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**SPORT PSYCHOLOGY AND THE CULTURAL TURN:
NOTES TOWARD CULTURAL PRAXIS***Tatiana V. Ryba and Handel Kashope Wright***CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Sport¹ psychology as cultural praxis is a critical discourse that emerged as an attempt to broaden the epistemological spectrum of theory and practice in the field (Ryba & Wright, 2005). Much of the knowledge base in sport and exercise psychology was developed by inference from positivistic research and practice with white male athletes. The Western ethnocentric bias inherent in mainstream sport psychology disconnects disenfranchised members of the sporting community, such as women, people of color, and queer individuals, from “their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world” (Smith, 1999, p. 28). Building on interdisciplinary cultural studies as well as the pioneering work of feminist, critical race, and queer scholars of sport, cultural praxis articulates cultural studies scholarship with sport psychological problematics as a way of opening up sport psychological studies to issues of transnational identities, competing notions and sites of belonging, and contested cultures, which are enmeshed with power and ethics and which constitute the pressing actuality of our increasingly complex world. In this essay, we offer an overview of cultural studies and its potential (and necessarily difficult) articulation with sport psychology, which becomes more apparent in subsequent chapters of the book as the authors unearth and interrogate implicit ideological assumptions of our professional practices (inclusive of research, pedagogy, and consulting) in their areas of expertise. We then engage the cultural praxis heuristic model to propose a trajectory of sport psychology that is ethically and politically concerned about marginalized groups.

Sport Psychology and the Cultural Turn

In this essay we trouble the way traditional sport psychology maps its research and practice. We use the cultural studies as praxis model to propose a cultural discourse of sport psychology that deals with

issues of marginalization, representation, and social justice through theory, research, and practice in sport and exercise psychology. Within the proposed framework, practice is conceptualized as merging with cutting-edge theorizing and the politics of difference into cultural praxis. We engage the concept of identity as a thread to show how sport psychology can be a discourse that deals with a more overt and nuanced representation of athletes/exercisers and issues of justice.

Race as a form of identity points to issues of representation in sport psychology and offers an example of how difference has (not) been taken up by traditional researchers. In 1990, Joan Duda and Maria Allison challenged scholars of sport and exercise psychology to give serious consideration to the role of race and ethnicity in producing human behavior. They reasoned that the failure to address cultural identity/identification in sport and exercise not only has moral consequences of diminishing ethnic minorities' experiences but also "leaves the theoretical understanding of the human condition in these contexts biased and distorted at best" (p. 115). Much to the authors' credit, they recognized and pointed to methodological limitations of traditional research designs in the psychological study of culture. While arguing from within the cross-cultural discourse, Duda and Allison asserted that simply adding culture (i.e., the mere adoption of race/ethnicity as a categorical variable) will do very little to advance our understanding of motivation and meaning of sport and exercise among diverse ethnic groups. Rearticulating the human psyche as constituted by historically specific, social, and cultural discourses that produce culturally situated knowledge is central to the cultural turn rhetoric. Hence, we recognize Duda and Allison's call for the interpretive methodological framework, which included addressing cultural identifications at a conceptual level in research, as an early precursor of the turn to cultural theory and methodology in sport psychology.

Since the time of Duda and Allison's article, there has been an increase in cross-cultural research activity in the field. Much of the work was devoted to cultural validation of psychological instruments and identification of cultural similarities/variations in psychological constructs across cultures. Duda and Allison's challenge to begin to incorporate culture at a conceptual level (i.e., contextualizing the results within the cultural specificity of a sociocultural group) was not answered, for the most part, by cross-cultural researchers. Ram, Starek, and Johnson (2004) conducted a content analysis of articles

published in three leading U.S.-based journals—*Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* (1988–2000), *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* (1989–2000), and *The Sport Psychologist* (1987–2000)—and concluded that, of all the articles published, only 15 and 4 papers looked at race/ethnicity and sexuality, respectively, in a conceptual way to inform the results obtained.

The failure of cross-cultural sport psychologists to work with conceptual difficulties of culture observed by Ram et al. is hardly surprising if we consider the philosophical assumptions underpinning cross-cultural research. Cross-cultural psychology was conceived within mainstream psychology and shares its parent discipline's desire for universal truth and procedure-driven inquiry (Moghaddam & Studer, 1997). The following quote from Jaan Valsiner (2004) points to the implications of resting knowledge claims on method: "The result of using methods that superimpose their implicit assumptions upon the data construction is the construction of epistemological 'blind spots'—the method begins to determine the general ways in which researchers think" (p. 11). Indeed, methodological issues are inseparable from ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin our inquiry. Quantitative methods presuppose realist ontology, making it problematic for cross-cultural researchers to incorporate a social constructionist understanding of culture since such arrangement would lead to the study's epistemological antinomy. If, for example, we subscribe to the objective, independent, and single version of reality, conceptualizing culture as a coherent entity that exists outside of us, then our inevitable methodological choice is to study the effect of culture (often based on geographical location and ethnic or linguistic group) on psychological processes and behaviors of sport and exercise participants. Incorporating culture at a conceptual level most likely results in taking up culture as relational process rather than causal entity, as fragmented rather than holistic, and as negotiated and constructed rather than as "given," transmitted through processes of socialization and acculturation (Friedman, 1996). If these lines of reasoning make sense, then the ethical and political ramifications of research practices become apparent. Paraphrasing Weedon (1997), we pose the following questions for reflection. Are queer (or black, female) athletes essentially different from straight (or white, male) athletes (i.e., due to their sexuality, race, or gender)? Or are they socially constituted as different and because of their sociocultural location exhibit behavioral and/or emotional re-

sponses different from those of their normative counterparts?

The turn to cultural theory in social sciences, often associated with the “booming” of cultural studies internationally and especially in the United States since the 1990s (Storey, 1996), has been relatively invisible in sport and exercise psychology. We believe it was due to the pioneering efforts of feminist sport psychologists, notably Dorothy Harris, Carole Oglesby, Diane Gill, and Vikki Krane, that issues of difference, identity, power, meaning, reflexivity, and praxis—all of which are central to cultural studies scholarship—were brought into debates over knowledge production and legitimation as part of the ongoing crisis of representation in sport psychology. Metaphorically, the feminist scholars have paved the way for developing scholars in the field to enter the cultural studies paradigm.² It is testimony to the growing theoretical and political influence of feminist work that many authors in this book demonstrate a pronounced and prolonged engagement with feminist theorizing as a means of centering culture in research and practice of sport psychology.

Continuing the feminist legacy in the field, sport psychology as cultural praxis is a psychological imaginary that is ethically and politically concerned with equity, sociocultural justice, and the representation of the marginalized. The heuristic draws on cultural studies in general and the “cultural studies as praxis” model proposed by Handel Wright in particular (see Ryba & Wright, 2005; Wright, 2001/2002, for in-depth discussion) to broaden the focus on difference to include transnational identities, competing notions and sites of belonging, and contested cultures. Diversifying the field does not merely mean an inclusion of nonwhite subjects in our studies since such an “add on” approach often reasserts the centrality of the hegemonic white (and often male, heterosexual) way of knowing by virtue of “othering.”³ Diversifying the field against the backdrop of the cultural turn means a serious engagement with and reexamination of ontological, epistemological, analytical, and political underpinnings of sport psychological research. We proceed by introducing cultural studies and pointing to its intersection with sport studies, outlining the articulation of sport psychology with cultural studies as praxis and explicating how sport psychology as cultural praxis can and, in fact, is leading to the evolution of a radically expanded and altered psychology of sport.

What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?⁴

Cultural studies is a generic term that can refer variously to the general study of culture, the study of intercultural relations, the study of cultural production and consumption, and a form of cultural critique. The cultural studies discourse that has been taken up by the scholars of sport, particularly in the English-speaking world, is derived from a discourse that had its institutional origins at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham, England, in the 1960s. British cultural studies emerged as an attempt to understand the changing sociopolitical and cultural environment of post-World War II Britain. This attempt to make meaning of the then contemporary culture meant undertaking such projects as studying movements and subcultures as “hippies” and “skin heads” (Clarke, 1973); examining the role of popular culture and the cultural industries in the production of meaning (Hall, 1977; Peters, 1976); retelling history from the perspectives of previously marginalized groups in society (e.g., “herstory,” or history from women’s perspective, and also undertaking “history from below,” or history from the perspective of the working class) (Women’s Studies Group, 1978; CCCS, 1982b); examination and critique of police brutality directed at black and working-class populations (CCCS, 1982a); and critical analysis and theorizing of the phenomenon of Thatcherite Britain (Hall, 1988).

Most accounts of the origin of cultural studies point to a period marked by crises of identity in the social sciences and humanities as the environment of ferment and foment in which the new, interdisciplinary, and indeed anti-disciplinary field of cultural studies could emerge and thrive (Gray & McGuigan, 1993). The narrative is of a distinctly British and singular history, conceived with the seminal work of three founding fathers, Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, and E. P. Thompson, and born in 1964 with the establishment of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (the center that named the new field “cultural studies”). Though it quickly became quite interdisciplinary, English studies and sociology were the first discourses that cultural studies spoke as a toddler. This neat, singular, British academic narrative of origin has been muddied considerably by some figures who have asserted that arguments could be made, for example, for an African (theater), Russian (culturology), African American (black studies), or Appala-

chian (progressive education) origin of cultural studies rather than a white British (English and sociology) origin (Wright, 1995, 1998). Similarly, others have argued for an activist and performative acts origin rather than an academic origin of cultural studies (Davies, 1995). Ioan Davies, for example, has put forward the following alternative narrative of the origin of cultural studies:

Those of us who marched to Aldermaston and back in the 1950s and early 1960s, who helped establish the New Left Club . . . who discovered Jazz with Eric Hobsbawm, who taught evening classes for the Workers' Educational Association, who fought with Fife Socialist League who defended (equally) Tom M'boya, Lenny Bruce, Wole Soyinka, CLR James, Vic Allen are surprised to discover that what we were doing was inventing Cultural Studies. (p. 31)

What we have in Davies's account is an identification of leftist political activism and performative acts rather than academic work and struggle over the crises in the disciplines as the origin of cultural studies. These alternative narratives serve in part to confound cultural studies' purported and ironically "singular geographical and specific racial and cultural (read white, male, working class, British) origin" (Wright, 1995, p. 159). The point of the resulting multiplicity of narratives of the origin and history of cultural studies is not to have readers discern which version is "accurate" but to acknowledge that the history of cultural studies should be conceptualized as being as open-ended and fluid as its discourse and praxis. As some cultural studies theorists have pointed out, we ought not to look to a particular school nor to the emergence of institutionalized cultural studies as a singular, definitive origin, but rather to a messy situation of difficult to pinpoint conjunctures of political activism, performative acts, and intellectual and academic work at various moments and sites (Gilroy, 1991; Wright, 1998).

The CCCS projects displayed a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches since the investigated issues were considered to be more important than the disciplinary constraints placed on what questions one could ask and examine within an individual discipline. Thus, a radical ground-breaking discourse was developed at the CCCS that allowed British intellectuals to undertake progressive activism in an academic setting and to address pressing issues of social justice in and through culture in an interdisciplinary and also

anti-disciplinary manner. Drawing from various disciplines, reading the latest theory, and undertaking theorizing of their own, and generally working for progressive social change, they undertook mainly ethnographic studies to examine how power and privilege operated in culture and society and to give a voice to oppressed and marginalized groups. Hence cultural studies at the CCCS was a project of double articulation of culture in an intellectual and a political sense, where “‘culture’ is simultaneously the ground on which analysis proceeds, the object of study, and the site of political critique and intervention” (Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg, 1992, p. 5).

Once cultural studies was established as a discourse that dealt primarily with class issues, feminist and race theory and politics were used to strongly introduce women and gender issues, and black identity and race issues, and thus intervene in cultural studies itself and change the discourse from within (CCCS, 1982a, b; Women’s Studies Group, 1978). While different cultural studies theorists and activists would emphasize different characteristics or aspects, or even reject certain aspects, it is important to note that “openness” (in terms of theoretical and methodological approaches and in terms of content) is a pivotal characteristic of cultural studies (Gray & McGuigan, 1993). As Stuart Hall (1990) once observed, “cultural studies is not one thing. It has never been one thing” (p. 11). The fact that the “definition, scope, and concerns of cultural studies are . . . constantly differed and differing” (Wright, 1995, p. 158) within various contexts has resulted in the mushrooming development of diverse versions of cultural studies. The various discourses of cultural studies are distinguishable by such factors as geographical location (e.g., British, Canadian, American, African, Nordic, Australian, Asian, etc.), close disciplinary affiliation (e.g., closely related to communications and media studies, English and literary studies, sociology and anthropology, history, etc.) and variations on theory/practice balance (while cultural studies is supposed to involve the blending of theory and practice in praxis, some versions are almost purely theoretical while others maintain strong connections with grassroots activism). In the mid 1980s to early 1990s, the cultural studies’ axis shifted from England to the United States, where “many academic institutions — presses, journals, hiring committees, conferences, university curricula — have created significant investment opportunities in cultural studies” (Nelson et al., 1992, p. 1). The rise of cultural studies in the United States was also associated with the

cultural turn in social sciences, which was in part the incarnation of the growth of such intellectual trends as postmodernism, post-structuralism, and semiotics. Politically, the cultural turn signaled profound social changes taking place outside the academy as well as within and produced in conjunction with global cultural flows.

Given the complexity and diversity of cultural studies, which has moved from England to become a global discourse, it is useful to highlight the characteristics of a cultural studies project that holds the potential to transform the psychology of sport and exercise into a discourse that deals with issues of representation in a more nuanced and politicized way. First, cultural studies is a discourse interested in issues of identity/identification, representation, and the politics of sociocultural diversity. It provides a conceptual framework to engage with a dazzling plurality of difference—racial, sexual, trans-cultural, and intercultural—necessary for understanding contemporary unstable ethnoscaples. Second, cultural studies is a form of praxis. The project is informed by cutting-edge theorizing but also by blending theory with practice and empirical research to engender progressive social change. Third, cultural studies is disputed and contested in terms of its disciplinary origins and its relationship with the disciplines. Of major relevance to our work is that cultural studies has engaged not only principal humanities and social sciences disciplines like English, history, and sociology, but also the more practice-based, applied fields such as education and sport studies. Finally, cultural studies rejects taking up knowledge as neutral and an end in itself and has been a foment home for developing analytical tools to examine ideological, moral, and ethical implications of the Western power-knowledge. With its characteristics as outlined above, therefore, cultural studies emerges as an important discursive framework for instituting and understanding the cultural turn in sport and exercise psychology.

Cultural Studies Intersection with Sport Studies

Originally, sport was not established as a substantial part of academic scholarship. Sport activities were studied primarily within the context of cultural practices by anthropologists and/or historians. Generally subscribing to the arbitrary division between high and low culture, most scholars considered sport to be an unworthy subject for academic pursuit. Ironically, this marginalization was endorsed by both progressive and conservative politics (Blake, 1996).

For the Left, examining sport meant diverting attention from “real” political issues that were at stake. The Right, on the other hand, wanted to perpetuate the assumed unproblematic nature of sport—“a blissful unawareness about the social relations that control sport and other forms of physical activity, a frightening naiveté about the social context and material conditions underlying physical culture” (Sage, 1998, p. 13).

Pioneering sociohistorical texts by C. L. R. James (1963), Tony Mason (1989), and Wray Vamplew (1988), who produced important insights into sport as everyday practices, professional sport in Britain, and the relationship between sport and colonialism; E. P. Thompson (1966), who highlighted the relationship between sport and working-class culture; and Jennifer Hargreaves (1982) and Pierre Bourdieu (1978), who undertook the theorizing of how sport fits in the social structure of modern societies, helped the study of sport to be accepted by traditional disciplines. However, it was a slow process and sport as an object of study remained on the margins of what became its sociocultural foundations (history, sociology, philosophy). Andrew Blake (1996) has observed that

sociologists and historians tended firstly to ignore sport; then, when from mid-1960s they began to consider it, they saw it within these frameworks as either unimportant leisure practices or as harmful economic and ideological aspects of the class system. (p. 14)

Though some figures (e.g., Blake, 1996; John Hargreaves, 1982) have asserted that cultural studies followed the established academic pattern of marginalizing sport, others have argued that this was not the case, that cultural studies did take up sport as a significant socio-cultural phenomenon. As Andrews and Loy (1993) have rightly pointed out, since the days of the CCCS cultural studies has engaged “the study of sport as a cultural practice” (p. 255) in its larger project of taking popular culture seriously. From Birmingham onwards, cultural studies projects have questioned sport practices deconstructively, revealing the constructedness of what had been assumed “natural” and reading actively against the grain of the common sense and taken-for-grantedness of sport as a neutral, apolitical activity.

The cultural studies’ conceptual framework has blended well with critical approaches to sport studies (e.g., feminist, neo-Marxist, queer) because these theoretical approaches share with cultural stud-

ies a number of characteristics—for example, a distrust of the ideological assumptions underpinning the cultural and academic canon and a critique of the regulatory power of the canon to naturalize certain “truths”; a focus on the object of study without close adherence to the constraints of a single and singular discipline; and the centrality of issues of power and production of meaning. Critical scholars of sport, including Jennifer Hargreaves (1994), John Hoberman (1992), Helen Lenskyi (1986), William Morgan (1994), George Sage (1998), and Patricia Vertinsky (1994), for example, injected critical approaches into their fields by undertaking analyses of sport and exercise practices in conjunction with political economy, body politics, ideology, and power relations. These scholars have argued that the study of sport and exercise must be based on an understanding of their relationships with other everyday sociocultural and political issues of contemporary societies. C. L. Cole (1993) put forward a cogent summary of this position when she stressed:

. . . sport is always already embedded in a theoretical/political position since any conceptualization of sport presupposes a relationship between power/knowledge and meaning/politics and is embedded in a theory of power, its operations and mechanisms (typically liberal and/or repressive), and corresponding strategies of resistance and change. (p. 78)

Cole (1993, 1998) went further by pointing to the importance of a social analysis informed by cultural theories, which involves unearthing a cultural practice contingent on a specific historical conjuncture to produce a contextual map of the social formation. She urged the rethinking of the very foundations of sport sociology, asserting centrality of the body in the contextual matrix of social, political, economic, and technological articulations of sport. Thus, cultural studies emphasis on the body and the body practices as sites of popular pleasure, cultural production, and circulation of meanings has arguably been the catalyst in sport studies’ (re)turn to embodied physical culture and the emergence of physical cultural studies.

There is a wide variety of theories of the body and not all of them, of course, are associated with the cultural turn. Nonetheless, the (re)discovery of the body by sport sociologists was triggered by the cultural turn and holds significant implications for the psychological study of sport and exercise. Physical culture scholarship (see Harg-

reaves & Vertinsky, 2007, as a prime example) highlighted the body in motion as cultural interface of personal experiences, meanings, and subjectivities through which broader social, economic, political, and technological contingencies are articulated (Andrews, 2008). The important point here is that an understanding of embodiment as a sociocultural constitution of the body imbued with power, begs for reconceptualization of the psyche as socioculturally constituted and constituting in its articulation with “genetically endowed corporeality.” Allan Ingham (1997; Ingham, Blissmer, & Davidson, 1999) was among the first scholars of sport who attempted to reconcile the Cartesian split of scientific discourses in relation to personality, still hegemonic in sport psychology. Ingham (quoted in Andrews, 2008, p. 53) asserted:

We need to know how social structures and cultures impact our social presentation of our ‘embodied’ selves and how our embodied selves reproduce and transform structures and cultures; how our attitudes towards our bodies relate to our self- and social identities.

Hence, sport sociologists influenced by cultural studies contributed tremendously to our understanding of contemporary sporting cultures as sites of (re)construction of the embodied self. What seems to be missing, however, is the concern with needs and wants of a specific person. “There is no record of suffering, alienation, and distortion as revealed *through* the subjectival first person. . . . The focus on subjectivities and difference . . . thus tends to be apolitical in the sense of *praxis*” (Ingham et al., 1999, p. 239). As a corrective, sport psychologists are in a prime position to reassert emotional and (un)conscious psychic events of the person as they articulate with social structures and cultures. In this sense, sport and exercise psychology as a discourse is not only embedded in power relations but is powerful itself in its ability to frame its object and subject of study. We propose the sport psychology as cultural praxis heuristic as a direction for the field that situates its work in the contextual *glocal*⁵ matrix of contemporary sporting culture to understand its discursive enabling-constraining effects on the *lived* experience of oppression and empowerment. The praxis component of the heuristic works in tandem with analytical components of theory and research to engender social change in the field in general and in everyday lives of specific people in particular.