



Historical and Contemporary Synopsis of the Development of Field Education Guidelines in BSW, MSW and Doctoral Programs

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Adapting Strmic-Pawl's Flower Model to Teach Sport History for Social Workers: Implications for Anti-Opressive Social Work in Sport

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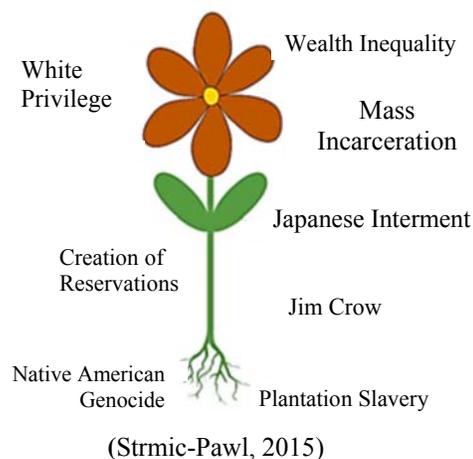
The past decade has seen a rising tide of social activism in sport (Kuhn, 2015; Schmidt, 2018). From Colin Kapernick's "take a knee protest" to the more recent ruling handed down by the Court of Arbitration for Sport against mid-distance runner Caster Semenya, sport is frequently used as a proxy battleground in our ongoing cultural wars (Schmidt, 2018). While athletes have found themselves empowered to either endorse or denounce any number of social issues, many bemoan a bygone era of apolitical athletics (Kuhn, 2015; Schmidt, 2018). History, however, shows us that such an era only exists in myth, and that as far back as organized sport goes, so too does its connection to politics (Schmidt, 2018; Zirin, 2008; Dyreson, 1999).

Sport historians and fans alike enjoy highlighting sport at its most liberative. Thus, we are inundated with celebrations of the protest of Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the American sprinters who raised their fists on the podium at the 1968 Summer Olympics (Zirin, 2008). Similarly, Muhammad Ali is deified for his criticism of the war in Vietnam. (Zirin, 2008). Going back even further, boxer Jack Johnson is a powerful symbol of black liberation for his victory over Jim Jeffries (Morgan, 1999). But at the time, all four were punished by the greater sporting community for their transgressions. Sport, despite its occasional habit of providing visibility to individuals from target communities, is in fact a largely conservative, reactionary ecosystem that contains and reproduces the same systems of oppression as the rest of society.

These few examples above act as evidence to show that sport has always been an area where progressive social forces clash with more reactionary institutions. Thus, as we do with other social movements, it is important to look at the institutions that limit change or perpetuate oppression. These institutions work together to create a system of injustice and often stem from the same historical roots. In this manner, it is important to look at the historical context that

brought forth modern day inequity. For this reason, the use of Hephzibah Strmic-Pawl's White Supremacy Flower model best demonstrates this process and its solutions (Strmic-Pawl, 2015).

Fig. 1. Strmic-Pawl's White Supremacy Flower



Above is Hephzibah Strmic-Pawl's White Supremacy Flower model, used to teach the history of white supremacy in the United States (Strmic-Pawl, 2015). The "roots" demonstrate the foundation of white supremacy with Native American genocide and plantation slavery starting systemic oppression (Strmic-Pawl, 2015). Moving up through the stem, the model demonstrates the different manifestation of these white supremacist institutions over time: Jim Crow laws, creation of reservations, Japanese internment, redlining and housing segregation (Strmic-Pawl, 2015). Oppressive policies that targeted people of color and lower socioeconomic classes became normalized practices that perpetuated a white supremacist system. Finally, the petals represent current systems of oppression in today's society (Strmic-Pawl, 2015). White privilege, wealth inequality, and mass incarceration are extensions of the stem and the

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roots that reflect historical manifestations of white supremacy (Strmic-Pawl, 2015).

The flower model of white supremacy is a useful tool to guide conversations about race in the United States. First, it points out the different manifestations of white supremacy throughout the nation's history and demonstrates how today's white supremacist institutions developed from their historical counterparts. Second, the model offers one key implication for anti-racist practice: those wishing to promote social justice and eradicate white supremacy must address the structural and historical nature of white supremacy. Strmic-Pawl asserts that just because a petal is removed does not mean another one will not grow back in its place (Strmic-Pawl, 2015). The model, then, points to the importance of addressing white supremacy's root causes in doing anti-racist work. The solution proposed by Strmic-Pawl's model is to build entirely new systems free of the historical influence of white supremacy.

A Flower Model for the History of Organized Sport

Just like in Strmic-Pawl's original model of white supremacy, the modern manifestations of inequality in sport have deep historical roots. Today those manifestations take the form of large pay gaps between male and female athletes in every sport; the sanctioning of transgender and intersex athletes; social and economic barriers to participation; and a pervasive jingoistic culture. But none of this was created out of thin air. It is the natural evolution of the racist, classist, and otherwise exclusionary acts that have been a hallmark of organized sport since its most protozoic form.

If we look to the origins of western organized sport, we find them to be inherently exclusionary. Some of the earliest versions of what could conceivably be labeled "sport" took place on the fields of British public (read: private) schools, institutions run for and by elite males. It was from Victorian Britain that we were also infected with the idea of amateurism, a concept as exclusive at its conception as it is today. As Holt (1989)

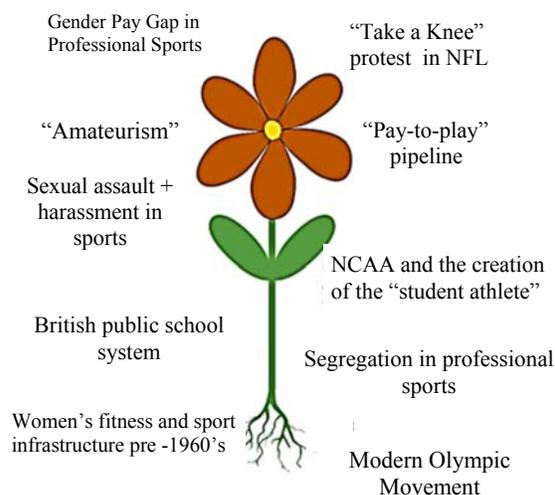
explains, early crew clubs decided to ban so-called "professional" rowers largely because they were embarrassed by losing to teams of manual laborers, whom they saw as socially inferior. Additionally, a large part of early British sporting culture involved socializing after the competition, and fraternizing with those outside one's class was certainly anathema. Thus, the concept of amateurism was born, couched in vague arguments about morality and character, as a way to exclude those whose presence on the field of competition was undesirable. It was from here that the idea emigrated to the United States, where the elite academic institutions in the northeast gladly took it up as their own. Over the years, arguments in favor of amateurism have evolved, but at its heart amateurism still remains what it has always been: a tool for the powerful to subjugate others.

The origins of the Olympics are similarly ignominious. What is now marketed as a chance for the countries of the world to put aside their differences and come together in a celebration of human excellence actually started largely because one Frenchman thought his countrymen were growing soft, and he saw a new Olympic movement as a way to toughen them up. Having just returned from a tour of the abovementioned British public schools, Baron Pierre de Coubertin went about creating an amateur sporting festival that similarly was very exclusionary. But while the Games would eventually become more multicultural and slowly get closer to achieving gender equity, the spirit of internationalism that Coubertin claimed the Games celebrated only became more of a sham. Throughout its history, the International Olympic Committee would be run in turn by Nazis, Nazi apologists, and open fascists; and the event would reflect the politics of the men running the show. From the 1936 Berlin Games to Mexico City in 1968 to Rio de Janeiro in 2016, each Olympiad is its own case study in some combination of the subversion of democratic norms, exploitation of local communities, or acceleration of police militarization (Goldblatt, 2018; Guttman, 2002; Guttman, 1983).

Oppression and inequity in today's systems of

organized sport have grown out of the oppression and inequity coded into previous systems of organized sport in the Western world. The flower model can be adapted to reflect the development of these systems over time.

Fig. 2. Sport History Flower Model



Implications for Education and Social Work Practice

Sport social work is a new and growing field. The Alliance of Social Workers in Sports is four years old and has seen rapid growth in its young history. Additionally, many institutions of organized sports are hiring social workers in response to a growing understanding of athletes as a vulnerable population. This growth has been most noticeable at NCAA Division I institutions. For any social worker interested in sport or for anyone who recognizes that athletes are frequently drawn from vulnerable populations, these are undeniably positive developments. However, in order to significantly and positively impact the landscape of organized sport in the United States, social workers must challenge these dominant institutions in addition to working from within to mitigate their harmful effects on athletes.

The flower model’s most important implication is that in order to make lasting, systemic change, social workers and other advocates must address the root causes of exploitation and oppression in doing their work. In the same way that Strmic-Pawl’s model conveys the importance of focusing on root causes in anti-racist practice, the model of sport history presented here conveys the importance of sport social workers focusing on the root causes of inequity in organized athletics. It is important to note that the root causes of oppression and exploitation in organized sport align with histories of racism, sexism, and other oppressive systems. Therefore, anti-oppressive social work practice focusing on the historical effects of racism, sexism, and classism must be central to the emerging field of sport social work. It is not enough to focus on the “petals” of sexual assault in college football, “pay-to-play” models in youth sports, and the exploitation of unpaid athletes in the NCAA. Social workers looking to positively impact institutions of organized sport must grapple with the historical development of these institutions and with the race- and gender-based inequities that these histories have produced.

Strmic-Pawl (2015) suggests that the white supremacy flower model be used to teach students for whom conversations about racism and white supremacy might be new and challenging. Similarly, the sport history flower model can also be used as a simple, effective way to teach sport history to social workers. Though sport social work is a new and growing area in the field, many social workers do not seem to be interested in sport or understand why athletes should be classified as a vulnerable population. This conversation, informed by a visual model like the one described here, can be tailored to practitioners at all levels of familiarity with organized sport and with broader themes of social justice. The model can also be used in the classroom to introduce the concept of sport social work or in a continuing education setting to facilitate a discussion about the responsibilities of practitioners to challenge power structures and build healthy alternatives to existing institutions.

Building Healthy Alternatives

What does it look like to “plant new flowers” or build healthy alternatives to current dominant systems of organized sport? For social workers, this work may include promoting sport as play. Starting at the youth level, current institutions of organized sport create a hyper-competitive environment in which young athletes are focused on “getting to the next level.” This focus creates the pay-to-play pipeline and leads to specialization (and with it, overuse injuries) at an increasingly young age. Research has demonstrated that unstructured play time is critical for children’s healthy development (Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2012; Milteer, Ginsburg, & Mulligan, 2012). Social workers who work with children and adolescents (in schools, for example) may be able to promote ideas of unstructured play and act as a bulwark against early specialization. Additionally, there are many programs promoting structured play that mirror more conventional organized sports but maintain a focus on leadership development and other non-sport-specific skills. These programs include Harlem Lacrosse and Girls on the Run, among others; social workers could play a role in bringing these or similar opportunities to youth with whom they work.

Still, today’s dominant model of organized sport is holding firmly in place. The authors of this paper recognize all the incredible work being done by social workers in existing institutions of organized sports. It is important to continue working within the current systems to lessen the effects of historical discrimination within sport and to make these systems as equitable as possible. Striking that balance of working both inside and outside of systems is something that social workers do well, and it is a great opportunity for social workers interested in sports. One opportunity for social workers working within these systems is organizing to build systems where profits are shared equitably with the people who create them – in other words, with the athletes themselves. Additionally, we recognize that systems-level change – especially building and promoting new systems – takes time.

Lastly, especially for social workers who are in teaching, research, or other positions at universities, is collaborating with experts in other disciplines who do sport history work. Sport historians and other scholars who focus on sport – in sociology, communication, or cultural studies, for example – can make valuable contributions as social workers analyze systems of organized sport and consider how best to either influence those systems or develop new, healthier ones. Social workers’ focus on social justice and expertise in policy- and community-level interventions can also make valuable contributions to conversations about equity and sport happening within other fields. Building healthier systems of organized sport will take a collective effort, and this kind of interdisciplinary collaboration is an important place to start.

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