

Issues in relation to Sport Masculinities and the Body

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Sport, Masculinities and the Body sets out to explore the practices in sport which contribute to a general understanding that some bodies are more appropriate for participation than others. The focus is upon everyday sport which could be defined as social or amateur, in the sense that it is voluntary, rather than elite or professional sport where there are commercial rewards and different motivations. However, this does not ignore the significant impact of professional sport which is often presented as a guide or exemplary model of how it should be played.

It is suggested that much of the literature written on sport upholds many taken for granted assumptions about those considered most able to participate. These assumptions are generally based upon (continued) unquestioned social constructions of gender and the body. In mainstream sports literature and journalism, performances of the young, professional male body are considered most noteworthy. It is also within mainstream sociology, particularly areas which claim to describe the sociology of sport, where these assumptions often still remain unchallenged. It is away from the specific location of sport where more reasoned debate has surfaced. Most noticeably in post-structuralist readings of the body which have highlighted the problems of continued constructions of gender based upon binary distinctions.

Exposing the constant conflicting interpretations of what sport should be (and to whom) provide a way of incorporating broader ideas, particularly so in the case of school sport and physical education, where participation is mandatory for young people, although the benefits or outcomes are not necessarily the same. The research explores developments in knowledge related to the gendered body and whether apparent availability of alternative identities (or ways of being) is formulated and acted upon at ground level. Although acknowledging the

theoretical developments in (post) post structuralism and queer theory in relation to gendered and queer identities, there is an element of caution derived from the author's sociological training. As pointed out by sociologists, such as Kirsch (2000) and Edwards (1998), some claims of fluidity and the availability of 'multi identities' do not hold up to rigorous examination and in many cases this is due to the use of less than robust methods.

Consequently, attempts are made by the author to 'keep my feet on the ground' and explore the lives of other men in the hope that it will enable consideration the relevance of 'masculinities' within the context of sport.

In summary, *Sport, Masculinities and the Body* sets out to explore the extent to which other men perform gendered bodily practices in their everyday lives. Explanations which emerge may provide the opportunity to develop and improve sociological understanding of the processes and practices through which body performance can be said to constitute gender and sexuality. Consideration is made of the extent to which alternative masculinities and body performances reinforce or challenge the current sporting framework which is invested heavily in specific versions of masculinity. Consequently, the book explores whether it is still relevant to consider sport as a significant site for the making and remaking of hegemonic masculinities. It also considers the significance of body practices as a central means through which these masculinities are formed and looks towards ways in which the 'limitations' which are created by 'restrictive' or 'expected' forms of masculine performances could be lifted.

Refs

Edwards, T. (1998) Queer Fears: Against the Cultural Turn, *Sexualities*, 1(4): 471-484.

Kirsch, M.H. (2000) *Queer Theory and Social Change*, London: Routledge.

Wellard, I. (2009) *Sport, Masculinities and the Body*, New York: Routledge.

