

Culture and Participation in Physical Education and Sport: The Case of Tertiary Female Students in Masvingo, Zimbabwe

by

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Abstract

The study sought to establish the role played by culture on the participation of tertiary female students in Physical Education and Sport (PES) in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. The study adopted the qualitative approach and a case study design. Self-designed individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussion schedules were used as data collection instruments. A sample of twenty female students was purposively selected from two participating tertiary institutions in Masvingo, one of which is a teacher training college and the other, a university that trains teachers. Data were analysed thematically using the narrative form. The study found that issues of gender socialisation, morals-*Hunhu/Ubuntu*, myths on virginity and sterility as well as beliefs on PES attire impacted negatively on the participation of female students in PES. On the issue of cultural socialisation, the study established that the traditional African Shona society of Zimbabwe regards females as custodians and gatekeepers of cultural values. They also strongly believe that from a tender age, females' place is in the home, helping their mothers in domestic work as preparation for marriage. They are, therefore, not expected to be at the playgrounds. The study recommends the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education to design cultural policies that enhance campaign programs through workshops and seminars, case shows and road shows. This would be done with an intention of sensitising diverse cultural societies of Zimbabwe to work towards addressing cultural gender stereotypes that restrict and disadvantage tertiary female students from participating in PES. This would help to demystify cultural traditions that tend to have a strong influence on marriage, viewing females as home dwellers.

Key words: culture, norms, gender, participation, female students, tertiary institutions

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Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies, vol.11, no.8, June 2018

Introduction

Inspite of the efforts made by the Zimbabwean government to afford equal opportunities and access to both males and females in all spheres of life, the reality on the ground is that strong cultural practices seem to continue to cause limitations in the participation of female students in PES (Manyonganise, 2010). Many female students in tertiary institutions particularly in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe included, tend to be continuously encountering discrimination in PES participation which appears to emanate from cultural constraints (Daimon, 2010). For centuries, this unbalanced scenario appears to have been accepted by many cultural societies of the world as an existing fact. Research in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe included, uncovered that the participation of female students in Physical Education and Sport seem to be hindered by the perpetuation of cultural beliefs which are camouflaged in the African patriarchal philosophies (Manyonganise, 2010; Mangena, 2009). Thus, the participation of female students in PES seems to be affected more than that of males. The female students must enjoy the same access and opportunities PES offers to develop their potential and possibility to earn a living from it. The African cultural philosophies among other things tend to cause discrimination which deprives female students of the many benefits which are achieved through PES participation (Kirk, 2012). This is all inspite of the national and international frameworks such as the Universal Declarations of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 which calls for everyone to have the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community (Article, 27) and conventions such as Article 5 (a) of the Convention on the Elimination Of All Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which calls for state parties to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women and to eliminate prejudices and practices which perpetuate discrimination (Kirk, 2012). Hence these frameworks seem to have accomplished very little in terms of eliminating traditional cultural practices that hinder tertiary female students from participating in PES. It is the purpose of this study to establish the part played by culture in the participation of female students in PES and the extent to which culture may influence the participation of female students in PES in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions.

Culture plays an important role in the construction and maintenance of gender structures in every society and in turn results in gender stereotypes in many societies of the world (Manyonganise, 2010). This implies that cultural philosophies may influence the participation of female students in PES. In both subtle and explicit ways and in both developed and developing countries, female students appear to be continually affected by cultural beliefs of their societies in PES participation. What this may imply is that female students' lack of participation in PES in tertiary institutions may be hooked to certain cultural factors entrenched in cultural belief systems. These reinforce certain societal values and norms that place emphasis on issues of masculinity and femininity, thereby creating discrimination and gender stereotyping in PES participation in tertiary institutions.

Some of the cultural factors that appear to constrain females include matters on culture and gender socialisation in Physical Education and Sport, morality-Hunhu/Ubuntu influencing female students' participation in PES, myths about PES participation resulting in loss of virginity and sterility and beliefs about clothing for PES (Manyonganise, 2010; Daimon, 2010). For clarity's sake, *Hunhu/Ubuntu* is further defined as the quality of being human which manifests itself through various human acts, clearly visible in social situations as well as among family. According to sociolinguist *Ubuntu* Mfenyana (1986), "it runs through the veins of all Africans who believe that a person is a person through other people. What this means is that *Ubuntu* may be viewed as a deeply personal philosophy that calls on mirroring humanity for each other, inculcating qualities that become a way of life. Ubuntu can be seen in the spirit of willing participation, unquestioning, cooperation, warmth, openness and personal dignity demonstrated by the indigenous black population (Flippin jnr, 2012). In many tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe, females tend to have been affected and perpetually portrayed as inferior to males due to such andocentric attitudes that are hidden and rooted in patriarchal culture (Manyonganise, 2010; Mangena, 2009; UN, 2007; Zimbabwe National Youth Policy, 2000). Although other researchers attempted to research on related issues concerning, for example gender, sport and culture (Manyonganise, 2010), the patriarchy of PES (Kapasula, 2010) exploring the interface between soccer and gender (Daimon, 2010) and the gendered dimension of competitive sports in a multicultural context (Ramtohul, 2010), very little has been researched on the role played by culture on the participation of female students in PES. This has been the major reason for carrying out this research study which seeks to establish the extent to which culture may influence the participation of female students in PES.

Literature Review

Gender socialisation is a process whereby a person becomes a member of a social group or society, learning the ideal cultural content and modes of behaviour and as a consequence, internalising the culture of the society to which she belongs (Ramtohul, 2010; Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). What this might mean is that the pattern of life followed by female students in tertiary institutions across the globe may be determined by gendered illusions imparted to them by some members of their societies. Manyonganise, (2010) states that many societies all over the world have developed ideas about what it is to be a man or a woman. These have resulted in the loss of some fundamental truths about the inherent make up of females and replaced them with distorted views.

What this might imply is that these views that come as gendered illusions have contributed to mental capacities that affect the participation of female students in PES in tertiary institutions. Such mental constructs may shape female students' self concepts that may affect their behaviours and perceptions. This may result in the creation of an environment that does not allow the individual to view and accept herself exactly the way she is (Mangena, 2009).

Thus, cultural relations in society may be viewed as relations of power that are established at an early age. To this end it may contribute in shaping mentalities that determine the participation of female students' in PES in later life (Azzarito, 2004). In the context of this study, it may be therefore submitted that if parents are active in PES they may be viewed as their children's first coaches in the field of PES.

In the African Shona society, which is the dominant group in Zimbabwe, females tend to be custodians and gatekeepers of cultural values because of their strategic position in the home. This disadvantages them in PES participation. In the African Shona society, it is the responsibility of girls and women (females) to sweep floors, wash dishes and clothes, cook, and serve food to brothers, fathers and husbands while boys have little or nothing to do (Chireshe, 2013; Manyonganise, 2010). It appears as if the situation has been like this for years and is taking long to be resolved. For example, a research conducted on women empowerment in Zimbabwe, by Musingafi (2009:51) revealed that females in some communities in Zimbabwe are still expected to undertake most agricultural tasks and marketing, do all domestic work, grind by hand cereal crops, herd cattle during the summer month, take cattle for dipping once in every fortnight and guard against baboons in the maize fields. In most societies in developing countries, females, from infancy, are socialised to help their families in household chores and are expected to be submissive, innocent, more careful, and sexually quiet, learning the centrality of their domestic realm in preparation for marriage (Manyonganise, 2010). Accordingly, young girls may be usually conscientised to believe that it is their responsibility to carry out domestic duties and they may even blame themselves if they fail to complete the tasks delegated to them by their mothers (Rege, 2008). This implies that from a tender age, girls might not be given time to interact with boys during leisure time. Hence, this may be a limitation for them to identify PES areas they are talented in. It may, therefore, be deduced that although there are very good global declarations, conventions, organisations and policies that encourage society to recognise the rights of female students to participate in PES, gaps between female and male students still persist. Hall cited in Musingafi (2009) notes that laws and policies may be there but are still at loggerheads with practice.

In the Zimbabwean Shona culture boys may be given time to partake in leisure activities of their choice (Manyonganise, 2010). Society creates opportunities for boys to discover their interests and abilities as they play with plastic balls, run along the roads, swim in shallow water, climb trees and play with home-made toy cars and guitars made of wire (Manyonganise, 2010:15). On the other hand, the fact that girls are always at home makes them play with household toys like pots, plates, dishes and dolls as they imitate their mothers and grandmothers. Thus, in terms of PES related activities, girls may end up playing more of traditional PES games such as *chuti*, *nhodo*, *chitsvambe* and other minor activities which lack expertise, for they are discouraged from spending their leisure time playing outdoor games with boys. All this is done in the name of culture and could have contributed to the lower female than male students' participation in PES over the years.

Taking it from above, one might also deduce that if society imposes cultural values that encourage boys and girls to play with different toys, it may appear as if it helps in perpetuating gender prejudice, hence, widening the gap between boys and girls in PES participation. According to the feminists' point of view, culture may be held responsible for putting gender pressure and a grip on males and females in many PES activities (Manyonganise, 2010, Daimon, 2010). This means that the problems of cultural influence on the participation of female students in PES have been in existence for decades and resolving it may not be an easy task.

In most African cultures, the girl child is nurtured following a particular trend that would enable her to even continue fulfilling domestic and conjugal duties within the home without excuses of tiredness when she gets married and this in most cases leads to disapproval in PES participation (Daimon, 2010; Kapasula, 2010). Thus, at marriage females continue with household duties leaving them with very little or no time to participate in PES as they follow the footsteps of their mothers and grandmothers (Manyonganise, 2010). This lack of participation which in most cases is due to domestic responsibilities has led to females operating at the bottom scale of poverty, and therefore contributing very little to the welfare of their countries. It is the belief of many African cultural societies, that the home and not the playground is associated with respect, dignity and morality for females. Dignity, respect and morality for females may also be considered as the tenets of an ideal African woman (Kapasula, 2010; Asakitikpi, 2010). Based on the views of the authors above, most African societies seem to hold ideologies that are still rooted in patriarchy and this appear to have always limited female students from participating in PES.

Society's social cultural order may manufacture a dominant hierarchy that legitimises marginalisation and unfair treatment of females and may lead to gender typing of tasks and stereotyping by society which may be transmitted from one generation to another (Lorber, 2010). In relation to the above point, and in the context of this study, it may be deduced that the participation of female students in PES may have a strong link with the norms, values and beliefs of a society's way of life.

Morality-*Hunhu/Ubuntu* Influencing Female Students' in PES

In Zimbabwean tertiary institutions, many female students from the dominant Shona culture are urged to observe morality - *Hunhu/Ubuntu* as part of their education. As a result of that female students are not allowed to go out for PES tournaments that require camping for days away from home and yet males may camp for a number of days without being questioned. (Manyonganise, 2010). Thus, parents of athletes may view camping as insecure and fear that their daughters may be abused. Further to this, it may be considered immoral for married females to be away from their husbands for a number of days, sleeping in lodges. Female students who do that are criticised for lack of morality.

According to the Shona cultural beliefs, norms and values, female students may not be allowed to sing and dance in public as spectators supporting their teams during matches or games (Manyonganise, 2010). Thus, the African Shona culture does not allow female students to dance raising and shaking the lower parts of their bodies which they term *kongonya* in front of crowds that include males. This results in opportunities for self expression, socialisation and participation in PES being limited because of perceived protection by society (Chitando, 2008). In most societies in Africa, it is characteristic of brothers and fathers to control their sisters and daughters and in most cases this is done for protective reasons (Manyonganise, 2010). What this might imply is that the African woman's moral point of view is still far from being respected because of patriarchy which is viewed in terms of the communitarian philosophy of *hunhu* or *ubuntu*. What seems to be the reality in most African nations is that strong cultural and traditional practices tend to restrict the participation of tertiary female students in PES (Daimon, 2010). What this means is that, female students are still culturally disadvantaged in PES, both as athletes and spectators. Hence, the need to establish the extent to which culture restrains the participation of female students in PES.

Apparently, deviating from societal norms may result in serious accusations from parents, siblings, peers and society in general for not adhering to the African Philosophy of Hunhu or Ubuntu (Kapasula, 2010, Daimon, 2010, Asakitikpi, 2010; Mangena, 2010). On the same note, in the Zimbabwean traditional Shona culture, it is even worse when a married woman chooses to participate in PES without the husband's consent. She may be labelled, "*The cock of the home*" meaning a woman who overrides her husband, who does not listen to the husband, has no respect and forcefully takes over authority from the husband. Married females' behaviour that show no respect for a husband may be viewed by society as serious disobedience (Manyonganise, 2010; Kapasula, 2010; Daimon, 2010; Asakitikpi, 2010). Accordingly, this may lead to divorce. In the African Shona culture, there is a belief that married women are not independent beings and they belong to men who are responsible for guiding and guarding their lives. This implies that females are expected to take the receiving and not the initiating role in their families. The belief in married men is that their wives are properties they own. Mangena (2009) observes that in the African traditional Shona culture, a married woman cannot function individually but with her husband, family and society, and as she becomes conscious of her existence, and with her responsibilities towards herself and towards others.

Myths about PES Participation Resulting in Loss of Virginity and Sterility

Although, scientifically it has not been proved correct, there tend to be a common universal belief that participation in PES is harmful to females' health for it damages their reproductive organs in terms of losing virginity and in some instances resulting to infertility in later life (Daimon, 2010; Manyonganise, 2010; UN, 2007; Amusa et al., 1999). Thus, PES participation for tertiary female students has always been culturally restricted in many tertiary institutions of the world.

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The belief is that if female students participate in PES their reproductive organs will be damaged. In most cultural traditions of Zimbabwe such as for example, the Shona and the Kalanga, loss of virginity as well as infertility in marriage are both regarded to be serious issues. The above mentioned issues of virginity and fertility in marriage seem to place more value and protection on the female than male body and have been in existence for decades in many developing countries (Daimon, 2010; Manyonganise, 2010; UN, 2007; Amusa et al., 1999). Thus, in most African cultures the issue of maintaining virginity and fertility is one of the expected credits a girl is supposed to receive from her husband and his family on getting married. At marriage, a girl is expected to be fertile so as to be able to bear children for her husband when she gets married. What may be surprising is that such patriarchal notions of femininity which require a girl child to be a virgin before marriage and also to be fertile when she gets married are not enforced for boys (Daimon, 2010; Manyonganise, 2010). Consequently, a girl who loses virginity before marriage may be rejected by her husband and in-laws and it may be embarrassing to the girl and her family. Thus, due to society's stereotypical beliefs, norms and values of this nature, many female students in tertiary institutions desist from participating in PES because of fear of facing penalties later in life if it so happens that their virginity and fertility are lost.

Beliefs about Clothing in PES

The matter of clothing for PES has also been a cultural controversial issue globally, from time immemorial and appears to cause resistance to female students' participation in the PES arena, particularly as a result of fear of contravening cultural values (Huggins & Randell, 2007). In some societies parents and the elders of a community may be against the participation of females in what they may term "inappropriate PES clothing" and this may lead to grave threats amongst participants (Huggins & Randell 2007; UN, 2007). For example, the Algerian Olympian, Hassiba Boulmerka, who participated and won a gold medal in the 1500 metre race in the 1992 Olympic Games, was both celebrated for her accomplishment and excoriated for exposing her body through wearing shorts and violating cultural rules. She was eventually forced into exile following the games because of intimidation from members of society (UN, 2007). The Zimbabwean Shona culture view female attire in PES along traditional gender lines and disregard clothing that expose the female body (Manwa, Ndamba and Manwa, 2010). Thus, females in Zimbabwe are discouraged from wearing such PES attire for it is believed that it would lure men. What is surprising is that young men, who are usually seen playing soccer in shorts only, particularly in hot weather, are not questioned. In the Zimbabwean Shona culture, females are not allowed to wear clothing that leave the navel out usually referred to as, *guvhu out* meaning *navel out*. This implies that inactivity and resistance to PES participation amongst female through society, participation in PES in such clothing may be prohibited. From what has been stated above, the issue of PES clothing has taken rather too long to be resolved and seems to be evolving.

Method

Research Design

A qualitative case study design was adopted in this research. Within the context of a qualitative research design, the assumption of the researcher was to provide a unique example of real people in real situations (tertiary female students) thereby enabling readers to understand the research situation more clearly (Cohen and Manion, 2011). Upadhya and Singh (2010) describe qualitative research as “a process of systematic inquiry into the meanings which people employ to make sense of their experiences as they guide their actions”. Thus, a qualitative case study deals with a particular group of individuals who share meanings or some cultural commonalities which is the case in this study where tertiary female students share experiences as they participate in PES.

Population

The study population was one hundred and fifty (150) female students from two tertiary institutions, one teacher training college and another university that trains teachers. Of the one hundred and fifty (150) female students who are studying PES as a specialisation area, ninety (90) are from a teacher training college and sixty (60) from a university in Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select final year students, specialising in PES. From the population, twenty (20) female students, ten from each of the two tertiary institutions were selected. The selection criterion conveniently targeted volunteers who were genuinely interested in participating in the study. One of the merits of purposive sampling for this study was that it assured the researcher of getting participants who had the potential to furnish her with rich and credible information, which is usually difficult to find (Upadhya and Singh, 2010). Thus, the participants who were involved in this study were unique in that they were experienced and knowledgeable in the subject area.

Instruments

The current study employed individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as data collection instruments. The in-depth interview questions with four tertiary female students sought to get interviewees' views on the role of culture in the participation of female students in PES. Focus group discussions with sixteen female students sought to clarify some of the points raised by the four female students who were involved in the individual in-depth interviews. The use of the two data collection tools was to produce thick descriptions and themes for data analysis (Maree, 2012). This could also enhance data credibility and reliability of the information supplied by participants.

In regards to ethical considerations, confidentiality was realised through obtaining signed statements by participants indicating nondisclosure of the research information (Gilbert, 2011). With this assurance the participants involved in the in-depth interview and focus group could freely discuss issues without reservations. Further the research ensured anonymity of participants through protecting them against identification (O’Leary, 2010 & Cohen et al., (2011). Second, for this study, codes would be used for ethical consideration to conceal the names of participants so that the data is not traced back to them. The possibility of causing harm to participant is then minimised. For example, IIP3 means in-depth Interview participant 3, FGDP3 means Focus Group Discussion Participant 3.

The Role of Culture in Socialisation

On the issue of how the cultural socialisation process of female students influence their participation in PES, participants in this study revealed that culture influenced their participation. Findings indicated that three out of four students, which make up the larger number of participants involved in in-depth interviews believed that the cultural socialisation of female students affect tertiary female students in PES participation. Participants expressed that societal cultural relations contributed in shaping their ideologies which later on in life determined the degree to which they participate in PES at tertiary level. Participants also disclosed that in the traditional African Shona society of Zimbabwe, female students were expected to fulfil household duties rather than spending time in the playgrounds participating in PES activities. Participants revealed that in their society PES is viewed as a domain for males and female students who participate in PES, particularly male dominated sports such as judo, wrestling, boxing and karate are accused for behaving like males and are not viewed as marriageable stuff. One in-depth interviewee commented:

I was brought up in a society that expects me to spent most of the time helping my mother in household chores such as washing and ironing clothes for my father, brothers and little sisters. My parents do not place value in PES participation, especially my mother who spends most of the time with me in the kitchen grooming me to be a good housewife when I get married one day (IIP3).

Another interviewee remarked:

When I grew up, I was only allowed to participate in light activities such as pada, nhodo traditional minor games such as Zai rakaora, Nyuchi dzandiruma and Moto mugomo. I was not allowed to play outdoor games with boys (IIP1).

Almost all the focus group discussants (thirteen out of sixteen) tended to share similar sentiments with the in-depth interviewees. For example, one of the discussants had this to say:

Every morning, my mother expects me to complete domestic tasks she delegates to me before I go to college and in the evening I am expected to prepare meals for the whole family. This leaves me with little or no time to participate in PES. This is the trend from the time I was a little girl. In my traditional African culture, females who participate in strenuous male activities are viewed as unmarriageable (FGDP7).

Issues of *Hunhu/Ubuntu* in PES participation

On the issue of how cultural norms and beliefs in PES influence female students participation in PES, the study revealed that all the in-depth interviewees involved in this study unanimously expressed the view that traditional cultural norms and beliefs such as code of ethics that include '*Hunhu*' in Shona and '*Ubuntu*' in Ndebele negatively influence the participation of female students in PES. It was revealed that the traditional African Shona culture of Zimbabwe labelled female students who participated in PES singing vulgar and dancing as moral boosters, in front of men, getting excited during zone competitions or tournaments as undignified. It was also revealed that female students who sang and danced as match supporters had questionable morals and were not stuff for marriage. The following are narrations of the predicaments from the in-depth interviewees:

The general belief in my traditional African Shona culture is that, as a woman I am not allowed to cheer up my team dancing before male spectators during a tournament or match in soccer or any PES activity. If I do that my morality will be questionable (IIP1)
In my traditional African Shona culture, singing and dancing to vulgar songs like, 'Ukaribata zamu mutepfetepfe' (If you hold the breast it is soft) in public is not allowed and it is society's belief that women who sing such songs during PES competitions or tournaments are undignified and are not quality for marriage (IP4).

Female students who sing vulgar songs like 'Bata chimoko, (Hold the beautiful woman) during athletic competitions may be viewed by their societies as prostitutes (IIP2).

On the same issue of how cultural morals and beliefs influenced the participation of female students in PES, three out of four in-depth interviewees, indicated that they were not happy about the unfair negative comments that were passed by some of the female spectators when they sang and danced for their teams during local tournaments. Participants revealed that they were criticised for singing the usual vulgar songs that are also sung by male supporters during tournaments. Similarly some of the focus group discussants noted how other female students viewed them:

Real women who are ideal cannot sing vulgar songs and dance in this undignified manner. Huum, vanotinyadzisa, havafaniri kutamba pamberi pevanhurume (They embarrass us. They are not supposed to dance in front of men (FGDP16).

Kikiki, I can't avoid laughing, these women are marketing themselves to men and who would really marry such? Only the insane men can pay lobola for such women who dance exposing their bodies (FGDP11).

These women are uncultured. They are violating societal norms by dancing in front of man, exposing themselves (FGDP3)

Aaah! Aaa! These are obscene dances. Only prostitutes can dance and sing like this. This is indeed shameful (FGDP8).

The findings above are confirmed by Manyonganise (2010:18) in her study on safety zones to public spaces for women participation in sports carried out in Zimbabwe, who avers that in the Zimbabwe Shona culture it is forbidden for females to fail to control their emotional feelings and to show excitement, dancing in public during soccer tournaments or competitions. Thus in the Zimbabwe Shona culture, females who show such excitement in public are often mocked and rejected and viewed as *nzenza* meaning women of loose ethics.

What may be surprising is that since time immemorial, PES tournaments and competitions have always encouraged excitement and joyful singing and this seems to have harmed nobody. It is therefore unclear why society seems to view female expression as a problem and one wonders whether this would receive fair attention one day.

This means that there may be a serious mismatch between what society expects to happen to female students participating in PES in tertiary institutions and what the local and international PES declarations such as the Universal Declarations of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 which calls for everyone to have the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community (Article, 27) and conventions such as Article 5 (a) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which calls for state parties to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women and to eliminate prejudices and practices which perpetuate discrimination (United Nations (UN), 2007) require. What this may imply is that laws and policies may be there but are still at loggerheads with practice.

Camping for Sports Away from home

In Zimbabwean tertiary institutions, it also emerged that some participants in this study also disclosed that parents, husbands and brothers were uncomfortable to have female students camping away from home for a number of days during mega tournaments or competitions in the company of other men. They indicated that they feared that the female students may be sexually abused or harassed by male students or lecturers. Participants further revealed that female students who go away from home for inter collegial and university competitions such as Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association (ZUSA), Zimbabwe Teachers Colleges Sports Association (ZTCSA) and Zimbabwe Tertiary Institutions Sport Union (ZTISU) were labelled as prostitutes since the African traditional Shona culture is protective and does not allow females, whether married or not to leave their families for days in the company of men. The female students in this study further revealed that females are always controlled and closely monitored by their parents and brothers. For example one in-depth interviewee remarked:

My parents always feel that it is insecure and dangerous to be away from home for a long time for I may be sexually abused or harassed. I also feel unsafe. We are sometimes labelled prostitutes (IIP2).

We are always accused for having affairs with male lecturers and female students when we go out for ZITCSA competitions (IIP3).

Some focus group discussants also commented:

My husband does not feel comfortable when I sleep in lodges or chalets during competitions held away from home. He fears that I may have sexual affairs with male lecturers and other men. Even my in-laws do not want me to participate in PES, especially in ZUSA where we camp away from home for a number of days (FGDP7). In my culture, going out for PES tournaments or competition with males, camping away from home for days, sleeping in lodges and chalets is associated with immorality (FGDP12).

In line with the above results, Kapasula (2010) states that it is society that holds the principles of democracy, which embodies the philosophy of inequality between males and females. The reason for female students' husbands and families to restrict their wives to attend away from home mega tournaments could be that husbands, brothers and fathers have protective and controlling mentalities that their daughters may be sexually abused and bring sexually transmitted diseases home. Such mentalities tend to have emanated from the African patriarchal culture that emphasises on *Hunhu or Ubuntu*, placing more value on the female than male child. The scenario of society being biased against the participation of female students in PES seems to have remained unshaken and in existence for decades. This is however, unfair for society seems to indirectly reveal that only female not male students should be protected and valued. In the context of this study, the other reason for families to restrict female students from camping for days away from home as they attend mega tournaments or games in PES appears to be society's way of preventing the spreading of HIV and AIDS and other diseases that are basically transmitted through sexual intercourse. What may not be well understood about the degree of protection for only female students is that HIV and AIDS can be transmitted to/by males and females? One then wonders why society tends to protect female students more than male students. Hence, such gendered and rationalised practices may suppress and limit female students' access to participate in PES to a large extent. What may be most interesting in the findings of this study is that male PES lecturers who accompany female students to these away from home tournaments were not spared by participants in this study for results tended to reveal that lecturers were accused by some parents, husbands and some of the female students themselves for having affairs with female students during the period they would be away from home. This may implies that issues of gender equity and cultural protection in the participation of female students in PES are taking long to be addressed for female students are still constricted and deprived of opportunities to be empowered and develop their self-esteem and efficacy. This scenario would hinder female students' contribution to the development of the economies of their countries for PES participation has the possibility of empowering them and their nations if they happen to excel.

In the traditional African culture, there is a belief that married women are not independent beings and they belong to men who are responsible for guiding and guarding their lives. This means that females are expected to take the receiving and not the initiating role in their families. Based on the results of this study, the fact that female students who attend away from home tournaments and games may be restricted from participating in PES by their husbands and families probably originates from long standing African cultural belief in most married men that their wives belong to them since they pay lobola before marriage and therefore the men and his entire family have control over the wife and permission to participate in PES should be approved by the husband and his family. For example, the traditional African Shona culture views a married woman as property owned by the husband. The present finding confirms Manyonganise's (2010) observation that in the African traditional Shona culture, a married man cannot function individually but with his family and society. What this means is that married tertiary female students should be conscious about issues concerning PES participation for they may result in serious accusations or even divorce.

Myths about Virginity and Sterility

On the issue of how myths about virginity and sterility influence tertiary female students' participation in PES, three out of four in-depth interview participants, who constitute the majority of the participants in this study, revealed that they were not enthusiastic to participate in PES for it leads to loss of virginity which could result to infertility. They also expressed that they were afraid of participating in PES because if they lost their virginity and fertility they would encounter marriage problems. Participants further revealed that their parents discouraged them to participate, indicating that if they did so, they would lose their virginity which they likened to loss of value in womanhood. Participants also revealed that parents sometimes barred them from participating in strenuous PES activities but allowed them to partake in light activities that did not involve jumping and wrestling. The following expressions are from in-depth interviewees:

*I belong to The Zimbabwean Shona culture which believes that if a virgin woman participates in PES she would lose her virginity and fertility. As a result of this I am not keen to participate for I have to protect myself as much as possible. I am afraid that if I lose virginity I would be rejected by my husband and members of his family at marriage. I am trying to avoid this embarrassing and disgraceful situation in my life (IIP3).
I am not motivated to participate in PES. I am scared of losing my virginity and fertility. It is all I have as a woman. Otherwise, no virginity and fertility means unsuccessful marriage (IIP1).*

My parents, especially my mother tends to guard against my virginity and fertility. She keeps on asking questions about the types of activities I participate in indicating that I should only participate in light activities and never in strenuous activities or else I would face the consequences of doing so. I take this to be good advice though frustrating at times (IIP2).

For example, the following focus group discussants revealed this in their utterances:

I belong to the traditional African Shona culture which believes that if a virgin woman participates in PES she damages her virginity and fertility and may face humiliation and rejection at marriage and because of this I am not willing to participate in hectic PES activities (FGDP13).

My mother keeps on emphasising that I would not get a good man to marry me if I lose virginity. I am only allowed to participate in light indoor activities such as chess and table tennis and barred from participating in all male dominated PES activities. (FGDP3).

The current findings are confirmed by literature from many authors worldwide who include Cahn in Davis & Weaving (2010), Daimon (2010), UN (2007), Huggins and Randell (2007) and Amusa et al., (1999) who tend to believe that inspite of lack of evidence from scientists and medical doctors, participation in PES for female students may cause life injuries to female reproductive organs, removing virginity and in some cases resulting in fertility problems at marriage. What is unfair about these results is that nothing seems to be said about maintaining manhood and issues of infertility at marriage. This implies that the female child is victimised by societal circumstances. The issue of parents barring female students' from participating in PES due to fear that their reproductive organs may be damaged has always come with various protective reasons. For example, in 1896, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics was cited in UN (2007:2) stating that no matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut to sustain certain shocks. The fact that gender stereotypes are still visible in PES today may mean that the historic influence of such great men may still be the reason why gender discrimination in PES participation has continued. The study also tends to reflect that society through parents still has the potential to disallow female students from participating in PES in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions. From the results of this study it may be inferred that cultural societies reinforces and rejuvenates bonds and therefore become a site of social reproduction where meanings are negotiated and maintained by the family members (Kapasula, 2010).

Cultural Societies Disallow Attire That Exposes Female Bodies

On how PES attire influences the participation of tertiary female students in PES, the findings of this study revealed that most participants who were involved in the in-depth interviews revealed that their cultural Shona society did not allow female students to wear the usual PES attire that exposed female bodies such as tights, shorts and gym skirts for it was taboo to do so. The findings further revealed that some female students were not allowed to participate in such attire for it would lure men. Some female students who participated in such attire revealed that they were very insecure to participate in attire that exposed parts of their bodies for if they do they would face serious consequences from their fathers and brothers and that would embarrass them. This resulted in lack of confidence and enthusiasm to participate in PES especially in front of their male counterparts. Participants also indicated that participating in such attire would also be a way of deviating from the marriage values female students are expected to meet by their cultural societies. One in-depth interviewer expressed this related discomfort, giving a reason for non-participation in PES:

In my traditional African Shona society, I am not expected to attempt to participate in PES attire such as tights, shorts, gym skirts and guvhu outs that expose my body for it is against my culture. It is taboo to do so (IIP4).

I am shy and lack confidence to participate in clothing that exposes my body for I know that my traditional Shona culture disapproves that. It is against my culture that believes that women should not wear clothes that expose their bodies for they would sexually arouse men (IIP2).

Twelve out of sixteen focus group discussants revealed similar sentiments on how PES attire for female students in tertiary institutions influence their participation in physical activities. The following are narrations of the predicaments from the focus group discussions.

I am not keen to participate in gym skirts that leave my thighs out because once I do that I will be likened to a prostitute for sexually attracting males. I am afraid of being humiliated by my societal members (FGDP10).

I don't want to embarrass myself and my parents by wearing tights and tops that expose my navel. If I do that I will lose the dignity of an ideal African woman (FGDP1).

The findings of this study revealed that, generally many cultures in Zimbabwe have negative influence on PES attire that expose female bodies and this appears to continue to hinder the participation of female students in PES in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions. It emerged in this study that most female students in tertiary institutions are not comfortable to participate in tights, gym skirts and tea-shirts that expose their bodies. The study further revealed that in the traditional Shona culture of Zimbabwe it is taboo for female students to wear clothing that does not cover the body properly. In relation to the results above, it may be resonated that disallowing tertiary female students to participate in such attire may be probably a way of preserving the Zimbabwean cultural norms and values on clothing. In the traditional Shona culture PES clothing for female students is still viewed along traditional gendered lines. The reason for that could be due to the fact that matters regarding modesty, nudity and gendered attire are expected to be instilled by cultural societies from birth to death. The other explanation for disallowing tertiary female students to participate in clothing that expose their bodies could be that, generally, Zimbabwean cultural leaders and the societies they lead chastise half nakedness to the extent that they openly shun individuals who wear attire that expose the navel commonly referred to as 'guvhu outs'. *Guvhu outs*, gym skirts and tights are associated with prostitution. It may be pinpointed that the reason for society to discourage tertiary female students to wear such PES clothes is possibly because it is believed to be a way of sexually arousing males, a habit that is common amongst many prostitutes. The study also revealed that the majority of the participants in this study indicated that they were shy and unenthusiastic to participate in PES attire that revealed parts of their bodies. The reason for this shyness among female students could be probably due to the fact that they felt bad because they were aware that participating in such attire was disapproved, and was therefore a way of violating societal norms, values and beliefs. The fact that the tertiary female students know that it is taboo in their society, to expose their bodies, would bring embarrassment, probably as a result of the fact that they were socialised to understand that any form of violation of cultural norms, values and beliefs would not only humiliate them but their parents and society at large. What this means is that the female students would again be aware that participation in PES in inappropriate attire would be disgraceful to an extent of not getting any interested men to marry them due to bad reputation. The present findings confirm Meier's (2005) observation that clothing that exhibit certain body parts during practical lessons prevent female students from being physically active for they fear that they may be rebuked and embarrassed. One wonders why many African cultural societies still treat females as victims of circumstances while males are at liberty in almost all spheres of life.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that female students' participation in PES is very low in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions. This is mainly because of cultural values that impede female involvement in PES. The situation is exacerbated by cultural norms and beliefs related to gender socialisation, myths on virginity and sterility and PES attire. Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations are made:

- There is need for universities and colleges to come up with campaign programs through workshops and seminars, case and road shows. The intention would be to sensitise diverse cultural societies of Zimbabwe to work towards addressing cultural issues related to gender socialisation, myths, taboos and beliefs, loss of virginity and sterility, PES attire and other gender stereotypes that restrict and disadvantage tertiary female students from participating in PES. This would also help to create societal awareness on the need to adjust on cultural traditions that tend to have a strong influence on marriage during the socialisation process of the girl child. When gender stereotypes of this nature are addressed, gender parity, equality and access in PES would be enhanced.
- There is need for Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education to design gender policies that demystify placing females in the home and attaching them to household chores. Such demystification would help in removing socially constructed cultural ideologies that tend to have seriously hampered the participation of female students in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. This would also help to bring a paradigm shift in the way cultural societies socialise children, regardless of their sex, in preparation for PES participation in later life.
- Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education to come up with strategic programs that deal with legal actions that enhance the rights and status of women through regulatory and legal processes essential for the elimination of cultural beliefs, norms and values based on *Unhu/ ubuntu* that restrict female students from exercising their rights and potential to participate in PES. This would be a way of reducing unnecessary pressures amongst female student participants as well as controlling cultural societies that practise discriminatory habits that discourage female students from participating in PES. Such a move would also possibly help to dilute the diverse cultural perceptions of societies in Zimbabwe which seem to have a serious negative historic influence on the participation of tertiary female students in PES.

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