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Book Review

Sports Criminology: A critical criminology of sports and games

by Nic Groombridge

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Nic Groombridge is well known for his work in sport. His recent book *Sports Criminology*, brings together a critical approach to sport and games, and links it to wider criminological theory. Sport and desistance from crime have a long history, and Groombridge goes to great lengths to detail this relationship. From 19th century concerns with social order and the moral condition of the new urban working classes (Bailey 1978) right through to the establishment of the Wolfenden Committee in 1957, government bodies worldwide have sought to investigate the contribution that sport might make in promoting the general welfare of society.

Groombridge's book takes a more contemporary view, and pitches the concepts of sport, and crime reduction in more modern-day arguments, which works on one hand, but fails to fully interrogate the historical narrative of sport and its relationship to delinquency. He focuses mainly on boxing, yet stretches arguments to motor sports, and football, which is an attempt to link concepts of masculinity to specific sports, and I could not agree more when he poses the question of whether crime prevention projects that use sport should "work more on masculinity and not so much on criminality" (p131).

Chapter seven is interesting, and much can be learnt, particularly surrounding Meek's (2014) work on *Sport in Prison*. Meek identified that of all the sports on offer to inmates, boxing was the most favourable. Groombridge also discusses the use of sport diversionary schemes in the community, schemes such as the international programme *Fight for Peace*; an international initiative that uses combat sports alongside education to reduce offending behaviour among young people deemed at risk of gangs. Some interesting figures from Sampson and Vilella's (2012) evaluation of Fight For Peace in Brazil and London are presented, and Groombridge is right to suggest that figures stating that 85% (n=33) of those that took part in Fight for Peace initiatives said they were less likely to be a member of a gang, are laudable.

Work by Morris et al (2003), which is eloquently discussed by Groombridge, criticises sport as a vehicle to tackle anti-social behaviour, and buttresses seminal works by the likes of Coalter (2007 pp 7-10) when he suggests that: "vague and unexamined claims surrounding sport's efficacy in addressing issues of anti-social behaviour and crime have always underpinned public investment in sport".

Groombridge outlines this very argument on page 130, and this is a wise argument to follow, as McMahon and Belur (2013) also discredit suggestions that sport's glove is a one size fits all approach. Indeed, the glove may have not fitted OJ Simpson, in his infamous trial for the alleged murder of his ex-partner and her male friend, and Groombridge is right to suggest that: "some of the most cutting critiques of violence in sport come from a feminist perspective" (p11). Accordingly, towards the end of chapter seven, Groombridge poses the question: does sport work for women? Notwithstanding, what lacks, is a real acknowledgement of the feminist critiques in relation to sport, and its arguable concomitance to violence against women and girls. There is a small attempt in chapter three, especially surrounding Groombridge's section on Celebrity and Corruption and the Kobe Bryant case ¹, yet surprisingly, there is no mention of more recent U.K based stories such as Ched Evans, however this could be merely down to timing.

The raft of evidence that links sports to violence against women and girls (Messner 1990; 2002; Palmer 2011) is discussed in chapter five, and Groombridge touches upon arguments that relate U.S college athleticism in particular, with violence against women, yet the arguments surrounding masculinity, sport and violence, are not fully interrogated. There is a nod to Connell's (1995) concept of 'hegemonic masculinity'. Nevertheless, the importance of Connell's work (1990; 2008) and its explicable link to masculinity and sport, is left on the bench in Groombridge's book. In the broader church that is masculinities, sport, and violence literature, an engagement with some more theoretical works by the likes of Anderson (2011) Jump (2017) and Matthews and Channon (2017) would have been welcomed.

To surmise, Groombridge suggests that: "sport is not a thing in itself that can cause or cure anything" (p147), and in some respects I see his point. Sport is socially constructed, and the sociologists among us would say so is crime. In this vein, we can see how Groombridge's book has merit, and can be considered as an 'off the shelf' resource when looking to locate how criminology plays ball alongside theorist such as Hirschi (1969) and Sutherland et al (1995).

In conclusion, Groombridge (p155) makes arguments that sport criminology should not be about "carving out specialist areas" within the discipline, "but to say something to, and about criminology more generally". I feel that *Sport Criminology* was successful in achieving the latter, if not a little too much. I am more inclined to agree with Atkinson and Young's (2008) arguments when they talk of theoretical intersections whereby sports criminology is the sociology of masculinities, feminism, and social control. Sport criminology, like any strand of criminology is open to interpretation, and could be classified as an emerging field. Accordingly, Groombridge would be viewed as a contributor, and his book a starting point in the wider debate.

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¹ Kobe Bryant was accused of rape but disputed the victim's claims as consensual

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