

### Role of sport in society

- **Vocabulary of sport pervades everyday life**
- Sport plays a significant role in the cultural life of most societies
- Millions of people go to watch live sport every week and watch on television or listen on radio
- A 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher called **Hegel** suggested that one could understand a people by the gods they worship
- One could make a similar claim about the sports that are popular among a people
- A sports culture which focuses on such values as **teamwork, self-discipline, willingness to sacrifice** personal glory for the benefit of the team
- One viewpoint is that the values that sports exhibit are **not inherent in sport** as sport **but are reflections** of values that originate in society (it is argued)
- We can also infer that sport **can and does teach those values** to its participants
- Sports instil values in participants and in turn those values are carried back into society.

### Marxian critique of sport

- So we can think about a Marxian critique of sport – particularly competitive sport
- In this viewpoint **sport reflects society**, but that is a capitalist society
- And the **alienation** that Marx suggests is endemic to capitalist competition and its values of winning at all costs are present in sport it is argued
- From the **Marxist viewpoint sport teaches** capitalist values including undesirable values inspired by sport
- It is also alienating because of the competition involved.
  
- It could be argued that it is **not competition** that is alienating in sport
- But rather **other values in society** - values not at all intrinsic to sport are imported into sport to its detriment
- Lasch – argues that contemporary sport is degraded and trivialised by being turned into a vehicle for **education, business and also entertainment**
- Instead, Lasch would have us **take out those elements** and restore sports to its own integrity- where the **negative values** could be **eliminated** from sport
- A third premise in the argument is that the values **of sport somehow originate in** society **which** does not allow for sport to have any inherent or **intrinsic value** of its own that might be carried into society

## Sport and Women

- There is a history of women **being excluded** from full participation in sport
- There is small amount of money spent on women's sports
- There is also **less participation in sports**, **less press** coverage of women's athletics
- And also still **some differences in the sports** that girls are encouraged to take up
- One viewpoint is that **women are simply weaker** and smaller than men, physically and therefore naturally inferior as athletes
- However, some point to statistical **differences in size**, **ratios of fat to muscle** and bone structure and suggest that women simply do not have the **physical ability** to compete with men as **athletes**
- Another argument that is made is that the **values associated** with sports – discipline, competitiveness, courage and manliness are **most desirable** for our **male youth to develop**
- The principle that is highlighted is that this focuses on physical differences between women and men
- Which are then used to militate against women participating fully in athletics

## Mind and Body

- Paul Weiss in his book philosophy of sport argues that one of the things sport accomplishes is to overcome **the experienced separation between mind and body**
- That many men (note men) experience
- Because sport demands both mental and physical activity
- And because one invests one's entire being, mental and physical in it, it offers us one of the few occasions for bridging **the gap between the mind and body**
- Weiss argues that this **separation is peculiar to men**
- Because women have supposedly more **emotional natures they** are therefore, he argues, do not experience such as separation between **mind and body**
- And therefore do not need to **overcome** it through **sport**
- In recent years, such arguments have come under **attack**
- Once given the opportunity, the significance, satisfaction and depth of involvement of **women in sport can equal that of men**
- At times in women's **Olympic swimming races the times** achieved would be sufficient to **win the men's** events a **few years ago**
- And there was controversy when **Ye Shiwen won the 400 m** individual medley – and one of the issues raised was because she **swam faster than the male winner** of the 400m individual medley
- It is argued that in some sports it **will become more common for women's time** to be **better** than men's times

## Sports design

- Many sports have been **designed and developed by men**
- To showcase characteristics of male muscles and bodies – it is argued – such as **strength, speed and muscles**
- Given that bias, it is hardly surprising, it is argued, that **women will not** achieve the same results as men
  - Some thinkers – such as **Betsy Postow** argue that given this **built in bias**, women will look bad compared with men
  - Instead she argues that women should focus on sports that highlight their own physiology – **such as gymnastics, diving or ultra marathoning**
  - She suggests that women should demand that **more sports be developed** that are **designed for women** and **that women should take an active role** in developing such sports
  - Others suggest that this would **deny women the opportunities** to play **basketball or similar sports**,
    - A slightly different argument is made by the **philosopher Marion Young**
    - Who focuses on the injustice of the **exclusion of women from sport**
    - She begins with the distinction between the experience of oneself or others as **body-subject, body-object**
    - To experience oneself as body subject is to experience oneself as a source of **power, activity and energy**
    - The body-subject is dominated by the **masculine**
    - To experience oneself as body-object is to **experience oneself as a thing**, as **passive** or **something** to be looked at
    - The body-object to be looked at, **passive other**, as the **essence of feminine**
    - We can use this argument to highlight that when female athletes do get media representations
    - They are often shown in **sexualised, feminine or submissive poses**
    - Young asserts that **women are therefore conceptually** excluded from sport

## Differences

- A distinction can be made between the claims regarding the **natural physiological differences** between men and women
- And the question of whether there are natural as opposed to culturally determined **psychological, intellectual or spiritual differences**.

- There is some **controversy** about the **physiological differences** between men and women
- Some might argue that at **least some of the differences** in size and muscle development might be the result of **social conditioning**
- How boys and girls are raised
- The extent to which they are **encouraged to be active**
- Men are thought to be more **aggressive and women more intuitive** and gentle
- We need to appreciate that there are some characteristics, physical and spiritual that men and women **share by virtue of being human**
- We saw earlier that Marx critiqued the notion of competition as undesirable
- But it is at least as likely that a **competitive spirit** derives from something about our **human nature as human** – rather than **male/female**

### **Athlete as hero**

- A culture's heroes will exhibit traits of character and personality that are most **desirable and honoured in a culture**
- We live in an era increasingly **dominated by technology**
- One of the characteristics of technology is that it **accomplishes by machinery** more and more of the **activities** which once required physical strength and agility
  - In a culture in which physical strength and agility is **less necessary in everyday life** we **elevate to hero status**, people whose activity exhibits those virtues
  - Athletes remind us of **'the way we were'**
  - They exhibit those qualities of **physical strength, agility and dexterity**
  - But now typically **neither need or exhibit**
  - The hero status of athletes is a **nostalgia for the past**
  - One viewpoint is that the **athletic body** is a **spectacle**
  - We admire it, but it is pointless
  - A more positive version, is that we recognise in the athlete the **qualities that we are in danger of losing** and want to **preserve**
  - On this argument, it is **not only the physical** but also the **spiritual qualities** which the **athletes exhibit** that leads us to admire them

### **Youth (male) and Sport**

- Paul Weiss observed the athletic field is one of the first arenas where our youth can hope to achieve and exhibit the excellence that they admire in their athletic heroes
- Long before a young person is capable of achieving excellence in business, politics or other areas he/she can achieve excellence in athletics
- There is also a persistent belief that sport turns boys into men
- And that immersion in sport is a form of initiation into the ways of men
- Where boys learn the values of competitiveness, aggressiveness, physical striving, mental toughness
- And this is illustrated by male sports commentators' choice of language
  
- But the admiration can be problematic, because however admirable and worthy of imitation
- Great athletes sometimes lead ethical and moral lives that are deplorable
- It is inspiring athletes to imitate their athletic heroes
- Especially when those personal lives are made to look exciting and glamorous
- It is sometimes held to be deplorable to hold up as heroes, athletes who perform activities with no practical value to society
- When there are others, scientists, business people, teachers, campaigners – who might engage in activities useful to society and ought to be the real
- And argue that it is better to establish sportspeople as heroes rather than soldiers who are trained killers
- And also that someone or some activity can be valuable and admirable independently of considerations of practical utility

### hegemonic Masculinity and Sport

- Sport, it is argued, gives masculine aggression the chance of a legitimised, ritualised outlet
- Violent aggression in sport – within rules – is positively rewarded
- Connell suggests there is a link between the waning confidence in masculine power and the growth of masculine potency in the media
- Aggression is seen as a defining male characteristic
- But it is argued that sports violence is learned behaviour
- Educating boys about attitudes towards homosexuality as well as gender
- So a hyper masculinity is promoted in some sports – such as rugby and football
- the media constructs a way of seeing, appraising and ranking masculinities

- In recreating a mythical past, Wimbledon recreates **different traditions** in emotional control
- The **English stiff upper lip**, contrasted with **American indignation** at official ineptitude (John MacEnroe)
- There are multiple competing codes at play
- But there are also hierarchies among these codes
- And the **media** does not simply reflect gender differences in the real world, but helps **to construct those differences**
- And there are complex, often competing **codes of gender, class, race and nationality in specific formations**