

Simone Fullagar, Emma Rich, Adele Pavlidis and Cathy van Ingen (2022) *Transforming Sport and Physical Cultures Through Feminist Knowledges*. Abingdon, Routledge.

ISBN: 978-0-367-76171-4 (hbk); ISBN: 978-0-367-76172-1 (pbk); ISBN: 978-1-003-16579-8 (ebk)

Hardback £96.00, eBook £35.99

Book Review

Dr Jenny Hall, York St John University, United Kingdom

16 December 2021

Transforming Sport and Physical Cultures Through Feminist Knowledges draws on cutting edge research to inspire readers to think through how physical experiences and embodied movement in sport and leisure are gendered in the twenty-first century. This edited volume begins to consolidate the emergent field of Feminist Physical Cultural Studies (FPCS) and in doing so extends knowledge in the broader canon of physical cultural studies. It does so through applying feminist new materialist approaches within a social justice agenda to understand how gender politics and relations are produced and negotiated in physical culture. Feminist new materialism offers a rich approach for exploring posthuman or more-than-human relations, in what Pink (2009) refers to as an emplaced mind-body-environment where gender is conceived as spatial, diverse, vital and fluid. Feminist new materialist approaches aim to extend beyond essentialist fixed binaries (male/female) and biological determinism to understand how gender is embodied, exposing inequalities, as well as how it can be transformative. The book makes an important contribution to PCS by broadening our understanding of how power, identity and difference are gendered in leisure and physical activity and how feminist knowledges can lead to social change.

The volume encompasses a wide milieu of perspectives to question the scope and scale of mobile bodies that attempt to understand how leisure and sporting practices can be i) a force for resistance, contestation and transformation; ii) how gender is embodied, relational and politicised and iii) how addressing inequalities can lead to shifting power relations and offer routes to activism and inclusion. Gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality and dis(ableism) are expressed through a range of power geometries within the leisure and sporting genres of netball, football, cycling, and pregnant physical bodies. A key theme centres on decolonial and postcolonial intersectional approaches for understanding how ethnic and racial physical cultural practices and experiences embody colonial histories that privilege white bodies. Brice and Andrews (Chapter 8) explore how race is erased through postfeminist neoliberal consumption of institutionalised messages of white middle-class female empowerment championed by major sporting organisations. They show how the 2015 U.S. Soccer Federation *SheBelieves* Campaign undermines women's power to resist sexism through postfeminist beliefs that place the onus on the individual (woman) to overcome hardships and barriers (Brice & Andrews, Chapter 8). Although Oxford and Spaaij (Chapter 4) demonstrate how young Colombian women and girls' participation in football is challenging the definition of what is socially acceptable in leisure and sporting pursuits. They show how coloniality of gender is imbued with diverse oppressions, configured in global, as well as local power structures, that privilege boys and call for spaces where women and girls are not subject to masculine-oriented structures. In contrast, Thorpe and Marfell's (Chapter, 2) ethnographic research involved adopting and recognising the importance of Indigenous People's knowledge, ways of thinking, values, attitudes, language, and social life; through co-producing an immersive Kaupapa Māori approach to researching netball in New Zealand. Their study highlights the significance of netball for strengthening Māori tribal

connections and how this helps to celebrate and revitalise cultural traditions, providing hopeful signs for FPCS new materialist research.

Importantly the book explores how immersive methodological autoethnographic and ethnographic approaches offered an opportunity to operationalise ways to investigate the material relationality between gendered objects and humans. Ray's (Chapter 6) autoethnographic account of participating in the Australian Football League (AFL) shows how relations between bodies, actions and discourse are complex, fluid and diverse. He demonstrates how masculinities become privileged and are 'written into existence via the relations which occur between bodies and objects.' Similarly, Barrie, Waitt and Brennan-Horley (Chapter 7) consider the technologically mediated world of road cycling in Australia to understand the affective dimensions of self-tracking and data surveillance through the cycling application Strava. In doing so, Strava is explored as a site of excess producing a range of emotions including shame, anger, pride and pleasure. Importantly spatial boundaries are shown to be expanded beyond the personal becoming the property of global communities that act to configure femininities and masculinities in new ways. For example, through 'broadcasting your ride, you broadcast your body to be judged' that, in some instances, led to the reproduction of masculine cultures of speed, risk and bullying. In contrast, to alleviate these power dynamics and politics, participants actively avoided using data recording technologies to preserve a sense of well-being and self-care.

Finally, the volume also offers key philosophical insights concerning the postgenomic turn and a move away from genetic determinism. Jette, Esmode and Maier (Chapter, 3) theorise how material social, economic, political inequities and stressors can contribute to the health outcomes of unborn fetuses. They challenge how change theory research in public health risks missing how key factors, produced through social, economic and environmental inequalities, can literally get 'under the skin' and contribute to obesity in the mother and child. They go on to argue that this is not necessarily a failing of individual mothers but of institutionalised (often unachievable) social pressures that place the onus on mothers to create healthy environments for their children. Similarly, Coffey (Chapter, 5) theorises how feminist new materialist approaches problematise normative truths about how bodies are constituted. Her analysis considers the impact that socio-normative messages concerning bodily appearance ideals can have through, for example, the practices of dieting. She explores how over a life-course, embodied experiences of bodily appearance change because of personal relationships, increased knowledge and changing leisure activities, which can open up new possibilities.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach this book begins to ground conceptual approaches to Feminist New Materialism through, for example, posthumanist, affective, more-than-human, assemblage and interpellation theories. These theoretical explorations provide openings for designing experimental methodologies and ethnographies that provide practical methods for gathering and interpreting empirical embodied data; thoughtfully weaving a breadth of theory with rich case studies and academic concerns with how gender becomes embodied. This volume begins to offer a framework for academics and postgraduate students to critically think through the gendered body in PCS. Importantly, it advances the emerging discipline of FPCS and signals the need to consider issues of gender, social justice and change in the realm of leisure and sport.

Pink, S. (2009). *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London: SAGE.