

Identification of gender discrimination in sports: Training of agents of change

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Introduction

Sport has always been considered as one of the most valuable educational tools for promoting social inclusion. However, sport is confronted with a number of threats to which athletes, particularly younger athletes, can be exposed and against which they should be protected, e.g., in any displays of violence and all forms of discrimination and/or intolerance. It is in this context that Psytool (Cruz et al., 2017; Velázquez, 2017), a European project financed by the ERASMUS + Sport program, was conceived and it seeks to support youth development through the practice of sport in positive and safe environments. The aim of the project is the promotion of psychological well-being in all areas of athletes' personal development via sports programs that are free of intimidation, have zero tolerance of substance use, adopt low acceptance of manipulation, and, promote fair play. To this end a collaborative network comprising various entities and research groups of renown in the world of sport and sport psychology has been formed and an e-learning platform (Hertting et al., 2017; Jaenes et al., 2017; Lara-Bercial, Porem, Gamito, Lubowa and Rosado, 2017) created to train practitioners (trainers, physical education teachers, referees, civil servants, directors, parents, journalists, etc.) as agents of change who act as transmitters and instigators of this framework of well-being in accordance with their respective responsibilities and who know how to recognize unsporting situations, react against them and promote positive experiences in grassroots sports (Borrueco and Cruz, 2017; Jaenes, 2017; Ponseti, Borrás, Cantallops and Garcia-Mas, 2017).

Sport is a social activity in which individuals can be exposed to numerous kinds of discrimination and social exclusion, e.g., gender inequality, homophobia, and/or sexism (Cleland, 2014) and it is a context wherein such conduct is frequently manifest and, in situations of comparison or division of gender, can give rise to direct conflict (Naranjo et al., 2017a, 2017b). It is an activity associated with a set of social standards that serve to establish and attribute masculine and feminine behaviour (Roper, 2014). Gender constitutes a social construction that is subject to variations in time, space and discourse, i.e., one can manage to change one's behaviour, over the course of time, as one relates to and identifies oneself with a gender (Parratt, 1996).

Due to the fact that men predominantly practise it, sport is perceived of as a “masculine” activity based on the perception that it is synonymous with such abilities as force and aggression (Pavlidis y Fullagar, 2016), whereas “feminine” activity is associated with passivity, weakness, gentleness and elegance (Hargreaves, 1986). This division has meant that women who practise what are traditionally considered masculine sports tend to have androgynous or masculine identities. Coupled with this is the marginalisation and restriction that feminine disciplines have to live with and which has led to the labelling of certain sports as more appropriate for women, those such as horse riding, gymnastics, volleyball and skating (Trankbaek, 1997), all these being forms of sport that focus more on aesthetics and elegance and that fit the stereotype of “appropriate female behaviour” (Taylor, 2001).

Furthermore, female sports are not taken into account in social media where even comments concerning major events tend to be few and far between. For example, in the Pekin Olympic Games in 2008, Angelini, MacArthur and Billings (2012) found that reports of women in sports represented a mere 27% of press coverage. In addition to this it is important to highlight the sexist connotations reflected in the vast majority of reports on female sports which serves to reaffirm hegemonic masculinity of sports and of the sporting media. (LaVoi, Buysse, Maxwell and Kane, 2007, Lumpkin, 2009, McKay and Johnson, 2008).

Given the relevance of the theme, gender discrimination has been included and treated in one of the Lessons on the Psytool Educational Platform. This lesson sets out to provide agents of change with as many resources as possible to meet their future requirements. In doing so, it provides plenty of knowledge and practical advice on how to detect and prevent these kinds of behavior and includes case studies and recommended reading as well as links to online materials, e.g., videos and presentations.

The main objective of this research was to assess the degree of satisfaction of the agents of change trained by the University of León on the content of the Lesson of the Psytool Educational Platform concerning gender and sport.

Method

Our sample was composed by 17 subjects (16 men and 1 woman), including 3 physical trainers, 2 trainers of soccer goalkeepers, 12 coaches (2 soccer, 4 handball, 2 swimming, 1 volleybal, 1 basketball) and 1 soccer team manager.

They all participated in the training from the lesson on gender and sport and all answered the questionnaire which was distributed once the lesson was over. The questionnaire was composed by 0 items and the responses were registered on a Likert scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very Much).

Results

With regards the lesson on gender and sport, the results reveal that the level of satisfaction among the agents of change is very high as the average score is 4.22. The item "Overall, I am satisfied with the lesson" was the one the scored the lowest (4.12) whereas the highest score (4.35) was for the ítem "The lesson has motivated me to look for more information on the topic". The rest of the items and its scores were: "The content of the lesson is relevant in relation to the topic"(4.24); "The lesson contents have helped me to understand the topic"(4.18); "The lesson contents were clear and adjusted to the expected level"(4.12); "The inclusion of case studies helped me to better understand the topic"(4.24); "I consider that the lesson may be useful for my role as agent of change in my context"(4.29); "After completing the lesson I know how to act in some of the given situations"(4.18); "After completing the lesson I feel prepared to manage some of the given situations"(4.24); "After completing the lesson I feel able to present the topic to other people probably not familiar with it" (4.24), and "After completing the lesson I feel able to present the topic to other people probably not familiar with it" (4.24).

Discussion

The results of our study show that the level of satisfaction of the agents of change at the University of León is really high and particularly so in the perceived value of the contents of the lesson in future applications.

Moreover, this level of satisfaction is particularly evident in the amount of interest the agents of change showed for the study of this lesson and this also serves to indicate

just how highly motivating questions related to knowledge and understanding of gender and sport are for these agents.

KEY WORDS: Gender, Sport, Discrimination, Education

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