came out to his team and his coach. He received questions like 'Who do you fancy? The one with curly hair or the blonde?' In other words, non-heterosexuality was constructed primarily in terms of physical desire. In general, however, the comments created a sexual aesthetic in which gay males were seen as 'dirty' and a threat: 'Four of us (teammates) talked about another teammate who sometimes behaves like a faggot. (They said) (h)e paid too much attention to two athletes who were taking a shower and specifically to their "sex pistols", so to speak.' Another diary keeper noted how his teammates expressed themselves in a homonegative manner about an acquaintance they all knew: 'He has become such a gay boy, a chocolate knight, really dirty, bah!' After one of the observers told his teammates he is gay, a series of homonegative comments by teammates followed and 'occurred, day in, day out', such as 'Don't look at me that way, you dirty so and so' and 'You'll have to go to another dressing room.' Being gay was therefore framed not only as being weak or effeminate, but also reduced to constructions of same-sex physical aesthetics. Such speech acts at times were part of macro physical aggression.

Shifting from verbal microaggression to physical aggression

Although microaggressions dominated the talk, two gay observers also recounted having encountered macroaggressions or dangerous situations. Sue (2010) describes these aggressions as forms of micro-assaults. Hessel came out to his team not so long ago. He has thought about stopping with his sport because he does not feel comfortable with the way he was 'represented' and treated. He explained:

Some of the lads throw the ball extra hard in my direction because they think I should be able to handle it as a gay. When the coach saw what was happening, he pulled me in front of the group and said that it didn't matter that I was gay and that they shouldn't have wrong expectations by playing the ball so hard. That certainly helped me.

Guido gave another example of homonegative violence or micro-assault. Although Guido felt accepted as a gay athlete by his own team, he was aware that an opposing team could be less tolerant. After several heavy fouls and offensive actions occurred during an emotional match, Guido's team decided to stop playing and walked off the pitch. In his logbook, Guido wrote the following after the match:

After we had left the pitch, we were constantly being called a 'bunch of gay boys'. I responded by saying that I was the only gay athlete in our team, and that they'd be better off keeping their mouths shut about gays. Then they retaliated by calling out: 'number four (my shirt number) is a queer!', to which I reacted: 'Yeah that's true, you're not insulting me

by saying that'. They also said to me: 'Are you going to the Reguliersdwarsstraat tonight?[9] Getting fucked in the arse!' To which I answered: 'Yeah, want to come along? That will be fun!' As we walked to our car, we heard someone say: 'Where is number four? Where is that poof? We're going to go gay bashing!!' One of my teammates answered: 'Why? Do you want his telephone number?' Luckily, they didn't recognize me in my normal clothes . . . After the match we left the club quickly and had a beer somewhere else. We made jokes about it and I was also complimented on the way I had responded.

Sue's (2010) definition frames these acts by teammates or threats by opponents as micro-assaults because they reflect an intention to harm through words or actions. Guido's performance also reflects Butler's (1997) contention, however, that performative speech acts not only constitute their targets, but also that that very constitution presents the possibility of counter speech. In other words, those who are targets of injurious speech such as homonegative language may talk back, which is what Guido did in reaction to this micro-assault. The team also sent a letter of complaint to the KNVB (the Dutch football association). The KNVB, however, refused to enforce sanctions against the offending club. By neglecting its institutional responsibility in this manner, the KNVB supported and strengthened heteronormative hegemony. Bury (2016, p. 217) has argued that '(w)hile gay footballers are included into the football family, the conditions of their inclusion are determined by others, who dictate that inclusion only works on the basis of adopting mainstream competitive and hetero-masculine values while remaining different'.

The walk: coming out/visibility

Most of the young men who acted as diary keepers have learned to accept this gay talk behaviour as normal since 'that's how we are'. During the interviews, those who self-identified as gay reflected on how they experienced these microaggressions. Cees (gay) indicated that he encountered 'gay' in jokes and remarks fairly frequently:

> It's as though it's become accepted to call out 'Hey gay boy'. It's become a filler, intended as a comic or funny remark. All these kinds of comments sometimes come across to me as hurtful and denigrating. I don't react to them; I may make a remark about it, but I never escalate it or anything like that. I also laugh along with the jokes sometimes. They've got no idea that someone they know is gay. I wonder sometimes how they would react if I told them I was gay. I reckon it could cause a few problems, that's what makes it so difficult. Maybe they'd want me to start showering separately   On the other hand, we're all friends and I've known them for years. Of course, I won't turn up one day with a pink sports bag. Maybe they'll think it's a joke, when I tell them, that I'm pulling their leg because you just

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9   Well-known street in Amsterdam that is popular with LGBTQI people.

can't see by looking at me. And I don't watch the Eurovision song contest or behave in a typically gay manner.

Cees' reaction reveals that the comments and jokes made about gays affected him personally, but he did not dare to let the others know that he is gay. Cees preferred to keep his mouth shut because he was afraid of reactions and because he realized that using the word 'queer' is considered to be 'normal' in his team. He seemed to have internalized a certain form of homonegativity and the gay aesthetic described earlier. He accepted that a man can become the target of ridicule if he does not act in what the majority has defined as 'normal' and if he does not fulfil masculine heteronormative expectations about how 'real' men look and behave. He distanced himself from a dominant gay aesthetic discursive practice that he knew was used by others for labelling those constructed as gay. This example also reveals how homonegative microaggressive behaviour can stigmatize any athlete whose behaviour may not always be congruent with the performance of heteronormative masculinity. The iterative performativity of these practices may then result in internalization of homonegativity and fear of coming out as gay.

These microaggressive practices also meant Niek (gay) did not dare to tell his teammates that he is attracted to men. He described his reaction after hearing homonegative speech acts by two of his teammates:

> I thought, 'did they really say that?!' I hadn't expected them to say such things. It doesn't bother me, but it doesn't make it any easier to bring up the subject of me being gay. I think it's strange, I'm not at all what you would call a stereotype. What can you do when someone says something like that? I just let it pass, it is not the right moment for saying something about it. That just has the opposite effect.

Similarly, an 'out' athlete (Hessel) distanced himself from the dominant discourse of gay aesthetics and described how he negotiated the subject of 'gay' and how he tried to conform to the dominant homonegative culture:

> I can sometimes break the ice with a witty comment about my homosexuality, but sometimes I have my doubts about what I can and cannot say. They consider it totally unacceptable when I start talking about how attractive a certain man is. I need to hold myself in check sometimes so that I don't react too quickly when they start talking about women in macho terms. It's at times like these that I feel like making a comment about men, but I think better of it.

The self-identified non-heterosexual athletes participating in our study often engaged in self-censorship to avoid being seen as provocative. They made sure they did not behave or dress in ways associated with femininity or gay as circumscribed by a dominant discourse of

gay aesthetics: 'As long as you do not prance around, have loose wrists, have a tight behind or high voice then you will not have any problem being a gay athlete.' Niek felt accepted because he behaved in a heteronormative manner. Another observer contended that if an athlete behaves according to constructed sexual gay aesthetics then he can expect homonegative comments. Hessel (gay) described the ambiguity of these microaggressions: 'There are about five of them at the moment (who engage in homonegativity) and there's one person in particular who makes aggressive remarks … it's pretty confrontational really but actually everything is said with a smile.'

This ambiguity between speech acts that are confrontational or oppressive and facial or other expressions that say something else constitutes a microinvalidation (Sue, 2010). Specifically, microinvalidations are microaggressions in which those speaking ignore how their speech acts (and other behaviours) may be oppressive or impact their targets.

Self-identified gay athletes as well as any athlete whose behavior did not fit the desired heteronormativity therefore had to negotiate homonegativity in team cultures that purported to be gay-friendly. These data suggest that those who self-identified as heterosexual exercised sovereign power to decide which speech acts were allowable and, in so doing, they privileged a form of masculine heteronormativity that included discursive practices of gay aesthetics misogyny.

Discussion

The microaggressive speech acts we describe in this paper privileged a heteronormative masculinity that is not specifically named but constructed in terms of what it is not: not weak, not associated with femininities, not associated with losing, nor with male homoeroticism, nor with what is considered to be abject. The dominance and normalization of such speech acts preserved the status quo, reinforced a gender binary and a constructed gay aesthetic and privileged a sport-related heteronormative masculinity. They reflect speech acts in sport by young men that are also common in schools – inside and outside physical education (PE) lessons – in different countries (e.g. Bailey, 2016; Linville, 2017; Nadal et al., 2011; Pascoe, 2007, 2013; Youdell, 2004). The members of sport teams observed in this study drew on heteronormative discourses in various ways.

They normalized heteronormative privilege in discursive practices by appropriating the words 'gay' and 'queer' in an ambiguous manner. At times, when these words were used as a greeting, they seemed to be devoid of any association except with masculinity or negativity since the words were used to address other young men. These words were employed in a subtle and repetitive performative way. Similar to participants in other studies (Bailey, 2016; Nadal et al., 2016; Romeo et al., 2017) on the use of homonegative language by youth in non-sport contexts, members of the observed teams in the current study often linked these words to perceived weakness, mistakes and/or errors.

Such homonegative speech acts were performative and not an isolated activity; they reflected current sexual and gender cultural discursive normalizations. The performative use of these speech acts contributes to the preservation of discursive heteronormative social systems of power. Those who engaged in these speech acts did not invent these expressions but drew on discourses about sexuality and gender that already existed. Butler (1993) has pointed out that performative speech acts are successful not just because of their intention, but:

> only because that action echoes a prior action, and accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices. In this sense, no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force. (Butler, 1993, 19)

The injurious nature of these speech acts flowed from the accumulative force over time of dominant discourses about sexuality and gender including heteronormativity and served as resources for the meanings attached to these words. Briefly, these speech acts resonate, especially in sport contexts, because they are embedded in a history in which modern sport was constructed to emphasize specific desirable practices of embodied heteromasculinity (Adams, 2013). Practices associated with weakness such as those attributed to gay men/homosexuality and women/femininity were and continue to be devalued and often form the base for injurious speech acts (e.g., Bailey, 2016; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; De Boise, 2015; Hoskin, 2019; Pascoe, 2007, 2013).

The homonegative language used during interactions in sport in the current study was both descriptive and constitutive. Although the deployment of homonegative speech acts through humour and use of gendered stereotypes was normalized among the teams in the current study, that use often had the capacity to wound or to Other those who did not comply with dominant discursive practices of masculinity. Being seen as mentally or physically weak or as engaging in a physical enactment of an aesthetic associated with gay men, making mistakes and/or being seen as submissive meant an athlete could become a target for physical aggression regardless of sexual preference. The young males who identified as gay therefore primarily aligned themselves with the sexualized language used by their peers. We also note that not all of the recorded acts could be seen as subtle microaggressions, but some are examples of micro-assaults and actual aggression such as throwing the ball with extra force at a gay athlete or threatening to attack a gay athlete after a match.

The microaggressive manner in which these Dutch young men used language they associated with queer is congruent with homonegative speech acts described by other scholars (e.g., Bailey, 2016; Bridges, 2014; Davies & McInnes, 2012; Pascoe, 2007, 2013). They suggest that boys engage in these speech acts to 'prove' their heteromasculine normativity and to avoid labels associated with a gay aesthetic. This reflects Butler's (1993, 1997) contention that speech acts shape subjectivities through their repetitive performativity.

The content of these microaggressions and their prevalence suggest that those who identify as non-heterosexual and those who are marginalized because of their non-conforming behaviours may be continually navigating and negotiating linguistic appropriations of words associated with gays and gay aesthetics.

The speech acts pertaining to gays and sexuality in the described sporting culture of young male athletes reflect the argument made by Bridges and Pascoe (2014, p. 247) 'that normative constraints are shifting (but ignore) . . . that these shifts have largely taken place in ways that have sustained existing ideologies and systems of power and inequality'. The athletes in the current study selectively integrated homonegative speech acts associated with gay aesthetics into their performance of gender. This incorporation does not change relations of power since, as the data suggested, its assigned use is largely determined by those endorsing a desired heteronormative masculinity. The reactions of those self-identified as non-heterosexuals in this study suggest they are included only if they practise and endorse heteronormativity and ignore homonegative microaggressions. Similarly, Croce (2015, p. 3) argued that:

> in an era of growing tolerance toward homosexual sexuality, the ways in which homophobic attitudes express themselves are remarkably adept at changing. As many critics and theorists suggest, such a discourse is so subtly couched that it may turn out to be more dangerous than openly reactionary views.

These speech acts described not only how these young men construct sexuality, but also how they constructed gender. What is seen as male weakness or feminine is defined as gay and therefore abject. Specifically, microaggressions using homonegative talk functioned to continually repudiate difference, especially that which was seen as an abject form of masculinity or associated with femininity (see also Buijs et al., 2011; Butler, 1993). The devaluing of what is associated with 'feminine' served as a subtext of many of the homonegative speech acts in this study and supports Pascoe's (2007, 2013) contention that research on these speech acts has neglected its gendered content, or rather its femmephobia. Femmephobia, sometimes called effeminephobia, is a disdain for or a systematic devaluation of femininity and reflects misogyny (Adams, 2013; Annes & Redlin, 2012; Hoskin, 2019; Richardson, 2009). If gender equality would be a current dominant discourse in sport then a gay aesthetic that associates specific and bodily enactments with femininity would not be constructed as an insult.

This gendered subtext of femmephobia and misogyny is strongly embedded in the wider context of sport and its discourses. The norm for valued behaviour continues to be practices associated with desirable sporting heteromasculinities (Adams, 2013). Although those researching these speech acts have described the anti-feminine nature of their content, this normalization of misogyny and how it may be reproduced and embedded in other discourses about sport, such as those about leadership and women in sport, has

received relatively little scholarly attention in research. This intersection of gender and sexuality in homonegative speech acts needs more attention, however, since it may explain why these speech acts specifically frame what is constructed as feminine as abject. This abject aesthetic ascribed to and associated with women may partially help to explain the difficulties in increasing the gender ratio in positions of leadership such as governance and why men are preferred as coaches for high-performance sport (Caudwell, 2016; Fink, 2016).

In conclusion, although male athletes in general may be more accepting of gay identities and may engage in interactions associated with gay masculinities in western contexts such as hugging and cuddling, the speech acts of the athletes observed in the current study emphasized microaggressive abjection of femininity and sexuality rather than celebrating sexual diversity. These homonegative speech acts were not so much individual actions that can be pathologized and/or curtailed through rules, legislation and/or punishment, however, but reflected how relations of power operate in sport and non-sport settings. These findings suggest that dominant discursive practices associated with desirable heterosexual masculinity exerted a great deal of power as to how the behaviour of these male athletes was defined and judged. These normative judgments are embedded in structural social inequalities in society, including in sport. This suggests that these inequalities and how homonegative microaggressive speech acts flow from and inform them need ongoing attention by policy makers and scholars.

6

Using a multilevel model to critically examine the grooming process of emotional abusive practices in WAG

Froukje Smits, Frank Jacobs and Annelies Knoppers

Introduction

The existence and promotion of youth sport has often been based on various assumptions about its value and role in society. Youth sport is assumed to be a site where pleasure/ enjoyment, physical and social development and learning to perform and win are emphasized (Coakley & Pike, 2014; Singer, 2004). Fun and pleasure are assumed to form the basic values underlying youth sport. This fun and pleasure is enhanced when children learn valued physical and social skills that contribute in a positive manner to their social and physical wellbeing and development as adults-to-be (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Learning to win and performing well under pressure are assumed to be necessary for this development to occur (e.g. Claringbould et al., 2015; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2014; Ryan, 1995). The importance of winning and achievement increases when a child engages in elite youth sport, especially sports that involve young athletes such as competitive gymnastics and swimming. This emphasis on winning is known as the discourse of performance/ achievement. As we explain further on, discourses are ways of thinking about certain ideas, objects and things.

Another newer discourse has been circulating in elite youth sport as well. In the last decade, the issue of physical, psychological and sexual abuse of athletes by coaches has received a great deal of attention (e.g., Brackenridge & Fasting, 2005; Fasting & Brackenridge, 2009; Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Grahn, 2014; Johns & Johns, 2000; Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2014; Pinheiro et al., 2014; Raakman et al., 2010; Ryan, 1995; Stirling & Kerr, 2008, 2013; Vertommen et al., 2015). This has led to a discourse of child protection and safeguarding that assumes that adults need to ensure that children and youth play in an environment in which they are safe and are not abused by coaches. The circulation of this discourse in youth sport has not however, eradicated abusive coach-athlete relationships.

Athletes who are in an abusive coach-athlete relationship often learn to adapt to and/or accept the occurrence of abusive coaching behaviours through a process called grooming. Grooming is the term applied to the gradual preparation of a child by the abuser through the normalization of harassment and, sometimes, sexual abuse (Cense & Brackenridge, 2001; Montserrat, 2011). Scholars have shown how the process of grooming enables coaches to sexually abuse athletes, often for many years, without resistance from athletes (Cense & Brackenridge, 2001; Moget et al., 2012). Leberg (1997, p. 26) suggests that there are three types of grooming involved in this process: 1) physical grooming that may lead to and include inappropriate touching of the athletes' bodies; 2) psychological grooming of the athlete and family, that may occur for example when a coach constantly tells an athlete and her parents that she needs to spend more time with him for practice, and 3) grooming of the social environment or the community, for example a coach building such a good reputation for competitive success that s/he becomes an unquestioned authority in the sport domain.

Stirling and Kerr (2008) have argued that grooming does not only lead to sexual abuse but also to emotional abuse. The focus of this paper is on the occurrence of emotional abusive

behaviours by coaches of elite women gymnasts. Stirling and Kerr employed the following definition: 'Emotional abuse refers to a pattern of non-contact deliberate behaviours by a person within a critical relationship role that have the potential to be harmful to an individual's [emotional] well-being' (p. 178). Our study focuses on the grooming process of Dutch elite women gymnasts so that they (seemingly) tolerate and normalize systematic emotional abuse.

Theoretical framework

Frameworks that have been used to examine the grooming process as well as the abuse of athletes, often focus primarily on interactions between coach and athlete at the micro level (e.g., D'Arripe-Longueville et al., 1998; Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Maitland, 2012; McMahon & Zehntner, 2014; Stirling & Kerr, 2009, 2013). The solution then seems to be to create rules and procedures that restrict touch and define illegitimate coach-athlete interactions (Piper et al., 2012). Such research does not explain however, how abuse may be sustained by individuals, social ideologies embedded in discourses and institutions. The results of our work with elite gymnasts suggests for example, that a grooming process at the individual/ or micro level does not occur in isolation from other processes that take place at club/local organizational level (meso) and at the national and international (macro) level (Knoppers et al., 2015). In this chapter therefore, we focus on the primary actors, specifically parents, coaches and directors of sport clubs/organizations that are involved in producing elite women's gymnasts. We identified several dynamics that enabled coaches to engage in grooming processes that resulted in the emotional abuse of young female gymnasts. The elite child athlete is therefore not the only focus of our study, but also parents, coaches and directors. We used a multilevel model to examine practices that played out in the grooming process of emotional abuse at macro, meso and micro level of elite women gymnasts.

Multilevel model

A multilevel model can be used as a relational frame-work that bridges the divide between macro-(inter)national, meso-local organisational and micro-individual levels of analyses to achieve a more comprehensive framing of the grooming process in elite youth sport (see also Syed & Ozbilgin, 2009). Figure 6.1 presents an illustrative summary of the multilevel model for the Dutch elite gymnastics sports context we used in our study.

Young women elite gymnasts participate in a sport that is organized in institutional contexts. The International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) and the National Gymnastics Federation (NGF) in the Netherlands comprise the macro level. These federations are responsible for the rules of the sport, organizing international and national competitions, determining who can participate, scoring systems, selection of judges, competition formats, etc. The local organizational or meso level consists of sport associations or clubs that are

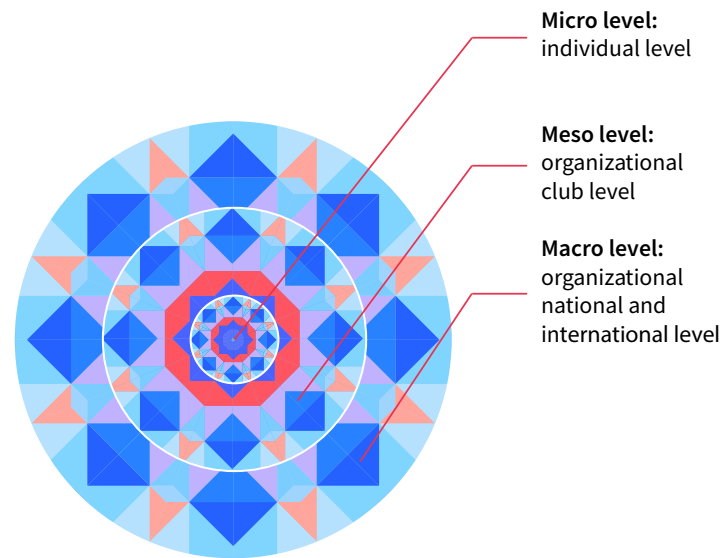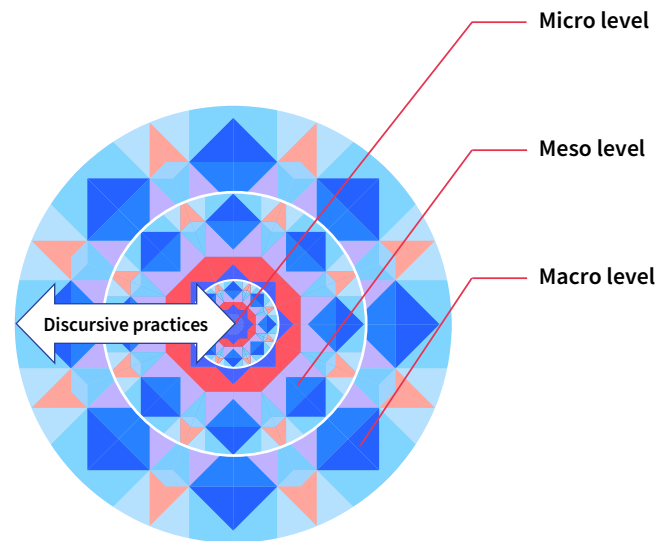**Figure 6.1:** Multilevel model Dutch elite gymnastics sports context

Micro level:
individual level

Meso level:
organizational
club level

Macro level:
organizational
national and
international level

Figure 6.2: Discursive practices in multilevel model

Micro level

Meso level

Macro level

Discursive practices

responsible for their own organizational policies, the focus of their club (recreational, competitive and/or elite), job descriptions, professional practices and use of space. These clubs are locally based and participation is voluntary for athletes. The clubs are structurally autonomous. Local clubs therefore, are responsible for the development of elite women gymnasts. Parents often support and encourage their children to participate in (elite) youth sports. We therefore also included parents as being part of the meso and individual level that contributed to the occurrence of grooming of the young gymnasts. The individual/ intrapersonal level (called the micro level) includes personal factors such as interactions, emotions, beliefs, values and social-relational influences in the athlete-coach relationship. These levels do not work as separate components but interact and inform the other levels. For example, the board of directors of a sport club (meso level) tends to be held responsible for the wellbeing of their athletes and other members of the club (micro level).

Discourses and discursive practices

We draw on the notions of discourses and discursive practices to explore how athletes, parents, coaches and directors legitimate their ways of thinking and doing about elite gymnastics. This results process of legitimization creates 'regimes of truth' that normalize abusive practices (Foucault, 1977). A regime of truth is a way of thinking about something that has become common sense or seen as 'fact'. Discourses are embodied and enacted through discursive practices, that is, we assume that all practices are situated within discourses.

Foucault (1977) argued that individuals and organizations position themselves with respect to discursive practices; they may accept, resist or negotiate their use of these discursive practices. Foucault (1977) also assumed that power/knowledge is always present because discourses act on individuals but the degree of that enactment varies by individuals and the context in which they live and perform. Therefore, power is always productive as it gives meaning to everyday practices (Foucault, 1977). Discursive practices produce ways of doing and of thinking and create regimes of truth about what is considered normal and abnormal. Normalization is a disciplinary technique of power that functions as a system of control over individuals. We use the term 'normalization' to refer to a web of normalizing practices that disciplines people to follow a discursive regime. For example, gymnasts and their parents may learn and accept that practicing 30 hours a week at a very young age is 'normal' and desirable. Figure 6.2 shows how we used Foucault's notions of regime of truth, disciplinary power and normalization to examine how primary actors situated in these three levels positioned themselves in their ways of doing and thinking with respect to the dominant discursive practices outlined in the beginning of this paper that may enforce grooming.

Multilevel theorizing assumes that discursive practices at the micro level are embedded at and emerge from the macro level and that discursive practices at macro level often develop through the interaction and dynamics of meso and micro level elements (Cunningham, 2012). For example, directors of local clubs at the meso level may hire coaches to produce winners in elite youth sport and may also expect them to engage in discursive practices that encourage pleasure and positive development at the individual micro level. We used this model to analyse how primary actors in Dutch elite women's gymnastics (athletes, parents, coaches and directors of sport federations and sport clubs) positioned themselves in relationship to the discursive practices of elite youth sport and how these dynamics interacted to create situations that facilitated the grooming processes of emotional abuse. The purpose of this study therefore, is to use a multilevel model to critically explore the complexity of the grooming process of emotional abuse. In so doing, we attempt to understand how emotional abusive practices may be sustained and/or challenged in elite women's gymnastics.

Methodology

We conducted semi-structured interviews to discover how 14 elite women gymnasts (ages 14–30 years) experienced elite gymnastics. The study involved eight currently active gymnasts and six former gymnasts from nine different elite clubs whose gymnasts perform at the highest national and international levels. These are the athletes who were selected by the NGF for international competitions. We also held 12 interviews with parents (ages 36–51 years) of these athletes. These interviews supplied data for a micro level analysis. In addition, we conducted semi-structured interviews to explore the discourses and discursive practices used by 5 coaches (ages 36–53 years) and 5 members (ages 42–61) of boards of directors of the NGF (macro) and of local sport clubs (meso) that produce elite female gymnasts. We analyzed the data by identifying the behaviors/practices of the primary actors and the possible discourses that produced them. We then looked at the ways the actors drew upon these discourses to legitimate the ways in which elite gymnastics was conducted by these coaches and regulated by directors. (For further detail see Jacobs et al., 2017; Smits et al., 2017).

Results

Although initially we tried to present the results per level, we found this was a difficult task since the multilevel approach assumes interaction between the levels. The analysis showed that the dominant norm for coaching behaviours at the micro level involved literally and metaphorically belittling female gymnasts. The interviewed athletes had learned that

their opinions were not important, that the coach is the person in charge who polices and regulates their behaviour and that s/he is to be trusted because s/he has their best interests at heart. 'Coaches are always angry at women gymnasts anyway, that's just normal, that's the way is has to be' (female gymnast).

Former and current female gymnasts regularly used similar words to describe the intimidating grooming actions taken by coaches such as: "very mean", "ignoring", "humiliating", "swearing" and "blaming". They and their parents did not necessarily like these behaviors but accepted these behaviors as being part of the development of elite athletes (Smits et al., 2017). These quotes reflect how grooming processes normalize emotional abuse in coach-athlete interactions (micro level). This faith and trust of the female gymnasts in the coach was one of the pillars that reinforced a coach-athlete relationship of dependency. They were groomed to accept this behaviour of belittlement as 'normal' and as required for their development. Such findings are similar to those reported elsewhere (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Stirling & Kerr, 2007, 2009).

We however also analysed how these micro level processes were part of and supported by discursive practices that transcended them. In the following paragraphs we give examples of discursive practices of elite youth sport that occurred in grooming processes and normalized emotionally abusive behaviours. We first present how the discourse of pleasure played out at all three levels.

Discursive practices of pleasure

All actors (athletes, parents, coaches, directors) used the discourse of pleasure or enjoyment as the primary driver for athletes to begin in gymnastics and stay involved. A female gymnast remembers how enjoyment was the reason for her to continue to stay active in gymnastics from early age on:

> When I practiced gymnastics at younger age as a pupil, I was always last in the competitions. I didn't mind at that time, it was just about having fun and enjoying [the sport], that's what it was all about.

An elite coach explained that pleasure is a fundamental aspect for every training:

> The foremost thing is that the athlete should always have fun in the sport, that however, does not mean that they sometimes think: 'this was a tough and difficult practice'. But, [that they also think] we worked well together, I am tired and satisfied.

Parents who encountered abusive coaching behaviors later on in the careers of their daughters, explained the importance of the discourse of pleasure: 'People ask me sometimes: 'why did you allow her to practice at the elite level?' My child enjoyed gymnastics so much, it went so well, it was just the fun she experienced while involved in gymnastics.' A

director involved in the organization of elite gymnastics at the local level (meso level) agreed with the important role of the discourse of pleasure, including at the elite level:

> All in all, practices are set up and organized in a way that we hope that every practice is fun and a special moment. Anyway, if they do not make it in elite sport, they can take it [those moments of pleasure] with them in their sport career elsewhere at a lower level. (director of local elite gymnastics club)

The board of directors used macro level discursive practices to describe pleasure as a main component in gymnastics: 'Safety, pleasure and positivity are more important than winning. the purpose of gymnastics may never begin with winning.' Club directors (meso) and those working at the national level for the NGF (macro) level additionally emphasized that they did what they could to ensure that pleasure and positive development predominated in elite women's gymnastics. They backed this up by pointing to their requirement that coaches consent to the use of child friendly policies and that coaches did agree to do so. The directors assumed this meant coaches prioritized pleasure and positive development and used positive pedagogies (Jacobs et al., 2017). Paradoxically, although directors at the meso and macro levels governed sport with an emphasis on discursive practices of pleasure, at the same time they created a context that emphasized high performance or achievement that informed coaching behavior in other (unintended) ways.

Discursive practices of winning and toughness

All actors affirmed the discursive practices of pleasure, performance and positive development as being important. However, an additional discursive practice, the discursive practice of winning, emerged from the interviews as a factor that contributed greatly to grooming. It was the use of this discursive practice that normalized toughness and the assumption that abusive behaviors were needed to develop this. Two directors, one at the national level and the other at the club level explained: 'Parents do not come because you promise a child friendly or child focused programs. No, people who want elite sport do not come for that; they come because they want to win' (NGF director).

> Elite sport is primarily about winning. That characterizes elite sport. The moment you say that is not so, then there is nothing left to talk about. If you say to your coach that winning is unimportant and that pleasure or development are more important, then that elite coach will leave your club. (director of local elite gymnastics club)

Parents agreed: 'If an athlete or parent complains too much, you're out. They have to work hard'. This agreement supported the grooming process of athletes as evidenced in remarks athletes made: 'I was a practice animal, that made it easy for the coaches, I didn't complain and did what the coaches demanded, even when I was in pain' (female gymnast).

The coaches themselves however, were not free from the power of various discourses about sport either. They were disciplined by the discursive practices of expertise and achievement. A coach explained how this worked:

> We are so afraid that athletes will lose their elite mentality is, that they see things in life that may be more attractive and make them want to quit. That is the big fear and that is why the doors of the gym are closed and athletes are not allowed to participate in anything else. (coach)

By claiming expert knowledge, coaches became the guardians of a grooming process that shaped the behaviours and skills of the athletes at micro level and directors within sport clubs at meso level who were silent about the practices they observed.

Discursive practices of silence

A code of silence was another the discursive practices that occurred at all three levels and encouraged the continuation of emotional abusive coaching behaviours. A director of a sport club described how these discursive practices became part of the grooming process as follows:

> If parents complain then their daughter will be told the next morning at practice, 'You do not tell your parents those kinds of things. What we do and say, stays here and you do not share that with your mother.' She [the gymnast] gets yelled at and is shamed in front of the others and/or is isolated during practice. You know that this girl will never say anything at home anymore. That is what I call total control.

Parents became part of the normalization process of grooming and as a parent realised when reflecting on the daughter's involvement: 'Looking back, she kept quiet about a lot of things'. Athletes confirmed that this is how they become part of the grooming process, led by the discourse silence at the micro level:

> Previously when I told [my parents] what happened and they complained, I was treated 1000 times more harshly in the gym. Others said: 'Did you have to complain again to your daddy and mommy?!!!' So, at one point you do not tell them anything anymore. And as you get older, you also do not want to burden your parents with your problems. (female gymnast)

In other words, all actors at three levels created a regime of truth at all three levels, based on their normalizing judgement with assertions of rationality and validity that seemed to legitimize the discourse of silence as a grooming factor that contributed to emotional abusive practices.

Discursive practices of disciplining the body (weight)

Finally, the discursive practices of disciplining the body for weight management goals also contributed to the grooming process that enabled abusive coaching behaviors to occur. Weight management discursive practices used in the clubs were unquestioned by all actors at the three levels. A coach described his/her view of the relationship between weight and performance: 'It's a shame if you are an athlete who has talent and skills, but you are too heavy.' Gymnasts have internalized this regime of truth about their bodies:

> Of course, the NGF is unhappy if you do not have a skinny body. They can't really let you take part in an international match [because] then they'd see a chubby kid walking around on TV, if you get my meaning … It [weight control] is really tough for me. I find it very difficult but I really do my best to stay at the desirable weight. (female gymnast)

A director of an elite sport club described how athletes reacted to such practices such as weight:

> There are some coaches who weigh an athlete regularly, often once or twice per week. The athletes know this and go to the toilet to induce vomiting. They are forced to think it [elite gymnastics] is primarily about their weight.

Directors who were aware of such weight control management, did nothing however to stop such practices, assuming this was part of elite gymnastics. Similarly, although parents were concerned about how elite gymnastics practices influenced their daughters' self-image and embodiment, they normalized this management. A parent explained for example the regime of truth about weight and body development: 'That development of becoming a woman, it's all forbidden, because then you become too heavy. And that's true, because when you weigh more, things work differently.' This discipling of the body was the opposite of the discursive practices of pleasure.

Conclusion

These data from those involved at macro, meso and micro levels of sport suggest that the power of discursive practices of pleasure was secondary to the disciplinary power of the discursive practices of achievement and child protection and safeguarding. These discursive practices are part of the grooming factors that enabled emotional abusive practices in elite women's gymnastics. The results of our research on these elite gymnasts, their parents and directors at local and national levels suggest that a grooming process at the micro level does not occur in isolation from other processes that take place at meso and macro level. In other words, grooming at the micro level by the coach is not an isolated practice, but is

part of a complex dynamic of discursive practices that extends beyond the coach-athlete relationship. This includes discursive practices used at the meso level such as the goals of a sport club where a program is housed, available pedagogical models, role of management and directors of sport clubs etc. In addition, the use of discursive practices by those at the macro level such as the governance of the sport at the national and international levels, the attention paid to sport in the public imagination and the images used by the media. Discourses and their accompanying discursive practices about pleasure, the persistence of a code of silence, the emphasis on winning and toughness and 'proper' body weight support ways in which institutions are shaped. These discursive practices used by those at both at macro and meso levels informed coach-athlete interactions at the micro level in this study. Similarly, these interactions reproduced dominant discursive practices about elite women's gymnastics. The use of discursive practices that facilitated emotionally abusive behaviour by coaches was therefore not confined to one level but occurred at all levels and transcended them. Together these discursive practices acted on the primary actors involved in our research to normalize emotional abusive behaviour by coaches and allowed it to continue. We assume our results are not unique and that similar processes occur in other elite (gymnastics/sport) contexts.

Although policies have been created to eradicate all types of abuse in youth sport, research shows that the discourse of achievement/winning/performance is often used world-wide to justify coaching behaviours that continue to normalize emotional abuse, including that of young athletes (Owusu-Sekyere & Gervis, 2014). This institutional context makes change difficult. Although powerful (autocratic) coaches may shape the directions of norms in the contextual micro level, they themselves are constrained by the discursive practices that flow from the meso and macro levels and at the same time, the discourses used by coaches to legitimate their behaviors may in turn shape the regimes of truth that predominate at the meso and macro levels. Change therefore, may only be possible if the discursive practices that drive or shape the institutional context are completely transformed; this includes the primacy accorded to discourses of winning and performance. Compliance with the discourse of safeguarding and protection therefore requires the involvement of all actors. They all need to think critically about their ways of thinking about and practicing sports and especially about the notion of developing mental toughness. If not, changes in rules will have little impact on coaching behaviour. This critical approach needs to become an essential or cornerstone of coach education, of support networks for directors and of athlete education. For example, Denison and Avner (2011) argued for a Foucauldian based approach to coaching in elite sport. Such an approach could be used by all actors involved to critically reflect on everyday coaching practices and the history and source of such practices as a step toward an understanding and practicing of ethical coaching (see also Denison, 2007; Denison et al., 2017; Jacobs et al., 2016). Since our study focused on women gymnastics, such an approach could have implications for women in gymnastics as well for elite women athletes in general.

7

"Can You Deny Her That?" Processes of Governmentality and Socialization of Parents in Elite Women's Gymnastics

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Chapter 7   "Can You Deny Her That?" Processes of Governmentality   120
and Socialization of Parents in Elite Women's Gymnastics

Chapter 7   "Can You Deny Her That?" Processes of Governmentality   121
and Socialization of Parents in Elite Women's Gymnastics
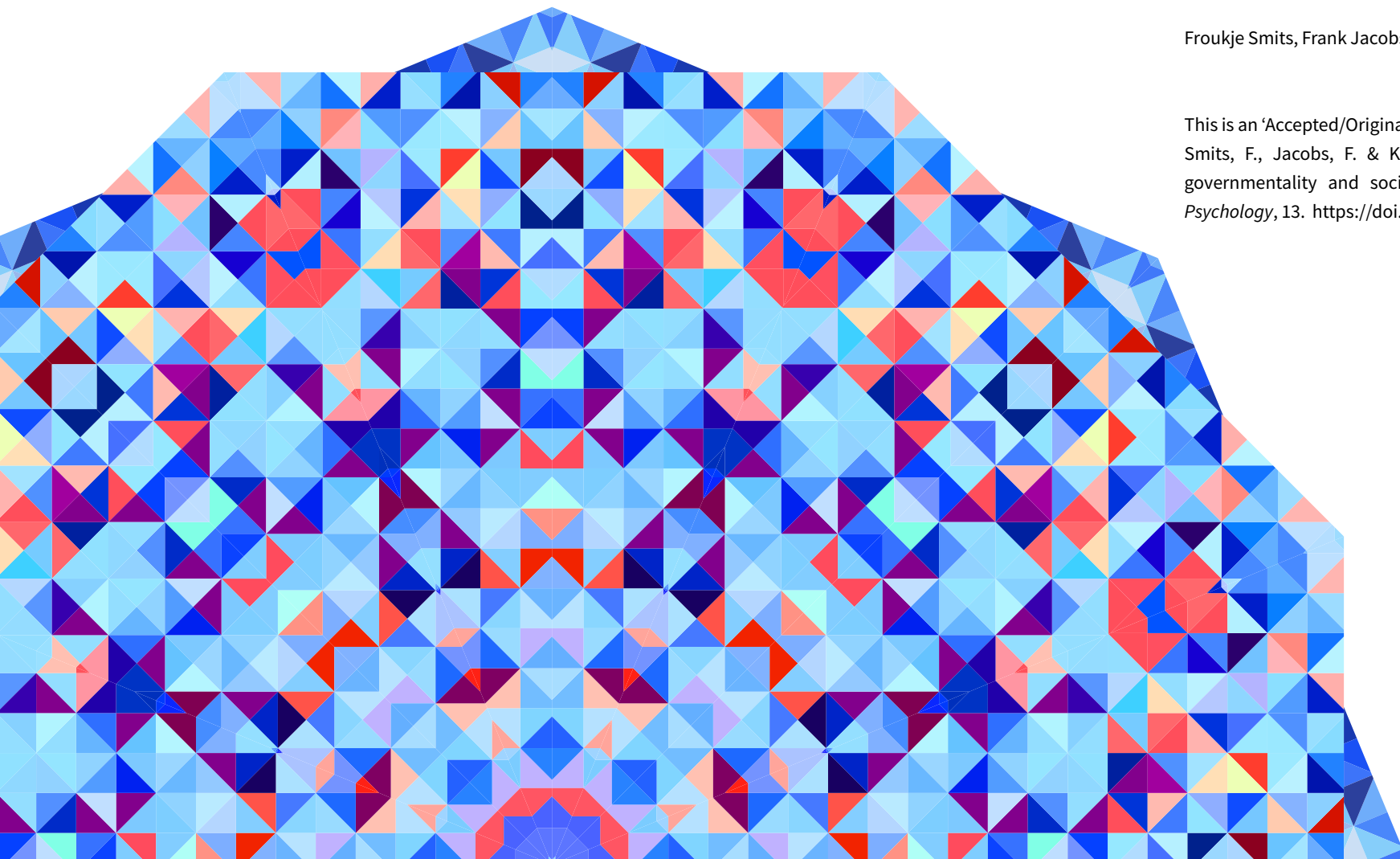
Abstract

Abusive practices in elite women's artistic gymnastics (WAG) have been the focus of discussions about how to eliminate or reduce them. Both coaches and parents have been named as key actors in bringing about change. Our focus is on parents and their ability to safeguard their daughters in WAG. Parents are not independent actors, however, but are part of a larger web consisting of an entanglement of emotions and technologies and rationalities used by staff, other parents, and athletes, bounded by skill development plans and by coaching expertise and authority. This entanglement may limit the ability of parents to bring about change. We draw on a Deleuzian notion of assemblage, Foucauldian concepts of discourse and governmentality and Ahmed's assertion about the entanglement of discourses and emotions to explore how parents are disciplined into accepting dominant discursive practices of sport clubs for elite athletes. The data were drawn from a project called the Parental Awareness Program (PAP) that was designed to make parents aware of practices in competitive WAG that may not be in their child's best interest. Participants were parents of young gymnasts who had been identified as "talented" and who were members of an elite gymnastics club. The data analysis was based on focus group discussions with a total of 22 parents and semi-structured interviews with 8 parents. The results suggested that although parents problematized many practices during PAP, processes of governmentality involving an assemblage of discourses about coaching expertise, families, talent, enjoyment, long term skill development plans and its associated time demands, together ensured parental consent for dominant practices. The data suggested that a reduction of abusive practices lies in part in critical examinations of skill development plans that are presented as regimes of truth and are kept in place by emotions and the authority accorded to coaching expertise. These processes curtail parents in their ability to safeguard what is in the best pedagogical interest of their daughter.

Keywords: gymnastics, parents, socialization, governmentality, elite

Introduction

Parents have always been part of youth sport, albeit serving in different capacities ranging from being chauffeurs, uniform washers, coaches, and supporters to working in the cafeteria and marking the fields. Their importance to youth sport should not be underestimated as they enable their children to participate in sport (Knight et al., 2020). The exact nature of parental involvement and influence appear to be shaped by both individual and contextual factors that include the context itself, the actions of other parents and coaches, their own experiences as athletes and as sport parents and their expectations for their child (Knight, 2019; Knight et al., 2016).

The dominant stereotype of parents of talented youth sport athletes, however, is that they are helicopter parents with irrational demands of coaches (Knight et al., 2017). It is not surprising then, that empirical research on parents and their specific contributions is largely limited to how parents can be involved in a positive way so that they do not put pressure on their children to produce outstanding performances or on coaches to produce champion athletes. The focus of a great deal of research in the last 10 years has been on how parents can be discouraged from trying to control their child's sporting experiences (Booth et al., 2014; Clarke et al., 2016; Kerr & Stirling, 2012).

Parents may, however, also become socialized or disciplined into a normalized culture of a sport and in so doing, may tacitly accept or ignore training practices, organizational factors/routines and emotional, physical, and sexual abusive behaviors and interactions with coaches that place a child at risk (Dorsch et al., 2009; Grenfell & Rinehart, 2003; Holt et al., 2008; Holt & Knight, 2014; Kerr & Stirling, 2012; Stirling, 2011; Stirling & Kerr, 2014). Parents have also realized that if they question coaches they may jeopardize the coach-athlete relationship (Kerr & Stirling, 2012; Smits et al., 2017). As a result, parents may often be silent bystanders in their child's experiences in sport instead of resisting practices that may not be in their child's best interest. Knight et al. (2020) argued that in elite sport where:

> winning is centralized and coaches are dominant, parents can find themselves trying to walk a tightrope between being there and available for their children, commenting on practices that they deem inappropriate, and not acting in a manner that may upset a coach and could subsequently impact on their child's chances of success in sport. (p. 307)

Relatively few scholars have looked at processes of parental socialization within the context of elite sport. An exception is work by McMahon et al. (2018). They examined parental socialization of elite swimmers and gymnastics. They found parents molded or shaped their behavior to be congruent with cultural narratives about what is needed for performance and perfections in this sport. The socialization processes of parents of elite athletes may mean they do not understand or see how the practices that comprise this training may not always contribute to the positive social development of the child (Lang, 2010a, 2010b; Smits et al.,

2017). Smits et al. (2017) found that parents of retired and current elite gymnasts accepted abusive practices because they thought that such practices were normal, that is, specific to elite gymnastics. Most research about parents accepting abusive practices as normal coaching behavior was, however, conducted before media and court cases worldwide drew attention to abusive practices in elite women's gymnastics. Our project explored current thoughts, attitudes and coping strategies of parents in navigating dominant practices in elite gymnastics. The project was situated in a setting and time in which abusive practices in women's gymnastics were constantly in the news, had become public knowledge and were also the subject of a parliamentary debate.

The revelations about coaches abusing youth sport athletes such as in gymnastics, have not only been condemned but have also created expectations that parents engage in safeguarding their children from forms of abuse that may occur during their sport participation (Harwood et al., 2019; Knight et al., 2016, 2020). Various scholars have suggested that this socialization of parents into the norms of elite sport culture might be countered by educating them about the forms abuse can take in sport (McMahon et al., 2018; Mountjoy et al., 2016). McMahon et al. (2018) for example, used narrative pedagogy in an education program geared toward parents of elite swimmers and gymnasts. The purpose of the program was to make parents aware of situations where abusive practices can occur. Parents participating in that study agreed the described hypothetical coaching practices presented in the narratives were unacceptable. They also, however, suggested that perhaps such coaching practices could be necessary to help a child improve their performance. Specifically, they rationalized and normalized these abusive behaviors by coaches and constructed the coach as knowing what the best and necessary practices were to produce elite performance. This acceptance of these ways of coaching may make parents unable to challenge practices that might not be in the best interest of their children. McMahon et al. (2018) used narratives about hypothetical situations and athletes, however. These parents might have reacted differently if the narratives had described their own daughters participating in elite gymnastics. Research is needed that explores how parents of elite athletes such as those in gymnastics, currently conceive of themselves as protecting their child in their participation in the sport and how, if at all, parents now problematize practices and the techniques or strategies employed by clubs.

Parents are not independent actors, however, but are part of a larger web consisting of elements such as affect, coaches, sport culture, other parents, and athletes that shape parental identities of potentially outstanding gymnasts (Dorsch et al., 2009, 2015, 2016; McMahon et al., 2018; Smits et al., 2020). These constructions can function as a mechanism of socialization that exerts control with the aim of obtaining parental consent to norms about what is accepted and needed to "develop the good gymnast" and to be the appropriate, compliant or "good parent." Relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the multitude of elements that constitute processes of socialization that could make parents complicit in accepting and normalizing current practices in elite gymnastics and/or resisting

such practices. In the current study we explore how parents thought about the processes of the development of their daughters as elite gymnasts and their rationale for their thoughts and how, if at all, they resisted what they saw as problematic practices.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The focus of our study was on how parents of talented young gymnasts navigated the practices, regulations and other elements that shaped their daughter's participation in elite gymnastics. The research question was: how are parents of elite young gymnasts governed into acquiescence of dominant club practices? Specifically, which elements comprise an assemblage of practices, regulations, knowledges and other forces that may interact to constitute parents of elite young gymnasts and which processes of governmentality socialize parents into acquiescence and acceptance of current practices?

Theoretical framework

Our study is based on comments made by parents during a Parental Awareness Program (PAP). The goal of the program was to enable parents to counter the strategies used by the club/staff and by their daughters to shape them into being proper gymnastic parents. We uncovered several elements that together comprised an assemblage that was subjected to processes of governmentality that socialized parents into acquiescence and acceptance of current practices. We foreground relations of power and governmentalities as they are constituted in regimes of practice or assemblages.

We used a lens based on Buchanan's (2015) conceptualization of assemblage, Foucault's (Foucault, 1974, 1991, 2003) notion of discourses and governmentality, and Ahmed's (2010) contention about the entanglement of discourses and emotions to explore how parents were disciplined or governed into accepting current practices in elite gymnastics. Buchanan (2015) used a Deleuzian notion of assemblage defining it as 'the productive intersection of a form of content (actions, bodies and things) and a form of expression (affects, words and ideas)' (p. 390). Specifically, an assemblage in the context of this study can be seen as the assumption that a multitude of practices, regulations, knowledges and other forces interact and construct what it means to be a parent of an elite gymnast (Brown et al., 2012). Assemblages are, however, shaped by discourses and relations of power.

A Foucauldian notion of discourse refers to 'what can be said and thought, who can speak, when and with what authority ways of thinking and doing that may become truth or common sense, often known as regimes of truth' (Ball, 1990, p. 2). Power is therefore, not seen as coercive but rather involves steering individuals toward specific ways of thinking and behaving that over time become common sense. Governmentality can be defined as acting on the actions of others or the act of conducting the conduct of others (Foucault, 2003). It describes a form of power that is not exercised through rules, but through ways

of expressing "truths" that emerge from discourses using rationalities and ways of doing (technologies). These rationalities and technologies emerge from conversations, traditions, culture, and experts that together encourage individuals to regulate their own behavior in a desired direction (Foucault, 1991, 2003). Governmentality in the specific context of the study refers to the shaping or governance of parental behavior and thinking as they engage with an assemblage that is specific to women's artistic gymnastics (WAG) (Buchanan, 2015; Dean, 2010; Rose, 2000). An explanation of how this type of non-coercive power circulates in a specific context requires an exploration of the technologies (the doing) and rationalities (the thinking) that are used to socialize or regulate into this acceptance.

Emotions are also a large part of sport, however (Lee Sinden, 2013). An initial quick scan of our data suggested perceptions of enjoyment and other emotions played a large role in the socialization of parents. Ahmed (2010) has argued that in addition to discourses, emotions can also shape human behavior and thinking. Emotion, therefore, can also serve as an element in governmentality (see also Burrows & Wright, 2007). A gymnast may for example, feel joy and share this enjoyment with her parents when she nails a specific move on a balance beam. The difficulty of this move is situated in discourses. Specifically, the gymnast feels joy (emotion) because she properly executed what is known (discourse) as a difficult move. Emotion/affect and the discourse are, therefore, inseparable and cannot be distinguished from each other (Ahmed, 2010).

The use of a governmentality analytic therefore, requires researchers to pay attention to how power is exercised through regimes or assemblages of rationalities (ways of thinking) and technologies (ways of doing) and how these assemblages are rooted in history/culture/traditions of the phenomenon under study. Following Ahmed (2010), we argue that emotions are entangled in each of these dimensions and in the elements comprising the gymnastic assemblage in the specific context under study. Governmentality then, refers to the daily rationalities and technologies that produce an assemblage of elements entangled in an affective web of power that govern/regulate or socialize parents into the proper training of elite gymnasts.

Context

The talent programs in the selected elite clubs are structured and organized by age and by level of performance. Girls tend to be selected for the talent program when they are young. They begin in the so called "pupil" classes for 7–9-year-olds. "Junior" classes are for those 10–12 years old. The young gymnasts become seniors when they are 13 and (still) judged to be talented. The seniors are further subdivided into three groups based on age: 13–14, 15–17 years and those 18 and older.

In addition to age-related categories there are six different levels of performance in WAG. The highest level is the (inter) national level for talented gymnasts. Gymnasts who

participate in the first, second, and third division compete at the national level, those in division four and five compete at the district level while those in division 6 (the lowest level) of performance, compete at the regional level. These differentiations across age and classification are associated with hours of training. Those in the 6th division for example, generally practice 4 h per week while talented gymnasts who are selected as seniors are required to practice up to 19 h per week when they are 13–14 years old; those who are 15–17 years old must practice 23 h while those 18 years and older must train 27 h and more. If a gymnast's performance level is considered to be subpar, she will be excluded from the talent program; if she wishes, she can continue to participate at a lower level and her hours of practice per week will decrease accordingly. In addition to having fewer hours of practice, the lower division gymnasts are trained by assistant coaches. The elite coaches coach only at the national level. This means that those gymnasts who drop-out of the highest level or are demoted to a lower level, learn less and receive less support from the club. Due to this hierarchy, most young gymnasts (and their parents) want to continue to participate at the highest level to fulfill their desire to develop their talent. We recognize that this development system is contextual. Every country may have its own long term development plan for gymnastics.

Methodology

Participants and the Project

The PAP was a collaborative initiative from researchers from a university in a midsized city and the board members of two clubs for elite gymnasts. It was grounded in a national program called "Sport innovator", sponsored by the Dutch ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. The boards of the two sport clubs sent a letter of to all parents whose daughters were enrolled in the clubs to invite them to attend/participate in a PAP session. The purpose of each PAP session was to enable parents to share their experiences and to make them aware of possible problematic practices that might be part of their daughter's involvement in gymnastics. During the PAP sessions the authors shared the results of scholarly research conducted with parents, coaches, club managers and elite gymnasts in the Netherlands. Participants also listened to/read recent (2021) media accounts of abusive coaching behaviors in women's elite gymnastics in the Netherlands. Subsequently, the participants split into three focus groups in which they reflected on their ideas about and their experiences with their daughter's participation in elite gymnastics. We used the sessions to collect data for the current research project. The data therefore, were primarily parent-generated.

We asked these parents if we could use their responses for the current research project and if we could record their discussions. They were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time, that their responses and remarks were confidential and that we would

do all we could to keep their responses/comments anonymous. We did this by not referring to them by codes/demographic details in the "Results" section.

This not only ensured their anonymity and their concerns about confidentiality and privacy but also prevents readers from projecting their assumptions about gender on the quoted fragments or possibly identifying a parent since the number of elite gymnasts are relatively few in each club. The emphasis of the analysis is on what was said in the focus groups, rather than on the (demographics of) the person who said it. Individuals were not the unit of analysis.

All of the participating parents agreed to participate in the study. The participants in the study were 30 parents whose daughters were involved in one of two elite gymnastics clubs. These young girls (6–12 years old) had been designated as talented by the club and as having potential to compete at the international level.

Data Collection

We used focus groups to enable and enhance collective interactions among parents. Scholars such as Kitzinger (1994) and Sparkes and Smith (2014) have argued that focus groups stimulate the spontaneous expression of participants as they react to comments made by others. Focus groups are an appropriate method for research situated within a post-structuralist perspective (Freeman, 2006; Madriz, 2000; Smithson, 2008). They are assumed to decrease the impact the researcher may have on a discussion. Focus groups have been used in post-structural research to uncover narratives and the discourses in which they are embedded. A strength of focus group methodology is that it enables research participants to develop ideas collectively, bringing forward their own priorities and perspectives. We did this by using an open structure format in which parents were asked about issues they had encountered and by enabling parental interaction with each other rather than only with the leader. The purpose of the moderator or leader in these types of focus groups is to facilitate the discussion and help identify the issues that emerge. We used a whiteboard to note issues that were mentioned by the group as well as by previous groups. The parents involved in the study were therefore, encouraged to talk to each other rather than react to the leader's questions. This method tends to foster feelings of solidarity among participants. They can share and/or produce common knowledge about relevant issues in the sport club. As Freeman (2006), who led focus groups of parents about the issue of testing in schools, argued:

> When parents question themselves and each other, when they agree and disagree about what they mean, when they seek approbation from others, when they accept the uncertainty of their interpretations by allowing contradictory claims to enter their discourse, they are engaging substantially, evaluatively, and morally with the topic. The parents do not share stories and then add evaluative commentary; they are thinking and engaging together evaluatively, using the stories as evidence of their thinking. (p. 91)

We therefore used these focus groups and the interviews to gain a better understanding of the issues these parents considered important with respect to safeguarding their daughter's participation in elite gymnastics and to uncover how they navigated these issues.

Research and media accounts that described the negative consequences of gymnastic participation for young girls in the Netherlands and the world served as an impetus for dialog among parents. We assumed these accounts gave parents a context and placed them in a critical spectator role. Scholars (Freeman, 2006; Madriz, 2000; Smithson, 2008) have argued that asking focus group participants to respond to a common focal point, in our case, media accounts and research, fosters a collectivistic rather than individual response. Through their engagement with other parents in the focus groups and/or with the results of the focus groups as was the case in the semi-structured interviews, understandings and meanings were constructed that were embedded in discourses about being a good gymnast and a good gymnastic parent.

The purpose of the groups was to enable parents to discuss issues they wanted to raise and to share with others about their daughter's participation in elite gymnastics. This purpose helped us identify elements comprising the assemblage of elite gymnastics practice. The discussion format in each group was semi structured and centered on three main topics: (1) their responsibilities/role as parents and the dilemmas they faced in supporting their daughter, (2) their requests of and wishes for the ways coaches guided and taught their daughters, and (3) their demands and requests of the board of governance of the club. Each topic was moderated by one of the researchers. The selection and use of these topics were based on our earlier research project that suggested practices in women's competitive gymnastics do not occur in a vacuum but involve various actors (Jacobs et al., 2017; Knoppers et al., 2015; Smits et al., 2017, 2020). In each discussion group, parents were also asked if they had other issues/questions they wished to discuss. To encourage interaction in the focus groups we used a progressive form of discussion (see also Freeman, 2006; Madriz, 2000; Van Doodewaard et al., 2018). Specifically, each group reacted to main points that emerged from the discussions in the other groups on the same topic.

The first evening, two parents (two mothers of two different gymnasts) attended the PAP session. The second evening was attended by 20 parents (13 mothers and 7 fathers). We asked the parents attending the second session to divide themselves into three similarly sized groups of about 6–7 people each. We assumed that parents would feel most comfortable in discussing issues they faced if parents could form their own groups. The two parents who came as a couple joined the same group. Each group met in a different space and then rotated through the three rooms. Each room had its own discussion leader who focused on one of the topics. Researchers involved with the project served as discussion leaders. The leader in each room used a white board to summarize the elements that parents in the previous group had raised about that topic and what they had said about that topic or specific element. Parents were then asked for new points of discussion as well as their

reactions to what previous groups had said. By the time the groups had rotated through all three rooms, no new discussion points were raised.

We therefore assumed saturation of issues was reached. The same program was used the first evening; the two parents formed one group. The third PAP session was canceled since no parents attended. We did not have access to membership lists of the club but according to a board member, most of the parents of young talented gymnasts participated in one of the PAP sessions.

Due to COVID-19 lockdowns we were unable to hold this program at the second participating elite gymnastics club. We therefore held individual virtual interviews with eight parents (four mothers and four fathers) of this club. Again, similar informed consent procedures were followed. We used a semi-structured topic list, based on the program and outcomes of the elements raised in the focus groups of the previous evenings and asked the interviewees to expand on them if they so wished. They were also invited to raise new issues but they did not do so. This absence of new issues also suggests saturation of the elements comprising the three topics was reached. We recorded verbatim everything parents said in the focus groups and interviews and what was written on white boards. The data were subsequently transcribed word for word.

Positionality

As three experienced professionals working in the field of physical education and sport at the university level, we acknowledge that our own biographies and our work in the area of pedagogy resonate in our research. Although all of the authors have an undergraduate degree in physical education, our only involvement in competitive gymnastics has been through a comprehensive research project focusing on elite gymnasts, their parents, coaches and the managers of the clubs of which they were a member. The current project is an extension of our this research endeavor in which we discovered that parents and club directors/managers were often blind to how elite gymnasts experienced their sport. During the current research project we therefore continually critically reflected on these assumptions to explore how they might have informed the ways in which we interpreted the data by using several iterations to reach agreement on our presentation of the results (Boeije, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Data Analysis

Analysis of focus group data situated within a post-structuralism perspective places little emphasis on "systematic analysis", as groups are viewed as producing locally situated accounts (Freeman, 2006; Smithson, 2008). Our post-structural analytic focus, therefore, was not on what individuals said in a group context but on how parents collectively negotiated and navigated discourses constructed within this group context about a "good" gymnast and being a "good" gymnastic parent.

Our analysis is situated in a post-structural theoretical framework (Freeman, 2006; Smithson, 2008). We therefore do not assume linearity or exclusive coding/categorizations. The codes as well as the placement of the elements into a governmentality analytic overlap because parents are socialized into a complex assemblage. An assemblage assumes complexity and that therefore, its elements overlap.

Our analysis was based on procedures described by Boeije (2010). We used the group, rather than individuals as our unit of analysis. Our data analysis consisted of two major procedures: first, identifying components of the assemblage that reflected the issues raised by parents and second, detecting processes of governmentality that socialized parents into navigating these issues or elements in the desired "club" way. The focus of both analyses was on what was said or done rather than who said it. We therefore did not assign pseudonyms to parents, nor use any marker to describe them nor did we differentiate between parents of the two clubs.

Although the ways the focus groups operated resulted in a funneling of the data, we began the analysis anew using the analytical process proposed by Boeije (2010) for analyzing qualitative data. We began with open coding of the data to identify elements or issues that might be part of an assemblage. Each researcher did this independently after which we shared the resultant codes, i.e., elements. This process revealed that there were various disparate but interrelated elements that were part of being a parent of an elite gymnast at the clubs. Although individually we named the elements somewhat differently, we were in complete agreement in our identification of them. We, therefore, worked toward reaching unanimity in properly naming the issues or elements that had emerged in this initial analysis.

We subsequently, situated the elements in the literature and engaged in a selective coding process, that is, sorting/grouping the issues/elements and/or adjusting the name of an issue (Boeije, 2010). Again, each of the three researchers did this independently followed by an inter-researcher discussion in which we continually shifted between the data and our theoretical framework to identify key elements of an assemblage that disciplined parents and their daughters into dominant ways of thinking and doing at the clubs. For example, initially we agreed on the code "family" but after the selective coding process it became "disruptions of family constellations". After discussions among researchers these issues were refined and selectively coded as: talent identification, (includes age), affect/joy (in skill mastery and in coach athlete relationships), hierarchical skill development plan, time spent including travel, family disruptions and forms of parental resistance. The socialization of parents was at the center of this complex assemblage. We subsequently used Dean's (2010) dimensions of governmentality (technologies, rationalities, and culture/tradition) as an analytical tool to describe how parents were subtly governed into accepting the *status quo.* Specifically, we describe and analyze how participation was legitimized and enabled, how parents and their daughters were disciplined into docility through skill development plans and the coach-athlete relationship, how parents coped with the various issues that

constituted the assemblage, how emotions and discourses about being a parent of an elite gymnast were entangled, and how parents resisted certain practices. Although these dimensions of governmentality and of affect were entangled with each other, we separated them heuristically to enable us to present the data. The resulting analysis revealed how participation was legitimized and enabled through talent identification, affect/joy and skill mastery; how parents and their daughters were disciplined into docility through hierarchical skill development, affect in the coach-athlete relationship and affect/joy. We expand on this assemblage in the "Results" section.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) have argued that rather than focusing on absolute standards of reliability and validity associated with quantitative research, qualitative research analyses need to address trustworthiness and credibility. We believe that the parents were trustworthy in describing their experiences. Rather than using a list of topics we wanted them to discuss, we asked them to name and explain the issues they wished to discuss (Freeman, 2006; Madriz, 2000). The data, therefore, were parent-generated as parents presented their issues. Data saturation occurred as reflected in our use of progressive focus groups, in the absence of new issues emerging in the final round of the focus groups and in the confirmation of the issues by the interviewees who also did not raise any new issues. This process could be seen as a form of triangulation of method and preliminary analysis and speaks to the trustworthiness of both the data and the analytic process.

We strengthened the trustworthiness of our analysis by engaging in separate (critical) readings of the data and the subsequent steps of the analysis (Boeije, 2010). These separate readings led to discussions among the researchers. After each discussion we returned to the data and situated it in the theoretical framework. The analysis itself was a process of creating (and dismissing) critical interpretations. We assume, based on the foregoing, that our data are trustworthy and credible in reflecting how these parents experienced their daughter's involvement in elite gymnastics. We do not pretend that we have uncovered THE truth about parents being socialized into gymnastics culture. Instead, we assume we have uncovered partial and situated truths (situated knowledge) about this socialization as described by these parents (Haraway, 1988).

Results

The results suggested that although these parents problematized certain practices during PAP sessions, they continued to accept the regulations and norms created by the staff. This acceptance was a gradual process that occurred after an athlete was marked as having potential or talent and selected to be part of the elite club. This process involved an assemblage (see Figure 7.1) that drew parents into a web of compliance shaped by an

entanglement of emotions, rationalities, the historical structure of technologies used to develop skill (the long term development plan), their daughter's progress and interactions with other parents and coaching staff. Although we highlight the role of emotions separately, we note that affect was also entangled in all of the dimensions of governmentality. We briefly discuss each dimension of governmentality as we present it. In the general discussion we look at the findings using more of a helicopter view.

Figure 7.1: Assemblage of the socialization of parents
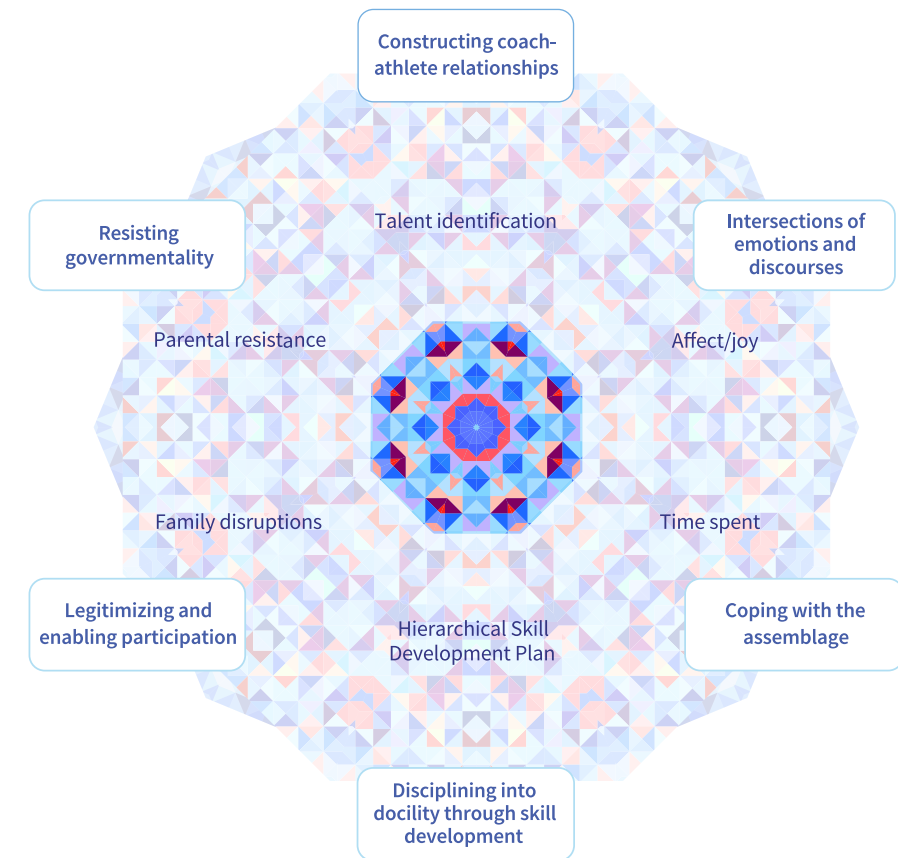
Legitimizing and Enabling Participation

Young girls became involved in the clubs when they were identified as being gifted or talented and having potential. Both the staff and parents noted that their daughters early on displayed qualities assumed to be needed for high level gymnastics. Parents described how their daughters were physically energetic when very young and were constantly trying gymnastics stunts in and around the house:

'When she was small, she was always physically active. She would often do handstands in the living room.'

'As a young girl she would stand on her hands and watch tv upside down.'

'She could hang from a horizontal bar for a long time.'

These parents, therefore, looked for a gymnastics club where their daughter could be involved. When these girls joined a club, they were quickly identified as being gifted and as possessing potential to be outstanding talented gymnasts. Parents gave examples of how this worked:

An affiliate of the club for elite gymnasts began near our house; our daughter joined it when she was 4 years old; now she is 11. A few months after she joined the club she was already identified as being talented; she moved to the elite level when she was 5 1/2 years old.

Another described how gymnastics was supposed to be a stopgap measure during the winter field hockey stop:

She [our daughter] was involved in field hockey but had nothing to do in the winter. So, we checked out a nearby gymnastics club. Two weeks after she started there, she was already moved to the group identified as having "potential".

Often local clubs had insufficient resources or possibilities for these girls to develop further. Parents then looked for elite clubs in other cities although going there meant travel by bike or train and/or parental chauffeuring duties. A parent explained what happened when their daughter joined a local club:

The highest level the local gymnastics club offered was the 2nd division. Few girls practiced at that level; she immediately won all the competitions. She was dissatisfied with only six practice hours per week and wanted more of a challenge. The local club could not offer her more. We then looked at the elite club in City X to see if that could provide her with the needed challenge and higher skill levels.

This search for an adequate club, instead of changing to another sport that could be done locally, was a crucial step in the entanglement of parents and their daughter with gymnastics, its culture and skill development model.

This identification of very young talented children for sport is part of the elite sport program of the Netherlands (Reijgersberg et al., 2010). This label of having "potential" in gymnastics has consequences, however, for the young girls and for their entire families. A parent acknowledged that 'gymnastics seems to be a sport in which the more you practice,

the better you become. It is not just about talent but also about practicing, much more than in other sports'.

This time element is considered to be a crucial part of becoming and being a good gymnast and disrupted regular family arrangements and routines. The following accounts by two parents revealed how talent identification can serve as a rationale for allowing a girl's involvement in gymnastics to shape family arrangements:

I have three children. One wanted to play rugby. I told him he couldn't because it asked too much: practices twice a week with competitions in the weekend. But then my daughter began gymnastics and she was very talented so we let her get involved. My son did not like that at first but he came to accept it.

We talk about this constantly. It [her participation] affects everyone in our family; we have to bring and pick her up since she is only 7. I cannot leave the youngest home alone so she has to come along. She (the youngest) always says 'I'm doing bringing and picking up' as if that is her activity. How long can we continue to facilitate this?

Participation is not an individual matter but involves the whole family and their routines. A parent described how family routines have been adjusted to fit the talented daughter's schedule: 'There are also matters such as eating and going to bed on time. We have to tell the others they have to get going because their sister has to go to bed. She needs a lot of sleep'. Another parent conceded the need for changes in family routines for the sake of a talented child: 'We struggle with the same thing. Can we ask everyone in my family to make sacrifices for one member?'

Family arrangements place the girl's practice schedule at the center because that schedule is extensive and intensive. This rationality about elite gymnastics being a time-consuming sport gradually became an accepted regime of truth for these parents. A parent explained how they had to accept a shift from the original few hours per week of practice to many: 'At first we said she could not practice so many hours in a week and not more than 4 days a week. Currently she trains 6 days per week and on some days has double sessions'. These disruptions were complex because involvement was linked to enjoyment:

The enjoyment of the other family members should not be sacrificed for the enjoyable experiences of one child. But I see how happy she is and how she loves it and that we can fit her schedule into ours. Then she does extremely well, wins a contest and comes home extremely happy. Can you deny her that?

A parent commented: 'I see that she loves it, that she can continue to improve. The fact that you are one of the best in the Netherlands does a lot for a person'.

This compliance involving a gradual shift to many hours and the acceptance of that by parents and gymnasts, is an example of the subtle working of governmentality. These accounts about talent identification echo Kilger and Börjesson's (2015) assertion that talent selection should be understood as a discursive repertoire embedded in a legitimacy bounded by what has been constructed as the identification of essential skills. Further on, we reveal how the staff used technologies to counter resistance to the time demands and how the resistance is diminished and absorbed.

Disciplining Into Docility Through Skill Development

Once these girls became part of a club, they were embedded in its long term development plan based on a regime of truth how young talented gymnasts should be developed, the necessary skill progressions and what was needed to make them outstanding. In this manner, they and their parents were regulated into docility via normalizing judgments about talent development (Foucault, 1974).

As we explained earlier, the girls were part of a multi-level program. Each level consisted of hierarchical skill progressions and development. If an athlete was unable to practice for a while she might be dropped to a lower level. These levels and the differences between them formed a technology that pushed the girls to desire to be at the highest level possible. The negative consequences associated with possibility of going "down" a level meant it was difficult for parents to insist on a time out for their daughters or to protest the number of hours their daughter spent on gymnastics.

Parents were not happy with the time element as the data above revealed but as the fragments show below, they gradually were governed into accepting this regime as necessary. Although they problematized these practices, they were subtly led to comply with them. The ways in which the development plan was regulated and its entanglement with emotions, especially enjoyment, made it difficult for parents to pull their daughter out of gymnastics. A parent explained how the time involvement slowly increased making it difficult to limit involvement:

> It went gradually. First the question was if she could also train Wednesday afternoons? Then later another afternoon was added. We thought: 'OK she really wants this'. She came home very enthusiastic about her practice sessions. Then a fourth afternoon was added, which she really wanted. What is the limit of how much we let her be involved? That is difficult, who determines this limit? You really need the hours of practice but is it worth it? She has talent. Her limit is 32 h since she needs time to eat, go to school, etc.

The challenge and enjoyment the girls experience in skill mastery also contributed to the compliance of parents with the development plan. Two parents explained what skill mastery meant for their daughters and the emotions that accompanied working toward skill mastery: 'My daughter loves the challenge of learning new skills. And then she practices,

practices and practices and finally she is able to do it and thinks 'Wow!'' and: 'My daughter is not busy trying to reach the top but mastering new skills'. This love of mastery also explains why dropping to a lower level was associated with less enjoyment. The following fragment reveals how the technology of a skill development plan ensured the girls did not resist the rules for skill development. A parent described how the coaches seemed to listen to the parents and girls about the number of hours of practice and gave them a voice in limiting the number of hours. In a short time, however, the girls ended up practicing the expected number of hours.

> We told the coaches we thought the time required for gymnastics was becoming too much. They said she could cut back but then she would have to return to the non-elite level. They added that it was a shame to waste so much talent. They then let the girls decide how many hours they wanted to practice and told them they could remain part of the elite division even with fewer hours but that it was expected that over time, they would practice more hours. When our daughter heard she could decide herself and stay in the elite program, she said she would stay. In about 4 weeks she increased the number of hours so that she was practicing according to the expected norm.

Not only the ways vacation time is filled changed when a girl is marked as talented, but the training regime also shaped school plans. The parents attributed their acceptance of these changes to the daughter's choices:

> She used to attend advanced classes at the high school level. Now she has decided to stop that and devote those mornings to gymnastic practice instead. We and the school have discussed the consequences of this decision with her. She then was allowed to choose what she wanted to do we accepted her choice.

Other parents also constructed their acceptance of the gymnastics regime based on the choice their daughter made:

> When you decide to be involved in elite sport then you have to sacrifice some things. We explained that to her and told her it was her choice. We did not push her to stay in the sport, we only tried to facilitate her choices.

This theme of choice is embedded in many rationalities parents used to justify their daughter's participation. This emphasis on choice that is entangled with enjoyment reveals why it might be difficult for parents to safeguard the interests of their daughter.

The long term development plan is part of the assemblage that regulates processes of governmentality employed by the club. Parents take on narratives used by the coaching staff that injuries are par for the course and that if a girl drops out for a time, then she will never

catch up. This element of the assemblage ensured the girls stayed in the program and did not take a time out for injuries because they would "fall behind". A parent described how this played out:

> There never is time for a break; yet the club says they take into account what this asks of the gymnasts' bodies. Our daughter has problems with her foot regardless of the solutions they devise for her. She does not dare to tell the coach about this although the staff says they should be told of such things. So, then we choose and we keep her at home and let her miss a practice.

We note that the parents did not keep her at home until she is pain free or injury free. A parent explained how the enormity of hours of gymnastic practice shaped their daughter's "choice":

> If she wants to stop for a while, even if it is only half a year, then that is the end of it for her. If you become a gymnast at age 6 and you did if for 4 years and invested so much then it is difficult for a child to choose another activity.

The long term development regime used by the gymnastic clubs is both linear and hierarchical. This linearity is similar to the results found by Dowling et al. (2020) in their analysis of the Long Term Athletic Development plan used in Canada. The linearity and hierarchy of such long term development plans shape the structure of clubs because it consists of various levels. Gymnasts cannot fall behind. The gymnasts' fear of dropping to a lower level, disciplined parents into accepting the structure. This Long Term Development plan for elite gymnastics in the Netherlands was controlled by the staff, primarily the head coaches. Parents and gymnasts had little to say in it. It was constructed as a regime of truth that was assumed to produce an "elite" athlete. None of the parents problematized the plan although they questioned the number of hours of weekly involvement it required. They accepted those hours as being a necessary part of the development of their talented daughter.

Coping With the Assemblage

Parents are also asked to make sacrifices for the sake of their daughter's development as a gymnast. There is literally little time off. A gymnast's daily, monthly, and yearly schedule is shaped by the demands of the long term development program in which there is little room for accommodation of individual desires. A parent described the dilemmas surrounding family vacations:

> Our family ski trips were an established ritual. At first our daughter wanted to continue to go with us but gradually she accepted that she could not go. We did not like it because our family consists of five members and not four.

Although parents problematized these disruptions, they were unable achieve changes to the schedule and its demands nor did they pull their daughter out of the club. They engaged in self-regulation to make the daughter's schedule a reality and a necessity.

Parents also described how the staff subtly worked to achieve acceptance of the practice regimes:

> We cut back the number of practice hours after we had moved and after a family member died. The coaches were unhappy about this reduction. They said it was OK but their attitude conveyed something else. I thought: 'they do not want to hear that this [reducing the hours] is necessary or they do not understand why this is necessary'.

This unhappiness served as a way to govern parents and daughter so that these parents felt pressured to increase the number of practice hours as quickly as possible.

Parents had other concerns as well. They problematized the possible effect that the many hours of practice and the types of activities might have on their daughter's body. Infertility was a major concern. A parent shared what they found on internet: 'I googled a bit and then read that muscle mass should not be too large because that [large muscle mass] leads to a low percentage of body fat which then means you are infertile'. Another echoed this fear but took it a step further: 'I am troubled by the idea that if you practice elite sport for a long time, that leads to difficulties in having children. I do not want this [her possible infertility] on my conscience'. Another problematized the exercises the girls needed do to be able to execute a full split: 'When I see how much those girls are stretched then I am not sure how safe it is for them.' These parents have seemingly taken on a discourse about the frailty of girls' bodies and the purported detrimental effect elite sport can have on their bodies. This biopolitical stance has been part of the (negative) discourse about the effects of girls and women engaging in competitive sports since the 1920s (Jackson & Tinkler, 2007). The clubs addressed this concern during an evening for parents during which a former athlete and coach challenged these myths. Interestingly, parents were not so much concerned about the possibility of their daughters being underweight and/or possibly developing eating disorders than they were about their fertility.

Despite attempts by the staff to counter parental rationalities with technologies such as member meetings, parents at times questioned if their daughter's involvement was worth it. They did so by drawing primarily on neo-liberal discourses of utility and weighing that against her enjoyment. Ultimately, they all used affect, the enjoyment factor, to justify their daughter's involvement. A parent admitted:

My daughter is not that good but she trains many hours per week. I then wonder: 'Is this worth it?' She cannot use her skills later for a job or to earn money with it. She participates in it because it is fun and it increases her self-confidence and to perform under pressure. But you can achieve that in other ways as well.

Another had similar questions about her daughter's participation after watching a documentary about mental and physical abuse in gymnastics:

The only thing my daughter knows is that gymnastics is lots of fun and is enjoyable. But there is so much more to do outside of gymnastics. She is only 6. When can we let her choose and when do we choose for her? I find that very difficult.

The emotions that accompany winning, governed the parents into complying with the program:

But it is difficult to set a limit as to how far you can go. She wants to win competitions and after that become even better and win more competitions at a higher level. How can you then say: 'You have to stop?'

Although the foregoing describes the objections parents had to many parts of the training rituals at the club, they based their acceptance of these arrangements on their perceptions of their child's enjoyment.

Intersections of Emotions and Discourses

Parents claimed they used their daughter's emotions as a guide for safeguarding her interests and wellbeing. Enjoyment was often the criterion for continuing in the sport and with the rigid training regime. Although identification of talent was the major reason these girls became involved in the first place, enjoyment was the central reason given by parents for permitting their daughters to continue participation 'Gymnastics is primarily about enjoyment and having fun.' And: 'If a child enjoys gymnastics a lot, who are you to say: it has to stop?'

Parents and daughters invested a great deal of affect/emotions in the sport and in their daughters. According to these parents' success produced happiness. They argue:

'As long as she enjoys it, it is OK.'
'I see she is involved because she fully enjoys it. She does not feel pressure to perform, which is probably why she does so well.'
'I am pleased with her involvement and will continue to support her in this as long as she enjoys it and injuries can be contained.'

This emphasis on pleasure seemed to serve as the guiding principle for parents for allowing their daughter to engage with gymnastics, regardless of coaching methods and time involvement. Parents enjoyed watching their daughters flourish due to their success. They were pleased with her progress. They were proud to have a highly skilled daughter. Parents said: 'It is special to have a daughter who is involved in elite gymnastics' and 'Now that she has been selected to the Junior national team, she realizes she is more capable than she realized. She realizes she might be able to reach the finals at the national competition.' They also acknowledged that this elite level asks a lot: 'If you do not work hard, you are out.' The emotions of parents also contributed to accepting the current arrangements or technologies 'I love seeing how she develops as a gymnast and how much pleasure she gets out of being able to execute a skill that she was unable to do previously.' And: 'No we do not feel we pressure her to win. She loves competitions. We just have to make sure WE stay calm.'

These perceptions and constructions of pleasure/fun and competence were the norm for continued participation. Ahmed (2010), in her discussion of the functions of promises of enjoyment or happiness, has argued that this promise has a governing character because it pushes individuals toward that that might bring that happiness. This promise played a large role in governing both parents and their daughters in their acceptance of practices that constituted the development of these gymnasts. Happiness also played a role in how parents regarded and accepted the behaviors and practices of the coaches of their daughters but possibly also contributed to parental inability to safeguard her interests and/or wellbeing and/or to mitigate the coach-athlete relationship.

Constructing Coach-Athlete Relationships

Parents attached a great deal of importance to the athlete-coach relationship but also recognized there was little they could do to influence that. They did problematize some of the interactions between coach and athlete. They wanted the elite coaches to use positive pedagogical practices. 'These coaches want the children to work very hard and trust them to do so. It is important that then they are complimented for their work.' Another recounted how a coach scolded a girl by saying: 'Don't think you will be allowed to compete if you work like this.' Several parents problematized negative pedagogical practices used by the top-level coaches:

They are not very pedagogically minded and say stuff at times when they should not. They also did that when we temporarily cut back the hours our daughter practiced. I think it was totally inappropriate.

A parent contended that what makes her distrust a coach is favoritism while another pointed out that remarks by a head coach can demoralize gymnasts: 'The only thing that demotivates or discourages her [my daughter] are snide remarks by a coach.' Another parent complained:

The elite level coaches do not even write a summary of our discussion with them about our daughter's development. Other coaches at lower levels do make such summaries. We talked about this with one of the assistant coaches, who understands but can do little.

The parents also did not like the negative attitude held by top coaches about schooling. 'They have said that school is not that important.' Such an attitude by coaches suggests they see these gymnasts as objects with bodies to be trained (Donnelly, 1993). They do not see them as (little) girls who have been largely shut out of the usual life for girls their age.

Some of the parents expected their daughter to negotiate obstacles she may encounter in her relationship with a coach. 'We push our daughter to address problems she has with the coach or coaching practices; we discuss it at home and then she talks it over with the coach. We try to stay out of it.' This "solution" seems to make the daughter solely responsible for her relationship with a coach and treats that relationship in a rational manner (Pike & Scott, 2014). Given the age of the gymnasts, the hierarchy that exists in elite sport and the authority assigned to coaches in the coach athlete relationship, this may not be the best way to safeguard a child. Other parents acknowledged that what a coach says influences young gymnasts but that they have little influence as parents because they are in a lower hierarchical position. For example, a parent was unhappy with some of the things the coaches said to the gymnasts. 'I do not know if the coaches can change. They need to see the effect of their words. I can support my daughter but they have a larger influence. She is powerless with respect to them.'

The parents constructed coaches that treat gymnasts in a negative manner, as an exception, however. According to them, 'Most coaches are not like that; they push hard but in a positive manner.' Parents seemed to accept the current coaching situation because they had experiences with other coaches at lower levels who used positive pedagogical practices. None of the "other" coaches are elite head coaches, however. Other studies of athlete-coach relationships suggest that a head coach is given a great deal of room to engage in punitive practices because of his or her perceived knowledge and expertise (Jacobs et al., 2017; Kerr & Stirling, 2012; McMahon et al., 2018; Smits et al., 2017).

Parents who were part of PAP sessions wanted to learn how to deal with, to ignore or to address such practices. Learning how to work with or around this behavior may, however, suggest acceptance. An angry parent objected to having to learn to deal with specific coaching behaviors that she/he thought were inappropriate. S/he exclaimed: 'I do not need to be taught how to deal with that behavior since such behavior is simply wrong!' These parents problematized coaching behaviors and tried to bring about change by talking to assistant coaches.

There were few reports of parents confronting the elite coaches directly. Parents attributed a great deal of authority to head coaches. By doing so, they were disciplined into tolerating coaching behaviors and working around them. This way of working served as a technology that enabled coaches to ignore how the lives of these gymnasts and their

complex daily realities may be at odds with the "real" world in which they live. They are both children and gymnasts but the child part faded into the background possibly because it was not embedded into the structured development plan of the clubs that focused solely on developing talent. The process of governmentality ensured that parents in general came to accept this (Bailey & Collins, 2013; Dowling et al., 2020). Although they did not agree with the nature of the interactions of some of the coaches with their daughters, parents normalized the behavior. Similar to those involved in the McMahon et al. (2018) study cited earlier, these parents seemed to assume that punitive coaching behaviors are a normal part of gymnastic culture. A parent asserted that: 'I've read the media accounts and the [critical] book by retired gymnasts, but I do not see that type of behavior as mentioned in that book.' This normalization suggests processes of governmentality have worked well to ensure these parents accepted behaviors as normal while also acknowledging that these behaviors may not be pedagogically acceptable.

Parents were inclined to acquiesce to the ways coaches behaved and to the development plan because they had few notions of what elite gymnastics demands. They realized they had a knowledge and experience deficit concerning the practices of elite gymnastics. 'The coaches simply want them to work very hard. They do not ask too much of her. This is what elite sport is and we tell her that continually.' A parent described how their own sport history is quite different:

> We [parents] have played another sport competitively. Things were quite different there. We have to trust these [gymnastic] coaches including knowing what "normal" growth and development is and that the injuries are part of this development.

And:

> Her ambition is to go to the Olympics. I think: 'Why not? Hold on to your dreams and why shouldn't you reach that level?' I also know the road to achievement is long and difficult. Everything is possible if you work hard, make a commitment to your goals, have a bit of luck and stay injury free.

This acknowledgment of their deficit in knowledge and expertise and their acceptance of coaching behaviors they do not like, therefore, served as a technology that limited parents in their ability to safeguard their daughter's interests. Discursive power is never complete, however. There is always room for resistance (Foucault, 1974, 1991).

Resisting Governmentality

The foregoing revealed how the clubs navigated the resistance of parents of arrangements that seemed problematic by introducing a measure gradually. Problematization was not just confined to head coach behaviors but included other issues such as communication

between the club and parents. The clubs attempted to communicate with parents and children through Instagram, Facebook and an irregular newsletter and a member council. A parent agreed that 'Communication with the coaching staff is not ideal yet but getting better'. Another parent, however, contended that communication by the coaching staff with parents and gymnasts was ineffective/lacking. For example, a parent contended that 'coaches want the girls to be independent. But then they tell these girls so much in a meeting, that the girls forget. A week later my daughter says something that she remembers from the discussion.'

Parents were able to push for change on several issues with respect to physical and mental wellbeing of their daughters. At first, only those gymnasts who were part of the top level could make use of the physiotherapist and the mental coach. Parents who wanted access to these professional services initially had to pay for this themselves. The only exception to this rule was that the club paid for these services for those who competed at the international level. The parents argued that all children should be able to access this support. 'There are fewer support resources for parents of pupils and juniors than for seniors. We don't agree because all those girls train an equal number of hours!' These complaints from parents have had some effect: The services of the support staff have been gradually changing to encompass all the children. Thus, parents were able to transform several of their problematizations of technologies into structural change. Such transformations were rare.

In summary then, the parents of elite young gymnasts were governed into acceptance of an assemblage of dominant club practices infused with emotions such as pleasure and enjoyment. This assemblage included the identification of their daughter as being talented and as enjoying her development as a gymnast, an almost unquestioned adherence to a hierarchical skill structure, colonization of time by the staff that resulted in many hours of practice and disruptions of family constellations, affect in coach-athlete relationships and moments of parental resistance. The socialization of parents is at the center of this complex assemblage.

Discussion

The data analysis revealed that parenting of these elite gymnasts occurred in a highly affectively charged space; both parents and gymnasts had a large emotional investment in their participation in the programs. The successful development of the gymnasts produced happiness; it was that happiness that enabled both parents and gymnasts to continue to be involved even when they did not agree with club policies or behaviors of some of the coaches. Over time, parental voices became compatible with the objectives of the coaching staff due to the technologies employed by the staff. For example, the staff listened and did not say no to the parents' request to reduce the number of training hours but instituted a process that gave parents and gymnasts a say in the number of weekly hours spent training. Within 4 weeks the girls had returned to their usual training routines. This entanglement of emotions

with rationalities used by parents to allow their daughter's involvement to take up most of her time and disrupt the whole family suggests why making parents primarily responsible for safeguarding their daughter's wellbeing in elite gymnastics may be inappropriate. The emotions and the construction of their daughter as talented combined to produce compliance even when parents problematized certain practices. These problematizations were, however, largely based on rational thought, rarely produced alternative discourses and rarely brought about significant transformations of technologies and rationalities that comprised elite gymnastics at these clubs.

The regulatory processes of these clubs based on the skill development framework normalized certain standards of behavior for parents and gymnasts. For example, the many hours of practice, rewards, exclusion or inclusion from certain groups and the learning/progressions that promoted skill mastery, instilled in parents and their daughters club norms and the desire to comply with these norms.

The governmental process that socialized these parents into being good gymnastic parents may have been strengthened by the societal discourse of what it means to be a good parent when a child is involved in sport. Coakley (2006) has argued that many parents believe that organized youth sport is a valued site where children build character, learn to cooperate and compete and to take on responsibility. Trussell and Shaw (2012) found that parents of young athletes were actively involved in their child's participation and allowed it to disrupt family rituals and resources because they felt 'their moral worth as a parent [was] evaluated by their children's successful participation in youth sport, and the parents' visible investment in this pursuit.' (p. 390). Consequently, these gymnastic parents may have been governed in various ways to accept the norms of conduct in these gymnastic clubs.

When parents and their daughters as well as the coaching staff assumed these norms were common sense, they were exercising power over themselves (Gallagher, 2008). These norms were coercive but also became productive. The girls mastered skills, did well in competitions and were able to move through skill progressions to learn even more challenging skills. This mastery produced enjoyment upon which parents based their decision to allow her to continue. This productive nature of governmentality strengthened the idea that the practices and other elements of the assemblage that produced club culture were normal and common sense. Whatever role these elements comprising this assemblage actually played in this normalization and acquiescence, up to a point they possessed their own:

> specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence and "reason". It is a question of analyzing a "regime of practices" – practices being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect. (Foucault, 1991, p. 75)

The results revealed that processes of governmentality resulted in these parents moving into the acceptance/acquiescence stage of what Kerr and Stirling (2012) have called consecutive

steps of grooming by coaches and staff that can normalize abusive practices. The first step consists of talent identification followed by parents being asked to trust the coach (step 2) and thus relinquishing a great deal of control over their daughter's wellbeing. The data revealed how these steps of talent identification and being disciplined into obeying/trusting the coaches disciplined the parents and gymnasts into self-regulation. The parents had concerns, however (step 3) and used PAP to problematize certain practices such as time spent, demotions through levels, disrupted family vacations, and negative pedagogical practices by coaches. However, the data analysis suggested parents were subjected to processes of governmentality by the staff that constructed these practices as normal. In this manner the complicity of parents and their daughters (as well as the staff) were continuously secured (step 4) despite parental resistance. These young gymnasts, therefore, will continue to be vulnerable to abusive practices during their gymnastic careers since their parents may be able to do little to safeguard their wellbeing, unless she stops her involvement in gymnastics. Step 5 of Kerr and Stirling's model of progressive steps of grooming pertains to coaches engaging in emotional, sexual and/or physical abusive behavior often with little resistance or knowledge of its occurrence by parents. Lang (2010a) has argued that the number of hours these girls spend on the sport can be seen as abusive. She contended that:

> recognition that such long training hours have become normalized as part of the discursive regime of elite youth sport has led to suggestions that elite youth sport more closely resembles the adult world of work than the child's world of play, and that child athletes are being exploited in ways that would not be tolerated in other social settings. (p. 60)

The gradual aspect of this process of governmentality that normalized these practices as well as the many issues that comprised its assemblage make it extremely difficult to hold these parents solely responsible for safeguarding the well-being and interest of their daughters in elite gymnastics. The technologies of the development plan with its various hierarchical levels, the purported enjoyment of the girls and the authority granted to coaching expertise and experience exercised power that socialized parents into acceptance and acquiescence of the assemblage that constituted elite gymnastics for young girls.

The responsibility for safeguarding described at the beginning of this manuscript seems to assume parents are not absorbed into the organizational and practice culture of a sport club and that they are able to be critical of and resist club norms and coaching practices. The results suggest this assumption is unfounded and not situated in the complex assemblage shaping gymnastic practices. This emphasis on individuals shaping their own subjectivities is significant, for it extends the terrain of government even further into the very depths of the soul (Rose, 2000).

Conclusion

The results revealed that being a parent of an elite gymnast who has been identified as having talent is comprised of complexities that form an assemblage. This assemblage consists of issues such as parental acceptance of discourses about the development of an elite gymnast, parental involvement based on perceptions of their daughter's enjoyment of skill mastery, the authority parents granted to coaches and expertise, the required flexibility of family structures and of other societal structures such as schooling. These intersected and produced the "good" gymnast and the acquiescent parent. Young gymnasts and their parents were socialized by these elements into what seems like total colonization of time and energy to adhere to the rationalities or discourses about development of young talents and what it means to be an elite gymnast and her parents.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study foregrounded relations of power exercised through governmentalities that were constituted in an assemblage of various elements. The findings suggest that the use of the concepts of assemblage, discourses, affect and governmentality enabled us to go beyond descriptions of coach-athlete interactions and to uncover complexities of changing practices in elite WAG and of supporting parents who are unable to enact change. The results also revealed the necessity of taking the entanglement of emotions and discourses into account in the study of sport practice. We did not ascertain the extent to which these findings were specific to the performance culture in elite WAG. Possibly other sports may be constituted by similar assemblages at the elite levels, even if athletes may begin at a later age than do gymnasts.

Our research focus was on parents of the youngest gymnasts who had been identified as talented. The replication of this and earlier studies on WAG in various countries could reveal the extent to which the assemblages that comprise systems and coach training may vary by country. Such investigations may offer other insights for possible change. Further research also needs to explore under which conditions parents are able to resist processes of governmentality and how these processes may stimulate them to withdraw their daughter from elite WAG. Such knowledge may assist parents in devising strategies that enhance their ability to safeguard the wellbeing of their daughters in WAG.

8

Conclusion and discussion
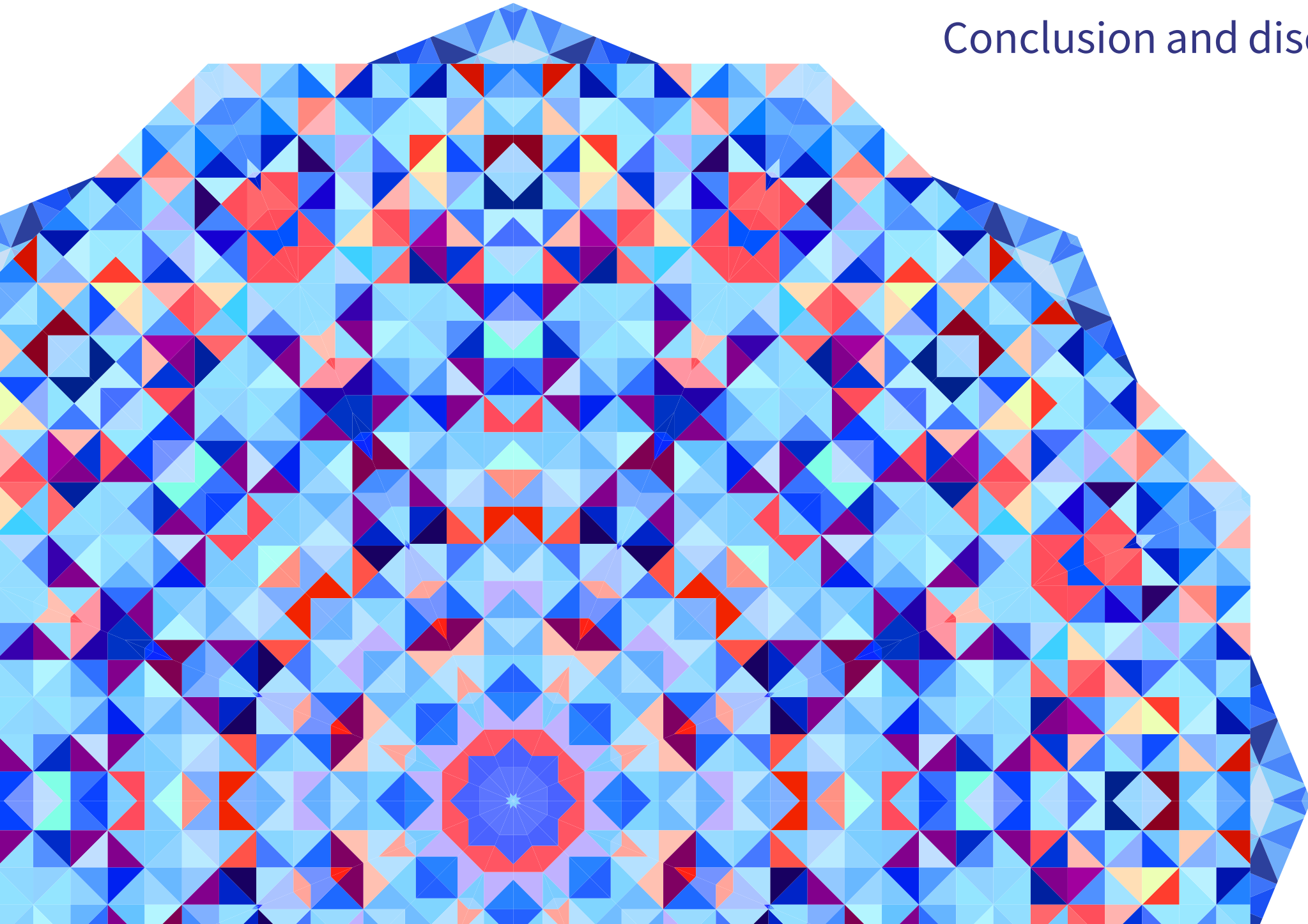
The purpose of this dissertation was to study how various Foucauldian tools could be used to create insight and understanding of youth sport practices and experiences.

> Foucault said: All my books … are little tool boxes … if people want to open them, to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, including eventually those from which my books have emerged … so much better! (Foucault 1975, 'Interview with Roger Pol Droit', cited in Paton 1979, pp. 115)

In doing so, I critically looked at various practices in youth sports using a theoretical framework that transcends post-positivist theories. I conducted six empirical studies to explore these practices. Table 8.1 shows a summary of the (number of) respondents involved in the different studies, theoretical tools and methods.

8.1.   Foucauldian theoretical toolkit

The following paragraphs elaborate on these different studies in detail, to answer the research question:

How do power, discourse and knowledge circulate and constitute youth sports and shape its participants (youths, parents, coaches)?

The answer is embedded in the chapter findings as described below and the two following paragraphs on the utility of the theoretical tools and future theoretical directions.

Foucault (1991) undertook and completed an extensive socio-historical excavation of the relationship between power, knowledge, and truth. Central in his work is a form of power that is relational (as compared to positional power), is productive, and flows through all interactions including language/texts and practices (Foucault, 1991). He introduced the notion of discourse to describe a socio-historical system that produces meaning and knowledge that 'can act to constrain and subject people to certain ends, identities and modes of behaviour' (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 8). Discourses as groups of statements circulate through language and texts to shape people's everyday practices and their bodies.

Discursive practices of thinking and doing draw on discourses. Discursive practices reflect how a discourse is acted on and circulates within a culture, in this case, as described in this dissertation, among youths, athletes, students, parents/adults and coaches. Individuals and their bodies become subject to specific discourses that construct their subjectivities such as 'I am a great kite surfer' or 'I am a talented gymnast'. Discursive practices set in motion a sense of 'normality'. It is from this sense of 'normality' that individuals engage in self-regulation in their thinking and doing to discipline themselves and others, often aligning with dominant

Table 8.1: Empirical studies in this dissertation.

Chapter	Respondents	Number	Theoretical tools	Methods
2	Orthodox Reformed Christian youths,	32	Discourses; surveillance; normalisation (Foucault, 1979), Bible-belt panopticon (Foucault, 1977; Barton, 2012), Governmentality (Dean, 2010), Breaches/dislocations (Brockling, Krasmann & Lemke, 2011).	Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, (scholarly) desk research.
3	Commercially-sponsored male kite surfers	11	Discourses (Foucault, 1972), constraints of action (time; space) (Shogan, 1999).	Semi-structured interviews, (scholarly) desk research.
4	Social Work students	28	Dressage (Foucault, 1995) Pastoral Power (Foucault, 2007).	Observations, reflections, (scholarly) desk research.
5	Self-identified heterosexual and self-identified non-heterosexual (male) team sport athletes	11	Discourse (Foucault, 1980), Performativity (Butler, 1993) Microaggressions (Sue, 2010).	Semi-structured interviews, solicited diaries/diary logs, (scholarly) desk research.
6	Board members, coaches, parents and (former) elite gymnasts	36	Discourses; discursive practices, regimes of truth; normalisation (Foucault, 1977).	Semi-structured interviews, (scholarly) desk research.
7	Parents of young gymnasts who had been deemed 'talented' and who were members of an elite gymnastics club.	22	Discourses; governmentality (Foucault, 1974; 1991; 2003), assemblage (Buchanan, 2015); inseparability of discourses and emotions (Ahmed, 2010).	Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, (scholarly) desk research.
	Total number of respondents	**140**		

discourses that circulate in a specific context (Foucault, 1982). Notions of power, discourse and knowledge were the focus in the empirical studies comprising this dissertation.

In **Chapter 2,** I explored Foucauldian forms of power operating in an Orthodox Reformed Christian (ORC) religious community that discipline youths to resist competitive sport involvement. I focused on the explanations young people gave for their resistance. I used desk research to analyse ORC publications and conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 32 ORC youth. I analysed the ways in which governmentality acted upon these Orthodox Reformed youths and enabled them to resist a dominant societal discourse about sport. Governmentality consists of the shaping of the conduct/ways of thinking and doing of individuals, in this case, youth involved in this study (Foucault, 1979). I found that these ORC youths drew on several conflicting cultural, religious and social discourses that are used in their communities, schools and churches regarding competitive sport, health and the body to legitimate their own non-participation/non-involvement. The results revealed how governmentality worked through history/traditions, culture, technologies and rationalities and also how ambiguity enabled moments of resistance to emerge (Dean, 2010). This resistance drew on the use of alternative discourses based on knowledges circulating through the ORC community and on the ambiguity that enabled breaches to occur, producing moments of resistance. The results suggest that the use of the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, as conceptualised by Dean, can enable researchers to gain insight into the power/knowledge nexus of a discourse and resistance to it.

Ambiguity as well as complexity also emerged in dominant notions about freedom and practices in kite surfing held by youthful kite surfers. In **Chapter 3**, I applied Foucauldian concepts of time and space (Shogan, 1999) to kite surfing to explore how the use of these concepts gives insight into how leisure sport activities enable and constrain participants. The focus of the study was on how space and time, embedded in disciplinary power, together produced athletic skill and identity in male adolescent kite surfers and how it informed their practices of freedom. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 commercially sponsored male kite surfers (aged 11-17). I found that, while their experiences were shaped by a discourse of freedom they associated with kite surfing, these young athletes were also subjected to disciplinary power produced by spatial and temporal limitations and capabilities, by commercialisation, by their subculture and through their use of and reliance on digital media. They used their subcultural space to create a male identity that they portrayed as being different from that associated with mainstream sports and with non-sponsored kite surfers. Although in general, action sport athletes tend to have more freedom in their choices in terms of space and time than most youths in mainstream sports, the young kite surfers were disciplined by spatial and temporal constraints such as school schedules, vacations, weather, availability of equipment and transportation needs as well as sponsor expectations. Descriptions of the sport on the internet and related forums as well as during face-to-face peer interactions informed their narratives. I concluded that these young kite surfers ably negotiated the constraints of space and time, although discursive practices

of parents, sponsors and other surfers also exercised disciplinary power on these surfers and their parents. This finding suggests that any analysis of freedom in action sports needs to include the concepts of time and space and that freedom in this sport, as well as action sports as a whole, should be seen as a complex discursive activity rather than simply as an example of an individual act of exercising freedom. The notion of almost absolute freedom that these kite surfers (want to) convey may reflect a wish or a way of labelling moments of enjoyment and pleasure. The discursive practice of freedom was so powerful for these boys that constraints of space and time were not seen as restrictive. Their use of a discourse of freedom may well form a basic part of the identity that these boys construct, cultivate and reproduce through their work as sponsored athletes. Although kite surfing is seen as a sport both at the recreational and commercial/competitive level, it is also often constructed as a discursive practice shaped by unorganised physical activity without formal structured adult leadership (Wheaton, 2013). In the following chapter, I explored discursive practices of leadership in an organised psychical activity that is not labelled as a sport in the specific context in which it took place.

In **Chapter 4**, I examined how social work students (SWs), who were leaders of the *U on Board* project, attempted to apply social work principles to build relationships with young refugees during this Sport for Development (SfD) project. Spaaij et al. (2019) have argued that relationship building plays an important role in SfD projects. Specifically, social work students (SWs) coached young refugees in a project meant to enable them to skateboard for pleasure and enjoyment. I drew on Foucauldian notions of disciplinary power, specifically dressage and pastoral power, to understand how these SWs obtained and practiced their knowledge and understandings about relationship building. I used the Foucauldian notion of dressage to examine how the discourse/knowledge flowing from their curriculum/course work disciplined SWs as leaders. Additionally, I explored how SWs used various pastoral power techniques to shape the behaviour of the young refugees and to build relationships with them. The data consisted of observations and reflections written by 28 SWs as well as their collective group observations in which they reported what they saw, their experiences, their interactions and their individual reflections on their professional skill development during the project. The results revealed that relationship building and producing enjoyment and fun were connected. The SWs had applied principles, using dressage and pastoral power, to build positive relationships with the refugees by engaging in 'good' practices that were forms of pastoral care such as being present, being attentive and engaging in peer activation. Although pastoral power can be seen as being a dynamic of control, the results suggested it can also be used in a caring and positive manner and contribute to relationship building of SWs with young refugees. In summary, SWs had learned how to enact pastoral care based on dressage, grounded in what they had learned in their courses. In so doing, they enabled young refugees to engage in non-competitive physical activity. Chapters 2-4 therefore focused on dynamics that are part of non-competitive, unorganised sports and

physical activity for youth. In contrast, Chapters 5-7 focused on the experiences of youth participating in organised competition (Chapter 5) and the role of adults (Chapter 6-7).

In **<u>Chapter 5</u>**, I investigated how homo-negative speech acts shaped subjectivities of young male athletes (aged 16-25). Specifically, I investigated verbal interactions pertaining to sexual identities during practices and competitions in male team sports to gain insight into the ways the use of homo-negative speech acts reinforced and challenged notions of masculine heteronormativity. The purpose of this study was to explore how young male athletes used homo-negative speech acts in the competitive sport context to construct a form of heteronormative masculinity and how self-identified non-heterosexual athletes navigated these speech acts. I drew on Foucault's (1980) notion of discourse and power/ knowledge, Butler's (1997) conceptualisation of the performativity of heteronormativity and of injurious speech acts and Sue's (2010) work on microaggressions to reveal the subtexts embedded in these microaggressive practices. The data consisted of diary logs/solicited diaries written by young non-heterosexual and heterosexual male team sport participants in a variety of sports. Those who collected data described what they heard during their own practices and competitions. The use of solicited diaries enabled them to record their daily lived experiences. My interviews with these diarists about their logs supplemented these observational accounts. The data revealed how young male athletes participating in the various sports normalised negative humour about nonheterosexuals, used physical stereotypes about gay men/boys, engaged in anti-homosexual physical aggression, appropriated the words 'gay' and 'queer', and often linked these words to weakness/ mistakes/errors. Those who self-identified as homosexual or non-heterosexual described how they negotiated dominant ambiguous heteronormative and homo-negative speech acts. The analysis also revealed how homo-negative speech acts were discursive practices used to endorse a desirable heteronormative masculinity and were entrenched in a gay aesthetic and abject femininity. I concluded that, despite a growing stated acceptance of non-heterosexual male athletes embedded in an inclusive masculinity discourse (Anderson & McCormack, 2018), homo-negative microaggressive speech acts contributed to the preservation of discursive heteronormativity in sport. The results point to the need to investigate actual practices and the discourses of which they are a part and how they may challenge (or support) a dominant discourse, in this case a discourse of acceptance. In this study on homo-negativity, I focused on microaggressions at the microlevel of competitive sport involving youths. Youth sport practice, however, is also shaped by discourses circulating on various institutionalised levels, especially at the elite level.

I used a multilevel model in **<u>Chapter 6</u>** to analyse how individuals who are part of Dutch elite women's gymnastics engaged with current discursive practices of high-performance youth sport and how the dynamics of this engagement interacted to create situations that facilitated grooming processes that often resulted in emotional abuse. I used a multilevel (macro, meso and micro) model to attempt to understand how emotional abusive practices may be sustained and/or challenged by discourses circulating in elite women's gymnastics.

Semi-structured interviews with 14 athletes, 12 parents, 5 coaches and 5 directors of sport federations and sport clubs provided the data. The results from a multilevel analysis suggested that the disciplinary power of the discursive practices of achievement, of child protection and of safeguarding was greater than the power/knowledge of discursive practices of pleasure. These discursive practices were embedded in the three levels and contributed to the grooming factors that enabled emotional abusive practices in elite women's gymnastics to occur. I concluded that grooming processes at the micro level by coaches were not necessarily an isolated practice, but were part of a complex dynamic of discursive practices that extended beyond the coach-athlete relationship involving meso and macro levels of institutionalised sport. The use of discursive practices that facilitated emotionally abusive behaviour by coaches was, therefore, not confined to one level but occurred at all levels and transcended them. Together, these discursive practices resulted in a situation that normalised emotionally abusive behaviour by coaches and allowed it to continue. In the next chapter I described a study in which I attempted to disrupt these grooming processes.

In **<u>Chapter 7</u>** I explored how parents were disciplined into accepting dominant discourses about gymnastics and its role in the well-being of their daughter. I designed a Parental Awareness Program (PAP) program to enable parents to disrupt possible abusive practices and to counter the strategies used by clubs/staff and by their daughters to shape these parents into being proper gymnastic parents, i.e. accepting of current practices in elite gymnastics. The data consisted of comments made by parents of elite young women gymnasts during the PAP sessions. My theoretical perspectives were drawn from Foucault's (1974, 1991, 2003) notions of discourses and of governmentality, Buchanan's (2015) conceptualisation of assemblage, and Ahmed's (2010) argument about the inseparability of discourses and emotions. The participants in the study were 30 parents of girls aged 6-12 who had been deemed 'talented' and as having the potential to compete at the international level. The results revealed how parents were disciplined or governed into accepting current practices in elite gymnastics, although they often disagreed with the practices. Several elements together comprised an assemblage that was subjected to processes of governmentality. Parents and their daughters were disciplined into docility through formalised hierarchical skill development, affect in the coach-athlete relationship and personal affection/pleasure of the gymnasts. These processes socialised parents into acquiescence and acceptance of current practices. Although parents problematised certain practices during PAP sessions, they accepted the regulations and norms created by the staff after an athlete was marked as having potential or talent and selected to be part of the elite club. The results revealed that being a parent of an elite gymnast who was identified as having talent was comprised of complexities that form an assemblage that prevented parents from disrupting potentially abusive practices. This assemblage consisted of their acceptance of discourses about the development of an elite gymnast and their perceptions of the enjoyment by their daughter of skill mastery. Parents yielded to the authority of coaches and expertise and to negotiated

the required flexibility of family structures and of other societal structures such as schooling. These dynamics intersected and created an assemblage and produced the 'good' gymnast and the 'good' acquiescent parent. This assemblage drew parents into a web of compliance shaped by an entanglement of the historical structure of technologies used to develop skill (the long-term development plan) and related rationalities and emotions accompanying the progress made by their daughter and interactions with other parents and coaching staff. The results suggested that a reduction of abusive practices lies in part in critical examinations of the discourses underlying skill development plans that are presented as regimes of truth and are kept in place by emotions and the authority accorded to coaching expertise. These power/knowledge dynamics curtail parents in their ability to safeguard what is in the best pedagogical interest of their daughter.

8.2.   Reflecting on the use of Foucauldian tool kit

In the foregoing paragraphs, I answered the research question:

How do power, discourse and knowledge circulate and constitute youth sports and shape its participants (youths, parents, coaches)?

In the following paragraphs, I reflect on the usefulness of a Foucauldian toolkit since 'Foucault is not absolute' and other additional theoretical tools could be used. I will therefore suggest further theoretical directions and research in the next paragraph (8.3).

In addition to the studies presented in the foregoing chapters, there is a considerable body of literature that has attempted to understand youth sports. Others and I have used post-structuralism that draws on tools suggested by Foucault (e.g., Claringbould et al., 2015; Donnelly, 1993; Dowling et al., 2020; Jacobs et al., 2016; Thorpe, 2008). As I described in Chapter 1, post-structuralism assumes power is not only relational but also inseparable from producing 'truth'. The relationality of power means all human being are participants in the (re)production of discourses or regimes of truth (Markula & Pringle, 2006). My aim in the use of a Foucauldian based toolkit was to reveal the complexities of youth sport practices and participants at three levels (micro, meso and macro) and how they are shaped by *regimes of truth* such as the popular freedom discourse that dominates kite surfing, the discourse of hierarchical skill development in gymnastics, the discourse of relationship-building though leadership embedded in course work, and discourses about the 'evil' of competitive sport. These discourses circulate in youth sport (as do others) and control or discipline youths and adults who participate in it.

I used different Foucauldian tools in this dissertation, including: governmentality, dressage, pastoral power, and space and time. These are all modalities (forms of power) that discipline individuals and populations.

Understanding power as a modality enables the conceptualisation of context in operation, with differing mechanisms, technologies and intensities of (different modalities of) power in specific loci, periods and institutional settings. [...] Rather than being two separate entities, power and context are intertwined – but in particular ways and with specific, identifiable effects. (Ahonen et al., 2014, p. 264)

Each of the studies comprising this dissertation in some ways stand-alone. They were conducted independently of each other and situated within a modality of power that was appropriate for investigating the complexities of specific sport practices. Together, however, the use of these modalities in these studies reveal how they can be used as tools to examine sport practices using a Foucauldian lens that focuses on disciplinary power.

Foucault (1979) also emphasised that power and resistance go hand in hand: 'where there is power there is resistance' (pp. 95). The analyses described in the various chapters reveal that parents do resist what they see as negative pedagogical practices. Similarly, although the freedom of kite surfers and of elite gymnasts may be restrained, the participants drew a great deal of enjoyment from their participation. Several ORC youths resisted the discourse of non-participation and proper clothing and went skating. Non-heterosexual athletes participating in the study as outlined in Chapter 5 also enjoyed playing their sport regardless of the homo-negative speech acts they encountered. Together, these results revealed that a discourse of pleasure is a powerful one that operates alongside those discursive practices that restrain or are abusive/exploitative. The discourse of pleasure also, however, plays an important role in the failure to disrupt a *regime of truth* about the purported need of coaches to engage in abusive practices so that participants can develop mental toughness (Pinheiro et al., 2014; Stirling & Kerr, 2013). In other words, the discourse of pleasure can cover hidden abusive/exploitative youth sport practices. I return to this discourse of pleasure further on in this chapter.

The use of a Foucauldian toolkit gave me insight into how these practices that produce complexities and both enjoyment and abuse or exploitation can circulate together in youth sports. This means that the use of Foucauldian tools in the study of youth sports can assist those who wish to better understand the complexities of involvement of youths in sport. This is not to say that the discourses presented in these studies are the only ones circulating in youth sports. Scholars have revealed, for example, how other discourses such as those about body image (e.g., Evans, 2006; Van Amsterdam, 2014), about being a 'good' coach (e.g., Jacobs et al., 2016) and about enjoyment (Walters et al., 2015) also shape the involvement of youth in sport. The use of Foucauldian tools may assist researchers in gaining understanding of what happens in youth sport and the experiences of its participants including athletes, parents, coaches and directors. These understandings may contribute to theorising about youth sports and may help counter its under-theorisation as argued by Messner and Musto (2016). These insights may also contribute to better understandings about processes of dropping out.

In summary, Chapters 2-7 map and critique the workings of power-knowledge within various social contexts of youth sports to expand understandings of its practices tied to strategic use of discourses or *ways of knowing* (Markula & Silk, 2011). Instead of focusing on sport clubs and their programmes/structures, I explored various segments of youth sport, specifically the participants and adults who contribute to that participation. The results reveal that discourses are not static or monolithic. I argue that a Foucauldian tool, specifically post-structuralist approaches, can enrich scholarship on youth sport. It can enable scholars to move beyond the focus on drop-outs, violence and obesity and instead allow for an expanded understanding of what various practices in youth sport 'do'. The use of a Foucauldian tool kit also can reveal how relations of power-knowledge are/can be reproduced, disrupted and challenged within both unorganised and organised youth sports. At the same time, as the various chapters have revealed (especially Chapter 7), the use of such a toolkit also highlights the complexity of changing practices that exploit and abuse youths. As such, it can be used to map and critique processes in youth sports and serve as a catalyst for change.

8.3.   Other theoretical directions

Although the use of a Foucauldian framework to gain insight into how relations of power-knowledge are or can be reproduced, disrupted and challenged within both unorganised and organised youth sports, has resulted in thought-provoking insights in the studies comprising this dissertation: a post-structural approach does not totally capture the complexities of youth sport and what its participants experience. The historic analysis through which Foucault formed ideas and claims to truth, asks the question of *how* rather than *why*. 'My objective […] has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects' (Foucault, 1982 in Rabinow, 1991, p.7). This means, he does not ask *why* it is that humans act in a certain way, but rather *how* it is that such ways of being are possible and under what conditions certain subjectivities are made possible (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2014). For this reason, scholars (e.g., Andrews, 2017; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010) have argued that such discursive approaches, although insightful, are based on the cognitive and tend to place movement experiences in the margins. Discursive approaches may also fail to capture the immediacy of the moment and the affect and sensuality that connect the material and non-material during performance. These scholars contend a New Materialist approach such as a non-representational theoretical framework (NRT) (Thrift, 2008) that places embodied movement at the centre of its analysis, is also needed to explore dynamics of affect in (youth) sports. NRT/New Materialism goes beyond the individual and focuses on the practices, performances, affect (senses and sensations) involved and the interactions of participants with material objects (Andrews, 2017; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010; Thrift, 2008). Specifically, this perspective views physical activities and

sport as shared 'material, embodied, expressed and sensed physical act(s) happening in space and time' (Andrews, 2017, pp. 769; Smits & Knoppers, 2020; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010). In other words, the use of NRT emphasises the immediate experience of movement in space (Thrift, 2008).

In contrast to an emphasis on immediate experience, Sport for Development (SfD) projects tend to be plagued by instrumental perspectives that require measurable results and progress in the use of sport and life skills. The enjoyment and pleasure that these activities may evoke tend to be ignored and/or seen as not measurable and therefore unimportant (Chawansky & Carney, 2017). Additionally, although action sport participation is often based on and elicits feelings of pleasure and freedom, research has paid relatively little attention to exploring the pleasure, fun and enjoyment and/or affect that may be generated in those sports (Pringle et al., 2015). I used longboards and GoPro cameras and NRT to study the affect generated in the use of an action sport for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds in a short-term ongoing SfD project called *U on Board* (Smits & Knoppers, 2022; also refer to Chapter 4). I used an NRT framework to explore the ways affects were produced during longboard instruction practices. I show how U on Board enables these girls to engage in affective positive (body) experiences and discuss how such SfD projects can create knowledges and pleasure in ways that can open up new possibilities for shaping sport practices. Consequentially, explorations of affect in youth sport may provide other insights about youth sport practices.

Chapter 6 and 7 pay scholarly attention to the continuation of emotional abuse as a normalised practice in elite youth sport, with the use of a Foucauldian framework. However, a Foucauldian framework by itself may not be sufficient to explain the dynamics that produce both ambiguity in and compliance by athletes and parents with elite sport practices. The use of a Foucauldian framework may reveal how disciplinary practices produce docile athletes and parents and ways in which they resist, while other dynamics may also be present as well. For example, D'Arripe-Longueville, Fournier, and Dubois (1998) found that successful elite judo athletes had developed mental skills that enabled them to transcend abusive autocratic coaching styles. Such findings suggest that possibly the use of other theoretical frameworks, specifically those that deal with ambiguity may provide additional insights into the continuation of these abusive practices.

The use of sense-making for example, a theoretical framework that focuses on how meaning is created in ambiguous situations (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), may give additional insights into the continuation of emotionally abusive coaching practices. Sense-making is a framework that can be used to connect micro-practices of individuals with broader organisational and societal contexts (Weick 1995). According to Maitlis and Christianson (2014), sense-making is the process through which people work to understand issues or events that are novel, ambiguous, confusing, or in some other way disrupt expectations. Specifically, researchers using this framework examine seven overlapping properties as described by Weick (1995), to understand vocabularies and the contextual

frame or culture that people draw on in their sense- or meaning-making of everyday practices.

Chapter 6 and 7 revealed how elite youth sport experiences and practices in gymnastics are contested and complex. Youth sport can therefore be seen as an ambiguous space. Some sport practices may violate the rights of children and may challenge the belief that youth sport should be a positive pedagogical site. Emotional abuse may result in chronic physical and/or psychological problems. Yet, these practices seem to continue across the world (see Brackenridge et al., 2010 for a summary). This means in addition to the use of Foucauldian tools, a sense-making perspective with its focus on agency and ambiguity may be a particularly appropriate addition to explore the continuation of practices that violate the best interest of a child in elite youth sport. Those who use this approach question how individuals make sense of dealing and coping with ambiguity in the abusive frame that surrounds elite youth sport such as gymnastics (Smits et al., 2017). Foucauldian tools can be used to excavate the discourses that underlie the sense-making.

8.4.   Methodological implications and reflections

The results described in the various chapters were grounded in data produced through various qualitative methodologies. The purpose of qualitative research is to describe, analyse and explain (Shaw, 2015). Shaw argues that 'this process [of analysis and explanation] is undertaken by researchers interpreting the experiences of participants, whether through interviews, focus groups, ethnographic or autoethnographic engagement, pictorial analysis or a myriad of other methods' (pp. 22). In Chapter 1 (Section 1.5) I explained how these are related to Foucauldian tools. I have explained these methods in detail in each chapter. In the next paragraph I elaborate on the usefulness of the various qualitative methodologies I have used to describe, analyse and explain processes and practices in youth sport. Below I give a brief reflection on my use of the various methods. In doing so, I will answer the second research question of this dissertation:

Which methodologies can be used to understand how reproduction and resistance shape discursive practices and experience in youth sports?

8.4.1.   Methodological advantages
In-depth or semi-structured interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways to try to understand people, thanks to its qualitative nature. It is the most feasible basic method of data gathering to obtain rich and in-depth experiential accounts of individual lives of respondents, groups, and organisations (Shaw, 2015). As a consequence, semi-structured interviewing provides a source of information, based on the assumption that the interviews result in true and accurate pictures of how respondents understand themselves and their

lives in a larger society such as the Netherlands that is characterised by individuation, diversity, and specialised role relations (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Although I prepared topic lists, the semi-structured interviews gave me the chance to improvise, to probe and to anticipate during the conversation on what was said by the respondents.

I used focus group interviews in various ways. In a focus group interview, the moderator directs the inquiry and the interaction among respondents in more or less structured manner, depending on the purpose (Fontana & Frey, 2000). For example, the purpose of the focus groups with the Orthodox Christian students (ORC) was exploratory whereby I identified key thoughts held by informants. I used a semi-structured interview topic list to accomplish this. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews and the focus groups used in the Parental Awareness Program (PAP) training study, was to aid the parents' recall of specific events in Women's Artistic Gymnastics (WAG) and to stimulate expanded descriptions of WAG events and the experiences shared by the PAP parents. In sum, the use of focus or group interviews in my research produced rich data in a cumulative and elaborative way, by stimulating the respondents, by assisting them in recall and by the flexibility of its format (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

In the study with a focus on the use of homo-negative speech acts in sports. I wanted to minimise the retrospection that can be part of interviews based on recall. This reliance on recall could produce vagueness due to generalities in recall of daily interactions and due to the value-laden topic of sexuality in male team sports. I therefore made use of solicited diaries. This method gives respondents the opportunity to describe what they heard and experienced during sport practices, specifically in terms of particular routines and rituals of behaviour (Latham, 2016). By doing so, I was able to conduct an in-depth exploration of the 'mundane' interactions.

I used observations forms in the study with the social work students (SWs), so that they could report what they saw, what they experienced and the interactions they thought were important to share. Additionally, each SWs was asked to describe their own reflections on working with refugee youths who participated in *U on Board* activities and on the development of their professional skills during the project. The use of these various instruments resulted in insights in how these SWs thought, what they tried to do and why they did that.

By engaging in desk research on the settings of youth involved in the studies, I was able to find a great deal of textual content on the internet, in newspapers, books, scholarly papers, and magazines. In addition, I also discovered oral and visual content in my use of social media like Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, community internet sites used by kite surfers and YouTube channels hosted by young commercially sponsored athletes. My use of desk research enabled me to become more aware, familiar with and/or part of the respondents' settings.

I applied a multi-method approach in various studies, often called *triangulation*, such as combining semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and desk research (for

example, refer to Chapter 2 on the Orthodox Reformed Christian youths), to achieve broader and better results. This multi-method approached allowed me to combine the use of different methods to gain greater insight in the phenomena I was exploring. (Denzin, 2010).

8.4.2.   Methodological limitations

Although qualitative methods can produce insights and understandings, they also have limitations. They cannot be used to compare relationships among variables. Instead of comparing relationships among variables as is done in quantitative research, qualitative researchers look for similarities and differences between themes and compare them with a chosen theory to better understand social practices. Interviews are 'persistently slippery, unstable, and ambiguous from person to person, from situation to situation, from time to time' (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p.654). This means researchers have to consider carefully who they interview, where the interviews take place and how to gain the trust of participants so they will share their (personal) stories and experiences. For example, I had to consider what to wear when entering a secondary Orthodox Reformed Christian (ORC) school. I therefore wore a skirt to gain easier access to that specific setting. Purposefully adapting my presentation of self in such a way to blend in could have a downside as well. Interviewees may assume I know some things that I do not and, therefore, they may not think it necessary to expand on their explanation. Likewise, understanding the language and culture of the respondents such as I did in the ORC and the kite surfing studies could be a limitation, because of my familiarity with the contexts. I grew up in a Christian household and I am a kite surfer. In my interviews I had to be careful to include probing questions that could lead to in-depth explanations instead of assuming I knew what an interviewee meant.

Besides, my gender as a researcher cannot be isolated from other important elements in data gathering. Gender filters acknowledge that 'the sex of the interviewer and that of the respondent do make a difference, as the interview takes place within the cultural boundaries of a paternalistic social system in which masculine identities are differentiated from feminine ones' (Fontana & Frey, 2000, pp. 658). I identify as a woman and use the pronouns she/her. When, for instance, I was interviewing the young male commercially sponsored kite surfers and the young male team players about sexual diversity in sport, my gender was a limitation because I could be seen as an outsider. At the same time, my position as an outsider meant I could ask probing questions that reflected my acknowledged lack of knowledge.

Although I assumed the focus group interviews in my dissertation were successful, this method has its own set of limitations. For example, the group culture may have interfered with individual expression. Particularly for young people, group dynamics with peers could be a limitation. They could influence each other when they talked about their ORC setting and sport, resulting in *group thinking*. Also, the group could be dominated by one person, for example one parent with positive experiences in WAG, while other parents may have had doubts about WAG practices and the wellbeing of their talented gymnastic daughters. This also means that researching sensitive topics with focus group interviews was challenging.

At the same time, since the participants of these group interviews knew each other, their familiarity with each other may have meant it was easier to discuss and/or to add to each other's stories. I tried to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to talk and drew on my list of possible topics/themed interview guide to conduct the conversations.

As a researcher, I strove to obtain the informed consent to all people involved in the different studies. However, this procedure was not always possible. For example, in the study on homo-negative speech acts in sport, I made use of solicited diaries/diary logs. Those who wrote these diaries gave informed consent; the other athletes who played a role in or were part of the settings recorded in the diaries were not asked for this consent because this conflicted with other important ethical issues of confidentiality and beneficence. For this study, I recruited 11 athletes to keep solicited diaries or diary logs of what they heard during practices and competitions. The data consists of their recollections plus the interviews. In Chapter 5, I presented the main arguments for this decision and situate them in the principle of *do no harm*. The arguments were grounded in my concern for the safety for the observers-cum-diarists, especially those self-identified homosexual diarists that have not come out to their team. I believe that, given the ambiguity and uncertainty of universal acceptance and celebration of sexual diversity, the athlete-cum-diarists have a right to have their sexual identity protected, including those who are 'closeted' to their team. In doing so, I protected them from potential harm such as harassment, that could be provoked by disclosing their engagement in the observation of gay-themed social interactions. For me, this protection from harm outweighed the importance of informed consent from all members of the observed teams and their opponents. Moreover, by not revealing their role as research-informant, I believe that the diarists were able to observe what is common practice as regards homo-negative speech. Besides, I note the impossibility of obtaining informed consent of all observed actors (e.g., opposing teams, referees, fans). I explained in more detail how I used the informed consent process with the diarists throughout the whole study and how I dealt with issues of confidentiality and debriefing in Chapter 5. This type of data gathering can also be emotionally demanding for observers. In this study, observers witnessed and participated in microaggressive practices and speech acts. I therefore paid extra attention to informed consent procedures and the wellbeing of the diarists throughout the study.

8.4.3.   Reflections on methodologies

I not only made use of a Foucauldian toolkit to conduct the various studies, but I also drew on my own history in sport, education and religion. My background in these areas enabled me to use methods that allowed me to approach the participants and establish rapport with them. I also recognised some of the contexts of the practices of the respondents in the different studies. I briefly sketch my positionality and history in these areas below.

Although I am not a member of the ORC community, I have a Christian background and grew up in a Christian home. The examples given by the ORC youths, such as not being

allowed to play sports on Sundays, were familiar to me. I wore a skirt for the interviews, because this felt like the proper and respectful thing to do. I felt comfortable in this specific ORC context, as I did in the contexts of the other studies.

I was very familiar with the kite surfing context as well. I have been a committed kite surfer since 2005. I was a pioneer in the sport in the Netherlands and one of the first women who practiced kite surfing at a high skill level. Because kite surfing women were few and far between at that time, I always felt I was being watched by people on the shore. However, once I was out on the water and playing with the elements, I felt free. I therefore could recognise the descriptions by and feelings of the young kite surfers about their experiences of freedom. This recognition enabled me to easily establish rapport with the young commercially sponsored kite surfers that participated in this study. Since I never had a sponsor, I was interested in their position as commercially-sponsored action sport athletes as well, because they were engaging in what is known as child labour. I learned about child labour during the courses I followed to be a physical education teacher and during my master's degree in social pedagogical issues. Child labour and the role of sponsors is also a relatively new topic of concern in the growing action sports contexts. As a result, the sport and wellbeing of the young action sport athletes interested me and led me to explore their experiences.

Although I do not have an insider perspective when it comes to young non-heterosexual men since I do not identify as a gay male, I have been involved in sports since I was a child and, therefore, I am sensitive to and familiar with the occurrence of microaggressive speech acts the boys mentioned in their diaries and during the interviews. I continue to hear such comments in sport settings.

My course of study as well as my experience as a physical education teacher alerted me to situations that may negatively affect youth in youth sports. During the project that examined elite women's gymnastics, I was amazed that the behaviours of coaches were seen as acceptable by their peers and many parents and athletes while such behaviour would be unacceptable if teachers engaged in them. I had to engage in a great deal of emotional labour in listening to and analysing the experiences of elite athletes, parents, coaches and directors and their seeming inability to change abusive practices. I took the time to engage in debriefing with my colleagues after these interviews.

Currently, I am a senior researcher in the area of social work. I strongly believe action sports can serve as a vehicle for the participation and resilience of refugee youth in sport for development projects. I, therefore, incorporated a living lab in a social justice course to enable SWs (social work students) to practice leadership skills while they attempted to bring pleasure and enjoyment to young refugees through action sports.

In the several studies I have made use of multiple methods to talk with different people and gain insight into their thinking. These methods served their purpose well. However, as I indicated in Section 8.4.2, they also have limitations. I assume that these limitations did not skew the results.

8.4.4.   Future directions for methodologies

In the future I wish to explore more and different methods for a better understanding of people in vulnerable positions and how sport and physical activity can support them in their wellbeing. Verbal interactions or written notes could complement other methods to reveal various complexities in youth sport. The use of such texts could be enriched by drawing on the *visualisation* in social sciences in general, in education (Bland, 2012; Koekoek & Knoppers, 2013) and also in social work and Sport for Development practice and research (Huss & Bos, 2019; Hayhurst, 2017; McSweeney et al., 2022; Phoenix, 2010). For example, McSweeney at al. (2022) adopted visual and digital methods to explore the use of bicycles in Uganda to achieve international development goals in a SfD project called Bicycles for Development. The use of visual and digital participatory methods contributed to a critical dialogue between the research team and participants in relation to understanding experiences of using the bicycle.

Visualisation has often been used in art-based research that is traditionally connected to education, where the use of images is a natural language for children (Eisner, 1997; Van Amsterdam et al., 2012). Currently, art-based research includes the use of community art, photovoice, outsider art and arts for social change to humanise institutions, to de-stigmatise minorities, and to give a voice to silenced groups (Chamberlayne & Smith, 2008; Huss, 2012, Huss & Bos, 2019, Leavy, 2009). The vocabulary of young research participants may be inadequate to allow them to express themselves verbally, they and the researchers may come from different cultures and/or they might not be overly verbal or used to expressing their experience in abstract terms. For this reason, art-based research methodologies could be useful to conduct youth sport research, especially in SfD projects.

Since the focus is on youth and many young people may be well-acquainted with visual media (Caron et al., 2019), the use of devices such as GoPro cameras that enable young participants, including those in SfD projects, to create vlogs could provide valuable forms of inquiry into the diverse, social, creative practices young people engage in on social network sites. These sites signify their belonging to a community and their will to contribute to collective discussions on social issues that matter to them (Caron et al., 2018; Raby et al., 2018). I have experimented with such methods and found they can elicit insights that probably would not emerge through conventional textual methods. For example, I made use of vlogs in a study with adolescent girls who exercise using longboards in the urban outdoors (Smits & Knoppers, 2022; see also Section 8.3). A vlog (i.e. a *video blog*) is a record of thoughts, opinions or experiences that takes the form of a short video and that individuals place online for other people to watch and comment on. However, reaching out to the wider community can be challenging through vlogging, due to a lack of identification with the vlogger. Additionally, the visual and shareable characteristics of vlogs require a careful consideration ensuring inclusivity, anonymity and confidentiality (Goedhart et al. 2022).

Participatory Video Research (PVR), however, has been used quite successfully and extensively in research projects to document perspectives from marginalised people (Kindon,

2003). Participatory video is a collaborative technique that aims to involve a community or group in the co-creation of their own film(s) (Lunch & Lunch, 2006). Specifically, PVR is a method in which research participants use digital video cameras to create their videos about their everyday experiences, to present issues and to address community concerns and social issues (Lenette, 2019). Central to PVR is the challenging of 'traditional filmmaking practices that narrate stories about rather than create stories with protagonists' (Lenette 2019, p. 202). For example, Sarria-Sanz et al. (2023) used PVR to explore the perspectives of 14 refugee participants on their place-making strategies in the Netherlands. The authors and the refugees co-designed and implemented a filmmaking course that relies on basic editing training and story-telling. They found that engaging in editing techniques during PVR had multiple benefits for the refugees, such as enabling a pathway for regaining confidence and highlighting social injustice in their communities. PVR, therefore, is part of a visual turn in research and draws on digital resources to enable participants in projects to communicate their thoughts and feelings. Thus, PVR can encompass much more than the research topic if research participants tend to explore other important issues of relevance in complex contexts such as in Sport for Development settings (Lenette, 2019).

SfD projects are often situated within a Freirean approach. A Freirean approach advocates for a critical, flexible and contextualised curriculum, contributing to transformative education processes through sport. Critical literacy and critical pedagogy, as described by Freire (1973), consist of the ability 'to name the world and to change it' (p. 88). This change is based on a theoretical premise that dialogue among participants is an 'essential necessity' if a project is to be transformative. The methods used to collect data for such projects usually assume participants are able to verbally articulate their experiences, feelings and thoughts and understand each other. Forced migration, however, has meant many people, including youths, are on the move. This move to other places is accompanied by complexities of language and of cultural understandings, making it difficult for participants of SfD to communicate with and understand each other. This complexity suggests that other methods may be needed besides the use of texts or speech to gain insight into the dynamics of SfD projects and their ability to be transformative. Nevertheless, forced migration and Freire's (as well as Foucault's) notion about the need for critical thinking to produce transformation are not necessarily tied to a specific form of literacy. This means that new media for recording communication can be used in dialogues between refugees, researchers and policymakers. Further research could be used to examine how the use of PVR allows youth to a create videos of their sport participation experiences while also enabling researchers to collect data about how these experiences might contribute to positive health and wellbeing of participating youth.

8.5.   Suggestions for changing thinking and doing youth sport

The various empirical studies in the previous chapters revealed the complexity of processes that constitute youth sport. At the end of each empirical study, I gave suggestions as to how the results could be used by those working in sport, including policymakers. Below, I briefly combine and summarise these suggestions.

I argue that the use of a multilevel model perspective is necessary to understand the complexity of youth sport. The results revealed that discursive practices at the micro level are embedded in and also emerge in and flow from the macro level. The gymnastics studies (Chapters 6 and 7) illustrate this well. Discursive practices constituting women's artistic gymnastics (WAG) at the macro level developed through the interaction with and dynamics of meso and micro level elements. The results also revealed how one (group of) actor(s) who tried to produce change at the meso level, such as occurred in the WAG study, were not able to resist norms and practices or significantly change them. The subtle processes of governmentality normalised practices as well as many issues that comprise assemblages of these practices in youth sport. The oft-invisible nature of governmentality makes it extremely difficult to hold individuals solely responsible for the safeguarding or well-being of youthful participants in sports. In other words, a significant transformation of practice is not something that can come only from individuals/single actors but requires transformational change at all levels, in thinking and doing. These connections between these various levels are not unique to WAG, however. Similar processes may occur in all youth sport contexts, although these interconnections and complexities may be unique to each context.

Youth are not passive however; young people can both reproduce and resist dominant sport discourses and form their ideas about sport in relation to their position in Dutch society and their participation in sport. I argue, therefore, that policy makers who want to understand the power of a particular discourse and resistance to it, need to explore how rationalities, technologies, history and culture reproduce discourses and also enable breaches in thinking and doing to occur. Moments of resistance can occur in places where ambiguities (are allowed to) emerge or become visible. These moments could be used by policy makers and professionals to explore the creation of youth sport practices such as action sports that could encourage youth to participate who do not feel they belong in organised sport.

In summary, the results of the studies comprising this dissertation have several implications for practice. First, discursive practices can be so powerful or seen as common sense for youth, that constraints of space and time in sport are not seen as restrictive. This suggests that the subjectivities or identities youth construct, cultivate and reproduce in participating in sport contain an element of choice, as was the case for the kite surfers for whom the discourse of freedom had become part of their identity. They did not have coaches or leaders who formally guided their participation. Although leaders in WAG seemed

to situate their practice more in a long-term model than in the needs of the participating gymnasts, the SfD study revealed how leaders who developed the skill of relationship building and critical self-reflection produced enjoyment in an activity created for young refugees.

In my attempt to understand how relationship-building and producing enjoyment and fun are intertwined in SfD leadership, I found that the use of concepts of dressage and pastoral power and critical self-reflection contributed to a deeper understanding that social work students developed about the building of relationships. This critical self-reflection could be expanded to other activities to explore how relationship-building by leaders with participants in youth sport can produce social resilience and empowerment and may result in enjoyment for those engaging in physical activity, whether or not it occurs in the organised sport context.

The dominance and normalisation of homo-negative speech acts reflected in their use in male sports revealed how a status quo can be sustained, reinforce a gender binary and construct a gay aesthetic. The general acceptance of these speech acts privileges a sport-related heteronormative masculinity. Such speech acts are performative and not an isolated activity, however; they reflect current cultural discursive normalisations in society. Those who engaged in this kind of (discriminating) speech acts do not invent these expressions but draw on discourses about 'others' that already exist. This means that normative judgments are embedded in structural social inequalities in society, including in sports. This suggests that these inequalities as well as how discriminative and excluding speech acts flow from and inform them, need ongoing attention by policy makers and scholars. Rules forbidding homo-negative speech acts in stadiums may be insufficient in reducing homophobia if wider social inequalities and accompanying speech acts and practices remain unchanged.

In sum, discourses are everywhere and power/knowledge circulate continually. This means there is no quick fix for complex issues in youth sports such as discrimination, exploitation, abuse, sense of belonging, integration, participation, resilience, etcetera. Policy development to change such practices in sports therefore needs to take these complexities into account.

8.6.   Foucauldian kaleidoscopic lens on youth sports

In this chapter, I reflected on the role of theory in explaining power in youth sports and described what aspects need further scholarly attention. I did not attempt to create a meta-theoretical framework that might incorporate each of the approaches used in the various chapters of this dissertation. However, a metaphor that can be used to describe the lenses through which to see the practices in youth sports is that of a kaleidoscope (Spade & Valentine, 2016). A kaleidoscope consists of small pieces of glass in a tube with mirrors at one end. Kaleidoscopes remind us that there are always other ways to see the world.

Even a small rotation shifts the image, shifts the interpretation, and shifts the options. Each rotation or turn of the tube results in a new viewing pattern or prism. In this dissertation, I consider the shape of the prisms as the Foucauldian tools and the colours of the prisms as the practices. The chapters in this dissertation can therefore be seen as prisms; I used each prism to describe and analyse how youth sport is shaped or constructed or *done* through power/knowledge.

In this dissertation, I challenged several modes of thought about youth sports and their practices. I purposely chose to explore practices and activities that vary greatly: resistance to competitive sport and the oft-invisible processes that are part of unorganised sports and of organised sports. Instead of drawing on commonly used post-positivist frameworks, I described an alternative way to study youth sport. In doing so, I gave participants a voice and contributed to the theorising of youth sport, as called for by Messner and Musto (2016). A variety in the use of theories, especially those that provide insight into the complex practices of youth sport such as the application of tools based of a Foucauldian approach to reality, can be used to develop policy and change practices that currently may result in youths dropping out, being exploited or abused or missing pleasure in participation. As I suggested in Chapter 1, if youth sport is considered to be an important contributor to the development of youths in society, then research and theorising need to go beyond investigating outcomes and, instead, critically examine its complexities:

> We must not imagine a world of discourses divided between accepted discourses and excluded discourses, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies (Foucault, 1978, pp.100).

The various studies revealed how a Foucauldian lens can be used to investigate youth sport practices and what this lens has to offer to scholars, administrators and policymakers to enhance their understanding and ability to respond to issues in youth sport. As Foucault (1988) argued:

> Critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest. (pp. 154)

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Summary in Dutch
(Samenvatting in het Nederlands)

De complexiteit van jeugdsport

Een Foucaultiaanse lens op macht, discoursen en kennis in jeugdsport

Sportdeelname door jongeren wordt geassocieerd met 'leuk' en 'goed' en beoordeeld als een belangrijke activiteit die bijdraagt aan de ontwikkeling van jongeren. Sport wordt daarom vaak gezien als een essentieel onderdeel van het leven van jongeren. Als gevolg daarvan richt onderzoek naar jeugdsport zich vaak op belemmeringen en obstakels die sportdeelname verhinderen. Er is echter behoefte aan kritische, theoretisch onderbouwde verklaringen voor de wijze waarop sportdeelname door jongeren wordt ervaren. Dergelijke verklaringen richten zich op processen die de betekenisverlening van sportdeelname aan het leven van jongeren inzichtelijk maken. In dit proefschrift richt ik me daarom op de sociale aspecten van jeugdsport door gebruik te maken van een poststructuralistisch theoretisch kader. Dit om (in)zicht te krijgen in de sociale krachten die jeugdsport in haar vele facetten vormgeven. Ik heb een Foucaultiaans theoretisch kader toegepast, dat de mogelijkheid biedt om deze complexiteit te onderzoeken vanuit een 'macht-sensitieve' benadering.

De twee onderzoeksvragen van dit proefschrift luidden: "Hoe circuleren macht, discours (heersende gedachten) en kennis in jeugdsport en hoe vormen deze de jeugdsport en haar deelnemers?" en "Welke onderzoeksmethoden kunnen gebruikt worden om te begrijpen hoe reproductie en weerstand van discursieve praktijken en ervaringen in de jeugdsport worden vormgegeven?"

Ik heb zes deelonderzoeken uitgevoerd, die samen laten zien hoe verschillende macht-sensitieve Foucaultiaanse concepten gebruikt kunnen worden om de ervaringen in de jeugdsport te analyseren. Alle onderzoeken zijn empirisch en maken gebruik van een verscheidenheid aan kwalitatieve methoden waarbij verschillende (groepen) respondenten zijn bevraagd.

In **hoofdstuk 2** richtte ik me op christelijke orthodox-gereformeerde jongeren, die trachten te leven volgens een strikte toepassing van de Bijbel. Orthodox-gereformeerden distantiëren zich formeel van het gangbare competitieve sportdiscours in Nederland, een samenleving die sport als een maatschappelijk goed beschouwt. Ik onderzocht met

Foucault's concept 'governmentality' hoe deze gelovige jongeren weerstand bieden tegen de dominante maatschappelijke discoursen over sport. De resultaten laten zien hoe governmentality via geschiedenis/tradities, cultuur, technologieën en rationaliteit uitwerkt en hoe ambigue momenten weerstand mogelijk maakte door alternatieve discoursen uit deze gelovige gemeenschap te gebruiken.

Kitesurfers nemen ook afstand van de reguliere georganiseerde sport, maar worden in hun deelname aan actiesport geconfronteerd met andere dominante discoursen, zoals het discours omtrent vrijheid. In **hoofdstuk 3** onderzocht ik hoe gesponsorde kitesurfende jongens vrijheid ervaren in deze niet-geïnstitutionaliseerde sportactiviteit. Daarvoor gebruikte ik Foucault's concepten over de beperking van actie in tijd en ruimte. Ik ontdekte dat, hoewel hun ervaringen werden gevormd door een discours van vrijheid dat zij associëren met kitesurfen, deze jonge atleten ook onderworpen zijn aan disciplinaire macht die voortkwam uit beperkingen in ruimte, tijd en mogelijkheden, door commercialisering, door hun subcultuur en door hun gebruik van en afhankelijkheid van digitale media.

In **hoofdstuk 4** onderzocht ik discursieve praktijken van activiteitenbegeleiders van een actiesport (longboarden) in een *Sport for Development* (SfD) project. Competent leiderschap dat zich richt op relatievorming kan bijdragen aan het plezier dat deelnemers ervaren tijdens hun deelname in sport en bewegen. Dit plezier wordt vaak beschouwd als een bijdrage aan het welzijn van de deelnemers. Ik startte het project, '*U on Board*', om bij te dragen aan het welzijn van jongeren die op een AZC wonen, waarbij Social Work studenten zich inzetten als activiteitenbegeleiders. Ik onderzocht hoe de Social Work studenten professionele vaardigheden probeerden toe te passen bij het opbouwen van relaties met jonge vluchtelingen tijdens U on Board. Hiervoor maakte in gebruik van Foucault's concepten 'pastoral power' en 'labour as dressage'. Uit de analyse met deze twee Foucaultiaanse concepten bleek dat en tevens hoe het opbouwen van relaties en het produceren van plezier aan elkaar gerelateerd zijn. Social Work studenten hadden geleerd hoe ze professionele vaardigheden konden inzetten die ze in hun opleiding hadden geleerd.

Sportorganisaties erkennen dat deelnemers aan jeugdsport blootgesteld kunnen worden aan misbruik en mishandeling. Rapportages over grensoverschrijdend gedrag in jeugdsport en maatregelen om dat gedrag te minimaliseren richten zich vaak op de rol van bestuurders en coaches. Relatief weinig aandacht wordt besteed aan hoe atleten zelf grensoverschrijdende interacties met teamgenoten hebben. Hoewel de acceptatie van homoseksuele of niet-heteroseksuele mannen in de sport in verschillende westerse landen toeneemt, wijst onderzoek er ook op dat jonge mannen, waaronder atleten, de neiging hebben zich schuldig te maken aan beledigend of homo-negatief taalgebruik en handelingen. Deze schadelijke en negatieve uitingen noemen we microagressies en maakt het voor zowel heteroseksuele als niet-heteroseksuele jonge mannelijke teamsporters moeilijk de dominante praktijken van mannelijkheid in hun sport te doorbreken. In **hoofdstuk 5** onderzocht ik hoe heteroseksuele en niet-heteroseksuele jonge mannelijke teamsporters uitingen van homo-negatieve en heteronormatieve microagressies ervaren en opvatten. Uit de analyse met Foucaultiaanse

concepten bleek hoe homo-negatief taalgebruik en handelingen discursieve praktijken vormen die bijdragen aan de bekrachtiging van heteronormatieve mannelijkheid in de jeugdsport. Ik concludeerde dat ondanks een groeiende acceptatie van niet-heteroseksuele mannelijke atleten, ingebed in een inclusief mannelijkheidsdiscours, homo-negatieve microagressieve uitspraken en handelingen bijdroegen tot de instandhouding van discursieve heteronormativiteit in de sport.

Zoals ik al eerder aangaf spannen sportorganisaties zich in om misbruik/mishandeling door coaches in de sport terug te dringen. Eén sport die heel duidelijk heeft erkend dat dergelijke misbruikpraktijken voorkomen is turnen. In **hoofdstuk 6** richtte ik me op emotioneel misbruik door coaches van topturnsters en afhankelijkheidstraining [grooming-processen] in de Nederlandse turntopsport, waarmee het (schijnbare) tolereren en normaliseren van systematisch emotioneel misbruik in stand wordt gehouden. Ik gebruikte een multilevel model om praktijken te onderzoeken die onderdeel uitmaken van afhankelijkheidstraining bij emotioneel misbruik in het topturnen op zowel macro-, meso- als microniveau. Ik onderzocht met Foucaultiaanse concepten hoe atleten, ouders, coaches en bestuurders hun manier van denken en doen over topturnen legitimeren. Ik concludeerde dat afhankelijkheidstraining op microniveau door coaches niet noodzakelijkwijs geïsoleerde praktijken waren, maar deel uitmaken van een complexe stapsgewijze dynamiek van discursieve praktijken, die verder reikt dan de coach-atleet relatie en ook betrekking had op meso- en macroniveaus van de geïnstitutionaliseerde sport. Het gebruik van discursieve praktijken die emotioneel misbruik door coaches mogelijk maakten, bleef dus niet beperkt tot één niveau, maar vond plaats op alle niveaus en oversteeg die. Samen resulteerden deze discursieve praktijken in een situatie die emotioneel misbruik door coaches normaliseerde en liet voortbestaan.

In de turntopsport wordt gediscussieerd over hoe deze praktijken kunnen worden uitgebannen of teruggedrongen. Ouders van atleten worden vaak verantwoordelijk gehouden voor de bescherming van de belangen en de lichamelijke integriteit van hun kinderen. Zowel coaches als ouders zijn genoemd als belangrijke actoren om veranderingen tot stand te brengen. Ouders zijn dus geen onafhankelijke actoren, maar maken deel uit van een groter web dat bestaat uit een verstrengeling van emoties, technologieën en rationaliteit die door hun kinderen, andere ouders, coaches en sportkader worden gebruikt. Deze complexe verstrengeling kan het vermogen van ouders om veranderingen tot stand te brengen beperken. In een poging om emotioneel misbruik in het topturnen een halt toe te roepen, onderzocht ik in **hoofdstuk 7** het vermogen van ouders van topturnsters om hun dochters te beschermen. Ik onderzocht met Foucaultiaanse concepten hoe ouders gedisciplineerd (getraind) worden in het accepteren van dominante discursieve praktijken van topturnclubs. De empirische data zijn afkomstig van het 'Turn het om!' *Parental Awareness Programme* (PAP) project. Het doel van de PAP-groepen was om ouders in staat te stellen kwesties/zorgen te bespreken die zij aan de orde wilden stellen en met anderen wilden delen over de deelname van hun dochter aan de turntopsport. De discussies in

de PAP-groepen stelden mij in staat elementen te identificeren die deel uitmaken van een samenspel van praktijken in het topturnen, die de kans op emotioneel misbruik vergroot. Deelnemers aan het PAP-programma waren ouders van jonge turnsters die als "getalenteerd" waren aangemerkt en lid waren van een topturnclub. Ik ontdekte dat, hoewel de ouders bepaalde praktijken tijdens de PAP-sessies problematiseerden, zij de regels en normen accepteerden binnen de topturnclubs wanneer hun dochter was geselecteerd voor de topturnselectie. De resultaten suggereerden dat kansen op een vermindering van emotioneel misbruik in het topturnen, gedeeltelijk liggen in een kritisch onderzoek naar de discoursen die ten grondslag liggen aan de werkwijze van talentontwikkeling. Het risico op emotioneel misbruik wordt door de werkwijze gedurende de talentontwikkeling in stand gehouden door enerzijds emoties en anderzijds de autoriteit die wordt toegekend aan coachdeskundigheid. Deze dynamiek van emoties, macht en kennis beperkt ouders in hun vermogen om te waarborgen wat in het beste pedagogische belang van hun getalenteerde dochter is.

In **hoofdstuk 8** heb ik gereflecteerd op het gebruik van het Foucaultiaans instrumentarium. Elk van de deelonderzoeken waaruit dit proefschrift bestaat, staat in zekere zin op zichzelf. Ze zijn onafhankelijk van elkaar uitgevoerd en gesitueerd binnen machtsmodaliteiten/ verschijningsvormen om de complexiteit van specifieke sportpraktijken te onderzoeken. Het gebruik van deze machtsmodaliteiten laat zien hoe ze benut kunnen worden als onderzoeksinstrumenten om jeugdsportpraktijken te belichten vanuit een macht-sensitieve Foucaultiaanse lens. Ik heb de werking van disciplinerende macht en kennis binnen verschillende sociale contexten van jeugdsport in kaart gebracht en bekritiseerd om het begrip van jeugdsportpraktijken uit te breiden. In plaats van me te richten op sportclubs, onderzocht ik verschillende segmenten van jeugdsport, in het bijzonder de jongeren en betrokken volwassenen. De resultaten laten zien dat discoursen niet statisch of monolithisch zijn. Ik betoog dat een Foucaultiaans instrument, in het bijzonder een poststructuralistische benadering, de wetenschap over jeugdsport kan verrijken. Het kan wetenschappers in staat stellen verder te kijken dan uitkomsten en resultaten van bijvoorbeeld sportdeelnamecijfers, uitval en obesitas en in plaats daarvan een breder begrip te krijgen op verschillende praktijken in de jeugdsport. Het gebruik van een Foucaultiaans instrumentarium kan ook aan het licht brengen hoe machts- en kennisrelaties (kunnen) worden ge(re)produceerd, verstoord en bestreden binnen zowel de ongeorganiseerde als de georganiseerde jeugdsport. Tegelijkertijd, zoals de verschillende hoofdstukken hebben aangetoond (vooral hoofdstukken 5, 6 en 7), laat het gebruik van een dergelijk instrumentarium ook de complexiteit zien van sportpraktijken waar grensoverschrijdend gedrag plaatsvindt en jongeren worden uitgebuit en misbruikt. Een Foucaultiaans instrumentarium kan dus zodanig gebruikt worden om processen in de jeugdsport in kaart te brengen en te bekritiseren en kan dienen als aanzet tot verandering. De in de verschillende hoofdstukken beschreven resultaten zijn gebaseerd op gegevens die met diverse kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden zijn verkregen. Ik heb in hoofdstuk 8 tevens

gereflecteerd op het doel van de verschillende onderzoeken (beschrijven, analyseren en verklaren) en de kwalitatieve methoden die ik daarbij heb toegepast.

Tot slot heb ik in hoofdstuk 8 als metaforische lens een caleidoscoop gebruikt om jeugdsportpraktijken te observeren, beschouwen en beschrijven. Een caleidoscoop is een buis met een kijkopening waarmee je wisselende kleurrijke patronen kunt zien door aan de buis te draaien. Caleidoscopen herinneren ons eraan dat er altijd andere manieren zijn om de wereld te zien. Zelfs een kleine draaiing verschuift het beeld, de interpretatie en de mogelijkheden. Elke rotatie of draai van de buis resulteert in een nieuw kleurrijk kijkpatroon of prisma. In dit proefschrift beschouw ik de vorm van de prisma's als het Foucaultiaans instrumentarium en de kleuren van de prisma's als de praktijken. De hoofdstukken in dit proefschrift kunnen daarom worden gezien als prisma's; ik heb elk prisma gebruikt om te beschrijven en te analyseren hoe jeugdsport en haar deelnemers worden geconstrueerd of gevormd door middel van macht/kennis. In dit proefschrift heb ik verschillende denkwijzen over jeugdsport en haar praktijken ter discussie gesteld. Ik heb er doelbewust voor gekozen om praktijken en activiteiten te onderzoeken die sterk uiteenlopen: weerstand tegen wedstrijdsport en de vaak onzichtbare processen die deel uitmaken van ongeorganiseerde en georganiseerde sport. In plaats van uit te gaan van veelgebruikte cijfermatige en doelmatige kaders, beschreef ik een alternatieve manier om processen in jeugdsport te bestuderen. Daarmee gaf ik de deelnemers een stem en droeg ik bij aan de theorievorming over jeugdsport. Een gevarieerd gebruik van theorieën, vooral die inzicht verschaffen in de complexe praktijken van jeugdsport, zoals met een Foucaultiaans instrumentarium, kan gebruikt worden om beleid te ontwikkelen en praktijken te veranderen die er momenteel toe kunnen leiden dat jongeren afhaken, worden uitgebuit, misbruikt of plezier in sportdeelname missen. Zoals ik al eerder suggereerde: als jeugdsport beschouwd wordt als een belangrijke praktijk die bijdraagt aan de ontwikkeling van jongeren in de samenleving, dan moeten onderzoek en theorievorming verder gaan dan het opleveren van cijfermatige en doelmatige uitkomsten. In plaats daarvan dienen ze de complexiteit kritisch te onderzoeken. De verschillende studies lieten zien hoe een Foucaultiaans instrumentarium gebruikt kan worden om jeugdsportpraktijken te onderzoeken en wat deze (caleidoscopische) lens te bieden heeft aan wetenschappers, bestuurders en beleidsmakers om hun begrip te vergroten en hun vermogen om te reageren op belangrijke vraagstukken in de jeugdsport te ondersteunen en verbeteren.

Curriculum Vitae

Froukje Smits obtained her BSc in Physical Education (PE) in 2004 at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences (Zwolle). Subsequently, she taught PE at several secondary schools between 2004-2010. Meanwhile, she was enrolled in the minor Sports, Movement and Policies at the Utrecht University (2008). She successfully completed her MSc. in the program, Youth, Education and Society (cum laude) at the Utrecht University in 2009. Froukje was employed as a researcher at the Mulier Institute (scientific sport-research institute) between 2010-2013. From 2013 onward, she works as a senior-researcher in the area of 'Social Impact of Sports and Physical Activity' at the Utrecht University of Applied Sciences. She was awarded number of research project grants as main and co-applicant and received several social impact and scientific awards. She also initiated the project 'U on Board' and embedded it in the 'U on Board Foundation' that she founded in 2021. In this way, the project continues to roll twice a week at a refugee reception centre in Utrecht.[10]

Awards (chronological order)

Finalist #BEInclusive EU Sport Award 2020, project 'U on Board', European Commission, December, 1, 2020. Brussel, Belgium.

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10   Visit www.froukjesmits.nl for an overview of all my publications and presentations.

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Appendices

![Universiteit Utrecht]

Co-auteursverklaring hoofdstuk 2

In overeenstemming met het Promovendireglement kunnen gepubliceerde artikelen opgenomen worden in het proefschrift. Indien dergelijke delen van het proefschrift in samenwerking zijn ontwikkeld, moeten deze delen vergezeld gaan van een verklaring van elk van de auteurs aandeel in het werk van de student.

Artikel en proefschrift

Deze co-auteursverklaring heeft betrekking op het volgende artikel:
'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport': Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal and alternative Reformed sport discourses.

Gepubliceerd als:
Smits, F., Knoppers, A. & Van Doodewaard, C. (2019). 'We must not engage in the blind glorification of sport': Christian orthodox youths negotiate dominant societal and alternative Reformed sport discourses. *Sport in Society*, 22(2), 281-295. DOI: 10.1080/17430437.2017.1360581

Het artikel maakt deel uit van het proefschrift met de titel:
Understanding youth in sport: A Foucauldian lens on power, discourse and knowledge in youth sports

Proefschrift ingediend ter verdediging van de graad door:
Froukje Smits

Omvang bijdrage

Froukje Smits
Heeft op de volgende schaal bijgedragen aan het bovenstaande artikel met de omvang:

A. Heeft bijgedragen aan de samenwerking (0-33%).
B. Heeft aanzienlijk bijgedragen (34-66%)
C. Heeft overwegend zelfstandig de werkzaamheden verricht (67-100%)

C
Mogelijke aanvullende opmerkingen over bijdrage:

-

Handtekeningen co-auteurs

Datum	Naam	Functie	Handtekening
12-5-2023	Annelies Knoppers	1e promotor	
12-5-2023	Corina van Doodewaard	coauteur	

Co-auteursverklaring hoofdstuk 4

In overeenstemming met het Promovendireglement kunnen gepubliceerde artikelen opgenomen worden in het proefschrift. Indien dergelijke delen van het proefschrift in samenwerking zijn ontwikkeld, moeten deze delen vergezeld gaan van een verklaring van elk van de auteurs aandeel in het werk van de student.

Artikel en proefschrift

Deze co-auteursverklaring heeft betrekking op het volgende artikel:
Leaders building relationships with young refugees during a sport project.

Gepubliceerd als:
Smits, F. & Knoppers, A. (2022). Leaders building relationships with young refugees during a sport project. *Sport in Society*, 25(3), 654-670. DOI: 10.1080/17430437.2022.2017827

Het artikel maakt deel uit van het proefschrift met de titel:
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Froukje Smits

Omvang bijdrage

Froukje Smits

Heeft op de volgende schaal bijgedragen aan het bovenstaande artikel met de omvang:

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B. Heeft aanzienlijk bijgedragen (34-66%)
C. Heeft overwegend zelfstandig de werkzaamheden verricht (67-100%)

C

Mogelijke aanvullende opmerkingen over bijdrage:

-

Handtekeningen co-auteurs

Datum	Naam	Functie	Handtekening
12-5-2023	Annelies Knoppers	1e promotor	

Co-auteursverklaring hoofdstuk 5

In overeenstemming met het Promovendireglement kunnen gepubliceerde artikelen opgenomen worden in het proefschrift. Indien dergelijke delen van het proefschrift in samenwerking zijn ontwikkeld, moeten deze delen vergezeld gaan van een verklaring van elk van de auteurs aandeel in het werk van de student.

Artikel en proefschrift

Deze co-auteursverklaring heeft betrekking op het volgende artikel:
'Everything is said with a smile': Homonegative speech acts in sport.

Gepubliceerd als:
Smits, F., Knoppers, A., & Elling-Machartzki, A. (2021). 'Everything is said with a smile': Homonegative speech acts in sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport,* 56(3), 343–360. *doi.org/10.1177/1012690220957520*

Het artikel maakt deel uit van het proefschrift met de titel:
Understanding youth in sport: A Foucauldian lens on power, discourse and knowledge in youth sports

Proefschrift ingediend ter verdediging van de graad door:
Froukje Smits

Universiteit Utrecht

Omvang bijdrage

Froukje Smits

Heeft op de volgende schaal bijgedragen aan het bovenstaande artikel met de omvang:

A. Heeft bijgedragen aan de samenwerking (0-33%).
B. Heeft aanzienlijk bijgedragen (34-66%)
C. Heeft overwegend zelfstandig de werkzaamheden verricht (67-100%)

C

Mogelijke aanvullende opmerkingen over bijdrage:

-

Handtekeningen co-auteurs

Datum	Naam	Functie	Handtekening
12-5-2023	Annelies Knoppers	1e promotor	
12-5-2023	Agnes Elling	coauteur	

Universiteit Utrecht

Co-auteursverklaring hoofdstuk 6

In overeenstemming met het Promovendireglement kunnen gepubliceerde artikelen opgenomen worden in het proefschrift. Indien dergelijke delen van het proefschrift in samenwerking zijn ontwikkeld, moeten deze delen vergezeld gaan van een verklaring van elk van de auteurs aandeel in het werk van de student.

Artikel en proefschrift

Deze co-auteursverklaring heeft betrekking op het volgende boekhoofdstuk:
Using a multilevel model to critically examine the grooming process of emotional abusive practices in women's artistic gymnastics

Gepubliceerd als:
Smits, F., Jacobs, F. & Knoppers, A. (2020). Using a multilevel model to critically examine the grooming process of emotional abusive practices in women's artistic gymnastics. In R. Kerr, N. Barker-Ruchti, C. Stewart, & G. Kerr (Eds.), *Women's Artistic Gymnastics: Socio-Cultural Perspectives* (pp. 190–202). Routledge.

Het artikel maakt deel uit van het proefschrift met de titel:
Understanding youth in sport: A Foucauldian lens on power, discourse and knowledge in youth sports

Proefschrift ingediend ter verdediging van de graad door:
Froukje Smits

Omvang bijdrage

Froukje Smits

Heeft op de volgende schaal bijgedragen aan het bovenstaande artikel met de omvang:

A. Heeft bijgedragen aan de samenwerking (0-33%).
B. Heeft aanzienlijk bijgedragen (34-66%)
C. Heeft overwegend zelfstandig de werkzaamheden verricht (67-100%)

C

Mogelijke aanvullende opmerkingen over bijdrage:

-

Handtekeningen co-auteurs

Datum	Naam	Functie	Handtekening
12-5-2023	Annelies Knoppers	1e promotor	
12-5-2023	Frank Jacobs	coauteur	

Co-auteursverklaring hoofdstuk 7

In overeenstemming met het Promovendireglement kunnen gepubliceerde artikelen opgenomen worden in het proefschrift. Indien dergelijke delen van het proefschrift in samenwerking zijn ontwikkeld, moeten deze delen vergezeld gaan van een verklaring van elk van de auteurs aandeel in het werk van de student.

Artikel en proefschrift

Deze co-auteursverklaring heeft betrekking op het volgende artikel:
"Can you deny her that?" Processes of Governmentality and Socialization of Parents in Elite Women's Gymnastics.

Gepubliceerd als:
Smits, F., Jacobs, F. & Knoppers, A. (2022). "Can you deny her that?" Processes of Governmentality and Socialization of Parents in Elite Women's Gymnastics. *Frontiers Psychology*, 13. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.829352

Het artikel maakt deel uit van het proefschrift met de titel:
Understanding youth in sport: A Foucauldian lens on power, discourse and knowledge in youth sports

Proefschrift ingediend ter verdediging van de graad door:
Froukje Smits

Universiteit Utrecht

Omvang bijdrage

Froukje Smits
Heeft op de volgende schaal bijgedragen aan het bovenstaande artikel met de omvang:

A. Heeft bijgedragen aan de samenwerking (0-33%).
B. Heeft aanzienlijk bijgedragen (34-66%)
C. Heeft overwegend zelfstandig de werkzaamheden verricht (67-100%)

C

Mogelijke aanvullende opmerkingen over bijdrage:

-

Handtekeningen co-auteurs

Datum	Naam	Functie	Handtekening
12-5-2023	Annelies Knoppers	1e promotor	
12-5-2023	Frank Jacobs	coauteur	

Froukje Smits

Understanding youth in sport

A Foucauldian lens on power, discourse and knowledge in youth sports