

through choice. Taylor suggests that the ability of lesbians to “choose” their supportive and intimate relationships is influenced by poverty and unemployment.

In addition to contesting understandings of lesbian experience, the book also challenges some of the emerging sociological insights on social class. Taylor firmly aligns her work with the argument that class, rather than having disappeared, has reformulated under the changing socioeconomic conditions of later modernity and is heavily influenced by Bev Skeggs’s work on the cultural (and economic) reproduction of class (*Formation of Class and Gender* [Sage, 1997]). Skeggs’s work, among others, argues that class identifications are ambivalent and contradictory and that people are hesitant to identify, or actively disidentify, with the category “working class.” However, the working-class lesbians in Taylor’s sample positively embraced a working-class identity and were able, with confidence, to articulate the ways in which class influenced their lives. Taylor argues that disidentification with the category “working class” was not apparent in her research. This of course may be due to the specificities of a sample recruited by advertising that the study was interested in working-class lesbians’ lives. There is a strong possibility that those who volunteered were likely to have a positive class identification. Nonetheless, this is a valuable sociological insight because it suggests that the label “working class” remains relevant among some sectors of the population in the United Kingdom.

One of the problems of researching and writing about the lives of “outsiders” is that scholars must draw on a complex and disparate set of theories and concepts in order to make sense of these experiences. Taylor does this admirably, but inevitably there are some relevant sets of literature that receive less attention than others. Foucault’s work is missing from the analysis, and consequently the discursive construction of identity, in terms of both class and sexuality, fades into the background. Similarly, the analysis might have been sharpened by elevating theories on heterosexuality, as a binary through which sexuality and gender are made, within the analytic framework. Despite this, I highly recommend *Working-Class Lesbian Life* as a text that asserts both the significance of social class to understanding sexual others and the significance of sexuality to understanding social class inequalities.

Living through the Hoop: High School Basketball, Race, and the American Dream. By Reuben A. Buford May. New York: New York University Press, 2008. Pp. ix+243. \$29.95.

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Reuben A. Buford May’s *Living through the Hoop: High School Basketball, Race, and the American Dream* documents how a high school

basketball program serves as a vehicle that keeps young African-American men away from street life; teaches them how to negotiate their poverty-stricken urban neighborhoods that are marred by drugs, alcohol, gangs, and violence; instills in them values of fairness, teamwork, respect, and a sense of self-worth; and provides them with an affirming support structure. While basketball offers these boys hope of upward mobility and living the American Dream, it is also structured by what May refers to as "the Dirty Trick." Though the harsh reality is that there is a .001 probability that any of these boys will become a professional basketball player, May argues that the belief that they can still make it against all odds provides them with the hope necessary to continue on in their daily lives.

Rather than document individuals or the elite players in the game, May focuses on an entire basketball program and the average players who make up the team. One of the unique characteristics of this program is the "no cut rule." Any student who tries out for the team is accommodated, since the alternative of rejecting a player, no matter his skill level, could lead him to the temptations of the streets, with the possibility of drugs, gangs, or delinquency.

What distinguishes May's book is his analysis of how the underlying culture of basketball serves as an alternative to that of the streets. May deftly shows how the team structure can serve as a resource for acquiring the tools and skills that enable players to handle the challenges they face in everyday life: conflict resolution, interracial interaction, hard work, handling pressure, gaining respect, building trust with others, facing adversity, and a sense of personal and team responsibility and accountability. In the end we see that this book is not simply about the game of basketball but about the game of life.

May's biggest contribution is discussing the Dirty Trick, a euphemism for the interlocking forces of mass media, community influences, coaching, and one's own abilities that perpetuate the mythology of upward mobility through athletics. This is rarely if ever discussed in sports circles. First, May argues that the mass media give players attention and status. However, they also perpetuate stereotypes of athletes in relation to drugs, sex, and violence, as well as the mythologies of individualism and hard work. Second, he documents how community influences are positive reinforcements that provide players with status and prestige, but this very affirmation sustains the mythology that pursuing athletics is the only viable path for a fulfilling and successful life. Third, given the level of competition, May explores the ways that these young men can delude themselves about their own abilities. Finally, May discusses the role of coaches in misleading players by providing the motivation and encouragement necessary to create a winning team.

For this reader, it would have been helpful if May had differentiated his work from the film *Hoop Dreams*, which May mentions only in passing as glorifying athletics as a vehicle for upward mobility; in fact, the film

documents how the dreams of the two protagonists aspiring to play in the NBA will never be realized. It is also surprising that he does not engage or make connections to Loïc Wacquant's work on boxing (*Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* [Oxford University Press, 2004]), which documents how the boxing gym functions in exactly the same way as the basketball team to bring structure and meaning to the boxers' lives and a way of escaping life on the streets. Nor does the author take up John Edgar Wideman's book *Hoop Roots* (Mariner Books, 2003), which discusses how playing basketball provides refuge from a hostile world. Since May covers much of the same well-worn territory discussed in these works, some differentiation would have helped clarify the unique sociological contribution that the book is making.

While *Living through the Hoop* intricately illuminates the lived experience of these young men on and off the court, it is in the area of theoretical framing and sociological contributions that the book fouls out of the game. There are few places where May connects sociological theory to basketball. While letting us in on the Dirty Trick, the book ultimately fails to provide a framework through which we can understand the micro and macro connections. An engagement with Douglas Hartman's excellent book *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath* (University of Chicago, 2003), which examines the institutions and the role that popular culture plays in shaping contemporary racial conditions in the United States would have proved useful in doing so. In addition, without a theory of hegemony or of false consciousness it seems these young men are very savvy in negotiating the pressures of their lives at some times and yet pawns duped by "the system" at others.

May discusses his own experience with basketball as both a player and a coach. This practical knowledge offers him a unique vantage point. This reader hoped for a longer discussion of not only how this shaped his identification with the players, but the way in which it guided his analysis. Most important is the role that May himself plays, as coach, as mentor, as father figure, and as a friend consciously perpetuating the Dirty Trick. Discussing this at length would have been eye-opening as to how the Dirty Trick ensnares everyone and how people are complicit and also active, even with the best of intentions, in their own domination. Nonetheless, by drawing attention to a much-neglected aspect of athletics in relation to race and upward mobility, May sheds light on an important area of research that I hope will inspire future scholarship along these lines.