Women, Ethnicity and Leadership in Sport

ABSTRACT

Sport does not provide a level playing field for all Australians. Previous research and national participation data has conclusively found that certain groups within the population are significantly underrepresented in the sporting environment. Female participation in sport is less than male participation, and female representation in leadership and management positions in sport is even lower. Women from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds involved in sport are even further disadvantaged. This paper explores the experiences of ten female sports leaders from marginalised ethnic groups. This is an area rich for study given the multicultural composition of the Australian population.

Interviews were conducted with women from diverse cultural and linguistic minority backgrounds who hold leadership positions in a range of sports. The narratives explored attitudes to sport and reasons why these women chose to take on leadership roles. The women's stories are embedded with notions of assimilation and discrimination, feelings of frustration and a sense of injustice. Exclusionary practices and stereotyped images were the motivation for these women to assume sport leadership roles. They did so in order to be in a better position to facilitate improved access to sports for other women from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In assuming a leadership role the women have started to change the system from within. A process of change needs to start on all fronts using innovative and progressive approaches that begin to challenge both racist and sexist constraints currently prevalent in Australian sporting environments.

Introduction

This paper provides a forum to listen to the stories of women from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds as they speak about the problems, constraints and benefits they have experienced as females in leadership positions in sport. The research explores the experiences of ten women born in non-English speaking countries whom have assumed leadership positions within the contemporary Australian sport environment. The women interviewed were engaged in discussions about the cultural, institutional, organisational and personal factors that influenced these experiences and the ways in which these either constrained or facilitated their leadership.

The underlying assumption of this research is that many women in sport have had to face substantial discrimination, alienation and marginalisation. The virtual absence of women from administrative and executive sports positions has been well documented (Theberge and Birrell, 1994 – USA; Hall,1996 - Canada; Hargreaves, 1994 – United Kingdom; McKay, 1997 – Australia, Canada and New Zealand). Additionally, Jan Cameron (1995) has pointed out the under-representation of women on volunteer boards and as executives on national sport organisations within New Zealand. Nancy Theberge's (1988) research highlighted the low number of women coaching at the elite level within Canada. Furthermore, Acosta and Carpenter (1994) discovered that in United States intercollegiate sports programs administered by women declined from 30 percent in the 1970s to 17 percent in 1992. Hall *et al* (1990) suggest that the few women who do make it into sport management positions are often chosen because they are 'one of the boys' and perpetuate the dominant masculine ideology rather than challenge it. The 'old-boy' network is yet

another force that perpetuates social exclusion across all dimensions of sport from the office to the post-meeting socialising over alcohol (Cameron, 1995).

Within Australia male dominance has encompassed almost every aspect of sport from coaching, umpiring, managing and leading in grass roots voluntary sport organisations and professional sport to the control of government sport policies and funding. Women have been continuously subjugated by male hegemonic cultural practices in sport that have acted to disenfranchise, disempower and constrain their sport opportunities as participants and in leadership roles. Even in the sports that have fully included women as players, most have continued to exclude women from positions of influence and authority (Vamplew, 1994). The title of Jim McKay's (1992) report 'Why so few? Women executives in Australian sport' is self-explanatory.

The notable exceptions are netball and softball, sports which have traditionally been played predominantly by women. In the case of netball men were formally excluded from even being registered players or holding official positions within the sport until the 1970s (Jobling and Barham, 1991). This exclusion meant that women held all positions in netball from players to administrators. While netball is exceptional in the space it afforded women to develop their own sport, in recent years as it has become more commercially focussed and men have quickly assumed key leadership roles.

Women in general have had to confront and challenge the dominant discourses of sport that construct leadership roles as implicitly masculine experiences. However, women

from minority ethnic groups have had to fight even harder to contest middle-class Eurocentric discourses that marginalise their experiences. The research outlined here investigates the experiences of this section of the population, women from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, by giving voice to their experiences of leadership in sport.

Research Aim

Women from non-English speaking backgrounds comprise nearly 23 percent of the Australian population and are significantly under represented in sport and physical recreation participation (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1999). Limited research has been undertaken to explore the reasons for this low level of sport involvement. A few studies have investigated the question from the perspective of player participation and concluded that racism and discrimination serve to informally exclude women from marginal ethnic groups from increased sport participation (Dew, 1992; Taylor, LeGrand and Newton, 1999; Taylor and Toohey, 1999). This study extends the focus to bring to light the experiences of the few women of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds who have assumed leadership roles in various sports.

The primary aim of the research was to facilitate a better understanding about cultural and gender relations in Australian sports. The ensuing research questions were:

> What are the experiences and perceptions of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in sport and are these experiences different from other women?

> Have sport organisations and discourses limited the leadership opportunities of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

The outcome of this paper is to present the women's stories and suggest how these experiences may have implications for the structure and practices of equitable sport organisation. It is recognised that each woman will hold a different view about the place of sport in her life. The extent to which sport is used to reinforce a negative identity or to reconstruct a liberating identity will vary between women, no matter what their ethnic background. This paper does not intend to make generalisation about all women from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and sport. However, there are some commonalities and the inexorable tension between compliance, resistance, structural and cultural constraints that will be examined and discussed in both conceptual and applied terms.

Women in sport – Women on the margins

Over the last few decades feminist studies have extensively and intensively debated the role that cultural institutions, such as sport, play in promulgating male hegemony. Investigations have ranged from theorising how power relations are created, maintained and reinforced by these institutions to revelations about how the same institutions can be used by women to contest and resist a gendered construction of society. While earlier feminist treatises proposed grand theories that were applied to all women, these theoretical assumptions have now shifted and recent works recognise that women are not a homogenous group. In particular, poststructural feminists have delved into questions about the marginalisation of women who do not fit into Eurocentric, middle-class,

Western 'white' theorisation (Prakash, 1994; Spivak, 1988). These critiques have suggested that feminist research needs to incorporate non-white, ethnic minority groups and poor women. The notion that we need to rethink social identities and forms of knowledge to encompass the 'other' are central to postcolonial feminist approaches (hooks, 1989). This acknowledgement of difference has led to a re-thinking of the place of marginalised women in theoretical feminist representations.

However, in sport studies questions of racial and cultural difference are still primarily researched within an androcentric paradigm and studies of the 'other' are just beginning to emerge in the literature (Thommson, 1998). Few research studies that investigate the nexus between women, sport and ethnicity have been published. In Australia, research on women and sport has found that sport has played a central role in the development of an 'Australian' identity and a supporting role in the maintenance of existing power relationships, dominant cultural values and institutionalised discrimination (Rowe and Lawrence, 1996). The maintenance of these dominant systems not only acts to marginalise women but also disadvantages others outside the mainstream cultural and power elite. Minority ethnic groups have been subjected to mainstream discriminatory practices across a range of cultural institutions, including sports organisation. Inequities have been ingrained in institutional practices that have upheld the sentiments of government policies that facilitated 'white' English cultural purity, assimilation, and integration. In the late 1970s government policy shifted to incorporate multicultural ideals and the early 1980s cultural diversity was formally accepted. However, policy

and practice can be worlds apart and research to date has found that sports have not been very tolerant or encouraging of different cultural groups (Cashman, 1995).

A survey on the involvement of Australians in sport indicated that 26.7 percent of females born in Australia had played sport in the twelve months previous to the study, compared to only 8.4 percent (less than one-third) of females from non-English-speaking countries (ABS, 1994). More striking are the non-playing involvement rates, which included coaches, referees, and administrators. Some 4.4 percent of Australian-born females surveyed had a non-playing role in sport; only 1.5 percent of females from non-English-speaking countries undertook such duties.

This seemingly impenetrable Anglocentric male domination of sport participation, management, administration and decision-making has put women from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in a position of continually being required to justify and fight for their right to equal access of facilities, funds, programs and opportunities. Lois Bryson (1990:183) suggests that in order to challenge this current dynamic, three specific sites of its perpetuation must be redressed. The first site is the arena of sport, which needs to be revisioned by increases to the number of women playing sports, greater involvement in traditional male sports and getting women into positions of power within sport organisations. Positioning women in these places will then assist to dispel myths about female inadequacies associated with sport. The second site is the point where sport intersects with other institutions; such as in the political arena or the education system. The third site is the personal level and requires both behavioural and attitudinal change.

Let's start the examination of sport at Bryson's first site, the arena of sport. The national sport data indicates that women from diverse cultural and linguistic groups have low levels of participation in sports, and they do not hold decision-making or leadership positions in sport organisations. The present research investigates why the presence of these women's is minimal in leadership positions, and if the women feel they have been able to impact change in either of the other two sites of perpetuation. A better understanding of the experiences of women from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds can provide the impetus to facilitate actions that address their virtual absence from sport participation figures and from leadership positions. Listening to the voices of women who have been on the margins of dominant discourses of sport and redefining the context of their leadership role in sport should provide a better understanding of processes of negotiation and accommodation.

Choosing an appropriate method

A series of interviews was undertaken with women born in non-English speaking countries who were in sport leadership positions. The central imperative of the research was to firstly listen to the women's own interpretations of their life experiences and subsequently discuss how sport fits into their lives. This principle reflects suggestions of feminist researchers that research should always acknowledge the location of women in a wider socio-cultural context and concurrently provides an examination of intersecting statuses held by women of various marginalised groups (Lenskyj, 1994). As Costa and Guthrie (1994:250) comment, 'when qualitative approaches that respect the diversity of

human experience are more generally accepted and employed by the dominant groups in sport research, we will likely gain a better understanding of sporting women and a celebration of difference may also result'.

By using qualitative methods that allow participants to present their perspectives in their own words and ascribe meanings to their experiences the research methodology facilitates discovery of new and unexpected outcomes (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). The use of interviews was a critical component of the research design as details about women's leadership experiences in sport are essentially unavailable in written sources.

Miles and Huberman's (1994) basic questions on the design of a qualitative sampling plan were used to determine the best approach to the present research. Given the purpose and research questions of the study the sample needed to be logically coherent and provide internal consistency. A purposive sampling plan was employed. Ten women were interviewed for the present study. These women had been previously nominated as role models in sport in a study on sport participation and culturally and linguistically diverse women. Sport organisations, specific ethnic groups and community support had identified the women agencies as individuals who were perceived as role models in their respective constituencies. Therefore, the women represented particular sports, ethnic communities and geographical communities.

All ten potential participants were contacted by telephone and the purpose of the research explained to each. All of the women contacted agreed to participate in the research. The

participants were asked to nominate their preferred interview location in accordance with Reinharz's (1992) advice that to listen to people and to empower them researchers should go to the respondent's space or a 'safe' place. A letter of confirmation of the nominated place and time was then sent by post. All participants were provided with the option of having an interpreter present at the interview. However, no one chose this option. Participation in the study was voluntary and all responses have been kept anonymous, therefore the names used in reporting the findings are fictitious.

The interview method was drawn from Franklin's (1997) conceptualisation of the shared understanding model of interviewing. This is where the interview is seen as a situation in which the interviewer attempts to gain understanding of how the interviewee experiences aspects of her own life and/or the world of objects and other persons. Aspects of cultural difference and diversity were taken into consideration when developing the interview themes and each individual interview situation was treated as unique. A conversational style of questioning was employed to allow for flexibility in terms of inherent language and constraints and acknowledgment of cultural values sensitivities. Of equal importance was assuring that research participants that they would not be judged by inappropriate Anglo-Celtic feminists standards or what Martin (1991) terms hegemonic feminist ethnocentrism. This is where 'the analytical and political preoccupations of an ethnically dominant group are falsely universalised and normalised with respect to women from minority and colonised groups' (Martin 1991:125).

The interviews with the women participants ranged from 25-75 minutes in duration. A female interviewer facilitated all of the sessions, as it was felt that this was a vital consideration for the female participants. As Reinharz (1992:23) suggests, 'that for a woman to be understood by a woman in a social research project, it may be necessary for her to be interviewed by a woman'. While gender itself is not sufficient to establish rapport, it is a factor, and contributed to the establishment of trust between the parties involved.

All of the interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts of the interviews were read through several times to obtain an overall sense of the content before being coded for analysis. Individual experiences and reflections were initially grouped by concept theme and then further differentiated by category as a framework for organisation, analysis and reporting of the findings. Although it is acknowledged that each woman's leadership experiences in sport and their own expression of this experience was unique, exemplars were consistently identified from these constituting factors was consistently identified throughout the data. Each of the concepts is discussed below with the use of direct quotes from the interviews used to illustrate women's perceptions and experiences or to emphasise or highlight a particular finding.

The stories

In reporting the findings, and in the analysis of the interviews, the participants' words are the primary source of data to be used in understanding the meaning, value and place of sport in the lives of these women. Sport is taken as a form of personal and cultural

expression by which women can communicate identities and complexities associated with their lives. The diverse narratives educed in the interview process articulate a range of stories and feelings about the social context and everyday reality of power, patriarchy, discrimination and resistance in sport in the lives of these women. While the uniqueness of each participant's experience is acknowledged, commonalities and interdependencies are likewise identified and examined.

Leadership experiences in sport

The narratives are used to explore if social relationships and institutions, including sport, create, maintain and perpetuate gender and cultural inequities within Australian society. In particular, if sport's power structure is based in an ideal of sport that is based on white, male dominance. Actions of inclusion or exclusion do not just indiscriminately occur; they are institutionalised and historically conditioned responses that are situated in a larger cultural context. Therefore, it is incumbent to now consider where and how these issues are located in the social realities of the interview participants. The influence of sport organisation discourses and practices in the lives of the women interviewed are investigated through the narratives provided.

Myths and stereotypes

Many women from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are subjected to stereotypes about their lifestyle, beliefs, customs and traditions (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1994). These commonly held opinions influence the way in which these women are perceived and

treated. Gender and ethnicity are interdeterminantly interrelated with varying forms and consequence on the 'level' playing fields of sport.

Mary is in her early twenties and is in her final year at university. She coaches children's badminton and is on the executive of two badminton clubs. Mary's story illustrates how stereotypes can impact shape sport involvement. Mary moved to Australia from Hong Kong with her parents when she was still in high school. She had previously played a number of sports but she was not encouraged to join the sport teams at her new school. She clearly felt that her exclusion related to her teachers' and classmates' perceptions about Asian students. *'I felt that people didn't expect that I would want to play, they thought all I wanted to do was study, but I would've loved to at least been asked.'* Mary further explained that the teachers at her school thought that they were doing her a favour by exempting her from sport and letting her have extra study time instead. '*Just because I was an Asian the teachers all labelled me as non-sporty, even though I was quite athletic*.'

Mary joined a church-based sports club and was soon taking charge of the group. She spoke with pride about their prowess at badminton and her role as a coach for the younger players. The experience she gained with the church sports organisation gave her confidence to join the badminton club when she entered university and Mary eventually went to be become president of the club. *'I took on the Presidents role because the guys weren't that responsible and they always expected we would get things organised anyway. They held all the official positions and took all the credit but we did all the work. So I*

thought that I would make a much better President, and so did a lot of the others! A few of us girls took over the executive and I think we ran a much tighter ship.'

While Mary speaks passionately about her involvement in badminton she believes that in some ways it just puts her into another stereotyped identity. '*Most of the club's players are Asian and I think that a lot of Australian students won't join because they think that badminton is an Asian sport or they think that they will feel alien. It's ironic isn't it*?' In his seminal work on ethnicity Cohen (1969) suggested people do not just self-choose an ethnic identity, others can also attribute it to them. In Mary's case the imposed label has acted to both limit and expand her leadership opportunities.

School environments and teachers were not perceived as particularly inclusive or sensitive to different cultural needs in the women's stories. Teresa was born in Italy and arrived in Australia when she was in primary school. Teresa is now in her mid twenties and works as a multicultural activity co-ordinator. She spoke animatedly about how she was ridiculed during her physical education classes at school and called a 'wog'. Rude and nasty comments and racist jokes from classmates discouraged her participation and left her detesting sport. '*They were not nice, I felt like shrinking away in the corner whenever we had PE*.' Such experiences at school are not uncommon, Daly's (1996) exploration of sexist behaviours found that peers collectively assisted in the construction of a sexist repertoire and sanctioned actions and comments that were regarded as sexist. Daly also found that in most instances the teacher took no action to curtail the unsavoury behaviour.

The schoolyard taunts kept Teresa away from sports for several years and it wasn't until she was at home with her first child that she decided to get physically active. She began attending exercise classes and tried to encourage a few of her friends from the Italian community to join. '*Firstly I joined the local gym, it had a crèche and the kids were looked after when I did classes. I really started to like it and went nearly every day. I also started to feel good about myself and my body. And nobody laughed when I was out of time with the music.*' However, the other women did not have a strong understanding of English and felt out of place in the classes. This impelled Teresa to train as an exercise instructor and lead classes in Italian. '*I was one of the first in a special program the health department started to get qualified instructors who could speak other languages. Now I have my own business in personal training and it is just booming*!'

Muslim women are continually subject to gross stereotyping within Australian society (Taylor and Toohey, 1999). Bel is a Muslim woman from Iran who came to Australia seven years ago as a university student. She has since married, has three children and does volunteer work for a Muslim women's group. Bel expressed her intense sense of frustration about the 'ignorance' that many Australians have about Muslims, explaining that many of commonly held assumptions are not accurate and these can be both negative and limiting. The most common stereotypes that she encounters almost on a daily basis are that Muslim women are oppressed; they are subservient to their husbands; and they do not like sports. '*People seem to think that just because we wear the veil that we are dumb and can't think for ourselves. We are independent women and we make our own*

choices about what we want to do, or not to do.' Bel felt that in not compromising their religious requirements, and not conforming to the tenets of mainstream sport provision, many Muslim women have been denied access to many sport opportunities. '*Most people seem to think that jumping into a public swimming pool in a revealing swimsuit is a choice that we can make or not make. They don't understand the implications. That's why we have a group for us women, just Muslims, we understand each other*.' This non-conformity to a prescribed western societal role underpins the women's feelings of being treated as 'different'. While gender and ethnic stereotypes have had a negative impact on sport participation opportunities, the many of the women interviewed here rallied to maintain their cultural diversity and in doing so have gained strength from their exclusion.

Exclusion

Stories of exclusion were also commonplace in the interview narratives. Nearly every woman interviewed had a story of exclusionary treatment ranging from explicit discrimination to subjection to subtle forms of alienation. In order to encapsulate these experiences a selection of stories are presented below. These examples serve to represent the seemingly endemic and systemic nature of gender and cultural inequity within sport.

In Iran, Bel played several sports such as basketball, volleyball and table tennis, all in segregated environments. '*In Iran we have separate sporting places for women and men. That give us complete freedom of playing sports … all the referees and all the people there are women only. .*' Bel tried to find a segregated basketball competition when she arrived in Sydney and was surprised at the reception she received. '*They all looked at me*

as if I was crazy, why would a Muslim women want to play basketball, they thought we weren't allowed to play sport. I was really angry.' Bel joined a Muslim women's group and they decided to enter a social team in the local volleyball competition playing in the hijab. '*All the other teams they were wearing shorts and they were pretty lucky to have movement of joints, but we were wearing these long dresses and hijab because we didn't have women only venues or environments but we played and we came first.*' An important element of this experience was the cohesion and the pleasure. As Bel said, *'we were united by our difference*.' These experiences prompted Bel to volunteer as a recreation and sport activities co-ordinator for her community Muslim Women's group. She finds this role somewhat frustrating because of the lack of awareness sport organisations and local government have about the needs of Muslim women. '*We are constantly lobbying the council for access to facilities. We pay the rates just like everyone else yet they continue to deny us our rights to do things like use the local pool with no men present. It's amazing the number of people who think just because we are Muslims we don't want to play sports, for us a healthy body is very important to our religious beliefs*.' Bel indicated, that she has had to constantly battle for the rights of Muslim women but that if she did not do her job then many Muslim women would be denied the opportunity to be physically active. Other research has similarly found that racial and religious discrimination affects sport choices and levels of access (Jarvie, 1991). Therein lies the paradox of the construction of difference, for Bel the stereotype has been both constraining and enabling. The sense of powerlessness she felt when confronted with exclusion from sport provided Bel with the impetus to start her own team and become actively involved in community issues. These initiatives have provided Bel

and other Muslim women with increased opportunities for sport participation and a sense of community and belonging.

Phuong grew up in Vietnam and came to Australia when she was 20 years old. She is now 45 years old and runs her own small business coaching swimming. Phuong's first experiences of sport in Australia were not encouraging, '*When I went to do aerobics, I feel embarrassed because my sister and I were the only Asian people. We felt like everyone was looking at us!*' Phuong feels that when many Vietnamese women first arrive in Australia they feel the same as her and do not play sports because they feel different. '*If they have to go themselves, they may have some sort of fear. I think everyone has fear when they are in a new environment.*' It takes time to adjust to a new culture and feel comfortable participating in activities. In recent years Phuong has become quite physically active. She goes to dancing classes and to aerobics every week. Phuong learnt to swim as an adult when her son started swimming lessons, she felt welcome at the pool because there were other Asians in her class. '*And when I went there, gee, I find a lots of Asians just like me! So I felt quite good!*' This was in contrast to her earlier experiences of aerobics when she felt that being Asian marked her as different and made her uncomfortable. Phuong trained as a swimming instructor and now operates her own small business teaching Vietnamese children and adults to swim. Phuong believes that she has been successful in her business because she can speak to the participants in their native language and they can share their experiences as Asian immigrants with her. As she says, '*I get lots of business from the local community, I know how they feel and I give them a place that they can learn to swim without feeling embarassed or silly.*'

The inability of existing sport organisations to meet the needs of women with different cultural expectations or language requirements was a common theme in the interviews. Isobel is originally from Spain and works with South American communities in the welfare area. As part of her job she had tried, unsuccessfully to get some of the girls to join the local soccer club. The main issue was that the girls did not feel comfortable with English and their parents were not happy with the evening training sessions that required the girls to travel a long distance at night. The club were not willing to change; the lack of tolerance for different cultural needs appears to be a consistent outcome of investigations on this issue (Cashman, 1995). Isobel subsequently established a women-only soccer club that recruited Spanish speaking coaches and umpires. She had the rules of the game translated, all club meetings were held in both English and Spanish and the girls were provided with a chaperone service to and from evening training sessions. The club's home ground was located next to a picnic area and families were encouraged to come to the games. The outcome? As Isobel explains '*It has been hugely successful, I just put my head down and got it done. There was a lot of toing and froing in getting the field but we managed to pull a few strings and it all came off. The best reward is watching the girls play. They have improved so much and just love competing in their own terms, without having to worry about not understanding what is going on and feeling left out*'.

Exclusionary incidents such as those discussed above are embedded in the stories of most of the women interviewed for this study. The stories are illustrative of Philipp's (1999)

contention that sport and leisure activities are constrained by intersections of marginality and discrimination. Furthermore, Theberge and Birrell (1994) suggest that sport is a critical site of cultural struggle and reproduction of privilege is reinforced in the messages of exclusion that the women interviewed conveyed in their stories.

Cultural Expectations

Maria arrived from Italy seven years ago when she was 25 years old and is a qualified dance instructor. In Italy, Maria had been an avid skier, dancer and roller skater. She still skates and has started swimming for exercise and wants to learn to ride a boogie board. Her parents encouraged her to play sport while she was growing up and she was actively involved in school sport. Maria said that, '*in Italy, the girls tend to play whatever is fashionable, like tennis or golf. It's different here where the Italian girls sit in the corner. In Italy, the girls are pushed into sports of some kind*.' Maria revealed that she was really surprised at the Italian community in Australia, '*when I went to their cultural club I felt like a foreigner! Seriously! Really incredible! It was very foreign to me … they keep the traditions of 60 years ago!*' She also feels that the women are less confident in Australia than in Italy, and have more restrictions. '*The Italian community here does not encourage girls to play sports; it is still very much a male thing. Fortunately for me is it all right for the girls to learn to dance because dance is graceful and for females '*.

Eleni, who has only been in Australia for just over a year, also found the difference between women in Greece and Greek-Australian women quite startling. *'I was so surprised it was like the last 50 years never happened!*' Eleni had coached gymnastics for

several years in Greece and came to Sydney to work for the Olympic organising committee. Eleni believed that in Greece many girls get involved in sport because '*it is the fashion*' but she felt that it was not the case in Australia. '*I thought that girls in Greece were disadvantaged in sport but the Greek families I have met here are even more restricting on their daughters. The sons can do anything they want, which is same as Greece, but I feel so sorry for the poor girls*!'

Identity

Alison is Maltese and an elite level athlete and coach. She is employed by the state government to go into schools and to encourage girls from minority ethnic backgrounds to be more physically active. Alison was the one woman who animatedly discussed how her sport leadership experiences provided her with a strong sense of pride and identity. As a representative of Australia she was 'Australian' first and foremost but is proud that ethnic communities have used her as a role model in sport. In this sense Alison is maintaining her ethnic identity in what is described by Hughson (1997) as a 'loose-knit' ethnic association, in that her ethnic association is not core to her everyday social life. Alison believed that ethnic girls should develop more positive attitudes to sport, learn English and, '*get away from all these rules in societies that happen back home you know and take the opportunity to participate in things at school.*'

Nearly all of the other women interviewed explained that while sport was a part of their lives, other dimensions were more highly valued. Their identity as a Muslim, mother, and businesswoman or their cultural heritage was paramount. With the exception of

Alison, Eleni and Maria the women said that they had assumed sport leadership roles to encourage and facilitate others to be physically active, to assist other women to overcome the barriers to participation that they had faced in their own involvement. Equity and social justice were the driving forces for their actions rather than love of sport.

Discussion and Conclusions

Given the stories of exclusion, discrimination and subjection to negative stereotyping that the women interviewed for this study related it is not surprising that women from non-English speaking backgrounds are not well represented in sport. The interview participants' narratives contained many common experiences. The process of migration and the fear and sense of cultural dissonance that the women felt elicited strong emotional responses associated with the transition to a new culture and language. The older women who had migrated when they were still attending school spoke strongly about their experiences of ethnic based discrimination and exclusion in sport. These women arrived during an era when assimilation and integration were expected yet they had limited access to English language classes and ethnic support centres. However, as their English language skills and financial circumstances improved, they felt better equipped to move into integrated settings and it was at this point in their lives that many of the women assumed sport leadership roles within their ethnic communities. The narratives presented here are of the voices of the women who made it; there are many untold stories of exclusion, racism and defeat that are not included in this study. These women need to be listened to also.

The way in which the women perceived their role as sport leaders was another common theme. Faced with exclusionary practices and stereotyped images, several of the women took on leadership roles to facilitate better access to sport opportunities for others. Very few of the women saw their identity defined by their sport involvement. Pride and strength of commitment to equity and access in sport was provided by their identity as a Muslim woman or community leader, not as a sportswoman. Many of the women's comments could be interpreted as indicative of a set of values that centres on family, security and creating a better lifestyle. Shona Thompson's (1992) research finding that women's volunteer work in tennis did more to support men playing the sport than women, also suggests that women take on a caring role in supporting others to engage in sport to a greater degree than men. The way in which the women enacted their leadership roles was within predetermined boundaries and in uncontested territories, keeping within a framework of cultural, patriarchical ideological, hegemonic and structural constraints.

The narratives seem to suggest that women need a strong sense of self and a willingness to assimilate into the Anglo-Australian dominated world of sport to assume leadership positions. However, in taking on these roles they often need to compromise their ethnic identity or find an alternative way inside. Inclusionary sport discourses are not prevalent; instead sports reflect the masculine and Anglo-cultural hegemony of its constituent community. Rowe and Lawrence (1996) have previously argued that sport maintains existing power relations, dominant values and institutionalised discrimination. From the stories heard in this research it would appear that the status quo has remained in place. Increased sport opportunities for women from diverse backgrounds are linked to the

elimination of racial stereotypes and discrimination. It would seem that eradication of racial harassment and this has not occurred in the world of Australian sport. Bryson's (1990) sites of perpetuation of equity remain relatively uncontested, mainly controlled by ethnocentric values, expectations and practices. Sport organisations and discourses are still a long way from celebrating cultural diversity.

Can sport provide the opportunity to challenge the dominant discourses on gender and ethnicity or allow women the freedom to construct their own spaces where they are comfortable taking a leadership role in sport? Present evidence would suggest that this avenue of contestation and change has not been well travelled. It will be interesting to watch whether it is a road that women choose to take in the future. For too long women from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds have been excluded from historical and contemporary sport research. As their voices have not been heard, their experiences of sport have been ignored. The interviews undertaken for this research were an attempt to capture these voices, emotions and meanings to better understand the perspectives that they represent.

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