Decolonizing Sex Segregation in Sports:

Global Gender Policing and LGBTQ+ Sports Activism in South Korea

by

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A dissertation accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Sociology

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Spring 2026

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Decolonizing Sex Segregation in Sports: Global Gender Policing and LGBTQ+ Sports Activism in South Korea

This dissertation examines the global politics of sex segregation and sex testing in sport through a multi-level analysis of gender policies and LGBTQ+ sports activism in South Korea. Drawing on transnational feminist and decolonial theories, as well as ethnographic research, it investigates how sex segregation is introduced, reproduced, and challenged across elite, community, and transnational sporting contexts.

Chapter I introduces the theoretical framework and argues that sex segregation is not a universal arrangement but a historically and geopolitically produced system. Chapter II outlines the research design, which combines ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, participant observation, and discourse analysis.

Chapter III examines the localization of global gender policies through the controversy over sex testing in South Korean women's football. The findings show that sex testing and binary sex classification are not simply imposed by international governing bodies but are translated through local media, institutions, and public understandings of femininity and sexuality. In this process, the female athlete's body becomes a battleground where global gender policing intersects with national identity and local gender norms.

Chapter IV analyzes the Queer Women Games, a queer women led sporting event that rejects sex based classification and gender verification. Rather than organizing participation through binary categories, organizers rely on collective commitments not to question or police

others' identities. The chapter demonstrates both the possibilities and tensions involved in creating nonbinary sporting spaces and identifies organizational strategies, including refusing gender verification in participation and competition, and establishing collective consensus against bodily surveillance and gender policing.

Chapter V compares the Queer Women Games and Gay Games Hong Kong to explore how global LGBTQ+ discourse interacts with local conditions. The findings show that LGBTQ+ sports activism takes different forms depending on political, cultural, and institutional contexts, ranging from grassroots resistance and alternative world making to transnational forms of inclusion and institutional integration.

Taken together, the dissertation demonstrates that sex segregation is sustained and contested through the interaction of global sport governance, national institutions, public discourse, and local activism. It argues that decolonizing sex segregation does not simply involve changing eligibility rules or expanding inclusion within existing categories. Rather, it requires reimagining the values that underpin modern sport itself. The findings show how queer and women led sporting spaces experiment with different practice of fairness, integrity, friendship, and belonging.

This dissertation includes previously published material that has been revised and incorporated into Chapters III and IV.

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Yang, Jinsun. (2025) "Localization of Sex Testing: Transnational Knowledge Production of Sex" *Women's Studies International Forum* 111:103078. doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2025.103078.

Yang, Jinsun. (2023) "Creating a Non–Gender Binary Sports Space: The Nonbinary Policy of Korean "Queer Women Games" *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 10(2): 116-132. https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-10440762

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first extend my sincere gratitude to all the participants in this research project who generously shared their time, perspectives, and stories with me. In both South Korea and Hong Kong, LGBTQ+ people continue to face institutional marginalization, and their trust in and support for this research made this study possible. I would also like to offer special thanks to the organizers of the Queer Women Games and Gay Games Hong Kong for their generous support in allowing me to conduct research and assisting with participant recruitment. Without their support, this project would never have begun.

To my committee members, Kemi Balogun, Jill Harrison, CJ Pascoe, Jina Kim, and Yu-Fang Cho, thank you for sharing your expertise with me and for your support, flexibility, and thoughtful feedback throughout this process. Your guidance has strengthened this dissertation in countless ways.

To Kemi, who served as my advisor throughout my years in the Sociology Department, I will always be grateful for your unwavering support, encouragement, and wisdom. Whether discussing theory, writing, academic life, or the challenges of navigating U.S. academia, you were always there with guidance and reassurance. I often imagine you reading my messy first drafts, correcting grammatical errors, reshaping awkward sentences, and strengthening weak arguments. More importantly, you taught me how to think, write, and persevere as a scholar. I could not have asked for a better advisor.

To my partner, 잇을: like so many other things in my life, this study began with you. Thank you for your love and unwavering support. This dissertation bears your imprint as much as my own.

To my world, st.cream: I wrote this dissertation with one hand petting you and the other turning the pages of books. Thank you for staying by my side and keeping me from falling apart. Forever loyal to you.

To 물체주머니: 라몽과 연정씨, 두 분 없이 공부하는 것을 상상할 수 없어요. 불가능해 보이는 박사논문을 함께 부숴가며 가능하게 만들었어요.

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나의 영원한 친구, 미경과 금자: 수십년의 시간을 지나며 서로 다른 삶을 이토록 지탱해준다는 게 너무 놀랍고 감사해.

To my mentors, Hyeyoung Woo, Myron T. Strong, Minwoo Jung, Travers, Tricia Lewis, and Clare Evans: thank you for your generosity, guidance, and encouragement. You shaped this journey in ways I can never fully repay.

To my immigrant gang, Jiayan, Wenyi (Jamie), Haisu, Ruby, Puja, Keya, Malavya, Stephanie, Ricardo, and Luna & Chente: thank you for your comradeship, laughter, and solidarity. Toward a world for immigrants.

To my writing group, Kyla, Kate, and Cameron: thank you for witnessing and sharing each day of this journey with me. Your companionship transformed the often lonely work of writing into a collective practice of care and accountability.

To my fellow members and friends in the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation (GTFF): GTFF was my first nest in the United States. It taught me the meaning of solidarity, collective action, and belonging. Solidarity forever.

To my cohort members, Bex, Alder, David, Myra, and Christine: thank you for learning,

struggling, and celebrating alongside me. I am grateful to have shared this journey with you.

I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to the faculty, staff, and graduate students in the Sociology Department and the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program at the University of Oregon. I have learned so much from you and alongside you. To the department staff, thank you for making it all happen and for your patience, kindness, and support during both ordinary and confusing times.

I am also indebted to institutions that have provided financial support for this project. These include a Dissertation Fellowship from the University of Oregon Division of Graduate Studies, a Writing Completion Fellowship from the Center for the Study of Women in Society, and the Wasby-Johnson Dissertation Award from the Department of Sociology at the University of Oregon.

This dissertation is based on human subjects research approved by the University of Oregon Institutional Review Board (IRB Protocol No. 06162020.019). All research procedures complied with the ethical guidelines established by the University of Oregon IRB.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

"In South Korea also, the history of sports is a history of colonization." (Tosa 2015 p.5)

Park Eun-sun, a legendary striker in South Korean women′s football, made her debut for the senior national team at the age of 16 in 2003 while still in high school, setting a record as the youngest player. In 2005, she scored on her professional debut while playing for Seoul City Hall. She was short during her early teenage years, but in her late teens she experienced a rapid growth spurt, reaching 181 cm and 80 kg and gaining attention for her imposing physical presence. Compared to many Western players, South Korean women′s footballers have often been seen as smaller in stature, so her emergence excited fans, who saw her as a new source of hope for Korean football. After being selected for the senior national team at 17, she scored seven goals at the 2003 AFC Women′s Asian Cup, helping South Korea secure third place and qualify for the FIFA Women′s World Cup finals for the first time. From 2009 to 2013, she continued to contribute to the national team, including winning a gold medal at the 2009 Summer Universiade and a bronze medal at the 2010 Asian Games.

Against this backdrop, the 2013 demand by opposing coaches for sex testing came as a shock to many fans. By then, Park Eun-sun had been a well-established senior player for over a decade, with extensive international experience. Women′s football in South Korea remained small in scale and under supported. In 2015, there were only 1,725 registered women players, about 2.94% of the number in Japan. This tight knit community meant that players, coaches, and

even fans were deeply familiar with one another from a young age. As a result, rather than accepting the call for testing, many fans reacted with outrage, launching petition campaigns that demanded disciplinary action against the coaches. Korean women′s football, which had rarely received sustained media attention even during World Cup participation, suddenly became the focus of widespread public coverage for the first time.

Fans believed that if media and public attention concentrated on the issue, the coaches would quickly be punished and support for Park Eun-sun would grow. This expectation was partly correct. The coaches, who had demanded a form of sex testing that had never formally existed in Korean football history, faced intense criticism. However, in a troubling turn, the media and the public did not focus on Park's physical ability or football skills. Instead, they became fixated on her body and gender. As if she were hiding some secret, journalists and the public began scrutinizing her gestures, voice, and personal history. Interviews extended to her family members and teammates. Although the National Human Rights Commission of Korea requested that the Korea Women's Football Federation discipline the coaches and prevent similar incidents, public obsession with Park's gender did not subside. Even as politicians and several celebrities voiced their support for her, Park appeared to struggle under the relentless surveillance of her body and gender by the media and the public. Eventually, she left the Korean league she loved and transferred to a Russian team.

While the coaches' demand for a gender test was blatantly malicious and shameless, and many people expressed support for Park. Some sensationalist media outlets produced provocative headlines for clicks, and some public turned her into a target of ridicule. Yet these were not the people who determined her career. The Human Rights Commission, women's football fans, her team Seoul City Hall, as well as politicians and celebrities, all supported her, yet she could no

longer continue playing football in Korea. Does this mean that even in a nation where sex testing does not formally exist, merely creating controversy around a female player's sex can destroy her entire career? That nothing can protect her? That if a similar controversy arises again, female athletes will once more be left completely vulnerable? Gender-based controversy can be fabricated by anyone, yet no one takes responsibility— how does such a controversy gain so much power? Where does that power come from?

This was not limited to South Korea. Across international sporting events, debates over women athletes' sex have persisted in various forms. Feminist and queer organizations, along with scholars, have developed extensive critiques of sex testing from multiple perspectives, including human rights, gender discrimination, scientific failure, medical invalidity, racism, heterosexism, imperialism, and colonialism. Still, they have struggled to provide alternatives. Policies such as sex-integration or trans/gender inclusion do not often address the most fundamental issues—the persistence of binary sex essentialism and the belief in male superiority. The research begins from this point.

This dissertation examines the decolonization of sex segregation in sport by tracing how global gender policies are localized, contested, and reworked in South Korea. It is guided by three interrelated research questions.

1. First, how do global gender policies in mainstream sports, including the two-sex system and sex testing, travel across borders and become localized in South Korea?
2. Second, how do globalized LGBTQ+ discourses interact with local sport cultures in South Korea where LGBTQ+ rights remain largely unrecognized in law?

3. Third, what alternative gender policies and sporting practices emerge from Korean LGBTQ+ activism, and how do they challenge dominant frameworks of fairness, inclusion, and belonging?

A decolonial approach is central to this analysis. Rather than treating Euro American sport institutions and scientific frameworks as universal standards, this dissertation interrogates how they operate as forms of epistemic authority that shape global definitions of sex, gender, and fairness. International sex testing, for example, has been justified through claims of objectivity and scientific legitimacy, yet feminist and postcolonial scholarship has demonstrated both its instability and its disproportionate impact on marginalized bodies that do not conform to Western binary sex categories.

Building on this critique, this project introduces the concept of the localization of sex testing to show how global gender policing is rearticulated within local contexts. In South Korea, sex testing does not simply arrive as a fixed policy. It is translated through media discourse, national identity, and everyday understandings of the body, producing new forms of knowledge that both reproduce and contest global hierarchies.

At the same time, this dissertation challenges the assumption that change takes a form of inclusion within the binary sex systems. Much of the contemporary debate on gender and sport has centered on transgender inclusion policies, particularly in the Global North, where questions of fairness, meritocracy, and safety are framed within liberal individualist terms. While these policies expand access, they often leave intact the binary structure of sex segregation and the authority of institutions to regulate bodies. In contrast, this study highlights alternative approaches emerging from LGBTQ+ activism in South Korea, particularly nonbinary policies that refuse sex

classification and instead reorganize sport through collective agreements that reject gender policing.

The empirical chapters develop these questions across different sites and scales. Chapter III examines grassroots organizing and asks: what alternative gender policies and sporting spaces have been created by LGBTQ+ communities in South Korea, and how does the nonbinary policy of the Queer Women Games differ from transgender inclusion models dominant in the Global North? Chapter IV turns to the professional level, focusing on the localization of sex testing in South Korean women's football. It asks: how is international sex testing reproduced and contested within a local league context, and how is the Korean female athlete imaged within these debates across nation, ethnicity, sex, gender, and sexuality? Chapter V situates these dynamics within a broader regional context and asks: how do globalized LGBTQ+ discourse and international sporting events shape LGBTQ+ sports activism in South Korea and Hong Kong, where governments do not legally recognize LGBTQ+ rights? What similarities and differences emerge between the Queer Women Games in Korea as a local LGBTQ+ sporting event and the Gay Games Hong Kong as a global LGBTQ+ sporting event in East Asia?

Taken together, these questions show that sex segregation in sport is not a fixed or universal system but a historically and geopolitically produced arrangement that operates across multiple levels. Decolonizing sex segregation, then, does not involve simply removing binary sex categories or achieving inclusion within existing frameworks. It requires exposing the colonial foundations of gender classification and tracing how they are reworked through local practices, activism, and alternative institutions. By centering South Korea and East Asia as sites of knowledge production, this dissertation contributes to the sociology of gender, transnational feminism, and sport studies, offering a new framework for understanding how gender, power, and embodiment are negotiated

in a globalizing world.

This dissertation includes previously published material authored solely by Jinsun Yang. A version of Chapter III, "The Nonbinary Policy of 'Queer Women Games,'" was published in *Transgender Studies Quarterly, 10(2).* A version of Chapter IV, "Localization of Sex Testing," was published in *Women's Studies International Forum, 111.* These chapters have been revised and incorporated into the present dissertation.

1.Sports/Feminism/Queer Activism in South Korea

State Policy, Sports Rights, and Gendered Participation

In Korea, leisure sports, as well as elite sports, were initiated by the government. After liberation from Japanese colonization (1910–1945), the Korean government enacted the National Sports Promotion Act (Act No. 1146, 1962.09.17) in 1962, and the Sports for All Promotion Act (Act No. 13251, 2015.03.27) in 2015, which brought growth in sports participation rates, organizations, facilities, programs, and instructors in the public sector (Choi, Jo, and Ok 2019;). These policies were not merely administrative measures but part of a broader state-led project in which sport was mobilized as a tool of nation-building, modernization, and international recognition. From the 1960s onward, military and civilian regimes developed an elite sport system oriented toward restoring national pride and achieving global visibility through Olympic success, supported by centralized governance, performance-based funding, and close alliances between the state and large corporations (Park and Lim 2015; Tosa 2015; Hong 2011). As a result, both elite sport and “sport for all” initiatives have been historically shaped within a hierarchical governance structure led by the central government, with limited influence from civil society and strong continuity in elite-centered priorities (Won and Hong 2014; Na and Black 2022).

In 2021, the Framework Act on Sports (Act No. 2021.08.10), known as "Sports Rights," was enacted, indicating that "all citizens have the right to participate in sports activities and enjoy sports without discrimination in sports and physical activities" (Korea Ministry of Government Legislation 2021). The 12th President (2017–) Moon Jae-in[1] emphasized that Sports Rights are a basic right for all citizens, guaranteeing that no one is discriminated against or excluded in sports for reasons such as nationality, gender, race, socioeconomic status, or physical condition. While this rights-based discourse marks a shift toward inclusion and welfare, it remains embedded within a historically centralized and elite-focused sports system. As historical institutionalist perspectives suggest, welfare and participation policies are layered onto, rather than replacing, existing elite-oriented structures, producing path dependence in sports governance (Myung 2025; Park et al. 2024). In this sense, the expansion of participation does not question the underlying structure of sport but instead extends access within a system that remains centrally controlled and performance-driven.

This tension between inclusion and structural continuity becomes particularly visible in gendered participation patterns. While government statistics suggest progress toward gender equity, with female participation in leisure sports (62.2%) slightly surpassing that of men (61.6%) in 2019, a closer examination reveals significant disparities by type of activity (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism 2019). When activities are divided into "sports" and "exercise," male participation in sports reaches 34.6%, nearly four times higher than female participation at 8.8%, whereas women are more active in exercise-based activities such as fitness, yoga, and swimming. These patterns demonstrate that sports participation is not only about access but is structured

[1] This paper follows the South Korean naming convention, where the last name is written first, followed by the given name. The romanization of Korean words and names adheres to the McCune-Reischauer system, except for names whose personal orthography is publicly known.

through gendered expectations that channel men and women into different forms of physical activity. Team sports and competitive ball games, in particular, remain significantly less accessible to women at both amateur and leisure levels, reflecting how institutional arrangements and cultural norms reproduce gendered hierarchies within sport.

Gender inequality is further reinforced within governance structures. Despite women's contributions to elite sport success, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions, comprising only around 16% of decision-making roles in sports organizations (Korean Sport & Olympic Committee 2020). Efforts to address this imbalance, such as the proposed 30% quota for women in leadership following the MeToo movement, ultimately failed to be implemented (Women News 2021), illustrating the persistence of androcentric institutional cultures and resistance to redistributing power (Pape 2020; Podoler 2020). These patterns highlight that gender inequality in Korean sports is not simply a matter of participation rates but is embedded in broader systems of governance that shape authority, legitimacy, and access.

Gender Policing, Antifeminism, and the Regulation of Female Athletes

In sports, where the gender binary is naturalized and justified through a two-tiered sex system, female athletes, especially those who excel, are often targeted as suspicious figures requiring scrutiny. The case of the online abuse of An San explicitly shows how binary gender norms are weaponized by antifeminism. In the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, An San, a 20-year-old South Korean archer, broke the women's Olympic record and became the first archer in Olympic history to win three gold medals at a single Games. Despite or due to her triumphant achievements, she became a target of online abuse by antifeminist internet communities in Korea. Her detractors claimed that An was a feminist, pointing to her short hair, her use of words that are commonplace in feminist circles, and a college degree from a women's university as corroborating evidence. Her short hair

became a symbolic gender deviation from normative femininity, and it was read as political deviance, linking bodily appearance to questions of nationalism, legitimacy, and belonging (Jung and Moon 2024). The rumor rapidly spread through social network services, and thousands of online commenters accused her of being a feminist and attacked her social media profile with disdainful comments.

This backlash unfolded within a broader ecosystem of online misogyny and antifeminist digital culture in South Korea, where feminism is frequently framed as misandry and a threat to social order (Jung 2023). Antifeminist discourse often draws on "evidence-based misogyny," circulating pseudo-rational claims through online platforms to legitimize hostility toward women and feminists (Ehrlén 2024). In this context, women athletes are not only evaluated for their performance but are also expected to embody an apolitical and properly feminine national identity. An San's case demonstrates how the label "feminist" is mobilized to delegitimize women athletes, framing them as unfit representatives of the nation (Kim and Shin 2022). Stigmatizing and devaluing a female athlete is not a new phenomenon, but this case marks a moment in which antifeminist backlash is explicitly organized around feminist stigma.

The Sports Rights initiative, which has gained the most traction in incorporating issues related to sex and gender into the sporting arena, frames gender equity as measured through the growth of cis-women's sports participation. It does not attend to sexist cultures and sexual violence in sports. Rather, Sports Rights reinforces binary gender norms by expanding "female sports" for cis women, which is overwhelmingly skewed toward individual workouts such as yoga, fitness, and swimming. This emphasis reflects a broader pattern in which women's participation is encouraged within forms of physical activity that align with normative femininity, rather than transforming the structural conditions that shape access, competition, and authority in sport. In this

sense, gender equity is quantified through participation rates while leaving intact the institutional and cultural hierarchies that continue to marginalize women, particularly in competitive and team-based sports (Podoler 2020).

However, the demand for women's team sports has noticeably increased at both the elite and amateur levels since the 2015 resurgence of Korean feminist activism, popularly referred to as a "feminism reboot" (Sohn 2020). This "feminism reboot," largely driven by digital feminist activism and online communities, transformed the cultural landscape by normalizing feminist self-identification and intensifying gender politics in everyday life (Jeong and Lee 2018; Sohn 2020). These broader cultural shifts are reflected in changing patterns of visibility and fandom. After the Tokyo Olympics, the ratings for women's volleyball surpassed both the men's baseball and basketball ratings, marking a significant moment in the recognition of women's sports as commercially and culturally valuable. The rise in viewership was closely tied to the popularity of star athletes and the heightened visibility of women's national teams, contributing to increased attendance and media coverage (Kim, Kim, and Kwon 2024). More broadly, the proportion of women spectators in professional sports has increased substantially in recent years, with female attendance rising from 38.7% in 2017 to 55.1% in 2020 (Kim, Kim, and Kwon 2024). Moreover, amateur women's football and baseball variety shows were broadcast for the first time in Korea and were a big hit, further expanding the cultural presence of women's team sports and challenging long-standing assumptions about women's athletic interests and capabilities (Kim 2024).

In line with the rising popularity of women's team sports, women-only sports have expanded both in the market and as a cause advocated by feminist activists . These developments are driven not only by increasing visibility but also by broader shifts in sport economies and participation patterns, as women's sport has become a growing commercial sector attracting sponsorship, media

attention, and new consumer markets (Lough and Irwin 2001; Elyasi 2024). At the same time, women-only events, particularly in mass participation sports such as running and fitness, have grown rapidly, offering spaces that are perceived as less intimidating, more socially supportive, and better aligned with women's needs and experiences (Newland 2019).

These developments suggest the emergence of new forms of engagement that challenge the marginalization of women in competitive sport and create alternative spaces for participation, visibility, and community. Feminist activists and fans increasingly use these spaces not only for participation but also for advocacy, mobilizing digital platforms, fan cultures, and collective identities to contest sexism, homophobia, and exclusion in sport (Rowe and Silva 2023; Toffoletti et al. 2025). In this sense, women-only sports function simultaneously as market products and political spaces, where gender equity is both commodified and contested.

At the same time, these changes remain uneven and are shaped by persistent structural constraints. Women's team sports continue to be institutionally marginalized, often treated as secondary to men's sports in terms of funding, media attention, and policy support (Cho 2023; Podoler 2020). Policy frameworks frequently mirror feminist discourses at the level of rhetoric while failing to fully recognize women's sports as independent domains requiring sustained investment and institutional commitment (Cho 2023).

As a result, the expansion of women's team sports unfolds within a contradictory terrain. On the one hand, feminist activism, increased media visibility, and shifting fandom have created new possibilities for women's participation and recognition in sport. On the other hand, these developments remain embedded within enduring gender hierarchies structured by policy, governance, and cultural norms. Moreover, gender equity itself is increasingly commodified, as the growing visibility of women's sports is leveraged for market expansion, sponsorship, and

branding, often without fundamentally questioning underlying inequalities. The growth of women's sports, therefore, should not be read as linear progress toward gender equality but as an ongoing negotiation in which feminist gains are simultaneously enabled, appropriated, and constrained by existing institutional arrangements.

Decolonial Feminist Approaches to Gender Categories

This dissertation examines gender as a historically produced system embedded in colonial relations of power rather than a universal or self-evident category. Drawing on decolonial feminist scholarship, it argues that gender operates as a central mechanism through which modernity organizes bodies, knowledge, and social hierarchy. The concept of the coloniality of gender shows that gender emerges alongside race, labor, nation, and sexuality within colonial rule, producing differentiated forms of humanity and structuring who can be recognized, governed, and known (Lugones 2010; Mignolo 2007). At the same time, this literature challenges the assumption that gender is universal. Many social systems have been organized through seniority, kinship, or other relational logics rather than binary gender distinctions, requiring gender to be treated not as an analytic given but as an empirical question (Oyěwùmí 1997; Lugones 2003).

Decolonial scholarship further highlights how gender is stabilized through epistemic practices such as translation. Translation operates as a form of epistemic control, determining what becomes legible as knowledge and how categories travel across contexts. Through processes of equivalence and standardization, diverse social formations are reorganized into dominant frameworks, often erasing alternative ways of knowing. At the same time, translation can become a site of contestation, where meanings are negotiated and incommensurable differences are sustained. These dynamics underscore that gender is not only a social category but also an

epistemic construct shaped through practices that govern how knowledge is produced and circulated.

The case of Korea illustrates how these processes unfold through layered regimes of rule. Gender was reorganized under Japanese colonialism and rearticulated through U.S. military governance and Cold War geopolitics, producing a historically sedimented field shaped by imperial and racialized power. These formations have direct implications for sport, where sex segregation is often treated as natural but relies on binary classifications produced through these same systems. Sport is a site where colonial classifications of sex and gender are both enforced and actively transformed.

Coloniality of Gender

The concept of the coloniality of gender marks a foundational shift in how gender is theorized. Rather than treating gender as a universal or transhistorical structure, decolonial feminist scholars argue that gender itself is a product of colonial modernity. It emerges as part of a broader system that reorganized race, labor, sexuality, and knowledge under colonial rule (Lugones 2006, 2010; Mendoza and Santos 2021).

In this formulation, gender is not simply a social category but a technology of domination. Colonial expansion imposed a binary, hierarchical, and heteronormative gender system that structured both social relations and ontological distinctions. Crucially, this system did not operate evenly. Lugones argues that colonial rule produced a division between those recognized as fully human and properly gendered—white, bourgeois Europeans—and those cast as outside these categories. Colonized populations were frequently constructed as "bestial," sexually deviant, or non-gendered, excluded from the categories of "man" and "woman" altogether (Lugones 2010).

This produces what Lugones describes as the paradox of the "colonized woman." While colonial discourse imposed gender differentiation, colonized females were not recognized as "women" in the same sense as white women. The category becomes structurally unstable, even empty, revealing how gender is unevenly distributed across racial hierarchies (Lugones 2010).

The coloniality of gender thus operates across multiple dimensions; power, knowledge and being. At the level of power, it is inseparable from racial and economic hierarchies that organize labor and social reproduction. At the level of knowledge, it privileges Eurocentric, masculinist epistemologies while marginalizing other ways of knowing. At the level of being, it produces differentiated forms of humanity, where some subjects are rendered fully legible and others are denied recognition altogether (Radlwimmer 2017; Manning 2021; Nassiri-Ansari and Rhule 2024).

Importantly, this framework does not posit a return to a precolonial gender system. Lugones rejects the idea that there exists a "pure" gender arrangement outside colonial influence. Instead, resistance emerges from within what she calls the colonial difference—the uneven, entangled conditions produced by colonial histories. Decolonial feminism therefore centers subjects who resist and negotiate these conditions, not as passive victims but as historically situated agents (Lugones 2010; Velez and Tuana 2020).

Subsequent scholarship extends and complicates this framework. Some scholars examine how coloniality of gender persists in contemporary formations, including postfeminist ideals of the "emancipated woman" that circulate globally while reproducing racial and geopolitical hierarchies (Giraldo 2016). Others question how the framework engages antiblackness and the specificity of racial violence, calling for further differentiation within decolonial feminist analysis (Terrefe 2020). Still others situate coloniality of gender alongside intersectionality and postcolonial feminism, emphasizing both its contributions and its limits (Mendoza 2017).

Taken together, this literature reframes gender as a central mechanism through which colonial power operates. Gender is not simply one axis of inequality among others but part of the infrastructure of modernity itself, shaping who can be recognized, governed, and known. This shift has significant implications for feminist analysis, requiring that gender be approached not as a stable analytic category but as an object of critique in its own right.

Against the Universality of Gender

If the coloniality of gender explains how gender emerges as a system of power, decolonial feminist scholarship further insists that this system cannot be assumed to be universal. The category of "gender" itself is historically specific to modern/colonial formations and does not map onto all social worlds (Lugones 2003; Rodrigues 2022; Oyhantcabal 2021).

This critique is not a denial of oppression, but a refusal of analytical universality. Decolonial feminists argue that Western gender categories—especially the binary division between "men" and "women"—are often imposed as the primary lens through which all social relations are interpreted. In doing so, they obscure other forms of organizing social life and reproduce Eurocentric assumptions about what counts as difference, hierarchy, and personhood.

Historical and anthropological research shows that many societies did not organize social relations primarily through gender. Instead, systems structured by seniority, kinship, spirituality, or other relational logics shaped social hierarchy and belonging (Oyěwùmí 1997; Lugones 2010; TallBear 2013). Some contexts included non-binary or multiple gender systems, while others did not treat gender as a foundational category at all (Rodrigues 2022; Oyhantcabal 2021).

Colonialism did not simply encounter these systems; it reclassified them. Colonized populations were often positioned first as non-human, outside the categories of "man" and "woman," before being reorganized into a binary gender system tied to racial and economic

hierarchies (Lugones 2010; Mendoza and Grijalva 2022; Sisson 2020). This reinforces the argument that gender is not an independent analytic but part of the same colonial matrix that produces race, labor, and subjectivity.

Within feminist theory, this critique destabilizes the category of "woman" as a universal subject. Decolonial feminists argue that treating "woman" as a coherent global category erases differences shaped by colonial histories, racialization, and geopolitical location. It also risks reproducing a familiar narrative in which Global South women appear as passive victims in need of rescue, rather than as historically situated subjects (Lozano and Grijalva 2022; Polanco 2022).

Rather than abandoning gender entirely, this literature calls for a different methodological approach. Gender must be treated as an empirical question, not an analytic assumption. This requires beginning from local social logics and asking whether and how gender operates, rather than presuming its universality (Lugones 2003; Gill and Pires 2019).

This shift has implications for feminist politics as well. Decolonial approaches emphasize coalitional forms of engagement that do not require a shared gender vocabulary. Instead of grounding feminism in a universal category of "women," some scholars propose centering opposition to gendered and sexualized forms of domination while allowing for multiple, context-specific ways of naming and organizing social life (Khader 2018; Monque 2021).

Taken together, this literature does not simply critique the universality of gender; it reframes gender as a provincial concept, powerful, globalized, but geopolitically and historically specific. The task, then, is not to discard gender, but to situate it: to treat it as one possible way of organizing social life rather than the framework through which all social worlds must be understood.

Translation, Equivocation, and Epistemic Control

Decolonial scholarship treats translation not as a neutral linguistic practice but as a central site of power. Translation determines what becomes legible, what counts as knowledge, and whose categories are recognized. It operates as a mechanism through which colonial epistemologies are extended, stabilized, and naturalized across contexts.

Rather than bridging worlds, translation often functions as epistemic control. Modernity establishes the terms of intelligibility, making visible only what can be expressed within its conceptual framework while rendering other forms of knowledge invisible or unintelligible (Vázquez 2011). In this sense, translation participates in what decolonial scholars describe as epistemicide—the erasure or subordination of non-Western epistemologies through their forced incorporation into dominant systems of meaning (Zhao 2020; Price 2021; Zhao and Zheng 2021).

This process often operates through the search for "equivalents." Concepts that do not share the same ontological grounding are translated into familiar terms, producing the appearance of sameness while restructuring meaning. What is lost is not simply nuance but the possibility of alternative ways of knowing. Translation, in this sense, does not only communicate knowledge; it reorganizes it.

The notion of equivocation captures this dynamic. Terms may appear shared across contexts while referring to fundamentally different worlds. Rather than resolving this gap, translation frequently suppresses it, aligning meanings with dominant frameworks (Yates and Núñez 2020). This is particularly visible in fields such as development or policy, where local concepts are reframed within global vocabularies, diluting or displacing their original significance.

At the same time, equivocation is not only a site of domination but also of possibility. Decolonial work highlights how translation can be repurposed. Intermediaries working across epistemic contexts may mobilize equivocation strategically, sustaining multiple meanings rather

than collapsing them into a single framework. Practices such as dialogical knowledge exchange challenge the assumption that translation must produce equivalence, instead foregrounding incommensurability as a condition of engagement (Yates and Núñez 2020).

These dynamics extend beyond individual encounters to institutional structures. Language hierarchies, publication regimes, and academic standards privilege English and Eurocentric forms of knowledge, shaping what is recognized as legitimate scholarship (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020; Sharma 2021). Translation here is embedded in broader systems that regulate the circulation and authority of knowledge.

In response, decolonial scholars call for forms of epistemic disobedience—refusing the terms through which knowledge is translated and valued within dominant frameworks (Mignolo; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020; Meghji 2022). This includes proposals for an ecology of knowledges, where different epistemic systems coexist without being subsumed into a single hierarchy (De Sousa Santos 2018).

Taken together, this literature reframes translation as a key mechanism through which colonial power operates at the level of knowledge. It produces hierarchy through erasure, equivalence, and standardization, while also opening space for resistance through practices that sustain difference. Translation, in this sense, is not secondary to sex, gender, sexuality, nation, or power. It is one of the ways these categories are made intelligible and governable in the first place.

Colonial Modernity, U.S. Military Governance, and Gender in Korea

Gender as a historically produced system embedded in colonial relations of power, co-constituted with nation, race, knowledge, and governance, and stabilized through classificatory and epistemic practices. Scholarship on Korea provides a historically grounded account of how

these dynamics unfold across layered regimes of rule, demonstrating that gender is continuously reconstituted through shifting imperial and geopolitical formations.

Under Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), gender was reorganized through overlapping imperial, nationalist, and transnational projects rather than externally imposed as a fixed system. Colonial governance transformed gender through institutional restructuring. Education, labor systems, medicine, and law did not simply regulate women's lives but reorganized bodies, reproduction, and domesticity as part of a broader colonial order (Shin 2001; Choi 2009). Gender functioned here as a key site through which colonial power operated, linking governance to everyday life. In line with decolonial accounts of the co-constitution of power, knowledge, and being, these institutions did not merely reflect gender difference but actively produced gendered subjects within a racialized and imperial hierarchy.

The emergence of the ideology of "wise mother, good wife" (현모양처hyeonmo yangcheo) illustrates how gender operated as a technology of governance. This was not a continuation of tradition, but a modern construct formed through the convergence of Confucian ethics, Japanese imperial policy, and Protestant domesticity. It positioned women as domestic citizens responsible for reproduction, hygiene, and moral order, aligning gender roles with both imperial governance and nationalist projects (Choi 2009; Cho 2023). These formations relied on epistemic reordering, in which heterogeneous practices were translated into legible categories that served state power.

The end of Japanese colonial rule in 1945 did not dismantle these gendered structures but rearticulated them under the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK, 1945–1948) and the subsequent Cold War order. U.S. military governance retained key colonial administrative and policing structures while introducing legal and political reforms aligned with liberal democracy and anti-communism, producing what Cumings (1981, 2005) describes as a

layered and incomplete decolonization. Gender was central to this transition. Prostitution, public health, and family law became sites through which the new regime sought to regulate population, morality, and national identity. Feminist scholarship shows that USAMGIK established a "toleration–regulation" system of prostitution, maintaining colonial forms of surveillance over women's bodies while reframing them through discourses of liberation and modernization (Park 2018).

These policies reveal how gender operates within a broader colonial matrix. Women were positioned simultaneously as subjects of reform and as objects of regulation, producing a gendered figure tied to nation-building and Cold War geopolitics. Legal regimes governing interracial marriage, sexuality, and citizenship further institutionalized racialized hierarchies aligned with U.S. imperial authority (Kwon 2018). Gender, race, and sovereignty were thus co-produced through military governance.

Postwar U.S. military presence extended and intensified these dynamics. From the Korean War onward, camptown (기지촌 kijich'on) systems institutionalized military prostitution around U.S. bases, where Korean women's sexual labor was regulated through state and military collaboration (Moon 1997; Soh 2008). Women were subjected to medical surveillance, spatial segregation, and disciplinary regimes, while being framed as contributors to national security and economic survival. As Moon (1997) shows, the South Korean state actively mobilized women as "dollar earners" within a militarized economy, linking sexuality, development, and geopolitics. Soh (2008) further demonstrates how these arrangements reproduced both colonial patterns of sexual exploitation and new forms of Cold War racial hierarchy.

At the same time, colonial and postcolonial transformations produced new forms of subjectivity. The figure of the "New Woman" (sin yeoseong) marked the emergence of educated,

urban women who participated in public life and wage labor. However, these transformations were uneven and stratified. Working-class women, including factory laborers and Jeju haenyeo divers, experienced modernity through different forms of economic participation and constraint, revealing unequal access to mobility and recognition (Fediunina 2022). These differentiated trajectories underscore that gender operates as a field of uneven relations, rather than a uniform system.

Militarization further reorganized gender at the level of citizenship and everyday life. Compulsory male conscription and anti-communist nationalism positioned men as soldier-citizens and women as reproducers of the nation, embedding gender into the structure of the state (Kwon 2000; Moon 2005). Militarized values extended into workplaces and social institutions, reinforcing hierarchical, male-dominated cultures and heteronormative family ideals. These processes illustrate how gender operates simultaneously at the levels of governance, economy, and subjectivity.

Importantly, this literature does not present gender as a coherent or totalizing system. Women navigated and reworked these conditions through labor, religious networks, transnational relationships, and activism. Camptown women, for example, have pursued legal claims against the state, challenging their historical marginalization and exposing the violence of militarized gender regimes (Lee 2018). Feminist and activist scholarship further links U.S. militarism to broader systems of patriarchy, race, and class, emphasizing how gendered violence is embedded in global power relations (Okazawa-Rey 1997; Moon 1997).

Taken together, this literature situates gender in Korea as a historically layered formation produced through successive and intersecting regimes of power—Japanese colonialism, U.S. military governance, and postwar developmental nationalism. Gender is not reducible to tradition or colonial imposition but emerges through the continuous restructuring of social life across

imperial and geopolitical contexts. Gender operates as a central mechanism of governance while remaining a site of contestation, negotiation, and transformation.

2. Gender Policing in International Sports Competitions and Feminist Critique

Historical Emergence and Gender Policing in Sex Testing

Sex testing, also called "gender verification" or "femininity testing," has been one of the most contested practices of gender policing in international sport. While a comprehensive and unified history remains incomplete, scholars consistently situate its emergence within the geopolitical context of the Cold War, where rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union intensified anxieties around national prestige, bodily authenticity, and competitive advantage (Ritchie 2003; Sullivan 2011; Pieper 2016). Suspicions that male athletes might be masquerading as female competitors to secure medals reflected broader concerns about the integrity of national representation and the legitimacy of competition. Within this context, sex testing emerged as a regulatory response, institutionalized to manage uncertainty and stabilize the category of "woman" in sport (Pieper 2016; Karkazis et al. 2012). From its inception, sex testing functioned not as a neutral scientific procedure but as a political technology embedded in global systems of power, tasked with maintaining the coherence of a binary sex classification system (Butler 2004; Fausto-Sterling 2000).

Historically, the methods used to verify sex have undergone several transformations, moving from crude physical inspections to increasingly complex biomedical techniques. Early practices in the mid twentieth century included so called "femininity certificates" and, in the 1960s, highly invasive visual and gynecological examinations, often described as "naked parades," in which female athletes were subjected to scrutiny by medical panels (Sullivan 2011; Tucker and Collins

2010). These practices were widely criticized for their degrading nature and lack of scientific legitimacy. In response, international governing bodies such as the International Olympic Committee and the International Association of Athletics Federations shifted toward chromosomal testing in the late 1960s, using Barr body tests to distinguish XX "female" from XY "male" bodies. However, these tests quickly proved inadequate, as they failed to account for intersex variations, leading to the exclusion of athletes who were legally and socially recognized as women and who possessed no demonstrated competitive advantage (Elsas et al. 2000; Simpson et al. 1993).

Subsequent attempts to refine sex testing through DNA based methods, such as SRY gene detection in the 1990s, similarly failed to produce a definitive or fair system of classification. Rather than resolving ambiguity, these methods reproduced it, demonstrating that no single biological marker can reliably determine sex. By the early 2000s, routine chromosomal testing was largely abandoned by major governing bodies, not because the problem had been solved, but because the technologies themselves had been discredited (Puffer 2002). However, this retreat did not mark the end of gender verification. Instead, it signaled a shift toward new forms of regulation.

From the 2010s onward, sex testing reemerged through hormone-based policies, particularly those focused on testosterone levels under the framework of hyperandrogenism (Ha et al. 2014; Jordan-Young and Karkazis 2019). These policies establish thresholds for testosterone in women's events, requiring athletes who exceed these limits to undergo medical intervention to compete. While presented as a more precise and scientific approach, hormone-based regulations remain highly contested. Critics argue that they rely on arbitrary thresholds, lack consistent empirical justification, and continue to target athletes who do not conform to narrow norms of femininity (Cooky and Dworkin 2013; Pielke 2017). In this sense, the shift to hormonal regulation does not

resolve the fundamental problem of classification but rather rearticulates it through a new scientific framework.

At the same time, the logic of testing has shifted from universal screening to targeted verification. Rather than testing all female athletes, contemporary practices focus on individuals whose bodies or performances raise suspicion. This transformation marks a shift from population level surveillance to individualized scrutiny, where the burden of proof is placed on athletes who fail to conform to normative expectations. In practice, this results in the disproportionate targeting of athletes whose bodies do not align with dominant ideals of femininity, including those with muscular physiques, deep voices, or nonconforming gender expressions (Henne 2015; Karkazis et al. 2012). Sex testing thus operates as a form of gender policing that extends beyond biological classification to regulate appearance, behavior, and embodiment.

Changes in institutional language further reflect the instability of the category being governed. Terms such as "sex verification," "femininity testing," and "gender verification" have been used across different periods, each signaling an attempt to align regulatory practices with evolving scientific and cultural frameworks (Pieper 2016). However, these shifts do not resolve ambiguity; rather, they demonstrate ongoing efforts to stabilize a fundamentally unstable binary. Sex testing is therefore less concerned with discovering biological truth than with maintaining the appearance of coherence within a classification system that is repeatedly challenged by empirical realities (Butler 2004; Fausto-Sterling 2000).

Understanding sex testing in this way shifts the analytic focus from evaluating its scientific validity to examining its role as a regulatory regime. Across its historical transformations—from visual inspection to chromosomal, genetic, and hormonal testing—sex testing has consistently functioned to police the boundaries of womanhood in sport. It operates as a mechanism of

governance that regulates bodies, enforces norms, and maintains the binary structure of sex classification. At the same time, the persistent failures and controversies surrounding these practices expose the fragility of the system they seek to uphold, opening space for alternative approaches to organizing participation that move beyond binary classification (Jordan-Young and Karkazis 2019).

Feminist and Decolonial Critiques of Sex Testing

Feminist scholarship has long challenged sex testing practices in sport, offering critical insights into their scientific, social, and political dimensions. One major line of critique focuses on the epistemological limitations of sex testing. Scholars argue that the repeated failures of testing technologies reveal that sex is not a fixed biological fact but a complex and socially mediated phenomenon (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Butler 2004, 2009; Magubane 2014). Biological markers such as chromosomes, hormones, genes, and anatomy do not align consistently, making it impossible to define sex through any single criterion (Henne 2014; Karkazis et al. 2012; Pastor 2019; Pieper 2016). Efforts to rely on specific indicators, whether chromosomal patterns or testosterone levels, thus fail to capture the multidimensional nature of sex, instead revealing the political work required to impose coherence on biological variation (Karkazis and Jordan-Young 2018; Pielke 2017). From this perspective, sex testing does not resolve uncertainty but exposes the instability of the very categories it seeks to enforce.

A second line of critique examines the normative assumptions embedded in sex testing practices. These practices are grounded in a binary model of sex that is closely tied to heteronormativity and gender conformity (Butler 2004; Henne 2014). Female athletes are expected not only to meet biological criteria but also to embody culturally recognizable forms of femininity. Those who deviate from these norms are more likely to be subjected to scrutiny, revealing how

gender expectations shape the application of scientific procedures. Contemporary policies centered on testosterone, often framed as objective measures of fairness, illustrate this dynamic. Feminist scholars argue that such policies rely on contested and limited scientific evidence while selectively targeting athletes whose bodies do not conform to narrow standards of femininity (Karkazis and Jordan-Young 2018; Pielke 2017). Sex testing thus operates at the intersection of science and culture, where biological classification is inseparable from social norms and regulatory logics.

A third line of critique highlights the intersectional and geopolitical dimensions of sex testing. Scholars demonstrate that race, nation, and colonial histories play a central role in determining who becomes subject to investigation (Adjepong 2020; Nyong'o 2010). Athletes from the Global South, particularly Black women and women of color, are disproportionately targeted, reflecting broader patterns of racialized surveillance (Blithe and Hanchey 2015; Karkazis and Jordan-Young 2018). From cases including Santhi Soundarajan (India), Dutee Chand (India), and Caster Semenya (South Africa) to more recent controversies surrounding Lin Yu-ting (Taiwan) and Imane Khelif (Algeria) at the 2024 Summer Olympics, sex testing illustrates how Eurocentric standards of femininity are reinforced while non-White bodies are subjected to heightened scrutiny. (Pastor 2019). Feminist and decolonial analyses further show that these dynamics are structured through global hierarchies of race and power, where Western norms of womanhood are treated as universal benchmarks (Henne 2014; Ritchie 2003). In this sense, gender policing in sport cannot be understood apart from colonial histories and ongoing geopolitical inequalities.

A fourth line of critique situates sex testing within broader systems of governance and control. From this perspective, sex testing operates as a form of gender policing that disciplines bodies deemed "out of place" within binary categories (Dunn 2017; Henne 2014). It functions as a biopolitical mechanism that surveils, classifies, and regulates bodies, often through invasive

procedures and, in some cases, coerced medical interventions (Mohapatra 2021). Scholars have described this system as both biopolitical and carceral, in that it not only categorizes bodies but also enforces compliance through institutional authority and social pressure (Travers 2009; Orsak 2024). The harms associated with these practices, including stigma, bodily violation, and psychological distress, underscore that sex testing is not merely a technical process but a deeply embodied and unequal form of governance (Karkazis and Jordan-Young 2018

From a postcolonial and transnational feminist perspective, sex testing can thus be understood as part of a broader system of colonial knowledge production and bodily regulation. Western biomedical science functions as the authoritative framework for defining and regulating sex, positioning itself as universal while marginalizing different understandings of embodiment (Pieper 2016; Ritchie 2003). In doing so, sex testing reproduces global hierarchies by imposing Eurocentric standards on diverse populations under the guise of neutrality. The classification of bodies in sport becomes a site where scientific authority, racial hierarchy, and geopolitical power intersect, shaping who is recognized as a legitimate "female athlete" and under what conditions.

Taken together, this body of scholarship reframes sex testing as a scientifically unstable, socially uneven, and politically charged practice. Rather than resolving questions of fairness, it reveals how sport operates as a key site where gender categories are actively produced, enforced, and contested. This perspective shifts the analytic focus from determining who belongs within existing categories to examining how those categories are constructed and maintained, opening space for alternative approaches to organizing participation beyond binary classification.

Fairness, Safety, and the Transnational Circulation of Gender Regulation

Taken together, these critiques suggest that sex testing should be understood not as a failed scientific practice but as a regulatory regime that governs bodies through shifting scientific,

institutional, and discursive criteria. Its persistence, despite ongoing controversy and scientific uncertainty, indicates that its primary function is not to establish truth but to maintain order. By defining who can compete in women's categories, sex testing stabilizes binary sex classification and reinforces broader systems of gender governance (Henne 2014; Karkazis et al. 2012; Pieper 2016). Rather than resolving ambiguity, successive testing regimes—from chromosomal to hormonal—demonstrate the ongoing need to recalibrate and defend a classificatory system that is inherently unstable.

In contemporary debates, this regulatory regime is increasingly articulated through the language of fairness and safety. These concepts are often presented as objective principles necessary for protecting women's sports. Proponents argue that maintaining a women's category requires regulating bodies perceived to possess advantages associated with male puberty, framing exclusion as necessary to preserve fair competition (Tucker and Collins 2010; Lundberg et al. 2024;). Similarly, safety narratives emphasize the need to protect women from potential physical harm, particularly in contact sports, positioning regulatory policies as forms of protection rather than exclusion (Posbergh 2022). In this framing, fairness and safety appear as neutral and technical concerns grounded in biological difference.

However, feminist and critical scholarship challenges these assumptions by demonstrating that fairness and safety are neither self-evident nor consistently applied. Critics argue that the concept of "fair play" is selectively mobilized, given that sport routinely accommodates wide variations in natural ability, such as height, endurance, and genetic advantage, without regulatory intervention (Cooky and Dworkin 2013; Pielke 2017; Krieger et al. 2019). The focus on specific traits—particularly testosterone—reflects not a comprehensive assessment of performance but a narrow and contested understanding of biological advantage (Karkazis and Jordan-Young 2018).

Moreover, empirical evidence linking endogenous testosterone levels to consistent performance advantages remains inconclusive, raising questions about the scientific basis of these policies (Pielke 2017).

Safety narratives are similarly complex and contested. While framed as protecting women athletes, these narratives often rely on hypothetical risks rather than documented harm, particularly in discussions of transgender and intersex participation. At the same time, feminist analyses highlight the significant harms produced by sex testing itself, including invasive examinations, coerced medical interventions, public scrutiny, and loss of livelihood (Sullivan 2011). In this sense, policies justified in the name of safety may expose certain athletes to greater forms of physical and psychological risk, revealing a contradiction at the heart of regulatory frameworks.

Importantly, fairness and safety are not applied uniformly but are selectively mobilized in ways that reflect existing power relations. Athletes who conform to normative expectations are rarely scrutinized, even when their physical attributes provide advantages. In contrast, those who deviate from these norms are more likely to be framed as threats to fairness or safety. This selective application reveals that these concepts are not objective measures but regulatory logics that naturalize binary classification while legitimizing intervention (Henne 2014; Posbergh 2022). In this sense, fairness and safety function as discursive tools that translate complex social anxieties about gender, difference, and competition into seemingly technical concerns.

From a broader perspective, these debates illustrate how sex testing operates within a system of governance that extends beyond scientific classification. As scholars note, contemporary eligibility rules are embedded in wider political and cultural struggles over gender, embodiment, and belonging, including the rise of anti-trans policies and debates over inclusion in sport (Travers

2009; Krieger et al. 2019;). Fairness and safety thus serve as key sites through which gender is regulated, contested, and redefined, linking individual cases to broader systems of power.

A transnational perspective further reveals how these regulatory logics circulate across contexts. Global media coverage, scientific research, and policy debates produce narratives about sex, difference, and competition that extend beyond international sporting bodies. These narratives do not remain confined to elite competitions but travel through dense networks of communication, including media platforms, scientific publications, and institutional guidelines, shaping how sex and gender are understood across different settings (Pieper 2016; Karkazis et al. 2012;). High-profile cases such as those involving Caster Semenya or Santhi Soundarajan become global media events, circulating widely and contributing to the production of a shared understanding of what constitutes a "real" female athlete (Cooky and Dworkin 2013; Pastor 2019). In this way, sex testing debates operate not only as regulatory mechanisms but also as cultural narratives that define legitimacy and belonging in sport.

As these narratives circulate, they are translated, reinterpreted, and adapted within local contexts. Actor-network approaches suggest that the persistence of sex testing depends on the continual alignment of diverse actors, including scientists, sports federations, policymakers, and media institutions, which collectively reproduce the link between biological difference and competitive fairness. Policy frameworks developed by international bodies such as the International Olympic Committee and international federations often serve as templates that are taken up, modified, or selectively implemented in national and local settings (Ritchie 2003; Pieper 2016). At the same time, scientific discourse reframes these debates as matters of objective expertise, further legitimizing their adoption across contexts (Pielke 2017). Through these

processes, regulatory logics of fairness and safety become normalized, even as they remain contested.

The South Korean context provides a particularly important site for examining these processes. Although formal sex testing policies have not been widely institutionalized, global discourses surrounding sex classification circulate through media, policy discussions, and public debate. These discourses shape how gender and athletic legitimacy are understood, influencing both institutional practices and everyday interactions. Narratives of unfair advantage and bodily difference, often grounded in global debates about testosterone, performance, and protection, contribute to the regulation of female athletes and the marginalization of gender nonconforming individuals, even in the absence of formal testing mechanisms. In this way, global systems of classification are embedded within local contexts, where they are reworked through specific cultural and political conditions

This dissertation addresses these dynamics by shifting attention from global governance to local practice. Rather than focusing solely on high-profile cases, it examines how systems of classification are reproduced, contested, and reworked within specific contexts. By analyzing how global discourses of fairness, safety, and biological difference are translated into local practices, it highlights the ways in which gender categories are both enforced and challenged in everyday sporting environments. This approach foregrounds the uneven and contingent nature of gender regulation, revealing how global norms are neither simply imposed nor fully resisted but are continuously negotiated in practice.

Transnational Discourses and the Production of Trans Exclusion

Following an essentialist understanding of sex, the Korean government has institutionally and legally ignored the existence of sex/gender/sexuality minorities(성소수자 seongsosuja) in sports by resisting the recognition of LGBTQ+ people as citizens. This absence of recognition is not simply a policy gap but reflects a broader commitment to binary sex classification as the foundation of sport governance. While little attention has been given to the exclusion and invisibility of LGBTQ+ people in sports, Korean transgender exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) have rapidly adopted the stance of contemporary U.S. counterparts to exclude trans people from sports and physical education. This alignment reflects broader global patterns in which trans people face systemic exclusion from sport, including harassment, lack of safe facilities, and restrictive eligibility policies that often require medical intervention despite the lack of consistent scientific evidence supporting claims of inherent athletic advantage (Jones et al. 2016; Lightner et al. 2024).

In the Korean context, this exclusionary logic is frequently articulated through the language of fairness and the protection of women's sport. Jin Ah Kim, the co-leader of the Women's Party, argued that it was unfair for Korean female weightlifters to compete against Laurel Hubbard, a New Zealand trans woman weightlifter in the Tokyo Olympics, while sharing the hashtags #FairPlayforWomen and #SaveWomensSports. Such rhetoric closely mirrors dominant discourses in the United States and British, where trans participation is framed as a threat to competitive integrity and women's opportunities, despite the absence of clear empirical support for these claims (McClearen 2022; Harris et al. 2023). These arguments rely on a naturalized understanding of binary sex categories and position cisgender women as a protected group, thereby legitimizing exclusionary policies while obscuring the social and political construction of sex categories in sport.

Considering that there has been no history of trans-inclusive policies or publicly known trans athletes in Korean sports until 2021, Korean TERFs' understanding of trans athletes is a typical example of an "imagined interaction," namely cis people's imagined interactions with trans people, where knowledge about the body and identity is hypothetical rather than grounded in lived experience (Westbrook and Schilt 2014). In this sense, trans exclusion in Korea is not driven by direct encounters but by the circulation of abstract narratives that construct trans athletes as inherently unfair competitors. Even in cases such as trans woman cyclist Na Hwa-rin in 2021, the discourse of fairness operates in complex and contradictory ways, sometimes leading to the internalization of exclusionary norms, including the belief that surgical intervention is necessary for legitimacy or that trans women should not compete in women's categories (Kim 2025). This demonstrates how the logic of fairness functions as a powerful ideological framework that shapes not only public debate but also individual subjectivities.

The rhetoric of unfair advantage attributed to trans female athletes is therefore not grounded in empirical evidence or local sporting realities but is hypothetically constructed through the circulation of Western media narratives and domestic transphobic discourse in Korea. Scientific claims about biological difference, often produced in Western contexts, are selectively mobilized and repeatedly invoked to justify exclusion, while dismissing the intersectional hierarchies of bodies shaped by racism, classism, colonialism, and imperialism. At the same time, scholarship on trans experiences in sport demonstrates that exclusionary policies are frequently unjust and unsupported by evidence, instead reinforcing rigid gender binaries and limiting female participation (Pérez-Samaniego et al. 2019). These dynamics reveal that gender regulation in sport operates through transnational systems of knowledge and authority, where certain forms of expertise are privileged while others are marginalized.

The Korean argument around trans athletes' participation in women's leagues thus illustrates a broader transnational process of trans exclusion, in which global discourses are selectively adopted and adapted within local contexts through imagined interaction. There has been growing investment in sports through laws and government policies that recognize sports as a basic right for all people to participate without facing discrimination. As a result, institutional investments for gender equity end up reinforcing the gender binary, maintaining sexist sports structure, and also erasing LGTBQ+ people in sports. Furthermore, TERF activities targeting trans exclusion have been intensified in collusion with the trans exclusion movement in the U.S. Korean sporting cultures grapple and experiment with reconfiguring participation beyond rigid sex categories and rejecting gender policing altogether, highlight the possibility of moving beyond both exclusionary TERF logics and limited inclusion frameworks, pointing toward more transformative approaches to gender justice in sport.

3. Conclusion

Decolonial feminist scholarship challenges the assumption that gender is stable or universal, instead situating it as a historical formation produced through colonial power relations and sustained through institutional and epistemic practices. Gender operates alongside race, governance, and knowledge, shaping how bodies are classified and regulated. This perspective shifts analysis away from fixed categories toward the conditions under which gender is constructed and maintained.

The Korean case illustrates how these processes emerge across layered histories of colonialism, militarization, and development. Japanese colonial rule, U.S. military governance, and Cold War geopolitics each reorganized gender through institutional reforms and ideological

projects. These layers do not form a coherent system but produce an uneven terrain in which gender is continuously structured and contested. At the same time, feminist interventions reveal that these formations are never complete, but actively negotiated in everyday life.

Sport is a key site where these dynamics unfold. Often framed as neutral and based on biological difference, sport relies on historically produced assumptions about bodies, fairness, and risk. Sex segregation functions as a governing mechanism that naturalizes particular understandings of the body while obscuring their political origins. Rather than asking whether sex categories are accurate, this study examines how they are institutionalized and contested within specific contexts.

Sex testing exemplifies this process. Far from a neutral scientific practice, it operates as a system of gender policing shaped by shifting scientific criteria and geopolitical anxieties. Feminist and postcolonial critiques show that it disproportionately targets marginalized bodies, particularly women from the Global South. Contemporary appeals to fairness and safety further obscure its political nature, functioning as regulatory logics that define legitimate participation while constructing certain bodies as suspect. These logics circulate globally and are reproduced locally, even in contexts like South Korea where formal testing policies are limited.

In South Korea, sport operates as a complex site of governance shaped by state policy, institutional structures, cultural norms, and transnational discourse. Efforts to expand participation often reproduce existing hierarchies through binary classification, gendered exclusion, and normative femininity. At the same time, everyday forms of gender policing extend beyond institutions into media and public discourse, where female athletes become sites of scrutiny and nationalist contestation.

These dynamics are further shaped by the uneven circulation of global narratives about fairness, safety, and biological difference. Even without extensive local experience with trans athletes, these narratives structure debate and justify exclusion, demonstrating how gender regulation operates through transnational flows of knowledge and authority. Gender in sport thus emerges not as a coherent system but as a contested field shaped by global frameworks and local reinterpretations.

Within this terrain, the expansion of women's sports reflects both transformation and constraint. Feminist activism and increased visibility create new possibilities for participation, yet these gains are often absorbed into existing institutional and market logics. Progress is therefore uneven and negotiated rather than linear.

By shifting focus from the validity of sex categories to the conditions of their production, this dissertation shows that the organization of bodies in sport is not inevitable but contingent. It highlights sport as a site where dominant classifications are both reproduced and challenged, opening space for reimagining participation, embodiment, and belonging beyond binary and hierarchical frameworks.

CHAPTER II: DATA AND METHODS

1.Theory Oriented and Multi Sited Case Study Design

This dissertation employs a theory-oriented case study design to examine sex segregation in sport as an apparatus to maintain global gender policing. Theory oriented case studies are particularly well suited for refining and extending theoretical frameworks through the strategic selection of empirically rich and analytically generative cases (Berman 2007). Rather than aiming

for statistical generalizability, this approach prioritizes analytical contextualization by situating findings within broader sociological debates on gender, embodiment, and governance.

The research is organized across three interrelated sites of analysis: elite sport institutions, community-based sport spaces, and transnational sport events. These multiple cases allow for an examination of how gender policies travel, are translated, and are contested across different institutional and geopolitical contexts. It also captures the uneven and context dependent operations of sex segregation, which cannot be understood as a singular or stable system.

Methodologically, this study is grounded in an interpretive and social constructionist approach that emphasizes meaning making as situated, relational, and historically produced (Warren and Karner 2015). Sex segregation is therefore analyzed not as a neutral classification system, but as an ongoing social process through which bodies are categorized, regulated, and contested.

To analyze these processes at several levels, I combine textual analysis, content analysis, participant observation, and in-depth interviewing. Across all methods, I adopt a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2014), moving iteratively between data collection and analysis. Initial coding attends closely to participants' meanings and discursive formations, while focused coding develops more abstract conceptual categories with greater theoretical reach. This approach allows theoretical insights to emerge inductively from the data while remaining in dialogue with existing scholarship.

Elite Sports: The Sex Testing Boycott Affair in the South Korean Women's Football League

At the elite level of sport, this study examines sex testing as one of the most contentious mechanisms of gender verification in modern sport governance. Building on the theory-oriented

case study design outlined above, I analyze the 2013 boycott controversy in the South Korean Women's Football League through textual and content analysis as a critical case of how global gender regimes are translated and enacted in local contexts.

The boycott was initiated by a group of coaches in the national women's football league, who threatened to withdraw from the upcoming season unless Park Eun-sun, a player on a rival team, underwent sex testing and was barred from participation. This demand was institutionally untenable, as neither the Korea Football Association nor the Korea Women's Football Federation had established formal regulations or precedents regarding sex testing in domestic leagues. Despite the absence of such policies, the coaches mobilized global discourses of gender verification to legitimize their claims, effectively invoking international standards to regulate a local sporting context.

The boycott brought unprecedented public attention to both Park and the women's football league. Media coverage and public discourse largely criticized the coaches' actions, framing them as discriminatory and unjust. In response, supporters of Park initiated an online petition titled "Please protect Park Eun Sun," which called for disciplinary action against the six clubs advocating for her exclusion. These competing responses reveal how narratives of fairness, protection, and legitimacy are contested and reconfigured within moments of crisis.

Despite visible public support, the controversy had significant consequences for Park's career. She ultimately left South Korea after accepting an offer from the Russian professional team FC Rosyanka. This outcome underscores the material effects of gender policing, demonstrating how discursive pressures and informal enforcement can produce exclusion even in the absence of formal regulatory mechanisms.

Importantly, while the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) was not

directly involved in the governance of the Korean domestic league, its gender verification regulations functioned as a powerful discursive resource. Local actors drew on FIFA's authority to legitimize their claims, illustrating how global governance frameworks extend beyond their formal jurisdiction. In this sense, sex testing operates as a form of global gender policing: a transnational regime of knowledge and power that can be selectively mobilized to define, discipline, and exclude bodies across contexts.

By tracing how international norms are invoked, reinterpreted, and enforced at the local level, this case demonstrates that global gender policing is not simply imposed from above but actively produced through situated practices. The boycott affair thus reveals the uneven and contingent ways in which global regulatory logics are translated into local struggles over gender, fairness, and belonging in sport.

Textual and Discourse Analysis

To examine the boycott affair, I employ a combination of textual analysis and media discourse analysis. This approach allows for the investigation of both institutional texts and their broader circulation within media and public debate. Rather than treating media coverage as a neutral reflection of events, discourse analysis conceptualizes media as a site where meanings are actively constructed, contested, and stabilized (Hall 1997).

Through this analytic framework, I address four interrelated questions:

(1) How is international sex testing reproduced and contested through the boycott affair in the South Korean women's football league?

(2) How are the bodies of Korean female players constructed within sex testing debates across axes of nationality, ethnicity, sex, gender, and sexuality?

(3) How do FIFA's gender verification regulations function within the Korean context as

mechanisms of gender policing?

(4) How is the narrative of "protecting female players" produced across discourses of human rights, nationalism, femininity, and anti-sexual harassment?

The textual analysis focuses on key institutional documents produced during the boycott affair. These include: (1) the boycott statement authored by six coaches and submitted to the Korea Women's Football Federation, (2) the response issued by the Seoul Women's Football Club, and (3) the ruling by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (13-petition-0845200). In addition, I analyze policy documents related to gender verification, including FIFA regulations and relevant policies within the Korea Women's Football Federation. These texts are examined to understand how gender verification is articulated, justified, and contested within formal institutional discourse.

Building on this, I conduct media discourse analysis to examine how these meanings are produced and circulated in public discourse. Media discourse analysis draws on the premise that language and representation are central to the production of social knowledge and power relations (Foucault 1978). In this framework, media narratives are understood as constitutive of reality, shaping how issues such as fairness, legitimacy, and gender are interpreted.

The dataset consists of media materials produced in South Korea between 2010 and 2019, collected using keywords such as "sex," "sex testing," "boycott," and "Park." The final dataset includes 458 Korean news articles, 30 video clips, and 3 radio segments. News articles were obtained through BigKinds, a database operated by the Korea Press Foundation. All materials were originally produced in Korean and translated into English by the researcher.

The analysis is informed by feminist media scholarship, which has demonstrated that representations of female athletes are shaped by broader gendered and racialized discourses. Prior

studies have shown how sports media reproduces gender inequality through patterns such as underrepresentation, heteronormativity, sexualization, and racialized framing (Cooky, Messner, and Hextrum 2013; Kane, LaVoi, and Fink 2013; Musto, Cooky, and Messner 2017). Drawing on this literature, I analyze how media narratives surrounding the boycott construct particular understandings of athletic bodies, fairness, and legitimacy.

Analytically, I examine recurring discursive patterns across media texts, including the framing of sex testing as a matter of fairness, the construction of the female athlete's body as suspect or vulnerable, and the mobilization of protection narratives. This approach aligns with feminist critical discourse analysis, which focuses on how gendered power relations are embedded in and reproduced through discourse (Lazar 2007).

By integrating textual and discourse analysis, this study captures both the institutional articulation of gender verification and its broader circulation within media discourse. This approach reveals how sex testing operates as a form of global gender policing, produced not only through formal regulations but also through everyday narratives that define and regulate the boundaries of legitimate femininity in sport.

Community-Based Sports: Queer Women Games in South Korea

The Queer Women Games (QWG) is an annual sports event in South Korea organized by the queer activist collective Queer Women Network (QWN). First held in 2018, QWG represents the first public sports event in South Korea that explicitly names queer women as a political category. According to its founding statement, "one can participate in QWG regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression" (Queer Women Network 2018). The event features team sports such as soccer, basketball, badminton, and relay, reflecting the disproportionate exclusion of queer women from team-based sports in South Korea. Each year,

QWG brings together approximately 400 participants, including both athletes and spectators.

While QWG is no different than other amateur sports competitions in South Korea in that it provides a space for recreational athletic participation, it departs fundamentally from dominant sport structures through its explicit challenge to gender policing. Unlike conventional sports systems organized around binary sex segregation, QWG does not require participants to disclose their sex or gender, nor does it permit participants to question or scrutinize others' sex and gender. As a result, the event does not organize competitions based on sex segregation or fixed gender categories, enabling all participants to compete within a nonbinary framework. The only requirement for participation is agreement with the political aims of QWG.

This nonbinary policy constitutes a significant intervention into the dominant logic of sex segregation in sport. It raises critical questions about how such an alternative framework emerges, how it is practiced, and how participants interpret and negotiate gender within this space. QWG thus serves as a key site for examining how grassroots activism produces alternative models of sport that challenge the naturalization of binary gender categories.

Insider Activist Researcher

The first phase of fieldwork was conducted at the second and third Queer Women Games during the 2019–2020 and 2022–2023 cycles. My engagement with QWG is shaped by my longstanding involvement in feminist and LGBTQ+ activism in South Korea. Prior to this research, and continuing throughout the project, I have been a member of the Queer Women Network, the organization that hosts QWG.

This dual role positions me as both an insider and a researcher. As Lofland et al. (2022) suggest, all research positions involve both advantages and limitations, regardless of one's

relationship to the field. In this study, insider status provided significant advantages in terms of access, trust, and depth of engagement. Without prior involvement in QWN, it would have been difficult to enter QWG as a researcher, particularly given the sensitivity surrounding participants' identities. Establishing trust in marginalized communities requires sustained relational work, and this is especially critical in contexts where LGBTQ+ individuals face social stigma, lack legal protections, and are vulnerable to outing and harassment.

QWN maintains strict confidentiality regarding participant information, reflecting broader concerns about safety within the Korean LGBTQ+ community. The organization's trust in me as a member made it possible to observe organizational processes and recruit interview participants. Many participants were willing to share personal experiences related to their sex, gender, and sexuality in part because of this shared community affiliation.

At the same time, my insider position introduces potential limitations. Participants may shape their responses in ways that align with the political vision of QWG, potentially limiting the expression of critique or disagreement. To address this, I triangulated interview data with additional sources, including Social Network Services (SNS) such as Facebook.

Following a reflexive methodological approach, I treat my positionality not as a bias to be eliminated but as a condition that shapes both access and interpretation. This includes ongoing attention to how my roles as an activist, organizer, and researcher influence data collection, participant interaction, and analytic framing.

Interviews

To examine participants' experiences, motivations, and interpretations of the Queer Women Games (QWG), I conducted in depth qualitative interviews. In depth interviewing allows for a detailed exploration of participants' perspectives while centering their meanings, interpretations,

and lived experiences (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Seidman 2019). This method is particularly appropriate for research with marginalized populations, as it enables participants to articulate their own narratives and situate their experiences within broader social contexts (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). By engaging both organizers and participants, this study examines QWG as a collectively produced space while making the experiences of queer and gender marginalized athletes more visible within sociological analysis.

I conducted a total of 40 in depth interviews with individuals involved in QWG, including organizers (n = 4), staff members (n = 6), and athletes (n = 30). Interviews ranged from 90 to 150 minutes, with an average duration of approximately two hours. All interviews were audio recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed. Recruitment was facilitated through the Queer Women Network (QWN), which distributed a call for participation to QWG participants. All interviewees voluntarily contacted me and agreed to participate in the study.

The interview protocol was semi structured, allowing for both consistency across interviews and flexibility to follow participants' narratives (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). The interviews were organized around two broad domains: participants' personal sports histories and their experiences with QWG. Specifically, the protocol addressed the following themes: (1) participants' lifelong experiences with sport, (2) motivations for participating in QWG, (3) interpretations of QWG's policies, particularly its nonbinary approach to sex segregation and the political significance of the name "Queer Women Games," and (4) perceptions of QWG as a sports space, including how it diverges from and overlaps with other sporting environments. This structure enabled participants to reflect on both individual trajectories and collective meanings associated with the event.

Data analysis followed a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2014), which emphasizes the iterative development of analytic categories grounded in participants' accounts.

Transcripts were first subjected to initial coding, using line by line and incident-based coding to remain close to participants' language and to capture actions and processes (Charmaz 2014). As patterns emerged, I engaged in focused coding, selecting the most significant and recurrent codes to synthesize larger segments of data into more abstract conceptual categories with greater theoretical reach (Charmaz 2014:141). Throughout this process, I employed constant comparison, systematically comparing codes across interviews to identify similarities, differences, and variations in participants' experiences (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

The interviewees ranged in age from their twenties to forties, and the majority had relatively high levels of formal education, with approximately 80 percent holding a bachelor's degree or currently enrolled in higher education. While this reflects the composition of many QWG participants, it also points to the classed dimensions of access to alternative sports spaces, an issue that is taken up in the analysis.

Given the risks associated with outing and the sensitivity of participants' identities, particular attention was paid to confidentiality. All interviewees were assigned pseudonyms. Following the anonymization strategy outlined above, I used Korean surnames only, which do not indicate binary gender and thus minimize the risk of identifying participants' gender identities. I also removed or altered any contextual details that could indirectly reveal participants' identities (Kaiser 2009).

All interviews were conducted and transcribed in Korean and later translated into English by the researcher. Translation was treated not as a neutral technical step but as an interpretive process that involves the negotiation of meaning across linguistic and cultural contexts (Temple and Young 2004; van Nes et al. 2010). This approach allowed for close engagement with participants' original expressions while remaining attentive to the limits of translation in conveying culturally specific meanings.

Global Sporting Events: Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK)

I conducted fieldwork at the Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK) in 2023. The Gay Games is a large-scale international sporting event that promotes LGBTQ+ inclusion and participation in sport. Modeled after the Olympic Games, it is held every four years and was first established in 1982 in San Francisco, United States. Historically, the Gay Games have been hosted primarily in North America and Western Europe. GGHK represents a significant geographic shift as the first Gay Games held in Asia, marking an important moment in the global expansion of LGBTQ+ sport activism.

Hong Kong is often described as a global city in East Asia and is regarded as LGBTQ+ friendly compared to neighboring regions. Still, this characterization masks important legal and political limitations. As Wong (2021) argues, LGBTQ+ inclusion in Hong Kong operates through a form of "queer liberal tolerance," in which visibility is permitted without full legal recognition, for example, a lack of anti-discrimination laws. This framework is shaped by Hong Kong's colonial and postcolonial history. Under British rule from 1842 to 1997, same-sex conduct was criminalized until 1990 (Shiu-Ki 2004). Following the transfer of sovereignty to China in 1997, there have been incremental legal changes, including recognition of certain transgender rights and limited protections related to spousal visas.

Despite these changes, the political environment in Hong Kong has become increasingly restrictive in recent years. Following the 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill movement, the imposition of the National Security Law by the People's Republic of China has significantly constrained public expression and collective organizing. Within this context, LGBTQ+ activism operates under heightened scrutiny, as public events may be interpreted as politically sensitive or potentially subversive (Wong 2021). GGHK therefore took place within a complex and

constrained political environment, requiring careful negotiation between global LGBTQ+ advocacy and local state regulation.

Comparative Research Design

Chapter V adopts a comparative approach to examine two LGBTQ+ sport initiatives in East Asia: the Queer Women Games (QWG) in South Korea and the Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK) in 2023. While both events share a commitment to expanding LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport, they differ significantly in scale, organizational structure, and political orientation. QWG is a locally organized, grassroots initiative that resists institutional gender policing and the exclusion of LGBTQ+ people, whereas GGHK operates as a global mega-event modeled on the Olympic framework, prioritizing international visibility and legitimacy.

Both South Korea and Hong Kong are highly industrialized and economically developed societies shaped by complex colonial histories that extend into the twentieth century. Hong Kong experienced British colonial rule from 1841 to 1997 before its incorporation into the People's Republic of China, while South Korea underwent Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945) followed by U.S. military governance (1945–1948). In both contexts, confucian social traditions have historically emphasized heteronormative family structures, shaping gender and sexual norms in ways that continue to influence contemporary social life.

By placing QWG and GGHK in dialogue, this study examines how distinct geopolitical conditions shape divergent strategies of LGBTQ+ sport activism. I conceptualize these differences through the analytical distinction between "protest" and "festival." QWG operates as a protest-oriented intervention that directly challenges binary gender systems and exclusionary practices in sport. In contrast, GGHK adopts a festival-oriented model that emphasizes visibility, celebration,

and global recognition, often working within existing institutional and political constraints. By analyzing these distinctions, this dissertation situates both events within broader debates in globalization and postcolonialism, and queer politics, highlighting how local histories and global hierarchies shape the possibilities and limits of activism.

Participant Observation

I conducted a short-term participant observation during the Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK), covering the full duration of the event from November 3 to November 11, 2023. Participant observation is particularly suited for examining social practices, interactions, and embodied experiences within their natural settings, allowing the researcher to access meanings that may not be fully articulated in interviews alone (Spradley 1980; DeWalt and DeWalt 2010).

Prior to fieldwork, I engaged in informal conversations and meetings with members of GGHK as part of my involvement in QWG organizing networks. Although these interactions were not formally recorded or treated as data, they provided important contextual knowledge about the event's outreach strategies, organizational structure, and transnational connections. Such preliminary engagement aligns with ethnographic approaches that emphasize immersion and contextual understanding as part of the research process (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011).

During the fieldwork period, I participated directly in multiple sporting events, including dragon boat racing, dodgeball, and football. Engaging as a participant allowed me to observe how gender policies were enacted in practice and to experience the event from the perspective of an athlete. Participant observation emphasizes the importance of embodied and situated knowledge, particularly in studies of sport, where meaning is produced through physical participation as well as discourse. Through participation, I was also able to engage in informal conversations with other

athletes, providing additional insight into how participants interpreted and navigated the event.

GGHK implemented multiple gender frameworks across different sports, including binary sex segregation, participation based on self-identification, and all-gender competition without sex divisions. I selected dragon boat racing, dodgeball, and football specifically because they offered all-gender formats, allowing for focused observation of how nonbinary or inclusive policies functioned in practice. In addition to observing gameplay, I paid close attention to participants' reactions to these policies, including moments of confusion, adaptation, and negotiation, and engaged in more extended conversations with participants about their experiences.

Beyond sporting events, GGHK included a wide range of programs, such as opening and closing ceremonies, concerts, exhibitions, parties, virtual running events, a festival village, and networking activities. Given the scale and simultaneity of these events, it was not possible to attend all programs. To supplement on site observation, I collected publicly available materials, including videos and photographs released by GGHK organizers. This multi-source approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the event while acknowledging the partial and situated nature of ethnographic observation (Denzin 1978).

Interviews

To examine how participants and organizers experienced and interpreted the Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK), I conducted qualitative interviews across two phases of fieldwork. Qualitative interviewing is particularly effective for capturing participants' situated interpretations of events and for understanding how meanings are shaped within specific social and political contexts (Weiss 1994; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). In this study, interviews are treated as contextually embedded accounts that reflect both individual experiences and broader structural

conditions.

During on site fieldwork in Hong Kong in November 2023, I conducted seven semi structured interviews with GGHK participants. These included four athletes, two audience members, and one community partner. Interviews were conducted in informal settings during the event, often following participation in sports activities. This approach enabled access to participants' immediate reflections while also reflecting the opportunistic and relational nature of fieldwork in large scale events (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011).

The political context of Hong Kong significantly shaped both access to participants and the scope of interview interactions. Following the implementation of the National Security Law in 2020, public discourse and collective activities have been subject to increased regulation, producing an environment in which individuals may be cautious about expressing political views (Toru 2020; Wong 2021) . Given its scale and visibility as an international LGBTQ+ event, GGHK could be perceived as politically sensitive. Organizers therefore actively managed interactions between participants, non-participants, and media to mitigate potential risks. These conditions limited opportunities for recruitment and made it difficult to identify participants willing to engage in extended discussion.

As a result, the on-site sample consisted primarily of individuals who were willing to speak within these constraints, including one Hongkonger[2], one expatriates, one international student and three international visitors. Interviews were conducted with individuals encountered during participation in sports events, reflecting a form of opportunistic sampling common in ethnographic research (Weiss 1994). While the sample is not statistically representative of all GGHK

[2] "Hongkonger" generally refers to a resident of Hong Kong who primarily speaks Cantonese, often alongside English, and may also denote those born or raised in the territory in contrast to expatriate populations.

participants, it provides insight into diverse perspectives shaped by differing roles, national backgrounds, and levels of engagement with the event.

To comply with the ethical and practical constraints of the field site, I did not ask direct questions related to politically sensitive topics such as protests or the National Security Law. Instead, interviews focused on participants' experiences of the event, their interpretations of inclusion and gender policies, and their perceptions of GGHK's purpose. These constraints are analytically significant, as they reflect the conditions under which knowledge about the event can be produced and articulated.

Following the event, I conducted a second phase of interviews with members of the GGHK organizing team between January and March 2024 via Zoom. These interviews provided detailed insights into organizational processes, including event planning, communication strategies, and the introduction of an all-gender league, which was implemented for the first time in this iteration of the Gay Games.

Across both phases, interviews ranged from one to two hours and were audio recorded with participants' consent. The final dataset comprises 20 interviews, including organizers/volunteers[3] (n = 10), athletes (n = 8), community partner(n=1), and audience member(n=1). Rather than aiming for representativeness, the sampling strategy is guided by analytic depth and variation, consistent with qualitative research approaches that prioritize the development of rich, contextually grounded insights.

[3] I use the combined term "organizers/volunteers" for several reasons. First, many interviewees hold specific titles such as team leader, chair, or director, and using those titles could make them more easily identifiable. Second, given the large scale of GGHK's organizing structure, most of my interviewees played key roles, making it appropriate to refer to them as organizers. Third, although all of them identify as volunteers, the term "volunteers" alone is too broad, as it includes hundreds of individuals involved in GGHK.

2. Language, Power, and Decolonial Methodological Considerations

All interviews conducted in Hong Kong were carried out in English, including those with Hongkongers and others for whom English was not their first language. All of my interviews in South Korea were conducted in Korean and translated into English by me. While English functioned as a shared communicative medium within an international event, this linguistic choice raises important methodological and epistemological concerns.

Language is not a neutral tool of communication but a site of power that shapes what can be expressed, how it can be articulated, and whose knowledge becomes legible within academic research (Smith 2012). As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) argues, research is embedded in broader structures of power that shape knowledge production. Transnational feminist scholars have noted English as both a strategic tool and a source of inequality. English facilitates cross-border feminist exchange but reproduces linguistic imperialism, "English hegemony" and "Anglo privilege" in time, labor, access, and visibility (Lunny 2019; Flotow 2019).

Conducting interviews in a second or third language may constrain participants' ability to convey complex experiences, emotions, and critiques. As Temple and Young (2004) note, meanings do not simply transfer between languages, highlighting the interpretive nature of translation. In this study, discussions of gender, sexuality, and political conditions in Hong Kong may carry culturally specific meanings that are not fully captured in English.

Feminist scholarship has highlighted that researcher–researched relations are inherently hierarchical and politically charged, even when aiming to "give voice" (DeVault and Gross 2007; Seibold, Richards, and Simon 1994). As an East Asian interviewer speaking in "broken English" or Korean English, the power dynamics with interviewees from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds become more complex. For example, when interviewing English speakers, whether

native or highly fluent, who are often from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, I feel increased pressure to assert my professional authority and legitimacy as a young Korean nonbinary scholar (Schembri and Jahić Jašić 2022). By contrast, when interviewing Hongkongers who have lived in Hong Kong their entire lives and are mostly middle class, I tend to adopt a more conversational and relational approach, allowing for moments of shared hesitation, code switching, and mutual accommodation. The fact that both the interviewees and I are East Asian, and that our first languages are not alphabetic but shaped by the structural pressure to learn English within Western imperial globalization, can at times reduce hierarchical distance. This shared positionality also creates a space in which participants may feel more comfortable expressing ambivalence or uncertainty.

The interactional dynamics of interviews are also shaped by the political constraints in Hong Kong. Participants navigating a politically sensitive environment, mostly Hongkonger, may adopt cautious or indirect forms of expression. These conditions influence not only what is articulated but also what remains unsaid. I intentionally avoid of questions about national security law, umbrella protests or mainland China, but some of interviewees wanted to express their opinion on these issues and I did not stop them. Though the fieldwork process and also the writing process, I remind myself ethics and insights of indigenous research method, relationality and accountability is the key in knowledge producing.

"In both critical theory and constructivism, knowledge in itself is not seen as the ultimate goal, rather the goal is the change that this knowledge may help to bring about. Both paradigms share the axiology that research is not seen as worthy or ethical if it does not help to improve the reality of the research participants" (Wilson 2008, p. 37).

Following this combined perspective, this study approaches language not simply as a

medium of communication but as part of the relational and epistemic conditions of knowledge production. The use of English in this research therefore reflects not only practical considerations but also the uneven global structures that organize transnational research encounters.

At the same time, this study remains attentive to how these conditions may reproduce epistemic hierarchies that privilege dominant, often Western, modes of articulation. To address this, I approach the data reflexively, attending to moments of hesitation, ambiguity, and simplification as analytically meaningful rather than as deficiencies. I also triangulate interview data with participant observation and publicly available materials to situate participants' accounts within a broader context.

Ultimately, this study treats cross linguistic research as a site where language, power, and knowledge intersect, revealing how global LGBTQ+ discourse is shaped not only by what is said, but also by the conditions under which it can be expressed.

CHAPTER III: THE NONBINARY POLICY OF "QUEER WOMEN GAMES"

Parts of Chapter III, "The Nonbinary Policy of 'Queer Women Games,'" was previously published in *Transgender Studies Quarterly 10(2): 116-132.* The article was authored solely by Jinsun Yang.

The Chapter III examines how QWG forms what I call a nonbinary sports space within a context where binary sex categories are institutionally rigid and deeply embedded in both local culture and global sport governance. Modern sport has been historically structured through Western, industrial, and patriarchal frameworks that naturalize binary sex categories and organize participation through male-centered norms, producing and legitimizing gender difference and male

superiority (Travers 2009). These structures are sustained through practices such as sex segregation, male-normed standards of training and performance, and governance systems that position men as the default subjects of sport, reinforcing what has been described as a "male preserve"(Dunning 1986) and a broader sport nexus that normalizes the two-sex order and gender hierarchy (Pape 2020; Channon et al. 2016; Anderson 2009).

Gender and sport scholarship has consistently shown that modern sport operates as a key site of gender surveillance, where bodies must be classified and regulated through discourses of fairness, safety, and integrity (Cole 1993;Travers 2009). In turn, these discourses are also themselves gendered. By focusing on QWG, this chapter shifts attention from critique to practice, showing how Korean queer feminist activism not only builds experimental infrastructures of sport that unsettle these binary and male-dominated logics, but challenges the modern meaning of fairness, safety, and integrity.

1. Introduction: Queer Women Games

Queer Women Games is a space where sex/gender/sexuality minority women who have been excluded from sports reclaim their ground and enjoy sports with freedom and equal rights, and a space to advocate for the values of human rights and sex/gender/sexuality equity. Sex/gender/sexuality diversity is a fundamental value of Queer Women Games. In all competitions, the male/female sex segregation of the mainstream sports world does not apply. All who agree to the aim of the QWG can participate, without restrictions on sex/gender/sexuality identity. -Queer Women Games 2018.

Queer Women Games was first held in 2018 by the Queer Women Network (QWN), a Korean queer feminist collective. It is the first public sports event in South Korea to explicitly name queer women as a designated group. The inaugural event, organized under the slogan "The

Game Has Begun," took place at the Eunpyeong District Sports Center in Seoul. According to official records, the first QWG gathered 315 participants, including 102 athletes, 151 audience members, and 47 staff members. Competitions included badminton doubles, 3 x 3 basketball, and a 400 meter relay, all structured as team based tournaments. The following year, in 2019, the second QWG was held under the motto "Feel Our Ground," expanding to approximately 450 participants and adding futsal as a fourth official sport.

The emergence of QWG must be understood in relation to broader sociopolitical tensions in South Korea concerning the meaning of gender equality. Since the 2010s, demands for women's safety and gender equality have intensified through large scale public protests, prompting the Korean state to introduce policies addressing gender inequality. These mobilizations, often described as a "feminism reboot," include pivotal moments such as the 2016 Gangnam Station protest against misogynistic violence, the 2018 mass demonstrations against digital sexual crimes, and the #MeToo movement, all of which reframed gender-based violence and discrimination as structural rather than individual issues. In response, the state expanded gender equality legislation and institutional mechanisms, including the Gender Equality Act and policies aimed at increasing women's labor participation and political representation (Kim and Kim 2011; Kim et al. 2022). Yet these policies continue to rely on a narrow and heteronormative definition of gender, effectively excluding sex, gender, and sexuality minorities (Na et al. 2014).

This exclusion became particularly visible on August 4, 2015, when the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family ordered the deletion of clauses referencing sexual minorities from the Basic Gender Equality Ordinance of Daejeon City Council after receiving complaints from conservative Christian groups. The ministry stated that the Act on Gender Equality applies to "women and men"

and therefore does not include concepts or policies related to sexual minorities.[4] Despite criticism, the revised ordinance passed without protections for LGBTQ+ people.

In response, feminist and queer activists mobilized against this exclusion. On October 10, 2015, a coalition of organizations including LGBTQ rights groups, anti sexual violence centers, disability rights groups, the Green Party, and human rights lawyers organized a rally titled "Ain't I a woman?"(나는 여성이 아닙니까)[5] Participants shared testimonies that revealed how their lived experiences were excluded from the category of "women" as defined by state policy. The rally marked the first large scale public mobilization explicitly centering sex, gender, and sexuality minority women in South Korea and demonstrated that feminist struggles cannot be reduced to a single category of women's issues.

The organizing network formed through this movement became the foundation for QWN, which later established QWG as part of its broader activist strategy. In this sense, QWG is not simply a sports event but a continuation of queer feminist political struggle. Its emphasis on anti-gender policing framework directly responds to the state's exclusionary definition of gender equality by refusing fixed and singular categories of womanhood, while its insistence on naming

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[4] The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, in an official document sent to Daejeon City titled "Request for Correction Regarding the Basic Ordinance on Gender Equality," stated: "The Framework Act on Gender Equality is a law aimed at developing a gender-equal society in which women and men work together, by guaranteeing equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for participation for both genders." It further pointed out that "therefore, it does not include or define concepts or policies related to sexual minorities."
HuffPost Korea. 2015. "The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family requested that Daejeon City remove its 'sexual minority ordinance.'" ("여성가족부가 대전시 '성소수자 조례' 삭제를 요구했다.") *HuffPost Korea*, August 11. Retrieved April 21, 2026 (https://www.huffingtonpost.kr/article/10666)

[5] OhmyNews. 2015. ""Ain't I a woman? Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, face this reality." ("나는 여성이 아닌가? 여성가족부 똑바로 봐라") *OhmyNews*, October 29. Retrieved April 21, 2026 (https://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0002150332).

"queer women" strategically engages feminist politics to expand the boundaries of who is recognized.

The series of events leading to the establishment of QWG illustrates how sport operates as a site of political intervention, where activism, identity, and institutional power are actively negotiated (Kaufman and Wolff 2010). QWG's commitment to sports without gender policing and its framing as a space for queer women are deliberate responses to the question posed to the state: who is the "woman" that gender equality policies are meant to protect? By tracing the experiences and practices of QWG, this chapter demonstrates how nonbinary sports spaces are actively produced through political struggle, organizational design, and embodied participation, reconfiguring how gender, fairness, and belonging are structured within sport beyond binary and male-centered frameworks.

To identify the processes through which QWG challenges mainstream sports' gender policing and male-centered structure, I divide my findings into two parts.

First, I examine how QWG disrupts the binary logic of sport, which is rooted in Western-dominated models of sex segregation. While many contemporary policies attempt to include transgender athletes, they often maintain the binary structure by regulating bodies through eligibility criteria and gender verification. In contrast, QWG's nonbinary policy undoes sex segregation itself by removing gender categories and rejecting gender policing, thereby challenging the foundational assumption that fairness in sport depends on binary classification. Through this practice, participants encounter different bodies without relying on assumptions about sex, gender, or sexuality, revealing the instability of binary categories and the limits of trans-inclusion within existing structures.

Second, I analyze how QWG addresses the male-dominated structure of sport by centering

queer women as the primary subjects of athletic participation. Modern sport has been historically organized as a male-centered institution, where women and gender minorities are positioned as marginal or secondary participants. By explicitly naming "queer women" while remaining open to all participants, QWG reorients the symbolic and material center of sport. It is organized as a public sports stage where all games are visible and actively supported by an audience, countering the historical invisibility of queer women in sports. Within this staged environment, participants discover their desires and capacities for joy and excellence in sports, while collectively reimagining the meaning of competition, achievement, and pleasure. In what follows, I examine QWG's goals, strategies, processes, and their effects through a range of empirical data.

2.Creating a Nonbinary Sports Space

QWG begins from the recognition that mainstream sports institutions sustain and reproduce the gender binary. To challenge these logics, QWG adopts two distinct but interconnected strategies to disrupt gender policing: undoing sex segregation in competition and building a shared commitment among participants not to judge one another's sex, gender, or sexuality identities.

First, the Queer Women Network (QWN) removed gender categories from the registration process. This intervention directly challenges the assumption that sex segregation is natural or necessary, while addressing exclusion of queer women in sports. Second, QWG introduced a collective oath in which participants agree not to judge others' identities or act on gendered or sexualized stereotypes.

Through these practices, QWG produces a nonbinary sports space that actively resists and disrupts gender policing, rather than relying on conventional trans or gender inclusive policies that offer only limited accommodations within an otherwise binary system (Braumüller et al. 2020; Phipps 2019). In this sense, QWG can be understood as a "proactive" reform that explicitly

welcomes sex, gender, and sexuality minorities, rather than a "reactive" approach that responds to individual complaints on a case-by-case basis (Davis 2017).

Participants' responses to competing in a nonbinary sporting environment without gender policing emerged in three primary ways. First, interviewees described experiencing both uncertainty and excitement in relation to the absence of gender categories. Second, the shared practice of refusing gender judgment enabled participants to engage in competition while maintaining ambiguity about others' identities, which became a collective norm rather than a source of anxiety. Third, QWG's policies facilitated the participation of trans and nonbinary individuals by shifting attention away from categorizing bodies and identities, and instead focusing on the structural inequalities produced by the binary sex system.

Strategy 1: Undoing Sex Segregation

The first strategy QWG adopts to create a nonbinary sports space is undoing sex segregation. Binary gender categories in sport require athletes to conform to a two-sex system and declare their identities in order to determine eligibility (Sullivan 2011). From school sports to amateur and professional levels, checking a gender category box is treated as a natural and nonnegotiable step of participation. This system reflects broader frameworks of modern sport that organize participation through binary classification and position sex difference as the basis of fairness and competition. QWG intervenes at this foundational moment by eliminating the gender category altogether, thereby challenging the assumption that sport must begin with sex classification.

QWG's first step in undoing sex segregation was deleting the gender category from its application form. This intervention exposes how mainstream sport compels individuals to conform to the gender binary as a precondition of participation, effectively excluding nonbinary and gender-nonconforming people from the outset. While many contemporary policies seek to include

transgender athletes, they often do so by regulating bodies within existing male and female categories, leaving the underlying structure of sex segregation intact. By contrast, QWG shifts the question from who fits into existing categories to whether such categories are necessary to play sports.

At the same time, QWG presents a productive tension between naming and inclusion. Although the event is titled *Queer Women Games*, which appears to define a bounded category, its eligibility remains fully open. As stated in its founding declaration, "sex/gender/sexuality diversity is a fundamental value of Queer Women Games… All who agree to the aims of QWG can participate… without any restrictions on sex/gender/sexuality identity" (QWN 2018). Rather than restricting participation, the title functions as a political claim that centers queer women while refusing to police the boundaries of that category.

Organizer Moon described how this principle shaped the earliest decisions about eligibility:

> We had never thought of limiting QWG eligibility based on participants' identities. It was the very first decision that all can participate in games regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We wanted the games to be a space where homosexual, bisexual and asexual people come to play without concerns about their sexual orientation. Also, we expected QWG to be a space questioning the naturalness of gender binary and sex segregation. Those two goals have reached an agreement at the beginning of QWG. We had more conversations about it, but no one mentioned that this event should accept only women. [Organizer. Moon]

Moon's account highlights that questioning sex segregation was not treated as a problem to be managed but as a foundational discussion shaping the event. Undoing sex segregation also transforms how participants encounter difference. As Moon further explained:

> We rarely experience different bodies from ourselves in sports. It splits. Women and men are divided. If you are something different then there would be the gender test. That is a familiar narrative to us. In QWG, participants encounter diverse and even ambiguous genders. The athletes participate of their own will, so they have to face it anyway. I hope that QWG can be a chance for them to broaden their experience by contacting different bodies through sports. The sporting bodies are distinct from mine but maybe in the same category. If participants meet different bodies and lower their guard against the differences, QWG would achieve what the QWN ultimately aims for. Sports could fall apart gender boundaries rather than strengthen. [Organizer. Moon]

This account suggests that sex segregation does not simply separate men and women but also obscures variation within categories. By removing these divisions, QWG creates conditions in which participants engage with a wider range of bodies and experiences, including differences that exist within what would otherwise be considered the same gender category. In doing so, QWG aligns with broader scholarly proposals for nonbinary and open sport models that challenge the rigidity of sex classification and expand possibilities for participation (Martínková 2020; Travers 2009).

At the same time, QWG does not ignore concerns about fairness but instead reopens them for collective discussion. Dominant understandings of fairness in sport are often grounded in what Cavanagh and Sykes (2006) call the advantage thesis, the belief that those assigned male at birth possess inherent physical advantages over those assigned female at birth. This assumption underpins many contemporary debates about women's, intersex, and trans athletes' participation. Organizer Han explained how QWG engages this issue:

> When it comes to sports, I think the belief in a physical discrepancy between the two sexes

> is deeply rooted in people's minds. If you are a man, you will play better than a woman because your body is masculine, and it has more athletic capacity. Without sex segregation, people say "this is unfair". It's a common idea for most of us that sex segregation should be maintained for fairness. Fairness is such a pivotal value in sports, however, we did not really have a chance to discuss it. QWG brought the participants into this discussion. I thought it would be a great opportunity if we could learn and experience fairness together without sex segregation. [Organizer Han]

Rather than dismissing fairness concerns, QWG reframes them by creating a space in which participants can collectively experience and evaluate what fairness means outside a biologically essentialist framework.

From the perspective of those marginalized within mainstream sport, undoing sex segregation also addresses issues of safety and belonging. Within QWG, the use of gender-neutral restrooms became a significant element of this transformation. Joo, a futsal player who identifies as genderqueer, described their experience.

> The most surprising thing was gender- neutral restrooms. That was amazing. I remember the moment I changed my uniform there. It reminded me that I didn't have to categorize myself into man or woman. While changing the uniform, I felt very safe there. [Futsal Joo]

For Joo, safety did not come from knowing others' identities but from trusting the collective norms of the space. Through these practices, QWG's strategy of undoing sex segregation reveals how deeply embedded assumptions about sex difference organize participation, fairness, and legitimacy in sport. By eliminating gender classification and fostering encounters across difference, QWG creates a space in which participants can collectively rethink

what sport is and how it might operate beyond the constraints of the binary system.

Tensions and Discoveries across Sex Differences

Participants' experiences of QWG's nonbinary policies reveal a set of tensions and discoveries that emerge when sex segregation is undone. When asked about nonbinary policies, many interviewees initially expressed confusion, discomfort, and even embarrassment. These reactions reflect the fact that most participants had prior experiences in sports structured by binary gender categories and male-dominated norms. Research shows that women often experience higher levels of anxiety and discomfort in mixed-gender or male-dominated sport settings due to concerns about performance, judgment, and embodied difference. In this context, QWG introduces an unfamiliar environment that disrupts deeply internalized expectations about gender, competition, and fairness.

One moment that illustrates this tension occurred during a relay event when a participant questioned the presence of a male-presenting team. As organizer Ahn recalled:

> Representatives from each relay team gathered to decide the running order. Among them was a group of men, or more precisely, a male-presenting team. One female participant approached me and asked, ″Why are men allowed to participate?″ I explained the aims of the Queer Women Games: to create a sporting space that moves beyond the gender binary and can be enjoyed by everyone. She disagreed, arguing that it was unfair because men and women have different physical capacities and therefore should not compete together. The organizers had anticipated this concern during the planning stage. A core principle of the QWG is to reject the assumption of male bodily superiority. Interestingly, in the relay race itself, the male-presenting team performed poorly, while the team that had raised the

concern placed second. After the race, the complaint disappeared. [organizer, Ahn]

This interaction demonstrates how fairness, often grounded in biological essentialism, operates as a taken-for-granted framework through which participants initially interpret competition. Ahn responded by reiterating QWG's foundational goal of creating a sports space beyond the gender binary and challenging the assumption of male physical superiority. While organizers anticipated such concerns, this moment reveals how deeply the logic of sex segregation structures participants' expectations of what counts as fair competition.

Importantly, these tensions were not resolved through abstract explanation alone but through embodied experience. In the same relay event, the male-presenting team was decisively defeated, while the team that raised the complaint placed second. Following the match, the complaint disappeared. Although this was the only direct on-site challenge reported, other participants similarly noted that encountering mixed or ambiguous gender presentations prompted them to revisit QWG's policies and reflect on their assumptions.

These findings highlight that undoing sex segregation requires more than removing categories. It involves transforming the meanings participants attach to difference. Prior research shows that eliminating gender divisions without addressing broader sport culture can reproduce inequality and place additional burdens on women and LGBTQ participants (Travers 2013; Channon et al. 2016; Pape 2020). QWG addresses this challenge by combining organizational policies with collective practices that encourage participants to question biological essentialism and remain open to new forms of interaction.

> As participants engaged in competition without sex segregation, many began to recognize that sex differences were not the most salient factor shaping athletic outcomes. Instead, they observed variation in skill, experience, and teamwork. Shin, a relay athlete, reflected:

> Honestly, it doesn't make sense. I'm 156 centimeters [5.1 feet] and what is the average height of the gay team? Some people were complaining 'How do lesbians compete with gays?' But when the game started, it turned out that was not really a thing but the gap between the elites and amateurs." [Relay, Shin]

In recreational and amateur contexts like QWG, differences in training, resources, and experience often outweigh differences attributed to sex. Participants repeatedly identified factors such as teamwork, practice, and prior experience as more significant determinants of performance than biological sex. These observations complicate dominant fairness discourses by revealing that athletic ability is shaped by multiple, unevenly distributed factors rather than a simple binary distinction.

At the same time, undoing sex segregation does not eliminate gendered assumptions but reconfigures them. Joo, a futsal player, described how their team evaluated a male-presenting team:

> "This is such a bias, but when we looked over the appearance of the Lion FC, we questioned 'Are they any good?' It might be a prejudice against gay if there were gays. But my team said 'We could beat them, we would win' (Laughs). They didn't look muscular or give off the macho men's aura. I thought it might be worth competing with them, but fortunately, we didn't have a match with them." [Futsal, Joo]

Joo, a futsal player, described what happened in their team when they saw the Lion FC, a male presenting team in futsal games. They guessed Lion FC was a gay team because the team presented male although, they were not sure. Joo's team did not see Lion FC as a skilled team because they were not muscular. Joo said that "it was a prejudice against gay men," but they were guessing Lion FC was a gay team because they were a male presenting team, and their low expectations about the Lion FC's performance was deduced from their impression of the team's

musculature. For Joo, the key point was not whether Lion FC were gay or not but how fit they were and how skilled they were as a competitor. Joo said it was “fortunate” not to compete with Lion FC, but they also hoped to have a chance to play against them.

Taken together, these experiences demonstrate that QWG does not simply disprove the belief in male physical superiority. While participants encountered evidence that challenged this assumption, it was not entirely abandoned. Instead, QWG creates a space in which competing logics of difference coexist, prompting participants to rethink how athletic ability is understood. As sex categories become less central, participants begin to recognize a continuum of bodies, skills, and performances that extend beyond the binary framework (Kane 1995).

Importantly, these shifts reframe the meaning of fairness itself. Rather than treating fairness as a fixed principle grounded in biological difference, participants begin to experience it as something relational, situational, and collectively negotiated. In this sense, QWG does not resolve fairness concerns but reopens them, revealing that what is often taken as a neutral standard is in fact shaped by historically embedded assumptions about sex, hierarchy, and competition.

In this sense, the tensions experienced by participants are not failures of nonbinary policies but central to their transformative potential. By bringing participants into direct engagement with uncertainty, difference, and contradiction, QWG fosters a process through which taken-for-granted assumptions about sex, fairness, and athleticism are questioned and reworked.

This section contributes theoretically by showing that undoing sex segregation does not eliminate tensions around fairness but relocates them from institutional regulation to collective negotiation. Rather than resolving difference through classification, QWG demonstrates how fairness can emerge as an ongoing social process shaped through interaction, experience, and shared participation.

Strategy 2: Rejecting Gender Policing

The second strategy QWG adopts to create a nonbinary sports space is rejecting gender policing. I use the term nonbinary policies to describe two core interventions implemented at QWG: the elimination of sex categories in participation and the collective agreement not to judge or probe participants' sex, gender, or sexuality identities. These policies operate simultaneously at the organizational and interactional levels, confronting the gender binary not only through institutional design but also through practices among participants.

First, QWG dismantles the two-tiered sex system by removing gender categories from the application process. Participants are not required to disclose or describe their gender to any agents, including organizers, referee, teammates, or competitors. This organizational decision directly challenges the assumption that sex segregation is natural, necessary, or fair. Practices such as sex testing have historically targeted women who appear "too masculine," as well as intersex and trans athletes, reinforcing the idea that legitimate participation depends on fitting into a binary system of "pure" male or female bodies (Sullivan 2011). By eliminating gender categories altogether, QWG refuses this logic and disrupts the institutional mechanisms that sustain gender policing.

Second, QWG builds a collective consensus among participants through a shared oath titled *Our Promise*, which explicitly commits participants to rejecting gender judgment. The oath was proclaimed at the opening ceremony and circulated through the QWG website, social media, and printed materials. The oath states:

As we have come together to take part in the 2018 Queer Women Games,

1. *All participants are equal regardless of types of participation and are subjects who advocate gender equity and the human rights of sex/gender/sexuality minorities.*
2. *Recognize that one's identity is best understood by themselves, and do not doubt or*

probe others' identities.

3. *Do not judge or act on stereotypes with respect to age, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity of others.*
4. *Keep in mind that the intimacy of physical contact varies from person to person and that the contact I want may be uncomfortable to others.*
5. *Do not use an expression or label which disparages minorities (disability/women/age/race).*
6. *If there is something you do not understand or feel uncomfortable about, actively express it, communicate it with others, and respond to it together.*
7. *We promise mutual trust to create a safe and pleasant space for everyone. (my translation)*

Clauses 2 and 3 specifically question sports authorities' governance and policing of bodies within a gender binary framework. Because participants do not indicate their gender identity on entry forms, the organizing group, QWN, does not collect information about participants' sex or gender identity. Rather than relying on institutional policing, QWG is grounded in participants' commitment, making their collective involvement necessary to achieve its goals. In this sense, clauses 6 and 7 establish a shared commitment by emphasizing active engagement and mutual trust among participants. An interview with organizer Han illustrates this shift:

> "In reality, the individual's sports experience or ability is not decided by their gender. Then sex segregation may not be fair. What if we have a participant who seems like a non-trans man, but the person says, 'I identify as female and I am a very, very lesbian'? We can't prevent her participation because we deny her identity. In fact, we followed our statement that no one is allowed to judge others' sex and gender identity." [Organizer, Han]

Han's reflection highlights how QWG renounces the institutional authority to regulate athletes' bodies, a power typically held by governing organizations (Sullivan 2011). Instead, responsibility is redistributed among participants themselves. Through the principles outlined in *Our Promise*, participants are encouraged to communicate and collectively create a safe and inclusive space. This emphasis on collective responsibility also challenges the internalized self-surveillance that athletes often engage in to conform to gender norms.

Through these intertwined strategies, QWG produces a nonbinary sports space that does not merely accommodate gender diversity but actively destabilizes the binary logic underlying mainstream sport.

Adapting to Uncertainty: Risking "Determining Gender"

While QWG's nonbinary policies seek to suspend gender classification, participants do not enter the space as blank slates. Rather, they continue to read, misread, and respond to others' identities through socially constructed gender codes, as they do in everyday interaction. At the same time, the collective promise not to doubt or probe others' sex, gender, or sexuality identities requires participants to remain in a state of uncertainty. This tension produces a distinctive mode of interaction in which participants must navigate between habitual practices of "doing gender" and the risk of "determining gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987; Westbrook and Schilt 2014).

As scholarship has shown, mainstream sport is a key site where gender is both performed and policed through everyday practices, from bodily presentation to assumptions about ability and belonging. In QWG, these processes do not disappear but are reconfigured. Participants often found themselves uncertain about others' identities and expressed this ambiguity during interviews.

> I also have doubts about whether a male team should match with only male teams… There might be athletes who identify themselves as women… If you start thinking about gender

in this way, it becomes an endless question. [Futsal, Joo]

Here, the uncertainty generated by QWG's policies opens a reflexive process in which participants begin to question the coherence and necessity of gender categories themselves. Rather than arriving at stable classifications, participants encounter what Joo describes as an "endless question," revealing the instability of gender as a basis for organizing sport.

Importantly, gender attribution in QWG is not only uncertain but also reversible and contested. Hong, a member of a male-presenting team, described how their team was perceived by others:

> We thought it was obvious that we looked like men. But when our team entered the venue, one of my teammates overheard someone in the audience whisper, "Are they butches?" That surprised me. For us, it felt so clear how we looked, but it turned out others could see it differently.
>
> Q: What did you think about that?
>
> It was actually really fun. I thought our team's physical characteristics were quite obvious, especially when the five of us were together. Maybe the audience was seeing us from a distance, which could have led to the misreading, but it was still an interesting experience. It seems like people see what they want to see. [Futsal, Hong]

Hong's experience demonstrates that gender is not simply expressed by individuals but actively interpreted by others in inconsistent and context-dependent ways. Even when participants assumed their gender presentation was clear, it could be read differently depending on perspective. This instability further undermines the idea that gender can function as a stable and objective category for organizing participation.

While such moments might appear to contradict QWG's principle of not judging others, participants emphasized that these interactions rarely resulted in exclusion or formal consequences. Instead, they became opportunities for reflection. Staff member Cho described how the QWG oath prompted self-awareness:

> Clause 2 pricked at my conscience. Recognize that one's identity is best understood by themselves, and do not doubt or judge others' identities. Well, is that person butch or transgender? I used to question others' identities like this. It might not have been judging, but I was adopting bias. The clause made me reflect on my behavior. [staff, Cho]

The principle that "one's identity is best understood by themselves" does not eliminate the impulse to categorize others but reorients participants' awareness of the power involved in doing so. In this sense, the QWG oath does not prevent participants from doing gender but invites them to question who has the authority to determine gender and how such authority is reproduced or disrupted.

These findings show that adapting to a nonbinary sports space involves an ongoing negotiation between habitual gendering practices and new norms of uncertainty and restraint. Participants continue to interpret bodies through gendered frameworks, yet they are simultaneously asked to suspend definitive judgments and remain open to ambiguity. This process exposes the instability of gender categories and reveals how they are continually produced through interaction.

Rather than eliminating gender, QWG creates a space in which gender is made visible as a contingent and contested process. By placing participants in situations where they must navigate uncertainty without relying on institutionalized categories, QWG disrupts the taken-for-granted practice of determining gender and reopens questions about fairness, difference, and belonging in

sport. In contrast to contemporary sport governance, where fairness is defined through measurable indicators, clear rules, and standardized categories that promise certainty and control (Loland 2019), QWG suspends these classificatory mechanisms and exposes how such systems depend on fixed and legible identities. In doing so, QWG does not reject fairness, but repositions it as an ongoing, relational process rather than a stable outcome guaranteed by categorical distinction (Travers 2013; Pape 2020; Cavanagh and Sykes 2006).

Within this space, fairness is negotiated through collective practices rather than predetermined criteria. Participants engage with ambiguity and sustain interaction without relying on binary classification, demonstrating that fairness can emerge through shared norms and mutual recognition rather than through rigid regulation. At the same time, this process reveals the limits of dominant frameworks that equate fairness with transparency, measurability, and procedural certainty, which obscure the value-laden and contested nature of sporting ethics (McNamee and Moriconi 2024). By foregrounding uncertainty and relational engagement, QWG shows that fairness and belonging are produced through embodied interaction and collective participation. However, because QWG suspends the familiar criteria through which fairness is secured, participants also experience moments of discomfort, confusion, and anxiety about what counts as fair competition. These tensions reveal how deeply the association between fairness, certainty, and categorical distinction is embedded in sport.

Reconstructing Trans and gender-nonconforming People's Access to Sports

As much as mainstream sports' gender policing has excluded and discriminated against gender-nonconforming and trans athletes, their participation has also exposed the instability of sex- and gender-binary systems, revealing that categories of biological sex are constructed through

imperfect and continually contested criteria (Cooper 2023). However, as long as sport continues to organize participation through sex segregation and to define fairness in biologically essentialist terms, trans and nonbinary people remain positioned as suspicious subjects whose legitimacy must be continually justified. Research shows that within such systems, trans athletes are routinely monitored, questioned, and treated as potential threats to fair competition, rather than as participants with equal claims to belonging (Pérez-Samaniego et al. 2019; Sharrow 2021) .

QWG's nonbinary policies intervene in this dynamic by reorienting the problem of fairness. Rather than treating trans and gender-nonconforming bodies as challenges to fair play, QWG shifts attention to the structure of sport itself, questioning whether fairness must be grounded in sex segregation at all. Participants' accounts illustrate how this shift reshapes access to sport. Staff member Jean described how QWG's eligibility framework created accessibility:

> I heard that the title is Queer Women Games, but it wasn't really limiting participants based on gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The title was noting that it would be great if queer women come to gather. This means that the event centers on queer women but people with different orientations or identities would be welcomed. In that sense, it was very accessible for people like me, genderqueers. [Staff. Jin]

Jin's account reflects how QWG separates belonging from categorical verification. While the event centers queer women politically, it does not require participants to prove their identity in order to be recognized as legitimate. This contrasts with mainstream sport, where access is contingent upon fitting into pre-defined categories and meeting regulatory criteria.

Jo, a genderqueer participant, further highlights how fairness operates as a site of exclusion in everyday sporting contexts:

> I lived as a man, and since I'm someone who passes as a man, I'm often perceived that

> way. I don't always feel the need to correct it. In many ways, it's out of my control. But when I play sports, people sometimes ask, "Shouldn't you, as a man, have a handicap?" It's a question I also end up asking myself. I just want to play with my friends, but instead I keep getting pulled into this difficult question, and it leaves me feeling uncomfortable. It creates this sense that I can't fully enjoy the game without doubt. At QWG, I'm sure some people may still have thought, "Why am I competing with that guy?" But there was a shared understanding not to voice those doubts. No one brought it up to me, and because of that, I was able to just enjoy the game. [Relay, Jo]

Jo's reflection makes visible how fairness is experienced not as an abstract principle but as a social demand that produces discomfort and doubt. In mainstream settings, fairness is often invoked to justify sex segregation, yet it simultaneously places the burden of justification on those who do not fit binary categories. As a result, trans, nonbinary and gender-nonconforming participants must continually negotiate their legitimacy, even in recreational settings.

By suspending gender classification and prohibiting the questioning of others' identities, QWG interrupts this dynamic. Importantly, this does not eliminate perceptions of difference or concerns about fairness. Instead, it redistributes them. Without institutional mechanisms to enforce categorization, participants are left to encounter difference without resolving it through binary classification. In this context, fairness becomes something participants experience and negotiate collectively rather than something predetermined by policy.

This reconfiguration is consistent with broader critiques of inclusion frameworks that leave sex-segregated structures intact. Such approaches often require trans people to adapt to existing systems, while the underlying logic of exclusion remains unchanged (Pérez-Samaniego et al. 2019; Braumüller et al. 2020) . In contrast, QWG challenges the structural basis of fairness itself by

creating conditions in which participation does not depend on verifying bodies or identities.

At the same time, QWG does not fully resolve the tensions surrounding fairness. Participants continue to carry prior assumptions about physical difference and competitive equity into the space. However, as shown in earlier sections, these assumptions are often destabilized through gameplay, where differences in skill, experience, and teamwork become more salient than sex categories. In this sense, QWG does not replace one definition of fairness with another but opens fairness as an ongoing question shaped by interaction and experience.

Reconstructing access, then, is not simply about including trans and nonbinary participants within existing frameworks. It involves transforming the conditions under which fairness is defined and enacted. By shifting the focus from regulating bodies to rethinking structures, QWG enables participants to engage in sport without being positioned as problems to be solved. In doing so, it offers a model in which access and fairness are not opposed but co-constituitive.

Therefore, QWG's strategies of rejecting gender policing and undoing sex segregation, along with the tensions that emerge in practice, demonstrate that creating a nonbinary sports space is not simply a matter of removing categories but of reorganizing the conditions under which sport operates. At the organizational level, QWG disrupts institutional mechanisms that enforce gender classification and redistributes authority over bodies and identities through participants' collective commitment to resisting gender policing. At the interactional level, participants navigate uncertainty, confront their own assumptions, and renegotiate how difference is perceived and evaluated.

These processes reveal that fairness, rather than a fixed principle grounded in biological difference, is produced through social interaction, institutional design, and embodied experience. This contrasts with contemporary sport governance, where fairness and integrity are increasingly

defined through measurable indicators, standardized categories, and procedural clarity that promise certainty and control (Loland 2019), yet remain contested and only partially captured by such metrics (McNamee and Moriconi 2024). The tensions participants encounter—confusion, doubt, and misrecognition—are not failures of the model but central to its transformative potential, revealing the limits of equating fairness with transparency and categorical clarity.

By sustaining these tensions rather than resolving them through binary classification, QWG opens space for alternative understandings of competence, belonging, and equity in sport. In this sense, QWG does not simply include those excluded by mainstream sport but redefines the terms of participation itself, demonstrating how gender, fairness, and access can be reimagined beyond binary gender through organizational strategies and collective commitment.

3. Creating a Queer Women-centered Sports Space

QWG adopts two interrelated strategies to reclaim and reconfigure a queer women-centered sports space, and in doing so, it intervenes not only in gender relations but also in the epistemic foundations of modern sport. First, its most explicit intervention lies in the naming of the event itself as Queer Women Games, despite operating as a nonbinary sports competition. The overwhelming majority of interviewees supported this naming practice, emphasizing that queer women were positioned as the central subjects of the event while participation remained open to all. In this sense, the title functions not merely as representation but as a political and epistemic intervention. Modern sport, as a global institution, has historically been built by and for cisgender men, operating through a male-identified, male-dominated, and male-centered system that naturalizes binary sex categories and positions men's bodies and performances as the standard of athletic legitimacy (Travers 2009; Anderson 2009). By centering queer women, subjects historically marginalized within both national and global sporting regimes, QWG disrupts this

epistemic order and challenges who counts as the knowing and legitimate subject of sport.

Importantly, this strategy does not reinscribe stable identity boundaries. Rather, the naming of Queer Women Games operates through a productive tension between specificity and openness: it asserts queer women as a political subject while refusing to regulate who qualifies as such. This tension unsettles the authority of categorical verification, which has been central to scientific and institutional regimes of classification, including sex testing and eligibility rules in sport (Braumüller et al. 2020; Pape 2020).

While participants acknowledged that broader cultural beliefs in male physical superiority persist, many emphasized that these assumptions were not substantiated within the space of QWG. As discussed in earlier sections, undoing sex segregation destabilizes fairness as a principle grounded in biological essentialism. Within QWG, participants encounter overlapping performances and capacities across bodies, making it difficult to sustain a binary logic of advantage. Rather than disproving male superiority, QWG renders it less operative by reorganizing how athletic ability is perceived and evaluated, producing an alternative understanding of sport grounded in relational, embodied, and situated experience.

Second, QWG constructs a queer women-centered space through its organization as a visible and collective sporting stage. Although QWG is an amateur competition, all games are publicly staged and actively witnessed by an audience. This staging is central to its political project. Within mainstream sport, visibility is unevenly distributed: elite male athletes occupy the center of media, institutional resources, and public recognition, while queer women's sports are marginalized or rendered invisible (Messner 1988; Cooky et al. 2015). By creating a space in which queer women are collectively seen, QWG reframes the politics of visibility and recognition. The audience plays a critical role, transforming sport into a collective and supportive experience, where competition

is not reduced to survival of the fittest and gender is not treated as something to be monitored or policed.

Together, these strategies produce a reshaping of sporting space. Being queer women-centered operates in two interconnected senses: queer women become the default figures within the sporting space, and they are brought to the center from the margins, drawing on bell hooks' (1984 [2005]) conceptualization of the margin as a site of resistance and possibility. This shift has significant affective consequences, as participants described a release from internalized suspicion about whether they deserve to occupy space, compete, and be recognized within sport (Travers 2009). Within QWG, this internalized regulation is disrupted, allowing participants to inhabit their bodies and relationships differently.

This transformation can be further understood through Audre Lorde's concept of "the uses of the erotic." For Lorde, the erotic is a source of embodied knowledge, power, and connection that resists the devaluation of marginalized bodies (Lorde 2007 [1984]). In QWG, participants engage in sport as a collective practice of joy, connection, and self-realization. Excellence and competition are redefined as relational processes that generate pleasure and meaning rather than reproducing hierarchies of dominance.

In this sense, QWG does more than symbolically center queer women. It challenges the epistemic foundations of modern sport. By decoupling excellence, competition, and fairness from biological determinism and individual meritocracy, QWG demonstrates that these values are historically produced and open to transformation (McNamee and Moriconi 2024). At the same time, the need to continually negotiate fairness without fixed categories underscores the tensions and uncertainties that accompany this transformation.

Strategy 1: Using the Title of Queer Women

QWG articulates one of its central goals as providing "a space where sex/gender/sexuality minority women, who have been excluded from sports, reclaim their ground and enjoy sports with freedom and equal rights" (QWN 2018). The use of the title *Queer Women Games* is the first strategy through which this goal is enacted. While QWG could have limited its eligibility to queer women as a defined category, it instead remains open to all participants. Given its nonbinary policy, which does not require participants to designate their gender identity, restricting eligibility by gender would be both practically and politically inconsistent. This produces an apparent contradiction: why name the event *Queer Women Games* if everyone is welcome?

Organizers understood this contradiction as generative rather than problematic. As Ahn explained, the term queer women should be read not as a fixed category but as a relational and political articulation:

> The title seemed contradictory at first. Why do we name it queer/women games where everyone is welcomed? But there must have been a reason. This is because we are queer "/ (slash)" women not queer ", (comma)" women. At first glance, I thought QWG was a competition only for people who is woman and queer. It seemed to have a too narrow entrance. Asking if queer/woman is a concept excluding men and heterosexuals, the answer is no. There are countless competitions full of males, where female athletes show up as well. If I were asked why we should use the term woman because giving a title to people who really didn't have an opportunity would be proper for the purpose of QWG. We also kept advertising that QWG was not only for women or queer people or women who are queer. That's how the title of QWG became more meaningful. [Organizer, Ahn]

Ahn's distinction between "slash" and "comma" highlights how the title resists binary logic. Rather than stabilizing queer and women as bounded identities, it holds them in tension, allowing

the category to remain open and politically charged. In this sense, the title functions as a strategy of centering without exclusion. It prioritizes those historically marginalized in sport while refusing to reproduce the boundary-making practices that structure mainstream sports participation. This approach resonates with scholarship that understands "queer" not only as an identity but as a critical and political practice that resists fixed categories, disrupts normative assumptions, and remains intentionally fluid and open-ended (Gamson 1995; Cohen 2020).

Organizer Moon explicitly framed queerness in this way:

> Few people identify themselves as queer women. People usually don't say "I'm a queer woman", rather they say genderqueer, lesbian, transgender and nonbinary. Queer/women is a strange expression. For an alternative title, we also thought of Pride Games, Rainbow Games. We discussed why we wanted the title queer/women because it seemed to imply sexual minority women even QWG was not limited to them. The conclusion I personally made is that first, queer is not an identity but a practice we are doing and should continue to do. Second, women are a reality grasping us, me. It's more than an identity. We cannot escape from the reality then we must continue to question it. No matter what others say, we inform our reality and practical ways to bring changes here. [Organizer, Moon]

Moon's account suggests that the term queer women operates at the intersection of practice and structure. "Queer" signals an ongoing effort to trouble norms and destabilize categories, while "women" refers to a material and social condition shaped by gender inequality. In this formulation, queer women is not a fixed identity but a political project that both names marginalization and resists its stabilization. As Moon further noted, the issue is not simply difference but the systematic deprivation of opportunities and resources for queer women in sport.

The majority of interviewees expressed support for the title, emphasizing that it successfully

positioned queer women as the main figures of the event while maintaining openness. As Cho described:

> Queer/woman represents the identity of the event. It implies who is the main here and whom the event is for. I believe that naming queer/women is moderately clear and moderately comprehensive. This is not limited to lesbians. Trans people will join in. I think it solves a dilemma that we want to keep open to many people while a sexual minority woman should be the main figure. What's my longing is..... It's fine. it's good to be open to everyone who opposes gender discrimination and who respects queer people and women. But I wish the main characters were queer women. Because there aren't many opportunities to be the main character. Because we prepared such a rare opportunity, I don't want to lose it...I guess I have a desire to be the main character. [Staff. Cho]

This desire to be "the main character" reflects the broader structural condition in which queer women are rarely centered in sports spaces. By naming queer women as the focal subject, QWG reverses the normative organization of sport, where cis-masculine men occupy the center and others are positioned as peripheral (Kane 1995). In QWG, participants reported perceiving queer women as the default presence, even in the absence of explicit identity disclosure. Many described their initial surprise at seeing hundreds of queer women gathered and actively participating in sports, challenging prior assumptions about isolation and invisibility. This re-centering has both symbolic and embodied effects. Tae, a badminton player, described how their expectations were disrupted:

> The prejudices inside me were like 'how many people is gonna be in QWG? I should go in case there were only a few, 'Are participants really good at sports? They probably just come to QWG for fun, not like real amateurs practicing on routine.' That was all my

> prejudice. I know there must be queer/women who like sports and play it in their lives. Even though I am one of them, I had such prejudices. While watching the games, it was sure that the teams had practiced for a long. It was not the skills that could be developed for a couple of months. These people have been playing this for years. It just struck me. I really liked it. [Badminton. Tae]

Similarly, participants noted that the presence of queer women as a majority transformed their sense of belonging. Rather than questioning whether they were alone or out of place, they experienced themselves as part of a collective. This stands in contrast to prior experiences in male-centered sports environments, where participants often internalized doubt about their legitimacy. As Nam reflected on playing basketball in school:

> I am not sure if I should call it discrimination, but there were certain emotions that I would not have felt if I were a man. That's my idea. Discouragement, or usually just feeling down. I asked myself if I were a girl who was not good at basketball but just wanted to play with others? What if boys wanted to have fun with themselves, and I was ruining their fun? Did they hate me or somehow like that? It definitely happened in physical education courses. [Staff. Nam]

Such "discouragement" reflects what Iris Marion Young (2012) describes as internalized oppression, where structural inequalities are experienced as individual inadequacies. In male-centered sports spaces, queer women often bear the burden of proving their competence and legitimacy. In QWG, this affective structure is disrupted. Participants described a sense of liberation from self-surveillance and gendered expectations. Kim, a relay participant, explained:

> I was always more self-conscious when playing soccer on a male dominant ground. It's not like, 'I want to make a good impression', but I was concerned that people probably think

that I'm not good at it because I'm a woman. What most impressed me in QWG was that everyone was wearing sportswear and gym clothes, sweating, and sitting comfortably, regardless of their gender. Most people were women and queer people and we felt each other...it definitely gave me a sense of liberation. Even though I don't make a good outcome here, I don't have to worry about the perception that this is because I'm a woman. [Relay. Kim]

This shift is further reflected in how participants read one another. Without formal gender categories, markers such as hairstyle become sites of interpretation. As Nam noted, short hair, often stigmatized in conventional women's sports, was widely present and re-signified as part of queer women identity within QWG[6]. While such readings may reproduce certain stereotypes, their meaning changes when they are collectively recognized and affirmed rather than marginalized.

In sum, the strategy of naming *Queer Women Games* does more than label the event. It reconfigures who is visible, who belongs, and who is centered within the sporting space. By foregrounding queer women while maintaining openness, QWG not only destabilizes binary categories but also reorients how participation, recognition, and belonging are organized.

Strategy 2: Building a Sports Stage

The second strategy QWG adopts to reclaim queer women's sports space is the construction of a formal sports stage in which participants can take their games seriously and be recognized by others. As organizer Han emphasized, QWG was intentionally designed as a "real sports competition," rejecting the tendency to treat queer women's sports as informal or secondary:

There were several goals when we first discussed QWG, but the initial goal was to hold a

[6] For Korean cases of misogynistic stigma directed at female athletes with short hair, see the section "Gender Policing, Antifeminism, and the Regulation of Female Athletes." in the introduction chapter.

> formal sports event. Do not make QWG into a fun field day or informal game with few rules since it is for sexual minority women. We are doing real sports competitions following formal rules and conditions. It is not going to be a sketchy or minimized game as other events do by reason of its participants' gender. [Organizer. Han]

Han's statement reflects a critique of how women's and queer sports are devalued within a broader male-centered and heteronormative sport system, where such events are often treated as less serious or outside the boundaries of "real sport" (Symons et al. 2017). These conditions are sustained through reduced resources, limited visibility, and lower expectations, which shape both material inequalities and how queer women athletes' capacities are recognized (Robinson et al. 2023).

QWG intervenes in this structure by insisting on formality, scale, and visibility. Central to this strategy is the presence of an audience. In the first two QWG events, nearly half of the participants were spectators, approximately 150 out of 350 in 2018 and 250 out of 450 in 2019, who attended to watch and support the games. Audience tickets were issued, and athletes themselves became spectators of other matches due to the tournament structure, producing a continuous circulation of attention and recognition.

Being watched and applauded work as a form of recognition that is structurally limited in many queer women's sporting experiences. Organizer Gu described this absence:

> People believe that if they do something well and work hard, they can get rewarded for it, which is a driving force in their lives. But women don't have a professional league to move forward after their amateur leagues. In the case of men, there are arranged routes as they grow up and build experience. But if female athletes play excellently, that's it. They think they are good at it, but they don't have models to compare and to check how good they are.

> They have no friends to share their athletic experience with. They have no experience to get rewarded for their excellence. I believe that is why QWG becomes a space where queer women long for and many queer women are eager to play. [Organizer. Gu]

Gu's account highlights how recognition in mainstream sport is unevenly distributed, with institutional pathways, spectatorship, and evaluative frameworks largely reserved for male athletes (Travers 2009). In contrast, QWG creates a space in which recognition is collectively produced. The audience actively affirms participants' presence and performance, transforming recognition into a shared experience rather than an exclusive institutional outcome.

Organizer Moon further emphasized the affective dimension of this staged recognition:

> We [organizers] envisioned a tournament with 200-300 athletes starting from a round of 16 then quarterfinals. There was such a burden, what if we didn't have enough participants?
>
> Q: Why did you want QWG to be so big scale? Because it's a lot of work.
>
> Yes, it is a lot of work, but I kept imagining the picture. To the end of the 2nd and 3rd floors in the gym, it is full of diverse people cheering hard for you. A large number of people come to cheer and applaud athletes even if they lose a game. Games should go on and on to the final. So after several competitions, the final winner would be exhilarated and satisfied. I was happy whenever these scenes came to my mind. [Organizer. Moon]

Moon's vision reflects a desire to make available an experience that is common in mainstream sport but often inaccessible to queer women athletes: being seen, supported, and emotionally invested in by others. Importantly, recognition is not limited to victory but extends to participation itself, shifting reward away from hierarchical achievement toward collective affirmation.

In QWG, formal competition combined with collective spectatorship also creates conditions

in which participants experience sport as both serious and pleasurable. Recognition intensifies embodied engagement, allowing participants to feel their capacity, effort, and connection to others more fully.

In this sense, the sports stage functions as a site of affective transformation. Participants who have internalized marginalization within male-centered sports spaces—often experiencing self-doubt and diminished expectations—encounter a different relational environment in QWG. Being seen and supported allows them to engage in sport without the burden of proving their legitimacy.

By constructing a formal stage with an active audience, QWG reforms the relationship between performance, recognition, and pleasure. Excellence is no longer tied solely to hierarchical comparison but emerges through collective engagement and shared affect. Competition remains meaningful but is no longer organized exclusively around domination or individual merit.

Through this strategy, QWG demonstrates that reclaiming sports space for queer women is not only about access or inclusion but about transforming how sport is valued and experienced. By linking recognition to collective experience, QWG reshapes the meaning of excellence, competition, and reward beyond male-centered sporting structures (McNamee and Moriconi 2024)

Revisiting Male Superiority and Binary Gender Difference

Sport has long functioned as a key site for producing and naturalizing binary gender difference by organizing rules, standards, and categories around binary sex classifications, however, the dynamics of QWG complicate this belief. In the second QWG (2019), a futsal match between the male-presenting team “Baby Lions” and the female-presenting team “Rovers FC” became a pivotal moment. Rovers FC defeated Baby Lions by a score of 9 to 1, in a game that drew the attention of nearly all participants in the arena. Each goal by Rovers FC was met with loud cheers, while even Baby Lions’ single goal was celebrated by the audience. For many

participants, the result was unexpected. As Tae reflected:

> What surprised me about the futsal game was that the female team played against the male team. At first glance, I thought, 'Is this game going to work?'. It turned out it didn't work in the opposite way. The skill gap was too big. The women's team played way much better (Laughs). I thought the scene was kind of really queer. [Badminton. Tae]

Tae's reaction illustrates how deeply embedded expectations of male superiority remain, even in amateur contexts. Although meritocracy is a dominant value in sport, the image of a female-presenting team outperforming a male-presenting team is often treated as exceptional. Such outcomes appear "queer" not because they are rare, but because they disrupt the presumed alignment between masculinity and athletic superiority (Kane 1995; Travers 2009). At the same time, this disruption does not simply replace one standard with another; rather, it exposes how assumptions of superiority are produced through institutional arrangements and interpretive frameworks.

Participants' reflections suggest that QWG does not simply disprove male superiority but reframes it as contingent and situational. Despite these moments of disruption, participants also expressed anxiety and uncertainty about competing without sex segregation. Bang described their team's reaction upon encountering the male-presenting team:

> When my team found the Baby Lions, we wondered, "What is that team?" "Who are they?" Are they gay? [Asked interviewer] We guessed it was a gay team. Oh, then what if they are outstanding players? Everyone was kind of nervous because winning was at stake. Isn't it unfavorable if we lose it? My team thought it was a bit unfavorable. To my mind, there was no complaint about Baby Duck's participation in QWG, because they were not really a trained team. If they were practiced, it would have caused some complaints." [Futsal.

Bang]

Even within a space designed to challenge this assumption, participants continue to interpret competition through familiar frameworks of fairness and hierarchy. Notably, however, Bang also emphasized that the concern was not solely about gender but about training and skill, indicating a shift from categorical assumptions toward situational and relational evaluation.

Participants' experiences further highlight how gendered expectations shape not only perceptions of performance but also interpersonal dynamics in sport. Choi, who had extensive experience playing with male athletes, described feelings of fear and exclusion in previous contexts, including concerns about injury and unequal participation. In contrast, Choi expected QWG to operate differently:

> I don't think people who come to QWG will regard me as an object of sexual harassment or not give me an equal opportunity since they see me as a woman. That's probably a matter of values. I thought that it would different because I believed they would treat and respect me as an equal team competitor. In fact, even if I had fewer ball passes, it wouldn't make me think that this was because I was a woman, but perhaps I was not in the right spot. It is the problem of values. [Basketball/Relay. Choi]

Choi's reflection underscores that gender inequality in sport is produced not only through assumptions about physical difference but also through interactional norms and expectations. While QWG does not fully eliminate beliefs in biological advantage, it creates conditions in which participants can relate to one another differently, emphasizing mutual recognition and shared participation.

Finally, these findings suggest that QWG does not simply overturn the ideology of male superiority but renders it unstable and contingent. By creating conditions in which participants

encounter diverse bodies, performances, and interactions without relying on fixed categories, QWG shifts the focus from whether male superiority is true to how it is produced, maintained, and negotiated in practice. In doing so, it demonstrates that gender difference and fairness in sport are not natural foundations but ongoing social processes shaped through institutional arrangements, cultural expectations, and embodied interaction.

Sports as Uses of the Erotic

I adopt Audre Lorde's (1984 [2007]) concept of the erotic to understand the meaning of "joy" in QWG as a queer women-centered sports space. Lorde defines the erotic not as narrowly sexual, but as "a source of power and knowledge" that permeates all aspects of life through deeply felt, embodied experience. As she explains, the erotic is not simply about what we do, but "how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing" (Lorde 2007 [1984]: 62). In this sense, the erotic refers to an internal standard of excellence grounded in affect, embodiment, and relational engagement.

Recent scholarship extends this concept to physical practices such as movement, dance, and sport, emphasizing that the erotic emerges through embodied intensity, sensory awareness, and shared experience (Honkasalo 2023). From this perspective, activities become "erotic" when they are performed with full presence, connection, and satisfaction, allowing participants to access knowledge about their capacities, desires, and limits. Applying this framework to QWG, participants' emphasis on "playing seriously" and enjoying games "without disturbance" reflects not only what they do, but how they feel in the process. QWG is "serious" not merely because it follows formal rules, but because it creates conditions in which participants can fully experience their capacities without doubt or interruption.

Lorde highlights two key dimensions of the erotic: first, the power that emerges from sharing deeply in any pursuit with others, and second, the recognition of one's own capacity for joy. QWG,

as a collectively staged sporting event, enables both. It offers participants a space to discover their own sense of satisfaction and completion, while simultaneously sharing that experience with others. Choi, a basketball athlete, described this overlapping experience as both a player and a spectator:

> In other competitions, I go back home right after losing my game. There is no audience. Only the athletes come, not even their families. At the end of the tournament, the final two teams play and no one watches it. QWG had the element of the audience. Even the athletes who finished their game sit down and watched other games together. There seemed to be a sense that I came here not only as an athlete, but to enjoy the event itself. I didn't just come to play basketball here, but I was experiencing QWG with everyone. My basketball was becoming everyone's experience. Anyone who watched my game witnessed that a person named Choi plays basketball like that. For the audience, having snacks and watching games with friends in QWG became a queer feminist experience of their own. That was really fun. [Basketball/Relay Choi]

Choi's account highlights how QWG transforms sport from an individual activity into a collective and relational practice. In many amateur sports settings, games are fragmented and individualized: athletes leave after their matches, and performances are not shared or collectively witnessed. In contrast, QWG's structure—where athletes become spectators and games are continuously watched—creates a shared field of experience. Watching queer women compete becomes meaningful not because of external recognition, but because participants recognize the rarity and value of witnessing each other's excellence.

Participants also described finding joy not only in winning but in appreciating effort, completion, and shared experience. In one badminton match, a team losing 1 to 20 received a loud and enthusiastic cheer when they scored a single point. Multiple interviewees recalled this moment

as emblematic of QWG:

> Everyone yelled out a cheer when the [losing] team scored one point. This is it. With full of pleasure. That was impressive. [Do you think it was possible because it was QWG?] Yes. The team joined QWG because they believed they would have fun there. Their skills couldn’t be suddenly advanced, but their goal was not just to win, but to score a point against the opposing team or to complete a game. They said they would like to participate in QWG again next year. Wouldn't it have been possible if it wasn't for QWG? [Staff. Lim]

This scene illustrates how the meaning of excellence is redefined within QWG. Rather than being tied exclusively to victory or comparison, excellence is understood as the capacity to fully engage, persist, and complete an action. In Lorde’s terms, the erotic is realized not through domination but through the depth of feeling and satisfaction in the act itself. The collective cheering for a single point reflects a shared recognition of this embodied effort and completion.

Moreover, the erotic in QWG operates as a form of relational power. Shared embodied practices can generate connection, reduce the threat of difference, and enable new forms of collective engagement. In QWG, participants do not simply perform for themselves but with and for others, producing a sense of connection that extends beyond individual achievement. The audience, teammates, and competitors all participate in this process, transforming sport into a site of collective meaning-making.

Therefore, joy is not incidental but central to participation. Participants come to QWG not only to compete but to experience a form of engagement that is often unavailable in mainstream sports contexts. The ability to feel satisfaction, connection, and recognition without judgment or shame allows participants to access what Lorde describes as the erotic as a source of power and knowledge.

4. Conclusion

This chapter examined how the Queer Women Games (QWG) forms what I call a nonbinary sports space and how such a space is actively produced through organizational strategies and collective practices. From a decolonial feminist perspective, this space does not simply expand inclusion within existing frameworks but unsettles the colonial foundations through which sex, gender, and athletic value have been historically organized. By undoing sex segregation and suspending the requirement to determine, disclose, or verify gender, QWG disrupts the institutional mechanisms that naturalize binary sex categories and position male bodies and performances as the universal standard of sport. In doing so, it shifts attention from individual bodies to the historical and structural conditions through which gender difference and fairness are produced and governed (Travers 2013; Pape 2020).

At the same time, this nonbinary structure does not eliminate gender but reconfigures how it is experienced. Participants continued to interpret bodies and performances through familiar, often Western binary frameworks, yet these assumptions lost coherence in practice. Overlapping performances across bodies destabilized binary understandings of gender difference, while exposing fairness as a relational and negotiated process rather than a fixed principle grounded in biological difference. The persistence of uncertainty, confusion, and concern among participants highlights that decolonizing gender in sport is not a linear process. Instead, it unfolds through tension, contradiction, and ongoing negotiation. In this sense, the nonbinary structure does not resolve binary gender difference but renders it contingent, unstable, and open to reinterpretation.

Alongside this, QWG centers queer women within the sporting space through its naming strategy and the construction of a formal sports stage. By naming the event the Queer Women Games while maintaining open participation, QWG repositions queer women as central subjects

of sport without reimposing rigid identity boundaries. This operates as a decolonial intervention into a sporting system historically structured by Western, male-centered, and heteronormative ideals. This symbolic shift is reinforced materially through the creation of a visible and collective sports stage, where competitions are taken seriously and widely witnessed. In a system that has long marginalized queer women's athletic participation, this combination of centering and visibility reworks how recognition and value are produced.

Importantly, QWG also transforms the meaning of sport itself. Participants experienced competition, recognition, and engagement through what Audre Lorde conceptualizes as the erotic, a source of embodied knowledge, power, and relational connection. From a decolonial lens, this reframing challenges the colonial rationality that defines sport through hierarchy, measurement, and domination. Excellence and competition were no longer organized solely through ranking but emerged through collective and affective engagement. Recognition from the audience functioned not simply as validation but as a relational process that intensified participants' sense of capacity, connection, and presence.

These findings demonstrate that transforming androcentric sport requires more than expanding access within existing systems; it requires reconfiguring the colonial logics that structure sport itself. QWG illustrates how two seemingly contradictory strategies, undoing sex segregation and centering queer women, operate together. By refusing gender classification, it disrupts regulatory regimes that police bodies, while by naming and centering queer women, it addresses the historical erasure embedded in sport. Rather than resolving this tension, QWG sustains it, allowing openness and centering to function as mutually constitutive practices.

Overall, this chapter shows that nonbinary sports spaces are not merely imagined but enacted through the interplay of policy, practice, and participation. By combining structural intervention

with collective engagement, QWG unsettles the taken-for-granted link between sex difference, fairness, and athletic value. In doing so, it not only offers an alternative model of participation but also reimagines sport as a site where dominant categories can be reworked and new forms of embodiment and belonging can emerge.

CHAPTER IV: LOCALIZATION OF SEX TESTING

Parts of Chapter IV, "Localization of Sex Testing," was previously published in *Women's Studies International Forum 111.* The article was authored solely by Jinsun Yang.

While Chapter III examined community-based sports as a site for experimenting with non-binary and queer-centered practices, this chapter shifts to elite sports, where gender categories are more rigidly institutionalized and regulated. In contrast to grassroots spaces such as the Queer Women Games, elite sports operate through formal governance structures, international standards, and intensified scrutiny over bodies. This shift in scale is not simply organizational but political: it reveals how global regimes of gender classification are enforced, negotiated, and contested within national contexts.

In South Korea (hereafter Korea), football has been a central site to produce national identity and developmental nationalism, particularly since the establishment of the first professional men's league in 1983 under the military regime of Chun Doo-hwan. As part of broader state-led modernization projects, sport functioned as a cultural technology through which Korea positioned itself within the global order (Joo, 2012), while also serving to legitimize authoritarian rule through the cultivation of disciplined, competitive bodies and nationalist sentiment. Within this context, elite sport was prioritized as a vehicle for international prestige and ideological competition, particularly during the Cold War (Ok and Park, 2014; Tosa, 2015), embedding a hierarchical and

performance-oriented sporting culture that continues to shape contemporary institutions and practices (Park and Lim, 2015).

Yet this national investment in sport has been profoundly gendered. While the Korea Football Association (KFA) operates multiple tiers of leagues for men, women's football remains confined to a single semiprofessional league, reflecting longstanding patterns of underinvestment and structural marginalization (Han, 2020; Kwon et al., 2012). This uneven development reveals how the benefits of state-led sport modernization have been distributed selectively, privileging men's sport as the primary site of national representation while relegating women's sport to the margins.

Despite the global expansion and commercialization of women's football, including the FIFA Women's World Cup, the Korean women's league has received relatively little media attention since its establishment in 2001 (Lee et al., 2022). This marginal visibility was disrupted in 2013 through what I term the "boycott affair." In this incident, coaches from six teams threatened to boycott the upcoming season while demanding sex verification testing for Park Eun-sun, a striker from a rival team.

Sex testing has historically been governed at the level of international sport by institutions such as the International Olympic Committee, World Athletics, and FIFA. Accordingly, existing scholarship has focused primarily on elite international competitions, examining how sex testing operates through the intersections of medical science, race, nation, and global governance (Sullivan, 2011; Karkazis et al., 2012; Pieper, 2016). Beginning in the mid twentieth century, these institutions and affiliated federations standardized sex testing through compulsory and often invasive procedures, including genital examinations, chromosomal tests, and later hormonal criteria, in the name of ensuring fair competition (Sullivan, 2011; Karkazis et al., 2012; Pieper,

2016). These policies were implemented across international competitions and gradually extended through global sport governance structures, effectively centralizing authority over sex classification at the transnational level (Bohuon, 2015; Krieger et al., 2019).

In contrast, national sport systems have historically lacked clear legal or institutional frameworks governing sex testing, often relying on informal practices such as physician issued "certificates of femininity" or ad hoc decision making without standardized criteria (Karkazis et al., 2012). This uneven regulatory landscape has produced a situation in which global rules shape local practices without corresponding domestic oversight, creating legal gaps, inconsistencies, and tensions with national human rights and privacy protections (Henne, 2014). However, this focus on international arenas leaves underexplored how these regulatory logics travel beyond elite competition and take shape within local sports cultures. As global policies, scientific discourses, and media narratives circulate transnationally, they are translated and reinterpreted in specific national and cultural contexts, shaping how bodies are perceived, evaluated, and governed. In this sense, sex testing does not remain confined to formal institutional procedures but extends into everyday practices of gender policing, suspicion, and boundary making within local sport settings. Attending to these localized dynamics reveals how global regimes of sex classification are reproduced, contested, and transformed on the ground, highlighting the need to analyze sex testing not only as a top-down regulatory system but also as a socially embedded and culturally mediated process.

The boycott affair provides a critical case for examining this process. Notably, the Korea Football Association has no formal policy or history of sex testing. Yet the demand for sex verification emerged forcefully within a domestic league, suggesting that global discourses of gender regulation do not remain confined to international institutions but circulate, sediment, and

become actionable at the local level.

In Korea, existing analyses have framed the boycott affair as an instance of gender discrimination (Hwang, 2013; Kwon & Kwon, 2012), gender controversy, or conflict within androcentric football culture (Hwang, 2016). While these interpretations highlight important dynamics of inequality, they often leave unquestioned the epistemological foundations of sex itself and the legitimacy of sex testing as a regulatory practice.

This chapter addresses this gap by examining how sex testing is localized within Korean women's football. It asks: What conditions enabled coaches to demand sex testing in the absence of formal regulation? How are global frameworks of sex and verification translated and reinterpreted within the Korean context? And how are the colonial logics embedded in global sex testing reproduced or reconfigured at the local level?

To answer these questions, I conceptualize sex as a historically and geopolitically constructed category through the lens of transnational feminist theory (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Mohanty, 2005; Moon, 2005; Patil, 2011). Empirically, the chapter draws on textual and media analysis of formal documents from sports organizations, 84 news videos and radio broadcasts, and 2,042 YouTube comments related to the debate.

The findings make three contributions that connect this chapter to the broader dissertation. First, they show how global hierarchies between governing bodies and domestic institutions enable the diffusion of sex testing discourse into local contexts. Second, they demonstrate how the body of a female athlete becomes a site where competing epistemologies of sex are negotiated, often reproducing imperialist narratives that position East Asia in contrast to a supposedly progressive West. Third, by theorizing the "localization of sex testing," this chapter illustrates how global gender regulation is not simply imposed but actively reworked within national contexts.

Taken together, this chapter bridges the grassroots experimentation examined in Chapter III and the transnational politics analyzed in Chapter V. It shows how elite sports function as a key intermediary site where global gender regimes are translated into local practices, revealing both the persistence of gender policing and the contested nature of its implementation.

1.Introduction

Binary Sex System in Korean Nation-Building

In Korea, sex, gender, and sexuality are often not analytically separated as they are in English. The term *sŏng* (성, 性) broadly encompasses what are distinguished in English as sex, gender, and sexuality. In this chapter, I translate *sŏng* as sex/gender/sexuality, while specifying distinctions when necessary to reflect the intended meaning. This linguistic overlap reflects not only semantic differences but also how these categories are historically and institutionally organized in Korea.

Because sex testing has never been formally institutionalized or recorded in domestic sports, it is difficult to locate it within official policy or established sporting practice prior to the 2013 boycott affair. Rather than tracing a direct policy history, I situate the emergence of sex testing discourse within a broader institutional context: the formation of binary sex norms through Korean nation-building.

One of the most significant sites where binary sex is codified is the Resident Registration System. The Korean government assigns every legally recognized citizen a unique Resident Registration Number (RRN), similar to a national identification number. Upon reaching the age of 17, individuals are required to register their fingerprints at a local government office and are issued a Resident Registration Card, which displays personal information including sex, name, birthdate, home address, fingerprint, and photograph (Kim, 2007). Until 1968, it was legally required for

citizens to carry this identification at all times, and even today it remains routinely used in everyday life, from verifying identity in public and private institutions to accessing digital services and purchasing age-restricted goods (Kim, 2007).

The RRN system is not simply administrative but reflects a historically produced infrastructure of surveillance and governance. It originates from mandatory residence reporting policies introduced in 1942 during Japanese colonial rule of Korea and was further shaped by registration policies implemented under United States Army Military Government in Korea (Kim, 2007). Following the Korean War (1950–1953), the system was consolidated under the Park Chunghee military regime in 1962 and remains largely in place today (Kim, 2007). Initially designed for military conscription, resource mobilization, and anti-communist surveillance, the system categorized populations into legitimate citizens and potential threats, embedding state authority over identity into everyday life (Kim, 2007).

Within this system, binary sex is a foundational marker of legal identity. The Korean legal system more broadly is structured around a binary model of gender grounded in heterosexual norms, which underpins categories of citizenship and belonging (Na et al., 2014). This binary is reinforced across interlocking institutions. The family headship system (*hojuje*) historically organized individuals into fixed gendered roles such as father, mother, husband, wife, son, and daughter (Na et al., 2014). Military conscription, limited to men, further stabilizes the male category as a distinct civic identity (Na et al., 2014). Registration and migration systems similarly produce hierarchies of belonging and non-citizenship, positioning those who do not conform to binary norms at the margins (Chung, 2020) .

These institutional arrangements shape everyday experiences of identity verification. Because legal sex is embedded in state identification, individuals whose appearance does not align

with the sex listed on their RRN often face suspicion, scrutiny, or exclusion. Transgender individuals who have not legally changed their sex may encounter harassment or threats when presenting identification in routine situations. In this sense, binary sex is not only a legal classification but an embodied and socially enforced norm (Na et al., 2014).

This broader context is critical for understanding the boycott affair. In the public debate surrounding the case, the sex of the athlete was not only questioned through references to global sports regulations but also through appeals to state-issued identification. The RRN thus functioned as a locally legible method of determining sex, alongside biomedical and sports-based criteria.

Situating the boycott affair within this institutional history reveals that the demand for sex testing did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, it drew upon existing state practices that already define sex as fixed, verifiable, and subject to external authority. At the same time, the controversy introduced new forms of verification rooted in global sports governance.

Building on this, I adopt the sociological concept of "determining gender" to analyze how sex is produced through competing authorities, including the state, medical science, sports institutions, and public discourse. This framework allows me to trace how global discourses of sex testing intersect with local regimes of identification, ultimately contributing to what I conceptualize as the localization of sex testing in Korean women's football.

This reveals that sex testing in Korea is not simply imported from global sports governance but is enabled through preexisting state infrastructures of binary classification, demonstrating how colonial and imperial logics of gender are reproduced through their localization.

The Sex Testing Boycott Affair in Korea

As discussed in the previous section, binary sex in Korea is not only a cultural norm but a state-produced category embedded in legal identification, surveillance, and everyday practices of

verification. The 2013 boycott affair must be understood within this broader institutional context, where sex is already constructed as fixed, legible, and subject to external authority. Against this backdrop, the controversy did not introduce the idea of determining sex but intensified and rearticulated it through the language of elite sports.

In 2013, striker Park Eun-sun was the top scorer in Korea's Women's Football League, scoring 19 goals in 22 games, while her team, Seoul WFC, finished second that season. Shortly after the season ended, it was reported that coaches from six rival clubs threatened to boycott the upcoming season unless Park underwent sex verification testing. One initial report stated, "An official from the Korea Women's Football Association revealed on May 5, 2013, that the coaches of six clubs, excluding Seoul WFC, had notified us last week of their resolution to prevent Park Eun-sun from participating in WK League matches next year," adding, "If Park continues to play, we will boycott the league" (*Financial News*, 2013).

In response, outraged fans launched an online petition titled "Please Protect Park Eun-sun," demanding disciplinary action against the coaches advocating for her exclusion. The petition gathered over 15,000 signatures within two days (KBS, 2013), signaling how rapidly the controversy expanded beyond the league into a broader public debate.

Seoul WFC held a press briefing on November 6, 2013, directly addressing the boycott and placing responsibility on the six coaches. Seo Jung-ho, head coach of Seoul WFC, and Kim Jun-soo, secretary-general of the Seoul Sports Association, argued that raising questions about a player's sex constituted a violation of basic human rights. They emphasized that Park had already undergone sex verification by the Korea Football Association in 2004 during her high school years and had subsequently been selected for the Athens Olympics. As a national team player who had participated in numerous international competitions, they argued, further questioning of her sex

should not be tolerated.

Following the press conference, the Seoul Sports Council filed a petition with the National Human Rights Commission of Korea. On February 24, 2014, the commission ruled that the coaches' demand for sex verification constituted a human rights violation and verbal sexual harassment. The commission stated that "the coaches' request for a sex verification test was sufficient to cause her to feel sexually humiliated and degraded," and recommended that the Korea Football Association take disciplinary action and implement preventive measures.

The six coaches, however, denied explicitly demanding a sex test. In an interview, Lee Sunggyun, then president of the Women's Football Coaches' Council and head coach of Suwon FC Women, claimed that their submitted document did not directly reference Park's sex (MoneyToday, 2013). Instead, the document stated: "Diagnosis of Park Eun-sun: If Park Eun-sun's eligibility for the national team is not determined by December 31, 2013, the coaches of six clubs, excluding Seoul WFC, will refuse to participate in the 2014 season" (ChosunMedia, 2013b).

The use of the term "diagnosis" implicitly invoked medical authority, framing the issue through the language of verification without explicitly naming sex testing. As the investigation by the NHRCK later revealed, at least one coach had previously raised the issue of sex testing with the Korea Football Association, indicating that the boycott was not an isolated incident but part of an ongoing attempt to question Park's eligibility. Following the controversy, two of the six coaches resigned, while the remaining four received minor disciplinary actions in the form of "strong warnings" from the Korean Women's Football Federation (Donga Ilbo, 2014).

multi-sited discourse analysis

This study employs a multi-sited critical discourse analysis grounded in a transnational feminist approach to examine how sex is constructed, regulated, and contested across institutional,

media, and public domains. Across the dissertation, I conceptualize sex not as a fixed biological category but as a historically and geopolitically produced construct, shaped through the interaction of global governance, national institutions, and everyday practices of interpretation. Methodologically, this approach traces how meanings of sex travel across sites and are rearticulated within specific local contexts.

In this chapter, I focus on the localization of sex testing in Korean women's football by analyzing discourse across three interconnected sites: formal institutional documents, broadcast media, and online public commentary.

For the textual analysis, the primary data consist of three formal documents produced during the boycott affair: (1) a boycott document authored by six coaches and submitted to the Korean Women's Football Federation; (2) a response statement issued by Seoul WFC and the Seoul Sports Council; and (3) the decision by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (decision 13-petition-0845200). To situate the boycott within broader transnational regimes of gender verification, I also analyze FIFA's gender verification regulations and two arbitral awards from the Court of Arbitration for Sport: *CAS 2014/A/3759 Dutee Chand v. Athletics Federation of India (AFI) & International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF)* (CAS, 2015), and *CAS 2018/O/5794 Mokgadi Caster Semenya v. IAAF & CAS 2018/O/5798 Athletics South Africa v. IAAF* (CAS, 2019). These documents allow me to trace how global legal and scientific frameworks of sex testing inform and shape local discourse, even in the absence of formal domestic policy.

Building on the textual analysis, I conducted a media analysis to examine how these discourses are circulated and mediated within the Korean context. I collected all available Korean news videos and radio clips related to the boycott from 2010 to 2023. Using keywords such as "sex" (성별), "sex testing" (성별검사), "boycott" (보이콧), and "Park Eun-sun" (박은선), I compiled

a dataset of 80 video clips and 4 radio clips from BigKinds, a news big data platform operated by the Korea Press Foundation. Although approximately 500 news articles were also collected, they were excluded from the dataset because most repeated content already presented in official documents or broadcast media, offering limited additional analytical value.

To capture how these discourses are taken up, contested, and reworked in everyday contexts, I analyze public responses through YouTube comments. As one of the most widely used platforms for news consumption in Korea, YouTube serves not only as a site of media distribution but also as a space of participatory knowledge production. According to the Digital News Report Korea 2024, 56 percent of Korean respondents access news via YouTube, significantly higher than the 47 country average of 24 percent (Korea Press Foundation, 2024). This widespread use makes YouTube a critical site for examining how public discourse is formed and circulated.

Prior research shows that YouTube comments capture spontaneous expressions of opinion, affect, and ideology, particularly in response to controversial events, and thus provide insight into how meanings are negotiated in real time (Dubovi & Tabak, 2020; Inwood & Zappavigna, 2023). At the same time, such data reflect the affordances and limitations of the platform, including anonymity, informality, and uneven participation, and therefore cannot be treated as representative of the broader population.

For in-depth analysis, I selected one highly circulated YouTube video, “Park Eun-sun is all woman” (SBS, 2013), a 2 minute and 58 second broadcast segment aired on November 29, 2013. In the video, Park Eun-sun shares aspects of her personal life and responds to the boycott controversy, while one of the six coaches is also interviewed. Using the YouTube Comment Suite (Wright, 2024) and the YouTube API, I extracted a total of 2,042 comments, including replies, which frequently extended and intensified the debate.

Through close qualitative analysis across these sites, I identify how sex is defined, contested, and stabilized through competing discursive authorities, including the state, global sports institutions, medical frameworks, media narratives, and public participation. All materials were originally in Korean and translated into English for analysis.

2. Transnational knowledge production of sex

Introduction of Sex Testing through the Hierarchical Relationship between FIFA and Domestic Leagues

Sex testing has historically been implemented by global sports governing bodies, and there has been no formal regulation of sex testing in domestic sports in Korea. The boycott affair, however, occurred within the Korean Women's Football League rather than at the international level. In this context, the demand that a female player undergo sex testing in a domestic league was both unreasonable and institutionally unsupported. Nevertheless, six coaches mobilized sex testing as a condition for their boycott, transforming the controversy over Park Eun-sun's sex into a strategic threat against her participation and her team.

This became possible through the hierarchical relationship between FIFA and domestic football institutions. FIFA governs football through a pyramidal, transnational structure in which national associations are direct members and domestic leagues operate under their authority. Although FIFA does not directly regulate domestic leagues, access to international competitions depends on compliance with FIFA rules, giving it indirect but powerful control over players, teams, and national associations (Meier & García, 2015) . In this structure, eligibility for international competition becomes a key mechanism through which FIFA's regulations extend into domestic contexts.

The six coaches explicitly exploited this hierarchy by targeting Park's eligibility for the

national team. Their demand for "verification" was framed not as a domestic disciplinary issue but as a matter of international legitimacy, effectively invoking FIFA's authority to pressure the Korean Women's Football Federation.

The coaches threatened to boycott the league unless Park's status was clarified, effectively tying domestic participation to international eligibility. FIFA's gender verification regulation itself is marked by ambiguity. It states that "androgenic hormones have performance-enhancing effects, particularly on strength, power, and speed, which may provide an advantage in football and could influence the outcome of the games,"(FIFA, 2011) yet it does not specify clear thresholds or criteria for determining eligibility . Sex testing is conducted primarily in response to protests in international competitions, while national federations are responsible for verifying and registering players' sex (FIFA, 2011). This division of responsibility creates a regulatory gap: global standards exist without clear mechanisms of accountability at the domestic level.

During the boycott affair, the Korean Women's Football Federation turned to FIFA for guidance. Oh Kyusang, president of the federation, stated that "we have requested FIFA to provide an interpretation of the regulation" and that "we have to follow FIFA's guidance" (JoongAng, 2013; MBC, 2013). However, there is no public record of FIFA's response. This absence of direct intervention, combined with the expectation of compliance, produced a space in which sex testing could be invoked without formal authorization or accountability.

As a result, the boycott functioned through what can be understood as transnational regulatory indirection. FIFA's authority operates less through direct enforcement than through its structural position at the apex of a global football hierarchy that governs access to meaningful competition. As a private transnational regulator, FIFA derives its power from controlling entry into highly valued "club goods" such as international tournaments, commercial markets, and

global visibility, which national federations and governments are reluctant to jeopardize (Meier and García, 2015; García and Meier, 2017). This control functions as an indirect but highly effective enforcement mechanism: the threat of suspension or exclusion from competitions like the World Cup incentivizes states to align domestic practices with FIFA regulations, even in the absence of formal legal authority (García-García and Meier, 2013; García and Meier, 2017). In this sense, FIFA's regulatory influence is exercised through market access and hierarchical governance rather than coercive intervention.

At the same time, FIFA maintains institutional distance from the consequences of its governance. Its claims to the "autonomy of sport," combined with its legal status as a private organization, allow it to shape national policies while remaining largely insulated from public accountability (Meier and García, 2015). Comparative cases demonstrate that governments often withdraw from regulating domestic football, even in the face of governance failures, in order to avoid FIFA sanctions. This produces a durable equilibrium in which private authority persists because it delivers access to competitions, revenue, and prestige that states depend on. As a result, FIFA is able to structure domestic sport practices and policy outcomes while remaining formally detached from their social and political effects.

The decision by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea further illustrates this dynamic. The commission ruled that the demand for sex testing constituted "sexual harassment in the workplace" (decision 13-petition-0845200), emphasizing the humiliation and degradation experienced by the player. However, the ruling did not question the legitimacy of sex testing itself. Instead, it framed the issue narrowly as interpersonal misconduct, leaving intact the broader regulatory framework that allows sex testing to exist. As the decision noted, the demand implied that the athlete possessed physical traits exceeding normative expectations of femininity, linking

bodily suspicion to gendered assumptions about appearance and ability (National Human Rights Commission of Korea, 2014).

This partial recognition reveals a key paradox. While the act of demanding sex testing was deemed punishable, the practice of sex testing itself remained unquestioned because it is authorized within global sports governance. In effect, domestic institutions could discipline individual actors but could not challenge the transnational system that legitimizes such practices.

The findings demonstrate that the hierarchical relationship between FIFA and the Korean women's football league was central to the introduction of sex testing into the domestic context. By leveraging FIFA's regulatory authority, the six coaches transformed a local dispute into a matter of global eligibility. At the same time, the Korean Women's Football Federation reinforced this hierarchy by deferring to FIFA rather than developing its own protective framework for players.

Taken together, this case shows that sex testing is not simply imposed from global institutions but becomes locally actionable through hierarchical governance structures that tie domestic participation to international legitimacy. This dynamic reflects how Eurocentric and imperial regimes of gender verification circulate through transnational sports governance and are reproduced in local contexts, positioning certain bodies as suspect and in need of verification.

The effects of this process extended beyond the institutional domain. As the boycott affair gained media attention, Park's body became a site of public scrutiny, where competing definitions of sex were produced and contested.

Female Player's Body: A Battleground for Transnational Knowledge Production of Sex

To analyze the public's response to the boycott affair, I collected 2,042 comments from a YouTube video clip featuring Park Eun-sun's interview (SBS, 2013). This clip does not mention

any international sex testing cases or use diagnostic language. The interview, originally aired on television in 2013, was uploaded to YouTube by the broadcaster in 2021, and the comments were posted between 2021 and 2024. Considering the timeline of international debates on sex testing, particularly those involving Caster Semenya and Dutee Chand during the 2010s, the comments posted after 2021 offer insight into how these global debates have shaped public interpretations of Park's sex identity in Korea. Although the video itself remains locally grounded, the comment section reveals how transnational discourses circulate and become retroactively applied to a domestic controversy.

Using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014), I conducted open coding of all 2,042 comments. From emerging patterns, six initial codes were identified: (1) sex testing, (2) boycott, (3) sex gender norms, (4) sexuality, (5) sports culture in general, and (6) simple reactions. I then focused on three of these categories, sex testing, boycott, and sex gender norms, and selected 492 comments that explicitly or implicitly proposed criteria for determining Park's sex. From these, eight criteria were identified and grouped into three broader approaches with greater "theoretical reach" (Charmaz, 2014, 141): traditional conventions, local norms, and global governing bodies. Traditional conventions include appearance, external genitalia, and self-identification. The local approach relies on government identification and collective acceptance, whereas the global governing bodies' approach emphasizes hormones and chromosomes. This classification is summarized in Table 1.

Approaches	Criteria	N	Comments
Traditional Conventions	Physical Appearance	190	“[Park is] Just a guy.” “I'm sorry, I thought you[Park] were a man by your face and voice.”
	External genitalia	18	“If I were that player, I'd take my clothes off and show mine [external genitalia].” “They are saying that they can’t trust the government ID and show them her vagina.”
	Self-identification	7	“Is it really necessary??? It's just insulting to the player. Why can't you simply accept it when she says she's a woman?” “Anyway she’s saying that she’s a woman. We need to stop saying she looks like a man. That hurt her.”
Global governing bodies	Hormone	92	"In the Olympics, a female athlete had her medals revoked because her testosterone levels were the same as men. She had female genitalia, but no ovaries, and she was a intersex, which means she had testicles in her body. Look up Semenya, there are other intersex athletes.” “I heard that Park Eun-sun was born intersex, lacking female hormones.”
	Chromosomes	35	"That's so stupid...if she was born with XX chromosomes, she’s a girl. If someone is good at soccer, does that mean they are a boy?” “Biologically, she's a woman, but it seems like she was born to be athlete with a high level t of male hormones. If a person has a lot of male hormones, their skeleton and strength are well built, and their breasts are fat anyway, so they are flat if they have less body fat. It's a matter of chromosomes, not appearance, so why are these people discussing sex with appearance, idiots...”
Local Norms	Government ID	12	"Just show them your resident registration numbers”. “The federation must have confirmed the [Park’s] resident registration numbers and they're still going to boycott her because of her appearance? How ridiculous!”

	Collective acceptance	26	"Aren't the six coaches really stupid?? Soccer isn't a solo sport, players have to live in a group... They shower together, change clothes together... If Park was a man, the women on the team would have already gotten into trouble." "Would you question the sex of a friend you went to school with if she looked like the other sex?? When she first joined the league, yes, but after years of playing face-to-face, is it normal to ask her to identify as female??"

Table 1. Approaches to Determining Sex in Comments on the Boycott Debate

Traditional Conventions

The most frequently suggested criterion for determining sex is appearance (n = 190). I define appearance broadly to include voice, physique, and what are commonly referred to in the comments as "secondary sex characteristics." Expressions such as "[Park is] just a guy" or "I thought you were a man by your face and voice" do not always explicitly advocate appearance as a determinant of sex, yet they reinforce the normative expectation that individuals categorized as female must embody recognizable femininity. In this sense, appearance operates as a taken-for-granted standard through which gender is made accountable in everyday interaction (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

External genitalia (n = 18) are also occasionally invoked as definitive markers of sex. Comments such as "I would just show mine" reflect the presupposition that sex is naturally fixed and visibly determined at birth, aligning with legal and institutional frameworks that divide individuals into binary categories without further justification (Park, 2019).

Self-identification (n = 5) appears only rarely and is framed not as a matter of autonomy or rights but as a response to perceived harm: "Why can't you just accept that she says she's a

woman?" Rather than drawing on liberal discourses of self-determination (Meyerowitz, 2004), these comments emphasize emotional injury and dignity. They uniquely adopt the perspective of the player rather than that of institutional authorities, foregrounding the affective consequences of the controversy rather than the legitimacy of classification itself.

Taken together, appearance, external genitalia, and self-identification constitute what I call the conventional approach, which operates as common sense knowledge. These criteria appear intuitive and self-evident, yet they reveal how the female athlete's body is made hyper-visible and subject to public scrutiny. As research on sport demonstrates, women athletes' bodies are not neutral but are sites where gender norms are enforced, negotiated, and contested (Caudwell, 2003). Athletic bodies that do not conform to hegemonic femininity are often read as excessive, ambiguous, or illegitimate, making them particularly vulnerable to suspicion and regulation .

At the same time, the reliance on appearance highlights a tension between performance and femininity. Female athletes are expected to excel physically while simultaneously maintaining gender norms that affirm their belonging in women's sport. When these expectations are disrupted, as in Park's case, the body becomes a focal point of scrutiny through which broader anxieties about gender boundaries are expressed. In this sense, conventional criteria do not simply reflect individual bias but reproduce structural expectations embedded in sports culture and society.

Moreover, these conventional approaches coexist with, and are often challenged by, other forms of knowledge that claim greater authority. Comments invoking biomedical or institutional criteria frequently dismiss appearance-based judgments as "emotional" or irrational, revealing an implicit hierarchy in which everyday knowledge is subordinated to scientific or regulatory expertise. This hierarchy mirrors broader global dynamics in which Western scientific frameworks are positioned as universal and objective, while other ways of knowing the body are marginalized

(Karkazis & Jordan-Young, 2018).

In this sense, the conventional approach is not simply residual or outdated. Rather, it operates as a key site where embodied perception, cultural norms, and transnational knowledge intersect. The prominence of appearance demonstrates that despite the growing influence of biomedical discourse, the body remains a central and contested terrain through which sex is interpreted and contested in everyday life.

Local Norms

Collective acceptance and government identification are categorized under local norms for determining sex. The term "local norms" does not suggest that these criteria are unique to Korea. Rather, they hold particular significance within a historical and institutional context shaped by colonial governance, Cold War politics, and postwar nation-building. While international sex testing policies tend to privilege biomedical and regulatory frameworks, often overlooking locally embedded understandings of sex (Cooky et al., 2019), a historical and geopolitical perspective reveals that collective and state-based forms of recognition play a crucial role in how sex is determined and validated in Korea.

Following liberation from Japanese colonial rule of Korea, the period of United States Army Military Government in Korea, and the Korean War (1950–1953), elite sports were institutionalized under military authoritarian regimes as tools for managing social order and projecting national strength (Park et al., 2012; Park & Lim, 2015). In this context, sport became closely aligned with state projects of discipline, collectivism, and ideological cohesion. Korean physical education, modeled in part on military training, emphasized collective identity and conformity over individual autonomy (Hong, 2011; Nam-Gil & Mangan, 2002). The widespread

use of boarding systems for athlete training further reinforced close interpersonal bonds and collective responsibility among teammates (Lee & Yim, 2011; Park & Shin, 2003).

These practices are embedded within a broader gender order shaped by Confucian patriarchy and modern state institutions. The Korean social and legal system has historically organized individuals into a rigid male female binary tied to family roles, heterosexuality, and national identity, treating other identities as deviations (Na et al., 2014) . Institutions such as the family registration system, military conscription, and welfare and migration policies reinforce this binary by defining proper citizens as gendered subjects within heterosexual and patriarchal structures . Within this framework, sex is not merely a biological attribute but a socially and politically regulated category that defines belonging.

Within this institutional and cultural context, collective acceptance emerges as a key criterion for determining sex. Comments such as "Would you question the sex of a friend you went to school with if she looked like the other sex?" and "After years of playing together, how can her sex be questioned now?" emphasize relational knowledge as a basis for legitimacy. Rather than focusing on the body as an isolated biological entity, these comments define sex through shared experience, intimacy, and social recognition. Park's long-term participation in women's teams becomes evidence of her belonging, suggesting that sex is validated through continuity of interaction rather than fixed biological markers.

At the same time, this relational approach places significant pressure on teammates. Comments criticizing teammates for not defending Park—"They use a locker room together, so why won't they testify for her?"—reveal how collective acceptance operates not only descriptively but normatively. Teammates are expected to act as witnesses who can verify the legitimacy of one another's bodies. This expectation transforms everyday practices of intimacy, such as sharing

accommodation or locker rooms, into sites of surveillance and proof. As a result, teammates are positioned in a contradictory role: they are simultaneously expected to demonstrate solidarity and to participate in the regulation of gender boundaries.

This dynamic reflects broader tensions in women's sport, where athletes must negotiate the coexistence of physical strength and hegemonic femininity (Cahn, 2003; Krane, 2001). When one athlete's legitimacy is questioned, it extends beyond the individual to threaten the integrity of the entire team. The sex testing debate thus destabilizes not only Park's identity but also the gendered boundaries that sustain women's sport as a category. In this sense, collective acceptance functions as both a protective mechanism and a regulatory one, reinforcing gender norms even as it resists external intervention.

Government identification, particularly the Resident Registration Number, provides a second key criterion within local norms. As noted earlier, this system has historically functioned as an authoritative means of verifying sex, age, and citizenship in Korea. Institutionalized through nation-building processes including male conscription, population control, and ideological surveillance, it encodes binary sex as a foundational element of legal identity (Na et al., 2014; Ruin, 2020). Comments such as "Just show your Resident Registration Number" and "The federation must have confirmed it already" reflect a widespread belief in the state's authority to define and certify sex.

Unlike collective acceptance, which is relational and experiential, government identification represents a bureaucratic and institutional mode of verification. It positions sex as a fixed category assigned by the nation and validated through documentation. In this framework, legitimacy is not negotiated through interaction but confirmed through compliance with state authority. This reliance underscores how deeply embedded the binary sex system is within everyday life, where

presenting identification becomes a routine act of aligning one's body with state-recognized categories.

Importantly, these two local criteria do not operate independently but interact in complex ways. Collective acceptance emphasizes lived experience and relational belonging, while government identification reinforces hierarchical and institutional authority. Together, they produce a layered system in which sex is validated both socially and bureaucratically.

From a transnational and decolonial perspective, these local norms are not separate from global regimes of sex testing but are deeply entangled with them. International policies that claim scientific neutrality often reproduce colonial and racial hierarchies while reinforcing patriarchal nationalism in local contexts (Munro, 2010; Nyong'o, 2010; Pastor, 2019). In Korea, global discourse does not simply override local norms but interacts with them, producing hybrid forms of authority.

For instance, while some comments rely on government ID as definitive proof, others dismiss it in favor of biomedical criteria derived from international cases. Conversely, collective acceptance is sometimes invoked to challenge both state authority and global scientific claims. These tensions demonstrate that local norms are neither static nor purely resistant. Rather, they are actively reconfigured through engagement with transnational knowledge.

Global Governing Bodies

Both local and conventional approaches are often refuted by criteria associated with global governing bodies, particularly hormones (n = 92) and chromosomes (n = 35). These criteria are categorized under global governing bodies' approaches because they are not only adopted and implemented by these bodies but are also closely linked to international sex testing cases that circulate in online debates. Among the 92 comments suggesting hormones as a determinant of sex,

16 explicitly reference cases from overseas. One commenter noted: “In the Olympics, a female athlete had her medals revoked because her testosterone levels were the same as men. She had female genitalia, but no ovaries, and she was intersex… Look up Semenya.” Such references demonstrate how global cases are mobilized as authoritative evidence in interpreting a local controversy.

Intersex (“인터섹스”, “간성”, “중성”, “양성자”, “양성구유자”) was one of the most frequently mentioned categories, alongside terms such as hermaphrodite (“자웅동체”, “남녀한몸증”), pseudohermaphroditism (“거짓남녀한몸증”, “남성 가성 반음양”), lesbian (“레즈비언”), transgender (“트랜스젠더”), and medical diagnoses including Turner syndrome (“터너 증후군”), Klinefelter syndrome (“클라인펠터 증후군”), androgen insensitivity syndrome (“안드로겐 불감응 증후군”), and gigantism (“거인증”). The coexistence of identity labels and clinical diagnoses within the same discursive field reflects the medicalization of sex, where diverse forms of embodiment are interpreted through diagnostic frameworks that pathologize deviation from binary norms.

These terms are not neutral descriptors but reflect the increasing medicalization of sex within public discourse. By invoking diagnostic categories, commenters frame sex as a biomedical condition that requires expert verification, rather than a socially or relationally constructed identity. This aligns with the historical trajectory of sex testing in global sport, where governing bodies such as the International Olympic Committee and World Athletics have shifted from invasive “femininity tests” toward hormone-based and chromosomal criteria. Contemporary policies continue to rely heavily on testosterone thresholds and biomedical indicators, despite ongoing scientific and ethical debates regarding their validity and fairness.

In the comment data, these global frameworks are frequently treated as the most objective and authoritative methods of determining sex. Statements such as “This is not about appearance. It requires chromosomal testing” or “She must have high levels of male hormones” demonstrate how biomedical criteria are positioned as rational and scientific, often in contrast to local or conventional approaches. Notably, even when commenters do not cite specific international cases, their arguments are often rooted in generalized knowledge derived from Western media and scientific discourse. This suggests that global governing bodies’ frameworks circulate not only through formal regulations but also through everyday channels of information consumption.

The prominence of cases such as Caster Semenya and Dutee Chand further illustrates how global examples shape local interpretations. In total, 66 comments explicitly mention international cases, with Semenya being the most frequently cited. However, these references are often partial, simplified, or inaccurate, indicating that what circulates is not detailed legal or scientific knowledge but a condensed narrative of “unfair advantage” and “biological truth.” In this sense, global discourse is not merely transferred but translated into locally meaningful forms.

At the same time, the invocation of intersex and related medical categories reveals the racialized and colonial dimensions of global sex testing discourse. As Zine Magubane (2014) demonstrates, intersex diagnoses have historically been shaped by racial and geopolitical contexts, with Western medical knowledge framing non-Western bodies as sites of abnormality and intervention. In Korea, where intersex identities are not institutionally recognized and remain largely invisible (Park, 2019), the introduction of intersex discourse occurs primarily through global sports controversies. As a result, intersex is constructed not as a locally embedded identity but as a foreign, pathological condition associated with athletes from the Global South.

This dynamic reinforces a broader pattern in which global governing bodies’ discourse

reproduces colonial hierarchies of knowledge. Biomedical frameworks are presented as universal and objective, while local and conventional understandings are dismissed as emotional or irrational. Comments such as "Don't be emotional, be rational" explicitly position scientific knowledge as superior, aligning with what Sociology describes as a "civilizing process" in which Western forms of knowledge are privileged as markers of modernity and progress (Elias, 1939).

These discursive patterns also reproduce orientalist binaries such as local versus global, East versus West, traditional versus modern, and emotional versus scientific (Mohanty, 1988; Moon, 2005). By framing sex as a universal and measurable biological fact, global governing bodies' approaches obscure the historical and cultural specificity of gender systems (Patil, 2018). At the same time, they position Western science as the ultimate authority, marginalizing alternative ways of knowing and regulating the body.

Importantly, these global frameworks are not simply imposed from above but are actively taken up and reproduced by individuals in everyday discourse. Commenters mobilize biomedical terminology and international examples to assert authority, often presenting themselves as more informed or rational than others. This demonstrates how global regimes of knowledge are internalized and rearticulated at the local level, shaping not only institutional practices but also public understandings of sex.

3. Conclusion

Sex testing remains an inherently unstable and unresolved policy, as scientific research itself demonstrates that sex does not exist as a fixed binary. The primary contribution of this chapter is to theorize the localization of sex testing by tracing how global discourses of gender verification are introduced, translated, and institutionalized within a domestic context. Through an analysis of the boycott affair in the Korean Women's Football League (2013–2014), this study demonstrates

how international sex testing discourse enters Korea and reshapes both institutional practices and local understandings of sex. The findings show that the hierarchical relationship between global governing bodies and domestic leagues plays a decisive role in this process. In particular, FIFA's gender verification regulations, which lack clear parameters for eligibility, reproduce its authority over domestic leagues through the structure of global membership. The six coaches strategically mobilized this ambiguity, leveraging FIFA's authority to legitimize their demand for sex testing in a context where no such policy formally existed.

At the same time, the decision by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea reveals the limits of national authority in challenging transnational governance. Although the commission ruled that the boycott constituted workplace sexual harassment, it did not question the legitimacy of sex testing itself. This outcome highlights a key paradox: while domestic institutions may regulate individual actions, they remain constrained in contesting global regimes that authorize and normalize such practices. In this sense, FIFA operates as a transnational authority that shapes domestic practices while remaining institutionally distant from their consequences.

The second contribution of this chapter is to show how the introduction of global sex testing discourse produces transnational knowledge of sex across multiple sites. Despite the relatively low visibility of women's football in Korea, the boycott affair generated significant public and media attention, transforming the female athlete's body into a site of intense scrutiny. The analysis of online comments reveals that sex is determined through three competing yet interconnected frameworks: traditional conventions, local norms, and global governing bodies.

The traditional conventions approach relies on appearance, external genitalia, and self-identification, which are often treated as self-evident and require little justification. The local norms approach, including collective acceptance and government identification, reflects Korea's

historical context of colonial governance and militarized modernity (Moon, 2005), where identity is validated through both relational belonging and state authority. In contrast, the global governing bodies' approach prioritizes biomedical criteria such as hormones and chromosomes, frequently invoking international cases and diagnostic categories. These frameworks are often mobilized to dismiss other forms of knowledge as emotional or irrational, reproducing hierarchies between scientific and experiential forms of understanding.

Importantly, these approaches do not operate in isolation but interact to produce layered and contested meanings of sex. The concept of localization highlights this process: global discourses are not simply imposed but are actively translated and rearticulated through local histories, institutions, and everyday practices. At the same time, the Eurocentric, androcentric, and racialized assumptions embedded in global sex testing regimes do not disappear in the process of localization. Rather, they are reproduced and reconfigured within the domestic context, often in ways that reinforce existing gender hierarchies and nationalist frameworks.

This chapter further demonstrates that sex testing functions as a critical site where multiple forms of power intersect. It brings together scientific knowledge, legal regulation, and cultural norms, as well as broader political histories of colonialism and imperialism. While sex testing is often justified in terms of fairness, integrity, and competitive equality, it simultaneously produces exclusion and harm, particularly for cisgender women, intersex, transgender and nonbinary communities.

The boycott affair illustrates the consequences of this dynamic. Despite significant public support for Park, she was ultimately unable to continue her career in the Korean Women's Football League. This outcome reflects a broader pattern in which the focus of scrutiny remains on the athlete's body rather than on the structures that produce and sustain sex segregation and gender

policing. As long as debates center on verifying individual bodies rather than questioning institutional frameworks, sex testing will continue to reproduce inequality under the guise of fairness.

CHAPTER V: PROTEST OR FESTIVAL? LGBTQ+ SPORTS ACTIVISM IN EAST ASIA

Global debates surrounding sex segregation, sex testing, and transgender inclusion have positioned sport as a central site of gender governance (Cavanagh and Sykes 2006; Pieper 2016; World Athletics 2023). Existing scholarship has largely focused on Western institutions and elite sport, framing LGBTQ+ inclusion as a question of access to existing categories and rights within established systems (Anderson 2009; Travers 2018; Henne 2015). However, this framing overlooks how LGBTQ+ sports activism unfolds in non-Western contexts, where political conditions, state relations, and historical trajectories shape distinct modes of engagement (Manalansan 2003; Altman 2001; Puar 2007). In East Asia, where legal recognition of LGBTQ+ rights remains limited, sport becomes not only a site of anti-discrimination claims but also a space for rethinking the political meaning of gender, equity, and collective belonging.

This chapter compares two LGBTQ+ sports events in East Asia, the Queer Women Games (QWG) in South Korea and the Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK), to examine how activism in sport engages global gender governance under different geopolitical conditions. While both events emerge in contexts where LGBTQ+ rights are not fully institutionalized, they adopt markedly different political frameworks. I argue that these differences can be understood through two overlapping but distinct modes of activism, protest and festival. Rather than treating these as

oppositional categories, I conceptualize them as strategic orientations that shape how activists engage with gender norms, institutions, and global LGBTQ+ discourses (Tarrow 2005; Keck and Sikkink 1998).

The Queer Women Games operates as a form of protest that challenges the foundational assumptions of sex segregated sport and rejects institutional authority over gender classification. Organized by queer feminist communities in South Korea, QWG frames sport as a site of collective resistance against gender policing, emphasizing autonomy, solidarity, and the transformation of existing structures. This approach resonates with feminist critiques of sport as a regulatory institution that disciplines bodies through binary gender norms and racialized standards of femininity (Birrell and Cole 1994; Henne 2015; Karkazis et al. 2012). In contrast, the Gay Games Hong Kong adopts a festival model that aligns with global LGBTQ+ movements, emphasizing visibility, diversity, and inclusion. As part of an international network of LGBTQ+ sporting events, GGHK seeks legitimacy through global recognition, corporate sponsorship, and engagement with state and institutional actors, reflecting broader trends of neoliberal inclusion in LGBTQ+ politics (Duggan 2004; Puar 2007; Eng 2010).

By placing these two events in dialogue, this chapter moves beyond a singular narrative of LGBTQ+ inclusion to examine how activism is shaped by geopolitical positioning, transnational flows of discourse, and local political conditions. I analyze their differences across four dimensions: geopolitical positioning, the adoption of global LGBTQ+ discourse, relationships with the state, and forms of financial legitimacy. Through this comparative framework, I show that protest and festival are not merely descriptive labels but reflect distinct strategies of navigating global gender governance. Ultimately, this analysis reframes LGBTQ+ sports activism in East Asia as a site where gender, politics, and geopolitics intersect, revealing that the meanings of inclusion,

resistance, and fairness are not universal but historically and spatially produced (Mohanty 2003; Lugones 2007).

1. LGBTQ+ Movements Between Protest and Festival

Scholarship on LGBTQ+ movements has long debated the relationship between resistance, recognition, and incorporation. Early social movement theories often framed activism through oppositional politics, emphasizing protest, disruption, and collective action against the state (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982). Within this tradition, LGBTQ+ movements have been understood as struggles for rights and visibility, emerging from marginalized communities to challenge legal exclusion and social stigma. The Stonewall uprising remains a central reference point, symbolizing militant resistance and the refusal of state control over queer lives.

However, more recent scholarship complicates this narrative by examining how LGBTQ+ movements are shaped by neoliberalism, globalization, and transnational flows of capital and culture. Lisa Duggan (2003) argues that neoliberalism produces a "new homonormativity," in which LGBTQ+ inclusion is achieved through depoliticized forms of recognition that align with market values and privatized citizenship. Similarly, Jasbir Puar (2007) theorizes homonationalism, showing how certain LGBTQ+ subjects become incorporated into nationalist projects, often at the expense of racialized and non-Western others. These frameworks shift attention from protest to processes of normalization, incorporation, and governance.

At the same time, transnational and postcolonial scholars have highlighted how Western LGBTQ+ categories and movement models circulate globally in uneven ways. Joseph Massad (2007) critiques the global spread of "gay" identity as a form of cultural imperialism, while scholars such as Grewal and Kaplan (1994) and Boellstorff (2005) emphasize the need to understand how sexuality is reworked in local contexts. These perspectives are particularly

important for analyzing LGBTQ+ movements in Asia, where activism often operates at the intersection of global discourse, local histories, and state constraints.

Within sport, these tensions are especially visible. Scholars have shown that sport can function both as a site of exclusion and as a platform for social change (Carrington 1998; Kaufman and Wolff 2010; Jules Boykoff 2019). LGBTQ+ sporting events, such as the Gay Games, have been interpreted as spaces of inclusion and visibility, but also as sites where corporate sponsorship, global branding, and institutional recognition shape the terms of participation. This dual character raises a key question: to what extent do these events function as political protest, and to what extent do they operate as depoliticized celebration?

Building on these debates, this study proposes a framework of "protest vs festival" to analyze LGBTQ+ sports activism. Protest refers to practices that directly challenge state power, legal exclusion, and dominant gender norms through confrontation, disruption, and refusal. Festival, in contrast, refers to forms of visibility and participation that emphasize celebration, inclusion, and community, often aligning with corporate, institutional, or global narratives of diversity. Importantly, these are not mutually exclusive categories but relational positions within a spectrum of activism shaped by political context.

This framework allows us to move beyond binary evaluations of "radical" versus "assimilated" movements. Instead, it situates LGBTQ+ sports events within broader regimes of governance, asking how different historical, legal, and economic conditions shape the balance between protest and festival. In contexts where activist infrastructures enable confrontation, events may lean toward protest. In contexts where political constraints and global capital structure participation, events may take on more festivalized forms. By tracing this tension, the framework highlights how LGBTQ+ movements are continuously negotiating between resistance and

incorporation within uneven global systems.

This theoretical framework becomes particularly useful when comparing the Queer Women Games (QWG) in South Korea and the Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK). QWG emerges from grassroots activist networks shaped by feminist, queer, and democratization movements, and thus tends to operate closer to protest. Its small scale, community-based organization, and refusal of rigid gender categories allow it to directly challenge both legal exclusion and the regulation of bodies in sport. In contrast, GGHK is embedded in global circuits of sport, capital, and governance. As a large-scale international event, it depends on corporate sponsorship, institutional recognition, and political negotiation, positioning it closer to festival. Its emphasis on diversity, inclusion, and global participation reflects not an absence of politics but a different mode of engagement shaped by Hong Kong's legal environment, colonial legacy, and constrained civil society. Rather than treating these as opposing models, this comparison shows how QWG and GGHK occupy different positions along the protest festival spectrum, revealing how LGBTQ+ sports activism is structured by uneven geopolitical conditions, legal regimes, and transnational flows of power.

2. Colonial Legacies and Geopolitical Location in Globalization

South Korea: Layered Colonialism and Developmental Globalization

South Korea's geopolitical position in contemporary globalization is shaped by layered histories of colonialism, war, and developmental state formation. These historical processes have structured not only its economic and political institutions but also the circulation of gender norms, cultural practices, and forms of social regulation, including those related to sport and sexuality. Understanding South Korea's position within global systems requires attention to both its subjection to external powers and its subsequent incorporation into transnational networks of capital and governance.

Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945) marked a foundational period in the formation of modern Korean institutions. During this time, colonial authorities introduced systems of governance, education, and bodily regulation that were deeply influenced by imperial ideologies. Scholars have shown that colonial modernity in Korea involved the imposition of new forms of discipline and classification, including gendered norms tied to productivity, hygiene, and national identity. These transformations laid the groundwork for the development of modern sport, which was institutionalized as part of broader efforts to produce disciplined and gendered citizens.

Following liberation and the Korean War, South Korea entered a period of intense geopolitical realignment under U.S. influence. The presence of the U.S. military and the integration of South Korea into Cold War geopolitics played a critical role in shaping its political economy and cultural landscape. Scholars have argued that U.S. hegemony contributed to the global diffusion of Western models of governance, including liberal capitalism, biomedical knowledge, and gender norms (Cumings 2005; Moon 2005). In the realm of sport, this included the adoption of international standards and participation in global competitions, which reinforced binary sex classifications and institutional hierarchies aligned with Euro-American frameworks (Henne 2015).

South Korea's rapid industrialization and economic growth in the late twentieth century further transformed its position within globalization. As a developmental state, South Korea pursued export-oriented growth and integration into global markets, becoming a key player in the global economy. This process has been accompanied by what scholars describe as compressed modernity, in which rapid social and cultural change occurs within a relatively short period (Chang 2010). Within this context, global discourses of gender and sexuality have been selectively adopted and contested, producing tensions between traditional norms and emerging forms of identity and

activism.

Importantly, South Korea's position as a non-Western yet highly globalized nation creates a complex relationship with global norms. While the country is deeply integrated into transnational economic and cultural systems, it remains outside the core of Western geopolitical power. This position shapes how global frameworks, including those related to LGBTQ+ rights and gender governance, are received and reinterpreted. As Kim (2020) argues, the adoption of global LGBTQ+ discourse in South Korea is mediated by local cultural, political, and religious dynamics, resulting in uneven and contested forms of recognition.

This layered geopolitical position also influences the development of activism. The legacy of authoritarian governance and subsequent democratization movements has produced strong traditions of grassroots organizing and protest. Feminist and labor movements have played a central role in challenging state power and advocating for social change, providing a foundation for contemporary LGBTQ+ activism. As a result, activism in South Korea often takes the form of resistance and collective mobilization, reflecting both the constraints and possibilities of operating within a context shaped by historical subordination and ongoing marginalization.

In sum, South Korea's colonial legacy and geopolitical location within globalization produce a context in which global norms are both internalized and contested. The country's integration into transnational systems coexists with structural inequalities and cultural resistance, shaping the ways in which gender, sexuality, and sport are understood and regulated. This complex positioning underlies the emergence of localized forms of activism that challenge dominant frameworks while navigating the constraints imposed by both domestic and global structures.

Hong Kong: Colonial Cosmopolitanism and Global City Integration

Hong Kong's geopolitical position within globalization is shaped by its history as a British

colony and its contemporary status as a global financial hub under Chinese sovereignty. This unique configuration has produced a form of colonial cosmopolitanism, characterized by deep integration into transnational networks of capital, governance, and culture. At the same time, recent political developments have introduced new constraints on civil society and public expression, creating a complex and evolving context for social movements, including LGBTQ+ activism.

Under British colonial rule (1841–1997), Hong Kong developed as a key node in global trade and finance, serving as an intermediary between Western powers and East Asia. Colonial governance established legal and administrative systems that emphasized economic liberalism and institutional stability, while also maintaining hierarchical structures of power and limited political participation (Mathews, Ma, and Lui 2008). English became a dominant language of administration, business, and international communication, facilitating Hong Kong's integration into global networks and shaping its cultural and institutional landscape.

The colonial legacy also influenced the development of legal frameworks related to sexuality. Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1991, earlier than in many Asian contexts, reflecting the influence of British legal reforms (Kong 2011). However, this did not lead to comprehensive protections or recognition for LGBTQ+ individuals, and significant gaps remain in anti-discrimination law and family rights. Scholars have noted that this combination of partial liberalization and structural limitation reflects the broader dynamics of colonial governance, in which certain forms of modernity are adopted without fully transforming underlying inequalities (Chan 2017).

Following the 1997 handover to China, Hong Kong has operated under the "one country, two systems" framework, maintaining a degree of autonomy in its legal and economic systems while being subject to Chinese sovereignty. This arrangement has allowed Hong Kong to retain its

status as a global city, attracting international business, tourism, and cultural exchange. Its role as a global hub has facilitated the circulation of transnational discourses, including those related to LGBTQ+ rights, diversity, and inclusion (Kong 2011). As a result, Hong Kong has become a site where global and local dynamics intersect, producing hybrid forms of identity and activism.

However, this geopolitical positioning has become increasingly unstable in recent years. The 2019 pro-democracy protests and the subsequent imposition of the National Security Law in 2020 have significantly altered the political landscape, introducing new forms of state control and limiting the space for dissent. Scholars and observers have described this shift as a move toward greater centralization and surveillance, affecting not only political organizations but also cultural and social activities (Reuters 2026). Within this context, civil society actors must navigate a more restrictive environment, adapting their strategies to avoid legal and political risks.

For LGBTQ+ movements, this means operating within a context that combines global visibility with local constraint. On one hand, Hong Kong's global city status provides access to international networks, resources, and discourses that support LGBTQ+ visibility and advocacy. On the other hand, increasing state regulation limits the extent to which activism can take confrontational or explicitly political forms. As Ong (2006) suggests, this produces a form of negotiated engagement, in which actors work within existing structures while pursuing limited forms of change.

Corporate and institutional actors play a particularly important role in this context. Multinational companies and professional organizations have become key promoters of diversity and inclusion, often framing LGBTQ+ issues in terms that align with global business practices. While this involvement provides resources and visibility, it also shapes the terms of engagement, privileging forms of activism that are compatible with market and institutional logics (Duggan

2003). This dynamic reflects the broader integration of Hong Kong into global capitalism, where economic and cultural flows are closely intertwined.

In sum, Hong Kong's colonial legacy and geopolitical location produce a context in which globalization is both enabling and constraining. Its integration into transnational networks facilitates visibility and participation, while its political environment imposes limits on expression and dissent. This dual positioning shapes the forms of activism that emerge, favoring strategies of negotiation and alignment over confrontation. As a result, LGBTQ+ movements in Hong Kong reflect the complexities of operating within a global city that is simultaneously open to international influence and subject to increasing political control.

3. Relationship with the State: Conflict and Negotiation

	Queer Women Games (QWG)	**Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK)**
Formal Significance	The first publicly open LGBTQ+sports event in South Korea	The first Gay Games (Gay Olympics) in Asia
Scale	Local/biennial	Global/every four years
Organizer	Queer Women Network (local queer/women activists)	Gay Games Federation & GGHK organizing team
Participants	400	2000 (expected 12,000)
Main Sponsor	Grassroots	Global and domestic corporations
Main Participants	Local LGBTQ+ communities and individuals	Expats, global corporate communities, foreign visitors
Registration Fee	$15	$190 + @
Class	lower- and middle	middle- and upper
Race	East Asian	East Asian and white
Age	20-30s	30-60s
Nationality	Korean	Hongkonger, American,

		Westen Europeans
Relationship with the State	Conflict	Negotiation
Financial Legitimacy	Grassroots Autonomy	Corporate Integration
Adopting Global LGBTQ+ Discourse	Local Solidarity Centering Queer Women	Global Integration Centering Gender Diversity
Geopolitical Strategies	Protest	Festival

Table 2. Comparison of QWG and GGHK

QWG and State Conflict

The Queer Women Games (QWG) emerges as a form of collective resistance shaped by its marginal geopolitical position within South Korea, where LGBTQ+ rights remain largely unrecognized and public institutions continue to regulate access to space and participation. QWG engages the state through a mode of conflict that emerges from exclusion, regulation, and denial of access to public infrastructure. Rather than operating within institutional frameworks, QWG's relationship with the state is characterized by confrontation and resistance. I argue that this conflict is not simply oppositional but constitutive, shaping the political identity of QWG as a space that challenges the authority of the state to regulate gender, bodies, and access to sport.

A defining moment in the formation of QWG as protest occurred prior to its first event. The first Queer Women Games in 2018 was originally scheduled to take place on October 21, 2017. However, the event was postponed after the gymnasium contract was unilaterally canceled. The gymnasium is a public facility owned and operated by Dongdaemun-gu office, a district of Seoul, South Korea. On September 26, 2017, three weeks before the scheduled event, Dongdaemun-gu voided the rental contract.

According to the district's officer, prior to the unilateral cancellation, a county official contacted the organizers and informed them that civil complaints had been filed because the QWG

was for sexual minorities. The official indicated that the contract might be revoked on the grounds of "offense against public morals" and "safety concerns" invoking regulatory language that effectively framed LGBTQ+ presence as a threat to public order. This cancellation was not an isolated administrative decision but part of a broader pattern in which public institutions regulate access to space through moralized and gendered norms. This incident also reveals how the state operates not only through formal policy but also through discretionary administrative practices that enforce normative boundaries around sexuality and public space.

In response, the QWG organization, Queer Women Network held a rally of women and sexual minorities in front of Dongdaemun District Office Plaza in Seoul, condemning the district's decision to cancel the gym rental. About 100 people gathered and chanted, "Open the gym to sexual minorities, now!"[7] The organization also filed a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission of Korea against Dongdaemun-gu office, alleging LGBTQ+ discrimination in the cancellation of the contract[8]. In this process, organizers mobilized networks within feminist and democratic movements, and the event became embedded in broader struggles over access, recognition, and bodily autonomy. Participants described the cancellation as a moment of awakening.

> The cancellation of the venue reservation by Dongdaemun-gu became a moment for me to reflect on our happiness as well as my own happiness. It made me acutely aware that people

[7] '미풍양속' 해친다고? 성소수자에게 체육관을 열어라 ['Harming Public Morals'? Open the Gym to Sexual Minorities]." 2017. *Hankyoreh*, July 15. https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/815110.html

[8] Five years after initiating the lawsuit, the Queer Women Network ultimately prevailed in a Supreme Court ruling in 2022. This marked the first decision in South Korea to recognize discrimination against sexual minorities in access to public facilities.
Refusal to Rent a Gym to Sexual Minorities Is Illegal…Court's First Ruling" 2022. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, May 24. https://www.khan.co.kr/article/202205241108001

like me—or rather, people in similar positions, even if we are not exactly the same—are being deprived of something essential [Staff, Jung]

As staff member Jung reflected, the experience revealed how essential access to joy and space was being denied. The deprivation of sport was not understood as a neutral inconvenience but as a structural condition in which queer bodies are collectively excluded from institutional spaces. Multiple interviewees also noted that the news of the gym cancellation angered them and served as an awakening moment, revealing that sexual minorities cannot even enjoy playing sports. In this sense, the state's regulation of space becomes a mechanism of gender and sexual governance, determining who is allowed to appear and participate in public life.

Importantly, QWG did not initially position itself as a protest event. Rather, protest emerged through this encounter with state power. The cancellation forced organizers to respond, leading them to file a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission and to mobilize broader networks for rallies. This reflects the relational nature of contention, where activism develops through interaction with institutional constraints rather than being pre-defined (Tarrow 2005). Conflict, in this case, is not simply resistance to the state but a condition that produces collective political consciousness.

This conflictual relationship reshaped how participants understood their involvement in QWG. Participation became an act of resistance, not only against exclusion but against the broader system of gender policing embedded in sports institutions. Protest here extends beyond visible demonstrations to include refusal, persistence, and the creation of alternative spaces. It is an insistence that queer women have the right to occupy public space and access institutional infrastructure, challenging the implicit norms that render them illegitimate.

At the same time, this oppositional stance reflects the broader context of LGBTQ+ politics

in South Korea, where the absence of legal protections and institutional support limits the possibilities for formal engagement with the state. Conflict is thus both a political strategy and a structural condition, shaped by a context in which negotiation with the state is often unavailable or ineffective. QWG's relationship with the state demonstrates how marginalization can produce forms of activism that prioritize confrontation, solidarity and the reconfiguration of space.

GGHK as State Negotiation

In contrast to QWG, the Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK) engages the state through a mode of negotiation that reflects the constraints and opportunities of Hong Kong's contemporary political environment. Rather than confronting state authority directly, GGHK operates through strategic alignment and careful management of political risk. I argue that this negotiated relationship is shaped by the post-2019 transformation of Hong Kong under Chinese sovereignty, where heightened surveillance and the National Security Law have significantly restricted the space for overt political expression.

Through its house rules, GGHK explicitly defines itself as non-political, prohibiting demonstrations and requiring participants to comply with local laws, including national security regulations.

-GGHK's House Rules

(...) GGHK is a non-political and non-profit organization specifically established to organize a joyful, inclusive sporting, arts and culture event open to anyone. This is our only focus.

- *Please do not initiate or carry out any kind of demonstration, political or otherwise, during the Games, or at any Games venues or events.*
- *All participants and visitors must abide by the laws of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), including the Law of the People's Republic of China on*

This explicit declaration of being nonpolitical must be understood in light of Hong Kong's post-2019 political transformation under Chinese sovereignty and the imposition of the National Security Law in 2020. After years of mass pro-democracy protests, Beijing enacted sweeping security legislation that broadens criminalization of acts deemed subversive, secessionist, or as colluding with foreign forces, producing deep constraints on public assembly and political expression (Reuters 2026). Following years of pro-democracy protests, the imposition of sweeping security legislation has expanded the scope of what can be considered subversive or politically sensitive (Hung 2020), creating an environment in which public gatherings must be carefully managed.

The political sensitivity surrounding GGHK was evident in public reactions leading up to the event. A group of Hong Kong lawmakers and anti-LGBTQ political actors publicly urged the government to cancel the Games, claiming it could pose a threat to national security and accused the event of introducing "Western ideology" that undermines traditional family values and public order (South China Morning Post 2023). Pro-Beijing legislators explicitly leveraged national security rhetoric to raise alarm about LGBTQ visibility, even as organizers insisted that the Gay Games would abide by local laws and remain a celebration of inclusion (Reuters 2026). At the same time, Hong Kong still lacks legal recognition of same-sex unions and has no statutory protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation, with recent efforts to introduce civil partnership legislation defeated in the legislature (South China Morning Post 2023).

In this context, GGHK's non-political house rules and prohibition of demonstrations are not simply procedural safeguards, but strategic adaptations to a politically constrained environment,

where overt rights claims or public protest risk legal or administrative repercussions. A festival framing thus becomes a means of securing regulated space within a post-protest order marked by heightened political risk, surveillance, and negotiated legitimacy. Tensions between the Hong Kong and Mainland China's government further shape which LGBTQ figures can be publicly represented in GGHK as well as who can be invited or associated with the event.

> Participants were required to comply with Hong Kong law, including national security provisions. Okay, should we invite LGBT plus activists? Right? Activists like Denise Ho, like Anthony Wong, those are really activists. They were very active LGBT public figure during the 2014 Umbrella movement. So you know, there was a very early consensus that, you know, it's not that we're not friends with them, but we will never have them close, get close to Gay Games Hong Kong, or associate with Gay Games Hong Kong, because we don't want the Gay Games Hong Kong become a political event. And I think that's very interesting, because Gay Games itself is about, you know, rights and human rights. (…) So it's a constant negotiation with the government. [Organizer/Volunteer Zong]

Organizer Zong discussed early decisions not to communicate closely with prominent LGBTQ activists involved in pro-democracy movements such as "Denise Ho" and "Anthony Wong". This very political distancing was considered unavoidable to keep GGHK non-political, so it can really be held. Hosting the Games required implicit cooperation with government authorities. Activism, in this context, is not expressed through confrontation but through the careful navigation of institutional constraints.

GGHK's relationship with the state thus exemplifies what Ong (2006) describes as

negotiated governance, in which actors operate within regulatory frameworks by aligning with state expectations while pursuing limited forms of agency. The festival model becomes a key mechanism for this negotiation. By emphasizing joy, inclusion, and cultural celebration, GGHK positions itself as non-threatening and compatible with official narratives, securing the space necessary to operate. This framing allows the event to exist within a politically sensitive environment where overt protest would be untenable.

The festival framing emphasized joy, inclusion, and celebration. As I will show in the next section, these elements were made possible through international corporate sponsorship. Without direct support from the Hong Kong government and under the intense surveillance of mainland Chinese authorities, corporate sponsors and global branding became central to organizing a global LGBTQ+ sports festival in Hong Kong. Promotional materials highlighted economic impact and international prestige. Festival here functions as integration. It signals that LGBTQ people are modern, global, and economically valuable. Visibility becomes currency. Yet participants expressed ambivalence. Some felt pride in representation, while others noted fatigue with tokenism. Visibility did not automatically translate into policy change. Festival framing allowed GGHK to operate within a politically sensitive environment. By emphasizing sport and culture rather than activism, organizers secured institutional space.

GGHK organized a “Festival Village” during the games, at The Grounds, located in AIA Vitality Park on Hong Kong Island which British troops. AIA Vitality Park is part of the Central Harbourfront redevelopment project and is operated through a partnership involving the Hong Kong government and private entities such as AIA Group Limited. The site is closely tied to the adjacent Hong Kong Observation Wheel and is programmed with corporate sponsored wellness events, fitness classes, and large scale entertainment. As such, it is not a neutral public space but a

curated environment embedded in Hong Kong's experience economy and global branding strategies.

Placing the Festival Village within AIA Vitality Park positioned Gay Games Hong Kong 2023 within an infrastructure that prioritizes tourism, consumption, and international visibility. At the same time, the park's emphasis on depoliticized leisure such as outdoor cinema, wellness programming, and cultural events enabled the festival to remain legible and acceptable under current governance tensions. In this sense, the use of AIA Vitality Park illustrates how LGBTQ inclusion is negotiated through alignment with corporate sponsorship, global city branding, and carefully managed public space, where visibility is permitted insofar as it reinforces economic value and avoids political confrontation.

The contrast between QWG and GGHK demonstrates how relationships with the state are central to the formation of LGBTQ+ sports activism. QWG's conflictual stance reflects a context in which exclusion produces resistance and autonomy, while GGHK's negotiated approach reflects a context in which activism must be carefully managed to remain viable. These differences underscore that engagement with the state is not uniform but is shaped by geopolitical conditions that define the possibilities and limits of political action.

4. Financial Legitimacy: Grassroots Autonomy and Corporate Integration

QWG: Grassroots Crowdfunding

The Queer Women Games (QWG) operates through a grassroots funding model that reflects its political orientation toward autonomy, collective participation, and resistance to institutional control. Unlike large-scale international sporting events, QWG does not rely on corporate sponsorship or state funding but instead depends on crowdfunding, small grants, and volunteer labor. I argue that this financial structure is not merely a logistical necessity but a constitutive

element of QWG's political framework, shaping its scale, accessibility, and relationship to community.

From its inception, QWG faced significant financial constraints. Organizers sought to establish the event as a "real sports competition," requiring adherence to official rules, the use of licensed referees, and access to proper facilities. This decision was politically meaningful. In a context where women's sports and queer athleticism are often invisible or dismissed as informal or recreational (Kauer & Rauscher 2018) organizers emphasized seriousness and competitiveness to assert the legitimacy of queer women as athletes. As organizer Park explained, the goal was not to create a casual "field day" but to build a space where participants' embodied skills and experiences could be recognized and shared through sport.

However, achieving this vision required substantial financial resources. Renting large venues, securing equipment, and hiring referees all demanded funding that exceeded what participants alone could provide. To maintain accessibility, QWG kept registration fees low, approximately 20,000 KRW (around $15), ensuring that cost would not be a barrier for participants. As a result, organizers turned to crowdfunding and small-scale donations to cover the remaining budget. While limited grants from organizations such as the Korea Foundation for Women and Lush Charity Pot[9] provided partial support, these contributions were insufficient to sustain the event without community fundraising efforts.

This reliance on grassroots funding[10] reflects the broader socioeconomic profile of QWG participants. The majority are local, predominantly Korean, and largely in their twenties and

[9] Lush is a British cosmetics retailer which provides Charity Pot grants to small, grassroots groups. they mainly include groups working for animal protection, human rights and the environment. https://weare.lush.com/press-releases/celebrating-15-years-of-charity-pot/
[10] QWG has used the grassroots funding model every year. https://tumblbug.com/2019queerwomengames

thirties, with many identifying as lower-income. In this context, maintaining affordability is essential not only for participation but also for sustaining the event's political commitment to equal accessibility of marginalized communities. Unlike global events that target international participants, QWG is oriented toward building a local community of queer women athletes, which shapes both its financial model and its scale.

At the same time, the absence of corporate sponsorship is not entirely voluntary. Organizers noted that major Korean corporations have historically avoided public association with LGBTQ+ initiatives due to widespread social stigma and homophobia. While some global companies have provided limited support for events such as the Seoul Queer Culture Festival, such involvement remains temporary and constrained. This structural limitation reinforces QWG's reliance on community-based funding, highlighting how financial marginalization is tied to broader patterns of social exclusion.

Importantly, this funding model produces a form of political autonomy (Ren & Gui 2024). Without dependence on corporate sponsors or institutional partners, QWG can define its own priorities, including the rejection of binary gender categories and the emphasis on collective consensus on new gender policies. Financial independence allows organizers to maintain control over the event's structure and meaning, avoiding the need to align with external expectations or branding requirements. In this sense, grassroots crowdfunding is not only a constraint but also a source of political possibility, enabling forms of activism that might otherwise be restricted.

However, this autonomy comes with limitations. The reliance on volunteer labor and unstable funding constrains the scale and sustainability of QWG, making it difficult to expand or maintain consistent operations. These limitations reflect the broader challenges faced by grassroots movements operating outside institutional support. QWG's financial model thus embodies the

tensions between autonomy and precarity, illustrating how economic structures shape both the possibilities and constraints of LGBTQ+ sports activism.

GGHK: International Corporate Sponsorship

In contrast to QWG, the Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK) operates within a financial model defined by international corporate sponsorship and integration into global event economies. As a large-scale international event, GGHK requires substantial resources to support its operations, including venues, logistics, marketing, and programming. I argue that this reliance on corporate funding not only enables the scale and visibility of GGHK but also shapes its political orientation, aligning it with frameworks of inclusion, branding, and global recognition.

GGHK's financial structure is closely tied to its positioning as a global event. Registration fees are significantly higher than those of QWG, with general participation costing approximately HK$1,500 (around $193)[11] plus additional fees about HK$600 (US$76) for individual sports. For many local participants, these costs are prohibitive, particularly given Hong Kong's minimum wage and cost of living.[12] While the event offers fee-waiver programs for certain groups, including youth, foreign domestic workers, and asylum seekers, these measures are limited in their ability to offset broader economic barriers.

As one soccer player, Leung, noted, "the price is definitely a blocker for local communities to join." They explained:

"It was 1500 Hong Kong dollars for registration, and 600 for football. So it's 2100. With

[11] The general registration fee includes access to the Festival Village, arts and culture events, opening/closing ceremonies, and three nights gala concerts.
[12] The statutory minimum wage in Hong Kong is set to increase to HK$43.1(US$5.50) per hour, effective from 1 May 2026. Hong Kong has ranked among the most expensive cities globally since the 1990s, especially for rent and real estate.

that budget, I could take a trip to Taiwan. I think the maximum should be around 1200 Hong Kong dollars, but even that is expensive. Maybe 800 or below would be more reasonable, like a concert ticket. But I don't know if that is possible given their budget. Still, the price is definitely a blocker for local communities to join." [Leung, soccer]

This pricing structure reflects the target audience of GGHK, which is oriented toward international participants, particularly those from the United States and Western Europe, as well as middle to upper class expatriates in Hong Kong, rather than local Hongkongers. The scale and cost of the event are designed to align with previous iterations of the Gay Games[13], which have largely been hosted in the United States and Western Europe. This alignment reinforces GGHK's integration into a Western circuit of LGBTQ+ sporting events. As a result, participation by Hongkongers becomes secondary to the goal of attracting a global audience, illustrating how financial structures shape the demographic composition of the event.

Corporate sponsorship plays a central role in sustaining GGHK. As noted in the GGHK economic impact study (2023), "Unlike previous Games, the Hong Kong Games were privately funded and operated by volunteers," without direct government support. Previous host cities such as San Francisco (1982, 1986), Vancouver (1990), New York (1994), Amsterdam (1998), Sydney (2002), Chicago (2006), Cologne (2010), Cleveland/Akron (2014), and Paris (2018) are globally recognized as queer friendly cities and were able to secure public funding as part of broader strategies of city branding and promotion. In contrast, GGHK was unable to obtain such municipal sponsorship and instead relied entirely on private sector funding. Major corporate sponsors included multinational companies such as HSBC, Standard Chartered, YouTube, and AXA.

These partnerships provide not only financial resources but also symbolic legitimacy,

[13] The registration fee for the previous Gay Games 2018 in Paris was €185 (about $213 USD).

positioning the event as a professional and internationally recognized platform (Chan 2018; Lim 2020; Tan 2019; Ren & Gui 2024). Corporate involvement extends beyond funding, with employees participating as athletes, volunteers, and spectators. In some cases, teams are explicitly affiliated with corporate identities, reflecting the integration of workplace networks into the event's structure. For example, in soccer7 games, 9 teams out of 16 teams had titles expressing their multinational company sponsor; YouTube FC, Deloitte Consulting, Nomura (Financial Company), LogiPride (Logitech), Deloitte (Management Consulting), Clifford Chance (Law firm), EY United (Accounting firm), Linklaters (Law Firm), WTW FC (Management Consulting), PwC Excel FC (Accounting firm). These teams are largely funded from DEI programs within their companies. DEI programs including LGBTQ advocacy has worked as a keyway for international corporations to build corporate legitimacy by showing how they take corporate social responsibility in Hong Kong seriously (Chan and Mak 2024).

This corporate presence shapes the political meaning of GGHK. While sponsorship is often framed as support for LGBTQ+ inclusion, scholars have critiqued such practices as forms of "pinkwashing," in which corporations selectively promote gay rights as part of progressive branding strategies while masking deeper structural inequalities they are likely to engage in (Spade 2015). In the context of GGHK, corporate sponsorship contributes to a model of "soft inclusion," emphasizing visibility and representation while remaining compatible with market and institutional logics of hetero-cis-gender normativity. LGBTQ+ identities are positioned as modern, global, and economically valuable, aligning with broader narratives of neoliberal citizenship.

At the same time, corporate funding enables GGHK to operate at a scale that would not be possible through grassroots organizing alone. The event's visibility, international reach, and cultural impact are all facilitated by its integration into global networks of capital and sponsorship.

This reflects a different form of political possibility compared to QWG, one that prioritizes expansion, recognition, and legitimacy within existing systems.

The emphasis on branding and corporate participation tend to overshadow the experiences of local LGBTQ+ communities, raising questions about whose interests the event ultimately serves.

> I think at the very beginning, the reception, when Gay Games were, when Hong Kong first get that hosting, the local LGBT community was not very happy. They're not thrilled about it. First of all, they were like, why sports that we are not into sports, right? we don't really have a very vibrant sports culture, as I said. And secondly, those people who are doing the organizing are mostly middle-class white men, white gay men, right? (…) And they are transitionary. So because the expats, they can leave whenever they want, right? They get all the best opportunities in working in money in Hong Kong, you know, as a whatever bank person. I know people from the local community do not really endorse Gay Games at all. – [Organizer/volunteer Wong]

Wong's observation that local Hongkongers did not initially endorse GGHK during its early organizing phase, prior to the involvement of a local co-organizer, reveals a significant disconnect between Hongkongers and the predominantly "middle class white men" expat organizers. This disjuncture reflects broader postcolonial tensions and entrenched hierarchies between Hongkongers and expatriates rooted in British colonialism (Leonard 2008, 2013). These dynamics are reproduced within LGBTQ+ scenes, particularly through racialized and classed distinctions that shape networks and power in Hong Kong.

In short, the contrast between QWG and GGHK demonstrates that financial legitimacy is a central dimension of LGBTQ+ sports activism, shaping both its structure and its political orientation. QWG's grassroots crowdfunding model enables autonomy and community-based

participation but limits scale and stability, while GGHK's reliance on corporate sponsorship facilitates visibility and expansion but aligns the event with institutional and market logics. These differences underscore that economic resources are not neutral but are deeply embedded in the geopolitics of gender, mediating how activism is organized, experienced, and sustained.

5. Adopting Global LGBTQ+ Discourse: Localization and Integration

English, Empire, and the Politics of Naming in LGBTQ+ Sports Events

The naming of LGBTQ+ sports events such as the Queer Women Games (QWG) and the Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK) is deeply embedded in geopolitical positioning shaped by colonial histories, linguistic hierarchies, and the global circulation of sexual identities. This section argues that English naming practices reflect and reproduce uneven global power relations, while also functioning as strategic tools through which LGBTQ+ activists position their events within, or in tension with, international circuits of recognition. In particular, the contrast between QWG and GGHK demonstrates how naming practices are closely tied to broader political orientations of protest and festival, revealing how geopolitics shapes not only activism but also its language and visibility.

Scholars have shown that contemporary LGBTQ+ identities and movements are shaped through transnational flows of discourse, often mediated through English as a dominant global language (Altman 2001; Manalansan 2003). Terms such as "gay," "lesbian," and "queer" circulate globally through media, NGOs, and activist networks, becoming key markers of identity and political belonging. However, these categories are not universally adopted or understood in the same way. Instead, they are reinterpreted and transformed as they move across different cultural and political contexts. Manalansan (2003) conceptualizes this as vernacularization, emphasizing that global LGBTQ+ discourse is always mediated through local meanings and practices. At the

same time, the use of English terminology often signals alignment with global LGBTQ+ frameworks, positioning events and organizations within a transnational field of visibility and legitimacy (Daniel Talv et al. 2025; Ashley Currier et al. 2012).

The dominance of English in naming LGBTQ+ events is inseparable from the legacy of empire. English operates as a global lingua franca that carries historical associations with colonial governance, modernity, and international authority (Phillipson 1992; Pennycook 1998). In postcolonial contexts, the adoption of English names reflects both the enduring influence of colonial structures and the strategic need to engage with global audiences (J. Usman et al., 2021; S. Boset et al., 2025). This is particularly evident in the case of Hong Kong, where British colonial rule and continued integration into global financial networks have produced a sociopolitical environment oriented toward transnational recognition. The naming of the Gay Games Hong Kong in English reflects this geopolitical positioning, signaling its connection to the international Gay Games Federation and its participation in a global LGBTQ+ sporting network.

Within this framework, the term "Gay Games" carries specific historical and political connotations rooted in Western LGBTQ+ movements, particularly those centered in the United States and Western Europe. It evokes a model of activism that emphasizes visibility, pride, and inclusion within existing institutions, aligning with what Duggan (2003) describes as neoliberal inclusion. The English naming of GGHK thus functions as a mechanism of integration, enabling the event to be legible to international participants, sponsors, and governing bodies. As Keck and Sikkink (1998) argue, shared language and framing are crucial for the formation of transnational advocacy networks, suggesting that English naming facilitates GGHK's participation in global circuits of recognition and legitimacy. In this sense, the use of English is not merely practical but reflects a broader geopolitical alignment with global LGBTQ+ discourse and institutional

frameworks, consistent with its festival orientation.

In contrast, the Queer Women Games in South Korea engages English naming in a different way, reflecting a distinct geopolitical position and political orientation. South Korea's history of Japanese colonialism and U.S. military influence has shaped its integration into global systems, including the diffusion of Western gender norms and institutional structures (Kim 2000; Na, Han, and Koo 2014). However, unlike Hong Kong, South Korea's LGBTQ+ movements have developed largely outside formal state recognition, often in tension with dominant social and political institutions (Seong-Jo Jeong et al., 2024; San Lee et al., 2026). Within this context, QWG adopts the English term "queer" not as a straightforward alignment with global discourse of visibility, pride, and inclusion within existing institutions but as a strategic and critical intervention.

The use of "queer" in QWG reflects engagement with transnational feminist and queer theoretical traditions that challenge normative understandings of gender and sexuality. However, this adoption is selective and localized, shaped by the specific conditions of queer feminist activism in South Korea. Rather than emphasizing broad categories of inclusion or diversity, QWG centers queer women's experiences in South Korea and foregrounds collective resistance against gender policing [14] in Korean sports culture. This aligns with Mohanty's (2003) critique of universalizing feminist frameworks, which often erase differences and reproduce Western dominance. By using English while simultaneously reworking its meaning, QWG demonstrates how global languages can be appropriated and transformed to serve local political goals.

Importantly, the naming of QWG signals a different relationship to global visibility and legitimacy compared to GGHK. While GGHK's English name facilitates integration into global

[14] According to a QWG organizer, "queer women" refers to those who are women, those who are queer, and those who cannot be categorized as either women or queer.

networks, QWG's naming reflects a more ambivalent engagement with transnational recognition. The use of English allows QWG to connect with broader LGBTQ+ discourses, but its emphasis on "queer women" also marks a refusal of universalizing categories and a commitment to specificity and marginality. In this sense, English becomes a site of tension rather than straightforward alignment, reflecting what Puar (2007) describes as the uneven incorporation of non-Western subjects into global regimes of sexuality.

The contrast between QWG and GGHK illustrates how naming practices are shaped by and reproduce different geopolitical orientations. GGHK's use of English aligns with its position within global LGBTQ+ networks and its festival model of activism, which emphasizes celebration, visibility, and institutional recognition. QWG's use of English reflects a protest orientation that engages global discourse selectively, prioritizing local solidarity and resistance over integration. These differences highlight that the adoption of English is not uniform but is mediated by local histories, political conditions, and strategic choices.

Ultimately, the naming of LGBTQ+ sports events reveals how geopolitics operates at the level of language, shaping how activism is framed, understood, and circulated. English functions simultaneously as a legacy of empire and a tool of transnational connection, enabling participation in global networks while also reinforcing hierarchies of knowledge and representation. By examining naming practices within the context of geopolitical positioning, this analysis underscores that protest and festival are not only modes of organizing events but are also embedded in the linguistic and symbolic strategies through which activists navigate global gender governance.

QWG: Local Solidarity Centering Queer Women

The Queer Women Games (QWG) engages global LGBTQ+ discourse through a process of selective localization that centers queer women's experiences in South Korea and prioritizes

collective solidarity over universal inclusion. Rather than adopting dominant global frameworks such as "diversity" or "inclusion" at face value, QWG critically reworks these discourses to reflect the specific historical, political, and social conditions of queer feminist communities. This localized engagement produces a distinct political orientation grounded in resistance to both global standardization and domestic gender norms, positioning QWG as an alternative model of LGBTQ+ activism rooted in community rather than institutional recognition.

This orientation is closely tied to the origins of the Queer Women Network (QWN), the organizing body behind QWG. QWN emerged through collective protest against the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family's directive to remove the term "sexual minority" from the Daejeon Gender Equality Ordinance in 2015. Activists criticized this policy for excluding sexual minorities' rights from the human rights under a framework of binary sex equality, revealing how state policies reproduce gendered and sexual hierarchies. In response, human rights organizations, LGBTQ+ advocacy groups, and individual activists formed a coalition that later developed into QWN.

This coalition organized a landmark rally on October 10, 2015, titled "Ain't I a Woman," which brought together more than 300 participants. By invoking Sojourner Truth's historic speech, the organizers drew a parallel between the exclusion of Black women from the category of "woman" in the United States and the marginalization of female sexual minorities within South Korean feminist and legal frameworks. This moment was not only a political intervention but also a foundational act of collective identity formation, marking the first public demonstration centered on female sexual minorities in South Korea. The continued organization of public events following this rally ultimately led to the creation of QWG in 2017, situating the Games within a broader trajectory of protest and community-building.

Within this context, QWG's engagement with global LGBTQ+ discourse is neither rejection

nor simple adoption, but an active process of translation. Global LGBTQ+ frameworks, often circulated through English-language discourse and transnational advocacy networks, tend to emphasize identity, rights, and inclusion (Altman 2001; Keck and Sikkink 1998). While these frameworks have contributed to expanding visibility and recognition in many contexts, they are often built on assumptions that do not fully capture local histories and social relations. QWG engages these frameworks critically, reshaping their meanings in ways that resonate with the lived experiences of queer women in South Korea.

This process of localization is particularly evident in QWG's emphasis on queer women as a central political subject. Rather than adopting a broad and undifferentiated LGBTQ+ framework, QWG foregrounds the specific marginalization of queer women within both mainstream society and LGBTQ+ communities. This reflects the intersectional dynamics of gender and sexuality in South Korea, where patriarchal norms and heteronormativity shape access to public space, including sport. By centering queer women, QWG disrupts the implicit hierarchies within global LGBTQ+ discourse that often privilege identities aligned with dominant Western models of visibility and recognition.

QWG's localized approach also reconfigures the relationship between individual rights and collective participation. Instead of framing inclusion as an individual entitlement, the event emphasizes the creation of a shared space in which participants collectively define the terms of engagement. This aligns with what Manalansan (2003) describes as the vernacularization of queer politics, where global ideas are reinterpreted through local cultural logics. In practice, concepts such as safety, belonging, and recognition are not imposed through standardized frameworks but are negotiated through community interaction and collective decision-making.

Language plays a central role in this process. While the use of the term "queer" signals

engagement with global discourse, its meaning within QWG is not fixed or universal. Instead, "queer" functions as a flexible and relational term that reflects the diversity of participants' experiences and the specificities of the Korean context. This aligns with decolonial feminist critiques that emphasize the need to move beyond universal identity categories and attend to context-specific understandings of gender and sexuality (Lugones 2010; Annette Sisson et al. 2020). In this sense, QWG does not simply adopt global language but actively reshapes it as part of its political practice.

At the same time, QWG's emphasis on local solidarity and queer women is not without tension. The prioritization of specific identities can create boundaries that raise questions about inclusion and exclusion within the event. However, these tensions are not shortcomings but integral to QWG's political orientation, which values situated knowledge (Haraway 2013) and specificity over universal applicability. By foregrounding these tensions, QWG highlights that engagement with global LGBTQ+ discourse is not a passive process of diffusion but an active and contested practice of negotiation, translation, and transformation.

GGHK: Global Integration Centering Gender Diversity

The Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK) engages global LGBTQ+ discourse through a model of integration that centers gender diversity, inclusion, and transnational visibility. Rather than critically reworking global frameworks, as seen in QWG, GGHK adopts and operationalizes dominant LGBTQ+ discourses circulating through international institutions, corporate networks, and global event cultures. This engagement reflects a political orientation that prioritizes recognition, legitimacy, and global connectivity, positioning GGHK within an international field of LGBTQ+ advocacy shaped by institutional norms and historical trajectories.

A central feature of this positioning is GGHK's framing as the "first Gay Games in Asia",

which carries significant symbolic and geopolitical weight. As articulated in its mission, "The Games have never been held in Asia, the world's largest continent and home to an estimated 221 million LGBTQ+ people… hosting the Games for the very first time here will be a momentous experience and a cornerstone for our Asian community as well as for the whole world."[15] This framing constructs GGHK not simply as a regional event but as a historic expansion of global LGBTQ+ visibility into Asia, positioning the region as both previously excluded and newly incorporated into a global narrative of inclusion. By emphasizing Asia as simultaneously marginalized and populous, the mission situates GGHK as a bridge between global LGBTQ+ movements and Asian contexts, reinforcing its role within an international trajectory of recognition and expansion.

This integrative orientation is closely tied to the historical foundations and evolving priorities of the Gay Games movement itself.

> The history of Gay Games was not about gender, it was actually about HIV. So the reason Gay Games started was because Tom actually had HIV and was prevented from joining the Olympics, right? So he wanted to create other games that were allowed to include themselves. Gender is the current forefront of discrimination, and I think Gay Games needs to adapt to push the boundaries about what kind of people are being excluded and how do we include them, right? So I think there's a big debate going on in Federation of Gay Games at the moment. –[Organizer/Volunteer Chan]

As reflected in interviews with Chan, the Gay Games originated not as a gender-focused initiative but as a response to exclusion tied to HIV/AIDS, providing an alternative sporting space

[15] https://www.gghk2023.com/our-mission/

for those barred from mainstream institutions. Over time the movement has shifted toward broader questions of inclusion, particularly around gender diversity. As Chan explained, gender has become "the current forefront of discrimination," requiring the Games to continually adapt and expand its framework of inclusion. This perspective highlights how GGHK situates itself within a dynamic global discourse, where inclusion is understood as an ongoing process of expanding categories rather than fundamentally transforming institutional structures.

GGHK's orientation is further shaped by its alignment with the Gay Games federation. As an internationally recognized sporting event, the Gay Games has long promoted values such as diversity, inclusion, and equality, offering a platform for LGBTQ+ participation within structured and professionalized sporting environments. By hosting the Games, Hong Kong positions itself within this global framework, adopting its language, organizational model, and symbolic politics. The use of standardized categories and English-language discourse enables the event to be legible to international participants, sponsors, and governing bodies, reinforcing its integration into mainstream sports culture.

The mission's emphasis on bringing people together "in the name of Sport, Fairness, Respect and Friendship" also reflects a universalizing language that positions sport as a neutral and inclusive medium capable of transcending cultural and political differences. Across organizational practices, inclusion is articulated as both a guiding principle and an evolving challenge. Promotional narratives frame the event as a celebration of diversity across national and cultural boundaries, reinforcing the idea that participation itself is a form of political progress (Gwyneth H. McClendon et al., 2014).

At the same time, GGHK's emphasis on gender diversity reflects a broader shift in global LGBTQ+ discourse toward expansive and flexible frameworks. Rather than centering a specific

community, such as queer women, the event adopts a broad understanding of diversity that accommodates multiple identities under a unified framework. This approach facilitates international participation and coalition-building, but it also abstracts from the specific conditions of local communities. In that sense the inclusion is often framed in terms of expanding access within existing systems, rather than questioning the structural conditions that produce exclusion in the first place.

The political context of Hong Kong further reinforces these dynamics. Following the imposition of the National Security Law, public expressions of dissent have become increasingly restricted, requiring events to carefully navigate political sensitivities. GGHK's explicit framing as a non-political event and its emphasis on celebration rather than protest reflect this environment, shaping how global LGBTQ+ discourse is mobilized. As reflected in interviews, organizers are acutely aware of these constraints and adopt a strategy of alignment and caution to ensure the event's viability. Despite these constraints, GGHK's integrative approach offers distinct forms of political possibility. By positioning itself as the first Gay Games in Asia and foregrounding a mission of global unity, the event achieves a level of visibility and symbolic significance that extends beyond the local context.

Taken together, GGHK demonstrates that engagement with global LGBTQ+ discourse can take the form of alignment and integration, producing a model of activism that prioritizes recognition, visibility, and institutional legitimacy. In contrast to QWG's localized and critical engagement, GGHK adopts a standardized framework that facilitates global participation while constraining political critique. The emphasis on being the "first Gay Games in Asia" underscores how this model is embedded in geopolitical narratives of expansion and global inclusion, highlighting the uneven ways in which LGBTQ+ activism is shaped by transnational power and

regional positioning.

5. Conclusion. Protest and Festival as Geopolitical Strategies

This chapter has argued that the distinction between protest and festival in LGBTQ+ sports activism is not merely descriptive but fundamentally geopolitical. Through a comparative analysis of the Queer Women Games (QWG) and the Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK), I have shown that these two forms of activism emerge from uneven historical, political, and economic conditions that shape how gender, sexuality, and participation are governed across transnational contexts. Protest and festival are not simply choices made by organizers but are produced through specific configurations of state regulation, global discourse, and access to resources.

QWG's orientation as protest emerges from its marginal position within South Korea, where LGBTQ+ communities face exclusion from institutional recognition and public infrastructure. The denial of access to public space, exemplified by the cancellation of the event venue on the grounds of "public morals" and "safety," reveals how the state regulates participation through moralized and gendered norms. Within this context, activism is generated through conflict. QWG does not seek inclusion within existing frameworks but instead challenges the legitimacy of those frameworks, particularly the binary sex system that structures sport. Its emphasis on local solidarity, queer women, and collective participation reflects a localized reworking of global LGBTQ+ discourse, one that prioritizes community-based resistance over universal inclusion. The reliance on grassroots crowdfunding further reinforces this autonomy, enabling political independence while also constraining scale and visibility.

In contrast, GGHK's orientation as festival reflects its integration into transnational LGBTQ+ networks and its positioning within Hong Kong's global city context. By framing itself as the first Gay Games in Asia, GGHK situates the event within a narrative of global expansion,

positioning Asia as a region newly incorporated into a global movement of LGBTQ+ inclusion. Its mission to bring people together through "Sport, Fairness, Respect and Friendship" articulates a universalizing discourse in which sport functions as a neutral and inclusive medium. This framing aligns with a model of activism that emphasizes visibility, recognition, and participation within existing institutional structures rather than their transformation.

GGHK's relationship with the state is characterized not by confrontation but by negotiation. Operating within a politically constrained environment shaped by the National Security Law, the event adopts a non-political stance and carefully manages its associations to ensure its viability. Corporate sponsorship and international partnerships provide the resources necessary for large-scale आयोजन, embedding the event within global systems of capital and governance. This integration enables visibility and international participation but also shapes the limits of political expression, privileging forms of inclusion that align with institutional and market logics.

Taken together, these differences reveal that protest and festival are distinct geopolitical strategies shaped by uneven access to power, legitimacy, and resources. QWG's protest model is produced through exclusion and marginalization, generating forms of activism grounded in autonomy, resistance, and collective redefinition. GGHK's festival model is produced through integration and constraint, generating forms of activism grounded in visibility, negotiation, and institutional alignment. These strategies are not oppositional in a simple sense but reflect different ways of navigating global gender governance under specific geopolitical conditions.

Importantly, this comparison challenges the assumption that global LGBTQ+ discourse provides a universal framework for understanding activism. While concepts such as inclusion, diversity, and visibility circulate widely, their meanings and effects are shaped by local histories and power relations. In QWG, the limits of inclusion produce a politics of refusal and alternative

world-making. In GGHK, the possibilities of inclusion produce a politics of expansion and normalization, even as they are constrained by state regulation and corporate interests. The framing of GGHK as the "first Gay Games in Asia" further illustrates how global narratives of inclusion are unevenly distributed, positioning certain regions as sites of progress while obscuring ongoing struggles.

Ultimately, the comparison between QWG and GGHK reveals that the politics of gender and sexuality in sport cannot be understood without attention to geopolitics. Protest and festival are not simply forms of activism but are expressions of broader configurations of power that shape how bodies, identities, and spaces are regulated and contested. Recognizing these differences allows for a more nuanced understanding of LGBTQ+ movements beyond Western-centric frameworks, foregrounding the diverse and uneven ways in which gender justice is imagined and enacted in East Asia.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

This dissertation set out to investigate the global politics of sex segregation and sex testing in sport by examining how gender policies and queer and women's sports activism operate across elite, community, and transnational levels. At each of these levels, this project asked three central questions: first, how global gender policies in mainstream sports, including the two sex system and sex testing, become localized in South Korea, and how, in this process, the South Korean female body and athleticism are shaped through the intersecting axes of nationality, ethnicity, sex, gender, and sexuality; second, how globalized feminism, LGBTQ+ movements, and international sports events interact with local sports culture in South Korea, where most governments do not legally recognize LGBTQ+ rights; and third, what alternative gender policies and sporting events

have been established through LGBTQ+ activism in South Korea, and how it challenges binary sex and modern sports values grounded in sports as Western civilizing project (Travers 2014).

By situating South Korea as a critical site of analysis, this study has shown that sport is a key institutional arena in which sex, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and the body are continuously produced, regulated, and contested. Drawing on a transnational feminist approach and ethnographic methods, this dissertation examined how the two sex system and practices of sex testing are introduced, reproduced, and challenged across multiple scales. Across these levels, the findings demonstrate that sex segregation operates not as a singular or stable system, but as a set of practices and logics that are unevenly enforced through global governance mechanisms, reinterpreted through national institutions, local LGBTQ+ activism, and public discourse,

Chapter III addressed the first research question by analyzing how global gender policies become localized in South Korea. The findings show that policies such as sex testing and binary classification do not simply transfer from global governing bodies to national contexts. Instead, they are translated through institutional arrangements, media discourse, and cultural norms that shape how the female athletic body is understood and regulated. In particular, the South Korean female athlete emerges as a site where multiple axes of power intersect. National identity, ethnicized expectations of femininity, and assumptions about proper sexuality converge to define what counts as a legitimate female athlete. The findings show how Eurocentric gender norms, and imperial power of global sports governing bodies embedded in international sex testing are not simply imposed, but are reconfigured and reproduced within domestic discourse. In this sense, the female athlete's body becomes a contested terrain where global gender policing and local understandings of sex and legitimacy collide. These findings demonstrate that the localization of global gender policy is not a passive process of adoption, but an active site of transnational

knowledge production that reshapes both policy and the bodies it governs.

Chapter IV addressed the third research question by examining alternative gender policies and sporting events established through LGBTQ+ activism in South Korea. Through ethnographic analysis of queer and women led sporting spaces, particularly the Queer Women Games, the findings show that organizers actively reject the foundational assumptions of sex segregation. These events do not collect or verify participants' sex or gender, eliminating the administrative basis for classification. Instead, they rely on collective agreements not to question or judge others' identities, creating an environment in which participation is not contingent on verification. At the same time, these practices differ significantly from transgender inclusion policies commonly discussed in the Global North, which often seek to include transgender athletes within existing binary categories through modified eligibility criteria. Rather than adjusting the boundaries of the binary, queer and women led sporting spaces in South Korea challenge the necessity of the binary itself. However, this refusal generates its own tensions. Participants continue to experience moments of uncertainty and implicit judgment, particularly when encountering bodies that disrupt normative expectations. Additionally, the decision to center "queer women" reflects a strategic tension between an anti gender policing vision and the need for political focus, as organizers seek to create space for marginalized groups while resisting binary sex categorization. These findings show that creating a nonbinary sports space is not only about rejecting gender policing, but about discovering different ways of organizing sport through ongoing negotiation, tension, and collective practice.

Chapter V addressed the second research question by analyzing how globalized feminism, LGBTQ+ movements, and international sports events interact with local sports culture in South Korea. The findings show that global LGBTQ+ discourse does not simply circulate and become

adopted, but is translated through specific geopolitical conditions that shape how inclusion, visibility, and participation are understood and practiced. Through a comparative analysis of the Queer Women Games and Gay Games Hong Kong, this chapter demonstrates that LGBTQ+ sports activism takes distinct forms as geopolitical strategies shaped by uneven access to state recognition, resources, and global networks. In this process, the Queer Women Games emerges as a form of protest grounded in marginalization and exclusion, characterized by grassroots autonomy, conflict with state institutions, and a refusal of gender classification. In contrast, Gay Games Hong Kong operates as a form of festival shaped by integration into transnational LGBTQ+ networks, relying on negotiation with the state, corporate sponsorship, and alignment with global discourses of inclusion and diversity. These findings demonstrate that global LGBTQ+ discourse is not a universal framework but is reworked through local histories, political constraints, and cultural contexts. Rather than producing a single model of inclusion, transnational interactions generate divergent forms of activism, ranging from refusal and alternative world making to visibility and institutional incorporation. In this sense, LGBTQ+ sports activism in South Korea and East Asia reflects not only local conditions but also broader geopolitical inequalities that shape the possibilities and limits of gender and sexual politics in sport.

Taken together, these chapters demonstrate that sex segregation in sport is a historically and geopolitically produced arrangement that operates across multiple levels and is continuously reshaped through transnational processes. The findings show that sex segregation is sustained and contested through the uneven interaction of global governance mechanisms, national institutions, local LGBTQ+ activism, and public discourse, rather than through a singular or coherent logic.

Across these levels, efforts to decolonize sex segregation unfold through three central tensions. First, the tension between refusing sex based classification and centering queer women

reflects how categories are simultaneously rejected as mechanisms of exclusion and strategically mobilized to address historical marginalization. Second, the tension between global sport governance regimes and local interpretations reveals how sex testing, while justified through global frameworks of fairness and scientific legitimacy, is reinterpreted within South Korea as a violation of bodily integrity and a form of sexual harassment. Third, the tension between the absence of legal recognition for LGBTQ+ citizenship and the circulation of Western centered global LGBTQ+ discourse demonstrates how transnational frameworks of inclusion are unevenly translated, producing divergent forms of activism shaped by geopolitical inequalities, including protest oriented grassroots resistance and festival based institutional integration.

Rather than resolving these tensions, queer and women led sporting spaces actively navigate and reorganize them in practice. Rather than expecting these tensions to be resolved, this dissertation shows that the coloniality of gender is continuously reworked across time and space, producing sex segregated sport and the beliefs that sustain it in uneven and context specific ways across sporting levels, events, and regions. In this sense, decolonization does not involve stepping outside existing systems, but transforming them through situated practices that reconfigure how gender, fairness, and legitimacy are organized.

In doing so, this dissertation demonstrates what decolonizing sex segregation can look like: creating queer women centered sporting spaces through concrete anti gender policing practices enabled by organizational intervention and sustained through collective commitment. These practices include refusing gender verification, eliminating sex categories in participation and competition, and establishing shared norms that discourage surveillance and judgment. Together, they shift the basis of sport from classification and measurement toward participation, collective responsibility, and negotiated belonging.

This process not only challenges androcentric sport culture and binary sex essentialism, but also unsettles modern sport values such as fairness, integrity, excellence, teamwork, and democracy by revealing their grounding in ongoing colonial and geopolitical projects. Rather than universal principles, these values are shown to be historically situated and shaped by imperial and colonial epistemic hierarchies that determine whose bodies are recognized as legitimate competitors.

Importantly, this dissertation returns to its central research questions by showing that decolonizing sex segregation is not external to sex categories and gender policy, but fundamentally entangled with them as part of a global enterprise. Sex categories and gender policies are continually produced and transformed through interactions among global sport governing bodies, national institutions, LGBTQ+ communities, and the public within uneven geopolitical formations.

Contributions

While scholarship on gender has long emphasized the social construction of difference, my work shows how these constructions are stabilized and contested through specific institutional practices that claim to measure and regulate the body. Global sport governance organizations such as International Olympic Committee and World Athletics define and enforce categories that travel across national contexts, shaping how bodies are understood and governed at multiple scales. At the same time, local actors reinterpret, resist, or rework these categories in ways that reflect different social, political, and cultural conditions. This multi-scalar analysis contributes to the sociology of gender by demonstrating how gender is not only constructed locally or discursively but also organized through transnational regimes of regulation that unevenly distribute recognition and legitimacy.

Importantly, this project foregrounds how alternative sporting spaces attempt to reorganize

these dynamics. In queer and women-led competitions, participants experiment with forms of inclusion that refuse strict sex classification while still grappling with questions of fairness and belonging. These spaces reveal that gender is not simply dismantled when categories are removed. Instead, it is reconfigured through new norms, expectations, and tensions. The absence of formal classification does not eliminate the perception of difference. Rather, it shifts how difference is managed, often through informal agreements, ethical commitments, and shared understandings of participation. This highlights that gender operates not only through explicit rules, but also through the social relations that sustain or challenge those rules.

Theoretically, this work contributes to ongoing debates in the sociology of gender by bringing together insights from embodiment, institutional analysis, and transnational feminism. It shows that gender is simultaneously a system of classification, a mode of governance, and an embodied experience that is felt, interpreted, and negotiated in interaction. By situating sport as a key site where these dimensions converge, this dissertation demonstrates how gender inequality is reproduced not only through exclusion, but through the everyday normalization of certain bodies as fair, natural, and legitimate. At the same time, it illuminates how these processes are neither fixed nor universal. They are historically contingent, politically contested, and open to reconfiguration.

Taken together, this project advances the sociology of gender by foregrounding the relational and embodied dimensions of gender regulation, tracing the transnational circulation of gender norms, and examining the possibilities and limits of alternative social arrangements. It shows that gender is not simply something that individuals have or perform, but something that is continually made and remade through institutional practices, social interactions, and the governance of bodies in everyday life.

Further Work

I gathered more material in the field than I could fully incorporate within the scope and time constraints of this dissertation. Across interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis, I often felt as though I was looking through a shifting lens, where small changes in analytic perspective revealed different configurations of how sex segregation, fairness, and gender are organized in sport. At times, the same empirical scene could be read as resistance, accommodation, or strategic navigation, depending on how one situated it within global governance structures or local community practices. This sense of analytic multiplicity points not to a limitation of the project, but to the density of the field itself and the need for continued, more focused inquiry.

There are several threads that I plan to return to in future work. First, while this dissertation centers gender and sexuality, class position emerged as an important but underdeveloped dimension shaping access to sport, participation in alternative spaces, and the capacity to contest or comply with gender regulations. The resources required to travel to international events, to sustain amateur participation, or to navigate institutional barriers are unevenly distributed. At the same time, marginalization within sport cannot be reduced to class alone, as relatively privileged participants also encounter forms of gender policing and exclusion. Further research could examine how class operates alongside gender and sexuality within global sport systems, particularly in relation to neoliberal restructuring, commodification of women's sport, and the uneven distribution of opportunities for participation and recognition.

Second, the dissertation has focused on queer and women-led spaces as sites of experimentation, but there is more to be said about the internal tensions and limits of these spaces. Efforts to refuse sex-based classification while centering queer women as a political category generate ongoing negotiations around belonging, identity, and fairness. These tensions are not failures to be resolved, but productive sites for theorizing how alternative social arrangements are

sustained over time. Future research could follow these spaces longitudinally to examine how they evolve, institutionalize, or fragment, and how participants themselves interpret the successes and contradictions of these projects.

Finally, these directions suggest that decolonizing sex segregation in sport is not a bounded project but an ongoing process that unfolds across multiple sites, scales, and temporalities. Further work can build on this dissertation by deepening the analysis of class, tracing transnational governance more precisely, examining the durability of alternative sporting spaces, and refining methodological tools for studying contested and politically charged fields.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Table 3: QWG Participants

Name	Role	Age	Race	Nationality	Residence	Occupation	Income	Education	Sex/gender/sexual Identity
Lee	Badminton	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	PhD student	Less than KRW 1,000,000 (under USD $750)	Currently enrolled in graduate school	panromantic pansexual, non-binary
Kang	Futsal	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	PhD student	Less than KRW 1,000,000 (under USD $750)	Currently enrolled in graduate school	Gay (not specifically defined)
Yoon	Basketball	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Teacher	KRW 2,000,000–2,999,999 (USD $1,500–$2,200)	Bachelor's Degree	A woman-friendly non-binary person who falls in love with women
Lim	Basketball	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Office Worker	KRW 2,000,000–2,999,999 (USD $1,500–$2,200)	Bachelor's Degree	Bisexual, non-binary, woman
Oh	Basketball	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Server	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	lesbian
Seo	Badminton	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Musician	Less than KRW 1,000,000 (under USD $750)	Bachelor's Degree	Cisgender pansexual/romantic woman
Song	Staff	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Student	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Currently enrolled in College	A panromantic, homosexual demigirl (often simply referred to as a lesbian woman)
Jeon	Basketball	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Office Worker	KRW 2,000,000–2,999,999 (USD $1,500–$2,200)	Bachelor's Degree	Non-binary pansexual (assigned female at birth)
Go	Futsal	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Researcher	KRW 2,000,000–2,999,999 (USD $1,500–$2,200)	Currently enrolled in graduate school	Queer

Sohn	Basketball	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Student, Actor, Babysitter	Less than KRW 1,000,000 (under USD $750)	Currently enrolled in College	Pansexual polyamorist (or something like that, but I mostly date women)
Bae	Relay	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Office Worker	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Bisexual woman
Hur	Relay	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Office Worker	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Gay
Nam	Basketball	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Unemployed	Less than KRW 1,000,000 (under USD $750)	Bachelor's Degree	Genderqueer, Lesbian
Jin	Staff	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Bookstore worker	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Non-binary, genderqueer, fluid
Kim	Relay	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Activist	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Pansexual. Genderqueer
Cho	Staff	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Office Worker	KRW 2,000,000–2,999,999 (USD $1,500–$2,200)	Master's Degree	person
Lim	Staff	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Office Worker	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Woman
Jung	Staff	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Pharmacist	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	High School or Equivalent	Fem. Political, self-identified lesbian
Sim	Relay	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Unemployed	Less than KRW 1,000,000 (under USD $750)	Bachelor's Degree	Lesbian, probably a butch
Ha	Staff	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Unemployed	Less than KRW 1,000,000 (under USD $750)	Bachelor's Degree	Women, Homosexual
Cha	Badminton	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Student	Less than KRW 1,000,000 (under USD $750)	Currently enrolled in College	Women, Lesbian
Tae	Badminton	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Nurse	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Questionary, Bi?
Woo	Relay, Futsal	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Office Worker	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Master's Degree	Queer woman
Min	Basketball	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Teacher	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Cisgender woman, homosexual
Han	Organizer Relay	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Lawyer	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Master's Degree	Transgender woman, bisexual
Shin	Relay	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Writer	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Woman, Bisexual

Chae	Relay	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Student	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Currently enrolled in College	Bi, Woman
Moon	Organizer	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Activist	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Butch
Ahn	Organizer	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Documentary Activist	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Woman, Questionary
Gu	Organizer	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Office Worker	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Lesbian
Won	Badminton	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Office Worker	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Cisgender woman, lesbian
Gong	Basketball	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Freelance	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	cisgender pansexual woman
Kang	Basketball	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Student	Less than KRW 1,000,000 (under USD $750)	Currently enrolled in College	Pansexual
Hyen	Staff	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Student	Less than KRW 1,000,000 (under USD $750)	Currently enrolled in College	Cisgender bisexual woman
Ham	Basketball	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Activist	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Woman, homosexual
Byeon	Basketball Relay	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Lawyer	KRW 2,000,000–2,999,999 (USD $1,500–$2,200)	Master's Degree	Genderqueer pansexual
Jo	Relay	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Office Worker	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Middle School	Nonbinary
Bang	Futsal	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	public official	KRW 2,000,000–2,999,999 (USD $1,500–$2,200)	Bachelor's Degree	Bisexual
Joo	Futsal	30-39	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	Unemployed	KRW 1,000,000–1,999,999 (USD $700–$1,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Genderqueer
Hong	Futsal	20-29	Asian	South Korea	South Korea	PhD student	Less than KRW 1,000,000 (under USD $750)	Currently enrolled in graduate school	Gay male

Table 4: GGHK Participants

Name	Role	Age	Race	Nationality	Residence	Occupation	Income	Education	Sexual	Gender
Leung	Football (Soccer) 7	20-29	Asian	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Business Developer	HKD$ 10,000-20,000 (USD $1,300-2,500)	Bachelor's Degree	Bisexual or Pansexual	Non-binary
Cheung	Badminton	20-29	Asian	China	Hong Kong	student	Less than HKD$10,000 (under USD $1,300)	Bachelor's Degree	Bisexual or Pansexual	Woman
Lau	Trail Running	60 or older	White	U.S.	Hong Kong	Retired	Less than HKD$10,000 (under USD $1,300)	Bachelor's Degree	Homosexual	Man
Li	Fencing, Volunteer	20-29	Asian	Chinese	Hong Kong	Photographer	HKD$ 20,000-30,000 (USD $2,500-3,800)	Bachelor's Degree	Homosexual	Man
Fung	Mahjong, Volunteer	30-39	Asian	Chinese	Hong Kong	Business Development	HKD$ 60,000 or more (USD $7,600 more)	Bachelor's Degree	Homosexual	Man
Wong	Volunteer	30-39	Asian	Hong Kong	United States	Ph.D. student	HKD$ 20,000-30,000 (USD $2,500-3,800)	Master's Degree	Pansexual	Non-binary
Yeung	Volunteer	50-59	Asian	Hong Kong Chinese	HKSAR	Legal consultant	HKD$ 40,000-50,000 (USD $5,100-6,400)	Bachelor's Degree	Homosexual	Woman
Tang	Volunteer	20-29	Asian	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Business Owner	HKD$ 40,000-50,000 (USD $5,100-6,400)	Bachelor's Degree	Heterosexual	Man
Chow	Volunteer	30-39	Asian	HKSAR	Hong Kong	University teacher	HKD$ 40,000-50,000 (USD $5,100-6,400)	Doctorate (Ph.D.)	Pansexual	Woman
Lam	volunteer	60 or older	Asian	British	Hong Kong	Information Technology consultant	HKD$ 10,000-20,000 (USD $1,300-2,500)	Master's Degree	Homosexual	Man
Ho	Trail Running	50-59	White	United States	France	Author	HKD$ 60,000 or more (USD $7,600 more)	Master's Degree	Homosexual	Man

	Audience Volunteer									
Ng	Volunteer	50-59	Asian	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Pm	HKD$ 60,000 or more (USD $7,600 more)	Master's Degree	Heterosexual	Woman
Chan	Road Races Audience Volunteer	30-39	Asian	Australian	Hong Kong	Project Manager	HKD$ 60,000 or more (USD $7,600 more)	Master's Degree	Homosexual	Man
Au	Audience	60 or older	White	American	US. Indiana	retired pharmacist	HKD$ 60,000 or more (USD $7,600 more)	Bachelor's Degree	Homosexual	Man
Wu	Dragon Boat Racing	50-59	White	USA	US, San Francisco	Technology-Agile Scrum Master	Under HKD$ 10,000 (under USD $1,300)	Bachelor's Degree	Homosexual	Woman
Ma	Dragon Boat Racing	60 or older	Asian	USA	US, San Francisco	commercial insurance advisor	HKD$ 60,000 or more (USD $7,600 more)	High School Graduate	Heterosexual	Woman
Mak	Audience	20-29	Multiracial	USA	Hong Kong, SAP	Anti-exploitation NGO	HKD$ 20,000-30,000 (USD $2,500-3,800)	Master's Degree	Heterosexual	Woman
Si	Mahjong	50-59	Asian	USA	US, Tacoma	Retail(Technical Specialist)	HKD$ 30,000-40,000 (USD $3,800-5,100)	High School Graduate	Heterosexual	Woman
Liu	Soccer 7	20-29	Asian	Hong Kong SAR	Hong Kong	Bank officer	HKD$ 30,000-40,000 (USD $3,800-5,100)	Bachelor's Degree	Heterosexual	Man
Zong	Volunteer	20-29	Asian	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	student	Less than HKD$10,000 (under USD $1,300)	High School Graduate	Heterosexual	Woman

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview will be semi-structured. Respondent will be asked to tell their story and interviewer will follow-up to probe the story and cover topics respondent didn't address.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview will be semi-structured. Respondent will be asked to tell their story and interviewer will follow-up to probe the story and cover topics respondent didn't address.

Queer Women Games (QWG)

1. Participation

1) How did you hear about the QWG?
2) Can you describe the process of how you decided to participate in QWG?
    a) Did you have any expectations or concerns before participating in the QWG?
3) What impressed you the most at the QWG?
4) If you were to participate in the QWG again in the future, what would be the primary reason?
5) If you were NOT to participate in the QWG again in the future, what would be the primary reason?
6) How do you think the experience of QWG has had an impact on you?
7) What were your thoughts on the non-binary policy in QWG?

2. Gender Policy

1) What are your thoughts on competing without sex segregation in this game?
    a) Did you change your mind before and after the game?
2) What, in your opinion, are advantages to playing sports without sex segregation?
3) What do you consider to be some concerns playing sports without sex segregation in sport?
4) What do you think about the title of the game called Queer Women Games?

3. Personal Sports Experience

1) What is your most memorable sports experience?
2) How did you become engaged in sports or disengaged from sports?
3) How does your sex/gender/sexuality identity impact or not impact your sports experience?

4) What are your thoughts on the belief that Asians are less competitive in contact team sports such as football, basketball, and baseball compared to other racial groups?

4. Questions to Organizers and Volunteers

1) Please describe your role in QWG.
2) What motivated you to become involved in organizing the QWG?
3) Did you face any challenges or obstacles during the planning and execution of the QWG?
4) What personal goal did you have in participating in QWG, and how do you assess its achievement now?

Gay Games Hong Kong (GGHK)

1. Participation

1) How did you hear about the GGHK?
2) Can you describe the process of how you decided to participate in GGHK?
    a) Did you have any expectations or concerns before participating in the GGHK?
3) What impressed you the most at the GGHK?
4) If you were to participate in the Gay Games again in the future, what would be the primary reason?
5) If you were NOT to participate in the Gay Games again in the future, what would be the primary reason?
6) How do you think the experience of GGHK has had an impact on you?
7) What were your thoughts on the registration fee?

2. Gender Policy

1) What are your thoughts on competing without sex segregation in this game?
    a) Did you change your mind before and after the game?
2) What, in your opinion, are advantages to playing sports without sex segregation?
3) What do you consider to be some concerns playing sports without sex segregation in sport?
4) What do you think about the title of the game called Gay Games?

3. Personal Sports Experience

1) What is your most memorable sports experience?
2) How did you become engaged in sports or disengaged from sports?
3) How does your sex/gender/sexuality identity impact or not impact your sports experience?
4) What are your thoughts on the belief that Asians are less competitive in contact team sports such as football, basketball, and baseball compared to other racial groups?

4. Questions to Organizers and Volunteers

1) Please describe your role in GGHK.
2) What motivated you to become involved in organizing the GGHK?
3) Did you face any challenges or obstacles during the planning and execution of the GGHK?
4) What personal goal did you have in participating in GGHK, and how do you assess its achievement now?
5) Looking back, what lessons did you learn from organizing the Gay Games in Hong Kong?
6) How did you reflect on the possibility of GGHK hosting the Gay Games for the first time in Asia?

PPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE (QWG)

Please answer the following question in the space provided to the best of your ability.

1. Please select your age range.
   - ☐ Under 19
   - ☐ 20-29
   - ☐ 30-39
   - ☐ 40-49
   - ☐ 50-59
   - ☐ 60 or older

2. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? (check one. If you are currently enrolled, please indicate that you are enrolled.)

   - ☐ Middle School
   - ☐ High School or Equivalent
   - ☐ Associate's Degree or Technical/Vocational Degree (2 year)
   - ☐ Some College
   - ☐ Bachelor's Degree
   - ☐ Master's Degree
   - ☐ Doctoral Degree
   - ☐ Professional Degree (MD, JD, etc.)
   - ☐ Other _____

3. What is your race/ethnicity?
   - ☐ Asian
   - ☐ Black
   - ☐ Hispanic or Latino
   - ☐ White
   - ☐ Middle Eastern or Arab
   - ☐ Multiracial
   - ☐ Other_____

4. Describe your nationality:

_____

5. Where do you currently reside in (Country or City):

_____

6. Describe your current occupation:

7. What was your approximate monthly income last year? (check one)
   - ☐ None
   - ☐ Less than 1,000,000 KRW
   - ☐ KRW 1,000,000 to 1,999,999
   - ☐ KRW 2,000,000 - 2, 999,999
   - ☐ KRW 3,000,000 - 3, 999,999
   - ☐ KRW 4,000,000 - 4, 999,999
   - ☐ KRW 5,000,000 - 5, 999,999
   - ☐ KRW 6,000,000 or above

8. Describe your sex/gender/sexuality identity.

_____

9. What best describe you in terms of LGBTQ+?
   - ☐ I identify as LGBTQ+
   - ☐ I identify as LGBTQ+ ally
   - ☐ None of them

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE (GGHK)

Please answer the following question in the space provided to the best of your ability.

10. Please select your age range.
    - ☐ Under 19
    - ☐ 20-29
    - ☐ 30-39
    - ☐ 40-49
    - ☐ 50-59
    - ☐ 60 or older

11. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? (check one. If you are currently enrolled, please indicate that you are enrolled.)

    - ☐ Middle School
    - ☐ High School or Equivalent
    - ☐ Associate's Degree or Technical/Vocational Degree (2 year)
    - ☐ Some College
    - ☐ Bachelor's Degree
    - ☐ Master's Degree
    - ☐ Doctoral Degree
    - ☐ Professional Degree (MD, JD, etc.)
    - ☐ Other _____

12. What is your race/ethnicity?
    - ☐ Asian
    - ☐ Black
    - ☐ Hispanic or Latino
    - ☐ White
    - ☐ Middle Eastern or Arab
    - ☐ Multiracial
    - ☐ Other_____

13. Describe your nationality:

_____

14. Where do you currently reside in (Country or City):

_____

15. Describe your current occupation:

_____

16. What was your approximate monthly income last year? (check one)
- ☐ None
- ☐ Less than HKD$10,000
- ☐ HKD$10,000 to $19,999
- ☐ HKD$20,000 - $29,999
- ☐ HKD$30,000 - $39,999
- ☐ HKD$40,000 - $49,999
- ☐ HKD$50,000 - $59,999
- ☐ HKD$60,000 or above

17. Describe your gender identity (Check all that apply)
- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Intersex
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Nonbinary
- ☐ Genderqueer
- ☐ Other_____

18. Describe your sexual identity (Check all that apply)
- ☐ Heterosexual
- ☐ Homosexual
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Pansexual
- ☐ Asexual
- ☐ Queer
- ☐ Other_____

19. What best describe you in terms of LGBTQ+?
- ☐ I identify as LGBTQ+
- ☐ I identify as LGBTQ+ ally
- ☐ None of them

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