

# SOCIOLOGY 3GG3

## SPORTS VIOLENCE

*Department of Sociology, McMaster University, Winter 2006*

### **Instructor Information**

Dr. Michael Atkinson

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### **Class Information**

Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays: 12:30-1:20

Location: MDCL 1309

## ***COURSE MANDATE AND PHILOSOPHY***

This course is designed to expose students to mainstay sociological and social psychological theories of violence in and around sport fields. Over the course of the term we critically expect typical manifestations of aggression and violence in sports cultures, embodied experiences with sport violence, ideological/institutional systems which tend to support the performance of violence in sport, and representations of a full gamut of 'violent' behaviors surrounding sport. Case examples of violence covered in the course include, but are not limited to, player and fan violence, sexual assault in sport, the abuse of animals in sports spheres, crimes against the environment committed through sport practices, and hazing rituals. This course is designed to get students critically thinking about what constitutes acceptable, negotiated, or even criminal violence in sport.

To accomplish the above goals, the course is segmented into several interrelated sections. We begin the course by addressing some central issues in and around the study of sports violence. Included among these introductory issues are: the rationale for studying sport violence as a sociological topic; the status of research on sport violence within sociology and social psychology; and, the cross-cultural relevance of sports violence. From there, we investigate how issues and practices of violence do not simply occur on the proverbial playing fields. Picking up on the themes emerging from these topics, we discuss how various types of policy and moral entrepreneurs across social institutions now target sport violence. We also examine the role media play in disseminating images of athletes and athletics in Canada.

In many ways, then, the course highlights the centrality of sport in Canadian culture and encourages students to think critically about what sport means as a form of social interaction. Thinking critically about sport means studying it from all angles, and investigating the ways in which sport is both individually/collectively *enabling* and *constraining*. By the time the course concludes, I would like you to have gained a sense of how sport is contested social terrain -- that is, how it is a social institution wherein culture is created, negotiated, and resisted.

## ***RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STUDENT***

1. A careful and punctual reading of the required material.
2. Regular attendance at lectures and participation in class discussions and questions.
3. Advance notice to the instructor or the Department of Sociology main office if unable to comply with the schedule of coursework.
4. Students are asked to familiarize themselves with University regulations regarding plagiarism and academic dishonesty.
5. Students who are having difficulty with the course are advised to contact the instructor immediately to discuss the situation.
6. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with changes (additions, deletions, shifts) to this outline made in class.
7. Keep this outline. It will be your course reference throughout the term.

### ***STUDYING SPORT SOCIOLOGICALLY: AN IMPORTANT NOTE***

Due to the central position that sport enjoys in popular culture, this course tends to attract many students, some of whom see themselves as sports aficionados in one way or another. However, simply owning a Tiger Cats season ticket, being a high-performance athlete or a coach, or a sports trivia expert does not guarantee that you will perform well in this course. Certainly, knowledge of the world of sport is advantageous in the sense that names, dates, events, etc., will be familiar to you, and thus give you a 'leg up' in understanding the material. Still, *please* recognize up front that what the course requires most is a sociological imagination. This will be especially pertinent in writing the papers.

My goal for this course is to encourage you to interpret the world of sport around you from a sociological perspective (especially those possessing only little familiarity with sociology). Fundamentally, whether you are an athlete or not, this involves seeing the social world from a 'different' interpretive and *theoretical* standpoint. Studying sport violence critically as a sociologist means that we place these practices on the 'analytical table' and attempt to dissect them using a wide range of tools (i.e., theories, concepts, and ideas). Without delving into specifics here, the coursework will be based upon you *applying* sociology to the study of sport. Remember the following central points over the term:

- 1) **Sociology is the study of group life**; more specifically, how each one of us influences (and are influenced by) extended chains of social interaction on a daily basis.
- 2) The sociological concepts of **culture** (i.e., the total 'way of life' of a group of people) and **social structure** (i.e., a network of interaction that becomes 'formalized' over time).
- 3) Sport plays a role in the ongoing **socialization** of people (i.e., sport has a social role in bringing people together, and teaching people about cultural norms, values, and beliefs).

4) While sport brings some people together in a harmonious way, it is an institution (like any other) rife with discrimination, exploitation, and corruption --- essentially, sport is replete with power imbalances.

5) Sport is **interconnected with many other social institutions** such as the family, the school, the church, the State/government, and the media.

6) Sport both produces, and is produced by, **'cultural logics'** that influence our every day thoughts about such things as gender, health, ethnicity, social class, the economy, politics, nationalism, and globalization.

## ***COURSE READINGS***

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

There are two main texts that will be used throughout the course, and both are available at the University bookstore in the "Tank". Please acquire them early in the term and read well in advance of the lecture schedule.

**1) Dunning, Eric. (1999). Sport Matters. London: Routledge.**

This text is a general reader on the historical development of sport as a "mimetic" social institution wherein both real and symbolic violence is enacted.

**2) Kerr, John. (2004). Rethinking Violence and Aggression in Sport. London: Routledge.**

This text provides an excellent overview of dominant theories of aggression in sport with an emphasis on social psychological explanations.

**3) WEBCT readings**

In addition to the 2 course texts, a series of readings will be posted through WEBCT. Students are responsible for keeping up to date with these readings as they will be the subject of in-class discussion and coursework.

## ***COURSE ASSIGNMENTS***

**ASSIGNMENT 1 (DUE: JANUARY 31)**

For this assignment you will be asked to attend a small selection of sports events to unobtrusively watch how aggression and sports violence occurs in subtle and overt ways. **(Value: 30%)**

**ASSIGNMENT 2 (DUE: MARCH 3)**

For the second assignment, you will examine how the language and images of violence are embedded in, and mediated through, televised broadcasts of a sport of your choice. **(Value: 30%)**

**ASSIGNMENT 3 (DUE: APRIL 5)**

For the final assignment you are to select a type of sports-related violence of your choice and conduct empirical research on one main case of it in North America. Through the analysis, you will be asked to propose a series of 'harm-reduction' policy initiatives to combat the violence problem. (Value 40%)

### ***Assignment rules and procedures***

Please note that students must submit all assignments in order to pass (and/or receive a final grade for) the course. All assignments must be submitted through WEBCT. Assignments may not be submitted to our administrative assistants in the Department of Sociology (who will not date-stamp them), nor may they be faxed. However, students may submit coursework via email attachment when appropriate. Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 20% per day, unless accompanied by a medical note (do not submit these notes to me, they must be approved by an Associate Dean's office). Your final mark for the course will be converted to a letter grade according to the scale used by the Registrar.

ALL ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE HANDED OUT DURING THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF CLASS.

## ***COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS\****

### **January**

3-6: Violence and Sports-Related Violence (SRV)

- Dunning 1999 (Introduction); WEBCT reading

10-13: Sociological Theories of Violence and Sport History (Institutionalizing Violence)

- Dunning 1999 (Chapters 1-4)

17-20: Sociological Theories of Violence and Sport History (Gender, Class, Ethnicity)

- Dunning 1999 (Chapters 5-8)

24-27: Social Psychological Theories of Interpersonal Aggression (Process Explanations)

- Kerr 2004 (Introduction - Chapter 4)

### **February**

(Jan) 31-3: Social Psychological Theories of Interpersonal Aggression (Process Outcomes)

- Kerr 2004 (Chapters 5 - 9)

7-10: Sport Related Violence: Hazing and Self-Abuse; WEBCT reading

14-17: Sport Related Violence: Fan and Crowd Violence; WEBCT reading

21-24: **No Classes (Mid-term recess)**

### **March**

(Feb) 28-3: Sport Related Violence: Sexual Assault and Partner Abuse; WEBCT reading

7-10: Sport Related Violence: Terrorism, Sport and Political Violence; WEBCT reading

14-17: Sport Related Violence: Economic Exploitation and Violence; WEBCT reading

21-24: Sport Related Violence: Blood Sports and Animal Abuse; WEBCT reading

28-31: Sport Related Violence: Crimes Against the Environment; WEBCT reading

### **April**

4-5: Sport Related Violence: Policy and Harm Reduction Initiatives; WEBCT reading

**\* THIS OUTLINE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE (CHECK WEBCT FREQUENTLY)**

## ***IMPORTANT POLICY INFORMATION***

### **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3: [http://www.mcmaster.ca/senate/academic/ac\\_integrity.htm](http://www.mcmaster.ca/senate/academic/ac_integrity.htm)

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained. (Insert specific course information, e.g. style guide)
2. Improper collaboration in group work. (Insert specific course information)
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

### **DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES**

Do NOT fax assignments. Please see your instructor for the most appropriate way to submit assignments. The Sociology staff will NOT date-stamp assignments, nor do they monitor the submission or return of papers. Students should check the web, the white board and the Undergraduate Bulletin board outside the Sociology office (KTH-627) for notices pertaining to Sociology classes or departmental business (eg. class scheduling information, location of mailboxes and offices, tutorial information, class cancellations, balloting, TA job postings, etc.).

### **IMPORTANT DATES**

Classes for Term 2: Tues. Jan. 3 to Wed. Apr. 5

Last day of Drop and Add: Thurs. Jan. 12

Mid-term recess: Mon. Feb. 20 - Sat. Feb. 25

**Please visit the department website: <http://socserv2.mcmaster.ca/sociology/>**