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Editors

# The Palgrave Handbook of Feminism and Sport, Leisure and Physical Education

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# Judith Butler, Feminism, and the Sociology of Sport

Kristi Tredway

Judith Butler, a feminist philosopher and the leading cultural theorist of gender, has had an enormous influence on the field of sociology of sport. Much of the scholarship has come directly from Butler's three books on gender: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990/2006), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993/2011) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), which have garnered critique, reworking and application to sports by sport sociologists. Additionally, Butler wrote one article specific to sport, 'Athletic Genders: Hyperbolic Instance and/or the Overcoming of Sexual Binarism', published in the now defunct *Stanford Humanities Review* (1998).

The concepts and theoretical frameworks that Butler has provided us include an examination of the discursive creation and maintenance of gender as a category, the performativity of gender and sexuality, the signification of the sexed body, and the complex 'grid of cultural intelligibility' (2006, p. 208) that the heterosexual matrix illuminates. Debunking the discursive creation of gender, and that gender is material in some way, Butler theorized gender as performed. That is, gender is repeated over and over and again until it becomes part of who one is and how one presents oneself to the world. Thus, not only is gender *not* a signifier of sex, gender is performed by a person and can actually signify many things, and also nothing. Gender, as a concept, is bound to the concept of sex through discursive means where one seems to nod to the other. This signification of gender and sex leads to societal assumptions that a

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person with a specific sex coupled with a specific gender will be either heterosexual or homosexual, depending on the significations. Specifically, in the sociology of sport literature, Butler's theories have been most often used to more fully understand the experiences of female athletes, men and masculinity, lesbian athletes, and transgender and intersex athletes.

This chapter is organized in such a way as to explain Butler's theories in regard to gender, sex and the heterosexual matrix as they have been applied to sport. It begins with an explanation of how gender has been discursively constructed, according to Butler. This is related to, and will lead into, an analysis of Butler's theory of gender performativity. Following these two analyses of gender is a consideration of the signification of the sexed body. Finally, and to wrap up this study on Butler's influence on the field of sociology of sport, the heterosexual matrix is discussed. In this way, this chapter flows with Butler's building of her argument on gender: if gender is discursively constructed as well as being performed rather than hard-wired into the body, and if the discursively created and performed gender is what signifies the sex of the body, the 'grid of cultural intelligibility' (2006, p. 208) falls apart for lack of any tangible, material substance.

## The Discursive Construction of Gender

When *Gender Trouble* (1990) was published, it brought 'into being the disputatious troubling dynamic it announces by interrogating the stability and very existence of the category of woman which feminist politics has organized itself around' (McRobbie, 2005, p. 68). Feminism was, indeed, ripe for a shake-up. Modernity and second-wave feminism was on the way out, but there were no indicators of what would replace them. In explaining the emergence of Butler's work, McRobbie claims that Butler's work made sense to young lesbians and young feminist scholars (2005). *Gender Trouble* (1990) provided a foundational work from which to build the next generation of feminist theory. There were, and still are, critics of Butler's work; however, *Gender Trouble* has remained a pioneering text for feminist theory. Indeed, as McRobbie explains:

For some critics, ... Butler's work suggests a narrower, perhaps individualistic politics. Others, including myself, have seen the politics of destabilising norms and deconstructing power by interrogating its foundations, more positively. This can be understood as a critical part of the process of extending radical democracy by continually examining the claims political groups, in this case feminism, make, in order to represent their subjects, in this case women. (McRobbie, 2005, p. 69)

Butler's work has provided a resource for understanding women more broadly than only the predominantly white, middle-class women that second-wave feminists are accused of focusing upon. It also provides a politics across various sex and gender divisions.

To Butler, gender has been and continues to be discursively created. That is, gender is continually made and remade through the ways that we speak about it in our society. In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997a), Judith Butler makes the claim that identities do not exist until the speech act calls them forward.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, one 'must utter the term in order to perform the circumscription of its usage' (Butler, 1997b, p. 104). The example she uses is homosexuality in the US military. Since the origins of the US military, there has been homosexuality within the ranks; however, it was not "homosexuality" then, merely the act of having sex. Attempts to punish and contain homosexuality within the military did not exist until the issue of homosexuality in the military had been named, labelled. As Butler explains:

The regulations [against homosexuality] bring the term into public discourse, rhetorically enunciating the term, performing the circumscription by which—and through which—the term becomes speakable ... The regulation must conjure one who defines him or herself as a homosexual in order to make plain that no such self-definition is permissible within the military. (1997b, p. 104)

Prior to being named, homosexuality technically did not exist because it had not yet been called forth. The same can be said of lesbians in women's sports, especially women's tennis. It was not until the bogeyman of "lesbian" was discursively created that female athletes began to be policed for supposed sexual indiscretions. Once "lesbian" was in the discourse and, probably, the stereotypical images the term conjures, women's sports became the grounds where the hunt took place (see, for example, Cahn, 2015, pp. 164–184).

Another point to be made is that gender being discursively created does not mean that gender is just a word to be used in language. Indeed, Butler questions the limits of discursively bringing something into being when she asks, 'If I persisted in this notion that bodies were in some way constructed, perhaps I really thought that words alone had the power to craft bodies from their own linguistic substance?' (1993, p. x). To this conundrum, Håkan Larsson exclaims that, 'my reply to this irony would be that, yes, words have the power to craft bodies—but not words alone! What supports words in this formative process, however, is not matter but practice, of which people using words is only one aspect' (2015, p. 9). What happens, though, if we choose to disregard gender, since we now know it is a discursively created social construct? Butler notes that:

The tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction ‘compels’ our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (1990, p. 190)

Indeed, as Butler notes, ‘we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right’ (1990, p. 140). Thus, words are created but, from their creation, they take on social meanings that further define the meanings of the words.

## The Performativity of Gender

For Butler, identities are not only discursively created; they are performed. The repetitive performance brings identities—Butler especially focused on gender performance—into being. Furthermore, Butler is describing how the identity of sex is produced, consumed, represented and regulated.

Performativity is probably Butler’s best-known concept. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler described gender performativity as ‘the effect of gender ... must be understood as the mundane ways in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self’ (1990, p. 179). In addition, the feminist sport theorist Jayne Caudwell claims that gender performativity also includes how ‘the body articulates gender via size, shape and bulk, and gesture’ (Caudwell, 2006, p. 146), what Butler would refer to as one’s ‘corporeal style’ (Butler, 1990, p. 139). Indeed, ‘One must not simply act “feminine”, but look “feminine” too’ (Evans, 2006, p. 550). Even if the corporeal style does not match the performance, Butler notes that ‘bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled’ (1993, p. 2). This serves to further destabilize the concept of gender, as well as sex and sexuality.

In 1993, with *Bodies That Matter*, Butler clarified that gender performativity was not just a type of acting, so to speak. Indeed, she stated, ‘I never did think that gender was like clothes, or that clothes make the woman’ (1993, p. 231).

In Butler’s conceptualization, gender performativity creates the concept of gender because gender, itself, has no origin. It is, to Butler, more simply a concept, a discursive and social construction, that is performed but has no material substance. As Butler states:

Because there is neither an essence that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals

its genesis; the tacit, collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend to not agreeing to believe in them; the construction ‘compels’ our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (1990, p. 140)

Furthermore, ‘feminist postmodernism does not eliminate the subject or the self but finds it in operation as a series of bit parts in the concrete field of social relations. Politics must therefore imply subjectivities in process, interacting and debating’ (McRobbie, 1994, p. 69). Indeed, Stuart Hall is agreeing with Judith Butler when he refers to ‘becoming rather than being’ (McRobbie, 1994, p. 69), performativity versus a fixed subjectivity.

This discursive construction of gender, along with the performativity of gender, operates to destabilize the notion of gender. Barbara Ravel and Genevieve Rail explain:

By destabilizing the binary categories of sex, gender and sexuality, queer theory—and Butler’s, in particular, as found in *Gender Trouble* (1990)—questions the ‘naturalness’ of these categories. In this respect, queer theory stresses the notion of ‘performativity’ in that sex, gender and sexuality are not stable or ‘natural,’ rather they are the results of a repeated performance of a given sex, gender or sexuality. (2007, p. 405)

Thus, the assumption that gender, and Ravel and Rail include sex and sexuality as well, is natural (rather than discursively constructed) and therefore devoid of space for challenges gets called into question.

Butler’s theory of performativity is far more complex than it is usually given credit for. McRobbie claims that ‘the great misperception is that it suggests a kind of voluntarism and unconstrained agency, as though, if gender is an enactment, a crafting on or stylisation of the body according to certain conventions, then gender is also a kind of choice, so that social transformation of gender relations would rest on a simple act of self re-designation’ (2005, p. 83). Furthermore, McRobbie explains that: ‘Butler adamantly wants to part company with those who endorse the existence of individual agents, endowed with some capacity to bring about change in the gender system, as this is to ignore the way in which the effects of power define the contours of possibility for opposition or transgression’ (2005, p. 87). Although it would be nice if gender equality could come about so simply, this just is not true and does not give proper value to the myriad power structures that are in place to keep the gender binary in place. Indeed, Butler describes her theory of performativity as ‘a process of coercion, a forceful shaping of the body along

the narrow constraints of gender difference' (McRobbie, 2005, p. 84). This force is coming from within and from various societal power structures. And the shaping is done over and over again. Indeed, identification is not 'the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names but rather as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains' (Butler, 1993, p. 2). Furthermore, this refers back to the "heterosexual matrix". McRobbie explains that 'we see the revision of performativity so that it becomes a series of practices which mark bodies according to a grid of intelligibility in such a way that the body itself becomes a familiar fiction; it becomes known, a formal entity on the basis that other characteristics and possibilities are negated' (2005, p. 88).

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler makes the claim that gender, being understood as feminine or masculine, is a social and cultural construction. According to Butler, gender is what allows sex—being male or female—to signify. Indeed, Butler makes a call for us to "trouble" gender through our performativity of gender. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler backtracks from this call. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), gender performance could easily be seen as an act or a performance that one could just do at any moment. It seemed very individualistically concerned. Thus, in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler clarified that gender performance is "reiterated" over and over again, until it is hardly a conscious performance. To clarify further, Butler sees gender performance as acting our gendered selves through the performing of established gendered practices (we are often unknowingly taking part in these roles through our actions). The performance of gender is thus the faithful reproduction of traditional gender roles and identities.

Gender performativity, however, is more political. To Butler, gender performativity is the more conscious acting/production/reproduction of gender roles with the intent of producing certain effects. This could be either the conscious decision to perform our gendered identities in traditional ways, or the conscious decision to perform our gender in non-traditional or progressive ways. It is in this sense that one could argue that gender performativity is more political, since it involves conscious decision making (to either conform to or oppose traditional gender identities) rather than the faithful mirroring of gender performance.

Women's athleticism has always been a site for social discomfort as women claim the right to sporting gender performativity, those 'attributes long defined as masculine—skill, strength, speed, physical dominance, uninhibited use of space and motion' (Cahn, 2015, p. 279), previously reserved only for men. Katharina Lindner, in her discussion of cinematic representations of female athletes, notes that Judith Butler 'suggests that women's pursuit of

sports constitutes an often public staging and contestation of gender ideals as normative assumptions about the “natural” female body and its physiology are challenged and undermined’ (2011, p. 322). However, perceptions of women’s athletic gender performativity can evolve over time. Lindner, in describing Martina Navratilova, asserts that:

Bodies, such as tennis player Martina Navratilova’s, that were once considered monstrously masculine have, over time, been integrated into notions of intelligible, acceptable, and even desirable female physiology. Women’s sports can thus be seen as a space in which ‘our ordinary sense of what constitutes a gendered body is itself dramatically contested and transformed.’ ... Female athleticism has the potential to destabilise and ‘trouble’ normative and binary understandings of gender. (2011, p. 322; quoting Butler, 1998, p. 3)

Indeed, even as Butler has noted, ‘gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follows; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts’ (1990, p. 140).

Laura Grindstaff and Emily West, on the other hand, use Butler’s formulation to understand the performances of masculinity among male cheerleaders (2006). Male cheerleaders have a range of acceptable performances to choose from; however, the performance of masculinity must be convincing enough for each in order to thwart perceptions of homosexuality. Grindstaff and West note that for women, there is only one acceptable performance of femininity in cheerleading, yet it is more dissociated from homosexuality than among male cheerleaders.

## The Signification of Gender on the Sexed Body

In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler responds to the critiques against gender performativity that she laid out in *Gender Trouble* (1990). Not only is gender performativity not simply acting or wearing specific clothes, it is reiterated over and over and actually marks the physical body. Indeed, Butler explains that ‘performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body’ (1999b, p. 94). Going further, Amanda Roth and Susan Basow explain that, according to Butler,

Gender is not a given, nor something inscribed upon us. We perform gender by *doing* femininity and masculinity. In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993), Butler went further to claim that sex is also a constructed

aspect of bodies. She claimed that ‘the regulatory norms of “sex” work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies’, and by performative, she meant ‘reiterative and citational practice’ (Butler, 1993, p. 2). Thus, sexed bodies are constructed through the activities we *do* continually, often without conscious thought. Butler’s point perhaps can be extended to the strength differences, which liberal feminists sometimes accept as natural and which radicals see as being used ideologically to maintain male dominance. According to Butler’s view of bodies as constructed, strength differences are constructed as bodies *do* femininity and masculinity. That is, *doing* masculinity builds strength, whereas *doing* femininity builds weakness. (Roth & Basow, 2004, pp. 246–247)

This description of the inscription of gender onto the body is reminiscent of Iris Marion Young’s conceptualization of “throwing like a girl” where girls throw a ball worse than boys—less distance, less power and less accuracy—because girls have been trained to perform femininity (Young, 1980). That is, by performing femininity, girls maintain their limbs close to themselves, so they do not step into the throw or extend their arms outward towards the target, which leads to less power. However, according to Butler, ‘assuming for a moment the stability of a binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of “men” will accrue exclusively to the body of males or that “women” will interpret only female bodies’ (1990, p. 6).

Critiques of Butler, apart from specific critiques about the concepts she puts forward, mainly focus on the perception that she is dismantling feminism. Butler questioned the term “woman”, and pointed out how “woman” is linked with other facets of identities and cannot be its own entity. Indeed, Butler claims that, ‘being called a “girl” from the inception of existence is a way in which the girl becomes transitively “girded” over time’ (1999a, p. 120). Butler was pointing out with her critiques of feminism, even though she is a self-described feminist, that feminist politics had been built for a group of people whose identities have been socially constructed and, furthermore, the discourse of feminism was keeping the concept of “woman” socially constructed. Are women, then, maintaining our own subjugation? The esteemed cultural theorist Stuart Hall provides an example of the discursive creation of identities by relying on Butler’s understanding of the creation of sex. Hall states:

In *Gender Trouble* (1990) and more especially in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Judith Butler has taken up, through her concern with the ‘discursive limits of “sex”’ and with the politics of feminism, the complex transactions between the subject, the body and identity ... Adopting the position that the subject is discursively constructed and that there is no subject before or outside the Law, Butler develops a rigorously argued case that ‘sex is, from the start, normative ...

In this sense, then, sex not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces (through the repetition or iteration of a norm which is without origin) the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls ... “Sex” is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time.’ (Hall, 1996, p. 14; quoting Butler, 1993, p. 1)

In popular understandings, a person’s gender performance tells others the particular sex the person has, thus, as Butler would explain, the reinscription of both gender and sex causes both to be produced and to become material as conjoined over time.

The noted sport historian Patricia Vertinsky explains further the gendered distinctions of the sexed body. She states that:

Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* has fully articulated the performative notion of gender, i.e. gender as something we do rather than something we are, hence a social relation practiced in social interactions. Gender distinctions, then, as dichotomous categories need to be seen as perpetuated, maintained or challenged through social mechanisms and social constructions. By examining how power inscribes itself onto bodies (and in turn provokes forms of resistance and instability), one can explore how fitness, health and sporting activities become attached to male and female bodies through the process of medicalization and its imbrication within complex sets of health and fitness narratives at particular moments of time. (1999, p. 5)

Indeed, gendered performances sex the body in particular ways. The body, too, is not just our flesh and bones. Fiona Gill, in her study of female rugby players, speaks of the cultural body rather than the physical body that may first come to mind. Contextualizing the concept of gender and bodies, Gill states:

Social context defines gender as being primarily embodied, inscribing meaning and uses onto the bodies of individuals. Our gender identity is limited, not by biology or the ‘natural’ body but by the ‘cultural’ body—the social interpretations of our bodies ... Gender identities are not defined by our physicality, but by the interpretations and expectations of our embodiment ... Thus the performance of a gender identity reflects both an internalized expectation on the part of the performer (this is how I should act), and the creation of an externalized norm (this is how all women are). (2007, p. 417; quoting Butler, 1987, p. 29)

Again, it is made clear how gender performativity informs and becomes a part of the sexed body.

Ian Ritchie explains the discursive construction of gender further when he uses Butler's theorizing to explain his understanding of the discursive construction of sex. Ritchie says:

For Butler, the norm of 'sex' and sex dichotomization is necessitated by the heterosexual imperative that has historically impelled the norm of the (hetero)sex(ual) binary as part of a humanistic process whereby a coherent self has been sought after in the first place. The subject, then, does not simply take on the gendered accoutrements of sex, as classical social constructionists accounts would have it; rather, the subject 'is forced by virtue of having gone through such a process of assuming a sex' (Butler, 1993, p. 3). Butler insists that, instead of viewing gender as a cultural manifestation of sex, we should think gender to designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as prediscursive. (Ritchie, 2003, pp. 82–83; quoting Butler, 1990, p. 7)

Indeed, the cultural implications of sex and gender are so entrenched that there is seemingly no space in society for intersex children, and later adults, so much so that, as Ritchie explains, 'those children that do not fit the imperative have literally and symbolically been transformed' (p. 83). Through surgery, the discursively constructed binary system remains unscathed.

The concept of power that Vertinsky mentions keeps appearing throughout this chapter. Power could be visible in the answer to the question that Håkan Larsson, Karin Redelius, and Birgitta Fagrell pose: 'What kind of movement is sensed as appropriate or inappropriate in a certain situation?' (2011, p. 74). This question follows from Butler's understanding of Pierre Bourdieu's social theories, specifically, 'the embodiment of "social rules" and how these rules constitute a bodily "knowingness" ... or a practical sense of what is appropriate or not in a certain situation' (Larsson, Redelius, & Fagrell, 2011, p. 74; quoting Butler, 1997b, p. 152).

Feminist sport scholars Debra Shogan and Judy Davidson, in their analysis of the Gay Games, state that men in drag and women performing femininity are in a position to work against the socially constructed connection between gender and sex:

Men in drag and conventionally feminine women *are* in a position to subvert the perceived naturalness of masculine men and create new ways of understanding and participating in sport because the 'artifice of the performance can be read as artifice' ... Since in most contexts neither men in drag nor feminine women are perceived to be able to perform sport skills, when they exaggerate the masculinity of men in sport, it is possible to disrupt the assumption that masculinity 'naturally' coheres to male bodies. (1999, p. 96; quoting Butler, 1993, p. 129)

In the context of the Gay Games, men in drag and feminine women would be those going against the stereotype of gay and lesbian athleticism, the toned but slight gay man and the aggressive, powerful lesbian.

In regard to those female athletes accused of not being women, it is their gender performativity that leads to this assumption. Caster Semenya is one such athlete who was subjected to medical testing to “prove” that she was a woman. Jules Boykoff and Matthew Yasuoka, in describing Semenya, explain the meaning of the “gender verification” test:

In a sense, the test became the signifier and Semenya became its signified. The relationship between signifiers and signifieds is at the core of Butler’s discussion of the signifiers ‘woman’ and ‘female’. Butler writes, that woman and female ‘gain their troubled significations only as relational terms’ ... The problem in the case of Semenya is the relational interaction between ‘gender’ and ‘sex’. Semenya’s gender is ‘woman’, as that is how she chooses to live her life and self-actualize to society. Her sex is what the IOC [International Olympic Committee] and other athletic bodies are trying to verify. Therein lies the discursive slippage: the sports-organizing bodies’ insistence on calling the process ‘gender verification’. This links to the media’s tendency to engage in ‘gender marking’—labelling events as ‘women’s soccer’, ‘women’s basketball’, and so on. Yet, the dividing characteristic is not the gender of the athletes, but their sex. It is not a separation between men and women, but male and females. (Boykoff & Yasuoka, 2015, p. 227; quoting Butler, 1990, p. ix)

The term “gender verification” may be accurate in that, according to Butler, a person’s gender tells the viewer what the person’s sex is. It is Semenya’s performativity of a masculine gender that provoked others into medically examining her to verify her sex. Indeed, ‘it is here that Semenya finds herself: a person caught in the linguistic struggle between gender, sex, and societal expectations’ (Boykoff & Yasuoka, 2015, p. 228).

Interesting, too, is the gendering and sexualizing of sporting spaces. A focus on men has created an atmosphere where not only is sport seen as a male sphere, but sporting spaces as well. Space itself is both gendered and sexualized through being male and heteronormative creations. Indeed, Caudwell notes that, with regard to soccer, ‘the idea that women and girl players are invading male sports terrain must be understood in relation to dominant practices that gender and sexualise football spaces as heteronormative’ (2007, pp. 184–185). To counter this, Caudwell has theorized about “dykespaces”, a subversion of a gendered and sexualized space. To Caudwell, dykespaces ‘reflect[] how space can be infused with lesbianism’ (2002, p. 24). Furthermore, ‘the idea that dykespaces can be created fits a queer political analysis of sexuality and space that is an “in your face” approach to challenging notions

of [hetero]sexuality' (2002, pp. 24–25). This subversion and transformation of space represents moments when regulatory practices used to protect heterosexuality and reinforce heteronormativity are neutralized. As feminist sport theorist Sammi King states, Butler 'suggests that while it is not possible to escape heteronormativity, it is possible to subvert it. Indeed, instability is constitutive of such power relations: Heterosexuality is not a discrete, self-evident fact but a truth effect that stems from the refusal or disavowal of identifications with homosexuality and that is (contingently) secured only through the reiteration of gender norms' (King, 2008, pp. 422–423).

Caudwell points to an "ailing heterosexuality" that requires such an egregiously and negatively situated other. She explains:

'Compulsory heterosexuality' in football is reified, however, through homophobic positioning of the figure of the lesbian as 'predator' and 'converter'. In this way lesbianism is positioned as abject and unintelligible. Such a strategy can be read from a Butlerian perspective as a manifestation of ailing heterosexuality. That is, heterosexuality is reinforced and protected by positioning lesbianism outside intelligible sexuality in order to maintain and reproduce heterosexuality as 'natural'. There is evidence that at specific times and within particular teams an inverting of the sexual 'norm' exists. (2002, p. 41)

This inverting of the heterosexual norm is where dykespaces emerge. Indeed, 'lesbian visibility provides evidence that some of the women destabilise, subvert and resist the construction of heterosexual space' (Caudwell, 2002, p. 35). These 'lesbian space invaders' (Caudwell, 2002, p. 35, 2004, p. 116) create political spaces for themselves and other lesbians. Thus, via dykespaces, lesbian athletes can create spaces that offer expressive freedom while also not feeding into the "ailing heterosexuality" in society.

## The Heterosexual Matrix

Judith Butler, in her theorizing of gender in *Gender Trouble* (1990/2006), explains that gender is constructed discursively through the 'grid of cultural intelligibility' (2006, p. 208)—which is how she describes the heterosexual matrix. Gender, then, is performed in ways that maintain the "cultural intelligibility" of the gender.

Judith Butler's "heterosexual matrix" has been of great interest to me. According to the matrix, a male who is masculine would be assumed to be heterosexual; likewise, a female who is feminine would be assumed to be

heterosexual. This, according to Butler, is what makes sense to people in society; people are intelligible to others in this way, thus, she referred to it as the 'grid of cultural intelligibility' (2006, p. 208). Those females who are masculine are, according to Butler, assumed to be lesbians. They are, then, unintelligible in society. Rebecca Lock, in her study of femininity and pain, explains Butler's connections between sex, gender, and sexuality further when she states:

I take from Butler ..., the insight that sex, gender, and sexuality are co-constitutive of one another. That is, to be understood as a real female you must also be feminine, and identify as heterosexual. By the same token, to be read as authentically feminine you must be female and heterosexual; and finally, if you are to be recognized by others as heterosexual as a woman, you should appear as a woman and that entails behaving in a way that is recognized as feminine. (2006, p. 159–160)

Indeed, the signifiers of sex, gender and sexuality operate together to provide a picture that others use to make sense of the person, to make them intelligible.

Håkan Larsson, Karin Redelius and Birgitta Fagrell push the concept of the heterosexual matrix further in their study of heteronormativity in a physical education classroom. They claim that the heterosexual matrix is so engrained that it also governs how we behave, meaning that we attempt to control the picture of ourselves that is being presented. As they assert, the 'heterosexual matrix ... conditions the way in which every student feels that s/he can appropriately engage with, and talk about, a certain activity and still feel, or be viewed as, heterosexual, i.e. "normal"' (p. 68).

I, too, have written on this, using the lived experience of Amélie Mauresmo, the professional tennis player, to add another dimension to Butler's theory of the heterosexual matrix (Tredway, 2014). Before she came out as a lesbian in 1999, Mauresmo was only ever mentioned in the media and by others with such benign descriptions as French, unseeded, and so on. After she came out, Mauresmo was described as having shoulders as wide as a house, having huge muscles, and it being unfair for women to have to compete with her. Tweaking Butler's theory of the heterosexual matrix helps explain this. Mauresmo's coming out caused a shift in what was intelligible. Prior to her coming out, Mauresmo was known as female and feminine, so her heterosexuality was assumed. After coming out, she was known as female and homosexual, therefore, masculinity was assumed. Furthermore, the assumptions with the 'grid of cultural intelligibility' (2006, p. 208) are so powerful as to completely paint a picture of someone as having specific attributes when that person had never been described in that way previously.

Scholars have used Judith Butler's theorizing of gender in various ways, building and stretching her theories in regard to the discursive construction of gender, the heterosexual matrix and gender performativity. The arena of sport, however, offers a particular visage of Butler's theories with each sport bifurcated already into categories of sex. Lisa Disch and Mary Jo Kane explain:

By virtue of . . . various devices that serve to reorganize a continuum of difference as a binary opposition and to establish that opposition as natural, we learn from professional sport to see oppositional sexual difference when we look at bodies in motion. This means that professional sport is more than an arena for the display of athletic excellence, more than a mechanism for the accumulation of corporate wealth, more even than an apparatus for the reproduction of race and gender ideology. It is also one of the most visible institutions by which the cultural logic of Butler's heterosexual matrix becomes everyday experience. (2000, p. 129)

That is, sport is where women face the policing of their gender performativity, questions about their sex, and, by extension, concerns regarding lesbians in sport.

## Conclusion

The major concepts and theoretical frameworks that Judith Butler has provided us, then, include the understanding of the heterosexual matrix, the discursive creation and maintenance of gender as a category, the function of gender performativity, and how gender informs the sexed body. Using examples of the uses of Butler's theories within the sociology of sport shows not only what the concepts mean but, also, how they can be used. The examples from sport scholars were by no means exhaustive. The examples used did, however, offer an array of ways that these concepts can be used.

Apart from her article, 'Athletic Genders: Hyperbolic Instance and/or the Overcoming of Sexual Binarism', published in the now defunct *Stanford Humanities Review* (1998), Butler did not overtly apply her theories to examples in society. This makes sense since she is a philosopher and not a sociologist. Thus, Butler's theories have been taken up in myriad ways by sociologists and social theorists to explain social phenomena that show the universality of her theories.

In summary, gender has been discursively created and policed in ways that enforce compliance with the socially approved gender performance. However, many people simply do not fit within the mandates of the prescribed gender

model. This is especially true of female athletes who, by their very presence in the traditionally male arena of sport, are marked as not performing femininity. By working against the construct of gender, people can destabilize the “naturalness” of gender and the belief that it is hard-wired into the body. Female athletes are in a unique position to be the vanguard of social activists challenging socially expected gender ideals because of their athletic skill and physical power.

## Note

1. This is exactly opposite of J. L. Austin (1975) who asserts that when it is discovered that something exists, it is then that a word is created to bring it forth.

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