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Sexual Minorities in Sports

Edited by Melanie L. Sartore-Baldwin. Published in 2013 by Lynne Rienner Publishers (171 pp.)

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Sexual Minorities in Sports, a collection of essays edited by Melanie L. Sartore-Baldwin, offers a current take on a timely issue in the sporting world: the stigma and discrimination experienced by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) population. In eight easily accessible chapters, the book is a comprehensive guide that explores many of the issues faced by sexual minorities in sports, ending with practical applications for how sport managers can increase sexual minority diversity within sport organizations.

At less than 200 pages, including all references, *Sexual Minorities in Sports* is inviting to all readers: students, faculty, and practitioners alike. Each chapter begins with a story, mostly detailing a situation faced by an LGBT athlete, making their experiences prominent and real in the minds of readers. These initial narratives were no doubt strategic by the authors. Although many professional and intercollegiate athletes have come out in the last year, these chapters were written long before the current crop of LGBT athletes shared their stories publicly. Further, these stories help illustrate the purpose of the book: how ideologies of sport and gender can lead to the stigmatization, discrimination, and prejudice of sexual minorities in sports.

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for the subject by defining key concepts, including a rationale for the use of “sexual prejudice” instead of the more commonly and colloquially used *homophobia*, before outlining the major sections of the book. The real meat of the book comes from the middle six chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 take on lesbian stigma and gay men in sports, Chapter 4 highlights transsexual and intersex athletes, and Chapter 5 tackles intersectionality by exploring the multiple minority statuses faced by African American LGBT athletes. Chapter 6, the longest section, painstakingly details the history and community building of the Gay Games. Chapter 7 provides a nice mix of theory and research to support practical applications for reducing sexual prejudice in sports. Chapter 8 is a three-page summary of the first seven chapters, ending with a call for more research on sexual minorities in sports and stressing the importance of allies in the field.

Many chapters seamlessly blend the sociological concepts of gender and sexual orientation with a sport management focus. This is done particularly well in “Women and the Lesbian Stigma” (Chapter 2), citing

both quantitative and qualitative research to illustrate the antecedents, consequences, outcomes, and moderators of lesbian stigma. Chapter 7 utilizes social categorization and diversity mindset theories to explain how practitioners can reduce sexual prejudice in the workplace. First, the benefits of sexual orientation diversity are discussed (e.g., enhanced decision-making capabilities and better understanding of the marketplace). These benefits are then linked with empirical evidence that sexual minorities have a positive impact on the workplace. Chapter 7 concludes with practical advice on how to increase the diversity of sexual minorities in sport organizations.

The book, however, is more than just a how-to guide for increasing diversity; it is also an easy-to-read, informative piece on gender issues in sport. Chapter 2, together with Chapters 4 and 5, provide understandable definitions of sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Overall, the book provides a good “Gender 101,” particularly for undergraduates or those new to reading about gender and sexuality issues. In contrast, however, “Men, Masculinities and Sexualities” (Chapter 3), might be for the more experienced reader, delving into “the social ordering of masculinities” (Anderson, McCormack, & Ripley, p. 43) and “complicating understandings of homosexually themed language” (p. 47). This book may be perfect for an undergraduate sport and sexuality/gender course, but the instructor must be ready to help students with the more postmodern theoretical concepts in Chapter 3. It may also be a good supplement for a sport sociology course. In particular, Chapter 4, on the understudied population of transsexual and intersex athletes, and Chapter 5, on race and sexuality, combine multiple sociological issues into a couple of short chapters. Further, Chapter 5 notes the importance of intersectionality between race and sexuality. Black LGBT athletes in the United States face issues of both racial prejudice and sexual prejudice, as “their struggles against underrepresentation, access barriers, and institutionalized bias stem not simply from being black but from being black and LGBT” (Walker, p. 86). The author does a fantastic job of stressing how multiple identities can impact an athlete and calls for more research in this area.

As noted, this book could not be more timely. In the last year, the National Football League drafted its first openly gay player in Michael Sam and the National Basketball Association featured its first gay athlete,

Jason Collins, playing for the Brooklyn Nets. Brittney Griner—starting center for the Phoenix Mercury and the new face of women’s professional basketball—recently posted her engagement to her long-time girlfriend on Twitter and Facebook. These athletes make a strong case for the study of sexual minorities, but can also make the book feel outdated already, despite being only a year old. For example, Griner, an African American woman, has surely challenged the stereotype of black athletes that is discussed in “Taking Account of Race” (Chapter 5). Also, Chapter 1 could not have opened with the story of Gareth Thomas as the “only openly gay male professional athlete who is still currently playing a team sport” (Sartore-Baldwin, p. 2), now that Sam and Collins are in the picture.

However, with a critical eye, readers may realize that issues discussed in this book are not disappearing simply because there are more LGBT athletes who have gone public with their sexuality. It is likely that soon there will also be coaches and administrators going public, and thus bolstering the arguments made throughout the closing chapters. As Griner recently helped lead the Phoenix Mercury to a WNBA championship in September, it is becoming clear that sexual minorities “positively contribute to workplace effectiveness” (Cunningham, p. 123). Moving forward, according to Sartore-Baldwin, “the importance of allies, advocacy, and education cannot be overstated” (p. 133) and getting *Sexual Minorities in Sports* in the hands of students, faculty, and practitioners is but one more way of doing this.

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