

Whose Game? Gender and Power in Fantasy Sports,

Rebecca Joyce Kissane, and Sarah Winslow,

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This volume is part of the ‘Sporting’ series of Temple University Press, which focuses on examining the links between sports, culture and history. The series has a global scope and deals with a topic of considerable relevance in the context of Cultural Studies, although sport is to a large extent still under-researched. The authors of this book have a well-established profile in the area of Gender Studies and Cultural Studies. Rebecca Joyce Kissane and Sarah Winslow are both sociologists, focusing on a range of Gender issues through their work. This is their first collaboration, based on the data they gathered through an online survey of Fantasy Sports gamers.

The Introduction to the book showcases the value of personal, lived experience within this research. At least one of the authors, specifically Rebecca Joyce Kissane, has not only been a mere observer of the processes described, but also an active participant in Fantasy Sports gaming. The book is also enhanced with numerous personal anecdotes about the practice of Traditional Fantasy Sports Leagues (TFS) in United States, and indeed many of its conclusions are easily transferable to the European environment. For those who are not familiar with this type of games, TFS computer games present many similarities with some other regulated games with a strong narrative component, such as pen-and-paper role playing games. This hobby allows the players to design, following the established rules of the game, their own virtual team, inspired by real sports teams, using names and profiles of players from

professional leagues in sports such as baseball, (American) football, soccer, etc. The success of each of these ‘virtual managers’ is calculated based on the statistics derived of the performance of the chosen players, and according to the ‘real’ league results day after day. The authors point out how these sports have become more popular as internet-based games. Several virtual platforms simplify the data collection processes, making the experience easier and funnier. These systems also provide social networks functionality and these communities make possible to have conversations about the game in an immediate and engaging way.

The authors analyze the results of their survey according to different quantitative and qualitative results (insights from the gamers). They articulate these results in the form of chapters, each of those dedicated to the exploration of a specific concept related to this form of entertainment. Thus, Kissane and Winslow study TFS as a form of fandom, a practice of cultural production in which audiences establish forms of consumption of great emotional involvement. Compared to other traditional forms of fandom, TFS Leagues are more personalized and allow more diversity. Nevertheless, they cannot be considered entirely gender or race neutral, but rather maintain white and masculine hegemony. The authors have also coined the term *'jock statscularity'* which combines apparently contradictory traits that they classify as ‘masculine’ and embodied ‘one-upmanship, competition, athleticism, control, and aggression—with a more nerdy and boyish masculinity that involves escaping responsibilities and being strategic, tech savvy, rational, and adept with statistics’ (p. 16).

Inevitably, despite the authors' argument that TFS is essentially a male practice, evidence from the relatively low number of female players and their experiences was also incorporated. The analysis of these testimonies serves as an introduction to a discussion of TFS gaming as a system of social relations and participation, highly determined by gender dynamics. The ethnographic focus of the text is, in my opinion, the most interesting aspect of

Kissane and Winslow's study. This combines social criticism with a positive tone since the discussion of these female gamers personal experiences could become an instructional guide about how challenging gender-based exclusion of women within these areas of leisure. At the end of the book the authors delve into the negative consequences of TFS gaming for the individuals involved, in terms of time, attention and emotional burnout.

Kissane and Winslow demonstrate clearly how both real and virtual sports contribute, to the prevalence of male-dominated discourses. Their research offers a mirror of realities within parallel forms of entertainment, real and virtual sport and particularly, practices among male-dominated sport fan communities (p.11).

Perhaps, in this triangulation, between media, gender and representation, fictionality should play a role more important than the one insinuated. The book offer comments on studies on gender representations on games and media, but it doesn't include in the discussion the dissection of fictional purely representational genres such as TV and Films. In this sense, the book made me think of that popular sitcom *The League* (2009-2015) that portrait the relationships among a heterosexual male 'pack' of players. The profile of this group of friends matches the demographics that this study portraits – that is, upper- and middle-class white men. While not commented through the book, this show could be a good example of many of the cross-gender dynamics that are suggested – also discussed through the social context of US post 2000s realities. In fact, a recurring plotline Through narrative derives from the conflicts caused when women, either wives, former (female) partners or casual hook-ups invade the space of this community and challenges implicitly or explicitly its male hegemony. These narratives aren't that different from many of the anecdotes collected in the Kissane and Winslow's study: 'Physically, nothing is precluding women from being competitive, interested

and knowledgeable of sports, aggressive, strategic, tech savvy, rational, adept with statistics, interested in escaping adult responsibilities, and attracted to experiencing a childlike play. Despite this, women still find that they are not treated and perceived as men are and, instead, suffer much of the same fate as women athletes or sports fans (p.99)'In that sense, the book accidentally points out how limits between fictional representation and our social reality are easily blurred, as far as genders and regulated fantasies –thoset we call 'games'– are concerned.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References

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