

Rees, C. Roger and Miracle, Andrew W., eds. *Sport and Social Theory*. Champaign, IL, Human Kinetics, 1986. Pp. 344. Index.

*Sport and Social Theory* (1986) is the companion to *Studies in the Sociology of Sport* (1982); both are comprised of papers presented at the 1981 meeting of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS) and were edited by the conference organizers, Andy Miracle, Roger Rees and Aidan Dunleavy. Whereas *Studies in the Sociology of Sport* contain the more substantive research papers, *Sport and Social Theory* reflects the theme of the conference, social theory and the future of sport sociology. The theme was chosen to stimulate more theoretically based research in the sociology of sport. As stated, the purpose was to “show the importance of social theory to the development of sociology of sport and to demonstrate its application in several substantive fields” (p. vii).

The book is divided into two parts: the first, Theoretical Perspectives, contains four papers and three responses devoted to the broader theoretical perspective. The second, Substantive Issues, has eight papers and three responses focused on socialization, small groups, and college athletics. Also included are two papers and a reaction on policy oriented research, and a forty-four page bibliography. Each part also contains a “Questions for Future Research” section. Thus, it is difficult to identify any single theme; each set of papers must be evaluated separately. As expected, some papers or sections are better than others.

In the first paper conference keynote speaker Gerald Kenyon uses a sample of published research in the sociology of sport to show how seldom theoretical frameworks have been used. His recommendations include the increased use of theory, a team approach to research, and for the cumulation of theory, that is, the development of theory rather than the mere use of theory. Overall, however, he stressed scholarship over theory.

In his response Alan Ingham criticized Kenyon’s association with structural-functionalism, pointing out that alternative theoretical perspectives are available, and adding that many sport sociologists use the functionalist perspective, but do not even know it. For many, it is the only way to do research; it was what they were taught in graduate school. He also criticized Ritzer’s multiple paradigm typology for compartmentalizing the subject matter.

In his paper, English sociologist Eric Dunning describes the “Eliasian” (Norbert Elias) or “figurational-developmental” perspective which emphasizes the use of culture and history in the interpretation of social phenomenon. He compares American and European sociology in terms of figurational analysis and discusses hooliganism in England from the same perspective. He criticizes Allen Guttmann’s explanation for the development of modern sport as too limited.

Respondent Jim Curtis acknowledges that many American scholars have overlooked Elias and recommends his work, especially *The Civilizing Process* (1978) and *What is Sociology?* (1978). Curtis was able to take his own advice

before writing his response and his reaction to Dunning benefits from his reading. He disputes Dunning's criticism of American sport sociology, but acknowledges that American sociology is "more characterized by individual (psychological) realism rather than by social realism," (p. 65) which is more common in European sociology.

Another English sociologist, Robert Pearnton, discusses several theories of violence in sport, paying special attention to hooliganism in England. He points out that violence must be considered "as part of wider dynamic processes, rather than from theoretical perspectives that regard the static nature of society as normal rather than its changing nature" (p. 78). From this perspective, he argues that although soccer hooliganism is a problem for English society, it is unlikely to be a problem in the United States.

The final dyad in Part One contains the Gregory Stone Memorial Lecture by Brian Sutton-Smith who spoke on the idealization of play and sport and a reaction by Gary Fine. Sutton-Smith argues that those who idealize play hide its true nature, that play and sport are both rife with ambivalence. One example of this ambivalence is that play is not always voluntary, that in some children's games, participants do not take part voluntarily, are taunted, and even beaten, all in the realm of play. He concludes that play and sport is what we want to make of it, that sport does not destroy the spirit of play, but that "both sport and play live in the same bed of ambivalence" (p. 102). In his comparison of Sutton-Smith and Stone, discussant Gary Fine points out that their views of play are similar. Sutton-Smith's belief that play, sport and games are not universal is consistent with Stone's contention that orientations to play and sport are contingent on social class.

Barry McPherson opens Part Two with an evaluation of the socialization literature in which he identifies the dominant themes in socialization and sport research, concluding that although this area has generated the most research, we can explain very little about how socialization works (the process). Coakley's review of literature in socialization and youth sport comes to the same conclusion.

Gunther Luschen traces the history of small group research in sport, noting that the group has been used as a context rather than an entity for study itself. He laments that the few published studies of sport groups have used a psychological perspective and urges the study of group dynamics, a topic discussed further by Neil Widmeyer. Gary Fine examines the small group from a symbolic interaction perspective, emphasizing the perceptions individual members have of the group and the development of an idioculture shared by all members of a team. In his reaction Melnick is critical of the focus on individual team cultures as being too limited, adding that the search should be for "universalistic" features which apply to all sport teams.

The section on college athletics is comprised of papers dealing with three major theoretical foci, functionalism (Jim Frey), symbolic interactionism (Eldon Snyder), and the conflict perspective (Stan Eitzen), followed by a reaction (John Massengale). Each of the first three papers includes a brief survey of the major tenets of a theoretical perspective, followed by a discussion of how that

perspective may be used in sport research. Frey points out that specific frameworks are limiting since they do not ask the right questions; for example, using functionalism or a conflict perspective emphasizes an either/or approach. Snyder highlights the utility of symbolic interactionism to study what sport means to people, the identities of coaches and players, and the negotiations underlying the order in sport organizations. Eitzen emphasizes the commercialization of college athletics, concluding that it is a condition that can best be studied from a conflict perspective. Massengale's reaction is most noteworthy for his seemingly misinterpretation of the conflict perspective.

Although a contrast to the theoretical theme of the book, one of its highlights is McPherson's description of attempts to make changes in the policies of two youth leagues in Ontario. In both the hockey and swimming situations the recommended changes were based on the results of surveys of participants, parents, and coaches. Finally, in another policy paper, Luschen advocates the production of action knowledge, a middle-of-the-road position between non-normative (value free) and applied research. Action knowledge would "advance the level of rationality and decision making and practical action." (p. 246). He cites Weber to support his position on action knowledge: "The sociologist can tell the policy maker what he or she *can* do, perhaps what he or she *wants* to do-but never what he or she *should* do." (p. 247)

Despite the quality of individual papers-I have used some of the articles in my classes-the book can be criticized for being incomplete and for being dated. Although entitled *Sport and Social Theory*, the content does not adequately cover social theory. Not all theoretical perspectives are included; for example, feminist theory is much more prominent now than it was in 1981, but it is not mentioned in the text. Conflict theory is discussed in only one chapter; and no one wants to admit to being a functionalist. A defense for this situation is that editors of proceedings are controlled by the content and quality of the papers presented at a conference. On the other hand, the editors also organized the program and had planned to publish two volumes of the proceedings before the conference began.

Moreover, some papers were written, others rewritten after the conference and, in some cases, the responses were not those of the original reviewers. In short, the book could be regarded as an historical account of the state of the sociology of sport world in 1981, a view anchored by forty-four pages of references, nearly all before 1982. Many sport sociologists would agree that their understanding of theory, especially the conflict and feminist perspectives, has increased considerably since then.

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