

## Introduction: Diversity, equity and inclusion in sport and leisure

Katherine Dashper\* and Thomas Fletcher  
Carnegie Faculty, Leeds Metropolitan University, UK

Corresponding author: [k.dashper@leedsmet.ac.uk](mailto:k.dashper@leedsmet.ac.uk)

When even an Old Etonian Conservative Prime Minister makes public statements condemning racism in British football, as David Cameron did in February 2012, the most sceptical of us can see both the importance of sport in everyday lives, and the inequity of modern sport itself<sup>1</sup>. Despite the mythology of sport bringing people together and encouraging everyone to work together to success, modern sport remains a site of exclusionary practices that operate on a number of levels. Although sports participation is, in some cases at least, becoming more open and meritocratic, at the management level it remains very homogenous; dominated by western, white, middle-aged, able-bodied men. This has implications both for how sport develops and how it is experienced by different participant groups, across all levels.

Within sociology and sports studies the concept of inequality has been widely defined and has been applied to various political ideologies. Inequality, as defined from the right, is inevitable, or is necessary for society to function well. In contrast, from the left, inequality is a social ill and should be eradicated by democratic or revolutionary means. According to Donnelly, 'Sport, by its very nature, produces and reveals inequalities'.<sup>2</sup> Early studies suggested that sport reflected existing inequalities – i.e., it acted as a microcosm of society. However, more critical studies of sport have since revealed that, rather than being a passive mechanism and merely reflecting inequality, sport, via social agents' interactions with sporting spaces, is actively involved in producing, reproducing, sustaining and indeed, acts as a site for resistance.

'In social terms however, sport has often been considered the great social *leveller*' (see Van Slobbe *et al.*, this volume).<sup>3</sup> In fact, sport continues to be cited as an exemplar par excellence of an agent of personal and social change (see Chamberlain, Dacombe, this issue).<sup>4</sup> Numerous studies articulate the possibility of sport acting as a legitimate space for political struggle, resistance and change, and as a modality for 'self-actualization and the reaffirmation of previously abject identities'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the experiences of marginalised groups can act as a resource for explaining contemporary political struggles over what sport means, how it should be played (and by whom), and its place within wider society. However, most people do not engage in sport to achieve certain societal ends. Instead, their participation is more leisure-focused, for enjoyment, health or to spend time with friends and family.<sup>6</sup>

Sport's structural, cultural and institutional inequalities have been well rehearsed.<sup>7</sup> In our own research exploring gender, sexuality and class in equestrian sport, and 'race' and ethnicity in cricket for example, we argue that sport is heavily implicated in the (re)production of inequalities, but it may also offer opportunities for challenge, and possibly transformation (see Watson *et al.*, this volume).<sup>8</sup> However, although that potential is there, the reality of achieving this is limited. As a number of the contributions to this special issue illustrate, the role of sport cannot be considered in isolation from wider social structures and discourses: sport is a representation of these social relations. The challenge facing academics, policy makers and practitioners in sport is leveraging sport's potential for positive action. In other words, we find ourselves revisiting 'old' ground in conceptualising the relationship between *democratisation through sport* and *democratisation of sport*. The problem with this is the lack of evidence pertaining to sport, and 'the absence of an understanding of processes and mechanisms which either produce, or are assumed to produce, particular impacts and outcomes'.<sup>9</sup>

Central to the theoretical framework of this special issue is the argument that the dynamics of cultural identities are contextually contingent; influenced heavily by time and place and the extent to which they are embedded in the culture of their geographic location. They also come to function differently within certain sites and institutions; be it in one's everyday routine or leisure pursuits, such as sport. As Bauman observes, in late modernity identity is fluid, continually negotiated and (re)constructed in the interactions of everyday life.<sup>10</sup> Such identity work is, however, subject to fractures and dissonances, where fluid notions of identity only go so far – choices about sport participation and leisure more generally, for instance, become conflated with hegemonic struggles over what sporting activities are everyday, what are normal, and what are acceptable.<sup>11</sup>

Individuals have some agency to make sense of their own place in the wider networks of society, but all the while they are negotiating their identities and legitimacy within sporting spaces.

The inspiration for this special issue of *Sport in Society* came from the 2012 launch of the 'Institute for Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure' (ISPAL) at Leeds Metropolitan University in the UK. One of the five research centres within ISPAL is the 'Centre for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion' (DEI).<sup>12</sup> The DEI Research Centre brings together researchers with a shared concern for critical social research within the broad areas of sport, physical education, leisure and culture. Currently (Spring 2013) there are 22 researchers within the DEI. Collectively their research practice is underpinned by principles of equity and social justice and reflects a commitment to examining inequities resulting from gender, 'race', sexuality, class, disability, age or religion and their intersections. Some of this work is showcased in contributions to this special issue (see Norman, Watson *et al*). The launch of ISPAL and the DEI provided us with the opportunity to (re)consider pertinent diversity, equity and inclusion issues within sport and leisure.

### **Overview of the special issue**

The 13 essays have been grouped into five broad sections: *Inclusionary politics and active recreation, sport, policy and inclusion, gender and sexuality, 'race' and ethnicity and watching and supporting sport*. Assigning essays to these sections was a difficult task, and we acknowledge that there was scope for cross-categorisation. This is both a strength and weakness of the process and was done purely for clarity, but may underplay the interconnectedness of the issues expressed here. Within this collection there are two 'Research Insight' essays. The purpose of these is to offer an opportunity for early career researchers to showcase their work, and due to their shorter format (4,000-5,000 words) provide an accessible outlet for research dissemination.

### **Section 1: Inclusionary politics and active recreation**

Section 1 begins with Rebecca Watson, Lee Tucker and Scarlett Drury's essay "Can we make a difference? Examining the transformative potential of sport and active recreation". Watson, Tucker and Drury consider if and how sport can be transformative for those involved, both participants and coaches and managers. The authors draw upon three individual case studies of gay-and-lesbian-identified football clubs, grass roots football and young men and dance to argue that research into the transformative potential of sport and active recreation needs to be empirically driven, focusing on change and transformation on a variety of levels: at the macro, sport-wide level; at the meso level, within individual sports clubs and organisations; and, at the level of individual athletes and participants. Following this, in his essay 'The Civilised Skateboarder and the Sports Funding Hegemony', Daniel Turner critically investigates public funding of the alternative and niche sport of skateboarding. He argues that sports funding and policy decisions are based upon a hegemonic conceptualisation of sport (and its benefits), which may be at odds with the ethos of participation in alternative sports. He problematizes the compromises that skateboarding has to make in order to fit within what he terms the 'sports funding hegemony' and questions the implications of this for the identities of skateboarders.

### **Section 2: Sport, Policy and inclusion**

Rod Dacombe opens section 2 with his essay 'Sports clubs and civic inclusion: Rethinking the poverty of association'. Dacombe argues that, despite the position of sports clubs acting as a 'community resource' – for example, a hub for social networks, generating information and promoting trust - has long been acknowledged, sports clubs have been largely neglected in scholarly discussion of civic participation and deprivation. He suggests that sport is marginalised from discussion of policy, and challenges the view of many political scientists who tend to treat the role of sport in the activities of government as an irrelevance. Some of the issues addressed by Dacombe are examined further, from a different perspective, by Martyn Chamberlain's essay 'Sports-based intervention and the problem of youth offending: a diverse enough tool for a diverse society?' Chamberlain questions the evidence-base supporting the efficacy of sports-based interventions for preventing youth crime and re-offending. He calls for more methodologically robust evidence to support the argument that participation in sporting activity can directly lead to a reduction in anti-social and offending behaviour and thus, to change the lives of some young people for the better.

### **Section 3: Gender and sexuality**

The third section of this collection shifts focus to questions of everyday manifestations of gender and sexuality in sport. Alex Channon begins by considering the transformative potential of sex integration within martial arts in his essay 'Enter the discourse: exploring the discursive roots of inclusivity in mixed-sex martial arts'. He contends that the discursive framing of martial arts in contemporary Western culture is significant in the generation and normalisation of mixed-sex inclusivity in these settings. Through an exploration of everyday training practices he explores how sex integration becomes normalised and accepted within this milieu. Deborah Butler continues these themes in her essay 'Not a job for 'girly girls': horseracing, gender and work identities' where she analyses the experiences of female 'lads' in the male-dominated working environment of horse racing. Butler argues that female 'lads' are in a contradictory position: forced to embody masculinity in their everyday working lives, yet denied the status and opportunity to race ride, due to their female bodies. Leanne Norman also centralises female voices in her essay 'The Concepts Underpinning Everyday Gendered Homophobia Based Upon the Experiences of Lesbian Coaches', and in so doing, further advances discussion of everyday inequalities. Her concept of 'everyday gendered homophobia' highlights how gender and sexuality intersect in the experiences of lesbian coaches. In distinguishing this from other forms of homophobia she argues that everyday gendered homophobia is the integration of gendered homophobia into daily situations through practices that initiate and sustain unequal power relations between lesbians and dominant social groups.

### **Section 4: 'Race' and ethnicity**

In the fourth section of this collection we provide three diverse case studies. Marcelo Almeida, Janelle Joseph, Alexandre Palma, Antonio Jorge Soares' essay 'Marketing Strategies Within an African-Brazilian Martial Art' centralises the African-Brazilian martial art of capoeira and examines the ways in which contemporary marketing of capoeira has arguably diluted its cultural authenticity. They contend that the symbols of capoeira, and African-Brazilian culture more generally, that are marketed worldwide are based on the legends of the physical activity's history and origins. These symbols are promoted as 'authentically Brazilian', increasing the value of the capoeira 'product' by demonstrating proximity to a history of struggles for equality and celebrations of multiculturalism in Brazil, when in reality the 'product' is relatively new, relying heavily on invented traditions. Michel van Slobbe, Jeroen Vermeulen and Martijn Koster's essay 'The making of an ethnically diverse management: contested cultural meanings in a Dutch amateur football club' examines pertinent issues of 'race' and ethnicity within the context of the management of a recreational football club in the Netherlands. They trace the evolution of the club's ethnic composition from predominantly white Dutch to becoming more ethnically diverse. They document how changes in the organisational structure and culture of the club led to racially- and culturally-motivated antagonisms resulting in the inveterate and institutionalized 'us' and 'them' dynamic which came to characterise the organizational culture of the club. Next, Souvik Naha provides the first of two 'Research Insights'. In 'Sport Controversy, the Media and Anglo-Indian Cricket Relations: The 1977 'Vaseline Incident' in Retrospect' he problematizes postcolonial Anglo-Indian relations through an interpretation of British and Indian media coverage of the 'Vaseline Incident'. He suggests that the incident had two overarching consequences. Firstly, that it called into question the moral virtue of the England players and managers, specifically John Lever, the England bowler accused of applying Vaseline to the ball; and secondly, that the English cricketing establishment then embarked on an unfounded witch hunt against India captain, Bishan Singh Bedi, who had been a staunch critic of the England team and management throughout the process. Bedi's negativity, he argues, stirred anti-English sentiment amongst the Indian public and media commentators.

### **Section 5: Supporting and watching sport**

In his essay 'Social Inclusion through Football Fandom: Opportunities for Learning-Disabled People' Kris Southby centralises the voices of learning-disabled football fans which have previously been silent within sociological studies of fandom. In so doing he problematizes romanticised views of social inclusion as a simple matter of 'creating routes back into society and giving people a chance to integrate' into their communities. His ethnographic study of learning-disabled football fans suggests that football fandom provides learning-disabled people with an identity and sense of community and belonging beyond being 'disabled', but that the transformative potential of such experiences fall short of the social inclusion characterised by governments. Andy Harvey and Piotrowska Agnieszka also centralise the complexity of football fandom in their essay

'Intolerance and joy, violence and love among male football fans: towards a psychosocial explanation of 'excessive' behaviours'. In their provocative Research Insight, Harvey and Agnieszka suggest that psychoanalytic theory may provide useful tools for understanding the predilection of some football fans for excessive behaviour, ranging from aggression and the use of intolerant language to acts of spontaneous and unrestrained joy and love, include same-sex hugging and kissing, and which make up an important, if under-researched, aspect of fandom. Finally, Matthew Kobach and Robert Potter's essay 'The Role of Mediated Sports Programming on Implicit Racial Stereotypes' provides an innovative methodological approach for understanding how racial stereotypes of athletes become internalised by consumers of sport-related images and media commentaries. They apply a version of the Implicit Association Test (IAT). The IAT asks participants to rapidly pair various stimuli objects and traits and demonstrates how participants rely on associations that have been learned and reinforced through repetitive exposure to media commentaries. Kobach and Potter draw upon cultivation theory and social reality theory to argue that there is a relationship between overall time spent with mediated sports and the participants' notions of athletic ability, as defined by one's 'race'.

To many critical scholars of sport and leisure the issues raised in this Special Issue are nothing new, but the range of case studies and discussions presented here reaffirms the contemporary relevance of the concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion within the fields of sport and leisure. The content of this Special Issue covers a lot of ground, theoretically, empirically and geographically, but inevitably possesses limitations in its scope and trajectory and therefore must, as with all scholarship, be seen as part of a broader discourse. We thank the authors for their contributions and hope their essays spark interest and provoke further discussion.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sparrow, 'David Cameron calls football racism summit'.

<sup>2</sup> Donnelly, 'Approaches to social inequality in the sociology of sport', 221.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Spaaij, 'The social impact of sport'.

<sup>5</sup> Carrington, *Race, sport and politics*, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Spaaij, 'The social impact of sport'.

<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu, 'Sport and social class'; Jarvie, *Sport, racism and ethnicity*; Hargreaves, *Sporting females*; Griffin, *Strong women, deep closets*; Messner, *Taking the field*; Thomas and Smith, *Disability sport and society*; Long and Spracklen, *Sport and challenges to racism*.

<sup>8</sup> Fletcher, "'Aye, but it were wasted on thee'"; Dashper, 'Dressage is full of queens!'; Dashper, 'Together, yet still not equal?'; Fletcher and Spracklen, 'Cricket, drinking and exclusion of British Pakistani Muslims?'

<sup>9</sup> Coalter, *A Wider Social Role for Sport*, 2–3.

<sup>10</sup> Bauman, *Identity*.

<sup>11</sup> Fletcher and Spracklen, 'Cricket, drinking and exclusion of British Pakistani Muslims?'

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/research/centre-for-diversity-equity-and-inclusion.htm>

## References

Bauman, Zygmunt, *Identity*, Cambridge: Polity, 2004.

Bourdieu, Pierre, 'Sport and social class', *Social Science Information*, 17, no. 6 (1978): 819-840.

Carrington, Ben, *Race, sport and politics: The sporting Black diaspora*, London: Sage, 2010.

Coalter, Fred, *A Wider Social Role for Sport: Who's Keeping the Score?* London: Routledge, 2007.

Dashper, Katherine, "'Dressage is full of queens!' Masculinity, sexuality and equestrian sport. *Sociology*, 46, no. 6: 1109-1124, 2012.

Dashper, Katherine, 'Together, yet still not equal? Sex integration in equestrian sport'. *Asia Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, 3, no. 3: 213-225, 2012.

Donnelly, Peter, 'Approaches to social inequality in the sociology of sport'. *Quest*. 48, no. 2 (1996): 221-42.

---

Fletcher, Thomas, "Aye, but it were wasted on thee": Cricket, British Asians, ethnic identities, and the 'magical recovery of community'. *Sociological Research Online*, 16, no. 4: doi: 10.5153/sro.2468, 2011.

Fletcher, Thomas and Karl Spracklen, 'Cricket, drinking and exclusion of British Pakistani Muslims?' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, doi: 10.1080/01419870.2013.790983, 2013.

Griffin, Pat, *Strong women, deep closets: Lesbians and homophobia in sport*, Champaign, Il.: Human Kinetics, 1998.

Hargreaves, Jennifer, *Sporting females: Critical issues in the history and sociology of women's sports*, London: Routledge, 1994.

Jarvie, Grant, (ed.) *Sport, racism and ethnicity*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Long, Jonathan and Spracklen, Karl (eds.) *Sport and challenges to racism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Messner, Michael, *Taking the field: Women, men and sports*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Spaaij, Ramon, 'The social impact of sport: diversities, complexities and contexts'. *Sport in Society*. 12, no. 9 (2009): 1109-1117.

Sparrow, A. , 'David Cameron calls football racism summit'. 2012. Online. Available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/2012/feb/12/football-racism-summit-david-cameron> [Accessed 18/06/13]. +

Thomas, Nigel, and Andy Smith, *Disability sport and society: An introduction*. London: Routledge, 2008.