

Book Review

Criminal Justice Review

1-2

© 2023 Georgia State University

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissionsjournals.sagepub.com/home/cjr

Silva, D. and Kennedy, L. (Eds.), 2022

Power played: A critical criminology of sport, Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, pp. 400. \$39.95, ISBN: 9780776867801**Reviewed by:** Walter S. DeKeseredy, 5631 West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV, USA

DOI: 10.1177/07340168231213865

Criminology has a long history of examining the “usual suspects” that include a legion of interpersonal violent acts committed in private and public places (e.g., rape, armed robbery, etc.), corporate and white-collar crime, policing, prisons, juvenile delinquency, and hate crime. This is not to say, however, that criminology does not adapt to ever changing times and ignores new social problems like cybercrime. Nonetheless, sports-related wrongdoings and societal reactions to them continue to receive selective inattention, which is an empirically based observation repeatedly made explicit over the last four decades by leading criminological experts on the “dark side” of sport, such as Kevin Young, author of Chapter 1 in *Power Played*. Consider that one would still be hard pressed to find a single article on the relationship between crime, social control, and sport in the most highly ranked North American criminology journals, which, arguably, are *Criminology*, *Criminology and Public Policy*, and *Justice Quarterly*.

As highly celebrated singer/songwriter Bob Dylan would say, “The Times They are a-Changin’,” and critical criminologists are leading the charge. Recently, academics from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, particularly those based in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K., have produced some timely books that are quickly establishing a new criminology of sport, one that emphasizes how racial/ethnic, social class, and gender inequality shape various types of crime that occur on and off the playing field and the formal and informal responses to them. Prior, though, to Silva and Kennedy’s compilation, there was no comprehensive anthology that highlighted critical criminological perspectives and thus the editors should be commended for crafting their ground-breaking contribution, one that includes an international cadre of social scientists. Sixteen chapters are included in this collection, and these novel offerings reflect the fact that bridge-building between sport and criminology is a global and intellectually diverse enterprise.

A key objective of this book is to, in the words of Silva and Kennedy, “demonstrate how current developments in critical criminology can shed light on the various manifestations of crime and control within sporting cultures that both contribute to public understanding of criminal justice and reshape the justice system itself” (p. 32). Collectively, the chapters unequivocally achieve this goal. Even so, there is no party line and each chapter is unique, ranging from the Introduction that provides a brief overview of contemporary critical criminological directions and their relevance to sport, to subsequent offerings that focus on race, class, gender, and sexuality issues (Part 2), to those that carefully examine head trauma and athletic violence (Part 3), and last, but certainly not least, to issues related to governance, surveillance, security, and carceral contexts (Part 4). Most fitting, since he is a pioneer in the development of the critical criminology of sport, is Nick Groombridge’s “post-game analysis” of each chapter and his thoughts on moving forward.

Power Played has many strengths and it is beyond the scope of this critique to describe all of them. One that especially stands out is the thoughtful review of critical criminological schools of thought featured in Silva and Kennedy's introduction. It is an excellent pedagogical tool and could easily be used in a senior undergraduate course on theories of crime, deviance, and social control. Another major strength is the broad range of topics covered by the contributors. As Groombridge correctly points out, "They advance criminology let alone any sports criminology" (p. 372).

What many readers might find troublesome with this book is that there is no in-depth discussion of the causes of athletes' crime and deviance, and the two editors take pride in this omission. They state, "readers who are searching for answers to the question of 'why athletes commit crime' may be inclined to close this book now; no such answers will be given. Rather, this volume reveals the ways in which sport and sporting cultures contribute to and reflect problematic, harmful, and potentially misleading discourses and understandings of crime, deviance, and the criminal justice system" (p. 11). Ignoring the factors that contribute to athletes' violence against women, racist practices, and other harmful behaviors that occur off the field will give newcomers to the field of critical criminology the impression that, like right-wing administrative criminologists such as the late James Q. Wilson (author of the 1985 best-selling book *Thinking About Crime*), all critical criminologists disregard the value of searching for the causes of interpersonal crimes. This is not true, as demonstrated by rich theoretical work done by left realists and feminists. In my own case, for example, I am a critical criminologist who has devoted nearly forty years of my life to identifying sociological and social psychological factors that motivate patriarchal men to beat, rape, and psychologically victimize women in intimate relationships, and together with *Montreal Gazette* journalist Stu Cowan and George Washington University sociologist Martin D. Schwartz (see our 2023 book *Skating on Thin Ice: Professional Hockey, Rape Culture, and Violence Against Women*), I am now committing much time and effort to answering the question of "Why is it that professional sports, and notably hockey, remain a bastion for rape culture and violence against women?"

Yes, it is true, as Silva and Kennedy point out on page 12, that "almost all the criminological and legal scholarship examining the intersections between sport and punishment has dealt with incidents that occur off the playing field," but the bulk of this work is atheoretical and descriptive. Moreover, much, if not most, of the current data on male athletes' deviant and criminal conduct, in fact, comes from North American journalists and legal experts. It is time, then, for more progressive social scientists to jump into the fray and do more sophisticated studies and theory construction. Left realists such as Brian D. MacLean would argue that a more holistic critical criminology of sport requires that the entire process of crime be examined, and this entails focusing on the causes of athletes' social and legal norm violations on and off the field, as well as investigating the important issues covered in Silva and Kennedy's book.

In sum, *Power Played* is essential reading for anyone seeking a refreshing alternative to orthodox social scientific ways of knowing about sport in this current era. My copy is now well-marked with red ink and many pages are dog-eared. As my good friend and colleague Claire Renzetti, editor of the widely read and cited journal *Violence Against Women*, says, "From my experience as a teacher, researchers, and activist, this is usually the sign of a very good book – good not only because it makes an interesting read but, more important, because it is useful."