

## **Stream Title: ‘ Level Playing Field’: Forget It – This Is Sport**

### **Stream Convenors:**

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“Sport is both a separate world, and a suspension of everyday life, yet is also highly symbolic of the society in which it exists...sport involves a dramatic representation of who we are and who we would like to be” (Maguire, 2009, pgs.1261 & 1262-63). The emotion of elite sporting success (Commonwealth Games; Olympic Games; World Cup ) is shared through the visual media and celebrated as ‘ours’ in nations where the centrality of sport is embedded in the fabric of society. Yet, if sport is symbolic of such societies what can sport tell us about equality, diversity and inclusion? Participants and spectators often perceive sport as separate from the important aspects of life and value free. This perception is reinforced through the uncritical, yet vast, body of print and imaging of sport that emanates from the media. Indeed, as Hokowhitu (2007, p.91) remarks “the idealistic notion of the ‘level playing field’ speaks to the inherent justice of sport, equal opportunities and is underpinned by egalitarianism”.

Research however, signals that on and beyond the playing field, sport is devoid of many of the attributes associated with equality, equity, diversity, inclusion and social change (see for example Obel, Bruce and Thompson, 2008). Certainly from a global perspective, sport from its inception was prudently segregated by gender (Messner, 2007) and in the 21st century there is little evidence of meaningful change. For instance, the current managerial ethos embedded in sport management structures continue to limit any meaningful change in the profile of those who lead, manage, coach and participant at the elite levels of sport (see for example [www.eeotrust.org.nz](http://www.eeotrust.org.nz) ). Implicit assumptions that characterise sports leadership as male may reflect a faith in meritocratic principles and equal opportunity that suggests gender is no longer an ‘issue’ in sport or its leadership. Adding a further ‘twist’, Gregory (2009) illustrates, through the concept ‘talk sports’, how inclusion and exclusion is shaped in white-collar (USA) organisational cultures. Exclusionary structures and processes are rarely acknowledged while the talent pool of participants is assumed to be infinite (Toohey and Taylor, 2009). There is little commentary on sport classification systems; stratification processes linked to high performance, achievement, physicality and resource allocation; the dominant masculinity of sport; the ‘symbolic annihilation’ of women; or equity in sport media coverage. The persistence of ideologies and practices over a long period of time adds to its hegemonic potential. In other words, sport is significant because it is perceived as insignificant (Richards, 1999).

This stream invites those working within the social sciences with an interest in the context of sport (eg - sports studies, business, economics, indigenous studies, law, management, media,

politics and tourism studies) to engage with the theme 'views from the edge' in creative and challenging ways. Novice researchers and practitioners are encouraged to participate.

Publication Plans:

Stream convenors are proposing a special edition of *Sport in Society* for publication of best papers from the stream.

Key Words:

Sport, Equality, Diversity, Management / Leadership, Social Change.

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