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ARTICLE

Gender in Coed Team Sports: A Social Psychological Perspective

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Coed team sports typically offer different experiences for women and men. Though scholars have documented gender imbalances in participation within such teams, the social psychological processes at play and the broader consequences of unequal participation have rarely been explored. In this paper, the authors revisit coed team sports through the lens of status construction theory and expectation states theory to suggest that coed teams reinforce gendered notions of worth, prestige, and competence in the field of sport. The authors draw on research showing that mixed-sex settings where people must cooperate to achieve a common goal are especially prone to the reproduction of gender stereotypes. This paper builds bridges between two subfields of sociology and illuminates gender dynamics in a coed sport that has not been previously studied (futsal).

Coed team sports promise an inclusive and engaging setting where women and men can participate alongside one another (Woman's Sports Foundation, 2012). However, existing research suggests that coed sports leagues, including those with rule modifications that aim at promoting fair competition, often fall short of delivering this goal and can end up reinforcing the situational salience of gender. Studies have documented this phenomenon in coed soccer (Henry & Comeaux, 1999), softball (Wachs, 2002, 2005), flag football (Wood & Garn, 2016), and korfball leagues (Summerfield & White, 1989). Given the popular idea that coed sports should always be encouraged and that rule modifications to maximize fair competition are unproblematic (Woman's Sports Foundation, 2012), the causes and consequences of gender imbalances in a coed playing field need to be further theorized and investigated. To this end, we draw from an extensive body of social psychological research demonstrating how status characteristics (such as gender, race, and age) are potent organizers of social relations, giving rise to power and prestige hierarchies within task groups in ways that can reinforce stratification systems (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986; Wagner & Berger, 1997). In addition to providing theoretical insights, we present and discuss new data from a coed futsal (indoor soccer) league.

We use status construction theory and expectation states theory—two well-established and empirically supported frameworks—to suggest that coed team leagues typically offer an unleveled playing field that reinscribes gender stereotypes and inequalities in sport. Status construction theory and expectation states theory are conceptually similar and focus on the interpersonal processes that create and perpetuate status beliefs (Ridgeway, 2011). Status beliefs are "beliefs that people of a certain social group (professionals, Whites, men) are more esteemed and competent than people in another social group (service workers, women, people of color)" (Ridgeway, 2002, p. 324). Status construction theory posits that status beliefs emerge in social interactions and, through repeated encounters, eventually diffuse widely onto the rest of the population (Ridgeway, 1991; Ridgeway & Erickson, 2000). Expectation states theory posits that existing status beliefs, stemming from status hierarchies in the wider society, shape the power and prestige order within small groups in task-oriented situations (Berger et al., 1972; Ridgeway, 2001, 2009; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986).

Sports teams, even recreational ones, are by definition groups with a clear collective task at hand: winning games. Players must engage in "cooperative, goal-oriented encounters" (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 850) in order to emerge victorious. Thus, it is expected that a hierarchy of influence, power, and prestige will be established among participants, giving rise to status inequality among team members. Given that gender is a primary frame that people draw on to organize interpersonal relationships (Ridgeway, 2009) and that traditional sports have been founded and historically dominated by men (Giulianotti, 2015; Messner, 1988), status inequality along gender lines would likely emerge even if there were no significant differences in average size and muscular strength between men and women. The existence of sex-based differences in biological resources for performance means that these two groups (men and women) are interacting on even more unequal terms, thus making the establishment of a gender-based status hierarchy arguably inevitable. Culture and biology are thus powerfully combined in a coed team setting, creating a potent arena for the (re)production of gender inequality in the field of sport.

We argue that most coed team sports create conditions where nominal differences between two groups (men and women) almost inevitably become status differences, thus offering little opportunities to challenge existing status beliefs about men and women in sport. We begin by providing an overview of status construction theory and expectation states theory. We then review important findings in the relatively scant literature on coed team sports. In sequence, we discuss data and findings from a pilot study on a sport that to our knowledge has never been analyzed in the coed sport literature—futsal (five on five indoor soccer). We then discuss theoretical implications and suggestions on how to further investigate the (re)production of gender inequalities in the field of sport.

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Status Construction Theory and Expectation States Theory

We draw from these theories given their long tradition in elucidating gender dynamics in task-oriented situations. These theories clarify how nominal characteristics become closely entwined with situational beliefs about worthiness among interactants, thereby biasing social relations and reinforcing systems of inequality (Ridgeway, 1991, 2009, 2011). Studies in this literature have shown that mixed-sex settings where people must cooperate to accomplish tasks, such as the home and the workplace, are powerful platforms for the reproduction of gender inequalities even in the face of structural and material changes pushing toward equality (for a comprehensive review, see Ridgeway, 2011). While these theories have been consistently applied to explain social relations in other mixed-sex, task-oriented domains, such as high-tech firms and higher education (Ridgeway, 2009), its potential to illuminate and address gender inequalities in mixed-sex sport remains to be explored.

Status construction theory explains how status beliefs are formed in interactional encounters and how these beliefs subsequently spread widely in a population (Ridgeway, 1991, 2002; Ridgeway, Backor, Li, Tinkler, & Erickson, 2009). Status beliefs are notions of competence and esteem associated with people of certain social categories. Status beliefs are not necessarily one's own beliefs about the status of certain social categories, but beliefs about "what most people think" of individuals in these categories—they are therefore cultural beliefs (Ridgeway, 2009, 2011). They are consensual and acknowledged by people from both advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Ridgeway & Erickson, 2000; Ridgeway et al., 2009). An example of a widely shared status belief is the idea that White men are more esteemed in the corporate world and more likely to be considered competent in such environment. The origins of these status beliefs are sometimes obscure, but they are frequently rooted in the sociostructural conditions that equip different social groups with different resources (Ridgeway, 1991; Ridgeway & Erickson, 2000; Ridgeway et al., 2009). Status construction theory draws on decades of experimental research investigating how people in small groups make decisions and influence others during task-oriented situations. In these experimental contexts, unequal access to resources defines status beliefs that favor actors endowed with more material resources (Ridgeway, Boyle, Kuipers, & Robinson, 1998). The theory posits that status beliefs are carried on from one interaction to another and through repeated encounters eventually become widely shared status beliefs (Ridgeway, 2002).

Expectation states theory is conceptually similar to status construction theory. It starts with the assumption of an existing and salient social hierarchy (along gender, race or class lines, for example) that influences interpersonal relationships within small groups in goal-oriented settings (Ridgeway, 2001, 2011; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). Existing status characteristics give rise to expectations and performance differences for group members of different social categories (e.g., men and women). Gradually, power and influence order emerges as people in high-status categories (e.g., men) influence more, defer less, and are more highly valued for their contributions than people of low-status groups (e.g., women), thereby creating an internal status order which becomes legitimatized (Ridgeway, 2002; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986).

Social stratification systems are therefore created and sustained over time in a self-fulfilling and circular manner, with structural conditions determining access to resources for certain social groups, which in turn give rise to different expectations for members of different groups leading to different performance and influence capabilities and the eventual formation and spread of status beliefs through repeated social encounters. Changes in the stratification order would only occur if the cycle is interrupted at any point. This is a pertinent point for the present discussion because, as we will argue, coed sports are not ideal platforms for interrupting this cycle, but rather function as arenas for the creation or amplification of status beliefs about men and women in sport.

The case of coed team sport is particularly problematic given the salience of the sex/gender division among participants. For both biological and cultural reasons, sex/gender differences matter and are highly salient in sport performance (Messner, 1988). This differs sharply from the workplace where biology typically plays no role in shaping people's performance capabilities. In the workplace, it is cultural beliefs alone often that determine gendered beliefs about competence and esteem. These gendered cultural beliefs play an even greater role in shaping expectations and performance in occupations that are traditionally sex-typed, such as engineering (male) and nursing (female; Ridgeway, 2009, 2011). The vast majority of sports was created by men for men and thus are inextricably linked with patriarchal social structures (Giulianotti, 2015). Thus, in addition to differences in average body size and muscularity, women encounter strong cultural beliefs that sports are arenas where men are central and women marginal. The fact that coed team sports exist in this wider context of inequality is problematic; they could potentially work to create or validate beliefs about men's higher status in the field of sport more broadly.

Coed Team Sports, Rule Modifications, Unintended Outcomes

Status construction and expectation states theory predict that resources and cultural beliefs shape behaviors in goal-oriented settings. Consistent with this notion, previous research found that coed sports leagues usually provide unequal sporting experiences for men and women and do not deliver on their promise of gender egalitarianism even in the presence of rule modifications to ensure fair competition (Henry & Comeaux, 1999; Summerfield & White, 1989; Wachs, 2002, 2005; Wood & Garn, 2016). In most cases, games remained largely male-dominated and role-differentiated, with men occupying more central positions and women being relegated to marginal ones, a phenomenon known as "stacking" (Henry & Comeaux, 1999). The sports leagues analyzed by these studies adopted rule modifications to encourage greater engagement among women, but such rules made no substantial impact on participation and often made players of both genders feel somewhat uncomfortable. These rule modifications can be interpreted as the institutionalization of status beliefs, an example of how status processes subtly write themselves onto organizational structures (Ridgeway, 2009).

Henry and Comeaux (1999) studied a coed soccer league in the United States through participant observation and in-depth interviews with players. The rule modifications established by this league included limiting the number of male outfield players to five, counting each goal scored by a woman as two goals, and implementing a three-goal limit per player each game. Men scored most of the goals (80%) and only on a few occasions did a woman's goal (which counted as two) determine who won the game. Their results also indicated male overrepresentation in passing statistics: 42% of passes occurred between men and only 8% between

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women. Man-to-woman passes accounted for 27% of passes while woman-to-man passes accounted for 22%. Men who were interviewed emphasized that coed soccer was a good opportunity for them to share their skills, while women saw it as an opportunity to learn new skills. When asked about ideal qualities in a player, men emphasized individual characteristics while women more frequently mentioned collective ones, thus echoing gender stereotypes of men as agentic and women as communal (Ridgeway, 2011). Finally, men typically mentioned that they "played down" in this league while women talked about "playing up."

In a similar study, Wood and Garn (2016) analyzed a coed flag football intramural league in the United States to understand how participants dealt with rule modifications designed to promote greater female participation. The implementation of "open" and "closed" offensive plays is an example of such modifications. In open plays, players of any gender could throw or receive a pass. In closed plays, a woman was required to be involved in either catching or throwing the ball. If a male player completed a pass to another male player during an open play, the play then closed. The play only reopened when a woman was involved in pass completion (either on the throwing or receiving end). In addition to some rules regarding runners, women's touchdowns were counted as nine points while male ones were counted as six.

Wood and Garn (2016) found that instead of promoting inclusion and cooperation, these rules created divisions and role differentiation. One participant stated that it was more like a four on four guys game and a four on four girls game happening at the same time. Men were always assigned as quarterbacks while women were expected to carry out restricted roles in somewhat marginal positions—the equivalent of stacking for this modality. Participants themselves demonstrated mixed feelings about the modified rules. While some acknowledged that the modifications ensured that women were more frequently involved, others dismissed them as "silly" and "dumb" (Wood & Garn, 2016, p. 245). Some women emphasized the increased pressure they experienced as a result of those rules, given that their actions counted more. These rule modifications were therefore seen as benevolent sexism, something which did not challenge but rather reinforced existing gender stereotypes. In sum, it was clear that men still dictated the game, and participants often thought of these rules as somewhat patronizing. Similar findings were reported by Wachs (2002) for a coed softball league, in which modified rules increased rather than reduced the salience of gender in the playing field. In a later study, Wachs (2005) portrays coed softball as a paradoxical platform wherein gender differences are simultaneously challenged and reinforced.

In contrast to the studies above, a study of quidditch provides a more optimistic perspective on the potential of mixed-sex sporting modalities to promote inclusion and contest stereotypes (Cohen, Melton, & Peachey, 2014). Quidditch was officially created in 2005, inspired by the Harry Potter franchise. Quidditch is a blend of dodgeball, handball, and flag football, wherein participants are tasked with throwing the ball (the "quaffle") through hoops at the opponent's end of the field while players from the opposite team attempt to disrupt these attempts by throwing dodgeballs. Quidditch has grown immensely in popularity and prides itself in being "one of the only true coed sports" (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 220). In this sport, no rule modifications exist to accommodate for supposed gender differences in factors affecting performance. In an online qualitative survey administered to 343 individuals in the International Quidditch Association network, Cohen et al. (2014) identified themes related to positive coed sporting experience, increased desire for inclusivity and equality, stereotype reduction, and increased self-confidence and pride among women participants. Gender did not seem to restrict people's roles in the game or their contributions to it, and participants emerged from the experience with reduced gender stereotypes and greater awareness and desire for gender inclusivity.

In contrast to traditional sports such as soccer and football, quidditch does not have a long history and culture of male dominance. In addition, it is also unclear the extent to which biological differences serve as a major performance advantage in this new sport. When biologically based performance differences and cultural beliefs about gender are minimal, gender is less salient, and we can then expect that status differences would be either inexistent or of lesser magnitude. Though this new sport offers some hope for the possibility of a truly coed sport genre, traditional team sports nonetheless remain widely popular. In the attempt to further understand gender dynamics in traditional sports, we collected data on a previously unstudied coed sporting modality, indoor soccer (futsal), which we believed would be more egalitarian given the relative absence of fixed roles and positions within game settings.

Coed Futsal (Indoor Soccer)

We collected data through naturalistic observation of six intramural futsal matches at a Canadian university in 2019. As with most intramural leagues, players were undergraduate students in their late teens and early to mid-20s, with a few older graduate students. Differently than community leagues, intramural league players are fairly homogenous in regard to age and level of education. We were interested in futsal because it is notably different from standard outdoor soccer in regard to more fluid positions and roles within the field. With the exception of the goalkeeper, it is common for players to rotate positions and occupy open spaces left by other teammates, thereby fulfilling both offensive and defensive duties. Due to this fluidity, the smaller size of the field and the lower number of players, it is arguably a modality that is less vulnerable to stacking (the placement of men in more central positions and women in more marginal ones) and therefore more favorable toward equal participation.

Each team in this league consisted of five players, with a maximum of three men per team. Typically, teams played with two men and two women as outfield players plus a male goalkeeper. Thus, similar to Henry and Comeaux's (1999) study on coed outdoor soccer, this league had a gender balance in the number of outfield players, making it a relatively controlled setting to investigate possible ensuing gender inequalities. Due to the short duration of the league, we could not collect data from more games. However, as we later detail, our results are very similar to Henry and Comeaux's study, which relied on the same number of games and a lower number of passes ($n = 499$). Thus, we deemed the sample to be effective for our exploratory purposes. We registered a total of 1,349 completed passes and documented whether they were passes that occurred from man to man, man to woman, woman to man, or woman to woman. Given the fast-paced nature of futsal, two researchers were required for this observational activity. One researcher was in charge of following the game closely and stating to the other researcher the kind of pass that was executed. For example, the observer would state "man-to-woman" to describe a pass while the other researcher registered this pass in the relevant column of the table devised for data collection. If a completed pass subsequently resulted in a goal, this pass was documented as an

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assist. Given the goalkeeper's unique role, we discerned passes in which the goalkeeper was involved. We present overall passing statistics as well as those for passes between outfield players only. As one would expect in a context where biological resources for performance and cultural frames advantage men, the findings show overwhelming male dominance in futsal, despite the features of this game that would arguably make it more equitable.

Of the 66 goals that were documented, 60 were scored by men (90%). Of the 35 assists recorded, 28 were carried out by men (80%). Considering that scoring and assisting are the two most highly valued actions in futsal, they are the ones more likely to confer higher status to the person who performs them. These numbers, therefore, matter if one is concerned with challenging stereotypes about women and men in sport. It is debatable whether a perfectly egalitarian scenario would mean a 50/50 balance in those numbers. However, our game statistics clearly reveal a highly inegalitarian sport, one that is likely far off from an ideal balance, whatever this balance may be. The passing statistics expose with even greater clarity the extent to which the games were male-dominated. Man-to-man passes accounted for 56.8% of those passes, and men were involved in 95.3% of all 1,349 completed passes (either on the giving or the receiving end or both). When only taking into account passes between outfield players ($n = 895$), 45% of passes were from men to men, and men were involved in 93% of all passes (Table 1).

These findings are strikingly similar to the ones presented by Henry and Comeaux (1999) and show that the different structure of futsal (smaller field, lower number of players, and greater fluidity of roles and positions) does not necessarily lead to more equal participation, thereby providing evidence against our hypothesis that futsal would be more egalitarian than standard outdoor soccer. There is some variation by game, as one would expect, but all matches showed similar patterns of overwhelming male engagement.[1] Since players in our sample are young adults studying at an elite university, we could speculate that they are more prone to progressive values that would foster more egalitarian participation, especially in comparison with the community league in the South of the United States studied by Henry and Comeaux two decades earlier. However, we found no evidence in support of this hypothesis.

Discussion and Suggestions for Future Research

In this paper, we aimed to provide theoretical and empirical insights to better understand gender imbalances within coed sports teams. Existing research and our own pilot study suggest that most coed team sports are settings in which men and women continue to

Table 1 Futsal Game Statistics

	Passes									Goals			Assists		
Game	M-M	%M-M	M-W	%M-W	W-M	%W-M	W-W	%W-W	Total	M	W	Total	M	W	Total
Game 1															
Overall	129	57.1	35	15.5	55	24.3	7	3.1	226	12	0	12	7	2	9
Goalkeeper involved	55	91.7	5	8.3	0	0	0	0	60						
No goalkeeper	74	44.6	30	18.1	55	33.1	7	4.2	166						
Game 2															
Overall	130	59.9	43	19.8	39	18	5	2.3	217	7	0	7	2	1	3
Goalkeeper involved	45	63.4	11	15.5	14	19.7	1	1.4	71						
No goalkeeper	85	58.2	32	21.9	25	17.1	4	2.7	146						
Game 3															
Overall	166	57.4	66	22.8	46	15.9	11	3.8	289	11	4	15	7	1	8
Goalkeeper involved	75	80.6	13	14	5	5.4	0	0	93						
No goalkeeper	91	46.4	53	27	41	20.9	11	5.6	196						
Game 4															
Overall	101	49	49	23.8	45	21.8	11	5.3	206	10	1	11	4	0	4
Goalkeeper involved	72	79.1	15	16.5	4	4.4	0	0	91						
No goalkeeper	29	25.2	34	29.6	41	35.7	11	9.6	115						
Game 5															
Overall	103	55.1	39	20.9	34	18.2	11	5.9	187	3	1	4	3	1	4
Goalkeeper involved	59	78.7	12	16	4	5.3	0	0	75						
No goalkeeper	44	39.3	27	24.1	30	26.8	11	9.8	112						
Game 6															
Overall	137	61.2	33	14.7	35	15.6	19	8.5	224	17	0	17	5	2	7
Goalkeeper involved	57	89.1	7	10.9	0	0	0	0	64						
No goalkeeper	80	50	26	16.3	35	21.9	19	11.9	160						
TOTAL															
Overall	766	56.8	265	19.6	254	18.8	64	4.7	1349	60	6	66	28	7	35
Goalkeeper involved	363	80	63	13.9	27	5.9	1	0.2	454						
No goalkeeper	403	45	202	22.6	227	25.4	63	7	895						

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"do gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987) in traditional ways. In contrast to mixed-sex training in martial arts which have proven to be empowering for women (Channon, 2014) and to coed youth swimming where gender similarities in athletic abilities were emphasized (Musto, 2014), coed team sports seem to provide little opportunities to challenge conventional understandings of gender differences in sport. Rather, they seem to reproduce a "soft essentialism" (Messner, 2011). As results from our pilot study corroborate, games remain largely imbalanced even with rule modifications in a sport that is, in theory, less prone to stacking. The social psychological frameworks discussed here would suggest that inegalitarian involvement in the playing field is problematic if one cares about changing status beliefs and creating alternative sport values that are not tied to masculinity. Status construction theory is concerned with the social processes that turn nominal differences between individuals of different social categories into status differences, eventually giving rise to widely shared status beliefs through repeated encounters (Ridgeway, 1991). Coed sports leagues are often settings where men and women do not participate on equal terms, for both cultural and biological reasons, thus leading to unequal involvement in actions that matter the most, such as scoring and assisting goals, and general passing. Importantly, this imbalance is problematic because it already echoes existing gendered beliefs about the worth, esteem, and competence of nominally distinct groups (men and women), thus hindering cultural and structural changes that tackle the marginalization of women in the field of sport.

The strong historical links between sport and patriarchal structures have unevenly shaped the distribution of resources for women in sport (e.g., inadequate funding for women's sports teams, less opportunities for women to be involved, etc.). These structures have also molded cultural understandings of masculinity/femininity and of the status of men and women in sport, with the female athlete frequently being considered as "contested ideological terrain" (Messner, 1988, p. 197; Wachs, 2005). The differences in magnitude and content of media coverage for men and women's sports, for example, are at the heart of controversies on the role of women in sport and in society more broadly (Bishop, 2003; Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015). Thus, in addition to biological disadvantages when competing alongside men, women also have to "play against the patriarchy" (Giulianotti, 2015). In social psychological terminology, these status hierarchies generate expectation states in the coed playing field, which then shapes the extent to which one behaves and performs in the playing field even in the absence of differences in ability. As recent experimental research in this tradition confirms, high-status actors will influence more, defer less, and become uncomfortable when their decisions are challenged based on a perceived (though experimentally manipulated) difference in status (Kalkhoff et al., 2020). In Bourdieusian terms, sport is a field structured in such a way that "masculine capital" (Miller, 2014) matters. Just like in the heavy metal scene studied by Miller (2014), actors who possess masculine capital in the field of sport can more readily convert it to other forms of capital, such as symbolic capital (reputation or status).

If one aims to interrupt the cycle that sustains gender inequality in the field of sport, most coed team sports need to be carefully reconsidered. The current paper provides a few hints of what some changes might look like at the interactional level of play, such as a requirement that more women than men need to be present in the field (in the case of futsal). However, further research is needed to confidently prescribe ways to make coed team sports more inclusive and egalitarian, and therefore, a viable platform for promoting inclusion and visibility of women in sport more broadly. In particular, it is important to hear more from participants themselves, both men and women, on how they experience participation in different coed sports and what they think could work better. Results from this relatively small literature suggest that respondents do occasionally enjoy the social and relaxed atmosphere in these settings (e.g., Henry & Comeaux, 1999), but often with "a significant undertone of skepticism and dissatisfaction" (Wood & Garn, 2016, p. 245). Thus, the following questions remain highly pertinent: How do participants describe their participation in these mixed-sex sport settings? How do they rate their contributions to the team? How do they think others see or judge them? Are they deriving positive and meaningful experiences from their participation? To what extent do they feel responsible for their team's wins and defeats? What kinds of emotions do they experience playing these sports in a mixed-sex setting? Importantly, why did they join coed leagues in the first place? It is possible that people's reasons for participating are mostly social. Even if this was the case, however, participation differences within games arguably still contribute to the reproduction of gender stereotypes in sport. Previous research using in-depth qualitative interviews on this topic is scarce and limited to small sample sizes. For a detailed and nuanced story to emerge, in-depth qualitative interviews with larger sample sizes, and ideally analyzing several different sports, would be required.

In addition, participant observational studies could provide rich descriptions of how women and men observe and address these participation differences. A thorough account of the interpersonal dynamics within coed teams would reveal the extent to which these imbalances are problematic, if at all, and provide reports of real-life behaviors, attitudes, and reactions of players to game situations where gender might matter. Another possibility would be to carry out quasi-experiments with pretests/posttests to assess the role of coed sports leagues in shaping or transforming status beliefs. Coed leagues administrators could, for example, require participants to fill out surveys upon an individual's registration and then once again after the league ends. These surveys could, for example, ask participants to indicate how much they agree/disagree (on a scale) with certain statements about status beliefs and their involvement with the game. Possible statements to consider include most people believe that men are more competent than women in sport; men do not pass the ball to women too often; I have a strong leadership role in my team; everyone in the team is equally important for winning games; I feel empowered by playing with this team; I am a liability to my team; my team would do better without me and so on. In addition, these surveys would include other important control variables such as gender, self-rated skill level, number of games played, previous experience playing coed team sports, age, political orientation, and educational attainment. These quasi-experiments, if carefully designed, could powerfully inform whether and how much participation in coed sport teams (re)produce status beliefs about men and women in the broader field of sport.

Conclusion

This paper is an invitation to rethink coed team sports from a social psychological perspective. We argue that most coed team sport settings offer little opportunities to challenge cultural beliefs about men and women in the field of sport. Coed team sports are contexts where the sex/gender category is highly salient even with rule modifications aimed to ensure fair competition. For cultural and biological reasons, men and women are typically not participating on equal terms and we

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stipulate that this discrepancy creates differences in expectations and performance opportunities and outcomes, thus establishing a power and prestige order within teams. Just like in other mixed-sex arenas that are battlegrounds for gender equality, such as the workplace and the home, gender stereotypes are prone to being re-inscribed. The data presented in this study reveal male dominance in coed futsal, a previously unstudied sport in the coed sport literature, with men overwhelmingly involved in scoring, assisting, and general passing. Though we cannot confirm that a gender-based status hierarchy exists within each team, the dramatic overrepresentation of men in all important game statistics suggests that this is likely the case.

Further research is needed to better understand how participants experience coed sports and the extent to which this modality shapes or reshapes people's status beliefs about men and women in sport. Possible research routes include qualitative interviews with participants of different sports leagues (with larger sample sizes than in previous studies) and quasi-experiments comparing status beliefs before and after league participation. While we do not advocate for the eradication of coed team sports, we believe that they are not a straightforward platform for challenging existing status beliefs, as they are commonly portrayed to be, and probably even foster the reproduction of gender stereotypes and inequalities. To ensure that toxic masculinity and gender frames do not impact women's participation, we emphasize that women's sports leagues and events should be valued, promoted, and cherished for their own sake. Channeling more resources and creating more opportunities for women-only sports at different levels of play seem to be better routes for tackling existing gendered notions of competence and prestige in the field of sport. In parallel, it is important to advocate for women's representation in regimes of sport governance and ensure better coverage of women's sports by mainstream media (Woodward, 2016), as so far "there is little evidence of any cultural shift towards a more inclusive sport and gendered hostility endures" (p. 264) despite the increasing number of women participants.

Coed team sports currently echo the *co-option strategy* advocated by liberal feminists—a perspective which "rejects conservative claims that biological differences or traditional gender values undermine women's sport participation" (Giulianotti, 2015, p. 83). However, we claim that the *separatism strategy* advocated by radical feminists might have something more interesting to offer. Separatism could allow for exploring "alternative sport values" (Giulianotti, 2015, p. 83) that would otherwise be inhibited in a field where masculine capital matters in multiple ways and challenge the soft gender essentialism of contemporary times (Messner, 2011). Until an adequate formula is figured out for enabling egalitarian participation in coed team leagues, mixed-sex settings where the sex/gender category is highly salient will almost inevitably function as platforms that subtly reproduce gender hierarchies, as is the case of formal organizations or the domestic sphere (Ridgeway, 2011), thus obstructing progress toward wider structural and cultural changes.

We acknowledge that we adopted a simplistic male–female dichotomy in this paper. Gender, of course, is not fixed and stable, but a more nuanced discussion on the fluid nature of gender was beyond the scope of this paper. Importantly, the experiences of trans men and women in coed sport constitute a promising topic for future research. We also recognize that sex and gender frequently intersect with other dimensions of social stratification, such as race, ethnicity, and sexuality (Scraton, Caudwell, & Holland, 2005), factors that we could not elaborate on. We hope, however, to have provided a compelling case for focusing more scholarly attention on coed team sports and shown how well-established social psychological theories can inform the study of gender inequality in the field of sport.

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Notes

1. The typical formation for each team would be two women and two men as outfield players and one male goalkeeper. However, there were a few exceptions to this formation. In one of the games, one team played with a woman goalkeeper (a very rare occurrence in this league) and the percentage of passes between men was expectedly higher than most games, though interestingly not the highest of all the six games. In another game, one team played with only four players (they were one woman short), but this game's statistics are similar to that of other games. Finally, in another game, one of the teams played with three women as outfield players in the final 3 min, and there were just as many woman-to-woman passes in this short period of time as there were in the previous 37 min of the game. Though 3 min of observation might not be sufficient for a robust conclusion, they provide some indication that having more women than men on a team could be a useful rule to implement in the search for more equal participation.

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