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Sporting Bodies: Evidence from the Beach

Sport and recreation are conspicuously embodied practices. Yet, paradoxically, most historians of sport do not consider the body germane to their field. It is also something of a paradox that while the body is an obvious and ready feature of everyday life, it is notoriously difficult to define, identify and isolate. This presentation explores these two interrelated paradoxes in more detail with examples from two Australian beach-based sporting cultures: surfing-as in the riding of surfboards-and surf lifesaving-or lifeguarding in the North American context. The theoretical context for this presentation is threefold: the body as a system of signs, the body as a social construction of the relations of power, and the body as a set of social practices.
