SPORT AND SOCIETY

Instructor: Brian Fair
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Spring 2014
Tuesday and Friday: 9:30-10:50
Office hour: Tuesday, 11-12, Pearlman 109,
and by appointment

Course description

Sport is one of the most pervasive social institutions in the United States. Parents believe organized sport leads to healthy outcomes for their children. High school and collegiate athletics are ensconced within academic institutions. Professional sports dominate various forms of media, while fans pay for pricey tickets to watch their cherished teams in person. In the public imagination, sport is a meritocratic arena that transcends the injustices of larger society. Less salient are critical perspectives on sport, which challenge these traditionally positive beliefs, and expose persistent forms of inequality within sport, such as sexism and racism. Through a sociological lens, this course will examine these various, layered dimensions of organized sport and their relationship with American society, with a particular emphasis on the construction of gender-sexuality, race-ethnicity, and social class categories.

Goals of the course

This is an overview of a socially significant topic. This course gives students the opportunity to think critically about sport and its place in their own lives and society as a whole.

The objectives of the course are as follows:

1) To introduce students to the discipline of sociology and the sociology of sport, focusing on the United States.
2) First, to understand how contemporary competitive sport is traditionally understood in the United States. Second, to interrogate and critique these traditional understandings attached to American sport.
3) To understand and explore sport’s various connections to social institutions and processes in American society, for example, the media’s construction of gender, race-ethnicity, and social class.
4) To provide students with sociological perspectives that will continue to inform their relationship with sport and American society, after the completion of the course.
5) To cultivate collegiate writing skills.

Some questions explored in the course are:

--What positive aspects are traditionally bestowed upon sport? For individuals? For communities
and society at large? How has this research been critiqued? What is the counter evidence? How does this relate to your own experience?

--Title IX ushered in a new era for women and sports. How so? How does the institution of sport remain gendered at different levels (i.e. social interactions, organizations, material resources, beliefs)?

--Is sport a meritocracy? Does sport function as an avenue of upward social mobility? Why is this such a popular belief?

--Why is sport believed to transcend race? How is racial inequality persistent in sport? How does the practice of sport, via the media, construct ideas about race?

--How do race, class, and gender intersect within sport?

**Role I will play in the classroom**

Typically, for the first part of the class, I will introduce the assigned readings and perhaps draw on relevant events and issues from the sports world. I will then facilitate classroom dialogue, ideally fostering lively discussion and debate about contemporary sport in the United States.

**How I will evaluate students**

There will be four essays assigned. The first three will be 5-6 pages and the fourth will be 10 pages. For each of these essays, students will be given several questions to choose from but they are also welcome to write on an essay topic of their own choosing.

Students’ final grades for the course will be based on the following criteria:

First essay: 20%
Second essay: 20%
Third essay: 20%
Final essay: 30%
Class participation: 10%

All papers should follow “Citation Guidelines” as posted on LATTE.

Attendance: This is a discussion-based course and therefore attendance and participation are crucial. You can miss two classes; once you have three absences, you will receive a zero for class participation.

**Readings**

There are seven required books for the course:


I will provide all other texts through LATTE or photocopies.

**IT IS ABSOLUTELY IMPERATIVE THAT YOU BRING THE ASSIGNED BOOKS AND READINGS TO CLASS. YOU NEED TO PRINT OUT ALL OF THE LATTE READINGS. YOU CANNOT RELY ON ACCESSING THE TEXTS IN CLASS VIA YOUR COMPUTER.**

**University Policy on Academic Integrity**

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see: [http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai](http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai)).

**University Policy on Academic Accommodations**

If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please see me this week and give me a copy of your letter of accommodation.

***SCHEDULE OF READINGS***

**I) INTRODUCTION**

**January 14**

Meet each other, review syllabus and expectations for the course.

In-class readings:

In-class discussion: What is Sociology? What is the sociological imagination? What is the Sociology of Sport? Within the sociology of sport, what are the main theoretical perspectives? What are the main empirical foci? How does the course relate to these perspectives and foci?

Goal: To understand how sociologists tend to think about the world, the topics this course focuses on, and how we will approach these topics.

II) BRIEF SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

January 17

The Past: Scarce, Informal, and Means-Oriented


The Present: Abundant, Organized, and Ends-Oriented

--Eitzen, chapter 33, “Her Life Depends on It II” (pp. 270-275), in Sport in Contemporary Society.
--First part of Chapter 1, “Sport and Social Capital: An Introduction” (pp. 1-8), in Matthew Nicholson and Russell Hoye’s Sport and Social Capital. 2008. LATTE.

Goal: First, to understand that “sport” is not timeless and universal; the forms of organized American sport are product (and producer) of a socio-historical context. Second, to reveal the traditional (often uncritically positive) understandings of sport.

III) SPORT IN COMMUNITY CONTEXTS

***Fenway Park, Merchandise, and Red Sox Nation

January 21

--Borer, introduction, chapter 1, and most of 3 (pp. 1-32; 67-88; 98-105), in Faithful to Fenway: Believing in Boston, Baseball, and America’s Most Beloved Ballpark.

January 24

--Borer, chapters 4 and 6 (pp. 107-132; 179-196) in Faithful to Fenway: Believing in Boston,
Baseball, and America’s Most Beloved Ballpark.

Goal: To understand how a professional sports franchise relates to aspects of community: physical place, collective memory, cultural-consumer objects, and fandom.

***Urban Ecology and Little League Baseball

January 28

--Grasmuck, chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-48), in Protecting Home: Class, Race, and Masculinity in Boys’ Baseball.

January 31

--Grasmuck, chapter 3 and conclusion (pp. 49-89; 193-205), in Protecting Home: Class, Race, and Masculinity in Boys’ Baseball.

Goal: To understand how the experience of community within organized youth sport is mediated by historical and ecological factors such as spatiality, race-ethnicity, and social class.

***“The Street and the Ring”

February 4

--Wacquant, chapter 1 (pp. 13-77), in Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer.

February 7

--Wacquant, continue chapter 1 (pp. 77-149), in Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer.

Goal: To understand how the context of a neighborhood relates to the form of a boxing gym and the apprenticeship of boxing, becoming a member of the gym, indoctrinated to the sport of boxing, via a deeply corporeal process of socio-structural inculcation.

February 11

--Finish Wacquant’s Body and Soul (pp. 77-149).
--Finish discussion of three books on sport in community contexts

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1 The FSA league is technically not affiliated with the national “Little League” organization; but it is a youth baseball team comparable to those officially associated with Little League.
Goal:

Begin Dave Zirin’s documentary, *More Than Just A Game*

**February 14**

Finish and discuss documentary

Goal: To transition to critical approaches to sport, understanding the paradoxical (and often ignored) political aspects of sport, especially as related to gender-sexuality, race-ethnicity, and social class.

**FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE**

***Vacation: February 17-21***

**IV) CATEGORICAL INTERSECTIONS AND RELATIONS: GENDER-RACE-CLASS**

**1. BACKGROUND**

**February 25**


--Messner, Michael, “Sport, Men, and Gender” (pp. 7-23), in *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity*. 1992. LATTE.

--Eitzen, chapter 32, “Are We There Yet? Thirty-Seven Years Later, Title IX Hasn’t Fixed it All” (pp. 265-69), in *Sport in Contemporary Society*.

**2. GENDER**

***Constructing Interest***

**February 28**

--Eitzen, Chapter 6, “Boyhood, Organized Sports, and the Construction of Masculinities” (pp. 38-54), in *Sport in Contemporary Society*.


Goal: To understand the socio-historical underpinnings of the longstanding asymmetry between males and females within sport and how this constructs a different personal interest or relationship with sport.
***Multiple, Relational Levels: Organizational, Communal, Embodiment, Beliefs

March 4

--Theberge, chapters 1-3 and skim chapter 4 (pp. 1-77), in *Higher Goals: Women’s Ice Hockey and the Politics of Gender*.

March 7

--Theberge, chapters 5-8 and skim chapter 9 (pp. 79-163), in *Higher Goals: Women’s Ice Hockey and the Politics of Gender*.

March 11

--Finish Theberge’s *Higher Goals* (pp. 79-163).
--Begin women’s rugby readings.

Goal: To understand how gender operates at multiple levels (i.e. organizational, communal, interactional, embodied, beliefs) and relationally (i.e. in contrast with men’s sport and masculinity). Specifically, to understand how female hockey players understand athletic marginality, function as a team, and enact physicality and aggression. And to understand the different perspectives on the relationship between male and female athletics, for example, binary versus continuum models.

***Sex-Gender-Sexuality: Constructing the Heterosexual Matrix

March 14


Goal: To understand the interplay between sex (and the body), gender, and sexuality as it is practiced in sport. Specifically, to understand the ways in which males and females similarly and differently negotiate and rework gender-sexuality expectations.

March 18


Goal: To understand how transgender athletes relate to the policies and practices of sport at
different levels.

SECOND ASSIGNMENT DUE

3. THE MEDIA

***Male and Female Sports Coverage

March 21

--Eitzen, part 3 Introduction, “Sport and Socialization: The Mass Media” (pp. 57-8), in Sport in Contemporary Society.

Goal: To understand the pivotal role the media plays in disseminating spectator sport, and the ways in which it is socially stratified.

***Representations of Female Athletes

March 25

--Heywood and Dworkin, prologue and chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 25-75), in Built to Win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon.

March 28

--Heywood and Dworkin, chapter 4 (pp. 76-99), in Built to Win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon.

April 1

--Heywood and Dworkin, skim chapter 5 (pp. 100-130) and read chapter 6 (p. 131-159), in Built to Win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon.

Media Education Foundation documentary, Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete.

Goal: To understand the different critical feminist perspectives regarding the representation of female athletes in the media.
***Constructing Categories in Sporting Practice

April 4

Finish and discuss *Playing Unfair*.


Goal: To understand how different forms of media coverage frame and present aspects of sport, and how this is constructed by and constructs racial and gender categories.

4. BIG-TIME COLLEGE SPORT

***Amateur? Educational? Upward Mobility?***

April 8

--Eitzen, chapter 9, “The Path to Success?: Myth and Reality” (pp. 137-50), in *Fair and Foul: Beyond the Myths and Paradoxes of Sport*. 1999. LATTE.

Goal: To generally understand the main tensions within and debates surrounding big-time collegiate sport.

5. PROFESSIONAL BASKETBALL

April 11

***NBA: Age, Dress, and the Colorblind Fantasy***

--Leonard, chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-58), in *After Artest: The NBA and the Assault on Blackness*.

THIRD ASSIGNMENT DUE
**Vacation: April 15-22**

**April 25**

--Leonard, chapters 3-5 (pp. 59-206), in *After Artest: The NBA and the Assault on Blackness*.

Goal: To understand how professional sport constructs and is constructed by the various interconnections between race, class, and gender.

**WNBA:**

**April 29**

Finish *After Artest* (pp. 59-206).


Goal: To understand the interconnections between the NBA and the WNBA.

**FINAL PAPER DUE DURING FINALS WEEK, SHORTLY AFTER LAST CLASS, EXACT DATE TBD**