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Intellectual Praxes and the Politics of Analyzing Sport

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This collection of essays serves as a map of major theoretical conversations used in the interdisciplinary project of analyzing sport in the context of social inequalities. But it is more than a map; reading this journal issue is like savoring the artistry of a jam session among master musicians. And if we consider that these virtuoso scholars are creating an ensemble of riffs, then the dominant chord structure for the collection is the theorization of identities and inequalities inside and outside of sport.

Each of the three lead contributions spotlights a specific theoretical tradition: Marxism, Critical Race Studies, and Poststructuralism. The three traditions can be considered as if they were different musical grooves using the same chord structure, whether blues, straight-ahead jazz, or salsa. Each lead essay is then paired with a response: David Andrews to Alan Bairner, Margaret Carlisle Duncan to Ben Carington, and Mary Louise Adams to Michelle Helstein. The dialogue among the scholars is equivalent to musicians performing their riffs using the musical phrasings of their theoretical tradition.

All the essays interpret the relationship between structures of power, discourse, and individuals in various ways. I discuss how this relationship is conceptualized in the essays by focusing on how the matrix of oppression and the interplay between domination and resistance are framed. Because all of the essays discuss the relationship between scholarship and politics at some point, I close this short essay with my own coda to the masterful jam session: a few remarks on the relationship between scholarship and society in the form of intellectual praxes.

The Intersections of Axes of Stratification

In these essays, the multiple axes of stratification are theorized in relation to identities and inequalities from various vantage points. Axes of stratification include gender, race, sexuality, and socioeconomic class; the relationship among these axes are positioned differently depending on how each particular scholar conceptualizes

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the dynamics among social structures, ideology, and consciousness. One approach situates a single axis of stratification as more central than others. For example, Alan Bairner (2007) makes the distinction between a "materialist perspective" and "identitarian analysis." Whereas he asserts that there are strong ties between the two, he also contends that "the fundamental importance of economics" must be integrated in any "identitarian analysis" (Bairner, p. 32).

In the conclusion of his essay, Bairner discusses Hurricane Katrina to illustrate his point. He notes that African Americans were adversely impacted—yet points out that poor white populations were also devastated. In this passage, Bairner argues that the primacy of class over race is essential. This framework, however, overlooks the possibility of how racialization structures poverty, unlike in Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro's seminal work on income and wealth and Douglas S. Massey and Nancy Denton's influential scholarship on residential segregation and the creation and perpetuation of an underclass (Massey & Denton, 1993; Oliver & Shapiro, 1995).

A second way in which the multiple axes of stratification are discussed in the essays is through the idea of intersectionality. For example, Margaret Carlisle Duncan (2007) departs from Bairner by contending that axes of stratification are intertwined. In her comparison of African American and white perceptions of the ideal female body type, Duncan's work examines how both race and gender create different perceptions and practices related to the body. David Andrews (2007) takes this a step further by arguing that race, gender, class, and sexuality not only interlock but also are mutually constitutive. He writes, "Material experiences of class have to be understood through their relationship with other forms of identity, through which the individual subject's experience is modulated (either positively or negatively)" (Andrews, pp. 42-43).

I concur with Andrews that multiple axes of stratification are not only intersectional but also relational. Moreover, this shifting relationship among the axes of stratification is created through discourse and structures of power. As Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Patricia Hill Collins, and Maxine Baca Zinn have argued in their work on interlocking axes of stratification, it is not enough to simply deploy an additive model of axes of stratification nor to merely discuss women of color (Collins, 1990; Nakano, 1999). Rather, this approach involves exploring the way race, gender, class, and sexuality are constructed and mediated through structures of power, discourse, and individuals, and then discussing how these intersections change, often in relation to each other.

An example of this analysis in the realm of discourse is Katherine M. Jamieson's (2000) article "Reading Nancy Lopez: Decoding Representations of Race, Class, and Sexuality." In this article, Jamieson examines the multiple ways in which the professional golfer Nancy Lopez was constructed as the "ideal, assimilated Mexican woman" (p. 145). Conducting a content analysis of *Sports Illustrated*, *Nuestro*, and *Hispanic* magazines, Jamieson argues that in some cases Lopez's race and femininity were featured in relation to white masculinity in sport. In other instances Lopez's heterosexuality, race, and femininity were constructed in connection with Latino masculinity *vis a vis* her husband. Jamieson's discussion of Lopez shows the mechanism through which these axes of stratification interact in different hierarchies and for the broader goal of reproducing dominant discourses.

Interplay Between Domination and Resistance

A recurring theme in the essays is a shared concern about conceptualizing the dynamic between oppression and contestation. How the essayists define the mechanism of oppression shapes how they frame the relationship between domination and resistance. The first approach emphasizes contestation, as in Margaret Carlisle Duncan's response to Ben Carrington's (2007) essay. Duncan argues that public institutional discourses make subject positions and identities available, and individuals respond by "adopting or negotiating a subjectivity" (Duncan, p. 68). Duncan makes a distinction between identity, subjectivity, and subject position; in doing so she contends that it is possible for individuals to reject or accept a subject position.

In contrast, other essays stress the need for social change but emphasize the overdetermination of dominant structures and ideology. In his essay Alan Bairner argues that although individual class consciousness and life opportunities do not passively reflect economic conditions, they are still primary—shaped by the "economic realities of material existence" (Bairner, p. 31). He recognizes that the discourse and material aspects of class are connected but maintains that socioeconomic conditions are primarily dominant over social constructions of class. Bairner identifies the links between cultural meanings and socioeconomic conditions but argues that the latter are overarching and dictate inequalities.

Whereas Bairner focuses on material conditions as related to discourse but still primary, Michelle Helstein (2007) and David Andrews argue that domination occurs through a continual rearticulation among material conditions, discourse, and individuals. For example, Helstein uses psychoanalysis to examine how material conditions construct desire, how constructed desire reinforces inequality, and how desire is seen as naturalized and the result of individual choices. Similarly, Andrews argues that individual consciousness is shaped by normative discourses that replicate structures of power. Andrews writes, "the practice of identification . . . locates the individual subject within the structures and operations of power" (Andrews, p. 38). Andrews' essay speaks more directly to Pierre Bourdieu by noting how class is shaped by structures, yet he emphasizes how socioeconomic inequalities are constructed and mediated in daily life (Bourdieu, 1992; McCall, 1992). For Andrews, "class is inhabited and experienced." In other words, class status is not only identified by the relationship to the means of production, but it is also lived and practiced. And so individual consciousness and experiences are situated within a context and in relation to material conditions (Andrews, p. 43).

Rather than examining structures of power primarily through social class, Andrews and Helstein discuss domination through the social construction of the individual. This process includes how these subject positions are shaped by social structures that naturalize social inequalities and the perception of these social constructed subjectivities as fixed and static.

Whereas the other approaches emphasized domination, Carrington underlines the possibility of the simultaneity of oppression and contestation. Carrington places more emphasis on the possibility of resistance than Andrews. Arguing that

popular culture and sport have the potential to offer glimpses into the practice of freedom and liberation, Carrington invokes, "a form of committed scholarship that is premised on the attempt to reveal the play of power and the complex articulations of dominant ideologies while simultaneously recognizing the joy, creativity, and moments of resistance and, occasionally, transformation that popular culture and sport provide us with" (Carrington, p. 62). He analyzes how some identity formations are central to political struggles in the context of social processes such as capitalist imperialism and white privilege; in doing so, Carrington asserts that oppression and resistance are concurrent. On the other hand, Helstein carves out space for resistance by situating the construction of the self within the context of social reproduction.

My research, like Carrington's, argues that both domination and resistance exist and relate to each other. In my analysis of working-class Chinese American basketball players, I examine how the material conditions of being working-class men of color versus working-class women of color led to the formation of embodied forms of resistance and rearticulations of these axes of stratification. Drawing from James Scott and Robin Kelley's scholarship, I look at how low-income housing, menial labor, segregated social spaces, and hostile educational conditions create a space in which basketball can be used as tool for generating and expressing oppositional consciousness (Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Kelley, 1994; Scott, 1985, 1990). Specifically, the research explores how the living and working conditions impacted working-class Chinese American women more harshly than middle-class Chinese American and white women while, at the same time, these conditions created the space for working-class Chinese American women to craft community and empowerment through a form of embodied feminism. Rather than a valorization of agency without the structural context of widespread inequalities, the research situates the infrapolitics of counterhegemonic working-class femininities in relationship to the dominant standards of middle-class femininity in Chinatown and the racial and gender segregation in housing, employment, and social milieus (Yep, 2002).

Analyzing the cultural politics of sport includes the interplay of domination and resistance, or what Paul Gilroy calls the "mediating space between agents and structures." (Gilroy, 1991, p. 156–157). As Ben Carrington argues in his essay, cultural practices can help facilitate and give rise to identity formation and, possibly, political change. Scholar Lisa Lowe (1996) contends that cultural practices provide an "alternative site" to "imagine subject, community, and practice in new ways" (p. 96). Through basketball and their bodies, these working-class Chinese American women basketball players explored new "imagined" positions in the face of racial, gendered, and class *de facto* discrimination. Although cultural practices do not necessarily or automatically lead to material transformations, these relatively hidden forms of cultural resistance are significant because they shed light on how certain types of domination are linked to specific forms of contestation.

Intellectual Praxes

The theorization of multiple axes of stratification and the relationship between domination and resistance are essential to the analysis of sport because sport is embedded with power relations—whether the focus of the analysis is the political

economy of sport, the representation of sport, the meanings attached to sport by individuals, or some relationship among these three. With the links between sport and power, it is intriguing that the essays in this issue all address how theorizing identities and inequalities in sport relate to engaging in political action and public debate.

In his article Carrington referred to the 2004 American Sociological Association's (ASA) focus on "public sociologies." As the president-elect of the ASA at that time, Michael Burawoy argued that "public sociology brings sociology into a conversation with publics, understood as people who are themselves involved in conversation....Between the organic public sociologist and a public is a dialogue, a process of mutual education." (Burawoy, 2005, p. 7) For Burawoy, sociology can be a "moral and political force" by offering critiques and analyses of systems of oppression and fostering dialogue about this analysis in a variety of publics (Burawoy, 2005; Burawoy, 2006; Gattone, 2006). Many scholars in this collection engaged in their research in order to interrogate the causes, processes, and effects of social inequalities. For example, Helstein embarked on her research in order to excavate the construction of desire in the corporate and consumer context of power. Mary Louise Adams (2007) envisions the emergence of new discourses to create a more just society.

Within the wide array of poststructuralist and postmodernist literature, much scholarship can be seen as "informing public debate" by analyzing sport through the lens of cultural criticism. Certainly, disentangling the relationship between knowledge and power by analyzing subjugated knowledge and multiple truths can be seen as a political act within the academy (Haraway, 1991). Yet, this raises the question of what are the "publics" in "public" debate. And, what are the links between the academy as a public and other publics in civil society?

Traditionally, public intellectuals have held conversations with the state and particular institutions in civil society, such as education and media. Yet, there is a diverse range of interpretations of what it means to "inform public debate." For some, scholarship and political struggle are integrated. Critiquing the tendency of sport sociologists to remove Marxism "from practice and from political struggle," Alan Bairner ends his piece with a call for "Marxist sociologists to stand up and pronounce publicly on the economic injustices of our age" (Bairner, p. 33). For others, the academy and other public entities should be in conversation, but placing activism within our scholarship is neither possible nor ideal. In his essay "Critical Social Research and Political Intervention: Moralistic Versus Radical Approaches," Ian McDonald (2002) examines the relationship between scholarship and political struggle. For McDonald, radical sociology separates research and political activism into different arenas. In the radical sociology paradigm, scholars provide research and assessments for groups who engage in political intervention. In contrast, moralist sociology integrates activism within the scholarship. Because activists emphasize changing society and working for social justice rather than the scholarly focus of understanding society and creating knowledge, McDonald contends that moralist sociology problematically blurs the lines between research and activism.

This question of the relationship between scholarship and society has been ongoing but is specifically compelling for the community of scholars who examine sport as a contested site of power. Close to 30 years after the establishment of

Ethnic Studies in the United States, Barbara Christian, one of the founders of African American literary criticism, poses a question that resonates with our charge of reflecting on the analysis of sport as a distinct field of inquiry. In the seminal essay, "The Race for Theory," Christian (1990) writes:

For whom are we doing what we are doing when we do literary criticism? It is, I think, the central question today especially for the few of us who have infiltrated the academy enough to be wooed by it. The answer to that question determines what orientation we take in our work, the language we use, the purposes for which it is intended. (p. 343)

To paraphrase Christian, this journal issue creates the opportunity to explore the question: "For whom are we doing what we are doing when we analyze sport as a contested site of power?" In other words, how do we define our praxes as scholars who examine sport as part of our intellectual projects? The late Brazilian educator Paulo Freire defines praxis as continuous dialogue between "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970, p. 36). Freire and Christian's ideas are useful points of departure in charting our identities as scholars. For me, various intellectual praxes in this issue coexist—whether researching for research's sake, informing public debate, creating social action, or crafting some combination of the three. These are neither mutually exclusive nor an exhaustive set of categories with fixed boundaries. My intention is to move into a discussion of the relationship among these many praxes rather than creating a binary of either scholarship or activism. I am intrigued with mapping the various ways people define this relationship in their intellectual work. Drawing from Sau-ling Wong's work in Asian American cultural criticism, these various intellectual praxes are simultaneous (Wong, 1995).

This collection of essays names our intellectual thought and practices in order to imagine and enact new ways of defining the relationship among our theories, our practices, and society in the context of social inequalities. The dynamics among these intellectual praxes are worthy of future journal issues and plenary sessions at conferences. Specifically, this means a sustained exploration into the relationship between intellectual thought and action, how these different praxes relate to each other, how these praxes change over time, why certain types of praxes are more prevalent than others depending on the context, and how the three types are rewarded and/or discouraged in the hierarchical terrain of the academy (Agathangelou & Ling, 2002; Cho, 1997; Minami, 1990; Woo, 1998, 2000).

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