



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Towards a feminist playology: social sport studies and the limits of critique

Heuvel, N.A.E. van den

Citation

Heuvel, N. A. E. van den. (2021, December 9). *Towards a feminist playology: social sport studies and the limits of critique*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3247110>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3247110>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Towards a Feminist Playology
Social Sport Studies and the Limits of Critique

Nathanja van den Heuvel

Research for this dissertation has been made possible through support of the Netherlands
Organization for Scientific Research (NWO)
ISBN: 978-94-6416-920-1

Provided by thesis specialist Ridderprint, ridderprint.nl
Printing: Ridderprint
Layout and cover design: Anna Bleeker, persoonlijkproefschrift.nl

© 2021 Nathanja van den Heuvel. All rights reserved.

Towards a Feminist Playology
Social Sport Studies and the Limits of Critique

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl,
volgens besluit van het college voor promoties
te verdedigen op donderdag 9 december 2021

klokke 11:15 uur

door

Nathanja Alida Elisabeth van den Heuvel

Promotor:

Prof. Dr. James W. McAllister

Copromotor:

Dr. Frank Chouraqui

Promotiecommissie:

Prof. Dr. Lynne Huffer (Emory University)

Prof. Dr. Richard Giulianotti (Loughborough University)

Prof. Dr. Jenny Slatman (Tilburg University)

Prof. Dr. Sybille Lammes

Prof. Dr. Susanna Lindberg

Contents

Acknowledgements	7
Introduction: Social sport studies and the limits of critique	9
Overview of the Chapters	12
Chapter 1: Methodology and data	
1.1 Description of the research procedure	16
1.1.1 Sampling and access	16
1.1.2 Fieldwork settings	18
1.1.3 Fieldwork activities and methodological reflections	18
1.1.4 Structure of the analysis	21
1.2 Overview of the data and key findings	23
1.2.1 Major results of the coding analysis of the interviews	23
1.2.2 Key Findings 'high performance'	25
1.2.3 Key Findings 'gender policing'	35
1.2.4 Key Findings 'sacrifice'	44
1.3 Summary of the key findings	48
Chapter 2: Sacrifice and the limits of the existing frameworks in social sport studies	
2.1 Introduction	52
2.2 Navigating the field of social sport studies	53
2.2.1 Key debates and theoretical frameworks: Marxism, cultural studies and Foucauldian poststructuralism	53
2.2.2 The feminist turn in social sport studies	58
2.3 Discussion of the research findings: 'high performance', 'gender policing' and 'sacrifice'	63
2.4 Conclusion	69
Chapter 3: Understanding Sacrifice in terms of Play	
3.1 Introduction and central research question	72
3.2 Sacrifice beyond the logic of the gift	75
3.2.1 Sacrifice and abundance	75
3.2.2 Sacrifice and freedom	80
3.2.3 The limits of the logic of the gift	82
3.3 Play: Theorizing sacrifice beyond dualisms	84
3.3.1 The lessons to be drawn from Bataille's notion of the gift	84
3.3.2 The Structures of Play	84

3.3.2.1 Play ‘in itself’	86
3.3.2.2 The freedom of play	87
3.3.2.3 Play’s non-seriousness	89
3.3.2.4 The seriousness of the world	91
3.3.2.5 The double experience of consciousness	92
3.3.2.6 Meaning making	93
3.3.2.7 The ambiguity of rules	96
3.4 Conclusion	97
Chapter 4: A synthesized understanding of post-Marxism and the theory of play	
4.1 Introduction	102
4.2 Sociological theses on sport and the athletic subject	104
4.2.1 A brief summary of the main theoretical claims of Marxist social sport studies	104
4.2.2 A brief summary of the main theoretical claims of Foucauldian poststructuralist social sport studies	113
4.3 A synthetic account of Marxist and Foucauldian poststructuralist insights	118
4.3.1 The limits of the cultural studies paradigm in social sport studies	118
4.3.2 Real subsumption, normation and normalisation	120
4.3.3 The key lessons of post-Marxism	123
4.4 The synthesis of social sport studies and the theory of play	124
4.4.1 Play and the limits of post-Marxism	124
4.4.2 The playing subject, freedom and indetermination	127
4.4.3 Foucault’s subject of freedom	129
4.4.4 Play, therapy and resistance	131
4.5 Conclusion	133
Conclusion: Towards a feminist playology	140
Bibliography	147
English summary	155
Nederlandse samenvatting	157
Appendix. Overview methodology and data	159
Curriculum Vitae	163

Acknowledgements

This research is part of the larger research project “Van voetbalvrouwen tot vrouwen-voetbal. Een interdisciplinair onderzoek naar de maatschappelijke impact van meiden- en vrouwenvoetbal in Nederland” (file number 328-98-006) funded by NWO, co-funded by de Johan Cruyff Foundation, Atria and Women Win and led by Prof. Dr. Martine Prange and Dr. Martijn Oosterbaan. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to NWO, de Johan Cruyff Foundation, Atria and Women Win for having made possible this research project. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr. Martine Prange and Dr. Martijn Oosterbaan for the opportunity to be involved in this research project. Martine and Martijn, thank you for the warm welcome. My gratitude also goes out to my supervisor Dr. Frank Chouraqui and my promotor Prof. Dr. James McAllister. Frank, thank you for asking the right questions and thinking with me. Thanks to you this dissertation has developed into what it is now. James, thank you for the critical feedback during the final stage of this project. I would also like to thank my late supervisor Prof. Dr. Glen Newey for his support during the start of this project. Gratitude also goes out to the committee members for reading and evaluating my manuscript.

I have had the pleasure of working with a wonderful team of scholars and societal partners. Kathrine van den Bogert, I enjoyed our conversations and collaboration. Thank you for that. The collaboration with the researchers from the Mulier Institute and in particular Agnes Elling were invaluable to the research. Thanks also to Atria and Women Win for your support.

I was also part of an inspiring work environment at Leiden University's Institute for Philosophy. Karineke Sombroek and Frans de Haas, thank you for your moral and practical support. Thank you also Hedwig Gaasterland and Selma Tummers for your friendship and support. With great pleasure I look back at our self-organised PhD support group meetings. Jan Sleutels, Tim Meijers and Stephen Harris, thank you for the conversations inside and outside the institute. A special thanks also to Carlos Roos, Stephanie Meirmans, Martine Berenpas and Jorrit Smit for joining me in establishing a PhD council-and community and for your friendship.

Thanks also to the wonderful group of Dutch philosophers of sport. Aldo Houterman, Sandra Meeuwssen and Guus Heijnen, thank you so much for your enthusiasm. Thank you also Sandra for being my paranymph.

I was also fortunate to be part of many feminist and womxn philosophy groups. A special thanks to Annemie Halsema, Karen Vintges and Iris van der Tuin. Thank you for everything that I learned from you.

Thanks also to Gabriel Fontana. It has been a great pleasure working with you on our project Multiform. Thank you also for your friendship.

My gratitude goes also out to my University Council colleagues, Sasha Goldstein-Sabbah and Marishka Neekilappillai. Thank you for the invaluable support during the final stage of this project. Thank you also Marishka for your friendship.

My friends, Deirdre Boer, Caroline van Twillert, Sanne van Driel, Dora Timmers and Marijke de Pous, thank you for always being there for me. You inspire me, and I thank you so much! Thank you also Sanne for being my paranymp.

I'd also like to thank Susanne and Rocky Pathania and Adjie Ilse for their support. Thank you for taking daily work off my hands when I needed it the most.

The saying goes that apples don't fall far from trees. This however does not mean that trees should be taken for granted. My parents, Hein van den Heuvel and Roelie Schuurung, thank you for having taught me to be critical, open-minded and socially engaged. My brothers, Marc and Steven van den Heuvel and sister-in-law, Fleur van den Heuvel, have also inspired me to write this thesis. Thank you!

My gratitude goes also out to my dear friend Roberto King. Thank you for listening to my rants, the training sessions in the gym and for our afternoon walks during the coronavirus lockdown.

Certainly my little nephews Veer, Neel and Samuel should not be overlooked. Thank you for reminding me again and again that play is as abstract as concrete. This thesis is dedicated to another little one. Nazaro, playing with you is what keeps me going.