

July 2015

Femininities and Masculinities in Brazilian Women's Football: Resistance and Compliance

Jorge Knijnik

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Knijnik, Jorge (2015). Femininities and Masculinities in Brazilian Women's Football: Resistance and Compliance. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(3), 54-70.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol16/iss3/5>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Authors share joint copyright with the JIWS. ©2022 Journal of International Women's Studies.

Femininities and Masculinities in Brazilian Women's Football: Resistance and Compliance

By Jorge Knijnik¹

Abstract

Football is not only one of the major cultural manifestations of Brazilian society; it is also the pinnacle of the country's hegemonic masculinity, a bastion into which women should not be allowed. Despite some progress and several international sporting successes achieved over the last few decades, Brazilian female footballers still endure extreme gender prejudice when playing football in Brazil. Gender discrimination blocks their access to minimal conditions of football training and playing at recreational and competitive levels. This paper aims to discuss gender issues that pervade Brazilian football. The paper applies a multifaceted theoretical background, combining a psychoanalytical view of gender issues with a sociological framework, to data collected through an ethnographic approach employing participant observation and interviews. The research uncovers acts of gender resistance and compliance by Brazilian female football players. Some women use football to resist the hegemonic gender order in the sport; they love the nation's cultural icon and they will fight for their right to play. Others argue for the importance of complying with a normative femininity in order to be acceptable to sport managers, agents, the press and the general public. Still others refuse a normative femininity and fight for the 'naturalness' of women in football. In the face of the hurdles faced by Brazilian women who want to enjoy the major sport in the country, this paper claims that only urgent federal legislation will lead women to gender equality in Brazilian football.

Key Words: Brazilian Women's Football, Femininities in Sport, Gender Identities, Brazilian Title IX.

Introduction

*Mushetsvennaia, zhestkaia sportivnaia bor'ba*²
[(Football) is a hard, manly sporting struggle]

The early defeat of the Brazilian women's football team in the 2012 London Olympics had a profound negative impact on women's football in the country. First, it interrupted the team's run of Olympic successes. Since Atlanta 1996, when women's football had been first included in the Olympic program, the Brazilian women's team had always qualified amongst the semi-finalists and had taken the silver medal in 2004 and 2008. The 2012 defeat generated a number of critical comments in the national press as well as from fans, who accused the players of a "lack of commitment" during the competition.

¹University of Western Sydney, School of Education and Institute for Culture and Society Email: j.knijnik@uws.edu.au.

² Mikhail Romm (1965), captain of the Russian football team, speaking in the early 20th century.

Kleitton Lima, the head coach of the Brazilian women's team for three and a half years before being sacked from his position just a few months before the London games, went public to defend the players as "heroines, superwomen who play a 'phantom sport' [...], with low wages, neither media nor reasonable facilities to practice, and who give their blood on the field" (Rimoli 2012). Lima's defence reveals not only his frustration with the insufficient grounds for critique of the team; it also shows his understanding that, without decent facilities and wages, without a supportive media, and without being allowed decent time to prepare, the players could not be expected to produce better outcomes.

Lima's comment speaks to the sorry history of women's football in Brazil. In all locations, from school grounds (Altmann 2002; Cavaleiro and Vianna 2010) to professional football fields, and despite the successes of the Olympic teams, Brazilian girls and women have faced a history of prejudice, discrimination and prohibition when they have tried to play football in the self-proclaimed "football nation" (Votre and Mourão 2003; Goellner 2005; Knijnik 2014).

During the past few years scholars around the world have undertaken substantial research on female footballers. In an international study across four European countries, Scraton, et al. (1999) set the agenda by asking whether football is "still a man's game", so providing an open arena for debate around gender topics in football. Menesson and Clement (2003) have investigated how homosociability in women's football is commonly associated with homosexuality. More recently, Griggs and Biscomb (2010), by revisiting UK Theresa Bennet's affair, have argued that gender prejudices towards female footballers remain as strong as they were decades ago, while Engh (2011) demonstrates that in South Africa the heterosexual paradigm is an issue for female footballers, too. Finally, Caudwell (2011: 331) brings an interesting feminist agenda to further the research in this field. She claims the importance of considering three feminist categories—woman, gender and femininities—"to demonstrate the value of continuing a gender analysis of football and its many cultures".

In this paper, I look at Brazilian female footballers' gender identities, going beyond the stereotypes that have labelled these women over the years as "macho", dykes or socially maladjusted (Caudwell 2009; Goellner 2005). Specifically, I aim to present the experiences and thoughts of Brazilian women footballers on their resistance to or compliance with gender norms as they navigate the world of football, the so-called 'traditional bastion of masculinity and the symbol of men's prestige and privilege' (Hong, 2003: 268). I seek answers in order to understand "what's going on" within the gendered Brazilian football world (Silverman 2013).

In order to present an ample picture of the gender identities in football culture in Brazil, I have used three complementary theoretical frameworks, allowing me to investigate particular aspects of these identities. My main questions are: Who are the women who play football in Brazil? How do they see themselves as players? Why have they chosen to engage in an activity viewed as 'masculine'?

I begin by looking at the ideas developed by Person in her several works on psychoanalysis, sex and gender. I find particularly useful her essay entitled "Some Mysteries of Gender" (1999), where she focuses her gender psychoanalysis on heterosexual women who built their personal identities through activities socially and culturally considered 'masculine'. Following the 'psychological' aspect of my conceptual background, I look at Hollander's (2002) ideas of gender in social interaction. I am mainly interested in the ways gender discourses and enactments can become "gender resistance: acts of opposition to conventional gender expectations or beliefs" (Hollander 2002: 475). I conclude the theoretical framework with the thinking established by Deutsch (2007), that, to achieve greater social gender equity, there is a

need to make gender less relevant in different sorts of social settings, from work and educational sites to sports interactions. If activities traditionally considered masculine are no longer given higher value, women who pursue these types of activities will no longer face discrimination or encounter personal conflicts (Deutsch 2007).

Following the theoretical section, I briefly explain my own trajectory within Brazilian women's football. I describe the directions in which my data collection has taken me as well as the tools that I used during my field research with the footballers. I then give voice to the footballers, linking their comments to the theoretical framework of this paper. I conclude the article by offering a proposal not only for the growth of women's football in Brazil but also for its emancipation.

The “Dizzying Mosaic” of Gender

Person (1999) points out that, until the final decades of the 20th century, many people failed to note the multiplicity of exceptions to established gender configurations. As a result, what historically prevailed was “a bit of circular thinking that gave priority to sexual object choice in defining gender role identity” (Person 1999: 296). As Person explains, what was previously seen as a fixed and immutable trail is nowadays considered to be fluid—but a fluidity limited by early life experiences that remain unconscious.

Person (1999) describes an array of femininities—from hyper-feminine to “neuter” women who have a conflict between the masculinities they admire and the femininities they reject, to clearly masculinized women. Both “neuter” and “masculinized” women are examples of what Person (1999: 308) calls “cross-gender identifications”.

Person (1999) is aware of the major social forces—such as the Women's Liberation movement and medical advances in birth control methods—that enlarged the ways sex, sexuality and gender identities are presently regarded and lived. However, she argues that it would be superficial to assume that all cross-gender identifications are caused by cultural and social forces and stereotypes.

Using a psychoanalytical approach, Person (1999) suggests that many women use rigid gender roles—masculine or hyper-feminine—in order to deal with preconscious or conscious conflicts with paternal or maternal figures during their first years of life. Person (1999) explains that the gender tracks that are constructed during the oedipal phase or in earlier years have a particular impact on cross-gender heterosexual women's identities. These identities may be conflictual or non-conflictual (Person 1999). As a child grows up, collective pressures to conform to social expectations act to eliminate major manifestations of cross-gender characteristics (Person 1999).

However, for the women analysed by Person, multiple fantasies and identifications with various influential masculine and feminine figures form a “dizzying mosaic of individual patterns” (Person 1999: 301) that do not necessarily conform to cultural gender rules. These complexities in the construction of gender identity lead Person (1999) to claim that we will miss out on the whole picture of masculine identifications in heterosexual women if we attempt to comprehend the phenomenon using only a social perspective. Hence, the importance of combining Person's psychoanalytical perspective with the social aspects of the gender debate, to assist the understanding of the gender identities of the Brazilian women footballers.

In the next section I use the framework provided by Hollander (2002) to discuss the social interaction process. I find Hollander's comparison between resistance and compliance

particularly useful: Are the women in Brazil who play football performing an act of gender resistance?

Gender Resistance

Hollander (2002) believes that, while gender is a social institution that is constructed and reinforced in social interactions and processes, there is also a degree of malleability in gender production. While hegemonic gender is reproduced and maintained through the social status quo, mainstream gender performances are also subjected to challenge and resistance.

Hollander defines *gender resistance* as “acts of opposition to conventional gender expectations or beliefs” (2002: 475). In her opinion, it does not matter whether the resistance occurs with or without intention, that is, whether someone wants to challenge the gender status quo or whether they are obliged by social or personal circumstances to do so, as in the case of a widowed husband and father who is forced to perform feminine-labelled nurturing tasks for his children. In such situations, Hollander (2002) claims, an act of gender resistance has taken place.

Hollander (2002) allows, however, that individual performances of gender resistance are not likely to spread major social change. Thus, a woman who resists a sexual assault is unlikely to change gendered notions of female vulnerability (Hollander 2002). Such acts must be connected to each other via words. Hollander maintains that *discourses*, as social acts, are a key way to further change by enabling people to reconfigure the world. Therefore, Hollander (2002) believes that creating alternate discourses on gender will engender acts of gender resistance that can face up to hegemonic forms of masculinity as well as dominant patterns of femininity.

Hollander (2002) understands that there is a co-existence of the hegemonic gender order and resistance against it. Nevertheless, she claims that we should always make an effort to throw light on the moments and discourses of gender resistance in order to begin to resist the hegemonic gender order and make social change possible. However, in addition to highlighting and analysing discourses, are there other options available to challenge this order? Next, I examine Deutsch's (2007) contestation of orthodox notions of gender as well as her proposition for new ways to resist at interactional and institutional levels, in order to achieve change.

Gender Undone

Deutsch (2007) strongly concurs with Hollander's idea that discourses shape reality and that resistant discourses can generate new ideas of gender. As discourses are crucial elements for both social conformity and change, Deutsch (2007: 122) proposes the phrase “undoing gender” to refer to social interactions that reduce gender difference.³ This phrase plays with the traditional expression, “doing gender”, which refers to social interactions that conform to and reinforce traditional gender patterns.

Deutsch (2007) argues that social acts of resistance to hegemonic patterns are more than merely individual doings; these actions can inspire others and hence have a social impact; for example, a girl who joins a boys' team in a ‘masculine’ sport can stimulate other girls to overcome gender barriers and do the same. However, Deutsch (2007) allows that the same resistant act can create troubles for girls and women who enter territory considered male. She believes that, overall, male competence as well as masculine-branded accomplishments and

³ In an interesting endnote to her paper, Deutsch (2007) claims that she was unaware of Butler's (2004) book of the same name until her own paper was peer-reviewed.

activities in our society are still considered superior. Accordingly, at the institutional level women must continuously conform to traditional gender patterns that define a desirable femininity to prove themselves as women in order to maintain professional status (Deutsch 2007). For Deutsch, sport is one of the most traditional male domains in which women must negotiate their gender by finding a balance between the strength required to play and the necessity to maintain a not-so-muscled body that conforms to the dominant femininity (Deutsch 2007).

Next, I describe my research trajectory within women's football in Brazil. I elucidate when and why gender issues in football drew my attention as well as how, using an ethnographic approach based in participant observation and interviews, I gained access to the players and coaches.

Conversations in the “Locker Room”

In 2001, after several years of being ostracised and with no opportunities to play, the creation of a new women's football championship had a profound impact on the Brazilian women's sport scenario—but it was not all for the good. The São Paulo Football Federation (FPF), a state-wide sports body and one of the country's largest and richest sport organizations, put out a call for players to participate in a new women's championship. However, the FPF call was clear: they wanted to change the face of the sport and make it more 'feminine'. The FPF was looking for players who were blonde and young, so, if a woman was black, did not have the 'right hair', or was older than 23, she could not play even if she was a very skilful football player. This was well-documented in the media, and it was reported as a clear attempt to interfere with the players' human rights (Knijnik 2013).

At that time, I was a lecturer in the School of Physical Education and Sport at Universidade de São Paulo and a few of my students who were participating in the championship brought back informal reports about what was occurring there. Their experiences sparked my interest in women's football (Knijnik 2013).

Following the misogynist 2001 competition, women's football came to a halt in Brazil. It recommenced only in 2004, after the national team won the silver medal at the Athens Olympics. It was in that year that I had the chance to advance my research pursuits within women's football. I was specifically interested in the players' daily life experiences (Silverman 2007) with football.

In 2004, Lars Graef, a former Olympic medalist who was in charge of the São Paulo State Department of Sports and Leisure, decided to organize a new state championship for female footballers. In order to support female players across the state who lacked opportunities to play, he put together, at very short notice, the 2004 spring championship. Many city councils around the state already had women's teams, and they were just waiting for the call.

The competition started in September, with 52 teams and more than 1,000 registered players ranging in age from 15 to 27. The 52 teams were split into 13 four-team groups and, from Friday nights to Sunday afternoons, each group was accommodated in a different venue across the state.

I was there watching games and collecting data from the first day. Every weekend, I tried to follow a different group. My initial intention was to watch matches, observe the surroundings and interview the players before and after matches, the common time to gain access to them.

However, when I arrived in the host cities, I found my former students in leadership positions in their new teams, as captains or assistant coaches. These acquaintances facilitated not only my access to the players but also my entry into their camps, where I could observe and participate in the players' off-field everyday life. I had meals with them and, if there was an available room, I was able to spend a few nights there. Men usually do not have access to the players' 'locker room'. Even male coaches do not spend their nights in the players' camps. This access enabled me to gain a more informed perspective (Silverman 2013) on the players' everyday lives than the more formal interview research would have allowed and thereby enabled me to take richer research notes.

Apart from keeping field research notes, that contained my personal observations as well as analysis of informal conversations that I had with players, coaches, managers and supporters, I formally interviewed 44 players, generally using an unstructured approach to engage in meaningful conversations with them (Silverman 2007; Hesse-Biber 2007).

My interview methodology follows what Hesse-Biber (2007: 111) calls 'feminist in-depth interviewing'. In her methodology, the author is concerned with the understanding of 'the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated' (Hesse-Biber 2007: 113). This was precisely the aim of these interviews—to unpack the stories and realities of the Brazilian women footballers, their diverse life stories and sporting trajectories. Hence, I wanted to listen to the footballers as much as possible, I wanted to hear their voices.

Similar to Hesse-Biber, I had a previous 'agenda' and a few topics to guide my interviews, but my central research concern was to hear their personal story and the origins of their involvement with football. However, I usually tended to "go with the flow" of the interview, seeing where it takes me (Hesse-Biber 2007: 114). As the footballers started to disclose details about their childhood and sporting careers, contradictory feelings about gender and issues concerning their bodies and their relationship to football and their families surfaced frequently, often to become a central part of our interviews.

As the conversations were unstructured, I used a variety of responses to provide the footballers with the reinforcement they needed to talk, without 'pushing my own agenda into the conversation' (Hesse-Biber 2007:126). I used a range of different response styles which proved to be worthwhile during the interviews: some interviewees were really communicative, in which case providing an 'uh-huh' response was encouragement enough to maintain the flow of speech. Mostly, I employed what Hesse-Biber (2007: 127) calls the 'Echo Probe': by repeating the last phrase uttered by the interviewee, I provided enough encouragement for them to keep on topic and disclose more information on any issue that appeared unfinished.

Other times, such as when an athlete paused frequently when talking, I used a probing intervention technique that would lead the respondents to talk more and be 'a bit more explicit' in regards to a particular point or issue (Hesse-Biber 2007: 127). For instance, if an informant uttered a general comment such as "I played on the streets" while talking about her childhood, I usually asked questions about whom she played with and the type of games she used to play. In this way the particular information needed could be unpacked.

The youngest player I interviewed was 16 years old and the oldest was 27. They were at different moments of their sports careers, from beginners at their first big competition to experienced footballers who had played overseas for the national team.

In the following sections, I discuss the relevant data from my fieldwork, using pseudonyms to avoid any identification of the players. I start with broader gender issues that I discussed with the players, those that affect the status of female football in the country. My notes

and the players' comments allow me to reflect on gender identities using the social concepts—resistance, compliance and interactions—discussed above. After that, I look at situations when a particular comment cannot be explained using the framework provided by the players' social interactions. They are so specific that they need a complementary approach in order to figure out 'what's going on' here. In these cases I employ Person's theoretical framework.

***Futebol Feminine*—Footballers and Their Gender Identities**

Saussure (1957) was the first of many language theoreticians to demonstrate that talk is not neutral. Talk both embeds, and has embedded in it, a vision of the world (Saussure 1957). These understandings are relevant to the way we construct gender identities and equality in contemporary societies.

In this section I discuss the term *futebol feminino*. To inform my discussion I draw upon two sets of data: informal conversations with a sports manager who I met on the fields and interviews with two players.

Futebol feminino literally means 'feminine football'. I have always disliked this label and felt it would be preferable to use the term '*futebol*' (football) for the sport and to describe any particular tournament as a "men's championship" or a "women's championship". The use of the term *futebol feminino* has frequently led sport stakeholders to argue for "adjustments" to *futebol feminino*, such as smaller balls, goalposts and fields, as well as shorter play periods. When these stakeholders were no longer able to prevent women's participation in football, they tried to downgrade women's capacities, in order to make sure that *futebol feminino* would fit into what they thought was a suitable game for 'women's nature' (Caudwell 2011).

The use of this term and its trivialization came back to me on my first fieldwork weekend. While I waited for the start of a match, I was approached by a middle-aged man whom I shall call Antonio. He was the officer of the Sports Department in charge of that competition field. It was the first of several talks I had with him during the competition. After each conversation I made extensive notes, trying to reproduce his words and the context in which he said them. As he had a middle management position in the Sports Department and, without any request from me, was disclosing his views about women's football, Antonio quickly became an important piece in my ethnographic jigsaw (Silverman 2013). I have treated the information he provided as naturalistic data found directly on the research field (Silverman 2013).

During our first conversation, Antonio expressed anger that he had been given his job—in charge of that competition field—as professional punishment. He had once been the chief officer of a prestigious nation-wide under-20 male football competition, but after a fan was killed in a major brawl during a game, his superiors had, as he explained, 'put the blame on me. Now I have to work with this *futebol feminino*'. He stressed the final two words as though they were the most despicable blasphemy that one could say.

Later, I discussed *futebol feminino* with the players who were willing to talk to me. They agreed with the use of the term *futebol feminino*, however their readings of this term were opposed. A few players, in an act of gender order compliance, confirmed that this was the way things were in the sports world: 'girls' were different and their way of playing football was not the same as the boys' way, so they should be labelled differently. Other players interpreted *futebol feminino* as a way to resist to the gender order; they stated that this term created their own identity and supported their struggle within the football world; prejudice and discrimination were the words frequently used by this group.

Nair, a representative of the compliant group thinks that the term *futebol feminino* is used to emphasise the differences between men's and women's football.

[E]veryone refers to us as *futebol feminino* players. It's been always like this [she paused to reflect]... Woman is different from man, not only the physical side, but the emotional part too. If you are rude, a woman cries... A man is tougher... A woman is more gentle and delicate. Men play on their manner—if you watch a *futebol feminino* match, you'll see how different it is from the male's game.

Caudwell (2011) has documented the '*footie chick*' project in international women's football that was supported by FIFA and featured a sportswear brand of the same name. This scheme aimed to promote the 'right femininity' in and off the football fields—meaning a normative and heterosexual version of the female. However, Nair goes beyond the merely physical differences expressed in the '*footie chick*' project; she claims that women are also internally different. For Nair, women are emotionally weaker. Their internal delicacy makes them play in a different way. *Futebol feminino* is different because of women's emotional and physical weakness.

Nair was not aware that, as in many sports, football has its own strategies to preserve the gender status quo. She could not see that football culture is hostile to women (Deutsch 2007). Nair's conformist discourse ultimately restricts women's activities as well as makes them victims of all sorts of violence (Hollander 2002). In her compliance with the view of women as weaker than men, Nair ultimately accepts the lower status of *futebol feminino*.

Other players were clearly resistant to normative views of gender. Suzana is a 26 year-old player who, through her words and actions, demonstrated her passion for football and her will to fight for women's right to play it (Goellner 2005). She believes that the word *feminino* after *futebol* is a symbol that supports women's battle: "we live in a very discriminatory country; if we don't put *feminino* there, things will get worse", When saying this, Suzana spoke with passion.

Suzana had had a difficult life. Her parents had prohibited her from playing football, so she ran away from home at 18 to follow her football passion (Altmann 2002; Campos 2010). However, things did not go well, and often she had no job, no money and no support to play football. Her difficulties, though, made her even more mindful of the prejudices embedded in Brazilian *futebol feminino*

We must keep *feminino*; it is our identity. Otherwise nobody will acknowledge us as *futebol* players. They think girls cannot play; there is lots of prejudice, lots of discrimination. Football... was created by men for men [said with great confidence]. No way would they accept *futebol feminino*. Society is not prepared... Football was meant to be a male thing, they don't accept *futebol feminino*... it's a men's thing; they promote their game... so we have to say *futebol feminino* to encourage our game.

Unlike the compliant players, Suzana appropriated the expression *futebol feminino* to support gender resistance within the Brazilian football realm. She wants to "encourage" the women's game using any available tool. Through her resistance she seems to want to affect not only "discourses about gender" (Deutsch 2007: 121) but also to help facilitate "feminist consciousness" (Deutsch 2007: 121). Evidence of this growing consciousness within the players

is the assertiveness that Suzana displayed in her statement, “we have to say futebol feminino to encourage our game”.

The futebol feminino discussion demonstrated that, in doing and undoing gender, as Deutsch (2007: 123) states, “words matter”. Futebol feminino carries the symbolic power to make women visible in a scenario where they are invisible (Deutsch 2007). Yet, at the same time, as feminists have rightly argued, just as the use of the generic ‘he’ makes women invisible, so too the associations with weakness of the word “feminino’ can have a negative impact on women’s football.

I was not expecting to find this anomaly. I had thought that the majority of the players would reject the term ‘feminino’ and affirm that there was only one football and that it was a sport for everybody, both men and women. I was also surprised by how many players were complying with the gender order. Nevertheless, the disruption of my previous assumptions was a sign that my field work was going well. Every time I went to the field, new questions and directions that I had not anticipated arose (Silverman 2007).

One of these new directions was the topic of the players’ childhoods. They were keen to talk about how, as young girls, they had dealt with football. This topic became a central part of my conversations with them and provoked new questions for me to ask them. Specifically, what was their attitude towards the next generation of players? Would they support their daughter’s dream to become a footballer?

The XX Factor: The Gender of the Next Sports Generation

Deutsch (2007: 118) claims that “a new generation that has grown up with changed gender definitions should create a world of greater gender equality”. My field work allowed me the opportunity to test this idea with this generation of women footballers who were arguably dealing with fewer gender limits.

Just a few months before I started my journey with the female footballers, a 12 year-old girl had shaken the grassroots Brazilian football scene by joining a boys’ team. She was not only a girl playing with the boys; it looked as though she was the best player in the competition. Nobody could block her free-kick shots. However, young girls playing football offers a direct challenge to the gender order of sports in Brazil (Altmann 2002; Cavaleiro and Vianna 2010) and the case went to the courts, as the São Paulo Sports Department had forbidden the girl to play in a boys’ only competition (Folha de São Paulo 2003).

A few weeks after I started my fieldwork, I came across Antonio again. I was following a Saturday afternoon match round of the women’s tournament. It was a very hot day, and the stands were nearly empty. Antonio saw me, waved and approached, smiling and saying ironically: “You really like futebol feminino, don’t you, Professor?” Then he pointed to a man seated on the stands: “He is the coach who put *that girl* on the boys’ team”. He was angry that the courts had allowed the girl to play in the tournament, as there had been nothing in the regulations stating that the championship was exclusively for boys. “Now, he added, I am in charge of rewriting the whole thing and making sure there is no room for girls’ participation in the future”. The São Paulo Sports Department was contradicting itself, promoting women’s football while creating obstacles to young girls’ participation (Scraton, et al. 1999).

I walked away from that conversation with Antonio with the intention of examining how the female footballers in my study would advise young girls about their sports careers. I intended to examine the players’ agency in a hypothetical situation: if they had the power to give advice to

young girls in their sports career, would they comply with or resist the gender order that restrains girls from playing football?

Once again, my findings were very different from what I expected. I anticipated that the players would make all efforts to help this imaginary younger girl in her football achievements. However, in my very first round of interviews with three young players, I was faced with straight negatives. They would never support a 12 year-old girl from their families, a daughter, a younger sister or a cousin, in their football career. Ana, an 18 year-old player, was emphatic:

If I had a daughter, I wouldn't like her playing ball. Do you think that I want her going through humiliation, hunger, even discrimination? At school, when they see a girl playing ball, everybody bullies her saying she is a dyke... My goodness! I would rather send her to play volleyball; it's a much more worthwhile sport for girls and women...

As Ana is already on the football field, I expected her to see herself and her teammates as challenging the gender order. However, in an unexpected move, she repeats traditional mental configurations and echoes old-fashioned representations (Hollander 2002). Defying the established gender order more than she has already done appears to be unbearable for Ana. She envisages the imaginary girl facing social penalties for breaking gender rules (Hollander 2002) and, as a result, thinks that this girl would get better social recognition by following the conservative patterns of doing gender (Hollander 2002). In the Brazilian sports realm, that means playing a sport considered 'feminine', such as volleyball (Goellner 2005).

Among both the compliant and the resistant players I interviewed, I did not find a single one who would support that imaginary 12 year-old girl in her football pursuits. There were a few like Ana, who would advise her to go for easier and more traditional, gendered sports; others, without actively discouraging her, would say that "football is a great sport for your body", a statement that implies that football is not so good for other aspects of players' lives, such the family or social side (Goellner 2005). Curiously, nobody mentioned the group side of the sport, the friendships that they carry for their lives, common in most athlete talk (Pfister 2010).

However, I did find one 26 year-old player who, without openly encouraging her imaginary young relative to play football, would try to improve the girl's political consciousness and her awareness of the hurdles in her way.

I would tell her about the consequences of her choice, the challenges and obstacles of playing football... These are prejudice and family. My dad always thought I would be a ballerina, so I had many troubles at home. So, her parents would not enjoy her choice ... there is lots of prejudice and discrimination ... people, neighbours, they put pressure on parents' minds. So, she needs her family to help her fighting everyone but God; if she is not strong enough to fight these barriers, she would never become a footballer, never.

Kelly's statement shows ambiguous support. Even if the girl has the right to play and should fight for it, she needs to make deals with two major authorities—family and God—in order to accomplish her football goals. Again, gender resistance in football is undermined; even as a footballer who has been on the fields for several years, and who, in doing so, has battled the traditional gender order, Kelly still avoids being openly resistant (Hollander 2002).

The data presented so far support a range of ideas about the femininities coexisting in football played by women in Brazil. All the women have to deal with prejudice and discrimination as soon as they enter the (male) football field. However, none have to deal with as much prejudice as the highly “masculinized” players. The bodies, appearance and manners of these women are constantly on the radar. They are labelled “macho-woman”, they are discriminated against, and they are accused of spoiling the ‘real femininity’ of futebol feminino. I ask: is there space for a masculinized femininity in Brazilian women’s football?

Therefore, in the following section I examine these masculinities in women’s football using Person’s approach of the gendered looking glass in which the players see themselves doing ‘male things’. Again, it was the males inside futebol feminino who helped me to start my questioning.

No Hair, No Play: The Gendered Camouflage

During my field work I met several football coaches, the vast majority of whom were men. I met just a single woman who was the head coach of a women’s team. She wanted to further her own sport studies, by doing a research degree on football tactical awareness amongst teenage female players. She twice visited me in my office at my university, bringing films of her team playing in the competition. On those occasions we talked about football tactics and training.

In contrast, I noted that I never had a tactical conversation with a single male coach. Our conversations always revolved around the players’ appearance. Hair was their final frontier. Most of them simply advised the players that they ought to have long hair. A few, though, were extreme. If a player wanted to be on their team, she was *required* to have long hair. End of discussion. Their motto was clear: “if you want to play in a women’s team, you must look like a woman”.

Clearly, they had a very narrow definition of what a woman is or should look like. The women who played in that championship displayed a plethora of differences: there was a vast range of hair types, skin colours, body sizes, off-field dress-styles, ways of walking, styles of talk, et cetera. There is no single femininity on football fields (Caudwell 2010). There are some who are close to dominant norms of femininity; and there are others who put the narrow definitions of gender under threat (Person 1999). I asked the players how they saw themselves. The results were astonishing. I had players opening their hearts and weeping; a few times I had to serve as their ‘therapist’ as the battle over the concepts of femininity, their own bodies and appearance brought up many overwhelming contradictory feelings (Person 2005). One night at the camp, during an intense talk and a few tears, Roberta told me that

It’s the biggest challenge of my life: being a woman and playing football in such a *machista* (sexist) country, where the field belongs to the men, not to us, women ... but I won’t change my way just to do what *they* want ... I don’t want to look like a ... princess.

Roberta’s appearance did not conform to either extreme of the gender continuum; she was ‘neuter’ (Person 1999: 309) in her appearance. She did not get along with well with the other players on her team, seeing them as “princesses, over-feminines”. Her statements, body appearance and football pursuits were indicators of a refusal of femininity in various parts of her

life (Person 1999: 2005). In her football life, she embodied not only a desire to be masculine, but perhaps more so a desire for what Person (1999: 308) calls a “wish not to be feminine”.

Among the players I observed and talked with, I was also able to identify two other types of woman described by Person (1999). The first type uses a “masquerade of hyper-femininity” (Person 1999: 303) as a defence against any misinterpretation of their sexuality. As they wish to be accepted in a male domain, they exaggerate their feminine characteristics to avoid any type of ‘gender trouble’. Flavia is a clear representative of this group, commenting that

I love football. I think you can be both things at the same time. I mean, I play as it's a cool sport, good to my body, but I still can be a woman, there is nothing that prevents me from taking care of my beauty.

Flavia's words mirrored what she did with her body. By early morning, she was already well-dressed, using lipstick and other tricks that highlighted her hyper-feminine mask. She was the symbol of a group of players who needed to hyperbolize what they thought was a socially acceptable and desirable femininity. In this way, they can manage living in a male terrain but, as Flavia says, “still be a woman”. It is a delicate balance (Person 2005).

The other type that I identified in my field work is what Person (1999: 312) refers to as “more extreme cross-gender identification”. A ‘maleness’ was manifest in their conduct, appearance and clothing both on and off the field. Unlike the other players, they did not seek me out to talk to me. Only once was I successful in having a long conversation with a ‘hyper-masculine player’. After being a passive observer of my talks with other players, Deise sent me a message through a teammate: she would like to have her testimony recorded for my research. In fact, she had a lot to say about her football experience.

Deise was a 21 year-old goalkeeper who had a long history with sports: in her teens she had been a top basketball player, but at 19 she had switched to football. Her initial statement had a political content: “I advocate for women to play or do whatever they want”. Her message was clear. Women need to fight for their right to play football. Biological sex cannot be the cause of women being undermined in their goals. Deise's political consciousness surprised me, as none of the other young players talked in such a clear way about campaigning for football or their wishes. Deise continued:

You won't become less woman only because you play a sport... I played basketball, you play against other women ... just that football is different, it's not a sport like many others ...

Deise's words, at first sight, confirm what several studies say about football in Brazil (Bellos 2002; Natali 2007; Campos 2010): it is more than a sport; it is a distinctive sign of the whole culture of the country, embedded in Brazilian social and political life. In Brazilian culture, football is also a realm of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995) in which a ‘gender war’ occurs every time a female—young girl, teenager or mature woman—kicks a ball (Goellner 2005).

Deise's final statement is about the player's bodies. She says that she used to be like other people who look at some female players as if they were men; however, she had changed her mind and she currently respects her body:

The thought in people's minds is that the women who play football are stiff, rough... I used to think [these women] wanted to be and look like men... but I don't think this anymore, I just think that this is natural...

The final words of this 'masculine' woman drew my attention: in her opinion, a woman with a 'masculine' body is "natural". Many people—such as the male football coaches I have talked to—see a problem in a woman who has a body that does not confirm to their notions of feminine; Deise does not see any problem. Her acceptance of her body as natural shows that, instead of promoting the 'right femininity' in women's football, sport stakeholders should worry more about the persistent rigidity of the gender divide (Person 2005) that undermines women's football.

All the women who I talked to and all the time I spent with the women on the fields and in the camps confirmed that many femininities and masculinities coexist in Brazilian women's football. At the same time, my research, like that of others before me (Mourão 2000; Goellner 2005; Rigo, et al. 2008), has confirmed the discrimination and the individual and collective acts of gender resistance evident in Brazilian women's football. These findings provide a clear picture of the issues confronting Brazilian women whose passion is football. So, I ask: where to from here?

The combined results of research must now be used as evidence to support and influence public policy change. There is a need for legislative solutions to support every girl and woman who wants to be part of what Bellos (2002) calls "the Brazilian way of life". As Deise said, how women walk or how they run or kick a ball is "natural"; different bodies express the diversity of football players existing in the country. We should fight for women's right to express their humanness through football. Therefore, in the final section I present a plea for a Brazilian Title IX.

A Plea for a 'Brazilian Title IX'

In 1972 the U.S. Congress passed Title IX of the Educational Amendments to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, a bill that prohibits gender discrimination in federally-funded educational establishments (Stevenson 2010). Title IX is legislation requiring schools to advance the involvement levels of females in sports to close parity with male athletic membership. Stevenson (2010: 285) states that, as a consequence of the bill, "the proportion of female high school students participating in athletics rose from 1 in 27 females in 1972 to 1 in 4 by 1978. In contrast, male participation remained relatively constant at 1 in 2".

Other researchers have found that Title IX has its limitations. Sangree (1999) points out that gender stereotypes in contact sports are still an issue for female athletes and Murray (1999) affirms that Title IX appears to have provoked a rise in male dominance of leadership positions such as coaches and sports managers.

However, even with these issues, the success of the legislation for gender equality in sports is undeniable. Kaestner and Xu (2010) detail how the growing involvement of girls in sport and physical activities (600% growth between 1972 and 1978) has led to significant improvements in their health. These authors found a substantial decrease in the risk of obesity by the time the girls who had participated in high-school sports reached their early 40s. Stevenson (2010) also refers to the outcome of better education and employment opportunities for women who had an early participation in sports.

In the same historical period, Brazil was under a military dictatorship. Civil liberties were suspended, the press was censored, political opposition was under threat and the guerrilla movement was being exterminated by the army. Women footballers were also suffering under another 'sport dictatorship', as since 1941, due to Sports National Council Legislation 3.1999 (CND 3.199/1941), women in Brazil had been forbidden to practice any sports considered to be against 'feminine nature'. They were banned from practicing football, combat sports, and water polo, among others (Mourão 2000). The legislation also damaged many women's sports associations that had flourished in Brazil during the 1940s (Rigo, et al. 2008). It was only in 1979 that this legislation was abolished, by which time many girls and women were already practising the forbidden sports, making the law completely out-dated (Rigo, et al. 2008).

Since 1979, Brazilian women have returned more and more to the sports arena, achieving great outcomes both nationally and internationally. However, as Mourão (2000) suggests, they have done so without producing any trouble; no political struggle has ever been fought to allow girls and women to raise their sports involvement levels in the country, nor have formal structures been put forward to support gender equality within sport. As Brazilian sociologist and feminist activist Unbehaum acknowledges (2010), the Brazilian feminist movement has never addressed the sports arena as a space for political struggle or pushed conservative sports organizations to look at gender equity (Donnelly 2008). It is as if Brazilian women have moved back into the sports world using the rear gate (Knijnik 2013).

As Deutsch (2007) argues, to further gender equality in society there is a need to reduce gender difference in social interactions. She is incisive when she states that, for girls and women across the United States, "title IX indisputably gave them revolutionary access to sports" (2007: 113). Deutsch's statement finds support in research on the U.S. Title IX that demonstrates the positive impact on women's sporting lives in that country.

Research on Brazilian women footballers also reveals that their football passion has been facing enormous obstacles since last century (Rigo, et al. 2008; Goellner 2005; Votre and Mourão 2003). Yet, my research demonstrates that the women's passion for the sport is clear. Despite the forces that push them from one point to another on the gender continuum, and despite their compliance with or resistance to orthodox gender rules, the women are all clearly passionate and strongly committed to playing. At the same time, though, my findings make evident that the road to the game is clearly a problematic one. The players' views about discouraging younger players show that they do not feel welcome on the football arena; the comments of Antonio express this; and the ambivalent actions of the São Paulo Sports Department confirm this, too. Therefore and considering the 'passion versus hurdles' anomaly that pervades futebol feminino, it is time for a Brazilian Title IX which legislate a welcome to the game for girls and women.

Similar to other compensatory policies already in place in the country—such as high-priority access to public tertiary education for black people and bigger political representation for women—a Brazilian Title IX would be one feasible way to transform the 'nation's passion' into a true cultural asset for everyone in the country. This would entail financial and political support for girls and women who want to play football but who, as my findings have shown, face prejudice and discrimination. More women freely playing football means that more girls can identify with them, transforming the sport from a symbol of hegemonic masculinity into an icon of cultural celebration, a space of tolerance and respect. A Brazilian Title IX would also mean the end of gender resistance and compliance on the fields; it would transform the struggles and suffering of countless girls and women into joy and sport happiness, not only for them, but also

for boys and men who would learn new ways to enjoy playing football without feeling the need or the pressure to be *macho* on the fields.

At the historical moment when Brazil is at the 'centre of the sports world', through its imminent hosting the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics, a Brazilian Title IX would offer an opportunity to build the future of futebol feminino in the country. Therefore, and using the findings of my research as leverage for this idea, my plea is that futebol feminino should be legally supported as a way of achieving social justice and gender equity while creating a new football universe, with values of solidarity and equality.

Bibliography

- Altmann, H. (2002). Meninas e meninos jogando futebol. *Verso & Reverso*, XVI (34 (jan-jun)), 89-100.
- Bellos, A. (2002). *Futebol: The Brazilian way of life*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Campos, D. (2010). On the Value and Meaning of Football: Recent Philosophical Perspectives in Latin America. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 37(1), 69-87.
- Caudwell, J. (2009). Girlfight and Bend it Like Beckham: Screening Women, Sport, and Sexuality. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 13(3), 255-271.
- Caudwell, J. (2011). Gender, feminism and football studies. *Soccer and Society*, 12(3), 330-344.
- Cavaleiro, C., & Vianna, C. (2010). Chutar e preciso? Masculinidades e Educacao Fisica Escolar. In J. Knijnik & R. Zuzzi (Eds.), *Meninas e Meninos na Educacao Fisica: Genero e Corporeidade no Seculo XXI* (pp. 137-154). Jundiai: Fontoura.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Deutsch, F. M. (2007). Undoing gender. *Gender & Society*, 21(1), 106-127.
- Folha de São Paulo (2003) O XX da questão. Retrieved from <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/esporte/fk1909200302.htm> (accessed on 10 October 2013).
- Engh, M. H. (2011). Tackling femininity: The heterosexual paradigm and women's soccer in South Africa. *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 28(1), 137-152.
- Goellner, S. (2005). Mulheres e futebol no Brasil: entre sombras e visibilidades. *Brazilian Journal of Physical Education and Sport*, 19(2), 141-151.
- Griggs, G., & Biscoomb, K. (2010). Theresa Bennett is 42... but what's new? *Soccer & Society*, 11(5), 668-676.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2007). The practice of feminist in-depth interviewing. In S. N. Hesse-Biber. & P. L. Leavy (Eds.), *Feminist research practice: A primer* (pp. 111-148). London: Sage.
- Hollander, J. A. (2002). Resisting vulnerability: The social reconstruction of gender in interaction. *Social Problems*, 49(4), 474-496.
- Hong, F. (2003). Soccer: A world sport for women. *Soccer and Society*, 4(2-3), 268-270.
- Hult, J. S. (1994). The story of women's athletics: Manipulating a dream 1890-1985. *Women and sport: Interdisciplinary perspectives*, 83-106
- Kaestner, R., & Xu, X. (2010). Title IX, Girls' Sports Participation, and Adult Female Physical Activity and Weight. *Evaluation Review*, 34(1), 52-78.
- Knijnik, J. (2013). Visions of Gender Justice Untested Feasibility on the Football Fields of Brazil. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 37(1), 8-30.
- Knijnik, J. (2014). Gendered barriers to Brazilian female football: twentieth-century legacies. In J. Hargreaves, Anderson, Eric (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Sport, Gender and Sexuality* (pp. 121-128). London: Routledge
- Menesson, C., & Clement, J. P. (2003). Homosociability and Homosexuality; the Case of Soccer Played by Women. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 38(3), 311-330.
- Mourão, L. (2000). Representação social da mulher brasileira nas atividades físico-desportivas: da segregação à democratização. *Movimento (ESEF/UFRGS)*, 6(13), 5-18.
- Murray, S. R. (1999). Should Men Coach Women's Teams and Vice Versa? *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 70(4), 11-12.
- Natali, M. (2007). The Realm of the Possible: Remembering Brazilian Futebol. *Soccer & Society*, 8(2/3), 267-282.
- Person, E. S. (1999). *The sexual century*: Yale University Press

- Person, E. S. (2005). As the wheel turns: A centennial reflection on Freud's Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 53(4), 1257-1282.
- Pfister, G. (2010). Women in sport - gender relations and future perspectives. *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, 13(2), 234-248.
- Rigo, L., Guidotti, F. G., Theil, L. Z., & Amaral, M. (2008). Notas acerca do futebol feminino pelotense em 1950: um estudo genealógico. *Brazilian Review of Sports Science*, 29(3), 173-188.
- Rimoli, C. (2012). O assustador Futebol feminino do Brasil. [online]. Retrieved from <http://esportes.r7.com/blogs/cosme-rimoli/?s=futebol+feminino>. (accessed on 14 November 2012).
- Sangree, S. (1999). Title IX and the Contact Sports Exemption: Gender Stereotypes in a Civil Rights Statute. *Connecticut Law Review*, 32, 381.
- Saussure, F. (1957). Cours de linguistique générale (1908-1909). *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* (15), 3-103.
- Scraton, S., Fasting, K., Pfister, G., & Bunuel, A. (1999). It's still a man's game? The Experiences of Top-Level European Women Footballers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 34(2), 99-111.
- Silverman, D. (2007). *A very short, fairly interesting and reasonably cheap book about qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Silverman, D. (2013). What Counts as Qualitative Research? Some Cautionary Comments. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, IX (2), 48-55
- Stevenson, B. (2010). Beyond the classroom: Using Title IX to measure the return to high school sports. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 92(2), 284-301.
- Unbehaum, S. (2010). A Educação Física como espaço educativo de promoção da igualdade de gênero e dos direitos humanos. In Jorge Knijnik and Renata Zuzzi (eds). *Meninas e meninos na Educação Física - Gênero e Corporeidade no Século XXI*. (pp. 25-35). Fontoura, Jundiaí.
- Votre, S., & Mourão, L. (2003). Women's Football in Brazil: Progress and Problems. *Soccer and Society*, 4(2/3), 254-267.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Esdras Guerreiro Vasconcellos (Universidade de Sao Paulo, Brazil) for his firm scientific guidance during my first steps as a researcher; I would like also to express my gratitude to Dr. Constance Ellwood for her careful English editing of the first draft of this paper, and Mrs. Catherine Myson-Föhner for her kind proof-review of the latest version of the paper.