



Book Review - Sport Social Work: Promoting the Functioning and Well-being of College and Professional Athletes

Traci Nigg

LiFEsports, The Ohio State University

Danny Bonaventura

Department of Athletics, University of Pittsburg

Pioneers of the Sport Social Work movement, Dr. Matt Moore and Dr. Ginger Gummelt, have once again taken their place as front runners in the field by providing a textbook for use in social work education and academic development. As a former NCAA athlete, current professor and collegiate tennis coach, Dr. Matt Moore's background influences his research, which focuses on the macro perspective of sport social work policy, research, and practice. When this textbook was written, Dr. Matt Moore was serving as President of the Alliance of Social Workers in Sports (ASWIS). While serving as Secretary for ASWIS, Dr. Ginger Gummelt brings expertise in clinical and direct practice with athletes. A former NCAA gymnast, gymnastics coach, judge, and parent of middle and high school athletes, Dr. Gummelt currently teaches social work direct practice and uses her various perspectives to explain how to best engage and assess athletes in a clinical setting.

Keywords: sport social work, social work education, textbook development

The overall theme and intention of the textbook is to raise awareness of athletes' needs and establish how social workers can enhance the well-being and effective functioning of athletes. This textbook is intended to grow the sport social work movement as this specialty gains momentum and attention from mainstream social workers. The authors have collected an abundance of references from a variety of professional journals including Exercise Science, Psychiatry, Sports Medicine, Sports Management, Athletic Training, Social Work Education, Sociology of Sport, College Counseling, Sports Psychology, and many others. By compiling empirically based research from multiple disciplines, the authors show respect to the professions that work in partnership with sport social workers while also demonstrating the uniqueness and necessity for sport social workers on the collaborative team for athletes.

Content Outline

The Sport Social Work textbook is divided into seven chapters and provides a foundation for social workers from micro, mezzo, and macro perspectives. The content is a must read for every social worker who plans to work with athletes at any level. With Dr. Matt Moore and Dr. Ginger Gummelt serving as co-authors, Dr. Moore lays the foundation and presents the mezzo and macro perspectives while Dr. Gummelt tackles the micro perspective.

The book begins with a definition of sport social work and explores how sport social work relates closely with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics and Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) competencies. This is followed by a chapter on interprofessional collaboration. This chapter outlines the challenges of interprofessional communication along with opportunities for sport social workers to collaborate with sport and exercise psychologists, mental health professionals, athletic trainers, administrators, coaches, and others. In chapter three, Dr. Moore covers the challenge of understanding the health and well-being of athletes. Additionally, Dr. Moore defines athlete identity and explores behavioral and psychosocial health risks athletes may face including some of the causes of those risks. In chapter four, Dr. Moore provides a theoretical framework for sport social work. Using an ecological framework, Dr. Moore discusses how social workers can take an individualized approach to working with athletes and provides a sample review. He also highlights systems theory, empowerment, social learning theory, resiliency, and human development considerations for sport social workers. The chapter wraps up with the process of change model and includes a figure of the transtheoretical model of change with athletes as well as how to apply theory to the process of change.

In chapters five and six, Dr. Ginger Gummelt discusses direct practice and clinical interventions with athletes. Dr. Gummelt lays the foundation for engagement and building relationships, which she categorizes into respect, empathy, and genuineness. She follows with assessment and planning, recommending a systems-ecological framework for assessment while highlighting the importance of utilizing culturally competent assessments. She finishes chapter five with a section on the change-oriented process which outlines the importance of a collaborative goal setting process that includes active athlete participation. In chapter six, Dr. Gummelt intentionally highlights some of the most critical issues that athletes face and helps to identify several ways social workers can intervene. Specifically, Dr. Gummelt looks at injuries, sexual assault, eating disorders, substance use and abuse, retirement, and mental health. While the list is not all-encompassing, it is; however, a strong prelude for some of the issues that athletes commonly encounter.

Dr. Moore returns for chapter seven to address sport social work policy. Social work policy plays a crucial role in the lives of athletes as each sport has its own governing body. In this chapter, he outlines the importance of establishing a policy platform for sport social work and provides several examples. He further examines existing organizational policies of sports entities, the social work profession, governmental policies, laws, and recommendations. The chapter concludes with ways social workers can influence sport policy.

The content from both authors has multiple practical uses for sport social workers and instructors. Social workers in college athletics will be able to apply many of the theories and practices outlined in this textbook with their athletes. Athletic departments and professional leagues employ staff who have developed perceptions of athletes based on their personal

experiences and education; however, this textbook provides a framework for social workers and other professionals to approach and serve athletes in an effective, holistic way. Dr. Gummelt's section is particularly important for those interested in direct practice with athletes. The textbook reinforces the unique needs of the athlete population and the attributes, skills, and knowledge one must consider when supporting athletes and the systems they operate within.

Evaluation

From an instructor's standpoint, the textbook is user-friendly and very effective. The content is easily digestible and the chapters can be read in a relatively short span of time. Along with the text itself, the authors have developed quizzes and tests through Cognella that can be used to measure student learning. Some of the most practical aspects of the book are the activities, figures, and tables in each chapter. The activities strategically engage students and encourages them to practice the material they are learning.

As a result of the textbook's design and applicability, instructors have chosen this as the primary book and structure for several accredited elective courses in sport social work courses at both the MSW and BSW level. Because many social work students are unaware of the specialty of sport social work it is beneficial that the text starts with the history of Jane Addams and her emphasis on free play and vigorous activity on playgrounds or gymnasiums during the 1900s. This allows readers to understand the correlation of sport social work to the origination of the social work profession. Throughout the textbook, Drs. Moore and Gummelt use social work ethics, values, and theories, and provide an in-depth analysis of their application to serving athletes. The text is organized in a way that allows the reader to understand why athletes are a vulnerable population, barriers they encounter when seeking help, as well as the role of athlete identity on development and perception of self. The authors present sport social work with a lens that explores how social workers can meet the needs, identify strengths, and empower athletes to achieve overall well-being and optimal functioning.

As for the implementation of the textbook, the discussions, activities, assignments, and case studies, are very useful and applicable in the classroom. The discussion topics are relevant and facilitate conversations about the topic of each chapter. The case studies give imagery and application to clinical social work practices and theories for addressing the specific risks and behaviors related to athletes. By including policy analysis, implementation, and development, the readers explore how formal rules, regulatory powers, and governing bodies influence the policies that affect the rights and justice of athletes. The textbook encompasses micro, mezzo and macro implications for sport social work, which is very useful for gaining the perspective of the whole athlete and athlete-in-environment.

Implications for Future Editions

One opportunity for improvement is the length of the book. While this is a great start, the textbook does not provide enough content for a 14-16-week semester. In order to extend the course, instructors will need to research and develop additional material based on the foundation laid by the authors. In-depth sections about youth and high school sports, collegiate athletics, and professional sports, and how certain aspects of each level have implications for sport social workers could be added to strengthen content and understanding. Expanding the career opportunities section of the epilogue is suggested to explain how each level of sport has different

employability considerations. In the undergraduate class, even though only a handful of students expressed a true interest in sport social work, the text was used to provide perspective and explain how social workers view athletes as a vulnerable population.

For the first edition of *Sport Social Work*, the authors primarily focused on collegiate and professional athletes. The authors also maintained a generalist approach to make the information more understandable, relatable, and less intimidating for curious students and those interested in learning more about sport social work. However, the authors do not specifically address the risks, behaviors and specific culture and environment surrounding youth sports. Further implications could include the role of parental involvement in youth development in sports and the transition from high school to collegiate sports. Also, a section could be added about researching sport across the lifespan to the role of recreational sport with adults and the elderly. Other special topics such as gender equality, LGBTQ athletes, race equality, cultural competency, athletes with disabilities, and the coach-athlete relationship and the influence of abusive coaching styles versus forming healthy relationships within teams and athletic departments could be included. Broadening the social work lens to international sport to promote sport for development of peace and social justice, especially in areas of conflict in the world, would also be beneficial for discussion. Additions of the aforementioned topics are recommended for future editions of the textbook.