

It's All for the Kids: Gender, Families, and Youth Sports. By Michael A. Messner. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, 288 pp., \$21.95 (cloth); \$14.95 (paper).

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Although children's reproduction of gender norms is seldom surprising, rarely do writers analyze how gender ideologies perpetuate in young generations. Michael A. Messner tackles this subject within the now ubiquitous youth sports institutions in the United States. However, his book focuses on adult involvement in youth sport and how gendered modes of participation reconstitute hegemonic gender scripts for adults, families, communities, and of course, the children who participate.

Using his own community of South Pasadena, California, as an example, Messner explores adult contributions to the American Youth Soccer Organization and Little League Baseball/Softball. Combining his own experiences with ethnographic field notes, historical research, statistical information, and interviews, Messner illustrates how adults' choices are constrained by societal rules for gendered behavior. Behaviors conforming to gendered expectations are naturalized as "choice" under liberal ideologies, reinforcing commitments to inherent gender difference. Messner explores choice to address broader issues, namely, how this framing as choice creates and sustains gender inequality. Because this work deals specifically with how adults' words and actions subtly teach children about gender, Messner presents sport as one of the profound ways gender assumptions are perpetuated for subsequent generations.

Although within these organizations, it is acknowledged that girls and boys should be valued equally, Messner exposes contradictions that arise when those who assert gender equality still cling to essentialist thinking. Calling this conflation "soft essentialism," he interrogates how "equity with difference" (p. 141) perpetuates the ideal of equality without disposing of ideas that men and women are inherently different. Messner suggests that youth sports, as an institution that makes corporeal ability or limitation visible, is a site for expressing assumptions and values linked to differences between boys and girls and thus men and women (p. 170).

Messner begins by discussing the most prevalent role women play in youth sports, the "team mom," or parent who provides snacks, organizational support, and emotional labor for the team. Through language and valuation, this role reinforces divisions of labor naturalized in the home and workplace. Similarly, Messner points out that female coaches, who seemingly might challenge naturalized divisions, often reinforce these notions through their participation. Female coaches, like women in general, are assumed to have "kids knowledge" but lack "sports knowledge" (p. 77), making them ideal for coaching young teams. However, as children age and gain athletic skill, men replace women. Messner attributes this to the valuation of sports expertise over teaching ability, while acknowledging that women are often encouraged to develop "kids knowledge" rather than other abilities. Furthermore, the harsher scrutiny given to women and their omission from informal networks creates invisible barriers that in turn create exclusion rather than overt discrimination (p. 52).

Messner then shifts focus to how adult male involvement creates and maintains masculinities. He suggests four primary coaching styles men employ, which not surprisingly are tied to hegemonic masculinities prevalent in professional-class workplaces and families (p. 96). Messner here addresses "doing masculinity," through collective policing of coaches' language, embodiment, and behavior. Those falling outside these boundaries are not overtly curtailed but are subtly discouraged through "innocent comments" that mark differences (p. 196) and the weeding out of unacceptable forms (p. 122). Rather than institutional discrimination, this is a collective project that enforces leadership

compatible with community values (p. 128). Here, Messner exposes the operation of privilege and the symbolic boundaries of community, highlighting the role that youth sports play in maintaining sex difference, racial inequality, and class distinction (p. 205).

Messner uses gender theory, specifically the study of masculinities, to address the formation and maintenance of gender norms as well as the symbolic limits of community, topics important to broader issues in sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. He illustrates how coaching behaviors help to construct and naturalize differences between girls and boys (p. 166), reestablishing an ideology of gender essentialism. Indeed, exposing some of the ways in which gender ideologies are passed from one generation to the next is possibly the book's biggest contribution.

Similarly, Messner critiques liberal notions of choice, illustrating how the gender expectations code coerces behaviors seen as freely chosen, an insight applicable to a range of disciplines. At its core, this book illustrates the maintenance of heteronormativity. Messner suggests a need for studies of masculinity and certain gendered institutions as well as less explicitly communicates the need for similar studies of "doing femininity." Although the focus of this book is narrow, the strong and detailed descriptions, combined with its grounding in data, make it a valuable contribution to studies of gender and sport.

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