Core aspects of sport and inequality penetrated in rich anthology


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By:

Anne Tjønndal
Msc. Sport Science & Research Assistant Sport Science
Department of Sociology and Political Science
Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
7491 Trondheim, Norway
E-mail: anne.tjonndal@ntnu.no

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It is a wide-spread concept that sport is a site of inclusion that brings people from all parts of society together. As the editors of this book demonstrate in their introduction, sports participation may have developed towards being more open and meritocratic, but the management of sport still remains dominated by white, middle-aged men, something that undoubtedly affects the practice and development of sport and leisure activities worldwide (Daspher & Fletcher, 2013).

Thomas Fletcher and Katherine Daspher (eds.) of Leeds Metropolitan University, have collected an array of articles within the field of diversity, equity and inclusion in sport and leisure from twenty-two authors. All of the book’s contributions are articles previously published in the scientific journal *Sport in Society*. The book is divided into five thematic sections: 1) *Inclusionary politics and active recreation* (chapters 2-3), 2) *Sport, policy and inclusion* (chapters 4-5), 3) *Gender and sexuality* (chapters 6-8), 4) *Race and ethnicity* (chapters 9-11) and 5) *Supporting and watching sport* (chapters 12-14). In my review of this book, I have chosen to highlight three of these articles.

**Skateboarders and The Civilizing Process**

David Turner (chapter 3) critically analyses how public funding affects lifestyle sports. His article is based on a qualitative study of a large indoor skatepark in Scotland. Using Elias’ theoretical perspectives of figuration and the civilizing process Turner’s paper demonstrates how lifestyle sports can be categorized as “mimetic experiences” and alternatives to engaging in traditional sporting activities. Furthermore, Turner argues that there exists a hegemonic funding model for governmental interest and provision in sporting activities. This model, he states, is based on two agendas: 1) public health and active citizenship, and 2) achieving international sporting success in sporting events such as the Olympic Games. As Turner’s analysis show, this funding model can be problematic for lifestyle sports such as skateboarding. The restrictions, rules and policies that come with governmental funding may cause skaters and other lifestyle sport practitioners to refrain from using these arenas built to stimulate more people to participate in skateboarding. As Turner puts it:

“The current funding hegemony continues to exist without alternative (..) lifestyle sports in general, and skateboarding in particular, are in danger of losing the mimetic properties which make them so attractive to participants in the first instance” (Turner, 2013: pp.33).
This chapter creatively interprets and demonstrates how skateboarding and new generations of skateboarders are becoming increasingly civilized through the hegemonic funding model that dominates governmental sports involvement. Perhaps this could be the beginning of a divide between older skateboarders, motivated by their ability to choose how and when to participate and younger generations of skateboarders growing up in the structures of large indoors skating parks restrained by policies derived from this modern governmental funding model?

**Martial Arts: a sex integrated training culture**

In his paper *“Enter the discourse: exploring the discursive roots of inclusivity in mixed-sex martial arts”* (Chapter 6) Alex Guy Channon provides a refreshing perspective to the gender and sport field of study. The article explores how martial arts provide a sporting context with mixed-sex participation opportunities. Further, how the training culture in martial arts is unique compared to the sex segregated training cultures in the majority of Western sports. Channon shows how sex integrated training spaces are the norm within martial art, whereas in Western sports sex segregation is one of the most taken-for-granted principles. The author also discusses some deeper differentiations between martial arts and Western sport, and argues that martial art embodies a broader philosophical and pedagogical focus, while Western sport tends to focus on competitiveness and hegemonic masculine values.

I would recommend anyone with an interest in gender and sports to read Channon’s study of martial arts training cultures in the UK. Martial arts for self-defence, fitness and as competitive combat are widely popular today, both for men and women. The unique mixed-sex training culture that many martial arts clubs offer is in my opinion an exciting site for further studies on constructs and meanings of gender in sport. It would be interesting to further explore what possibilities mixed-sex training spaces like martial art provides for women and men to express femininity and masculinity. Another topic which would be interesting to link to studies on mixed-sex sports is how sex integrated sporting cultures affect women’s’ possibilities and experiences in a traditionally male dominated area of society like sport.
**Football fandom as a site for social inclusion of learning-disabled people**

Using sport to tackle problems with social exclusion of specific groups in society is a well-known strategy implemented in policies of governments in many countries. In chapter 12, Kris Southby offers a critical analysis of the opportunities to tackle social exclusion that football fandom in the UK provides to learning-disabled people. Through using photo-elicitation exercises and semi-structured interviews with thirteen learning-disabled fans as methods of research, Southby argues that while football fandom can offer some social benefits, such as a sense of belonging and a shared social identity, it is unlikely to result in learning-disabled people becoming more ‘socially-included’ in society.

In my opinion, this paper shows the importance of studying local and specific contexts in the immense field of study that is social exclusion and sport. In his book “Sport and Social Exclusion”, Mike Collins points out that sport have the potential to be a site of empowerment and inclusion for marginalized groups in society. With that in mind, critical analyses of the possibilities and limitations that sports contexts provide for different marginalized groups are crucial for developing a better understanding on how sport actually offer social benefits and contribute to increased social inclusion in everyday practices.

**Interesting perspectives on diversity, social inclusion and equality in sport**

In conclusion, *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Sports and Leisure* is a versatile collection of articles on the extensive field of equality, diversity and social inclusion in sport. Because of this versatility in topics and empirical contexts the book is likely to interest a broad group of readers such as students, researchers, lecturers and sports professionals. Readers are more than likely to encounter one or several articles among the fourteen unique contributions which they find particularly relevant and enriching. Herein lies perhaps both one of the core strengths and weaknesses of the book. While it provides many interesting perspectives and has the potential to be far-reaching in terms of a diverse selection of readers - readers of the book might not find all of the articles equally interesting.
References

