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4

FEMINIST THEORIES FOR SPORT

Susan Birrell

Feminist theory is a dynamic, continually evolving complex of theories or theoretical traditions that take as their point of departure the analysis of gender as a category of experience in society. In the past it seemed to make sense to distinguish among varieties of feminist theories (liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, etc.); today it is more useful to conceive of feminist theo*ries* in the plural, as a series of theoretical approaches marked by rapid development and comprised of an intermix of voices and responses to earlier theoretical traditions. Whatever the sources, whatever the mix of voices privileged by a particular scholar, feminist theory within the sociology of sport has as its main purpose to theorize about gender relations within our patriarchal society as they are evidenced by, played out in, and reproduced through sport and other body practices.

Sport is clearly a gendered activity, that is, an activity that not only welcomes boys and men more enthusiastically than girls and women but that also serves as a site for celebrating skills and values clearly marked as 'masculine' (see, for example, Bryson, 1983). This is what we mean when we refer to sport as a 'male preserve' (Dunning, 1986; Sheard and Dunning, 1973; Theberge, 1985). Thus it is not surprising that feminist scholars find sport to be a logical site for analysis of relationships of gender.

When one talks about 'feminist theory and sport' what is generally meant is not just that one is studying gender in sport but *how* one is studying it: to claim that one is doing feminist analysis is to make a commitment to an explicitly theoretical approach to the interpretation of sport as a gendered activity. Feminist theory is not to be confused with a focus on 'women in sport', which was an early subject of study; rather, it is a framework for understanding women in sport that draws on and contributes to the development of feminist theories outside the field.

Just as all research on girls and women in sport is not necessarily feminist, not all feminist work focuses on girls and women. A growing area of interest, fostered by the growth of the men's studies movement, is on men in sport, on the ways that sport serves to consolidate male privilege, and on the often deleterious impact that masculine ideologies played out in sport have on many boys and men (Kidd, 1990; Messner and Sabo, 1990, 1994; Curry, 1991). As our theoretical understandings have become more sophisticated, the subject of our theorizing has expanded to include more critical analyses focused on the reproduction of gender relations and male privilege through sport, sport as a patriarchal practice, and sport as a site for masculinist hegemony. Each reconceptualization of the subject reflects and requires a shift in theoretical thinking, and these shifts are evident in the feminist theories we draw on for our analyses in sport. In the final analysis, however, gender relations must always be a key feature: a theory that does not take gender seriously as a category of experience cannot be considered a feminist theory.

One of the most salient features of feminist theorizing is that it is a dynamic process. While it may appear to produce particular frameworks which can be differentiated from one another, at least for heuristic purposes (and that will be one focus reviewed in the next few pages), in reality it is the provisionary status of

feminist theory which is its hallmark. Feminist theory is not neat: as hard as we scholars might work to simplify it, it refuses to be disciplined into discrete categories. This is both the strength and the frustration of feminist theories and a testimony to their resilience as useful frameworks for understanding. Feminist theory is unsettled – and thus unsettling to those of us trying to use it appropriately. But it is precisely because we live in a world of increasing complexity, confusion and contradiction that our theories must meet the social world on these terms.

Finally, feminist theory is an openly political or critical practice committed not just to analyzing gender in sport but to changing those dynamics. As the grounding of a plan of action for social action or praxis, feminist theory has clear implications for social change in sport.

FEMINISM AS A THEORY

Like other sociological theories, feminist theory offers an explanation of our lives within culture by attempting to abstract from concrete individual lives a general pattern of experience. Thus a theory is a framework for understanding, but it always develops within a particular cultural context and it is always provisional. Theory is never perfect, never complete, never proven. Instead, theory provides us with a starting point for our understanding but it begs to be expanded, contradicted, refined, replaced.

Theories often begin as critiques of current or dominant theories or ways of thinking, and feminist theories began as critiques of the limitations of the dominant theories in the disciplines that did not include women or did not take women's issues and insights seriously. The particular focus of feminist theories is to provide new ways to understand ourselves as gendered beings, that is, as women and men, and new ways to see the connections between our individual lives and the lives of other women and men. All feminist theories privilege gender as the central category of analysis because they are founded on the belief that human experiences are gendered.

Feminist theory is grounded in an analysis of personal experience – it bears, in fact, strong resemblance to the process of consciousness-raising central to many critical theories (see MacKinnon, 1989) – but the crucial step in this analysis is to overcome one's focus on the purely personal so that one is able to understand one's personal bad luck or misfortune as a small incident in a greater pattern of oppression experienced to some extent by all those who share the same life situation. Thus we learn to see beyond our own personal condition to the broader social conditions that surround us.

All feminists share an assumption that women are oppressed within patriarchy and a commitment to change those conditions. But not all feminists agree on how those oppressive relations are produced and reproduced, and not all feminists share the same vision for the future or the same agenda for change. In our application of feminist theories to sport, then, it makes sense to speak of the threads of feminist theories that spin together to produce a myriad of patterns useful in extending our understanding of the meaning of sport as a gendered practice.

The point of this chapter (as with feminist theory in general) is not to condense the complexities of feminist thought into one unifying theory but to reflect the multivocality of current thinking within the theoretical range that can be generally referred to as feminist theory. In what follows, I will review some basic tenets of feminist theorizing, discuss critiques of feminist theory by non-feminists, and introduce three stages through which feminist theorizing about sport appears to have traveled. Within those stages, theoretical threads of importance to contemporary feminist theory will be delineated and discussed. This will include a discussion of liberal and radical feminism as the founding categories of feminist thought about sport; attempts to theorize difference more profoundly by turning (in the 1980s) toward synthetic and critical theories such as Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, racial relations theories and cultural studies; and the status of feminist theories in a postmodern world, as we move toward more truly interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks, borrowing insights from Foucault, discourse analysis, Gramscian hegemony theory and poststructuralism.

Before we begin, however, a brief discussion of the resistance to feminist theories seems appropriate. Feminist theory is a self-reflexive theoretical practice that changes because those who produce and use the insights the theories offer are constantly unsatisfied with their scope, their focus or their limitations. Thus some of the harshest critics of feminist theory are feminists themselves, that is, those who make 'inside the paradigm' critiques. But feminists are not the only ones engaged in analyzing feminist theory.

Criticisms from 'outside the paradigm' must also be taken seriously. Because these critiques are aimed at the entire enterprise of feminist theorizing and not the particularities of specific feminist theories, it makes sense to discuss them at this point. The more specific critiques generated by feminists as they work to broaden and improve theory will be integrated into the text in an appropriate place, partly to demonstrate concretely the self-reflexive nature of feminist theorizing.

RESISTING FEMINIST THEORY

The View from Outside

While feminist self-criticism, or 'inside the paradigm' critiques, generally take a dialectical form as scholars work to address shortcomings and produce more useful theories, criticisms of feminist theories which originate 'outside the paradigm' generally discredit the practice of feminist theory altogether. Most criticisms from outside are conservative in nature. Often they are founded on a belief that women and men are different by design (that is, genetically, biologically, divinely) and were thus ordained to live different lives, lives that surely were not meant to include such a masculine activity as sport. Such critics see no need to analyze or advocate change for women.

Not surprisingly, one early and particularly effective form of critique has been apathy: the wholesale ignoring of women's interests in sport or the dismissal of women-centered critiques of dominant forms of sport. A more active critique dismisses feminist theory by discrediting women as unsuitable athletes and/or unworthy topics for scholarship. John Carroll's (1986) essay, 'Sport: virtue and grace', in which he argues that women spoil sport as sport spoils women, stands out as the most explicit example of this sort of critique (see also J.A. Hargreaves, 1986, for a direct rebuttal).

Another main line of criticism attacks feminist theory (and other critical theories as well) for not adhering to the mainstream notions of social science they believe should characterize the field. John Phillips (1993), for example, labels critical feminist analyses 'pseudo-science', complaining that they lack objectivity and are value-laden and politically motivated. Feminists respond that feminist theory is a critical theory *intended* to be coupled with social action. Likewise, critical feminists see no inherent value in objectivity (even if that elusive goal could ever be achieved). They are convinced that a range of methodological and theoretical approaches, which could include but would not privilege social science traditions, is more appropriate for the study of gender, sport, power and culture.

A final criticism of feminist theories could be referred to as the backlash or reverse discrimination position. This criticism is that as the result of affirmative action and such scholarly developments as women's studies and feminist theory, the scales of gender inequity have tipped and women now have an unfair advantage over men both theoretically and socially. This critique is sadly out of touch with the real world, where inequities of gender, race and class continue to flourish.

FEMINIST THEORIES FOR SPORT: THREE STAGES[1]

For the purposes of this review, I discuss the relationship between feminist theories and sport as occurring in three general stages. First was an early atheoretical stage, focused on developing a research area focused on 'women in sport'. Next, came a self-conscious search for theoretical homes within feminism, which began roughly in 1978 (see Birrell, 1988). Finally, our current stage emerged in the late 1980s, strongly influenced by postmodern sensibilities, during which we are moving, often reluctantly, beyond modernist conceptions of theory and toward less unified, less linear analyses. My review focuses largely on the latter two stages, which cover the past two decades, as the dialogue between feminist theories and sport developed.

Early Atheoretical Attention to Women in Sport

Although important critical analyses of the dominance of masculine values in sport existed in England (Sheard and Dunning, 1973; Willis, 1974), analyses of the place of girls and women in sport undertaken in North America and Europe in the 1970s contented themselves with documenting inequalities and arguing for the expansion of opportunities for women. With notable US exceptions (Felshin, 1975; Hart, 1972), they did not do so within an explicit theoretical frame. Research at the time was dominated by psychological topics focused on sex or gender roles, traits

and motives, and role conflict. Sociological attention was primarily paid to socialization (see, for example, Greendorfer, 1978). Gender was conceived of as a variable or distributive category rather than a set of relations sustained through human agency and cultural practice (see Birrell, 1988, and Hall, 1988, 1996, for a more extensive discussion of this history).

In 1978, two books appeared in North America which marked a significant turn toward feminist theory: Carole Oglesby's edited book *Women in Sport: From Myth to Reality* (1978), and Ann Hall's monograph *Sport and Gender: a Feminist Perspective on the Sociology of Sport* (1978). Two years later, at the first NASSS conference in Denver, the influence of feminist theory on sport was clearly evident in papers presented by Ann Hall (1980), Nancy Theberge (1980), and Mary Boutilier and Cindy SanGiovanni (1980). Even more importantly, the conference provided a site for feminist scholars from several countries to meet one another for the first time, to create a feminist network and to develop a sense that a critical mass of scholars did exist to further this interest. Boutilier and SanGiovanni gave a particularly important paper which introduced one important typology of the current state of feminist theories outside of sport. Relying on Alison Jaggar and Paula Struhl (Rothenberg)'s (1978) classifications of feminist frameworks, Boutilier and SanGiovanni identified and discussed liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism and socialist feminism. These paradigms, particularly liberal feminism, informed much of the feminist research on sport in the decade of the 1980s, though by the end of the decade increasingly critical and synthetic theoretical efforts were shifting the focus.

Moving Toward Theory: The Modernist Project

The decade of the 1980s was one of exciting change in the study of gender and sport. This second stage was characterized by self-conscious critiques of the atheoretical beginnings of the field from feminist scholars such as Susan Birrell (1984) in the United States, Ann Hall (1981, 1984) and Nancy Theberge (1984) in Canada, and Lois Bryson (1983) in Australia. As our understanding grew of feminist theories developing outside the field, we used those insights to inform our own analyses. But while some feminists urged the field toward more sophisticated theoretical models, most of the research in the field was influenced by a liberal feminist approach. By the end of the decade, however, the turn to critical theories that explicitly theorized relations of power, and more inclusive theories which explicitly theorized difference in terms of relations of class and race as well as gender, moved us toward a critical feminist cultural studies approach and again changed the direction of the field.

The Ur Categories of Feminist Theory: Liberal and Radical Feminism Liberal feminism and radical or cultural feminism are to a great extent the grandmother categories that created and nurtured all the rest. Because they seem to dominate popular understandings of feminist thought (that is, most people who are at all familiar with feminism can recognize these two strands but not others), they can be seen as the *Ur*, or originating categories. Despite much movement away from these generative categories, they remain so central that they might also be considered residual categories of feminist theory.

Liberal feminism is the dominant form of feminist thought and action in North America, Great Britain and Europe. Liberal feminism is based on the humanist ontological position that men and women are more alike than different. Despite their inherent similarities, however, women and men come to live different lives, with different experiences, different opportunities and different expectations, because society erects barriers that restrict their equal participation in society. Extending the rights that women naturally deserve requires removing these artifically constructed barriers (such as the right of college men to receive athletic scholarships while college women had virtually no opportunities to participate at all). Liberal feminists advocate equal access, equal opportunity, equal reward structures, equal pay for equal work, comparable worth and similar equal rights for women.

In terms of sport, liberal feminists work to remove the barriers to girls' and women's participation in sport through legislation such as Title IX and the Equal Rights Amendment in the United States. The limit of liberal feminist thought is that it entails no fundamental critique of the structures themselves, advocating instead that women merely be allowed to take their equal place alongside men in them. To the extent that it focuses on structural limitations, liberal feminism focuses little attention on ideology, or the dominant way of seeing the world that works to keep social structures in place.

Radical or cultural feminism responds to the liberal agenda for change by arguing that it does not go far enough. Men and women, they argue, are essentially different. The patriarchal system men have established (and which continues to benefit all men, even those pro-feminist men who would like to see the system changed) has failed dramatically; what is needed is another vision of the world emanating from the insights of women. Radical change entails a fundamental societal transformation, not just equal access to the system that already exists. Rather than agitating to get women involved in the male-dominated athletic system that already exists, for example, radicals argue that the entire system must be dismantled and reconstructed from the standpoint of women. The way to accomplish this is not through legislation but through revolution. Another radical solution is for women to establish their own separate spaces and practices outside the purview of patriarchy. Lesbian separatism is a particularly strong voice in this movement.

Beginning in the early 1980s, research and analysis was explicitly framed by or read through particular theoretical traditions. Liberal feminism which advocates the inclusion of women and girls within the structure of opportunity and privilege enjoyed by men and boys clearly underlies the bulk of research documenting inequalities of opportunity, advocating Title IX and documenting the precipitous decline in coaching and administration positions for women within women's sport (Acosta and Carpenter, 1994).

Critiques of the conservative limitations of such a feminist approach generally advocate that radical feminist theory should replace liberal feminism theory as the grounding for analysis and, more importantly, social change. The main focus of radical feminism is that sport as we know it must be entirely dismantled so that a feminist alternative might be constructed. But some writers have looked to organized athletics for such situations. Slatton (1982) makes the case for the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) in the United States, Grant (1984) makes the case for international women's field hockey, and McKay (1997) explores the effect of affirmative action initiatives in sport in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Other feminist alternatives are built outside institutionalized sport, in softball (Birrell and Richter, 1987; Lenskyj, 1994), rugby (Wheatley, 1994), body building (Miller and Penz, 1991), and aerobics (Haravon, 1995).

The Move Toward Synthesis

Theorizing Difference: Gender, Race, Class, Sexuality Liberal and radical feminism can be seen, and criticized, as 'pure' categories of feminist theory. That is, they focus on gender as the primary category of oppression to the exclusion of other categories such as class, race, sexuality, age, nationality, religion. This is a serious problem for those engaged in critical analyses of sport because gender is only one part of an interconnected matrix of relations of power which also include relations of class, race, sexuality, religion, age, etc. Neatly separating gender out of this matrix can happen only theoretically, and, through ignorance and neglect, this strategy does violence to those in other oppressive relationships, such as race and class. If the proper subject of feminist theory is women in all our diversity, then the proper project of feminist theory is theorizing that diversity. The subject of feminist theory must shift from *woman* to *women* to reflect the vast experiential diversity of women's lives. A central part of the contemporary feminist project is to discover and theorize links to the lived experiences of other oppressive relationships.

The move is not without its problems, however, particularly issues of 'primacy' (Harding, 1993) or arguments over whether race or class or gender is the primary and most oppressive category of experience. While such commitments to one group isolated from others may serve an important purpose in the development of particular theoretical positions, and more importantly, strategies for social action (and this is the strength of identity politics espoused by the Combahee River Collective, 1984), they offer incomplete grounds for analysis in a world which we increasingly understand as structured by the complex interactions of all these relationships. This realization paved the way for the first synthetic theories, that is, theories that try to combine the insights from two or more theoretical traditions.

The first attempts at synthesis were between radical feminist theories and Marxism – the theoretical approach called Marxist feminism. But Marxist feminism is generally agreed to privilege the primacy of class over gender, a situation not acceptable to many feminists (the classic statement here is Hartman, 1981). Marxist feminism is grounded in the assumptions of Marxism: that the basic oppression is economic and that class is the most important category of experience and analysis. Gender oppression, the Marxist would argue, is derivative of class oppression; rid the world of

economic exploitation and gender inequities would also disappear. Contemporary Marxist feminist analyses focus on women's oppression through labor. Women are kept outside the system of waged labor, are systematically located in poorer-paid segments of the workforce, engage in labor which does not count as work within the dominant notions of waged labor, and in contrast to men who are characterized as being engaged in production, women are engaged in reproduction: not only the biological reproduction of children (the next generation of workers) but reproduction of the necessities of domestic life needed to refresh the (male) worker. All of these insights can be applied to the situation of women in sport in capitalist countries. Although not often couched within the language of Marxist feminism, analyses of woman athletes, coaches and administrators as laborers could be enhanced in this way.

This first-order synthetic theory reflected in Marxist feminism was quickly reformulated in the more equitable socialist feminist theory. Socialist feminist theory privileges neither capitalism nor feminism but acknowledges class and gender as mutually supporting systems of oppression: capitalist patriarchy is the proper subject for analysis and social action. In sport, this move began with calls to join feminist interests to the Marxist theoretical project (Beamish, 1984) or to develop a socialist feminism for sport (Bray, 1983; Hall, 1985; Theberge, 1984). Although explicit attention to this paradigm appears to have decreased, feminist analysis continues to take account of the material relations of women in sport in more subtle ways. For example, in a particularly interesting study that takes gender, class, race and nationalism into account, Thompson (1988) discusses Australian women's refusal to support their men through reproductive labor as a means of protesting against the Australian rugby team's involvement with the white South African team.

Socialist feminism was quickly recognized as the appropriate site for second-order synthesis theories or the matrix model which works to focus on interacting impacts of gender, class and race. Even with the acknowledgement of the equal importance of gender and class, theorizing difference along lines of race and ethnicity remains an underdeveloped focus in sport studies. Early efforts (Birrell 1989, 1990) had to depend on theoretical work outside the field for guidance.

Women of color – African American, Latina, Asian American, Native American – have never been absent from feminist movements, but they have often not been recognized or honored in feminist theories in any meaningful way. This is despite the fact that the Combahee River Collective's (1984) early essay on identity politics was a major theoretical contribution to feminist theorizing. Moreover, one early and unsatisfactory solution to the absence of women of color from feminist theories was to include 'women of color' into already existing feminist theories. At least two problems immediately surface. First, such an approach clearly diminishes the experiences of women of color because it assumes that they can be contained in existing theories, grounded in the experiences of white, middle-class women. Secondly, this strategy assumed that 'women of color' was a unified category of experience not differentiated by the variety of experiences that mark the life course of women from different cultures. As a result of such egregious shortcomings, many women of color developed a deep distrust of feminist theories, seeing the act of theorizing as an act of colonization (Christian, 1987).

Another suggestion from women of color was to build feminist theory around the experiences of the most oppressed and marginalized group: to build feminist theory from margin to center (hooks, 1984) or to produce Afrocentric feminist thought (Collins, 1991). The solution generally accepted today fits within the notion of producing synthetic theories by theorizing a 'matrix of domination' (Collins, 1991). Early examples of the successful application of such a theory can be found in Angela Davis's (1983) analysis of slavery as a product of race, class and gender, and the collaborative work of Bulkin, Pratt, and Smith (1984), which argued that oppression is understood as situational, that is, as the product of particular times and places. Solutions to oppression, then, must also be situational. They argue for forming strategic alliances across identities, around the oppressive relationships most dramatically in need of redress at particular times.

In recent years, we have begun to investigate the relationships between gender and race as they are played out in sport. For example, Stan Eitzen and David Furst (1989) brought women into the time-honored tradition of stacking with their focus on volleyball. Brenda Bredemeier (1992) clearly refigured the research program on morality and sport from a multicultural perspective. Mike Messner's feminist essay 'White men misbehaving' (1992b) serves as an important reminder that

women are not the only humans who are gendered, and blacks are not the only humans who are raced. Indeed, a good deal of work on the intersection of race and gender takes as its subject the analysis of black masculinity (Andrews, 1996b; Awkward, 1995; Baker and Boyd, 1997; Cole, 1996; McDonald, 1996a, 1996b). Still, Yvonne Smith (1992) reminds us of the need for further work on women of color. Especially needed is research that extends our understanding of race beyond African Americans (Birrell, 1989, 1990).

The relationship between gender and sexuality receives increasing attention within feminist theories. The clear attempts of sport to enforce gender difference through the heterosexualization of women athletes is one aspect of this (Birrell and Theberge, 1994a; Davis, 1997; Duncan, 1990, 1993). Early radical feminist theories often theorized sexuality, more specifically lesbianism, as an integral part of the separatist move (Bunch, 1975; Rich, 1980). They found the relationship to be clear: feminism is the theory and lesbianism is the practice.

Women in sport have long dealt with the assumption that any woman strange enough to want to tread in male territory to play sport is probably not just a tomboy but a lesbian. When we turned our attention to this in the 1980s, the topics of most concern were bringing lesbian existence within the scope of feminist attention and producing an analysis of the ideology of homophobia, which as many feminists pointed out, kept both lesbians and heterosexual women out of sport. In North America, Pat Griffin (1992, 1993), Helen Lenskyj (1986) and Dorothy Kidd (1983) did groundbreaking work in this area. In the 1990s, Susan Cahn's (1994) book furnished one of the more comprehensive discussions of the history of homophobia in sport and physical education; and Pat Griffin (1998) and Mariah Burton Nelson (1991, 1994) brought these issues before the general population. While work on sexuality in the 1980s focused on lesbian identity, even more complicated theoretical models for understanding sexuality, and its relationship to sport, emerged in the next decade.

The Critical Agenda and Feminist Cultural Studies

As the 1980s progressed, more and more feminist energy was directed toward the critical agenda in sport. Critical approaches are explicitly about power and how gender relations are reproduced by, resisted in, and transformed through sport. Cultural studies, or more properly, feminist cultural studies (Cole and Birrell, 1986), was the logical product of the moves to theorize difference through synthesis. Cultural studies was initially developed in England, and it has had significant influence on the study of sport in North America as well. Cultural studies is based on the assumption that power is distributed inequitably throughout society, often along lines of gender, class and race. These relations of power are not fixed but contested. Although the inertia of power generally rests with those already in power, in fact power is constantly contested. It is that struggle that interests critical scholars. Moreover, power is usually not maintained by force or coercion but through more subtle forms of ideological dominance. Ideology is the set of ideas that serve the interests of dominant groups but are taken up as the societal common sense even by those who are disempowered by them (Theberge and Birrell, 1994a). Sport is a particularly public site for such ideological struggle: 'what is being contested ... is the construction and meaning of gender relations' (Birrell and Theberge, 1994a: 344). The usefulness of the theoretical vocabulary of cultural studies to explore the intersections of gender, race and class in sport has been clearly recognized.

In 1988, Birrell identified four themes central to the critical feminist cultural studies project:

1 The production of an ideology of masculinity and male power through sport.
2 The media practices through which dominant notions of women are reproduced.
3 Physicality, sexuality, the body as sites for defining gender relations.
4 The resistance of women to dominant sport practices.

Ten years later, these themes still receive significant attention. Based on the work of Eric Dunning (Dunning, 1986; Sheard and Dunning, 1973), the first theme functions today as the primary assumption of the field. Mike Messner's (1988) essay 'Sports and male domination: the female athlete as contested ideological terrain' is a cornerstone of this tradition (see also Birrell and Theberge, 1994a, 1994b, and Theberge and Birrell, 1994a, for an extensive discussion and application of this paradigm). Increasingly this area is theoretically informed by Gramscian hegemony theory: 'Hegemony is a fairly complete system of ideological dominance that works through the apparent complicity of those disenfranchised

by it' (Theberge and Birrell, 1994a: 327). One particularly active site for the construction of masculinist hegemony around sport is through media practices.

As feminists expand our notions of what the proper subject of feminist theorizing is, increasing attention is being paid to the place of men within the patriarchal structures of sport. This is a far cry from earlier focuses on men in sport; these analyses are informed by the realization that, although all men benefit from life within a patriarchal culture, some men find their own gendered roles as hypermasculine jocks difficult to fulfill. Most of this pro-feminist work is conducted by men, most notably Mike Messner (1990b, 1996), who has theorized the process as well as applying the new men's studies to his own work (1990a, 1992a). Don Sabo has also been an ally in providing feminist analyses of men's experiences in sport (1990) and editing two anthologies that bring that perspective to sport (Sabo and Runfola, 1980; Messner and Sabo, 1990). Tim Curry's (1991) account of what takes place in male locker rooms gave a rare insider's view of a central site for the reproduction of masculine hegemony. In Canada, Bruce Kidd (1990) offers an insightful view of the 'dynamic of women's oppression/men's repression' through the structures of sport. In addition, a number of these articles single out male violence through or surrounding sport as a mainstay in the production of male privilege (Curry, 1991; Disch and Kane, 1996; Kane and Disch, 1993; Messner, 1990a, 1992a; Theberge, 1989; see also the *IRSS* issue on 'the macho world of sport', Klein, 1990).

Much of the provocative critical work on the ways that the media produce images of women in sport has been conducted by Margaret Duncan. She has studied photographic images of women in the Olympic games (1990), the presentation of women in *Shape* magazine (1994) and, with Cindy Hasbrook (1988), televised images of women's sports. All of her essays provide thoughtful analyses of the dynamics of representation and the struggle for agency in that representation (1993, 1994). In their review of the ideological control of women through media images, Birrell and Theberge (1994a) discuss several themes: the underrepresentation of women athletes in the media; the trivialization and marginalization of their accomplishments; the sexualization, or more properly, heterosexualization of women athletes; the hidden discourse on homophobia; the depiction of women's involvement in sport as tragic; and the construction of women as unnatural athletes and of female athletes as unnatural women. In the most extensive study of a particular site in this process, Laurel Davis (1997) explores the production, textual features and reception of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue.

The tradition of documenting resistance to dominant sport practices remains a vital one in the field, no doubt influenced by the work of John Fiske (1989a, 1989b). In the 1990s, Bryson (1990) and Birrell and Theberge (1994b) explored several channels of resistance for women in sport, and Helen Lenskyj (1994) explored feminist softball, Libby Wheatley (1994) reported on songs sung by feminist rugby players, Miller and Penz (1991) watched female bodybuilders 'colonize a male preserve'; and Haravon (1995) suggested ways to make the aerobics gym a resistant space for feminists.

Of the four themes identified by Birrell in 1988, however, by far the most attention has been paid to issues of physicality and the body, and for that we give credit to the turn toward Foucault and postmodernism.

FEMINIST THEORIES FOR A POSTMODERN AGE

The term 'postmodernism' is best applied to the conditions of contemporary life rather than assigned to a particular theory, although some theories, such as post-structuralism, discussed below, are better adapted than others to express the confusions and contradictions of life in a postmodern era. Life in postmodern times has exploded a number of modernist (mis)conceptions about the world, and many of them have deep effects on feminist theory. Postmodernism deconstructs modernist fallacies about unity. The authenticity of the self, a central notion in many theoretical schemes, including the focus on identity politics which underlies radical feminism, is replaced with notions of subjectivity, that is, our self as subject is always contexted within dominant discourses. Postmodernism also disrupts our belief in an essential relationship between language and reality. In a way, reality eludes language. Far from being a tool for our self-expression, language is reconceived as the primary means through which our consciousness is structured. This way of thinking also decenters the notion of truth; there is no truth, there are, at best, provisional truths. Finally, postmodernism challenges the notion of totalizing theories – theories that aim to understand the world within one cohesive explanatory structure – such as those fashioned by modern sociological theories.

The emergence of cultural studies as the dominant paradigm for feminist analysis in the 1980s served as a bridge to the more interdisciplinary, postmodern sensibilities. Another round of stocktaking essays appeared at the end of the 1980s (Birrell, 1988; Deem, 1988; Hall, 1988; J.A. Hargreaves, 1990; Talbot, 1988), attempting to trace a direct line from the relatively organized feminist frameworks of the past to the sorts of intellectual forces that would guide the future. Cultural studies was taking us beyond the boundaries of social science into the relatively unbounded territory inhabited by Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and Gramsci where the languages spoken include discourse analysis, hegemony theory, post-structuralism, deconstruction and postmodernism. Jennifer Hargreaves (1986, 1990) and Talbot (1988) were clearly anticipating the entrance of Foucault, and in 1993, with the publication of her important essay, Cheryl Cole was identified as a major visionary for the post-structuralist feminist studies move in sport.

Michel Foucault and post-structuralism are at the center of these shifts in several ways. Post-structuralism focuses on the 'analysis of social organization, social meanings, power, and individual consciousness' (Weedon, 1987: 21) constructed through language or other forms of representation. The theoretical and methodological strategies of analysis influenced by post-structuralist thought require us to focus our attention on the construction of narratives and the contesting of meanings. The narratives that surround sport and the body furnish obvious sites for this analysis because sport figures so prominently in the production of 'celebrity bodies'. Discourse analyses that attend to the construction of gender relations through sport narratives include focuses on Renee Richards (Birrell and Cole, 1990), Magic Johnson (Cole and Denny, 1995; King, 1993), Lisa Olson (Disch and Kane, 1996; Kane and Disch, 1993), Mike Tyson (Birrell and McDonald, 1993; Awkward, 1995) and Michael Jordan (see the essays in Andrews, 1996b).

The Foucauldian concept of the production of power through surveillance and discipline provides provocative new points of departure for the study of the athletic body. As a wide range of scholars have demonstrated, sport and other body practices are a central site for training the docile body. One needs merely to think back on one's experiences in physical education, with its emphasis on 'schooling the body' (J.E. Hargreaves, 1986), to see why this is so. Most of the work which follows this lead is discussed by David Andrews in his chapter in this volume, but the work of Mary Duquin (1994a, 1994b), Margaret Duncan (1994), Susan Bordo (1989), Laurie Schultz (1990), Brian Pronger (1995, 1990), Genevieve Rail and Jean Harvey (1995), Cheryl Cole and Harry Denny (1995), Cole and Amy Hribar (1999), Sindy Sidnor (Slowikowski, 1993), Dave Andrews (1993), Elizabeth Grosz (1994) and Pierkko Markula (1995) all deserve special mention here as well.

Queer Theory and the Transgender Challenge One important reconceptualization in our theories of gender was Judith Butler's (1990) identification of the heterosexual matrix: the interrelationships among sex, gender and sexuality (or desire). Since the 1970s, it has been customary to use the term 'sex' to refer to one's biological and genetic category: one is embodied either male or female. 'Gender' was used to refer to the cultural scripts and behaviors that those born male or female were expected to fulfill: one acts masculine or feminine. 'Sexuality' refers to one's choice of sexual partner. The three, sex/gender/sexuality, are not causally related, but our cultural assumptions lead us to believe they are. We assume the three naturally come in a complete package: female, feminine, heterosexual. We assume we can read one category from information we have about another. And finally, we assume that each category belongs in a binary.

The first of these terms to be questionned was gender, and it was soon recognized that masculine and feminine roles were not the only choices, even in a sexist society. Both scholars and the general population were drawn to the notion of 'androgyny' or the combination within one person of traits characteristic of both genders. Gender was the easiest term to deconstruct because it was increasingly apparent that gender was culturally constructed. In the past few years, however, our notion of sex as a binary and our notion of sexuality as a binary have both been seriously challenged, with far more dramatic results.

To argue that there may be more than two mutually exclusive sexes is to challenge the notion of difference itself, for metaphors of

difference often rely on the male/female binary for their meaning. Nevertheless, research in sport has provided a particularly compelling site for examining this logic, for sport remains one of the few cultural activities still felt to be logically arranged by sex. Susan Birrell and Cheryl Cole's (1990) analysis of the cultural meaning of Renee Richards, the male-to-constructed-female transsexual who fought a legal battle to be allowed to play tennis on the women's tour, offered one opportunity to recognize that sex categories are cultural constructions that require enormous cultural work to maintain. John Hood-Williams (1995) performs the same deconstruction of sex testing for athletics, and Laurel Davis and Linda Delano (1992) read the subtext of an anti-drug campaign to find fears of transgendered bodies lurking beneath.

The third concept, sexuality, has also been dislodged from its binary assumptions. Other possibilities for sexual choices, such as bisexual and more recently transgender, work not only to disrupt the binary but to dislodge sexuality from its position as an identity. Instead, it is argued that actions or particular choices may have a sexuality, but individuals do not have a permanent sexual identity. Thus the phrase 'I am a lesbian' (a statement of identity) is replaced by 'I am in a lesbian relationship' (a situated choice). Sykes (1996) explores the implications of this in her post-structuralist critique of lesbian identities.

A transsexual, like Renee Richards, is someone who believes he or she was born into the wrong body. The transsexual undergoes considerable anguish and work in order to have the sex signifiers of one gender exchanged surgically with those of the other. Dramatic as the plight of the transsexual is, 'transgender' is a more radical concept. A transgendered person believes that sex, gender and sexuality do/should not exist as permanent conditions, nor do they have any necessary connection to one another. The transgendered person wants to live in a body (and, more radically, a society) where sexed bodies do not matter.

The deconstruction of the heterosexual matrix disrupts some aspects of the feminist project. If sex and gender do not exist as real, enduring categories, what happens to our central category, woman? What is the subject of feminist theory? In this sense we can say that the transgender movement has queered the categories of our analysis. This fascinating development is a clear challenge for our future.

FEMINIST THEORY, SPORT AND CULTURAL PRACTICE

Theorizing is a challenging and rewarding activity in its own right, but as a critical theory, feminist theory is committed to producing frameworks of understanding that can serve as the basis for thoughtful and profound social change. The connection of feminist theories to sporting practice can best be characterized as providing the theoretical underpinnings for the arguments made by advocacy groups as they work to redress the inequities and increase the opportunities for girls and women in sport. Some are involved in particular research projects with a conscious concern for identifying barriers to girls' and women's participation and helping girls discover and enjoy sport. The research traditions of socialization, role models and coaching burn-out are examples of this impulse. Other feminist work assesses and documents inequities and injustices in sport, at both the practical and the ideological level.

Feminist practitioners in sport work to fulfill that promise so that social action in sport can take place within a comprehensive plan. Unlike their counterparts in men's athletics, women collegiate athletic administrators in North America pay attention to the more accessible writings of liberal feminist theorists, sometimes working together at conferences or in workshops to build bridges between theory and practice. The New Agenda conferences sponsored by the Women's Sport Foundation in the US in 1983 and 1984 are good examples of this collaborative process. While the practitioner and the theorist may not always be the same person, their commitment to each other's work and to the same feminist end strengthens their respective work.

Among those concerned with day-to-day gains for women in sport there is an acknowledgement that theory helps to arrange our ideas and to see the bigger picture, the broader context. And while theory is not always explicitly invoked in the work they do – the memos they produce, the expert court testimony they provide, the speeches they give to booster clubs, parents and young athletes – it often underlies and strengthens their messages.

As evidence of these connections, I mention four arenas in which theory and practice exist together in sport. First, in terms of advocacy, many who speak on behalf of the interests of girls and women in sport – by supporting legislation such as the Civil Rights Restoration Act in the US, by bringing Justine Blainey's case to play ice hockey before the Canadian Supreme Court, by providing expert testimony in court cases such as *Bell* v. *Grove City* and *Cohen* v. *Brown* in the US – rely on research informed by feminist theory to frame their arguments.

Secondly, organizations that advocate for women in sport have been founded all over the world. In Canada, the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS/ACAFS) has been in existence since 1981; they have held several national conferences and publish a newsletter. In the US, the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) takes a leadership role in disseminating information, supporting legislative initiatives, and sponsoring research studies and national conferences, such as the New Agenda conferences in 1983 and 1984 which focused on turning research into action. The Women's Sports Foundation in the United Kingdom, Women-Sport International (WSI), WomenSport Australia and the International Working Group (IWG) all work to bridge common interests. In general, these groups follow a liberal agenda for change.

Thirdly, several publications draw on the resources of those involved at all levels of analysis and theory. CAAWS publishes a newsletter, *Action* (formerly *The Starting Line*), and the Citizens for Sports Equity publish *Full Court Press*. In a more radical vein, *Girl Jock* and other clearly feminist 'zines focused on sport and the body, such as *Fat! So?* and *Fat Girl*, work to provide spaces for all women to enjoy sport and their bodies on their own terms. Unfortunately, no mainstream magazine in the US, even those that appear to focus on women and sport, offers the full encouragement toward empowerment that a feminist grounded publication would. The mainstream magazine with the most disappointing history, from this perspective, is the magazine most recently sold as *Women's Sports and Fitness*. Founded as *Womensport* in 1984 by Billie Jean King as a means to provide support for girls and women interested in and involved in sport, the magazine has gone through several reorganizations, generally shifting its focus away from competitive sport and toward appearance-driven fitness activities (Endel, 1991). Most recently, the magazine has been bought out by Conde Nast and consolidated with their new publication *Conde Nast Sports for Women*. Time Inc. have apparently abandoned their attempt to capture the emerging women's market, stopping production of their occasional *Sports Illustrated Womensport* after three numbers.

Fourth, homepages for CAAWS (*www.caaws.ca*) and the Women's Sport Foundation (*www.womenssportsfoundation.org*) facilitate connection to those important organizations. In addition, the Feminist Majority maintains a site (*www.feminist.org/sports*) where one can find links to a variety of sport topics, including Title IX, gender equity, Olympic sport, NCAA and WNBA basketball, the martial arts, and much more. Information specific to Title IX in the US is maintained at bailiwick.lib.uiowa.edu/ge. Finally, some measure of success can be gleaned from the fact that mainstream media, such as *USA Today* (no doubt facilitated by the NASSS 'expert' file) regularly seek out feminist or 'alternative' approaches to issues of women in sport.

THE FUTURE OF FEMINIST THEORIES FOR SPORT

As a dynamic and evolving theoretical practice, feminist theories will continue to change and develop as scholars struggle towards more complete understandings of the complex dynamics of power relations of which gender relations are a fundamental part. At the present, that course seems to be dominated by two important trends. One trend is the move towards synthetic theories that use the insights of feminist theories as one thread to weave into more complex theories of power and the interrelationships of gender, race and class. The second is the move across the disciplinary boundaries of sociology towards the powerful insights offered through post-structuralist approaches. In the future, new cultural conditions that we cannot yet even envision will challenge us to provide new forms of understanding. That mandate is the most exciting prospect in the process of theory.

Whatever the challenges are, feminist theory will surely be an important part of the theoretical process. For that reason, references to a postfeminist era are both wrong-headed and politically dangerous. To assert that we are in a postfeminist world is to assert that feminism is no longer necessary. This goal – the dissolution of feminism – can be sought from two very different political positions: working towards the end of gender or working towards the end of feminism. The first scenario would envision a world in which the gendered nature of social

life has been eradicated so that gender is no longer an index of the provision of privilege or a key point around which power revolves. Although such a state of affairs is not likely to happen in our lifetime, that condition would be greeted with different responses by feminists located within different theoretical groups. Some feminist theories see the end of gender as the goal of feminist theory, feminist thought and feminist action; interestingly, the end of gender would eradicate the need for feminist theory as the primary tool both to explain and protest those conditions. More nefarious, however, are calls for the end of feminism before gender privileges are deconstructed. This second scenario, which implies that feminism and feminist theory are *passé*, is a counter-revolutionary move that must be resisted.

As long as a culture is characterized by gender privilege and as long as sport remains a preferred site for the reproduction of that privilege – and there is no prospect of those fundamental relationships changing in the foreseeable future – feminist theories will continue to make a fundamental contribution to our understandings of the meanings of sport in culture.

NOTES

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1 In the discussion that follows, my focus will be on the generation of theory concurrent with the second wave of feminism, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, and I will draw upon several different schemes for understanding the overlaps and distinctions among feminist theories. Tour guides for this excursion include Jaggar and (Struhl) Rothenberg (1978, 1993), Tong (1989), Donovan (1985) and Collins (1991), and in sport, Boutilier and SanGiovanni (1983), Hargreaves (1994), Birrell (1988) and Hall (1996). Among the labels these scholars apply to various strands of feminist thought are liberal feminism, radical or cultural feminism, Marxist feminism, socialist feminism and postmodern feminism. I will discuss each of these to the extent that they are vital frameworks within the sociology of sport, and I will introduce several other frameworks which are clearly significant in our current studies of sport and gender relations but which often rest uneasily within the overarching label of 'feminist' theory.

With some important exceptions, most of the excitement within feminist theory and sport appears to be taking place within North America, England and Australia. Articles published in the *IRSS*, for example, our premier international journal, primarily feature articles on participation figures and structural analyses from other countries.

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5

INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT

Peter Donnelly

Interpretation is the basis of all sociology, and all science. If I observe a recurring event, or discover a relationship between two variables, a statistical tendency, or empirical evidence of causality, such discoveries require interpretation. However, within the field of sociology, the term *interpretive* is used more narrowly to refer to a particular group of sociologies which have as their basis the interpretation and understanding of human meaning and action. Johnson notes that:

> a sociological understanding of behaviour must include the meaning that social actors give to what they and others do. When people interact, they interpret what is going on from the meaning of symbols to the attribution of motives to others. (1995: 146)

Interpretive sociology represents, in large part, one of 'the two sociologies' (Dawe, 1970). In their task of exploring the relationship between the individual and society sociologists have divided, since the earliest days of sociology, between the 'system' approach and the 'action' approach. This division is captured well in Thompson and Tunstall's question: 'Do the two approaches of social systems and social action theory simply correspond to our own ambivalent experience of society as something that constrains us and yet also something that we ourselves construct?' (1975: 476). Interpretive sociology fits clearly into the social action side of the divide, a position that is both its strength and its weakness.

Included in interpretive sociology are Weberian sociology, the 'sociologies of everyday life' (symbolic interactionism, Goffman's dramaturgical sociology, labelling theory, phenomenological sociology, ethnomethodology, and existential sociology) (Douglas et al., 1980), and hermeneutics.[1] Marshall (1994) notes that these sociologies differ in two ways. First, in the extent to which they view interpretation as problematic (p. 255) – Weberian sociology and symbolic interactionism take a relatively unproblematic (commonsense) approach to interpretation; phenomenology, ethnomethodology and hermeneutics developed more refined approaches. Second, in the degree to which they go beyond the actor's own understanding of what he or she is doing (p. 255). As Jary and Jary note:

> all social reality is 'pre-interpreted' in that it only has form as (and is constituted by) the outcome of social actors' beliefs and interpretations. Thus it is, or ought to be, a truism that no form of sociology can proceed without at least a preliminary grasp of actors' meanings. (1995: 336)

Thus, while Weberian sociology takes *Verstehen* (understanding) as its basis, and distinguishes between 'descriptive' and 'explanatory' understanding; and Alfred Schutz (phenomenological sociology) developed Weber's work to distinguish between 'because' motives and 'in order to' motives; other interpretive sociologies (for example, existential sociology) assume that the actor's own meanings are the basis for analysis, while the remainder (such as ethnomethodology, Goffman's dramaturgy) focus more on discovery of the rules of social action and interaction.

Just as interpretive sociology is related to the social systems/social action debate in