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The mediating effects of family on sport in international development contexts

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Abstract

The role of family in influencing sports behaviour is widely recognised. This paper extends this body of knowledge by examining how the family influences young people's responses to sport programmes operating in international development contexts. Recognising the central role of the family as a social institution, the paper highlights the cultural significance and specificity of the family, and the importance of this to sport programmes which aim to foster social change. Drawing on empirical data from studies in India, Zambia and Brazil, the multiple and contradictory roles that families play in relation to three sport programmes are analysed. It is shown that while families may support and even extend the positive impact of programmes, they might equally resist them, and in some cases may even be a source of the problems that such initiatives seek to alleviate. The paper concludes that locating young people's experiences of and responses to sport within their family context is an important step in developing a better understanding of the social and cultural environment within which international development programmes operate.

Keywords: international development; sport; family; parenting; social change; poverty

Introduction

This paper examines how families can mediate young people's responses to sport programmes operating in international development settings. The use of sport to achieve social outcomes is widespread, both in western contexts and in international development ones. In 'western' societies sport is employed to further a variety of equity, diversity and inclusion agendas, such as the integration of recent immigrant groups (Krouwel et al., 2006; Gasparini and Vieille-Marchiset, 2008) and the engagement of disaffected youth (Sandford et al., 2006; Spaaij, 2009). In the less affluent countries of the Majority World, it is harnessed in support of the Millennium Development goals, contributing to global efforts to raise education levels and reduce exposure to health risks in some of the poorest communities in the world (e.g. Donnelly et al., 2007; Coalter, 2007). Sport is therefore being used in very diverse social, cultural, economic and political contexts yet with an overarching aim of facilitating social change. Researchers studying such programmes seek understanding of whether such change takes place, and what influences this. In this paper, our purpose is to consider why 'family' has central significance to this process.

Our interest in family has been stimulated by our experiences of researching the use of sport in international development work in South America (Brazil), sub-Saharan Africa (Zambia) and South Asia (India). These studies have made us aware of the immediate practical influence that families have on how young people respond to sport programmes operating in international development contexts. Project personnel with whom we have worked consider families crucial to programme success, and emphasise that young people only participate if family members (especially parents) allow them to. The logistical difficulties of accessing family members means, however, that research has seldom addressed this important influence. This paper therefore examines why researchers can benefit from studying in more detail how families affect young people's responses to sport programmes.

Addressing the role of families has an additional benefit for researchers studying sport in international development contexts. Family is the key social institution through which culture is constructed and mediated, and within which social values are translated into social practice (Georgas, 2006; Smith, 1995). By considering family context, researchers can locate young people's response to sport within a wider understanding of their social and cultural environment. Developing

culturally-specific knowledge of this sort is especially important to understanding how sport may contribute to core international development agendas that aim to change social relations, such as those promoting the empowerment of young women. Including ‘family’ within studies of sport in international development may therefore contribute to the development of more culturally appropriate research (Kay, 2009).

In this paper we first discuss the significance of family as a social institution through which culture is (re)produced, and the implications of this for social relations. We then present empirical evidence of how family influence affects young people’s engagement with sport programmes in international development contexts. Throughout we adopt terminology that reflects our concerns to: (i) recognise the autonomy of the recipient countries of international development aid, and their status as partners in, rather than objects of, ‘development’; (ii) acknowledge the positioning of sport within the wider field of international development work; and (iii) recognise the diversity, complexity and fluidity of the cultural contexts within which such programmes operate.

Firstly, at the macro level the term ‘Majority World’ is used to refer to countries in the ‘developing’ or underdeveloped world and the term ‘Minority World’ to refer to the western or ‘developed’ world where the minority of the world population live. The phrasing reminds us that the former constitute by far the majority of the world’s population and possess rich cultural traditions that are in some cases more widely upheld globally than those of westernised states. The terms Majority World and Minority World can of course unduly homogenise both world regions and imply simplistic distinctions that are problematic. However, the distinction at least invites reflection on the unequal relations, differences and resemblances between them (Punch, 2007: 277) and on the importance of these in underpinning the multiple and contradictory roles that families play in relation to sport programmes operating in international development contexts.

Secondly, in describing the use of sport within international development work, we avoid the phrase ‘sport-in-development programmes’ as being primarily associated with programmes specifically focussed on sport and led by sports organisations. Referring to ‘sport in the context of international development’ draws attention to the other arrangements under which sport is incorporated in development work – e.g. when adopted by transnational organisations such as UNICEF as one form of provision among many, or incorporated by indigenous organisations into an

established programme of work, as in the case of the NAZ Foundation referred to in this paper. Finally, in relation to ‘family’ itself, it is recognised that although family is a universal and necessary institution for human survival in all societies in both the Minority and Majority Worlds (Georgas, 2006; Hennon and Wilson, 2008), family structures and practices vary according to a range of factors such as class, gender, age and culture in both worlds. This recognition of diversity underpins the narrative that follows.

The family as an influence on responses to sport in international development contexts

The family is a central social institution: some form of organisation based on parentage and marriage is present in every historical and contemporary human society (Georgas, 2006; Hennon and Wilson, 2008). Like other social scientists, sports researchers have long acknowledged how significant families can be in influencing young people’s behaviour (e.g. Greendorfer and Lewko, 1978; Spaaij and Anderson, 2010). Families may foster youth participation in sport and provide the practical support their offspring require to be able to participate and progress; conversely, they may constrain participation by withholding support, whether through choice or necessity. Families are also important as conduits through which structural constraints to sport are transmitted: the likelihood of young people participating in sport correlates highly with family characteristics such as family structure and socio-economic status (Kay, 2003). Overall, the family is rightly regarded as a crucial influence on young people’s involvement with sport.

The family may be particularly significant when sport programmes have broader social aims. In the wider social sciences, family is recognised as central to the process through which young people may be able to escape social and economic disadvantage (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1997). In Europe, young people’s social mobility is affected by the interaction of family context with wider socio-cultural influences and there is a substantial wage penalty associated with growing up in a less-educated family (Padoan, 2010: 183).

Families also influence outcomes for young people in international development contexts (Buchmann and Hannum, 2001), as do other key agencies of socialization including schools and peers. As in the Minority World, however, it is

inappropriate to generalise about 'family' across all Majority World countries. Research into the effects of family on educational stratification shows considerable variations between countries (Buchmann and Hannum, 2001). In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, children with academic promise may move to households in the wider kinship network to gain access to higher quality schools (Lloyd and Blanc, 1996); elsewhere, however, families can affect young people's access to education very negatively. Strobbe et al. (2010) found that youth in families affected by HIV/AIDS often take on a heavy burden of responsibilities within the home, reducing access to schooling and leading to a breakdown in the intergenerational transfer of knowledge.

The family is therefore crucial in affecting young people's life chances. As a key social institution it is regulated by political, legal and religious institutions which reflect the prevailing consensus on what family life 'should' be. This makes families culturally specific and central to individual and collective social practice. Family relationships are however complex and fluid, and are created through everyday behaviours that overlap and interact with those related to gender, generation, class and ethnicity (Morgan, 1996). Cultural orientations and values are formed within families, establishing expectations and ideologies that underpin wider social relationships. This positions family as central to the processes of social change with which many sport programmes and researchers are concerned.

In Minority World countries family forms increasingly diverge across social classes and cultural groups, yet the prevailing concept continues to be that of a household structured primarily around the nuclear unit, consisting of children living with their (biological) parents. Couples are expected to form independent households on marriage and have relatively limited responsibilities to the extended family. The biological relationship between a parent and a child is regarded as paramount in defining responsibilities for child rearing, which is directed towards nurturing independence and autonomy in children. The nuclear model, based on an ideology of individualisation, retains wide currency in countries where people of European heritage make up the majority of populations and dominate the institutions that codify 'family'.

This contrasts with the 'collectivist' family ideologies and practices popularly associated with in much of the Majority World (Kim et al., 1994). As in the Minority World, however, Majority World family structures and orientations have been affected by the political, economic and cultural shifts of the modernisation project and

are marked by great cross-cultural variation (Hennon and Wilson, 2008). The professional classes in emerging commercial urban centres increasingly reproduce many of the characteristics of western family life. In Sudan, for instance, where families traditionally consist of two or three generations with siblings living side by side and sharing domestic duties and economic responsibilities, a large proportion of families in the cities are now based on the nuclear family unit (El Hassan Al Awad and Sonuga-Barke, 1992).

Notwithstanding these developments, collectivist values systems remain dominant among many Majority World populations, with family membership less narrowly and rigidly defined than in western societies (McDonald-Wilmsen and Gifford, 2009: 2). A wider network of relationships is recognised in family membership, and even persons unrelated by blood or marriage may be classed as members of a family (Georgas, 2006). As part of this fluidity, the practice of ‘social’ (as opposed to biological) parenting is widespread; children may address several adult relatives as ‘father’ or ‘mother’ regardless of precise biological relationship (Mkhize, 2006), and many children are reared by multiple care-giving figures whom they have only a distant (or no) blood relationship. This contrasts with western expectations that biological parents should have sole responsibility for child rearing and is reflected in the African saying, ‘it takes a village to raise a child’.

This orientation to family as a wide system of reciprocal social relations requires children to be instilled with respect towards older generations. Collectivist ideologies therefore tend to value a high level of authority exerted by parents over children (especially girls), obedience by children to their parents, and the suppression of individual self-interest by family members in favour of advancing the collective family status and well-being. This potentially raises an issue for development programmes which pursue individualised outcomes – such as equity programmes which aim to empower disadvantaged individuals by building their self-confidence and encouraging them to recognise and assert their individual rights. Gains in terms of personal development may be offset by disruption to social relations: in her analysis of a girls’ football initiative in Kenya, Saavedra (2009), for example, makes reference to participants using football as an excuse to avoid meeting their responsibilities to their families. The priority many sport programmes attach to individual development may be more in keeping with the Minority World cultures from which they originate than the collectivist culture of the communities in which they operate.

Families are especially significant in underpinning gender relations, in both Minority and Majority Worlds. In most collectivist cultures gender roles are strongly differentiated and females have low status. This reflects not just prevalent social mores, but deep-rooted differences in concepts of kinship that underpin the family 'system' in its entirety, described in Murdock's (1949) landmark discussion of 'unilineal' and 'cognatic' kinship, and later developed by authors such as Ember and Ember (2002). The majority of societies, including India and China, follow unilineal descent systems, which are almost universally based on descent through the male sex only. This means that females are not members of a household in their own right, but only through virtue of their relationship to a male (e.g. as a father's daughter or a husband's wife). By way of contrast, people of European ancestry follow the principles of 'cognatic' kinship (descent through both sexes) which accords greater status to women and has greater compatibility with ideologies of gender equity. Cognatic principles are however followed by only 30 per cent of the world's cultures. The wider-spread unilineal descent systems present a deep-rooted, culturally embedded obstacle to gender equity that is continually reinforced in the daily social relations acted out in family life, and may present a formidable obstacle to sport programmes that promote gender equity.

Differences in family ideologies and structures are further reinforced by differences in the functions which families perform in contrasting cultural contexts. In non-industrial contexts, families and kinship networks commonly have a wider array of functions than in westernised societies. Families and communal relationships are of particular significance in low-income countries where there are no formal social welfare mechanisms to address problems arising out of income inequalities:

The family, kinship relationships and religious groups therefore act as redistributive mechanisms, as well as means of promoting interpersonal relations and the social identity of individual members (Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1997: 423)

In many Majority World communities, families have substantial responsibilities for the well-being of their members, further enforcing collectivism in family life. In contrast, in Minority World countries the market and the state have usurped many traditional family functions, reinforcing the progressive shift from a 'collective' to an

‘individualist’ orientation (Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1997). For most westerners, the role of the contemporary family is therefore relatively narrow in comparison to other times and cultures.

International development work which uses sport to foster social change cannot be examined in isolation from their wider social context. We have discussed above how this context is mediated through family, which shapes much of the practical and socio-cultural environment within which young people respond to sport. It is therefore valuable for researchers to contextualise young people’s behaviour within a culturally-specific understanding of their family context. We now examine empirical evidence of the types of influence that families can exert on young people’s responses to sport programmes.

Procedures

The empirical analysis that follows illustrates different ways in which family influence can shape young people’s responses to sport programmes in international development contexts. The examples are drawn from three separate studies conducted between 2008 and 2010. Using qualitative data from different sources to inform an overarching analysis clearly raises a number of issues, but has become more common with the wider use of qualitative evidence to inform policy and practice. Methods have been developed “to bring ... findings together for a wide audience: methods that preserve and respect the essential context and complexity of qualitative research, but which are not bound by it” (Thomas and Harden, 2007: 5).

Many techniques that allow qualitative studies to be combined involve re-analysis of original data – for example meta-ethnography (Noblit and Hare, 1988) and thematic synthesis (Thomas and Harden, 2008). This approach has been criticised however as threatening to ‘both de-contextualise findings and wrongly imply that they are commensurable’ (Thomas and Harden, 2007: 4). This concern has particular relevance to data collected in different cultural contexts, as in this paper. In these circumstances data synthesis would not be appropriate and in our analysis we therefore retain the separateness of our studies, using each to provide a single example of a key theme.

The case studies were conducted with three sports programmes: Vencer in Brazil, GOAL in India and EduSport/Sport in Action in Zambia. The case study is a

research strategy which focuses on understanding the real-life dynamics present within single settings (Yin, 1994). Each case was sought to be understood individually and in as much depth as possible. The findings of each case study were compared to those of the others in order to strengthen and reflect on the case study results and to make the interpretations and explanations more robust (Yin, 1994). Table 1 overviews the research methods used in the three studies; full detail of the research methodologies can be found in the references listed.

The case studies provide evidence of three ways in which families can influence young people's response to sport programmes: as a source of problems to be addressed, a source of resistance to the programme, or as a contributor to programme aims. In their original forms, each case study provided detailed insight into the multiple ways in which family affect young people's responses to a sports programme. In each, all three forms of family influence were in evidence. As it is not possible to capture this complexity in the space available here, our present analysis employs the studies more selectively, with each used to illustrate just *one* of the three forms of family influence. This more focussed approach allows the analysis to be located within a discussion of the relevant cultural context and the nature of family life within it. This does not imply that each study only provided evidence of the issue it is used to illustrate here; for the purpose of the current analysis, however, we find it most appropriate to present the data in this format.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Findings

Our empirical studies indicate three ways in which families directly influence responses to sport in international development contexts (Table 2):

1. Families themselves are often the source of the *problems* that are being addressed, either inadvertently or deliberately;
2. Families may *resist* young people's participation in sport in development initiatives;

3. Families may *support* young people's participation in sport in development initiatives.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

The following analysis looks in turn at the family as a source of problems, resistance and support. Illustrating each of these themes through a single country example allows us to locate our analysis of the role of the family within a specific social and cultural context. The *Zambian* research provides an example of the family as a source of problems; the work in *Brazil* shows the family as a source of resistance; and the study in *India* illustrates the family as a source of support.

Families as source of 'problems': a *Zambian* example

Family life among low-income groups in *Zambia* has significant implications for young people's well-being. As in most African nations, the majority of *Zambia's* population practices a collectivist form of family: membership is wider and roles less tightly defined than in Western societies. Typically, an extended family comprises a large network of connections among people from multiple generations and of varying degrees of relationship, spread over a wide geographic area, and bound to each other through reciprocal obligations (Foster, 2000). These networks have traditionally acted as social security systems, providing protection and care for the vulnerable and sick (Strobbe et al., 2010). This function has been dramatically undermined, however, by the combined effects of poverty, malaria and the HIV-AIDS pandemic, which have reduced life expectancy to circa 39 (UNAIDS, 2008). More than one in seven adults in the country is living with HIV, and despite heavy investment in HIV prevention programmes, prevalence rates have remained more or less stable since the nineties and are as high as 25 per cent in some urban areas (Government Republic of *Zambia*, 2010).

Young people's experience of their families varies widely; many of our interviewees in *Zambia* identified their families as their source of comfort and moral guidance, through which they are able to lead a 'good', principled life. For some, however, experiences are more negative. 'Family' was frequently identified by workers in sport, education and community work as contributing to three particular

problems in the lives of young people: poverty and its consequences; lack of parenting; and abuse of children within the home.

Poverty

Family experience of poverty circumscribed young people's lives. It was common for children to be required to earn income for their family:

Because most of the parents that stay in Chawama most of them don't work, they depend on selling things at the market so they use their children to raise money. (Head teacher, Zambia)

Families were often unable to support their children's education, undermining a key strategy to address the HIV-AIDS pandemic:

It is dependent on the parent if they can afford or not afford, there is no punishment for a parent who is not taking a child to school, it is up to the parent. Some communities though the poverty levels are high and they cannot take their children to school. (NGO staff member, Zambia)

In some cases, poverty could drive families to extreme measures:

Then there are some parents, they encourage children to do prostitution because maybe that is where they raise money, that type of things. This really happens here within the community. They are bread and butter through prostitution. Those are some of the problems that we face. (Head teacher, Zambia)

These examples indicate how deeply a family's socio-economic status can affect children's immediate living conditions and long-term life chances.

Lack of parenting

Despite the tradition of collectivist child rearing, low adult life expectancy meant that many children lack secure homes. HIV-AIDS has been a major contributor:

Because of the HIV pandemic many children are running their lives on their own so that is why there are a lot of children on the streets. Nuclear family now is not here because a lot of children have no parents... (NGO staff, Zambia)

The impact of this form of family breakdown has particular significance for girls who take over caring roles in the family and are less likely to attend school:

You find girls of about 12 years old are heading families because everyone else has died, so if there is a boy and a girl the boy will go to school but the girl will have to look after the family at home. (NGO staff, Zambia)

These unstable family environments present both practical and emotional problems for children. In this context, workers delivering sport programmes saw their central contribution as providing the adult role models that young people lacked:

We want our people to be aware [that] sometimes they might be the highest influence on that child's life and they have to act like a parent and a guardian. Give them the love that the children don't have. (NGO staff, Zambia)

Child abuse

The problem of sexual abuse of children in Africa is well-documented (e.g. Mulikita et al., 2005) and was frequently referred to by interviewees. Girls' subordinate position made them vulnerable to abuse within their own families:

The girls are the most affected by HIV-AIDS, a woman has no say in sex. A girl child is also abused in that way, many children are abused by relatives ... they will be abused by relatives in the home and when it is in the home it is dealt with at a family level, normally it would go to court but the family

wouldn't want that they would not want to break up the family. (EduSport staff, Zambia)

Summary: the family as a source of problems for development

In all cultural contexts and global regions, impoverished family environments increase the likelihood of negative outcomes for children (Seccombe, 2000). In the context of sport programmes, this means that families may be a significant source of the very problems such programmes are seeking to alleviate. The three examples above illustrate how this can occur. The impacts of *poverty* go beyond material deprivation, with poor living conditions often generating higher levels of stress and lower educational and occupational attainment (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1997). The extreme circumstances of some very poor families may even directly expose children to HIV risk through prostitution. *Lack of parenting* can occur when parents are absent, or unable to provide support for their children. Repetti et al.'s (2002) concept of 'risky families', characterised by overt family conflict, deficient nurturing, and family relationships that are unsupportive and neglectful, is instructive in this regard. The significance of *child abuse* and violence occurring within families is self-evident: abused children have higher rates of developmental delays and, as adults, exhibit impaired social behaviour and more social adjustment problems (e.g. Abdulrehman and De Luca, 2001).

Families as obstacles to sport in international development contexts: a Brazilian example

The great diversity of social and family contexts in Brazil is well recognised (Torres and Dessen, 2006; Afonso, 2008). The typical family household in Brazil consists of parents and children, but in many cases this is not the isolated nuclear unit familiar to many in the Minority World. When poor Brazilians speak of 'family' they usually mean a large extended kin group, which consists of maternal and paternal relatives and in-laws. Many Brazilian families in deprived urban areas are characterised by extended membership and a wide range of family functions (e.g. Goldstein, 2003).

The extent to which families encourage young people to participate in sport programmes varies greatly. There are several reasons that may lead to negative valuing

of programme participation. Our research with the Vencer programme in poor neighbourhoods in Rio de Janeiro reveals three particular issues: family pressure on children to raise income or to fulfil domestic caring duties; families' low educational attainment; and downward levelling pressures.

Children required as earners or domestic carers

Poor Brazilian families usually experience family relationships which reflect pressing economic needs (Torres and Dessen, 2006: 266). Children are commonly required to participate in activities to maintain the family, including paid labour and domestic tasks. Families may resist participation in sport programmes because short-term needs are more pressing, as also noted in the Zambian example. The Vencer study illustrates the significance of such pressures:

In our community [the expectation] is to work from an early age. ... At home I experienced the situation, not having gas and my mother not having money to buy it, wanting to eat bread today but there was no bread ... So there are young people who see this and start working to help out, while in other cases the parents tell them to work. (Female Vencer participant, Brazil)

Vencer staff indicated that family pressure to earn money from an early age may be greater for young males than for young females, with the latter often performing domestic tasks. Several female participants in the programme played a central role in their family households, which at times interfered with their ability to attend classes.

Low educational attainment

Closely related to economic pressures are families' particular investment strategies. Poor families may value education as a means for social mobility, but their everyday needs largely circumscribe their investment in children's education: 'The discourse of the families is that their children study but in practice the family wants them to work' (Vencer coordinator, Brazil). Family strategies tend to be focussed on short-term needs rather than on long-term returns:

Often these children, when they are 10, 11 or 12 years old, they have already superseded the educational attainment of their parents. Many of the parents live entirely in the present. The idea of going to university for four years and to only start a career afterwards doesn't make sense to them, like, 'how do people live until then?' (Vencer educator, Brazil)

Educational activities may thus be regarded as a luxury that many families cannot afford. As a consequence, parents may discourage children from participating in sport programmes. This can have a direct impact on young people's responses to such programmes:

In our last group we had a relatively large number of drop-outs. We began with 66 young people and ended with 50. Of those who dropped out of the program, at least 50 per cent did so under pressure of their families. Some of them fought really hard and negotiated with their families because they wanted to stay. (Vencer coordinator, Brazil)

Another aspect of this is families' limited experience with the education system, which can present obstacles for youth who want to immerse themselves in new learning environments:

They don't have that experience in their families. They never saw their father read the newspaper and look for job ads. And they have never seen someone talk about the tests you need to pass ... (Vencer director, Brazil)

Downward levelling pressures

Family relationships may also exert downward levelling pressures on younger family members who want to get ahead in life through sport programmes that offer developmental opportunities. For example, they may characterise young people's efforts as fruitless or as a threat to solidarity and their own sense of self-respect. In these instances, close family relationships do not increase human capital but prevent acquiring it (Portes and Landolt, 1996). The following example illustrates the significance of such pressures:

Once we had a boy [in the Vencer programme] who was upset because his father told him that he was their worst son because he didn't help him and only wanted to study. [The boy] ... wanted to study to change the cycle. He wanted to have more salary and take [his family members] from the *favela* and change their lives. Two of his brothers are in jail because of involvement in drugs. He wants to be different, but his father says that he is the worst, that he is useless. (NGO director, Brazil)

Summary: the family as obstacles to development

The examples from the Brazilian case study illustrate how family environments can be resistant to sport programmes in international development contexts. Precarious living conditions can produce a situation in which *children are required as earners or domestic carers* from an early age. We can see here an intergenerational reproduction of economic disadvantage and *low educational attainment*, with poor young people often lacking the educational qualifications to obtain well-paid employment (Gacitúa Marió and Woolcock, 2008). *Downward levelling pressures* may further discourage young people from participating in sport programmes. However, these issues are very much class-based issues (Goldstein, 2003; Afonso, 2008) that also affect low income families in the Minority World; in other words, they are by no means exclusive unique to poor Brazilian families or to the Majority World. In the next section, we examine how families can also be contributors to sport programmes in international development contexts.

Families as contributors to sport in development initiatives: an example from India

India, like many eastern states, has traditionally been a collectivist society. The family is its central social institution and provides the context within which the essential themes of cultural life are learnt. Indian families are characterised by hierarchical relationships between family members, interwoven with patriarchy, producing a society strongly marked by gender inequity (Newbiggin, 2010). This has become the focus of many international development initiatives including those involving sport.

The basic units of Indian society are the patrilineal family unit, consisting of men related through the male line and their wives and children, and wider kinship groupings. The preferred residential unit is the joint family, ideally consisting of three or four patrilineally related generations sharing accommodation and cooperating in mutually beneficial social and economic activities. When relatives cannot live in close proximity, they typically still maintain strong bonds of kinship and attempt to provide each other with economic help, emotional support, and other benefits. Loyalty to the extended family thus continues to be a deeply held ideal for almost everyone.

Relationships within families tend to be strongly gendered, placing lower value and considerable constraints on females. Girls are socialized from an early age to be self-sacrificing (Mullatti, 1995), and wives are expected to be dependent, compliant and non-assertive. In comparison to men, women are more vulnerable to poverty and poor health, have low levels of education and access to the labour market, and limited social and economic resources (e.g. Sinha, 2003; Chanana, 2004). Among poor women, female literacy levels are low and domestic violence widespread.

Attempts to address gender inequity in India have immediate implications for family practices, and may face strong resistance. If, however, families become receptive to such change, the close-knit and collectivist nature of the family unit can reinforce and even extend positive programme impacts. The research conducted with the GOAL sports programme in India shows how this may occur. This short account shows how the young women became more assertive within their own families; how families share the knowledge their daughters gain; and how this may contribute to a wider shift in gender relations.

Young women's positions within the family

Several young women reported that their family relationships had altered as a result of their involvement in GOAL. They were now able to express and assert themselves:

I have developed my communication skills which helps me put across what I want to put across. For example with my family, I have certain aspirations within myself that I could never express. But now I have mastered communication skills and all, I could bring it forward. (Participant, Deepalaya)

The local School Principal noted how important this could be for young women:

... girls are not given that much of importance and their views are not given adequate weighting. So now at least they know how to assert their rights, they know how to speak within their family and be heard which I think is a step in the right direction. They can be very active decision makers in the long run in the families. (School principal, Deepalaya)

Disseminating knowledge to and through family

Parental acceptance of the programme allowed the young women to share the knowledge they obtained:

Whatever we learn [at GOAL], we go and share it with our families, our mothers and brothers and sisters, so even if they are unaware of other things, they get the knowledge. (Participant, Deepalaya)

Contributing to cultural change

Sharing knowledge has the potential to contribute to cultural change by re-educating older and younger generations. The School Principal had observed parents in the community increasingly realising the importance of educating their daughters:

[This is happening because] before, education was not something that appealed to these people, they wanted their children to work 'cos that was a helping hand, helping with younger brother and sisters or getting children married off. But now people are gradually understanding the value of education, over a period you see the difference that education brings about, so gradually it is coming into the understanding of the parents, so I see major change. (School Principal, Deepalaya)

The girls reported how some of the immediate constraints around them were loosening:

...now the scenario has changed, because they have seen the changes in me, the way I talk, I am active, my laziness has gone. And now my father says, “Don’t worry I will not get you married off. Go ahead” (Participant, Deepalaya)

Our mother says ‘I could never study, I never got the opportunity, but I don’t want that to happen with you, I want you to go on in life and make it big’. (Participant, Aali Gaon)

The GOAL educators were under no illusions that the programme would dramatically change the girls’ futures. They believed however that it could contribute to gradual cultural change:

We always have to think, you know, where are we taking them? I don’t see them becoming professional netball players, because I know they can’t reach that. I don’t see them being in the corporate world, doing a corporate job, because somewhere down the line in one or two years they will get married. But, the changes we are looking for ... [are] sharing the information, passing the information, bringing about the change, when they have daughters, or sons, you know? ... they being mothers, who have the knowledge, [they will] share it. That is what we are about, the chain is broken. (GOAL Project Manager)

Summary: the family as contributors to development

The GOAL research suggests that, when families are supportive, progress towards development objectives may occur. The impact of GOAL depended on the families of the young women responding positively to their daughters becoming more articulate and assertive, allowing them to occupy more influential *positions within the family*, and disseminate the knowledge they obtained *to and through family members*. As families began to value their daughters obtaining education, they adjusted their expectations, potentially contributing to *cultural change* concerning in gender roles and relations. Obtaining family support is particularly significant to gender empowerment projects; as McCallum (2006: 8) warns, ‘simple statements about the need to empower women and build their skills [often] ignore the complexity of gender

relations, the reality of power imbalances and the long hard work involved in shifting entrenched cultural norms.’

Discussion: directions for future research

This paper has demonstrated that ‘family’ is diverse in its ideologies and practices, yet universal in its importance to young people. For sport programmes pursuing wide-ranging social objectives in international development contexts, the family is particularly significant for its role in defining the basis on which social relations are constructed. This needs to be better recognised in research into the ability of sport to engender social change.

This paper provides empirical examples of ways in which young people’s negotiation of sport is affected by and mediated through family relationships. The examples show that families are significant to sport initiatives in multiple ways, from being a source of the very problems that programmes seek to address, to providing resistance or support for young people’s participation in them. In addition, the nature of family in the communities under studies emphasises the particular significance of family to sport programmes when these are operating in international development contexts. The families in the case studies displayed the structures and ideologies that predominate – although are by no means universal – in Majority World countries: an orientation to collectivism rather than individualism, extended rather than nuclear family structures, and wide-ranging rather than relatively narrow functions, especially in relation to providing welfare protection in the absence of state mechanisms for doing so. Taken together, these characteristics mean that the family is a central social institution, significant not only in the private domain but in wider economic and cultural life. The omission of the family in research into sport in international development contexts therefore means that the base unit of social relations is excluded from analyses that purport to address how sport may engender social change.

Addressing this omission is a complex task. It requires a research effort of markedly greater sophistication than the exploratory investigation offered here, which indicates that family is significant but does not examine the intra-family processes through which its influence is exerted. In particular, in focusing on broad characteristics that distinguish the institution of family in different cultural contexts, we have not addressed the issues of diversity among families within a shared cultural

context. Within the field of family studies, however, analysts highlight that variations in ideologies and practices exist both between and within families. Lareau (2003), for example, has examined class-based variations among families in the United States, noting that key elements of family life cohere such that there is a cultural logic to child rearing and clearly identifiable class differences in the way parents go about this. Reay's (1998) work provides an illustration of how this may affect interaction with policy and formal institutions. Focusing on British parents' engagement with education systems, she distinguishes different types of maternal relationships to school/education that reflect class structures. Reay also highlights variation *within* the family unit – in particular, the gendered differential in expectations and responsibilities between mothers and fathers. Indeed, addressing variation within families is a further element that needs to be a central component of analysis of the role of family in sport and development.

In summary, we argue for the inclusion of the 'family factor' in analyses of young people's responses to sport programmes operating in international development contexts. Restricted to secondary analyses of existing datasets, our approach has inevitably been insufficiently gendered and class-informed. At a conceptual-analytical level, we suggest however that young people's responses to sport programmes in development contexts will depend not only on the ways in which programmes are delivered, but also on how they are experienced and interpreted within, and mediated through, young people's family environments. The diverse forms of family influence are crucial to revealing the complexities, contradictions and ambiguities of young people's sports experiences.

Finally, focusing on family highlights the need to understand individuals' responses to sport in relation to the social and cultural contexts in which they occur, and requires researchers to move beyond the individual level of analysis to address the wider context of sport in development initiatives. Somewhat paradoxically for a policy area that aspires to deliver cross-cultural benefit, the cultural underpinning of sport-for-development research has rarely been addressed. We suggest that such research should adopt a wide lens in which individuals' experiences can be appropriately located; without this, the social impact of these initiatives cannot be properly understood.

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Table 1: Three studies of sport in development programmes

Programme	Location	Methods	Period	Reference
EduSport and Sport in Action	Lusaka, Zambia	Participant ($n = 54$) interviews and focus groups, and stakeholder interviews ($n = 22$)	2006-2007	Kay et al., 2008
Vencer	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Participant and stakeholder interviews ($n = 96$) and surveys ($n = 249$), participant observation	2008-2009	Spaij, 2011
GOAL	Deepalaya and Aali Gaon, India	Participant ($n = 31$) and stakeholder interviews ($n = 7$)	2008	Kay et al., 2008

Table 2: The influence of family in sport in international development contexts

Dimension	Illustrative practical impacts	Illustrative attitudes/values
The family as context	Structure/size/composition Living/household arrangements Marriage practices Gender practices Family role in community	Collectivism v. individualism Ideology of parenting Inter-generational relationships Gender ideology
Families as source of problems	Poverty Lack of parenting/caring Violence against children Child abuse	Not valuing the child Gendered household roles Unstable/neglectful family relationships
Families as obstacles	Children required as earners Children required as domestic carers Adults have low educational attainment Adults lack institutional knowledge Downward levelling pressures	Resistance to change Not valuing education or sport Resistance to education
Families as contributors	Permitting/encouraging participation Attending parent/family activities Contributing to delivery Learning from children Influencing wider community	'Receptive to change' Valuing child's development