

ABSTRACT

Normal, natural and proper: women's football in the Anglophone Caribbean

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This thesis interrogates women's football in the Caribbean and considers the extent to which relations of gender impact on what is considered normal, natural and proper behaviours for Caribbean women in sport. Anchored in the Caribbean, this work examines women's lived experiences as footballers; challenges and opportunities encountered by women who play football; the development of women's football; and, sport policies towards women's football. The work questions whether, in this region, football is considered "natural" for one gender and "not normal" or "proper" for the "Other". The primary aims of this investigation are to detail the major challenges that women footballers encounter in the Caribbean; and, to augment the available literature on this subject. Among the issues discoursed and deconstructed are masculinist themes perpetuated in sport; sporting identities constructed in patriarchal ideologies; and, opportunities for social advancement and achievement in a sport created by men, for men, at the expense and to the exclusion of women. Caribbean feminist conceptual tools within a Cultural Studies theoretical framework are used to interrogate these issues. The study posits that sport privileges male and marginalises female participation, based on commonly accepted cultural and social practices; some of which were adopted through practice while others are part of the social and cultural fabric of the Caribbean. The work suggests that despite international indicators that football participation among women is on the increase and becoming progressively more competitive, regulations and conventions that advocate fair and equitable opportunities for men and women in sport are ignored or generally absent. Gender inequities and stereotypical notions of sport as a male preserve in constructions of Caribbean sporting identity/ies and cultural significance persist, hindering the development of football among women. The study concludes with recommendations intended to make football spaces in the Caribbean more gender equitable.

Keywords: Football, Caribbean, Gender, Sexuality, Women and Sport, Sport Policy