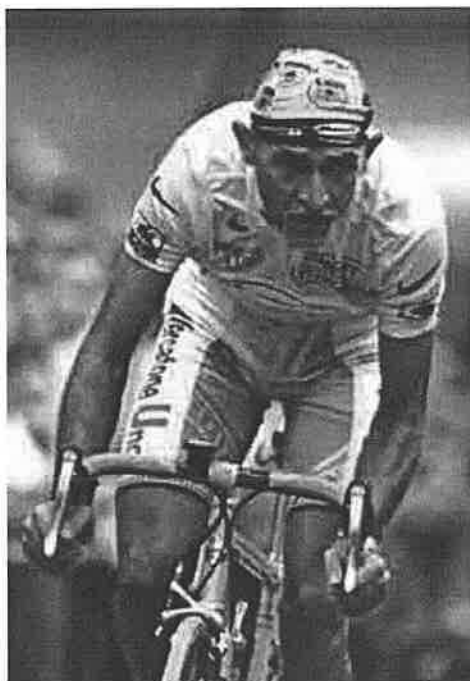


Chapter 12

Sport, body and health



How can our understanding of sport today help to redefine what is meant by the body, health, pain, injury and hunger, in not only different social worlds but also different worlds of health?



PREVIEW

Key terms defined ■ Introduction ■ Health-worlds and life chances ■ Sport, body and society ■ The body and social theory ■ Deviant bodies ■ Civilised bodies ■ Natural bodies ■ Sport, the body and religion ■ Sport and the body in social thought ■ Civilised bodies and the quest for excitement ■ Body, class and physical capital ■ Women, body habitus and lifestyles ■ Sexuality and the gendered body ■ The body, power and knowledge ■ The body, identities and differences ■ Other sporting bodies ■ Sport and body culture as cultural policy ■ Summary

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in the nineteenth century to ascertain just exactly what is the normalised body and what is the normalised or accepted truth about drugs in sport, and who defines this truth. The relationship between sport, the body, health and well-being is both complex and culturally and socially varied.

Many have tended to view the body as a fixed, unchanging fact of nature, viewed in biological terms rather than as being social, cultural or historical, or invoking political economy. Naturalistic and social constructionist views have left their mark upon how people have thought about human embodiment in relation to sport, health, fitness and physical activity. Many new ways of thinking about the body have opened up sport, body and society as a vibrant area of research. It is no longer possible to think of the body solely in universal, fundamental or natural terms, but rather in differentiated and plural terms. A striking development has been the extent to which encounters between social and ethical thinkers, as well as Western and non-Western schools of thought have wrestled with explanations of body, health, pain, injury, hunger and contributed not simply to a more comprehensive and complex understanding of different social worlds or sporting worlds, but also health worlds (Germond and Cochrane, 2010).

Earlier interventions such as Shilling's *The Body and Social Theory* (1993), Scott and Morgan's *Body Matters* (1993) and Turner's influential *Body and Society* (1996) all recognised sociology's neglect of the body and argued for divergent approaches to recognising the need to analyse humans as embodied persons. Much of this work has explored the varied cultural meanings attached to bodies and the way they are controlled, regulated and reproduced. Coakley (2003: 140) testified to changes in the ways that bodies have been socially defined and contributed to different exchanges concerning how people think about the body in society. Most notably, in terms of sexuality, ideals of beauty, body image and identity, health, social differences, violence and power, the medical profession and high performance sport.

If you add to this recent research relating to pain, injury, hunger, performance and the management of these (Loland *et al.*, 2006; Waddington, 2001; Eichberg, 2011), then the study of sport, body and health has proliferated into a corpus of knowledge that has:

- challenged traditional Western ideas about the separation of mind and body;
- questioned the moral, cultural and sociological implications relating to how bodies are protected, probed, monitored, tested, trained, manipulated, rehabilitated and disciplined all in the name of sport;
- questioned the simplistic way in which bodies are differentiated and represented as marks of gender, race, disability, age and other social divisions without really thinking about the recognition of difference or the dangers of thinking in differentiated terms;
- questioned the way in which body culture figures as an alternative to conventional notions of sports policy; and
- encouraged health-seeking strategies that draw upon multicultural environments and places, and challenge the notion of normality.

It would be wrong not to relate this introduction to sport, body and health to other chapters in Part 3. The body has figured prominently in accounts of *sports, violence and*

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deviance. Cole's (2002) review of sport and the body describes the role of science and technology in the production of a modern sporting body, which she describes in both normal and abnormal terms. Deviant/transgressive bodies are viewed as those that challenge or shock societies' orthodox attitudes to the sporting body. The language of deviance and violence is used to explain the appearance of non-normative bodies that do not conform to the conventional wisdom in a domain that often invests dedication to bodily perfection. Such views are often expressed in relation to female and male bodybuilders, male boxers and female bullfighters. Shilling (1993) refers to the notion of civilised bodies. Elias's analysis of civilised bodies was both sociogenetic and psychogenetic in that it encompasses long-term processes underlying society's development and the personality structures of individuals. Changing rates of bodily violence, body manners and violence in sport have been drawn upon to substantiate and add weight to the theory of the civilising process. To simplify, the relatively civilised bodily characteristics and/or different rates of violence in sport of those involved in sport today are compared with their medieval counterparts as a basis for explaining an ongoing process of change.

So, too, has the body figured in debates about *sport, nature and the environment*. Are our bodies to be thought of purely in biological terms, or does nature or the environment in which bodies are located in time and space affect the relationship between body, self-identity and society? The naturalistic view holds that the capabilities and constraints of human bodies define individuals and generate subsequent social, political and economic relations. Women have challenged and buried the way in which natural bodies have historically been viewed as being a generic male form. Alternatively, socio-biological or natural views of the female sporting body point out that feminists have reproduced a distortion of the natural female body that, because of social pressures, requires women to pursue the tyranny of slenderness or a particular type of body. The notion of feminine embodiment often requires regimes of diet and exercise that are far from healthy. The tyranny of slenderness has been central to studies of feminism, aerobics and the politics of the body. What determines the tyranny of slenderness – the body or the environment? And to what extent can we change, manipulate one or the other, or both? The relationship between natural bodies competing in natural activities in a natural landscape was, suggests Magdalinski (2004), a primary method of understanding the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. When London was awarded the 2012 Olympic Games, its success was, in part, due to its commitment to producing environmentally friendly places.

Some of the thinking presented in sport, religion and spirituality could equally be pertinent to thinking about the body and healthy worlds. Turner's seminal contributions to both the sociology of religion and the sociology of body provide possibilities for thinking about *sport and religion*. The human body is typically central to shifting debates about whether sport is more or less secular. Hashemi (2000) has reminded us of the constraints that impinge upon the athletic body of Muslim women wishing to train for karate competitions in Afghanistan. In 1998, the second Islamic Women's Games took place – involving athletes from 24 Islamic countries. The relationships between sport and divine bodies, secular bodies and Islamic bodies are potentially rich areas for any student, teacher or researcher wishing to explore sources of human mythology and religious dogma. Add to this the challenge that the regulated body and the metaphors associated with right-handedness or left-footedness as being regarded

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One important normative idea that needs to be mentioned is that rival notions of health worlds also contain divergent and often cultural conceptions of not just health and well-being, but freedom and justice. Justice often rests upon the necessity of reciprocity and mutuality in relation to both self, others and regions. Freedom, whether negative or positive, often rests upon the tension between actual and potential realisation of winning or losing further freedoms. As has been argued throughout this book, issues of inequality need to refer to not just inequalities in an economic sense, but also inequalities in capability between people and/or places. The challenge is to narrow the gap in both inequalities of income and capability in an attempt to making both sporting and health worlds more just, transparent and free.

SPORT AND THE BODY IN SOCIAL THOUGHT

The range of social thought about the study of sport, body and society is varied and while much progress has been made it would be misleading to suggest that while the importance of the body to fields such as sports studies is developing apace it remains less developed when compared to the centrality of the body to relatively contemporary concerns of social theory and thought. Nonetheless, various traditions of social thought have informed our understanding of sport and the body and, in this section, I should like to draw attention to some of the key contributions to sport and the body in social thought.

Civilised bodies and the quest for excitement

Although the human body is not the central focus of the work of Norbert Elias, the analysis of bodily functions, bodily manners and bodily acts were substantive areas of concern that contributed to the theory of the civilising process. A key component of the civilising process was a concerted effort to understand how external restraints on behaviour could be replaced by internal, moral regulation. The civilised body, argued Elias (1978: 140), has the ability to rationalise and exert a high degree of control over its emotions, to monitor its actions, and those of others, and to internalise a demarcated set of rules about what is and is not appropriate behaviour. Such a process provided the basis for making a contrast between the civilised and uncivilised body over a period of time (Shilling, 1993).

The notion of the civilising process has informed and sustained a vein of social thought that has been captured in collections of essays such as Dunning and Rojek's (1992) *Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process* and Dunning *et al.*'s (2004) *Sports Histories*. One of the principal functions of sport and leisure activities talked about within this body of work was that those activities that took place within the spare-time spectrum were partly devoted to bodily maintenance, the control of emotional thresholds, and the enhancement of body appearance through utilising the outer body as a means of display. Thus, the body contributed not only to the performing self, but also to the promoting self. Both the quest for excitement and for identity were involved in physical and emotional bodily activities, such as the controlled decontrolling of emotions and eliciting different rates of excitement, as well as pleasurable acts such as smiling or less pleasurable acts such as wincing with pain, which are both intentionally deployed symbols that can convey a range of messages as a result of involvement

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From Bourdieu's work, it is clear that bodies are involved in the creation and reproduction of social difference. More specifically, bodies bear the imprint of social class because of three main factors: an individual's social location (material circumstances of daily life), the formation of their habitus and the development of their tastes. As a result of these factors, people tend to develop bodies that are valued differently and serve to naturalise social differences through such features as accent, poise and movement. According to Bourdieu (1978), the working classes adopted an instrumental approach to the body in which the body is a means to end. The body tends to be characterised as a machine in relation to health, illness, exercise and lifestyle in that it is always important to put the body right. Working-class attitudes to bodies are marked by the demands of getting by in life and the temporary release from the demands of everyday living. By contrast, the dominant classes are characterised as viewing the body as a project and have available resources to choose whether to place an emphasis on the intrinsic or external functioning of the body. In comparison to working-class groups, middle-class groups are deemed to have more control over their health, which can be exercised by choosing an appropriate lifestyle.

The relationship between physical activities, body habitus and lifestyles has been explored in a number of studies. Laberge and Sankoff (1988: 285) concluded that the structure of relations between different physical practices, different types of attention to the body and various leisure activities provided information about the social meaning of participation in physical activities and the social logics that govern these activities. The variation or pattern of participation by women in physical activities according to social class depended not only upon the different capacities of women with regard to time and money but also the variations in perception and appreciation of the profits and/or immediate or long-term benefits that participation in various physical activities could bring them. The relationship between physical activities, body habitus and lifestyle is determined in part by class habitus.

Social class, according to Bourdieu, was not simply a function of belonging to a particular social category, but also how one perceived one's self in relation to that category. The relationship between the body, class and exercise could not be understood purely in terms of what a group or person did, but how they also perceived what they were doing in relation to class activity. The value of Bourdieu's contribution to this discussion is important because it places the body and sport as bearers of symbolic value. The general importance of the body's orientation through sport and leisure activities may be as an expression of elite status but there might also be a mismatch between a person's orientation to their body and a related taste for sport. Thus, participation in certain sports might be seen as requiring social, cultural and economic capital before actual preferences or tastes are actualised in terms of participation. Such concerns raise critical questions about how people understand their body and physical activity, and how the choices that are made influence life chances.

Sexuality and the gendered body

The headline of a leading newspaper reads 'Row as beauty queen made a role model' (Allardyce, 2010: 7). Such headlines are not uncommon in the UK press. The article was about whether or not a glamour girl and beauty queen was the right person to choose as a role model to promote a campaign aimed at tackling childhood obesity and, in particular,

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**SPORT IN FOCUS 12.2: KEY ARGUMENTS ABOUT GENDER, BODY CULTURE AND HEALTH**

- Theorising gender and acknowledging that shifts in thinking and theory are ongoing.
- The fact that the historical body has also changed, as illustrated when one compares the Victorian cult of the family and the early years of female sport with the contemporary progress made by women's football.
- The representations of gendered bodies in sport through the media and, for example, how the body is used in displays of sexuality but also that such media representations contribute to the denial of women or the marginalisation of lesbian or homosexual sports coverage.
- The body diaspora and the ways in which notions of ethnicity, race and diaspora provide alternatives for reassessing the accepted gender hierarchy about sport and the body, for example, the role of the body in offering anti-national, anti-essentialist and non-European sophisticated accounts of the body and sport.
- Accounts of different masculinities and men's talk in relation to women's sport, female body culture, competition and homophobia.
- Sexuality and how this manifests itself in sport, gym cultures, exercise clubs, sporting tastes and body movement.
- The body, physicality and power and how different permutations of these notions manifest themselves in terms of violence, sexual abuse, gender orders in sport, sports organisations and struggles/resistance to produce change.
- The normative ideas of justice and freedoms are not uniform and the gendered body, like the healthy body or sporting body or athletic body carries with it many constraints and possibilities.

and accumulate new bodies of information. This notion has been applied to discussions about the body and health, the body and sexuality, the body and exercise, the political economy of the body, education and schooling, the body and masculinity to name but a few areas. These areas have been influenced by the idea that power constructs and dominates. The use of power and knowledge has helped to generate discourses about sport, the body, exercise and health that are viewed as natural and normal but are in fact legitimated through the use of power relation and knowledge. Simply put there could be no power relations without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that did not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.

Foucault argued that power was an inevitable part of the production of society, that its presence was dispersed through intellectual and bodily disciplines and that social relations

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deriving from the Latin root *idem*, implying sameness and continuity, it was not until the twentieth century that the term came into popular usage. The usage of the term in relation to body, sport and society has taken many forms, all of which have attempted to reinforce and challenge *essentialist* understandings of sport, body and society. Essentialism refers to that which is a core identity or identities after everything else has been peeled away and the extent to which sport and body cultures reproduce and reinforce essential identities. The historical contribution has highlighted the invented or constructed character of identity associated with many sporting traditions and body styles. The historical approach, as with other approaches, views identity as essentialist but also *contingent* in that the identities are associated with body change over time and are, therefore, contingent upon particular histories. The psychodynamic approach to identity, body and sport has attempted to answer the question: who am I, and to what extent are the sporting and bodily practices I am involved in a reflection of self in a psychodynamic sense? The sociological approach to identity also has links to a theory of self in that a sociological tradition of identity theory has been linked to the symbolic interactionism associated with George Herbert Mead, Erving Goffman and Peter Berger. In this sense, body identities have been explained through the process of socialisation, communication and body language, all of which have attempted to reconcile the inner subjective creative bodily 'I' with the more outer, partly determined and objective 'me'. With particular reference to sport, discussions of national identity have drawn upon the notion of sport, helping to construct an imagined community while developmental or process sociologists have asserted that sport and the body are but vehicles for an overall quest for identity.

The notion of *identity crisis* has been evoked to imply that identity only really becomes an issue when a particular, culture, social group, or nation is facing a crisis of identity. The notion of the body or sport reflecting an identity crisis is problematic in that it reduces discussions of body identity to being simply reactionary rather than body or sporting identities being enabling. The framing of debates about the body and/or sport in this way is not sensitive to particular identity crises unique to sport or body culture at a particular point in time. Did the impact of football hooliganism in the 1990s and beyond pose a particular crisis of identity for English football or was English football simply reacting to broader social and cultural forces? If sport is viewed as a key component for the expression of national identity, then the fragmentation of different parts of the world may pose a particular crisis of identity for particular body cultures at local, national and international levels. Identity politics on its own is relatively meaningless and the notion of identity in crisis can contribute to an understanding of sport and body cultures in different parts of the world experiencing large-scale political upheaval or in places where new social forces attempt to dilute, replace or marginalise national identities. To what extent have body cultures helped to reassert a new European identity that threatens national identities? To what extent has sport reflected or enabled forms of reconciliation or a hardened militancy among various ethnic identities? Thus, identities that are forged through sport, body and society may matter more if there is a real or perceived crisis of identity, globally, locally, personally and politically.

A crucial concept is the notion of *difference* in relation to the body and sport. The marking of difference is crucial to the construction of identities in sport, body and society. Identities tend to be formed in relation to other identities and differences are used to signify or represent them. This unsatisfactory trend tends to take the form of binary forms of

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**SPORT IN FOCUS 12.3: OPPOSING CORNERS – THE BOXING DEBATE**

Women's boxing will appear in the London 2012 Olympic Games for the first time. The arguments for and against have been summarised below.

For:

- It is a good thing we are trying to bring equality into sport.
- It is much more accessible than other women's sports.
- Having it on TV during the Olympics will raise the profile.
- Women wear the headguards and are medically checked every time they box.
- The risk is no more or less than other women's contact sports such as rugby.

Against:

- The British medical authorities (BMA) are disappointed with the decision to televise women's boxing.
- Since the early 1980s, the BMA has called for boxing to be banned.
- The opposition is based upon medical evidence that the risk to acute injury and brain damage is too great.
- Irrespective of gender, boxers can suffer damage to eyes, ears, nose and brain.
- The cumulative effect of a lifetime in the ring can be irreversible damage.

contest's modern history. Should the debate about women's boxing be framed in terms of medical grounds (the same logic applies to men's boxing) or equality grounds?

Other sporting bodies

In drawing attention to the fact that indigenous Australians grow up in historical contexts of racism both inside and outside of sport, Gardiner (2003: 43) concludes that indigenous players have to confront a sports culture in which traditionally white codes attempt to dictate, order and define black bodies. The texts that have emerged from indigenous people's lives in Australia have begun to produce an 'other' history of Australian football codes. In reality, there is also a rich substantive terrain of women's sport in Africa, Asia and the Middle East but, as Hargreaves (2004: 197) points out, there is a dearth of sport feminist literature from outside the West. She draws our attention to the need to develop multiple complex accounts of women in sport but also to the *vital* point that, to many, homogenous accounts of sporting identity for women tend to conceal many hidden forms of injustice, discrimination and activism in other worlds. This holds true for work on the body and identity as much as it does for sport. Anne Leseth (2003: 243), talking of dance, sport and the body in Dar-es-Salaam contrasts the notion of a Western body image with 'other' points of view and, in doing so, draws upon the words of Betty, a 25-year-old woman living in a

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**SPORT IN FOCUS 12.4: THE BODY, PEOPLE AND MOVEMENT**

<i>Bodily movement</i>	<i>Emotional movement</i>	<i>Social movement</i>
<i>Basic experience:</i>		
"We play" motion emotion, motive, motivation	"I am moved" people in motion	"We are the people"
Physical practice	Feelings of togetherness and difference	Self-organisation and conflict
<i>How to discover:</i>		
Sports studies	Psychology/sociology	Sociology/politics
<i>What we discover:</i>		
People in sport, dance, festivals and games	People as social identities	People as civil society/ other cultures
<i>Differentiations and contradictions:</i>		
People in competition	Identity of achievement	People's will
People in discipline	Identity of integration	Popular culture
People in festivity	Identity of encounter	People's solidarity

SUMMARY

New ways of thinking about the body in social and cultural terms have led to an interest in the study of the sport, body and health. The bodily practice of peoples in different parts of the world is a basis for their social life. The body remains central to struggles for recognition. A plethora of studies have been organised around the uses and abuses of the body in and beyond sport that have redressed the cultural and social blindness of biological paradigms that historically limited the body gaze to complex biological concerns. In reality, the body in a physiological, medical, biological, religious and social sense is a key component to the practice of power, democracy, lifestyle and identities. The fact that bodies of knowledge will interconnect and talk to one another is a refreshing breakthrough. This has helped to address some or all of the following concerns:

- the process by which ideas about the body in sport and beyond are viewed as natural, deviant, different and/or biological;
- the ethical, social and legal implications of how bodies are protected, probed, monitored, rehabilitated, disciplined and/or evaluated;

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QUESTIONS

- 1 Use examples from the literature on sport, body and health to explain the following terms: 'identity', 'difference' and 'representation'.
 - 2 Choose two from the following list of body formations and compare and contrast the social theories behind them: the natural body, the civilised body, the engendered body, the body *habitus*, the socially constructed body, the fascist body, the African body, the oriental body.
 - 3 Explain the difference between essential and contingent approaches to understanding sport, body and society.
 - 4 Evaluate the contribution that post-colonial thinking has made to our understanding of the body in other cultures.
 - 5 What are the advantages of the broader notion of body culture over sport in terms of policy formulation?
 - 6 Explain the terms 'health worlds' and 'life chances', and consider how they help us think about sport, pain, health and/or illness.
 - 7 What does the term 'other' sporting bodies mean?
 - 8 Provide a short evaluative history of the use of drugs in sport.
 - 9 What is Fraser's critique of Foucault's work on the body and identity?
 - 10 Describe the key points inherent within Eichberg's account of body movement presented in Sport in Focus 12.4.
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PRACTICAL PROJECTS

- 1 Select two popular health magazines and, over a three-month period, carry out a content analysis of the two magazines as a basis for writing a critical report on body representation and health.
- 2 Go to a local gym or exercise club in your area and carry out a series of interviews with three different populations in order to ascertain what their views are on the perfect body.
- 3 Identify five different articles in the journal *Body and Society* that have researched aspects of sport, exercise or physical activity, and use these to compile a short case study on *representation* and sport, exercise and/or physical activity.
- 4 Identify three different local populations in terms of social class participation in exercise. Carry out a series of interviews with each population, enquiring about why exercise is important to the body and what sort of body people would like. Write a