**Contested spaces and rainbow laces: Institutions and change in the LGBT sports movement**

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This paper focuses on LGBT movements in sport which challenge dominant structures of masculinity and heteronormativity, which have been observed to be particularly intensified and obdurate within sports settings (eg Jones and McCarthy, 2010; Wellard, 2002). It views such movements as attempting to bring about structural, attitude and cultural changes within sport, and draws upon the author’s own experiences within this field. Sport here is defined not as one single entity, but as a number of different organisations and institutions operating at different levels and scales. Furthermore, there are institutions across these levels which operate within mainstream sport, and others which operate specifically within LGBT sport.

Lefebvre’s (1991) triadic concept of social space is used as an initial framework to link these levels and spaces in which sport takes place, with perceived space representing the physical spaces of sport such as pitches and locker rooms; conceived space representing the rules and regulatory codes of sport as well as the cultural and social meanings of sport; and lived space being the cultures and normative behaviours which emerge during the actual performance of sport and related activities within these spaces. The paper develops arguments that the change desired by LGBT movements in sport can only come about by engaging with all three of these levels of space and the institutions and organisations within them (Lawley and Boncori, 2017).

The paper then focuses on LGBT sports organisations which engage in LGBT campaigning activity and/or provide sports activities for LGBT participants, examining how they relate to existing institutions of sport and how they develop institutions of their own. In both cases, a tension emerges between LGBT sports organisations operating as counterspaces (Soja, 1996) or oppositional structures to those of the mainstream, and an observed ‘mainstreaming’ tendency to become co-opted into the dominant structures and norms of sports (Caudwell, 2007). For example, whilst LGBT sports groups have the potential to organise beyond the traditional gender dualisms which are found in many sports, the affiliation with sports governing bodies needed in order to compete can lead to adherence with the regulations of sports governing bodies which can prevent mixed gender participation and also require the exclusion of participants based on gender identity. A form of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) occurs whereby governing bodies provide legitimation, resourcing and anti-discrimination legislation which supports the LGBT sports movement whilst simultaneously drawing the movement away from more radical, queer agendas and towards the dominant mainstream norms and structures. Furthermore, the LGBT sports movement has developed its own NGOs and international institutions which have been observed to have developed their own mainstreaming tendencies, for example the Gay Games has been criticised for privileging a mainstream professional image of LGBT participants whilst playing down more radical, queer elements of LGBT identity (Symons, 2007). The examination of LGBT sports organisations turns finally to the Rainbow Laces campaign organised by the UK LGBT charity Stonewall, and which has increasingly engaged with commercial organisations and sports governing bodies. The paper examines the impact of this on existing LGBT sports campaigns, and how once again more resource and visibility is provided to the LGBT sports movement but at the same time drawing it towards mainstream perspectives.

The paper concludes by highlighting the complexity of bringing about the change desired by the LGBT sports movement. Lefebvre’s social space highlights the vast number of heterogeneous spaces and levels across which this change needs to be focussed, and how such spaces are lived spaces that are continually contested and renegotiated. The experience of the LGBT sports movement and its institutional interactions highlights how this contestation takes place within these multiple spaces and levels and between radical and mainstreaming tendencies.

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