Trans women and/in sport: Exploring sport feminisms to understand exclusions

Abstract

This paper explores past and present conceptual aspects of sport feminisms to understand trans women and/in sport. The adverse treatment of trans sportswomen now runs through governing bodies, sport media, individuals who are in decision-making roles, policy formation, and public social attitude. The move to exclude and/or restrict trans women from sport is apparent at national and international levels and demonstrates shifts in sport policy. The aim of the paper is to explore past and present developments in sport feminism to highlight the value of its dynamism to explain, critique, and challenge the current treatment of trans women athletes. The paper highlights the need to further develop, within sport sociology, a de-colonial transfeminism. De-colonial in this context involves post-colonial feminism, black feminism and queer of color critical approaches.

Introduction

Recently, several key international and national governing bodies of sport changed their publicly available, documented policies to announce the ban and/or restriction of trans women's participation alongside cisgender women. For example, the contemporary policy changes made by World Rugby, World Athletics and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (see Harper, 2022), and specifically the banning of trans women from World Athletics events (31st March 2023). As a consequence of these alterations in policy, there appears to be sport-by-sport (e.g., World Aquatics) and national (e.g., UK Sport, National Collegiate Athletic Association NCAA, British Rowing) repercussions involving a re-thinking and re-writing of transgender policy. It might be that the domino effect is not yet complete and that we witness further policy formation that excludes trans women from sport.

Reaching back twenty years, in 2004 when the IOC introduced the Stockholm Consensus on sex reassignment surgery, trans women were accepted within sport, albeit based on a medical model of listed conditions (Cavanagh and Skyes 2006, Sykes 2006). Even since the update of the Stockholm Consensus in 2015, 'the policy direction had been to allow trans and non-binary women to participate as woman

athletes' (Burke, 2022, p.1). It did seem that '[p]olicy changes and an increasing number of publicly out trans athletes in elite sport signal a trend toward inclusion and acceptance of trans people' (Karaçam, 2022, p. 5). However, in 2020 and 2021, social attitude and policy formation began to shift. Given this shift, it is important to consider related processes occurring outside of the sporting arena. For example, specific to the UK, the 2004 Gender Recognition Act (GRA) 'had been significant in enabling trans people to change their birth certificates to their acquired gender without the requirement of surgical interventions' (Hines, 2020, p. 699). In 2018, the UK Government published their consultation on the reform of the GRA. The aim of the consultation process was to make 'it easier for transgender people to achieve legal recognition' (https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9079/); activism and campaigns that called for the right to self-identify, and therefore include non-binary and gender diverse people, were presented and considered during the consultation. However, it was decided in 2020 that there would be no reform to include self-identification.

What is apparent is that there is a backlash to increasingly visible trans activism, and contemporary endeavour for trans equality law (Pearce, Erikainen & Vincent, 2020). The debates have caught the lens of the media; mediated often-hostile coverage of single-sex services and single-sex spaces are now familiar in the UK and elsewhere with writers referring to transgender moral panics to explain the backlash (Mestre, 2022; Miles, 2022; Pepin-Neff & Cohen 2021). This socio-cultural populist context, including a move to the far right (Butler, 2021), has been viewed as influencing anti-trans policy and practice within sport (Hines, 2020; Itani, 2020). For example, in the United States of America, there is a view that the Supreme Court ending the constitutional right to abortion reflects an on-going right-wing assault on bodily autonomy: "Republicans consistently put forward extreme anti-abortion bills at the very same time that they have proposed bills to attack, immiserate, and eliminate trans people, particularly trans children" (Lennard, 2022, ¶2). Woodward (2023) reports in the USA: 'at least 20 states ban trans women and girls from sports that match their gender' (n.p.).

Additionally, Karaçam (2022) demonstrates how 'anti-trans voices have become louder' (p. 8) within sport including negative public opinions made by ex-elite white

cis gender athletes (Martina Navratilova, Paula Radcliffe and Sharon Davies), and the setting up of organisations such as Fair Play for Women in the UK, Save Women's Sport in USA, and Save Women's Sport in Australasia.

In the UK, there are precursors to how socio-cultural and [party] politics can form a potent nexus to regulate, and make abhorrent, non-normative identities and subjectivities. For example, the amendment to the Local Government Act 1988, Section 28, made legal the 'prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material'. Section 28 was abolished in Scotland in 2000 and in England in 2003. This serves as one example of who and what is produced as non-existent and non-legitimate through policy and law at a given time. It highlights the impact of social, cultural and political attitude, both negative and positive, on the treatment of the LBGTQ+ community in the UK. Another example involves what has been tagged as an 'historic day'; on 22nd December 2022, the Scottish Government, 'approved plans to make it easier and less intrusive for individuals to legally change their gender, extending the new system of self-identification to 16- and 17-year-olds for the first time' (Brooks, 2022, ¶ 1). As expected, given negative media coverage of trans rights in the UK (Mermaids, 2019), responses to trans inclusive legislation include a large amount of speculative and unfounded association between transgender people and criminality (Fisher, 2017).

For the purpose of this paper, it is the recent shift in treatment (by governing bodies, individuals who are in decision-making roles, policy formation) of trans women in sport that encouraged the exploration of past and present sport feminisms. The anti-trans and/or exclusionary trans feminist caucus is not strong within the social sciences of sport *per se*, but there is evidence of its influence within sport policy and sport science. Anti-trans and/or exclusionary trans feminists have worked with conservative groups (both political and religious) (Hines, 2020) to shape a conservative sport policy (Burke, 2022) and arguably 'a logic of cisgender supremacy' (Sharrow, 2021, p. 1) when it comes to defining womanhood.

In this paper, I track the development of sport feminist theory to evaluate its contribution to challenging dominant notions of womanhood. This mapping demonstrates how sport feminism has avoided an anti-trans and/or trans

exclusionary approach to trans women, and yet more can be achieved, conceptually, to continue the fight for trans women's access to sport at all levels of participation.

To begin, I discuss how sport feminisms have analysed the category 'woman', sex and gender. Making use of earlier (1990s) sport feminist analyses of women footballers in Europe, the discussion demonstrates a reliance on the sex-gender distinction, which is the idea that sex is biological and gender is socially constructed (Oakley, 1972). There is an element of feminist reflexivity in this discussion as I critiqued my contribution to sport feminism during this period. The aim is to illustrate the limits of sport feminist frameworks of womanhood. I move to show how post-colonial feminists, black feminists, queer feminists and transfeminists have made significant challenges to traditional western-centric, colonial, white feminist concepts, namely the category 'woman'. Through this focus on post-colonial feminist, black feminist and queer of color critique, the discussions engage with de-colonial feminism. However, de-colonial feminism is larger than these three approaches; it comprises of several feminisms, including indigenous feminism (Tlostanova et al., 2019), Palestinian feminism (Ihmoud, 2022), and Islamic feminism (Mincheva ,2023).

[Colonial] sport feminist theory

For Hines (2020), the 'argument that sex arrives from biology has haunted feminist politics around trans issues in the 21st century' (p. 703). This linking of the sex-gender distinction to transgender is important because Hines points out that 'the sex/gender binary model was constructed as part of a colonial project' (p. 705). Colonialism is underpinned by whiteness and white supremacy (BlackDeer, 2023) as such it is important to track back to see how sport feminist analyses implicate whiteness, and how this impacts sport feminist versions of the sex-gender distinction, and the category 'woman'. For this purpose, I take a feminist reflexivity approach to critique specific work. It is my positionality as a feminist within football studies that enables this scrutiny. To start, there were few feminists working within football studies, however, early feminist intervention involved two articles, written in the same year.

In 1999, Scraton, Fasting, Pfister and Bunuel wrote about women playing football in England, Germany, Norway and Spain – *It's still a man's game? The experiences of*

top-level European women footballers. In the same year, Caudwell wrote about *Women's football in the United Kingdom: Theorizing gender and unpacking the butch lesbian image*. Both articles provide widely acknowledged feminist theoretical analyses of football, at a time when 'football studies' was dominated by work by men about men. The feminist approaches taken to explain women's active involvement in the game in Europe serve to illustrate how sport feminists can be committed to different explanations of the key concepts of sex and gender.

Scraton *et al.,* (1999) acknowledge at the outset that:

> Women's access to football can be seen as a political outcome of a liberal-feminist discourse that centres on equal opportunities, socialization practices and legal/institutional reform. (p. 99)

They continue by arguing that liberalism has produced a weak conceptualisation of equality because it fails to take a full account of the prevailing structures of power. They argue for a critical sport feminism that seeks to interrogate gendered power relations, thus enabling a move outside of the [gender] 'oppositional model oppressor/ oppresses' (p. 100) to consider agency and resistance as well as different women's experiences based on heterogeneous positions such as class, disability, ethnicity, and sexuality. The authors acknowledge the emergence of postmodern and poststructuralist feminisms and the shift to non-essentialism through the deconstruction of gender, and this links with their view that different women have different experiences of gender, and football. However, they do not stretch so far as to deconstruction the sexed-body, and whiteness. In their analysis of 40 semi-structured interviews with footballers playing the game in England, Germany, Norway and Spain, they take a feminist position that is not feminist liberalism or feminist postmodernism/poststructuralism, but a feminism that recognises women's differences, shared and non-shared experiences.

A key finding from their study was that: 'All of the women talked constantly about themselves as being 'other' to female or feminine, particularly when describing their childhood experiences. … The majority defined themselves as 'tomboys'' (p. 104). The authors argue that by identifying as tomboy, which is viewed as a form of

masculinity, the players are supporting ‘the ‘naturalness’ of the dualities of male sport/female sport and masculinity/femininity thus reducing cultural and social constructs to biological fact’ (p.150). They conclude that ‘these women have simply crossed gendered boundaries in order to access a sport that is associated with masculine traits’ (p. 108).

For the footballers in Scraton’s *et al.* research (1999), there is indication that ‘for many of them, their identities as gendered sportswomen became more problematic in adulthood.’ Adult female masculinity (Halberstam, 1998) is the focus of Caudwell’s feminist analysis of women’s football in the UK (1999). In Caudwell’s study, the figure of the butch lesbian emerged as important to the research participants. This finding is analysed through a focus on the socio-cultural construction of gender and sexuality, specifically lesbianism. Claiming a post-structuralist feminist approach and drawing on the work of Judith Butler (1990 and 1993), Caudwell deconstructs the production of eligible gender and sexuality in western contexts, specifically in football. Through this deconstruction of the knowledge produced to legitimise heteronormative configurations, and the alignment of gender and sexuality, Caudwell moves to include sex (sexed body) as also socially and culturally constructed; this challenged the feminist notion of the sex-gender distinction evidenced in the work of Scraton *et al.,* (1999).

Caudwell shows how ‘[t]raditionally the butch is vilified, maligned, and condemned, and within feminist politics’ (p. 393). Referring to Feinberg’s (1993) work to make the point that ‘regardless of the emerging human rights campaigns and shifts toward equal rights, (the butch) continued to receive the most severe instances of discrimination and abuse’ (p. 393). Given this degree of marginality, Caudwell seeks to make the butch lesbian footballer legitimate, and safe through a critique of normative sex-gender-desire constructions, which dictate the viability of identity/subjectivity vis-à-vis ‘woman’.

In summary, the viability of ‘women’ footballers for Scraton *et al.,* (1999) exists within the binaries of sex and gender, and the sex-gender distinction. Caudwell (1999) disturbs the binary of gender, seeking to explain it as plural and inclusive of lesbian genders. The recognition of non-binary gender begins to destabilise the binary of the

sexed-body. However, the sexed body is not deconstructed, it remained as a stable entity.

The two differing feminists analyses evidence fundamental feminist debate that persists in contemporary research. The examples offer insight into the conflicting feminist views of transgender participation in sport. For instance, for some feminists, sex is a fixed essence that informs the 'category woman'. As such biological birth sex is foundational to some strands of sport feminist endeavour for women's rights i.e., the right to play football without abuse, discrimination and prejudice. At the time, the shift towards deconstructing the sex-gender distinction and the category women (Caudwell, 1999) failed to fully engage with key feminist work, for example, how 'Delphy (1984) theorised sex as coming from gender: sex differences are read through gender, not the other way round' (Hines, 2020 p. 703).

Adopting feminist reflexivity exposes the shortfalls regarding the potential of early sport feminist theorising in paving the way for future trans sportswomen's participation. The 1999 analyses do not provide theory to enable trans women's participation in football because the category woman remains conceptually intact. At the same time, and apparent, there is a lack of engagement with the whiteness of the work. This begs the question of white supremacy in the construction of these sport feminist framings. Race did not feature as a category. The feminist focus on sex, gender and sexuality, especially in the work of Caudwell (1999), ignored and omitted race. Furthermore, there is no interrogation of the ontological and epistemological origins of the conceptual framing. It is this ignorance which gives rise to narrow definitions of womanhood.

Post-colonial and black feminist theory

The comments made by the British Lord Sebastian Coe, President of World Athletics, regarding trans women, for example: the 'future of women's sport is 'very fragile'' and 'gender cannot trump biology' (Myers, 2022), demand critical analysis through discussion of post-colonial and black feminism.

In her well-known work, Spivak (1988) pursues the question – 'can the subaltern speak?' In her detailed, and dense, critique of white male European philosophers,

she sets out arguments to support her final assertion: “The subaltern cannot speak” (p. 104). She shows that despite the aims of ‘leftish intellectuals’ (p. 70) (e.g., Marx, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari) to interrogate power, oppression, capitalist labour exploitation and the production of knowledge, they all fail to recognise the epistemic violence of their own work. Spivak summarises:

> Yet we might consolidate our critique in the following way: the relationship between global capitalism (exploitation in economics) and nation-state alliances (domination in geopolitics) is so macrological that it cannot account for the micrological texture of power. To move toward such an accounting one must move toward theories of ideology - of subject formations that micrologically and often erratically operate the interests that congeal the macrologies. (p. 74)

For Spivak, the epistemic violence committed involves the inherent denial of imperialism: imperialistic law; territorial imperialism; and imperialism as a civilising mission, which governs subject formation in the interests of the colonial, and the production of knowledge about ‘the subaltern’. As such, ‘[t]he clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other’ (Spivak, p. 76). Bringing together her post-colonial theory and feminist thinking, she asks: ‘Can the subaltern (as woman) speak?’ Through a particular analysis she writes: 'White men are saving brown women from brown men' (p. 92), thus demonstrating the position of the ‘subaltern woman’ in relation to colonial and patriarchal power. Spivak’s (1988) focus on gender shows how epistemic violence, imperialism and ‘Other’ (the micrological textures of power) operate for women:

> Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization (p. 102).

It is impossible to pay tribute to the entirety of Spivak’s work in this paper. However, sport feminists concerned about white supremacy and racism have successfully applied her arguments to provide important critique of how colonialism, race and gender have/have not been theorised/conceptualised in sport. For example, Ratna and Samie (2017) emphasise ‘Other’ girls and women in their work on race, gender and sport. They show how white supremacy functions in sport and how women of

colour are othered through ‘the mechanisms of sport and physical culture, which work to position ‘them’ as marginal, and ‘Other’’ (p. 4). Ratna and Samie (2017) make the point that it is: ‘the largely positivistic, androcentric, assimilationist, ethnocentric and Eurocentric thinking which has colonised much of the scholarship in the sociology of sport’ (p. 10), vis-à-vis women of color.

In accordance with Ratna and Samie’s work (2017), Brown (2018) provides an important critique of sport, specifically the representation and treatment of black female bodies, through discussions of post-colonial and black feminism. She evidences how ‘women of colour are Othered, and viewed as existing outside of the realm of *emphasised femininity* that is tied to whiteness’ (p. 490). Moreover, Brown (2018) applies de-colonial feminists theoretical and conceptual frames to sex/gender testing. The on-going practice of sex testing ‘functions to reinforce the essentialist female/male binary in which men are viewed as superior athletes, while also illuminating colonial discourses of black and Third-World women’s bodies’ (p. 491). For instance, how global governing bodies of athletics (and white cisgender male figure heads such as Coe) treat runners Caster Semenya and Santhi Soundarajan is a reminder of how colonial processes operate through a complex web of western-legitimised medical/’scientific’ and public discourse, to define womanhood in sporting contexts (Batelaan and Abdel-Shehid, 2021). Re-iterating Spivak’s argument, this process is built upon epistemic violence because it is white hegemonic femininity (Brown, 2018; Wheaton et al., 2020) that is assumed and determined as the exemplar of womanhood (Adjepong and Carrington, 2014; Magubane, 2014; Ratna and Samie, 2017).

For a long time, black feminists have questioned the white western feminist construct of the ‘category woman’. By re-asking the question: “Ain’t I a woman”, first spoken in 1851 by Sojourner Truth at a Women’s Rights Convention in Ohio, black feminists adopt the locution to challenge ‘all ahistoric or essentialist notions of ‘woman’’ (Brah and Phoenix, 2004, p. 74). Moreover, the boundaries of feminist thinking, theorising, activism and praxis (‘sisterhood’) are brought to the attention of the white feminist movement through the exclamation: ‘white women listen’ (Carby, 2009). The ‘problem of whiteness’ in feminist sport studies has been exposed as ignoring the intersections and compounded oppressions of race, sexuality, class and gender

(McDonald and Shelby, 2018). In this way, McDonald and Shelby (2018) 'challenge the primacy of gender as always already the most important social relation' (p. 498) in feminist sport studies. This challenge can be aimed at the sport feminist football work discussed above because the sex-gender distinction was assumed within whiteness.

Through both post-colonial and black feminisms, de-colonial feminists have effectively intervened to reveal a large proportion of [sport]feminist theory that ignores whiteness and its operation as a foundational epistemic violation. Spivak (1988) shows the colonial and post-colonial as deeply and inherently denial and refusal processes, especially when it comes to the women and girls. Black feminists demonstrate racial power and ignorance surrounding the production of dominant white versions of 'womanhood'. These de-colonial theoretical interventions have been applied, successfully, to sport studies scholarship by key writers (Adjepong and Carrington, 2014; Brown, 2018; Joseph and Kriger, 2021; McDonald and Shelby, 2018; Ratna and Samie, 2017) to develop and expand our understanding of gender, and the sexed body.

Hines (2020) discusses transgender as impacted by 'white colonial rule in which local understandings and practices of gender diversity were disappeared' (p. 705). Writers (Binahohan, 2014; Boellstorff et al., 2014) have called for de-colonising transgender by making visible the histories, spatialities, identities, languages, knowledge and understandings of people of colour and indigenous people. Marshall (2020) reiterates the point that the sex-gender binary was/is produced by the colonial, moreover, that gender expansiveness was 'slaughtered' by colonialism, and the gender binary is 'a tool of white supremacy' (n.p.). For example, Marshall (2020) details how '[i]n India, colonial officials judged the worth of hijras via British ideals of manhood despite hijras not being men' (n.p.). Marshall provides a litany of cases whereby white colonisers/settlers sought to eradicate expansive and diverse indigenous expressions and structures of sex-gender, concluding that:

> … it's unfeasible to discuss transgender history or issues without bringing up colonialism and race. To be transphobic — to discredit the millennia of gender variance in different cultures, to insist that one's body defines their mind, to cast transgender people as degenerate — is to be racist (n.p.).

Sport feminists, writing from a de-colonial position, have identified how epistemic violence, which can be described as ‘the anonymous codification and structure which determines the knowledge formation of a given epoch’ (Bartels, et al., 2019, p. 1), underpins early, and arguably contemporary, sport feminisms and sport feminist empirical accounts of women and/in sport. Early sport-feminist-produced knowledge of the category ‘woman’ is also disputed and disrupted by queer theory and transfeminism.

Queer theory and transfeminism

Queer activism and queer theory have enabled sport feminists (Adjepong, 2023; Caudwell, 2003; Davidson and Shogan, 1998; Eng, 2007; Krane and Waldron, 2021; lisahunter, 2018; Sykes, 1996) to deconstruct normative versions of sex-gender-sexuality and to open up sport to the non-normative. Early interventions by sport feminists focused on queer sexualities and called for equality, inclusion and social justice for all people who identify as belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. For instance, lesbians were mostly viewed with disdain (Griffin, 1992) because of the stereotypes of lesbian [masculine] gender (Caudwell, 1999), and treated as bogeywomen (Cox and Thompson, 2001). The focus on sexuality continues in work about queer athletes: the sports dyke, the sports fag and a sexuality that is not one (Linghede and Larsson, 2017) with critique of how sporting practices construct heteronomativity, and how these normative constructs are contested. Spatiality and pedagogy are examined through a queer lens (lisahunter, 2019) to show the actual slippages between the normative and non-normative, and thus the potential to queer Physical Education. In sport psychology, Krane and Waldron (2021) re-new a call for a queer approach to research and practice to transform the discipline from its widespread ‘functionalist, masculinist, and positivist infrastructure’ (p. 486).

It is the application of queer theory to the body (Sykes, 2011) that illustrates the ways the sexed body is produced through dominant ideas surrounding the binaries that uphold sex-gender-sexuality, and its compulsory order (Butler, 1993). The sports’ body must fit the sports’ binary otherwise it is open to surveillance, scrutiny, exclusion and made abject as well as object of ‘abnormality’. However, queer sport feminists have celebrated bodies that do not fit the binary arrangements. They have achieved this through a focus on ‘queer bodies’, including ‘racialized gender, sex, or

sexuality … and also those who felt different due to their physical dis/ability, their body shape and size' (Sykes, 2009, p. 251).

Sykes' (2009) reference to racialised gender bodies is significant because queer sport scholarship was and continues to be framed by whiteness. Both McDonald (2007) and King (2008) made crucial critiques of queer approaches in sport studies, for example:

> Much of this work [queer], … focused on the experiences of a narrow stratum of North American and European lesbian and gay athletes whose sexual subjectivities are rendered in isolation from the processes of racialization and capital accumulation through which they are constituted. (King, 2008, pp. 419-420)

Outside of the realm of sport studies, critiques of queer scholarship continue. For instance, Espineira and Bourcier (2016) argue that 'queer' reflects a white Anglo imperialistic language that promotes 'an abstract concept of political subjectivity' (p. 88). They highlight its shortfalls:

> "Queer" lately has been the target of harsh criticisms for its multiple perceived failures: internal racism, false promises of intersectionality, class privilege, the still burning issue of feminism. (Espineira and Bourcier, 2016, p. 90)

They go on to ask: "Is this queer corpse worth reanimating, or should we let it die?" (p. 90). In the work of O'Rourke (2014) *Queer Insists* (for José Esteban Muñoz†), and his eloquent remembrance and gratitude to Muñoz, there is the potential of queer scholarship.

> Muñoz's work, in his essay in *Queer Futures*, and elsewhere, presents a profound challenge to the calcifications or entombments of queer theory (I would venture that his death gives us another occasion to ponder the many deaths of queer theory and its many afterlives, its immemorial currents, even its immortal life. (p.12)

O'Rourke writes about the many significant influences/insists made by Muñoz, including the need for a politics of epistemological humility as set out by Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz (2005). Epistemological humility is a 'mode to counter the self-referential logics of US-centricism and queer Eurocentrism' (Chiang and Wong, 2017, p. 121). By applying epistemological humility to queer theory: '[i]t needs to resist itself, fold back on itself, in order to resist itself' (O'Rourke, 2014, p. 27), there is promise of a 'queer theory to-come, *à venir'* (p. 28). O'Rouke contemplates the yet

to-come book Muñoz talked about, during their correspondence, on feeling brown, sensing browness and brown theory. Despite the important existing work on queer of color critique (Ferguson, 2004), more can be achieved in sport feminism because as Chiang and Wong (2017) highlight, queer theory still has not sufficiently engaged with racialisation and empire.

Returning to queer feminism and sport, in a posthumanist analysis of *hyperandrogenism in women's sport,* Linghede (2018) focuses on glitching bodies, specifically intersex bodies that 'break, crash and confuse the conventions of pre-programmed and binary gender patterns' (p. 570). Applying existing sport feminist arguments: 'Over and again it has been found that some athletic bodies cannot adjust to sporting and scientific sex classifications' (p. 573). Linghede (2018) explores '[b]odies that are witty agents. Bodies that show that people live with a multiplicity of variations and combinations of genitalia, gonads, chromosomes and hormones' (p. 573). These arguments further illustrate the possibilities of non-binary bodies in exposing the errors and failures within the two-sex model of sport; glitching bodies can be celebrated because they 'turn what is taken for granted upside down and inside out' (p. 581). Unfortunately, it remains, as with previous queer feminist work in sport, that there is a shortfall when it comes to [glitching] bodies as already raced and racialised.

One important exception, in terms of positioning non-binary bodies within 'colonial evolutionary narratives' (p. 79), is the work by Erikainen, Vincent and Hopkins (2022) on non-binary inclusive sports in Scotland. For example, they write regarding differences of sex development (DSD):

> The history of intersex(ualized) bodies is structured by racially mediated medicalization, where White intersex bodies or people with DSD have been subjected to normalizing medical interventions, usually in infancy and without consent, while Black ones were seen as "confirming the essential biological difference between whites and blacks" (Magubane, 2014, p. 781). (p.80)

Hines (2020), in her brief discussion of sport, reiterates a key point that 'there are clearly considerable variations in both the genitalia and the reproductive organs of people placed within the expansive categories of male and female' (p. 708). Feminists and queer feminists in sport studies have known this for some time,

however the application of a queer perspective to transgender athletes is limited (*cf.* Travers, 2006; Fischer and McClearen, 2020), and work on trans queer athletes of color is scarce. One outstanding contribution is the work of Adjepong (2023) who advocates a queer African feminist approach, and its value to trans sports studies. Through a focus on the experiences of African intersex athletes (Annet Negesa, Castor Semenya, Bilguisa and Salimata Simpore, Holarli Ativor), Adjepong (2023) offers 'an analytical framework that attends to how colonialism, patriarchy, religion, and capitalism structure gender and sexual ideologies' (p. 153). By showing 'how indigenous epistemologies that challenge the coloniality of gender can help produce gender justice within sports' (p. 157), Adjepong (2023) develops an invaluable contribution to queer feminist sport studies as well as a pathway for the development of transfeminist sports studies.

Transfeminism is relatively new to sport studies. Jones (2021) advocates for a 'transfeminist sports studies [that] makes strange—queers—the very practices, systems, and structures, recreational to professional, that pathologize transness in sports' (p. 60). Furthermore, Caudwell (2022) argues for a 'transfeminist ontology as fundamental to the fields of sport, PE and physical activity. That is a belief in, and commitment to, the legitimacy of transgender existence, trans being and being trans' (p. 344). This can translate into the transfeminist proposition that trans women are women. Importantly, emerging sport transfeminist scholars (Barras, 2021; Karaçam, 2022) provide research-informed valuable insights about and from the transgender community. However, more is needed from within sport feminism to develop a transfeminism framework, especially a de-colonial transfeminist approach, in order to contest the exclusion and regulation of trans sportswomen.

Transfeminism, according to Hines (2020), can be compared with the developments in feminism when it comes to transwomen's suffrage, equality and the recognition of diversity. Referring to the work of Stryker and Bettcher (2016), Hines (2020) argues that 'intersectionality motivates transfeminism' and the recognition that there are 'different ways of being gender diverse within trans communities' (p. 712). As such transfeminism challenges white cis feminism 'to account for the femininities of women who were not assigned female at birth' (p. 711). However, Koyama (2020) details the ways feminism and elements of transfeminism remain inherently racist

through ‘the unspoken racism of the trans inclusion debate’ (p. 61). In a re-print of an essay published in 2000 in which Koyama (2020) provides ‘a critical account of the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival’s trans exclusionary policy’ (p. 61), the point is made that: ‘Even the argument that ‘the presence of a penis would trigger the women’ is flawed because it neglects the fact that white skin is just as much a reminder of violence as a penis’ (p. 66).

Anti-racist transfeminism is required, and a starting place might be the work of Bey (2022). In an intricate account of Black trans feminism, Bey (2022) expands our understanding of black trans, black feminism, and trans feminism with the aim to go beyond intersectionality and ‘to mine each of these for how they contribute to the culmination of black trans feminism as a modality of worldly inhabitation, an agential and performative posture in and after this world’ (p. 5). Simultaneously, Bey (2022) seeks to abstract: ‘the corporeal surface as only one node of blackness, transness, and womanness’ arguing that ‘the taking of such theorizations seriously will necessitate radically undoing what we have come to hold very dear’ (p. 7). Bey’s desire for a ‘subjectless critique’ and refusal ‘to posit *a* or *the* subject of black trans feminism’ means ‘rejecting a “proper” object of both study and knowledge production’ (p. 7). This proposition is challenging, especially for a sport transfeminism that centres the corporeal, and yet the approach holds huge potential for transfeminism.

Conclusions

Contemporary anti-trans feminism and/or trans-exclusionary feminism situate pro-trans perspectives as un-feminist based on the foundational premise that sex is fixed at birth and remains stable, with the absolute argument that trans women are not women (Raymond, 1979; Jeffreys, 2014). Notably, Simon (2021) provides an extensive and detailed critique to evidence how the gender critical feminist movement rely on ‘colonial remnants of gender discourse’ in order to challenge transgender rights. Within the socio-cultural and political arenas of sport, there is evidence that anti-trans feminist discourses have influenced recent policy formation (Ravat, 2022). This contrasts with the abundance of feminist social science research and writing that effectively debunks the traditional sex-gender distinction and category ‘woman’ as fixed, stable and universal (see Erikainen, 2019).

In sport, it is testosterone that has become the absolute and perfect measure of manhood and womanhood (Erikainen, 2019; Jones, 2021; Schultz, 2021). Schultz (2021) highlights how testosterone is 'the latest criterion in a long line of attempts to define femaleness, each of which has ultimately failed' (p. 609). Through a rigorous analysis of how testosterone is presented through sport governing body's delivered logics of 'fairness', Jones (2021) reveals the social life of testosterone and how talk of testosterone (T-talk) 'unjustly targets transgender athletes' (p. 61). Moreover, Karkazis and Jordan-Young (2018), make visible the colonialised and racialised 'powers of testosterone' in targeting women of colour from the Global South. They conclude that T-talk and testosterone testing are '… yet another version of "sex testing," accomplished by racializing sex and associating "failures" of dichotomous sex with failures of modernity, characteristic of countries or regions outside the industrialized West' (p. 6).

Sport studies scholars are working hard to contest the current application of [inconclusive] science to exclude and regulate transgender women in sport (e.g., E-Alliance, 2021; Ivy, 2021; Ravat, 2022). Many of these scholars are broadly speaking feminists, but perhaps not de-colonial transfeminists. It is the potential of de-colonial transfeminist approaches, which might be what is required to challenge the anti-trans feminist and/or exclusionary trans feminist claims to 'protect' women's and girls' and their sport. Their aim is extremely tenuous, but it has gained currency within predominantly male run sport governing bodies and policy formation. To re-phrase Spivak (1988), it seems that white cis [colonial] men [Lord Coe] are saving white cis women from trans women.

In this paper, I have evaluated the developments within sport feminism that are relevant to understanding, and challenging, the current treatment of trans women in sport. We are facing what can be described as a backlash (Hines, 2020; Itani, 2020; Vincent, Erikainen & Pearce, 2020) against trans women in/and sport. This backlash has been explained through moral panic (Mestre, 2022; Miles, 2022; Pepin-Neff & Cohen 2021) as a response to progressing trans rights, inclusion and equality. The current sport policy shifts reflect yet another phase of control and exclusion of bodies that do not live up to white western-constructed ontological and epistemological

ideas of sporting womanhood. It is crucial that sport feminists continue to produce robust, reflective and reproving approaches—e.g., de-colonial transfeminist approaches—to explain and challenge how and why bodies, identities and subjectivities are denied inclusion.

Early sport feminist work failed to break away from the axiomatic sex-gender distinction. The women footballers that embodied masculinity presented a dilemma for sport feminist thinking (Scraton et al., 1999), but not necessarily for sport feminists seeking to expand sporting gender (Caudwell, 1999). At the same time, post-colonial and black feminist thinking and activism successfully challenged white bourgeoisie feminism (Davis, 1982) for its erasure of relations of race, ethnicity, colonialism and post colonialism in the construction of sex, gender and 'woman'. This de-colonial challenge struck the core of the definitional category 'woman' through an interrogation of the epistemic violence of whiteness in defining womanhood. Sport feminists have evidenced how women of color face abuse, discrimination, exclusion and prejudice because of 'anti-Black structural racism and sexism' (Razack & Joseph, 2021, p.299), and through disciplinary philosophies and paradigms (science) that 'ignore power relations sustained by White, patriarchal, ableist, capitalist systems' (Joseph & Kriger, 2021 p.1).

With further critique and deconstruction of traditional feminist knowledge claims regarding sex and gender, queer sport feminists have, over the last two to three decades, opened up sport to queer bodies. Queer sport feminists not only celebrate and champion bodies that do not fit the binary model of sex, which is potent and omnipresent in sport, they also call for new approaches to the study of the sporting body that moves away from the prevailing 'functionalist, masculinist, and positivist infrastructure' (Krane and Waldron, 2021, p. 486) of sport science. Crucially, the presence of queer bodies in sport is a constant reminder that the two-sex system in sport is flawed (Adjepong, 2023; Linghede, 2018; Jones, 2021; Schultz, 2021). However, within sport studies, more can be achieved through a queer of color critique of whiteness. This call can be echoed for sport transfeminist futures. Trans sportswomen are pathologised through inconclusive western 'science' and the scientific objectification of their bodies. The feminist lobby within this movement to

exclude trans women rely on the notion that sex is immutable, universal and essentialist, which is shown to be a colonial project (Magubane, 2014; Simon, 2021).

It is the western socio-cultural and political arena of sport, as one of the main domains within our communities, societies and globally, that has engendered the logics of the sexed body as fixed and stable (Erikainen, 2019). A sport feminist lens demonstrates the continued control of womanhood in order to fit a dominant model, which is cisgender, white and colonial. This paper tells a story of sport feminists' past and current challenges to the regulation of human bodies, namely trans sportswomen, by those in power. It is a call for future work that connects de-colonial sport feminism, in this case post-colonial feminism, black feminism and queer of color approaches, to expose the power base of decision- and policy-makers.

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