

Introduction

The principal purpose of this book is to provide an informed and readable guide to a range of debates about sport as a social phenomenon. To that end, the book has been organised around the concepts that seemed to the contributors to have been most central to these debates.

The writers of the book have each teaching about the social aspects of sport for some years. This has entailed the use of a number of academic disciplines – chiefly history, politics, philosophy and sociology. The various sections in the book draw intermittently on each of these disciplines, but especially on sociology. Sociology, by its very nature, is about the relatedness of related things and it is inevitable therefore – and quite proper – that from time to time matters discussed in one section are examined likewise in several others.

There are a number of examples of this which may usefully be flagged up here: ‘rational recreation’ – an early Victorian philosophy of leisure – is discussed in relation to **Rationalisation** and again in the section on **The Civilising Process**; the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is dealt with principally in the section on **Habitus**, although, since much of Bourdieu’s work is about class, it could have appeared with equal validity in the section on **Social Class**; and, similarly, there are references to the sports policy of the Soviet Union in several sections – those on **Alienation** and **Olympism**, for instance. Likewise, there will be mentions of the work of influential philosophers such as Karl Marx and Michel Foucault in various chapters and the same goes for popular themes, such as Macdonaldisation, and sports brands, such as Nike.

The sections have been arranged in alphabetical order but they should not necessarily be read in this order: for example, it is almost certain that most readers will need to read the chapter on **Methods** before tackling the section on **Ethnography**.

Furthermore, the debates and controversies that the book deals with should not be thought to be to be confined to the individual sections. Once again some useful cross-referencing can be done: for example, criticisms of the concept of **Globalisation** will be found in the entry on **State, Nation and Nationalism** (and vice versa); Foucault’s notion of power has critical implications for the notion of **Hegemony**; the argument in favour of the biographical in the section on **The Sociological Imagination** might provide a good basis for debating the anti-individualist arguments in the section on Discourse and Post-Structuralism, and so on.

Finally, it must be stressed that the book attempts to deal dispassionately with matters which the reader: (a) might feel very strongly about (like the use of drugs in sport); or (b) might not have seen as subjects for critical reflection (like the body). Thus there will be arguments presented here that will strike some readers – undergraduates, perhaps – as unusual or controversial. Historically, though, it has been in the nature of sociology as an intellectual enterprise to try to analyse how things *are* and to keep this analysis free from judgements of how they *ought* to be. So, for instance, while many textbooks on sport will straightforwardly assume ‘doping’ to be a bad thing, in this book it is assessed simply as a social phenomenon (something that people do) and as something that is argued over. Similarly, the section on **The Body/Embodiment/** deals in what we might call ‘relativist’ notions of healthy bodies. Many or Most of us take for granted what constitutes a healthy body, but things are changing in this respect and people now argue from a variety of political positions that there is no one ‘correct’ body – it’s all relative. Here again sociology is merely fulfilling part of its historic mission – to take up the vital questions raised in the wider society and to give them critical reflection: in this case, new political ideas and arguments have helped give rise to the sub-discipline known as the Sociology of the Body.

Responsibilities for the contents of this book have been apportioned as follows.

The sections on Alienation; Amateurism; Culture; Doping/Drugs; Gender; Hegemony; History; Ideology; Imperialism/The Post-Colonial; Olympism; Politics/Policy/Power; Race and Ethnicity; Rationalisation; Social Class; State, Nation and Nationalism; The Civilising Process; and The Sociological Imagination were written by Stephen Wagg, who also edited the book.

Carlton Brick wrote on Capitalism; Commodification/Commodity Fetishism; Consumption; Discourse and Post-Structuralism; Ethics; Fandom; Globalisation; Marxism; Postmodernism/Postmodernity; and Semiotics.

The sections on Ethnography; Extreme Sport; Habitus; Identity and Difference; and the Body/Embodiment were composed by Belinda Wheaton and those on Feminism and Sexuality by Jayne Caudwell.

Paul Norcross helped a good deal in the framing of the book and kindly provided suggestions and material for the section on Ideology.

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