

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
School of Human Kinetics
Human Kinetics 381: *Leisure, Sport, and Popular Culture*

INSTRUCTORS

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CLASS TIMES: 4:00pm-7:00pm, Wednesday

LOCATION: War Memorial Gym 206 and 208

The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; ... the point is to change it.

- Karl Marx

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

In recent years, members of the sport sociology community have become increasingly interested in what is loosely described as “cultural studies.” Part of this shift involves a multi- or anti-disciplinary approach to studying sport, one that is particularly sensitive to issues of “race,” gender, class, sexuality, ability, and so forth. A “physical cultural studies,” as it is often called, understands sport to be an important phenomenon within a larger field of popular culture. That is to say, sport can no longer be described as an innocent and apolitical sphere bracketed from the complexities of everyday life. Instead, sport and physical culture only emerge through what we will call the representational politics of power relations. In this course, we will engage sport through an introduction to critical theories of popular culture. We will explore various theoretical frameworks including Marxism, hegemony theory, critical race theory, feminism(s), queer studies, and cyborg theory. The general purpose of this course, then, is to provide an overview of the ways in which popular culture (including sport) has been studied within and beyond a sociological perspective in recent years. It aims to provide a broad range of theoretical perspectives that may be used to understand the media (film, in particular), subcultures, power relations, and the socially constructed nature of the body.

REQUIRED TEXT: HKIN 381 Instructional Manual. Readings from the manual are listed for each week of the course. The manual is available for purchase in the bookstore.

GRADING (see page 4 for more details)

1. **Class participation and presentation of individual research projects – 10%**
2. **Group presentations – details to be handed out in the January 10 class – 10%**
3. **Mid-Term: 20% (in class, *February 28*)**
4. **Major Paper: 25% (due *April 11* – in class) – details to be handed out in January 17 class**
5. **Final exam: 35% (held during examination period, essay format – other details to be provided on class handout)**

WEEKLY OUTLINE

January 10 – Introduction to the course

Introduction to course and discussion of course outline.

January 17 – The Politics of Popular Culture and Sport: In this lecture, we will explore the multiple meanings of culture (“high” and “low”) and what it means to look at culture and sport from a critical perspective. This class will introduce and foreshadow later discussions of hegemony, power relations, and class conflict from within the terms of contemporary social theory. It will make a general application of critical theory to the study of popular culture.

Hall, S. (1994). Notes on deconstructing “the popular.” In J. Storey’s (Ed.), *Cultural*

Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader (pp.442-453). London: Prentice Hall Europe.

Storey, J. (1998). What is popular culture? In J. Storey’s (Auth.), *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (2nd ed.) (pp.1-20). Athens; University of Georgia press.

Video: bell hooks: *Cultural Criticism and Transformation*

January 24 – Reading Visual Media: Critical Approaches to Reading Media Representations: This seminar aims to provide a tool kit for critically reading media representations (i.e., film, television, advertising print media, games, commentary and photography). Through a focus on the representation of sport and sporting bodies, we will introduce some of the main methodologies used by sport sociologists to analyze popular and alternative media. These include discourse analysis, semiotics, audience research and content analysis. This seminar also introduces the concept/framework of political economy for understanding the commodification of sport within a global network of communication (and media) culture. *This seminar will be particularly instructive for your assignment on reading media.*

Schirato, T. & Webb, J. (2004). Chapter 1. In T. Schirato & J. Webb’s (Auths.), *Reading the Visual* (pp.11-13). New South Wales: Allen and Unwin.

Oats, T & Polumbaum, J. (2004). Agile big man: The flexible marketing of Yao Ming. *Pacific Affairs*, 77(2): 187-210.

January 31 – Critical Approaches to Studying Popular Culture: Marxism, Hegemony, and Cultural Studies (and group presentations): Building on the previous discussion of popular culture, this class introduces the basic concepts of Marxism including alienation, means/mode/relations of production and base/superstructure. It invites us to think of sport as a form of labour. The lecture will also introduce Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony to explain the ways in which ruling class ideas resonate with “the masses.” Using hegemony theory, we will then examine some of the general trends of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) that originated at the University of Birmingham in the 1960s.

Brohm, J.M. (1978). *Sport, a Prison of Measured Time: Essays*. I. Fraser (Trans.). London: Pluto Press.

Storey, J. (1998). Introduction: The study of popular culture and cultural studies. In J. Storey’s (Ed), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (2nd ed.) (pp.x-xviii). London: Prentice Hall.

February 7 – Power & the Body: Introduction to Foucault (and group presentations): This class introduces the work of French post-structuralist, Michel Foucault. Through his study of the shift from repressive regimes of state control over citizens in the 17th century to a more diffuse organization of power between citizens and the state in the 18th century, Foucault reconceptualized how we think about power. His concept of power relations as a network is useful for the study of sport because it focuses on the body as both a subject and an agent of power. With an emphasis on the body, we will also introduce some ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, who wrote about the ways in which we embody our status within certain social hierarchies (i.e., class and gender). The aim of this seminar is to provide students with a basic understanding of the body as a site of power relations within sporting contexts (as well as in representation).

Schirato, T. & Webb, J. (2004). Normalizing vision. In T. Schirato & J. Webb’s (Auths.), *Reading the Visual* (pp.131-149). New South Wales: Allen and Unwin.

Frew, M. & McGillivray, D. (2005). Health clubs and body politics: Aesthetics and the quest for physical capital. *Leisure Studies*, 24(2): 161-175.

February 14 – *The Muscle on Masculinities: Critical Approaches to Analyzing Gender Through Sport (and group presentations)*: While we often conflate “gender” with women and “women’s issues,” it is well recognized that masculinity is a foundational structure of sporting institutions. The aim of this seminar is to demonstrate the relationship between sport, masculinity, heteronormativity and the male body. This seminar introduces students to the main theoretical approaches used by sport sociologists studying masculinity. It includes the formative concepts of hegemonic masculinity, masculine hierarchies, homophobia, and female masculinity. We will draw upon Ellexis Boyle’s research on Arnold Schwarzenegger and the racial and gender politics of bodybuilding and boxing.

Connell, R.W. (1995). The social organization of masculinity. In R.W. Connell’s (Auth.), *Masculinities* (2nd Ed.) (pp.67-86). New South Wales: Allen & Unwin.

Klein, A. (2000). Dueling machos: Masculinity and sport in Mexican baseball. In J. McKay, M. Messner, & D. Sabo (Eds.), *Masculinities, Gender Relations and Sport* (pp. 67-85). Thousand Oaks, London & New Delhi: Sage.

Abdel-Shehid, G. (2004). The boundaries of the closet: A black queer theory of sport and masculinity. In G. Abdel-Shehid’s (Auth.), *Who da Man? Black Masculinities and Sporting Cultures* (pp.139-150). Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press.

February 21 – *Reading Week – no class*

February 28 – MID-TERM – followed by video (TBA)

March 7 – *Sport and the Body as Resistance and Incorporation (and group presentations)*: In this class we shift gears from thinking about the “structural” determinism of the body and physical culture to the possibilities of resistance and transgression. We will explore the practice of body modification and physical satire as a way of expressing a form of resistance that is always already ambivalent. To this end, we will review cultural practices like tattooing and the antics of *Jackass* in relation to identity politics, homoeroticism, and the heteronormative mythologies of dominant sporting culture. We will conclude with a viewing of Stacy Peralta’s *Dogtown and Z-Boys*.

Brayton, S. (2007). MTV’s *Jackass*: Transgression, abjection, and the economy of white masculinity. *Journal of Gender Studies* 16(1): 55-70.

Sweetman, P. (1999). Marked bodies, oppositional identities? Tattooing, piercing and the ambiguity of resistance. In S. Roseneil & J. Seymour’s (Eds.), *Practising Identities: Power and Resistance* (pp.55-80). Hampshire: Macmillan Press.

Video: *Dogtown and Z-Boys*.

March 14 – *The Body and Technology: Problematizing the “Natural” Athlete (and group presentations)*: Within the techno-savvy context of sport. It is clear that new technologies have rapidly and overwhelmingly altered the boundaries of the human body. In response, this seminar challenges the traditional oppositions used to define the “normal” body: natural/unnatural, human/machine, organic/artificial. We will introduce the concept of the cyborg, a melding of the human and inhuman via technological intervention, and will ground our discussion in the context of drugs and other performance enhancing substances/technologies in sports. Our discussion will also invite questions about the underlying ideologies of competitive sports and the distinctions between “natural” and enhanced athletes. This seminar will continue to trouble the taken-for-granted binary oppositions and the categories through which we think, “see” and define bodies and identities.

Balsamo, A. (2000). Reading cyborgs writing feminism. In L. Janes, K. Woodward, & F. Hovenden

(Eds.), *The Gendered: A Cyborg Reader* (pp. 148-158). London & New York: The Open Press.
Butryn, T & Masucci, A. (2003). It's not about the book: A cyborg counternarrative of Lance Armstrong.
Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 27(2): 124-144.

March 21 – Race and Racisms in Sport & Popular Culture (begin individual class presentations of research): The final lecture confronts what we call the representational politics of race. It interrogates the ways in which “race” is made to appear natural and immutable in popular culture and sporting spectacles. We will survey a broad range of issues related to racism as it appears in different historical periods (i.e., liberal racism, colourblind paradigms, white male backlash). We will explore the ways in which the arena of sport serves to legitimize and also contest the socially constructed category of “race” in North America.

Schultz, J. (2005). Reading the catsuit: Serena Williams and the production of blackness at the 2002 U.S. Open. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 29(3): 338-357.

Springwood, C.F. (2004). “I’m Indian Too!” Claiming Native American identity, crafting authority in mascot debates. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 28(1): 56-70.

Conference: Presentations of Your Original Research Papers

March 28 – Individual Class Presentations of Original Research Projects

April 4 – Individual Class Presentations of Original Research Projects

April 11 – Individual Class Presentations of Research and Major Paper due (in class) and Review for Exam

CLASS FORMAT

A general but flexible format for class will be followed, which will include:

Lecture – ranging from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours

Break – 15 minutes

Video – ranging from 10 minutes to an hour

Group Work, Discussion, Group Presentations – 1 hour

EVALUATION PROCEDURES

Class participation and individual presentations (10%): Class participation is vital to this course. You will be asked to actively contribute to class discussions, question periods following presentations, and small group work. You will also be discussing your individual research projects with peers. The findings of these projects will be presented to the class during the course’s official “conference” that will take place from March 21 until April 4 (perhaps beginning as early as March 14, depending on size of class). To achieve maximum grades, class attendance and participation is required.

HKIN at the Movies! Group presentation (10%): In groups of 2 or 3, you will be asked to use the resources learned in class to provide a critical review of a sport-related film of your choice. These films may be independent, Hollywood, niche-market (i.e., snowboard/skateboard videos), etc. You will be asked to explain the ways in which the film’s “narrative” presents particular worldviews and identities as “normal.” We encourage you to be especially critical of the films, paying particular attention to issues related to race, class, gender, sexuality, ableism, and so forth. You will also be asked to explore the possible connections between the production of the film and its content, what we might call the political economy of media production (i.e., who owns the production company? Is the producer corporate or independent, and to what effects? Where can one find this film?). Your group will be asked to make a lively presentation to the class, exploring multiple reading strategies and theoretical frameworks outlined throughout the course.

Examinations (midterm 20%; final 35%): There will be two examinations: a midterm and a final. Materials discussed in lectures, videos, readings, and classroom forums will be used as fodder for these

exams. Exam format will include essay-style questions (short and long). The midterm exam will include all material discussed/read/viewed up until and including the January 31 lecture. The final examination will be cumulative but will focus more specifically on material covered AFTER the midterm period. The final examination will be held during the April examination period, and expectations will be reviewed during our final class.

Major research project/essay (25%): Details to follow.

OTHER ISSUES

1. Late major papers will be accepted with a penalty of 2 marks per day (out of the 25 marks available for the assignment). Papers are due in-class.
2. Students who know in advance that they will be unavoidably absent from the mid-term should apply for special consideration from the instructor as soon as possible to determine how the missed graded work can be completed. Supporting documentation must be submitted to the Undergraduate Advising Office at the earliest possible date. The School of Human Kinetics requires a minimum of two weeks notice.
3. Students whose attendance or performance is severely affected by medical, emotional or other disabilities should consult with their instructors early in the term to discuss special arrangements. Supporting documentation from either the Disability Resources Centre or a physician must be submitted to the Undergraduate Advising Office.