

Beyond the Tale, Beyond the Pale: Re-Telling and Rethinking Theoretical Interpretations in Sport History

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Sport historians are producing vibrant, provocative histories of sport. Yet, sometimes these authors are incapable of theoretically voicing and defending the philosophical foundations of such writings. There seems to be little debate within our journals or meetings about the philosophies of writing sport history. Such debates are crucial to the life and relevance of sport history. We can base this on personal experiences as members of several disciplinary groups and upon marginalizing critiques experienced in sport history. In particular, the standardized, institutionalized pattern of historiography denies the use of “deep” writing that literary (versus scientific) and social scientific writing provides. That is, it now seems proper for sport historians to continue to consider the challenges related to writing set forth by schools of symbolic interactionism and postmodernisms/poststructuralism.

As sport historians, we take Stuart Hall’s “detour through theory” in order to embrace, criticize, and/or abandon some of these challenges to the writing of sport history. We propose that sport historians must challenge their social and epistemic backgrounds and bases to write challenging history and biography. Specifically, we discuss the work of scholars like Denzin, Hewitt, and our own work, to provide/provoke an interpretation of some of the tenets from this work that might be used as a theoretical foundation for a sport history that writes history from the “inside out.”