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SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT

VOLUME II

Social Divisions and Conflicts in Sport...



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SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT

Introduction: Social Divisions and Conflicts in Sport

Richard Giulianotti

In Volume 2, our attention turns to the social divisions and conflicts in sport that have been examined by sociologists. We focus particularly on the classic sociological problems of class, gender, sexuality, and racism and ethnicity; in addition, we examine forms of industrial exploitation, injury and abuse towards athletes and animals. Many of these articles engage directly with the theories and concepts which were set out in Volume 1.

We begin with three articles that address the interconnections between sport and social class. The definition of social class is highly contested among sociologists: for example, Marxist approaches focus particularly on the social relations of production, while Weberian approaches focus more on market inequalities. Here, we may understand social classes as being constructed largely through socio-economic factors which systematically differentiate social groups in terms of occupation, relations of production, wealth, income and life-chances. Moreover, all of these factors have direct influence upon the sets of cultural 'tastes', practices and identities that serve further to structure and to differentiate social classes (cf. Bourdieu 1984; Crompton 2008; Savage 2000; Wright 1997).

Historically, social class positions and divisions have served to facilitate, to channel and to restrict forms of sport participation, for example, through entrance fees and controlled membership lists (cf. Gruneau 1983; Hargreaves 1986; Veblen 1953). The increasing commercialization of sport in recent years has marginalized further the participation of lower class groups, for example, in paying for admission to prestige events or accessing adequate facilities (cf. Collins & Kay 2003; Giulianotti 2005; Smart 2006; Wagg 2004). Class factors are also at play in recent 'medical panics' over the low physical activity levels of young people, particularly in working-class communities (cf. McDermott 2007; Smith et al. 2004).

The first article on social class, which is included here, by Ken Roberts, Ken Green and Andy Smith, explores how the sport-social class nexus is played

out among young people in the UK. While arguing that physical activity and sport participation are more 'class-related' than 'class-based', the authors demonstrate that strong social class inequalities persist in relation to sports. Thus, for example, upper- and middle-class children are able to spend more time doing more varied physical activities than are their working-class peers.

The work of Bourdieu (1984) has enabled social scientists to probe the nexus between class and sport participation (cf. Mehus 2005; Stempel 2005; Thrane 2001). For Bourdieu, the struggle for distinction between social groups (usually social classes or class fractions) is marked by diverging cultural tastes that are themselves symptomatic of different kinds of habitus. The article by Thomas Wilson, which is included here, draws heavily upon Bourdieu to explore how cultural capital is more potent than economic capital in shaping sports involvement, particularly in relation to 'prole' or apparently lower-class sports. The article by Joanne Kay and Suzanne Laberge develops and extends these themes by focussing on one sporting pastime – adventure racing – and how it is both shaped by and appeals to the particular habitus and cultural capital of corporate managers.

We then turn to feature seven articles that explore issues of gender and sexuality. Modern forms of sport and physical exercise were established in deeply gendered ways during the 19th and early 20th centuries, being suffused with patriarchal ideologies and organizational structures that served to exclude or to marginalize women. The struggle to participate was fought especially in everyday social environments, for example, in schools and places of employment, as well as at elite level, for example, in the right to compete in more physically demanding disciplines, such as middle- and long-distance running. In turn, women in sport have fought to challenge dominant ideologies that undermine the female body's association with strong physical activity, for example, in the display of musculature (cf. Guttmann 1991; Hargreaves 1994, 2000; Markula 1995).

The article by Gertrud Pfister, which is included here, engages with these historical aspects, to explore several key issues that impact upon current and future gender relations within sport. Drawing upon a 'constructivist' approach, Pfister's broad analysis covers sport-gender relations in regard to participation, media coverage and leadership. While critiquing the lingering presence of gender divisions and ideologies, Pfister concludes in positive vein by noting that women's greater participation in all sports (including violent ones) points towards the long-term decline of deep-seated mythologies regarding 'stronger' and 'weaker' sexes.

The next article, by Barbara Cox and Shona Thompson, provides a shift in theory, scale and methodology. Using a strongly qualitative, empirical case-study of women's football in New Zealand, Cox and Thompson examine the gendered aspects of sport with respect to the body and sexuality. The post-structuralist thinking of Judith Butler (1990) is particularly useful for their theory of the 'multiple body', which is deployed to highlight the complex, diverse and empowering ways in which women may practice and experience sport in corporeal terms.

It is crucial for social scientists to recognize the influence of distinctive national-cultural forces upon gendered identities, practices and structures in relation to sport (cf. Crossman et al. 2007; Hargreaves 1994; Hartmann-Tews & Pfister 2003; Hong & Mangan 2004). The article by Eui Hang Shin and Edward Adam Nam, which is included here, explores the national-cultural forces that underlie the remarkable international successes of Korean female golfers in recent years. Shin and Nam explain the important social backdrop to these successes, notably Korea's intensive examination culture which promotes focus and work ethic, the strong familial contribution to player development, and the long-term 'emboldening' of women since the Korean war.

We turn then to explore masculinities within sport. Historically, modern sports have functioned to instil and sustain dominant masculine identities and practices that are typically centred on themes of aggression, violence, heterosexuality, obedience and self-sacrifice (cf. Mangan 1998; Messner 2007). The work of R.W. Connell (1987, 1995, 2000) has been central to the social scientific study of masculinity, and has enabled sociologists to explore how 'hegemonic masculinities' are reproduced and contested within sport (cf. Davis 1997; Trujillo 1991). The article by Connell, which is included here, provides a highly qualitative sport-based application of his thinking, through a critical case-study of the masculinity of one successful Australian athlete. For Connell, the structures of hegemonic masculinity speak through the athlete, 'appropriating' his body, to reproduce a particular gender order within sport that serves dominant ideologies of masculine identity as well as the forces of commerce.

Arguably, the work of Michael Messner has thus far provided the most extensive and substantial single contribution to the sociological study of masculinity within sport (see, for example, Messner 1990, 2007; Messner & Sabo 1990, 1994). The article by Messner and Nancy Solomon, which is included here, provides a critical, empirically informed examination of Title IX legislation in the United States. Title IX was intended to promote equal opportunities in sport, and its most significant impact has often been identified in school or college sports. For Messner and Solomon, this legislation means that underlying conflicts in interest exist between men who favour big revenue sports (like American football or basketball) and those who prefer more marginal sports. Yet, so many men in the latter groups express views that support big-revenue sports; a paradoxical, self-defeating position that plays directly into the hands of wider, gender-regressive forces.

We then move on to examine issues regarding sexuality, with two highly qualitative articles on the sport experiences of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) community. Sport has long been underpinned by 'heteronormative' and homophobic principles and practices which explicitly marginalize LGBT individuals and social groups (cf. Griffin 1992; Veri 1999). However, the broad rise of lifestyle and identity politics, and the growth of the gay and lesbian movements have served to contest these dominant heterosexual forces in sport in recent years. Thus, we have witnessed the development

of the 'Gay Games' since 1982, which enables the mass gathering and participation of LGBT groups; the proliferation of separate sports leagues that serve LGBT communities; or the 'coming out' of athletes such as Martina Navratilova and Amelie Mauresmo in tennis, or Ian Roberts and Gareth Thomas in the different rugby codes (cf. Symons 2010; Travers 2006).

The article by Eric Anderson, which is included here, examines how hegemonic, heterosexual masculinities may be contested by 'openly gay' athletes. Anderson recognizes that these athletes struggle to be seen in a way that positively integrates their sexuality and athleticism. In turn, the athletes often prove themselves to heterosexual sport participants through demonstrating capabilities in non-sexual forms of hegemonic masculinity, most obviously through successful sporting performances. The article by Barbara Ravel and Geneviève Rail, which is also included here, inquires more fully into the gender construction and coming out process within sport. Drawing particularly upon poststructuralist feminist and queer theories, Ravel and Rail argue that their research among sportswomen serves to challenge assumptions regarding the linearity of the coming out process or the 'fixed' nature of sexual identity.

Our next thematic focus is on 'race' and ethnicity within the sociology of sport. We begin by exploring normative and philosophical issues surrounding the logics of race and racism within sports discourse. The article included here, by Jonathan Long and Michael McNamee, marshals several empirical studies to provide a nuanced comparative schema for judging different 'racist' statements and practices in sport. In particular, the authors highlight the need to move away from binary understandings of racism (wherein, for example, statements may be classified as racist or not), and to discern instead the different 'degrees of culpability' that are identifiable in everyday sporting discourse.

We turn next to consider the disproportionately high representation of African-Americans in elite North American sports. Certainly, this prominence has been facilitated by the long-term successes of African-Americans and other ethnic minorities in fighting their systematic exclusion or marginalization in sport (cf. Edwards 1969). However, it also reflects more deep-seated forms of racism, such as coach assumptions concerning 'natural' athleticism, and deeper social facts regarding the poor educational prospects and labour market opportunities afforded to black youth (cf. Hall 2001). The article by Scott Brooks and Michael McKail, considers the case of black basketball players vis-à-vis their 'preferred worker' status. Brooks and McKail highlight the influence of low socio-economic positioning, vulnerability, and the power of structural interests in creating 'niche' markets such as basketball for these marginal groups.

The article by Kristin Walseth and Kari Fasting, which focusses on Muslim women in sport, enables us to broaden the analysis of the race/sport couplet, to examine the interplay between ethno-religious identity and gender. At first glance, the sport position of Muslim women would be anticipated as particularly

marginalized, given the strong constrictions placed upon their physical activities and public role within Islamic society. However, utilizing substantial research in Egypt, Walseth and Fasting provide some counter-intuitive findings, notably that Muslim women sport participants believe that Islam encourages such participation; moreover, many of the most committed participants tend to have relatively fundamentalist Islamic standpoints.

Finally on 'race', we turn to consider the position of Native American (or 'First Nation') cultural identity in regard to elite sport. As part of their corporatized public identity, many elite sports clubs have colonized and commodified some rather stereo-typed signifiers of First Nation culture, most obviously in relation to naming – think, for example, of the Chicago Blackhawks in ice-hockey, the Washington Redskins in American football, and the Atlanta Braves and Cleveland Indians in baseball (cf. Davis-Delano 2007; *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 2004). The article by Michael Robidoux moves analysis of this sociological problem to a further level, by exploring how First Nations peoples themselves use these 'indigenous' symbols, images and language as forms of self-representation. Although they often display 'false' kinds of 'Indian-ness', these signifiers do also enable First Nations peoples to explore and to construct distinctive types of self and collective identity.

Our final five articles examine specific fields in which forms of physical injury, exploitation and abuse occur within sport. The first two articles deal with the occupational interplay between exploitation and injury among boxers and football players respectively. The leading sociologist Loïc Wacquant (e.g. 1995a, 1995b, 2004) has provided several rich ethnographic studies of American boxing through an imaginative Bourdieusian analytical framework. In the article that is included here, Wacquant examines how boxers understand their barely-regulated exploitation by trainers and promoters, and how they seek to carve out and to protect forms of personal integrity within these oppressive relationships.

Pain and injury are typically presented by sport coaches and other athletic pedagogues as inescapable aspects of competitive physical activity, as 'part of the game', particularly for professional athletes. Dominant discourses and narratives serve to shape the ways in which athletes understand and 'talk away' their injuries, or mask the pain that is endured (cf. Howe 2001, 2008; McTear 1994). The article by Andrew Sparkes and Brett Smith is a deeply qualitative study of the narratives employed by individuals who have suffered catastrophic spinal cord injuries through sport participation. The focus here is on the different ways in which pain is thematized by the individuals, for example, in terms of their personal biographies or how the pain is 'named'. The article by Martin Roderick explores workplace injury among professional footballers in England. Drawing upon in-depth interviews with many players, Roderick reveals the general stigmatization that is associated with injury within the subculture of football, and identifies the potent social and occupational pressures that militate against players presenting themselves to club officials as 'injured'.

The sexual exploitation of athletes has received important, but belated examination by sociologists of sport in recent years (e.g. Brackenridge 2001). The article included here, by Kari Fasting and Celia Brackenridge, draws on substantial qualitative research to explore the sexual harassment of young female athletes by their coaches. Fasting and Brackenridge argue that a repertoire of interactive techniques and 'harassment scripts' are used by some coaches in their abuse of athletes. The authors advance recommendations for changes in coaching practice that should be introduced to combat this problem.

Our final article, by Michael Atkinson and Kevin Young, examines the issue of animal abuse in sport. Some articles by figurational sociologists have applied Elias's concept of the 'civilizing process' to explain how 'blood sports' such as fox-hunting and badger-baiting came to be 'civilised' or banned (cf. Elias and Dunning 1986; Stokvis 1993). Atkinson and Young draw upon figurational sociology – notably the concepts of mimesis, figuration and civilizing process – to examine abusive practices in American greyhound racing. They suggest that the sport's declining popularity may be partly explained by the more civilized attitudes of North Americans towards the treatment of animals. Yet, Atkinson and Young also recognize that wider transformations in the sports entertainment industry have had an impact on the market for greyhound racing. Thus, the authors reflect a recurring theme throughout this volume: that many social divisions and conflicts are strongly shaped by deep-seated political-economic forces and interests.

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Social Class, Young People, Sport and Physical Education

Ken Green, Andy Smith and Ken Roberts

A great deal is known about the relationship between social class and education and, to a lesser extent, about social class, leisure and sport. Very little, however, is known about the relationship between social class and physical education. It is our intention in this chapter to begin to tease out the significance of social class for our understanding of physical education and, more specifically, how 'the class divisions that arise in economic life are liable to spill over' (Roberts, 2001: 21) into other areas of young people's lives that have implications for physical education: such as their leisure lifestyles, sporting abilities and dispositions, and so forth.

Social class has proved to be related to virtually all areas of life so it is no surprise to find that class is related to leisure in general, and sports participation in particular. However, within leisure there are exceptions (watching TV, for example) and other uses of leisure where the predictive power of class is relatively weak (for example, gambling). This also applies to certain sports such as angling and football. Might it, then, be possible, via physical education, to weaken the link across the whole of sport? Indeed, might it be possible for physical education to have a positive impact upon the likely involvement of young people from all social class backgrounds in sport and physical activity beyond school and into adult life? Before we examine these issues we want to say a few words about recent economic changes and their consequences for social class and class-based inequalities in Britain.

Economic Change, Social Class and Inequalities

If social class depends upon the ways in which people earn their livings – that is to say, on their occupations – then ‘changes in employment are bound to change the class structure’ (Roberts, 2001: 80); and, indeed, they have. New technologies and wider processes of globalisation have, as Roberts (2001: 79) observes, ‘ushered in new, post-Fordist economic times’ characterised by ‘greater flexibility (of labour markets, jobs and workers); more precarious, non-standard employment (temporary, part-time and self-employment); higher unemployment; pressure on those in jobs to do more; and wider income inequalities’. These changes in the social class structure of Britain have led to renewed attempts to design up-to-date social classifications (see Roberts, 2001). For present purposes, however, we need only offer a few summary comments on the significance of such changes for our understanding of social class in relation to life in the UK in general and education and physical education in particular.

Recently, Collins (2003) has recounted Beck’s (1992) argument that in the (supposedly) postmodern, individualised societies typical of the West, ‘the concept of class is terminally crumbling’ inevitably to be ‘replaced by individual values and behaviours centred around consumption’ (2003: 69). Writers such as Beck (1992), Giddens (1991), Lash and Urry (1994), among others, have suggested that ‘as the era of mass consumption disappears’ lifestyles become not only ‘more and more diverse’ (Tomlinson, 2003: 98) but also more and more significant than the old social markers of class, ethnicity and gender. For most sociologists, however, it is axiomatic that the much-heralded claims of an end to class – in the sense of a disappearance of class distinctions of any note – are simply not supported by the evidence. Most would agree with Armour’s (2000: 71; citing Travers, 1999) observation that ‘postmodernist suggestions that social class is no longer a relevant concept are “at odds with our everyday experience”’. Roberts (1999) points out that while some areas of social experience – leisure, for example – are, indeed, more *individualised*, money remains at the root of many obvious differences: in health and education, for example. In relation to leisure, in particular, economic inequalities ‘rather than alternative ways of life’ continue to lie at the heart of ‘the main differences between uses of leisure in different strata’ (Roberts, 1999: 87). In short, ‘the kind of individualism that has spread in these post-Fordist times’ continues to be of ‘a structured variety’ (Roberts, 2003: 23) – structured, among other things, by social class. Despite the overall ‘upgrading’ of the UK workforce, and the growth in absolute terms of the middle class, ‘many young people remain very close to where they started out in life’ in social class terms. To the extent that they do so, their biographies become individualised in a relatively ‘passive’ manner as they ‘make the best of available opportunities’ (2003: 24).

It is true that, by degrees, old class formations may have been undermined by social and economic changes in recent decades, and the working class has

become more fragmented or disorganised. Nevertheless, not only do class inequalities ‘remain very much alive’ they are, in fact, wider than ever when ‘judged by income differentials’ (Roberts, 2001: 80). While Britain is undoubtedly ‘a far more prosperous country now than in the 1960s, nevertheless ‘a substantial section of the working class has not shared the benefits’ (Roberts, 2001: 108). Even though they are no longer as strong as they have been in the past, class differences remain huge: ‘The most wealthy one per cent of the population holds approximately a sixth, and the bottom 50 per cent holds hardly any of all personally-held wealth’ (Roberts, 2001: 1). All in all, there has been a clear polarisation of income levels in Britain since 1980 as ‘the less advantaged sections of the population have become even more disadvantaged’ (Roberts, 1995: 2). Poverty, according to Collins (2003: 68), is at the ‘core of (social) exclusion’ with 23 per cent of British people potentially classified as ‘in poverty’ in 2001. In relation to young people, one million children are said to be in a state of poverty currently in Britain with nearly 10 per cent of children experiencing ‘severe and persistent poverty lasting five years or more’ (Carvel, 2003: 10).

Social class is evidently ‘related to people’s wealth, health and education’ (Roberts, 2001: 6) and, for that matter, many other aspects of their lives. The effects of class range from the ages at which people marry, how they vote and church attendance through to risks of criminal conviction (Roberts, 2001). To this list, we might add playing sport and experiences of physical education. The poorest million children are more likely, among other things, ‘to miss meals or be unable to join in play activities’ (Carvel, 2003: 10) while children in severe poverty appear ‘five times as likely as other children to be excluded from simple social activities like having a friend around for tea ... or even having a hobby’ (2003: 10).

Before exploring the significance of social class for leisure, sport and physical education in greater detail, we want to say something about social class as a concept.

Defining Social Class

In academic as well as popular thinking, attempts to define social class tend to have an economic base. In other words, ‘all concepts of class group together people with similar ways of making their livings, that is, in similar occupations’ (Roberts, 2001: 21). Sugden and Tomlinson (2002: 312) observe that ‘few would disagree’ with the broad notion of social class as an ‘economically grounded concept’. ‘In the most general of senses’, they suggest, ‘class is the social and cultural expression of an economic relationship’ (2002: 312). They add that classes ‘are made up of people who are similarly placed in terms of the contribution they make to economic production, the command over resources this gives them and the lifestyles which this helps to generate’.