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Philosophical Perspectives on Gender in Sport and Physical Activity

Edited by Paul Davis and Charlene Weaving. Published 2010 by Routledge, London and New York. ISBN 10: 0-415-47661-5 (hbk) ISBN 10: 0-415-47662-3 (pbk)

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The study of sport as a socio-political phenomenon has gained significant interest over the past thirty years, resulting in the publication of several high quality edited volumes on gender and sport. The editors of *Philosophical Perspectives on Gender in Sport and Physical Activity* articulate the purpose for another anthology in the Preface, claiming, "It might be, as we have been counseled for some time now, that old and once serviceable social paradigms of (for instance) sex, gender, sexuality, agency, humanity, and even sport itself are being tested to breaking point" (ix). This volume uniquely takes this breaking point as a point of departure. The editors continue in writing, "If so, then the topics of this anthology are liable to ring increasingly urgent, making sport's well-documented political and ideological evasiveness unsustainable" (ix). With respect to this claim, the book fulfills its purpose.

The book is structured into four parts. Each part contains three essays for a total of 12 chapters, in 200 pages. In addition, the editors have included a Preface, Introduction, and Postscript. Part 1, "Sport and the construction of the female", contains three widely anthologized essays. The book opens with a classic piece by renowned feminist political philosopher Iris Marion Young, entitled "The exclusion of women from sport: conceptual and existential dimensions." First published in 1979, Young argues that the cultural definitions of 'woman' and 'sport' are mutually exclusive. Young claims that to exclude women from sport is to also exclude women from "full participation in humanity" (13). This is an excellent opening piece for a volume that takes the breakdown of established conceptual paradigms as its organizing principle. Next is Elizabeth Spelman's "Woman as body: ancient and contemporary views", originally published in 1982. Spelman traces the association between 'woman' and 'body' by analyzing selected discussions from Plato and then connecting the account to feminist theory. Angela Schneider's 2000 essay "On the definition of 'woman' in the sport context" is the last essay in Part 1 and offers a helpful view that connects the methodological and conceptual difficulties that arise when analyzing tricky concepts such as 'gender' and 'sex' with practical issues, such as gender verification testing.

Part 2, "Objectification", opens with co-editor Paul Davis' piece, "Sexualization and sexuality in sport," originally published in 2000. Davis argues for a distinction between 'sexualization' and 'sexuality' and then demonstrates the efficacy of this distinction by, in turn, arguing that sexualization is morally objec-

tionable while sexuality is not. “Mere and partial means: the full range of the objectification of women” by Carolyn McLeod, originally published in 2002, argues that objectification is a matter of degree, and that thinking about objectification this way enables feminist theorists to better understand instances of objectification. I was excited to see that the anthology includes an original contribution by co-editor Charlene Weaving, one of the field’s up-and-coming authorities on gender and sport. Her essay, “Unraveling the ideological concept of the female athlete: a connection between sex and sport” explores several examples from sport discourse that exemplify how “in the discourse of heterosexual sex, women are typically configured as harmed objects” (83). Further, she claims that when this discourse is reversed, such as in songs sung by female rugby teams, supposed oppositional discourse is a “mere oblique manifestation of the same hegemony” (92). Weaving’s argument reiterates the theme of the volume by problematizing theoretical conceptions of resistance and agency.

Part 3, “Sex boundaries: construction, naturalization, and opposition”, contains three essays that explicitly address the challenges that arise when deconstructing the male/female-masculine/feminine binaries in sport. Ken Saltman’s 1998 piece, “Men with breasts”, originally published in 1998, shows how these categories become blurred in professional bodybuilding, where men who take steroids develop breasts and practice cosmetic activities associated with conventional femininity, such as hair removal. In “The doping ban: compulsory heterosexuality and lesbophobia”, originally published in 2003, Rebecca Ann Lock draws a parallel between doping by female athletes and lesbians, claiming that both female dopers and lesbians pose a similar perceived threat to the dominant social order through the fear or actuality of masculinization and challenges to hegemonic femininity. No contemporary anthology on gender would be complete without the cyborg making an appearance, and Michael Burke’s 2004 essay “Could a ‘woman’ win a gold medal in the ‘men’s’ one hundred metres?: female sport, drugs and the transgressive cyborg body” delivers, providing a forward-looking methodology for feminist appropriation of putatively masculine sporting spaces.

The essays that comprise Part 4, “Homophobia”, are particularly strong and well-placed as the concluding section of the book. The first essay, “From ‘muscle moll’ to the ‘butch’ ballplayer: mannishness, lesbianism, and homophobia in U.S. women’s sports” by Susan K. Cahn and originally published in 1993, traces the connection between female athleticism and homophobia back to the early 20th century. As one of the few historically-oriented essays, Cahn’s account is indispensable for exemplifying how gendered ideology manifests in human social interaction. In “Outta my endzone: sport and the territorial anus”, originally published in 1999, Brian Pronger attempts to reimagine the homoerotic/homophobic dynamics of competitive sport, using postmodern concepts of alterity and the philosophy of limit. “Openly gay athletes: contesting hegemonic masculinity in a homophobic environment” by Eric Anderson, originally published in 2002, is the last essay. Anderson’s essay is distinctly sociological, using interviews with openly gay male high school and collegiate athletes to articulate how gay male athletes “negotiate hegemonic masculinity in a homophobic environment” (192). Anderson’s conclusion resonates with the editors’ claims in the Preface (noted above) about the unsustainability of sport’s political and ideological evasiveness.

Anderson writes, "Perhaps most encouraging is the fact that I could conduct this research at all...this suggests that hegemony in the athletic arena is not seamless, and sport will remain contested terrain for years to come" (193).

The organizational structure of this book is superb. By organizing the book by 'contested boundaries' the volume accurately reflects the state of current debates. The volume has a unique and effective balance of depth and breadth. Each essay contributes to the volume's purpose of explicitly addressing the conceptual difficulties that have come to loom large in theorizing gender and sport. The book is appropriate for upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses in philosophy of sport or feminist theory. I think the volume would function best in conjunction with another text, because to fully benefit from what this volume has to offer, I think students would need more background than this volume provides. With 12 essays, the volume is relatively short, and thus, manageable. Though the volume effectively gathers contemporary essays, all of the essays, except for Chapter 6, have been previously published and a number of them have been previously anthologized. While the editors made fine choices, I would have liked to see more original, or at least lesser-known, contributions. Also, since the anthology uniquely includes physical activity in the title, I would have liked to see the connection between sport and physical activity addressed more explicitly. Despite this criticism, the anthology does not currently duplicate another book on the market, due to its purpose and methodological orientation. *Philosophical Perspectives on Gender in Sport and Physical Activity* rivals other excellent anthologies on gender and sport, such as *Gender and Sport: A Reader* edited by Sheila Scraton and Anne Flintoff and published in 2002. *Gender and Sport* beats *Philosophical Perspectives* in only one respect, in that *Gender and Sport* includes a brief introduction to each section which introduces the problems and main claims to be covered. But, this is not a major shortcoming. *Philosophical Perspectives on Gender in Sport and Physical Activity* is firmly dedicated to philosophical methods and inquiry, making it an invaluable resource for philosophers of sport.