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EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE REVIEW

Sport and Society

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Cashmore, E. (2005) *Making Sense of Sports* (4th edn). London: Routledge.

Coakley, J. (2004) *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies* (8th edn). Boston: McGraw Hill.

In teaching at different institutions, across a number of levels, it is noticeable that there is a marked difference in student learning when the subject of study is something that the group can easily relate to. When students feel 'engaged' with a particular subject then learning is often perceived as more relevant and enjoyable. It is well established that active learning is more effective than passive learning (see for example, Biggs, 1999) and looking at the place of sport in society provides numerous opportunities to develop learning strategies.

It is some forty years since the publication of Kenyon and Loy's (1965) seminal paper, which provided a significant catalyst for developing the sociology of sport as a field of academic study. One of the earliest texts to contribute to the development of the subject was Jay Coakley's (1978) *Sport in Society*. Since then the subject has grown markedly to the extent that the study of sport in society can no longer be considered a 'young and naïve problematic' (Jarvie, 2004:579). The following essay looks at two key texts in the area. It is hoped that this will be the first in a series of reviews that will explore core texts in the subject areas of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism. As lecturers and students are often faced with an increasingly wide choice of texts to consider when developing courses and/or purchasing relevant works, it is envisaged that these reviews will help locate texts in relation to their suitability for learning and teaching.

The work of both Cashmore and Coakley appear on the core reading lists of many undergraduate modules related to sport in society. Over the past fifteen years they have become widely accepted as *the* key introductory books in the subject. Although other introductory texts have appeared recently (e.g. Horne et al., 1999; Houlihan, 2003; Jones and Armour, 2000) the works of Cashmore and Coakley are still considered as the key readings on many undergraduate programmes. The first edition

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of Coakley's (1978) work predates Cashmore's (1990) by twelve years. Since then the subject area has witnessed exponential growth, but it is worth noting that many introductory texts in sociology still largely ignore sport. Such an omission seems particularly strange when one considers the place of sport in contemporary society.

In the eighth edition of *Sport in Society* Coakley (2004) highlights the purpose of his publication as being about showing students how sociology can be used to study sports in society, and encouraging students to ask questions and think critically about sports as part of social life. The text is organised to facilitate the use of published literature, combined with the Internet, to learn about sports in society. Although I have always found it to be an accessible work, as the text has been developed it has become more and more 'student friendly'. An accompanying lecturer's resource pack and website provide further support. At the end of each chapter, in addition to highlighting key texts in the area, Coakley also includes a list of useful websites.

In my own teaching of the subject I have noticed that students do not always 'locate' where the information is coming from. Weaker students occasionally 'parrot' Coakley without recognising the historical and cultural situatedness of his work. Various issues have a very different background in the United States of America than they do in the United Kingdom. Cashmore's text is quite useful here as he uses numerous examples from both the USA and the UK to contextualise key issues.

Cashmore's work provides a useful introductory overview as he integrates numerous perspectives in an attempt to make sense of sport. In drawing upon studies from a variety of disciplines, Cashmore shows how research into sport has developed markedly, arguing that 'sport as an institution is just too economically big, too politically important, too influential in shaping people's lives not to be taken seriously as a subject for academic inquiry' (2005:2). His text differs to Coakley's in that sections of Cashmore's work now encompass more of a broad brush approach, drawing upon contributions from a range of behavioural and physical sciences. As with Coakley's text, Cashmore's work has developed a great deal since the first edition was published.

Both authors, as befits their status as key figures in the subject, write in a clear and accessible style. Each text includes a number of thought-provoking questions and useful exercises to develop thinking around subjects. Where both texts are also valuable is that they are not constrained by any one particular theoretical viewpoint and demonstrate the multidimensional and wide-reaching scope of the subject. For those of us committed to the promise of the sociological imagination, both texts show that there are numerous ways to look at the place of sport in society.

The challenge for those of us teaching units on sport and society is to get our students thinking beyond taken-for-granted assumptions and to begin questioning, analysing and reflecting upon the social world. It is important to view learning related to sport and society as being about conceptual change and not just the acquisition of information. Biggs (1999) suggests that such change can take place when it is clear to learners what is 'appropriate', what the objectives are and where they can see the direction in which they are heading. Both texts clearly identify 'signposts' throughout to help point the way and each also provides some thought-provoking questions at the end of each chapter.

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