



Identity, belonging, and community in men's Roller Derby

by Dawn Fletcher, Oxon, UK, Routledge, 147pp., ISBN: 978-1-53614-902-9 (hardback), £120, ISBN: 978-0-367-85680-9 (ebook), £33.29

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The last two chapters deal more with societal issues. Jarvie and Ahrens' chapter refers most of all to Amartya Sen's theoretical frame and focuses on the experience of The Homeless World Cup Foundation, and Street Soccer Scotland, one of its partner organisations, and on their actions for social integration and development of capability. The last chapter analyses the role of sports protest under Donald Trump's presidential administration, proposing two examples. The first one, highly visible, is Colin Kaepernick's well-known case, and his struggle against racism. The second one, less recognised, is New England Patriot's members' refusal to meet the president and their fight against sexism.

This book, which is addressed to a wide range of readers (undergraduate, postgraduate, researchers, practitioners, the general public), has several interesting aspects. Among these, it addresses the relationship between physical activity (sport, physical education) and social justice through both microscopic (individual experience, psychological dimension, educational relationship) and macroscopic (social, societal, cultural, and religious) frames. Furthermore, it proposes a strong interdisciplinary dimension, crucial to address the complexity of the issues analysed (capability, social justice, sport, racism, etc.).

We come to the (few) weaknesses of this book: first, it tries to propose potential strategies for social justice action, without entering a pragmatic dimension, often limiting itself to proposing some examples, analysing them based on some specific theoretical perspective, and then describing their positive effects. Furthermore, none of the chapters focuses on the health dimension, which however is strongly linked to each of the issues analysed, especially that of social justice. But these are certainly weaknesses that do not affect the overall quality and originality of this one-of-a-kind book, which I warmly recommend.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Alessandro Porrovecchio is Associate Professor in Sociology of Health at the Université du Littoral Côte d'Opale. Currently coordinator of ESA (European Sociological Association) Research Network 28 Society & Sport, his fields of interest mainly concern social health inequalities and social justice, and their links with physical activity and education. Further lines of investigation concern the epistemology of interdisciplinary research and the question of reflexivity in research.

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In recent years, significant attention has been given to issues around gender discrimination both in scholarly works and in popular media. Indeed, over the vast span of human history, discrimination,

in general, and gender discrimination, in particular, have hurt countless people, which makes it one of the most ubiquitous problems humanity has faced. The book 'Identity, Belonging, and Community in Men's Roller Derby' (Routledge) by Dawn Fletcher discusses the findings of her meticulously conducted ethnographic study on the male practitioners of a traditionally female sport. This concisely-written (6 chapters, 147 pages) book breathes new life into the ongoing dialogue within leisure studies about gender discrimination and group identity.

First, because scholarly work generally tries to address the most urgent matters first, the focus of the broader discrimination literature has been on clearly disadvantaged groups (e.g., African-American communities in the US). Likewise, the stream of research on gender discrimination has given more attention to discrimination against women and individuals identifying as non-binary. By contrast, Dawn Fletcher tries to break the barriers resulting from gender discrimination by taking a completely different perspective – she delves into discrimination against men choosing to participate in a sport that is traditionally preferred by females. The first two chapters of the book entitled 'Not Just a Girls' Sport' and 'Community and Engagement' focuses on describing this struggle and the value of this community for the participants.

In doing so, Fletcher essentially reminds us that not being in a particularly disadvantaged group does not mean that one will not face discrimination. After all, in a discriminatory environment, one non-standard choice as simple as choosing a certain leisure activity can quickly put anyone into a disadvantaged position. In addition, Fletcher notes that current debates 'focus on the negatives of male-dominated environments, but this research suggests that alternative spaces exist, where it is possible for men to relate to each other differently, and for all genders to engage in mutual support, although it also highlights significant challenges' (p. 140). By doing that, this book builds on and extends the on-going dialogue in the literature regarding the community-building and social support benefits of leisure activities (e.g., Stone, 2018).

Next, in the section entitled 'Image and Identity' Fletcher provides detailed insights regarding the identity schema of this collective, such as the defining characteristics of this group. This bridging chapter prepares the reader for the following two chapters entitled 'Belonging and Inclusivity' and 'Barriers to Belonging', which focus on the identity-related factors playing a role for and against participation in this group. That is, theoretically grounding her work on the identity literature, Fletcher links the literature on gender discrimination in sports and other leisure activities (e.g., Godoy-Pressland, 2014) with the literature on intra-group processes.

The book also goes deep in its examination of the multi-layered nature of social pressure and exclusion. For instance, even in this group of men and non-binary individuals who are engaging in a traditionally female sport, exclusion can occur due to factors like self-efficacy dilemmas (e.g., inclusivity vs. performance). Fletcher explains that 'despite a desire to be inclusive ... certain [higher performing] members are permitted more freedom to behave in ways that alienate others.' (p. 1). Similarly, even this group that has defying social norms at its heart can, at times, yield to social pressures. For instance, roller derby players commonly wear flashy clothing called *boutfit*. However, 'at the 4 Nations Tournament, and the Men's World Cup, male skaters chose to tone down their appearance, and skaters who would normally wear outfits did not ... Female skaters were increasingly under pressure to dress like "serious athletes" ... at high level events, male skaters were also beginning to experience a similar pressure' (p. 60). In other words, Fletcher's findings imply that in order to address discrimination- and exclusion-related issues, leisure studies scholars have to go beyond inter-group processes (e.g., how a group's engagement in a leisure activity is perceived by the public) and delve also into the internal processes of the group.

The contributions we have discussed so far are mainly relevant for research on leisure, gender, and social identity. However, I believe that academics working in other research areas would also benefit from Fletcher's book. For instance, the different perspectives offered by the book provided me with various insights into innovation adoption vs. resistance by consumers and in organisations. Overall, the book is concise and packed with insights from a context that most people would not

encounter. As a result, the content is both novel and well worth readers' time.

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