



sport  
hidden curriculum  
equality global mass media  
culture education

# THE SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

AN INTRODUCTORY READER

Edited by **ANTHONY LAKER**

# **The Sociology of Sport and Physical Education**

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Anthony Laker**

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*The Sociology of Sport and Physical Education* is the first one-stop introductory guide for undergraduate students of Sport and Physical Education in the UK. With contributions from the leading names in its field, *The Sociology of Sport and Physical Education* examines the most important current issues in this area.

The first section of this book will enable students to understand and contextualise the issues discussed by looking at the theoretical background and research methods used in the sociological study of sport. The book also covers a wide range of contemporary concerns, centring on the notion of difference in physical education and sporting contexts.

Topics discussed include:

- Gender, race and ethnicity.
- The sporting body.
- Participation and socialisation.
- Critical pedagogy and the hidden curriculum.
- Politics, sport and the mass media.

Each chapter concludes with questions for discussion, and a selection of tasks and suggested further reading, making this an ideal basis for either individual study or for a lecture series.

*Anthony Laker* is Degree Director in Physical Education in the Department of Exercise and Sport Science at East Carolina University in the USA.

With contributions from Bob Chappell, Gill Clarke, Matthew Curtner-Smith, Brian Davies, John Evans, Barrie Houlihan, Barbara Humberstone, David Kirk, Doune Macdonald, Gareth Nutt, Dawn Penney, George Sage and Sandra A. Stroot.

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# Introduction

The original idea for this book was born some years ago when I was teaching 'sociology of sport and physical education' to undergraduates in Plymouth, most of whom were training to be teachers. I noticed that my references and recommendations for additional reading were from both British and American authors. This was fine when I was referring students to specific topics, as both countries have fine traditions of sport sociology research and writing. I was able to cite particular chapters or articles that my students could go away and study. My problem came when asked to recommend one text that could be used as a course reader. There were many such books from American authors, but British authors had been much more specialised in their writing and there wasn't a 'one stop' book reference that I could supply. This book is intended to fill that gap and is therefore aimed at undergraduate students of sport, physical education, recreation and leisure; indeed, it is for any student interested in sport as a social phenomenon.

The result is a compilation of writings from the leading academic authors of their generation. I have been very fortunate that I was able to persuade these colleagues, friends and, in some cases, heroes to contribute to this book. I feel privileged to be able to write in their company.

There are twelve topics, each covered by one of the twelve chapters. At the end of each chapter there are some questions for students to reflect on. These could also be used as test, or examination, questions. The tasks suggested are designed to encourage students to engage with the material and to develop a personal context in which to interpret the subject matter of the chapter topic. Most of the tasks can be done in groups to encourage the social interaction so important in the constructivist, and social learning, formation of knowledge and understanding. Students who develop a particular interest will find the recommended further reading useful when pursuing their interest.

The way this book is used is, of course, entirely up to the course tutor or lecturer. However, the concept and layout lend themselves to being used as a course reader, an introductory text that supplements a series of lectures. The first three chapters cover what might be called the necessary background information of the importance and place of sport in culture, the theoretical background and the research methodologies prevalent in sport and physical education research. This provides a sound theoretical context on which to base the topic chapters that follow.



Although this is not an exhaustive account of all things sporting and sociological, the topics selected encompass most arenas of topical debate. Issues such as gender, the sporting body, race and ethnicity, and equality and equity are addressed and analysed from a macro and micro viewpoint. How these factors affect participation and socialisation are then considered. The critical perspective comes to the fore when the hidden curriculum and critical pedagogy are elaborated on. Finally, we look at the larger issues of political influence and globalisation and how they have an effect on sport and physical education.

I begin by discussing the relationship between sport, education and culture. These concepts are all interwoven and are very important to the way we live and conduct our lives. We all have experience of all of them and they impact our lives on a daily basis. Education promotes and maintains our culture, and sport is a part of that education and a part of our culture. This is also true of many cultures worldwide and there is a global language and community that has sport as its binding force. John Evans and Brian Davies then deal with the paradox of educational research in Britain. It has been claimed that such research is too theoretical and not relevant, yet universities are partially funded according to their high quality research output. Professors Evans and Davies briefly outline the development of research in physical education and conclude that it definitely has had an impact on classroom practice. They call for more, not less, theory and innovation in research and teaching. Chapter 3 looks at the different methodological approaches to educational research. Positivism, the interpretive paradigm and critical theory are explained by Matt Curtner-Smith. For each of these research paradigms Dr Curtner-Smith provides a description, a look at the evolution, and some examples of published studies. The references following this chapter are a valuable resource to all readers interested in continuing with any form of sport pedagogy research.

Barbara Humberstone investigates the issues of femininity and masculinity in sport. The construction of notions of femininity and masculinity is a result of social interaction, dominant ideology and institutional bias. Professor Humberstone explains the concept of patriarchal hegemony and begins to investigate how 'difference' is interpreted in gender forms. David Kirk also celebrates 'difference' in his chapter on the sporting body. As with gender, the body and how it is viewed is a social construction. Professor Kirk explains the cult of slenderness, how we 'school' our bodies to conform to dominant ideas of acceptability, and how the media promote normative body shape values. School physical education and sport in general are sites where this 'body construction' takes place and some alternative approaches for teachers and coaches are suggested.

Race and ethnicity are sometimes wrongly used as interchangeable terms. Bob Chappell explains these terms in Chapter 6. One of the critical points of the book is his attribution of the success of black athletes to socialisation and not to race differences. He then takes a cross-cultural look at black sports people in the USA and Britain, concluding with an examination of the involvement in sport of the Asian population in Britain. Dawn Penney's chapter on equality and equity suggests that the way 'difference' is interpreted and accommodated is the key to

equity of provision, accessibility and opportunity. Dr Penney draws on her substantial investigation into the National Curriculum in physical education to point out that we still have a long way to go in promoting real equality for our young people in education. Too often 'difference' is seen as a problem requiring a solution, whereas it should be seen as a state of being that deserves recognition and acceptance.

Sandra Stroot draws heavily on Bandura's social learning theory when writing about socialisation and participation in sport. She explains that the family, teachers and coaches are crucial in getting children involved in sport. However, Professor Stroot points out that continued participation is dependent on many other factors such as gender, social class, commitment, sporting identity, and race and ethnicity.

The notion of a 'hidden curriculum', in addition to the regular school curriculum, has received much attention from educational sociologists. Gareth Nutt and Gill Clarke help us understand how such a 'hidden curriculum' is constituted and transmitted in the school environment. They point out that the social relationship between teacher and students is a conduit for this transmission and that the 'power' of the teacher and the peer group is vital in transmitting these covert social values and messages. Teachers are also subject to a 'hidden curriculum' of sorts and the nature of teachers' work is changing. 'Deprofessionalisation', initial teacher training and examinations in physical education are shown to account for some of this change. Doune Macdonald continues the critical theory theme with her account of critical pedagogy. She analyses what it is and why it is important. Her description of three case studies provides fine examples of action research in teacher education, school physical education and a community physical activity programme. Dr Macdonald provides a model for reflective practice in these locations and her explanation of the cycles of action research should be valuable to any students considering such a project as part of their studies.

The final two chapters take a much broader look at sport in a political and global context. Barrie Houlihan investigates the various motives for governments adopting sport as a cause. These motives are various and not always the most altruistic. National prestige, control of social problems and health promotion are three that Professor Houlihan documents. The National Curriculum for physical education, soccer player transfer and eligibility, and anti-drug taking policy are used as examples of government involvement in sport. In a world of instant communication, domestic sports policy is often conditioned by the prevailing international climate and interests. George Sage takes up this theme in his chapter on the globalisation of sport and the media. Historically, the media has supported the status quo and been resistant to change. But the world's media is coming under the control of a decreasing number of corporations and individuals. Professor Sage writes about the symbiotic relationship between sport, business and the media. All serve the interests of the others. The media adapts and creates sports. What we see, hear and read is a mediated version of the real event. We are living in a global village, and sport and the media are global phenomena.

This book was originated to meet the needs of students and lecturers. I believe it serves that function very well. However, as I have conversed with the authors, read the chapters, and become involved in the content I have reformed my opinion of the way we should explore the sociology of sport and physical education. We put topics in boxes; I am as guilty of that as anyone. This book is designed that way; it is easy to study and understand that way. But it really isn't the way it should be. All of the topics are inter-related and should not be separated from each other. When you read this book try to make connections across the topics; that is what the tasks are for. Try to understand what you are reading from an intellectual and personal viewpoint. It is only by personalising the knowledge that you will truly understand it.

In a globalising, post-modern society, change is said to be the only constant. In editing this book I have come to realise that, in sport sociology and across all the topics, concerns and issues, 'difference' is the only similarity. This book then, is really an examination and exploration of difference in the human sporting condition.

Anthony Laker  
March 2001

First published 2002 by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
270 Madison Ave, New York NY 10016

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group*

Transferred to Digital Printing 2007

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Typeset in Times New Roman by GreenGate Publishing Services,  
Tonbridge, Kent

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

The sociology of sport and physical education: an introductory reader / [edited by]  
Anthony Laker.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Sports--Social aspects. 2. Physical education and training--Social aspects. I. Laker, Anthony, 1951-

GV706.S645 2001  
306.4 83--dc21

2001019961

ISBN 0-415-23593-6 (hbk)  
ISBN 0-415-23594-4 (pbk)

**Publisher's Note**

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent

Printed and bound by CPI Antony Rowe, Eastbourne

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# 1 Culture, education and sport

*Anthony Laker*

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to place sport in a social, cultural and educational context. This implies definitions of culture, education and sport, and the academic juxtaposition of each to the others. However, it will be seen that culture, education and sport have commonly-held meanings which, in some cases, eradicate the need for further clarification. So, apart from defining these important concepts, this chapter will also deal with the pervading nature of sport in society, sport as a system of sub-cultures and the degree to which sport has become an important symbol for individuals and societies worldwide. Sport has a variety of functions for different segments of society and therefore different meanings to those different populations.

Everyone knows what a culture is. Everyone knows what education is. And everyone knows what sport is. But everyone has slightly different definitions of culture, education and sport. What we require are commonly understood definitions of terms for the purpose of this chapter. The mere fact that we need to define these terms for the purposes of this analysis highlights the problem that definitions and meanings are context specific and will vary as the contexts of their usage changes. The potential differences in the meanings of sport have already been touched upon, but culture as a term can evoke different interpretations.

There is an inevitable and symbiotic relationship between culture, education and sport. Education and sport are two of the major institutions of our society. As such, they interact with each other, and of course other institutions, to contribute to what we commonly regard as culture and society. In this way, neither education nor sport are ideologically neutral because they have implicit values which we incorporate into recognition of both culture and society. This incorporation of sport and education into the meaning of society and culture legitimates them and gives them both a value and a place. Although we have only referred to sport and education here, it can be seen how the various societal and cultural components (such as religion, work and the family) are constructed through systems of meaning that are legitimated through practice and adoption and perpetuate the commonly-held view of culture and society.



The above argument indicates the real value of sport and education; that is, they have importance in many of our everyday lives, and they are a part of the fabric of our society. The emotions, particularly those of parents, raised by education and the number of newspaper pages devoted to sport are a testament to this importance.

## Culture

There is a commonly-held view that culture is art; paintings, sculptures, drama and the like, but that is mistaken. The artistic view of culture is limited by its narrowness of application – it is only one aspect of culture, and is sometimes referred to as ‘high’ culture. The converse is that a ‘low’ culture also exists and refers to football, pop music, and TV. This élitist view has little appeal in academic debate and, as the boundaries between these two opposing cultural dichotomies becomes ever more blurred, the currency of this framework is devalued.

A culture is a system of shared values, meanings and symbols that enables societies and individuals to operate effectively without continually redefining these values, meanings, symbols and points of reference. Imagine the impossibility of having to say what we meant by religion, for example, every time we used the term; or what morality meant to us; or what we understood by the word sport. Take the symbol of the cross. In one context it indicates religion, spirituality, and the religious claim that Jesus died on a cross to grant us salvation. In another context, as a traffic sign, a cross means two roads intersecting, and we must therefore drive with care. A cross on its side, in yet another context, indicates that something is wrong, incorrect and possibly needs to be done again. The meaning of the symbol clearly depends upon the context in which the symbol is placed.

As well as being things and items, symbols can be found in actions and language. Hand gestures, facial expressions, body language and head movements sometimes have specific meanings in different cultural contexts. In western society, we commonly throw paper and small pieces of household rubbish on a fire. However in Nepal, the Hindu and Buddhist household gods live in the hearth and it is an insult to throw rubbish at them. Giving or receiving items with one’s left hand is poorly regarded in some Asian and eastern cultures because of the sanitary function for which the left hand is used. It is far better to offer and receive with both hands. Nearer to our own western experience, Churchill’s V for victory hand gesture has come to be interpreted as a peace symbol. Although connections can be made between victory and peace, these are different concepts located in different times but represented by the same symbol.

These differences within shared meanings are what make separate cultures unique. People within the culture do not have to define their symbols at every social interaction. The commonly-held perception of meaning lubricates the social process. Within cultures there are sub-cultures. These smaller groupings of individuals also share systems of values and meanings and this develops their clear and separate identities. Some of the most obvious examples are surfers and bikers. Each of these groups has very distinctive ways of dressing, talking and