



Serving up change? CSR as a tool for social change - the UNESCO-WTA partnership

Courtney Szto, BHK., MSc.

Department of Exercise Sciences, University Toronto, Toronto, Ontario



Background

Created in 2006, this 'landmark' partnership between UNESCO and the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) set out to "raise awareness of gender equality issues and advance opportunities for women's leadership in all spheres of society" (UNESCO, 2006).

Promoter of Gender Equality (PGE) player program: Venus Williams, Zheng Jie, Vera Zvonareva, Tatiana Golovin



"We know tennis players are great role models, inspirational figures for many women around the world." Stacey Allaster, CEO, WTA.



"As the world's leading sport for women, we have a responsibility to do everything we can to help break down barriers to success for women." - Venus Williams

Programs Supported

Liberia - women's only night school in Monrovia

Cameroon - foster successful female politicians, businesswomen, and athletes.

Jordan - educate women about their legal rights

Dominican Republic - advocate for women's political involvement

China - Increase the number of rural women involved in political decision-making.

Research Questions

How does the UNESCO-WTA partnership represent CSR as a tool for social change?

- 1.) What are the ideological underpinnings of CSR within this partnership?
- 2.) How does each organization represent gender equality?
- 3.) Does the focus on gender overlook other factors of marginalization? (e.g. race, class, sexuality etc.)
- 4.) What kind of knowledge is (re)produced by the Promoters of Gender Equality program?
- 5.) How do discourses of business affect development initiatives?

"It's about what Billie started, that women are strong and confident, and deserve to be equal. As we go to other parts of the world, where appreciation for women is not the same, it's pretty energizing." - Stacey Allaster, CEO, WTA.



Theory & Methods

Theoretical frameworks applied: Postcolonial Feminism and Orientalism

Methodology: Intersectionality

Method: Discourse analysis of *Project Implementation Plans* (provided by the WTA Tour), UNESCO/WTA press releases, media articles.

Summary of Analysis

- Equality is viewed as women being equal with men
- Western feminism set as the benchmark for all women

"Our goal is to let women and girls throughout the world know that there are no glass ceilings and...to support programs that provide real opportunities for women to succeed in whatever they set their minds to." - Venus Williams



- Third-wave feminist projects reproduce capitalist system and gender inequities
- Gender mainstreaming fails to de-centre men's interests and privileges
- Increased opportunities are thought to create a level playing field
- Business thinking infiltrates development practices
- Assumes: community support is easily attainable, empowered women will foster gender equality, more women in positions of power will bring gender issues to the forefront
- Gender understood as THE axis of discrimination
- Cannibalism of human rights (gender equality over religious freedom)

Recommendations

- 1.) Adopt public sociology perspective - combine academic theory with the activation prowess of big business.
- 2.) Change language of equality to equity.
- 3.) Reconceptualize gender and gender equality to include other factors of oppression (e.g. race, class, sexuality, able-ness).
- 4.) WTA should fight for the last match at Grand Slam tournaments.
- 5.) Incorporate panel discussions before select WTA tournaments with PGEs to discuss issues in sport.
- 6.) Promote global equity in local contexts rather than global gender equality.
- 7.) Better accountability from all partners.



"When countries extend an invitation to the [WTA]... they are implicitly associating themselves with its values." Larry Scott, Former CEO, WTA.