

SEVEN FACES OF WOMEN'S SPORT

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SEVEN FACES OF WOMEN'S SPORT

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Jane is originally from New Zealand but is based in Scotland and has two teenage daughters, who are keen young sportswomen.

C. D. Fisher is a Futebol Activist, Scholar and Artist. She is involved in organising around the labour rights of female players and promoting gender justice in sport through movement. She played professional futebol (Brazil, Sweden, USA) and now uses muscle memory, movement and narratives from the pitch to explore the way elite sport perpetuates power relations and identity (con)forming mechanisms. She uses reflexive, experiential research to explore how the commodified version of futebol as we know it is shaping bodies and social relations – and what clues the game can offer us about possibilities for other ways of proposing, experiencing and enacting human relations. While critical of the sport, Fisher remains committed to the great potential of the world's most popular game to create community and collective action, produce subversive and free bodies, and offer us alternatives beyond our current order.

Fisher has published on the gender (re)presentation and embodied resistance of female futebol players in Brazil as a Fulbright Scholar (*Journal of Sport & Society* (2015)). She co-founded the Guerreiras Project, a project promoting gender justice and labour rights through futebol in Brazil. She curated/co-created the 2016 contesting/contexting SPORT Exhibition during the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games. She holds a BA in Biological Anthropology from Harvard University (2004); and an MSc in Gender & Development, from the London School of Economics (2010).

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Marisa Schlenker received her undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin- Madison in political science and Spanish literature, where she was also a member of the university's women's soccer team. Her passion for sport, combined with her interest in development studies, led her to the field of sport for development and subsequently involvement in various organisations. Since 2016, Marisa has been pursuing a master's degree in international administration and conflict management at Konstanz University.

Foreword

I was lucky; although on reflection, luck had very little to do with it. Fortunate might be a better word altogether. Fortunate, when growing up in the 1970s as a boy, to have access to a wide range of sports at school (and some excellent amateur coaches) and good public facilities: open spaces, organised pitches, tennis courts, changing rooms and a sports centre and swimming pool in town. At the time, public policy came under the guidance of The Sports Council whose tag line was 'Sport for All'. Looking back, the message was simple, credible and inclusive.

Decades later, I find myself managing a set of barristers' chambers whose success is mostly a team effort, so it's no surprise that sport metaphors are quite common. After all, both depend on individuals who are very ambitious, focused and able – and sometimes hard to manage. Both compete in environments where tiny margins make huge differences. Moreover, occasionally both put relationships at risk as 'rivals' compete for work, or individuals seek superior positions. However, from my observations, I would suggest that occasionally it makes sense to sacrifice 'winning big' in favour of 'winning right'.

As seasoned coaches and managers will know, there are two truths. First, the best individuals do not always make up the best teams. Second, the cost of achieving short-term aims can often be found in long-term, and perhaps initially unseen, problems. However, a socially cohesive and inclusive team can defuse, or at least constructively handle, future deficits and conflict.

In whatever capacity, you engage with sport in Britain, (or wherever you live today) ask yourself what you are seeing. Is it a continuation or reflection of some utopian idyll of free access for all, perhaps even where taking part really is more important than winning? Or is it eerily bereft of social benefit and rich diversity? Is it organised in the interests of the nation or just for a tiny, often privileged minority? I suspect that if we look beyond the high-profile glamour of 'media sports' to the grass roots, or if we witnessed sports in other countries, we might barely recognise them at all.

One of the main reasons for this is the pursuit of money or at least the perception of the opportunity of riches, at the expense of participation and access; a situation which has come about with the blessing of the agencies and funders supposed to protect grassroots sport and the collusion of sporting bodies and media.

On one level, the chronic underinvestment in school sports over the past 50 years has set a tone; PE now includes such well-known sports as 'dance' and Swedish Longball (who knew?), yet from experience, one wonders how many of our youngsters can even catch a ball by the age of 12. (Note to OFSTED and other educational evaluators, why not set 75% as a target of physical literacy?).

On another level, an executive home now occupies the penalty area of the public football pitch; you have to take out a membership of your local sports centre at the price of a private gym membership and all the classes are fully

booked; there's not a netball club within two hours of where you live ('Sorry Girls'); my daughters will be adults before a space becomes available on the regional athletics programme and; a decent cricket bat will set you back a week's work at the minimum wage.

At the other extreme, perhaps the richest sporting league in the world - the English Premier League - regularly features teams entirely bereft of 'home grown' talent. Is it a surprise that our 'National Sport' has failed to deliver any meaningful success at global or even European events for over 50 years? Can you imagine an Auckland accountant or a Dunedin delivery driver ever saying, 'OK, so we lost to Romania in the Rugby World Cup. No worries, the best players from Japan and France play in the NZ Provincial Cup'.

So, while I admire the driven athletes who push themselves day-in and day-out during winter training, I admire the child (and her parent) who rocks up in an unsponsored tracksuit and at often considerable family expense, one freezing evening in February to train or play sport.

Unfortunately, the economic model for the 'development of sport' in the UK depends on these extremes and while the nation's human sporting capital is invested in the hundreds of thousands of volunteers, clubs, amateur participants and officials, much of its financial sporting capital is devoted to a limited number of sports and a tiny number of athletes and coaches.

In addition, do not necessarily expect any help from the statutory agencies, funders or custodians of the game. Amateur or professional, the sporting individuals are at the whim of bodies whose governance is sometimes so out of touch with reality they could either be accused of being subsidiaries of media companies or be charged with directorial or trustee malfeasance.

At some stage, the whole nation might wake up to the fact that the extraordinary commitment of the families of the Liverpool 96 exposes the only act of collusion between agencies charged with organising, hosting and policing sporting events in the past 30 years. Layer on top of this type of behaviour, the influence of massive media organisations and betting companies, and we would be forgiven to assume that we cannot always believe our eyes in a sporting contest. These are not sports stories. These are crimes on a monumental scale.

This book reinforces my views that sport today is inherently gendered, can restrict access as much as it promotes it and has a dis-functional relationship with money. It is littered with incredible stories of discrimination, elitism, exploitation and mal-administration and yet offers the reader the hope that with improved governance the idea of 'sport for all' might have some credibility for men and women.

We must continue to remind one another of what we are here to do, why what we do is important and what is expected of everyone involved especially when it comes to progress. We may accept that what we do now is informed by our past and that we are merely custodians for those who might follow, but we ignore the present at our peril.

Tim Coulson,
Chambers Director, New Park Court Chambers

Introduction

Jane Dennehy

When I first took up wicketkeeping in the summer holidays of 1975, I knew something special was going to happen. I was a pretty good sprinter, played tennis in the summer and netball in the winter but cricket always seemed to be untouchable. This was probably because it was always played by boys including my older brothers and I was only ever allowed to watch. You can imagine how my heart sang when the neighbourhood team told me I was playing. My appointment had nothing to do with my talent but more to do with the wicket-keeper being away on his family holiday. However, never one to turn down an opportunity I was in. Sadly, what I had not worked out is that when keeping wicket, it pays not to stand up, especially when the batter is showing off his new bat. First ball of the game and the new bat collided with my head. I remember seeing stars then darkness. Yes, I was knocked out. I am not sure there is a name for this unusual feat but I think there should be, and in keeping with ducks, perhaps something bird like.

My story has very little to do with boys excluding girls from sport and more to do with how sport made me feel. It made me feel strong. I did play cricket the next day and even stayed on the team all that summer although not as wicket-keeper. Playing not just cricket but netball and tennis made me feel in control of my body. Catching a ball on the run and passing it to a teammate who is ready for it, is thrilling. It makes me feel proud. However, that pride is not confined to my own experiences.

At the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympics, a British women's bobsleigh team crowd-funded to get to the start line. Their story tells of a badly managed sport governing body who ran out of money leaving them penniless 5 months out from their goal of being on the starting line. They have 'powered by people' on the side of their sled and that gives me a lump in my throat. I connected with them. I also connected with the girls on my junior netball team who recently experienced winning their first league game.

Sport connects people by transcending geopolitical boundaries and that is unique. The frustration that comes with researching, educating and advocating

for sport is equally unique. Rather than connecting with the potential progress the U20 women's football world cup held in Papua New Guinea in 2016 could have delivered, I am left wondering why there are unfinished pitches and the PNG team has not had a training or game since everyone left. Unfortunately for the girls in my junior team who have turned 15, there is no team or league for them to play in which is accessible. The only option is to set one up – a job for the coming months.

The story of women and sport is fraught with global and grassroots challenges. Nevertheless, when these challenges are stripped back they have the same origins. A lack of investment in athletes and facilities, not enough coaches or competitions. However, there is in women's sport an over-abundance of passion, energy and resilience from the people who believe that girls and women should, like boys and men, have access to sport and its mental, physical and social benefits. However, it is evident that emotion and goodwill is not enough to shift the imbalance in gender justice, which exists as the norm in sport. However, before moving onto gender justice, I want to explore the idea of sport and fortunately in my quest for a new perspective, I was re-introduced to philosophy and more specifically the philosophy of sport which as a discipline is developing in some academic circles.

A question. Why do thirty people want to run around passing an awkwardly shaped ball with the aim of trying to get said ball over a line without being stopped? Logic would suggest it would be easier if everyone had a ball and simply walked to the line and put it down on the ground? Similarly, why would someone use all their energy to try and jump over a high metal bar when they could walk around the obstacle? The answer to this conundrum is very easily answered, because that is the sport or the game.

The idea of games, and for the purposes this introduction, more specifically sport, was explored by Bernard Suits in his witty, philosophical story of the grasshopper who is willing to die for his principles. Grasshopper and his friends including the lovable character 'Skepticus' explore the concept of Utopia.

Grasshopper's hypothesis is that in Utopia, there would be no need for any productive labour (work) and all resources would be unlimited. Therefore, all governing, administrative, economic and financial institutions would be redundant. Furthermore, Utopia would be populated by people who have no need of emotions fuelled by scarce resources like jealousy, hatred and power or knowledge as the answer to everything exists. As Grasshopper deconstructs society, he discards all the 'isms' and gender, race and social class are unfathomable classifications. The question that immediately becomes important and is asked by Skepticus is – 'What is left?' And Grasshopper, answers – games.

'For in games we must have obstacles which we can strive to overcome *just so that* we can possess the activity as a whole, namely playing the game. Game playing makes it possible to retain enough effort in Utopia to make life worth living'. Suits goes on further to say that '[...]all instances of organised endeavour, whatever, would, if they continued to exist in Utopia, be sports'. (Suits, 1978, p. 172–176). Moreover, you may well ask, how does Grasshopper deal with the question, 'What about those people who do not like games and sport?'

With some amusement, Grasshopper suggests those who do not like games would talk themselves into finding more meaning in their lives by rejecting the solutions available in Utopia, creating needs and seeking to solve those needs by having to administer the limited resources. We end up full circle back in reality but perhaps a little wiser.

In philosophy, the challenge is not to assign blame but rather to push our thinking and encourage dialogue beyond the boundaries of our own comfort and the predictability of a status quo. The philosophical jab Suits provides is one that challenges us all to take a moment and ponder a different reality, perhaps even a utopian reality. For sport, this could mean free and easy access for all, no gender bias or discrimination, no homophobia or harassment, no nepotism, democratic and transparent representation in all sports governing bodies, unlimited media coverage for all professional sports, equal working conditions for all athletes and unlimited use of facilities anywhere in the world.

Such a vision is not unrealistic. However, to shift the status quo there needs to be wider engagement not only with issues, which are well documented, but also with the action to dis-assemble and re-design the structural and cultural impediments. Ownership of sport rests with the people, the volunteers who coach and administer, the generations of players who laugh, cry and strive together, sometimes to win and sometimes just to reach the line. Design thinking offers sport and the persistent gender inequalities it suffers a useful way of progressing knowledge and its implementation.

Design thinking is an approach which draws on a range of philosophies and processes making the concept not easy to define (Kolko, 2015; Lahey, 2017). However, its application is increasingly being adopted in environments outside its origins of product and technology design. The approach has its core focus on solutions, not a continual identification and re-identification of the same problem. The common focus is on the user and their experience and therefore requires a combination of empathy, curiosity, ideas, research, analysis, experimentation and re-testing. Design thinking can be used to solve complex problems and offers sport generally and more specifically individual sports and organisations an opportunity to re-think women's sport. Design thinking should resonate with sport because the process itself has many of the same principles as team sport; a collection of different skills, a goal and strategy for achieving the goal, a coach or coaches and an acceptance that not every idea will be successful but it will lead onto another idea to try.

Whatever approach is used to pursue solutions and driven more balanced gender equity in sport, acknowledging existing power bases and embracing a re-distribution of power is vital or progress will remain an illusion.

We have identified 4P's in women's sport, which are central to the themes developed throughout this book. The first 'P' is for *profession*. Sport offers professional pathways for athletes and non-athletes in the sector although there is a mixed picture of labour market issues. The second 'P' reflects how sport is a *product*. Whether it is professional women's sport, equipment and clothing design and manufacturing or media, this element of the sector is driven by the forces of commercialism and markets. The third 'P' is the role sport has in many

people's lives, as a *pastime*, a source of recreation. Moreover, the fourth and final 'P' captures the multiple and changing *personal* relationships, we as individuals, have with sport over our lifetime.

This book uses the 4P's to examine seven specific and connected themes, which include governance, nationhood, media, competition, bodies, economics and sport for development. Our collective argument is that not only the themes co-exist but also collide to reinforce inequalities that are reproduced through global and local sport communities.

Media and political figures often assert that progress towards achieving gender parity has advanced. However, circumstances around recent major sports events such as the Women's Football World Cup and Olympic Games suggest otherwise. From controversy around facilities to miniscule commercial sponsorship, from body confidence to physical literacy, from grass roots to elite performance these events reveal ideologies and barriers that mitigate against parity for women's sport remain entrenched.

Capitalism is a major driver in the globalised sport sector. This has contributed to an explosion of sport as a profession, which has a variety of dimensions. An obvious one is the growth of women professional athletes, yet the experiences of being a professional athlete are diverse. Similarly, the number of different professions in sport is also disparate. However, the professions must traverse clashes of culture that encase sport as a product and pastime. For instance, a largely volunteer based administration with inherent structural and cultural gender imbalances; nepotism and internally focused attitudes can perpetuate a lack of diversity, inclusion and progressive governance.

Women's sport as a product and how it is positioned in the media and as a commercial opportunity for sponsorship and funding is becoming more viable and visible. Nevertheless, media driven representations of women athletes, demands for women's sport to compete while being compared with men's sport, and an overall lack of physical, cultural and economic resources hinder development through sport in communities at local, national and international levels.

Women in sport as a subject is somewhat stuck in a research vacuum of media coverage and board representation which means the dialogue and evidence is repetitive and does not encourage wider discussions which is what this book advocates. For many people working in sport, platforms to discuss the complex issues are limited and fragmented and undermine the opportunity for progress.

This book brings together some different perspectives and draws on the author's knowledge and experience of sport from academic, research, athletic, business, law and advocacy perspectives to present a fresh and rigorous discussion of women in sport. Each of the authors has different experiences of sport as individuals, academics and women. We come from different social and geographical backgrounds and yet we all share a common commitment to amplifying hidden voices, illuminating diverse experiences and fighting to ensure that sport is accessible for girls and women to played for fun, to be fit and healthy and where relevant professionally.

Our thesis is that change is slow, but investment in different skills and a widening external focus towards new knowledge and the different voices could direct sustainable, collaborative and strategically relevant change for women's sport.

An informed critical examination of interconnected issues around women and sport in the twenty-first century is absent from current scholarship. This book will provide a collection of separate but connected essays, which explore some of the intersecting issues through the lens of seven faces: nationhood, media, governance, competition, bodies, sport for development and action for development. The collection seeks to amplify the ways in which inequalities are sustained by struggles between dominant social, political and economic power networks. We argue that only by making visible this complex matrix, does it become possible to create agendas for more rapid change to rebalance existing gender inequalities.

The first chapter focuses on the first face of women's sport, media, and Dennehy presents an analysis of the role of media, which she argues, too often gets stuck in narrow debates of coverage. With more than 30 years of data on media coverage, the evidence is clear, the current approach of appealing to media owners sense of fairness is not working. Media exemplifies pluralism and a traditional collection of private and public ownership models of print, radio and broadcast which are being challenged and complemented by the growth of new media technology.

From social media platforms to live streaming, the opportunity to share information and connect with people is incredible. However, who makes the news is a question of gender and recent IOC figures on press accreditation at the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympics makes this point. Of the total 2,853 press accreditations, only 544 were women (19.1%). From the news agencies, Associated Press had 17.1% women, Reuters, 20.4% and Getty 17.6% with Xinhua represented by 30% reporters and 29% photographers who were women. (Anthony Edgar, IOC, LinkedIn Post.)

The breadth of media creates a challenge for researchers who often do not have as easy access to digital content and user statistics when compared to newspapers. This is one issue that needs to be further explored to assess what is fast becoming a new category of coverage. Similarly, with the unfathomable amount of information available on the internet and social media, the time for increased critical thinking and analysis is now.

This chapter uses statistics and stories to explore the relationships between media, sport and gender to demonstrate the value and importance of media knowledge in framing women and sport issues and making those issues relevant to the continually adapting beast that are media.

The second face is explored by Reid who explores nationhood. There are many examples of the different ways in which sport intersects with the idea of nations and related identities and ideologies. The shared sense of belonging to a named national community, the assumed collective experience of sporting triumphs and disasters, and the conflation of sports events with wider social and political ideas, values and myth-histories are some of the ingredients of the

complex matrix of nationhood. There is some merit in asserting it is predominantly through sports events, particularly international occasions, that the nation becomes manifest. Arguably, there are few other occasions when the nation, conceptualised and imagined as a homogenous, unified and depoliticised community becomes real. In the context of major events and international competition, sports provide the terrain where symbolic and ritualised representations of nations are celebrated.

The landscapes of nationhood are however, acutely political. Fundamentally, it is male sports practices and sporting heroes who predominate popular, political and academic discourses of nationhood. In contrast, women – so often the binary ‘other’ in considerations of gender and sport – are overlooked in considerations of the nation’s sporting narratives, excluded from or marginal to the symbolic iconography of the imagined community. Stated simply ‘the reality of nationalism is always gendered’ (Bruce, 2014, p. 32).

This chapter will unravel some of the threads in the matrix of nationhood through which contemporary women’s sport operates. Although not central to all of the contributions in this collection, nationhood is an intriguing point of departure. At the core of the discussion is an exploration of the ways in which media narratives associated with sport, international sports competition and related activities serve to reinforce, sustain and potentially challenge the gendered and gendering narratives of sport. The discussion will challenge taken for granted assumptions that surround the sporting nation as a manifestation of the gendered corporate social body. In so doing it will expose the unnoticed language of shared collective belonging that conceals both the gendered and racialised discourses of the sport – nation – identity complex across local and global contexts.

Governance is the third face and Dennehy discusses how bringing women’s sport into a political economic environment can support the development of more critical and connected thinking and action to dissolve current inequalities. The neoliberal project has been instrumental in limiting the value of sport and especially women’s sport. Throughout the turbulent years of global financial meltdowns and austerity measures, sport has managed to retain its unique position in society. A position where commercial, voluntary, national and global interests sit together comfortably, although as argued in this chapter often too comfortably. Without a recognition that sport generally, and women’s sport specifically is situated in a political economy, it is unlikely that current governance strategies and their implementation in sport by sporting organisations will be fit for purpose.

This chapter will explore why a gender analysis of women’s economic and social position is important for understanding the power relations, which exist and prevent a ‘level playing field’ where girls and women can freely and safely access sport. As a product, women’s sport should be developed and promoted in its own right, so the commercial benefits grow. As a pastime, gender equity in sport and sport facilities should be a public duty and responsibility and as a professional woman athlete, sport should deliver labour rights and protection from exploitation.

The fourth face is bodies with Fisher paying particular attention on the football body. Fisher looks at the women's football pitch, from the spaces and resources around the players to the bodies of players themselves. Material constraints have relocated onto physical bodies and acceptance has been contingent on a representation of the female body, which fits with mainstream western media's version of athletic femininity.

The narrow script cast on the women's football appears to be pushing out other gender expressions and identities through what one might call a 'feminization' of the women's game. Many women are striving tirelessly to achieve this image, but it is a constant struggle as their body types, skin colour, class, gender expression, and sexuality are often at odds with the narrow script.

She examines the context of women's professional football today arguing that using alternative approaches to development of the game like 'the commons' can be critical to resisting the dominant commercialisation and commodification of the elite men's game. She suggests women's football offers an opportunity to re-think football and its role in the professional game and wider society.

Competition is the fifth face discussed. At all levels of sport from grassroots to elite performance, competition is dynamic. For many people, the defined structures of sport provide an opportunity to learn and experience the scarcity (one winner) and challenge (multiple winners) models of sport. For athletes playing team sports, competition brings individuals together to form unique camaraderies, often transcending relationships in other aspects of life. For those athletes playing individual sports, competition can drive and motivate personal performance goals.

Dennehy draws on dimensions of her competition model to explore collective, internal and temporal competition. Drawing on empirical data an exploration of how experiences of competition can change over time will be explored particularly as athletes retire and fully transition into the labour market.

How athletes replace, miss or reinvent the dynamism of competition in their working lives is an important aspect for sporting bodies and the wider labour market to consider. For some athletes applying their knowledge of competition can be useful in the workplace as they recognise the dynamic in different forms. For others the confidence gained from being a competitive athlete can disintegrate as they move from a sporting to a non-sporting sphere.

In terms of employability and dual careers, an examination of competition can inform employers, managers and peers so they can better understand the experiences of athletes in relation to competition. Such knowledge can guide better practices for the benefit of individuals, sport and other organisations.

Sport for development is a broad term and the sixth face, which is explored by Schlenker. With a vast range of programmes and activities which seek to use sport to address different social issues and inequalities, this chapter will begin with a brief outline of sport for development with a specific focus on women and girls.

Using a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis Schlenker builds a picture of this sector as one which is complex and has multiple stakeholders who as she argues do not always work together creating tensions and gaps which could be overcome. The approaches used in gender, sport for development often start with the sports evangelist

In the seventh face, Dennehy returns to the action of governance and explores with rugby, cricket, football and an arts organisation the planning and delivery of strategic plans. She argues that embracing good governance is critical to achieving gender equality in sport. From the boardroom to the playing field, good governance underpins the growth and success of sport. Since the 1970s when tennis challenged the ‘battle of the sexes’ women’s sport has experienced progression and regression in equal measure. The body of knowledge, which can be attributed to the social and cultural challenges of women in sport, continues to grow, but as this chapter argues, the time has come to re-frame the discussion and re-ignite the call for action drawing on ideas and action from sport and the arts.

This chapter includes interviews with individuals from national and international governing bodies, club administrators, athletes, arts organisation and social activists to highlight the personal and professional relationship actors have with sport.

The knowledge to drive structural and cultural change often already exists, but finding it can be difficult when the same people keep being asked the same questions. Looking outside the comfort of personally driven networks and seeking knowledge from academia, business, activism and other sectors like the arts, offers opportunities for collaboration and knowledge transfer.

Who Is This Book For?

This book is grounded in the rigors of academic research and we hope the resources will be of value to researchers, policy makers, students and stakeholders in sport. We recognise that readers have a finite amount of time and this book will be sharing space with other books about women in sport. When we decided to add our knowledge to the body of work, we noticed with excitement the growing number of books that offer readers personal and professional journeys and experiences of athletes and journalists.

Such a positive publishing trend was the catalyst for producing a book, which seeks to go beyond individual stories and experiences. The social, cultural, and economic barriers that prevent sustainable action to increase the access of girls and women continue to persist.

We recognise that sport and more specifically individual sport governing bodies are increasingly confronted with a fierce competition for the attention of children, teenagers and young adults. The opportunity cost for sport governing bodies of continuing ‘business as usual’ is simply too high, in and across sports and countries. That is not least the case in securing future funding from governments, sponsors and media broadcasters.

We hope this book will encourage new thinking to ensure sport can become a multi-generational, lifelong activity, which is inclusive of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, class, geography and sexual orientation. As authors, we accept we cannot address all the issues, nor in some instances in the detail we would like, but our primary intention is to encourage wider critical thinking, new research areas, discussion and of course action.