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Sport in Consumer Culture

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Sport, Identities and Lifestyles in Consumer Culture

Introduction

In a consumer culture consumption largely takes the form of purchasing commodities, goods obtained through market exchange rather than produced for direct use. For most of the 20th century, sport in Britain was conceived of as a form of culture largely outside the social relations of capitalist consumer culture. In the last twenty-five years this isolation has broken up. Some social scientists argue that a transformation of sport has occurred because of the increased connection between sport, the media and advertising (Hargreaves 1986, Whannel 1992, Horne et al. 1999). Television has been 'probably *the* single most influential driving force underlying the commodification of sport' (Miles 1997, p. 140)

Chandler et al. (2002, p. 47) argue that commodification, used as a synonym for commercialisation, refers to the way that 'both sport and its participants have become products for sale in the marketplace'. The neo-marxist sport sociologist, Jean-Marie Brohm (1978, p. 180), once described sport as 'an apparatus for transforming aggressive drives' of the working class. Instead of 'expressing themselves in the class struggle, these drives are absorbed, diverted and neutralised in the sporting spectacle'. Although not part of the ruling class, sport stars figure in the mediation of corporately produced goods to the consumer. As such they enter what Rojek (2000, pp. 70–74) refers to as the 'celebrity class' and what Alberoni (1972/1962) before him called the 'powerless elite'. Yet Hunter Davies, journalist and writer, suggests that involvement in sport as a fan entails a different relationship than that of a simple customer (quoted in Miles 1997, p. 129) 'Every year United fans have their ashes scattered on the turf at Old Trafford. How often do you see that happening at Tesco's?'

How does sport in consumer culture differ from other aspects of culture? We can accept that professional sport is fully incorporated into capitalist consumer culture, or would like to be so; but as other forms of physical culture – a broader notion encompassing exercise and other forms of physical activity – sport

has differing degrees of relationship to commodification. It exists between the state and the market. This distinction between sport as a participatory experience and sport as a spectator event is important. As we have seen, Pierre Bourdieu (1999b) refers to this as the distinction between sport as 'practice' and sport as 'spectacle'. In popular journalism, sport as practice in consumer culture produces two dramatic figures – the couch potato and the exercise addict. On the one hand is the concern that more and more people – especially school-aged children – are watching sport rather than doing it. On the other is the less often voiced concern that some people may be over doing it – whether this is the (male) football fanatic or the female involved in several aerobic exercise classes a week. In this chapter we present evidence and argument to help you make up your mind about the veracity of these and other social stereotypes about lifestyles and ludic body styles in consumer culture.

This chapter begins by considering theoretical debates about the concept of lifestyle. Many writers have associated the notion with individualisation, the use of the body as a medium of personal expression in 'body projects' (Shilling 1993) and the aestheticisation of everyday life – all part of the contemporary social experience of consumer culture. They ask how far is consumer culture 'an important context for the development of novel relationships of individual self-assembly and group membership'? (Lury 1996 p. 256). Whilst these accounts have emphasised the creativity of lifestyles, we will argue that the body and lifestyles, through advertising and branding, have been used in the production of contemporary consumer culture as a way of life (Smart 2003, p. 73, Klein 2000a, pp. 113–115, Castells 1998, p. 340). As John O'Neill (1985, pp. 101–102) argued two decades ago, 'The consumer is not born but is produced by anxiety-inducing processes that teach him or her to want things that service needs which arise in the first place only from commercial invention.' He continued, 'Millions of consumers are conscripted to the labour of learned discontent from their earliest childhood.'

Arguably central to identity in consumer culture is the development and spread of consumer identity. Bocock (1994) notes how new patterns of consumption developed among the urban middle and working classes at the end of the 19th century. The emergence of consumer society sees the emergence of consumer identity and 'a new kind of individual who is anxious… "to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces"' (Bocock 1994, p. 181). These types of people have an increased awareness of style and 'need to consume within a repertory or code which is both distinctive to a specific social group and expressive of individual preference' (Bocock 1994). The person in the city 'consumes in order to articulate a sense of identity, of who they wish to be taken for' (Bocock 1994, p. 182). Consumption as a means of signification is what some writers have claimed is an attribute of postmodernity. Clearly, however, it was something recognised as long ago as the late 19th and early 20th century by sociologists such as Simmel and Veblen. This feature of consumption also forms the basis for

different status groups to establish their position or rank in contrast or distinction to others.

Consumption for symbolic purposes and status value might be thought to be the preserve of the affluent in the advanced capitalist countries. Indeed substantial numbers of the world's population – including between a third and a quarter of those people who live in the advanced capitalist countries – are mainly interested in consumption for material provision rather than for 'show'. Yet the idea of consuming goods for their symbolic value as much as if not more than for their use value is not restricted to these post-industrial societies. Consumerism has spread as a global 'culture-ideology' mainly for two reasons (Sklair 2002, pp. 108ff.). First, capitalism has entered a globalising phase, and secondly the technical and social relations that structure the mass media have 'made it very easy for new consumerist lifestyles to become the dominant motif' (Sklair 2002, p. 108). Hence '"consumerism" may influence even the symbolic life of the poor' (Bocock 1994, p. 184).

Understanding Lifestyles in Consumer Culture

For much of its history, sociology has focussed on producing and working – the wider social and economic environment – rather than consuming and playing. In the past thirty years, sociologists have begun to re-focus their analysis, including consideration of consumer culture. Advocates of the idea of post-modern culture, in line with replacing the social with the signifying, have argued that consumption is now increasingly organised by lifestyle as opposed to traditional 'ascribed identities' or modern structural social divisions and inequalities (Slater 1997, p. 202). Yet arguably many people have been structurally excluded from the postmodern experience, by immobile identities such as being female, black, disabled and old. Sociological interest in the connections between different patterns of social relationships (for example, child rearing, attitudes to social institutions such as school, education and personal health care) and the consumption of material goods and culture has often been underpinned by an understanding of social class as the key social factor. With the emergence of the concept of lifestyle the precise relationship with social class has become less clear-cut.

As Tony Veal (1993, p. 247) describes it, lifestyle is 'the distinctive pattern of personal and social behaviour characteristic of an individual or a group'. He identified four key questions for research into lifestyles (Veal 1993, p. 248): First, what are the processes by which people adopt lifestyles or, alternatively, have lifestyles thrust upon them? Secondly, what is the meaning and importance of actual or desired lifestyles to individuals – are they as important as some people believe? Thirdly, are lifestyles expressions of freedom or a contrived tool of consumer capitalism – are people heroes or dupes? Fourthly, has lifestyle replaced traditional social variables, such as social class, gender, age and so on,

as the key differentiating variable in society, and what might the implication be for the analysis of leisure and sport?

David Chaney (1996, p. 38) argues that 'we need something like a concept of lifestyle to describe the social order of the modern world'. We should see the notion as offering further elaboration on Western individualism. Bourdieu (1984/1979) offered another constructive use of the concept. He argued that the objects of taste acquire their meaning, as do words, through their associations with other objects (words), and not simply in themselves. Hence Bourdieu (1984/1979, p. 88) notes that 'detective stories, science fiction or strip cartoons may be entirely prestigious cultural assets or be reduced to their ordinary value, depending on whether they are associated with avant-garde literature or music . . . or combine to form a constellation typical of middle-brow taste'. The same applies to sport. No matter how 'good' a sport might be, if it does not fit within the social and cultural values and meanings, or 'habitus', of someone it will not be acceptable. Bourdieu (1984/1979) argues that some people with 'cultural capital' are able to transgress boundaries and experiment (the petit bourgeois, however, are the most deferential to convention). Cultural intermediaries (including academics like Bourdieu himself) can read the struggles over taste and the 'delusions' of others. Cultural intermediaries are able to comment and offer advice through magazines and other media outlets about lifestyles and fashions. In consumer culture new expert cultural intermediaries – advertisers, designers, marketers and point-of-sale-strategists – have a major role to play in the construction of contemporary lifestyles.

The following extract from an item in the British men's magazine *Jack* illustrates the role of cultural intermediaries in positioning sportswear within the fashion system of contemporary consumer culture.

> The Italy national football shirt has long been an icon of understated chic . . . Puma has picked up the gauntlet by producing a shirt that is worthy of this rich sartorial heritage. Neil Barrett, the Italian-based Brit. responsible for Puma's Italia collection, is a one-time Senior Menswear Designer at Gucci and Design Director of Prada Menswear. (*Jack*, June 2004, p. 25)

Advertising and the (re)construction of the ideal body mediate the relationship between consumption and personal identities. There is a clear overlap with the impact of consumer culture on identity.

Chaney argues, however, that Bourdieu's notion of habitus is too prescriptively deterministic – not allowing for the playful adoption of styles as commentaries on people's own lifestyles. 'A central element in why there has been an increasing interest in lifestyle practices in later modernity is that an established hierarchy of cultural codes is . . . being over-turned by contemporary practice' (Chaney 1996, p. 67). 'De-differentiation', or a blurring of categories of taste may be occurring (Martin 1981, Featherstone et al. 1995). Rob Shields (1992, p. 8) suggests that lifestyles based on leisure spaces are inherently

liminal – outside normal social space and order. In their marginality to dominant frameworks of meaning, leisure spaces are open to the liminal chaos which places social arrangements in abeyance and suggests their arbitrary, cultural, nature. Shields argues against coherence in the actor and lifestyles – 'consumption for adornment, expression and group solidarity become not merely the means to a lifestyle, but the enactment of a lifestyle' (Shields 1992, p. 16).

In short, some writers suggest that lifestyles in consumer culture may be not just (as traditionally viewed) either a distinctive mode of exploitation or a new form of structural status overlaying established class distinctions. Instead 'we may have to rethink lifestyles as distinctive ways of being that call into question our understanding of the grounded embodiments of identity and community' (Chaney 1996, p. 76). He argues that the crisis of authority in modernity not only is the 'stuff' of intellectual discourse but also 'can be seen to motivate the investments in meaning and identity that constitute so much of everyday lifestyle practice' (Chaney 1996, p. 83). Hence lifestyle sites display both the reassurance of authority and the principle of ambivalence (or anxiety) in consumer culture. Shopping malls can offer reassurance, whilst lifestyles 'may be practical means of living with ambivalence' (Chaney 1996, p. 84). Lifestyles become a precondition of the cultural innovations of postmodernism and especially neo-tribal forms of association (see Hetherington 1994). The *global* rationality of cultural corporations seeking economies of scale in the manufacture of taste is opposed by *local* knowledges that diffuse, subvert and appropriate commodities and services for 'irrational' styles.

Giddens' (1991, 1992, 1994) account of sociocultural change in late modernity also argues that identity is produced by radicalised modern conditions, but identity is not completely fluid. He states that 'Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, "How shall I live?" has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat' (Giddens 1991, p. 14). Furthermore for Giddens 'in the context of a post-traditional order, the self becomes a *reflexive project*' (Giddens 1991, p. 32). For Giddens, then, lifestyles are radically reflexive – self-aware – and 'there is a necessary openness to the meanings of any lifestyle in context' (Giddens 1991, p. 85). In short, 'the meanings of lifestyle practices are not primarily determined by "forces" in the wider society (of whatever sort)' (Giddens 1991, p. 85). The development of lifestyles and the structural changes of modernity are linked through institutional reflexivity. 'Because of the openness of social life today, the pluralisation of contexts of action and the diversity of "authorities", lifestyle choice is increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity and daily activity' (Giddens 1991, p. 5). The significance of this view for understanding sport in consumer culture is that for Giddens self-identity is an embodied project, understood by individuals in terms of their own sense of and ways of telling, personal identity and biography.

For Giddens lifestyles are more significant projects than 'leisure activities', the latter notion having been corrupted by consumerism and neo-liberalism.

The commodification of self-hood, through marketing strategies, emphasises style at the expense of meaning. Understood as existential projects, rather than the consequences of marketing projects, lifestyles have normative and political as well as aesthetic implications. For Giddens a politics that flows from this significance of lifestyle in late modernity also transforms our understanding of emancipation. He distinguishes between a tradition of *emancipatory politics* (in which activists seek to improve the organisation of collective life to enhance individual autonomy) and *life politics*. The latter does not 'primarily concern the conditions which liberate us in order to make choices: it is a politics *of* choice. While emancipatory politics is a politics of life chances, life politics is a politics of lifestyle' (Giddens 1991, p. 214). Chaney (1996, p. 86) concludes, 'Lifestyles in this view are processes of self-actualization in which actors are reflexively concerned with how they should live in a context of global interdependence.'

Lash and Urry (1987 and 1994) argue that the break-up of organised to fragmenting and disorganized capitalism is paralleled in culture. For them this situation offers a positive potential for creative autonomy – grounded in increasing reflexivity and especially aesthetic reflexivity – 'the very stuff of post-organized capitalist economies of signs and space' (Lash and Urry 1994, p. 59). For them 'reflexivity' means ways of acting that are informed by a consciousness of the self – that acts by the actor are imbued with personal awareness. There is greater choice, although greater identity risk (Lash and Urry 1994, p. 50). For Lash and Urry (and Chaney) postmodern culture means greater importance being attached to aesthetic matters in both everyday life and in 'structural concerns' (p. 69). Hence lifestyle practice and personal identity are connected and self-conscious aestheticism is no longer restricted to the avant-garde, but becomes part of the 'aestheticisation of everyday life' noted by Featherstone (1991).

Despite these confident assertions, Colin Campbell (1995, p. 113) has argued that 'there may well be good reasons for believing that it is unwise of sociologists to build theories of modern consumer behaviour around the concept of "lifestyle"'. Campbell (1995, p. 114) considers the most problematic feature of the concept of lifestyle – or the '"consumption as indicative of identity choice" thesis' as he calls it – is that it implies that consumption carries implicit meanings or messages. Rather than adopt this 'communicative act paradigm' Campbell (1995, p. 115) suggests that it is important to make three distinctions. First is that between the idea that actions are intelligible and that they have a precise, agreed meaning. Second between something (a symbol or an object) possessing a meaning and something constituting a message. Third is the distinction between receiving a message and intending to send one. Hence if some one decides to buy a particular brand of trainers and wears them whilst out shopping then it is not possible to say that everyone who sees this person will read the significance of the shoes in the same way. Just because someone may be able to read a meaning into the shoes worn by another, for many people they will just be a pair of sports shoes. Hence Campbell (1995, p. 117) is sceptical of 'the general claim that the activity of consuming should be viewed as an endeavour by individuals to indicate a chosen "lifestyle" to others'. Instead Campbell (1995, p. 117) suggests that there are no grounds for assuming that consumption involves 'an attempt by the consumer to "adopt a lifestyle" or "create an identity"'.

Others have argued that it is the notion of consumer *choice* implicit in recent social theories of lifestyle and identity, as well as in political and business rhetoric, that needs to be critiqued (Warde 2002). Choice can involve selection, picking in preference, considering fit or suitable, as well as willing or determining. The problem is that the first two meanings sometimes get conflated with the final meaning – the ability of an individual to determine his or her own fate. The latter is dependent on more systemic issues – most notably the distribution of resources, and social, political and economic power.

> Behaviour is collective and situational; and the appropriate methodological stance is collectivist or institutional. If the collective and institutional conditions of consumption are ignored, then the structure of unequal distribution of power in the various fields of consumption is also overlooked, and all actors are attributed with an equal capacity for control over their own situation. (Warde 2002, p. 19)

He continues that 'In certain fields of sociological analysis, a strong emphasis on individual agency may be beneficial. However, in others, it may be prejudicial to understanding and, in the field of consumption, this is particularly the case at present' (Warde 2002, p. 18). Warde (2002, p. 11) suggests that many 'sociologists have increasingly come to adopt the premises of a common-sense view of the world of consumption which owes much to the penetration of commercial and promotional discourse into social science'. Further this 'appears to have encouraged, a tendency to turn the benevolent aspects of consumption into a legitimisation of commercial culture and an apology for liberal capitalist markets'.

The result has been the marginalisation of alternative perspectives, including, may be especially, the production of consumption approach. This approach has been passed over in much recent sociology and the balance has swung over towards cultural (and market) populism (McGuigan 1992, Frank 2000). There have been few structural analyses of the potential political divisions over consumption. They are mostly to be found in the journalism of the anti-capitalist, 'no logo', movement (Klein 2000a). Hence there has been an apparent convergence between the concerns of social science and the market research approaches to consumer behaviour – possibly a sign of the commercialisation of mental life and the subordination of intellectual reflection to the instrumental and practical purposes of selling goods and services (Monbiot 2000).

Another way of considering the concept of lifestyle critically, consistent with the Foucauldian perspective introduced in the previous chapter, is to

view it as part of a new discourse of policing the body through the neo-liberal welfare state (Howell and Ingham 2001). Through exercising smart lifestyle choices the individual becomes personally responsible for his or her own quality of life. Responsibility for health is individualised. As Howell and Ingham (2001, p. 337) state, 'The language of lifestyle is one of independence and self-sufficiency: it signifies pleasure, freedom, success and mobility.' The debate about lifestyles in contemporary society mirrors others in social science about the extent to which our actions and decisions are freely chosen or manipulated by dominant institutions, values, ideologies and discourses. Rather than treating it as an analytical concept alone it is necessary to see it as a political one. This makes it another essentially contested term.

Identities and Consumption

The new conception of identity that has emerged in sociology in the past fifteen years views identity as an ongoing project. Previously the self was either considered as 'a fully centred, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action' or someone 'formed in relation to "significant others"' through interaction between self and society (Hall 1992b, pp. 275–276). Now the subject, rather than 'having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented; composed not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved identities' (Hall 1992b, pp. 275–276). This is what Stuart Hall called 'the post-modern subject' in which identity becomes more of a '"moveable feast": formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us' (Hall 1992b, pp. 275–276). Identities are constructed but questions remain about how, from what, by whom and for what purposes?

At its simplest we can say that identity refers to how we see ourselves in relation to others. In this respect identity is about similarities and differences – drawing distinctions between 'us' and 'them'. Bechhofer et al. (1999), for example, argue that we should think of any individual's sense of national identity as not fixed but as constructed and sustained by the mundane realities of everyday life. Hence the national identity that anyone will claim to have will vary according to his or her spatial and temporal location. It also depends upon how others perceive those claims. Bechhofer et al. carried out interviews with members of the landed and arts elites in Scotland and people who lived in Berwick-on-Tweed, a small town closest to the border between England and Scotland. (Ironically, the home ground of Berwick Rangers Football Club, who play in the Second Division of the Scottish Football League, is actually located across the border in England!) Their findings suggest that place of birth does not necessarily determine people's sense of national identity. Over time this sense of identity can change for any individual. In some families children will opt for the same identity as their parents while in others

they do not. In making an identity claim, some individuals implicitly or explicitly reject alternatives; they are constructing their own identity by contrasting it with other possibilities. Bechhofer et al. distinguish between *identity markers* and *identity rules*: the former are those characteristics that have symbolic importance in identity construction or recognition; the latter are the 'rules of thumb' whereby in particular circumstances the markers are actively interpreted. For example, a lone Englishman in a Scottish bar watching a sporting event between the two countries is likely to play down his identity, out of a sense of self-preservation if nothing else!

A second study of identity formation in the UK (Hetherington 1992) suggests that traditional sources of identity – such as class, gender, locality and ethnicity – may no longer be as influential. Hetherington studied the public reaction to young people following alternative life styles in Britain in the late 1980s and early 1990s. His research focussed on 'new age travellers', groups of people who moved about the country often, living in their vehicles and taking what work they could find. In addition to studying the 'moral panic' over the travellers Hetherington explored the nature of the social relationships uniting groups of travellers. He argued that in contemporary societies the traditional bases of identity were no longer as effective, and consequently people look for alternative forms of 'sociation'. These alternative forms, 'new sociations', in his opinion, were organised around shared beliefs, styles of life and consumption practices. These 'tribe-like' groupings, of which travellers are an example, are relatively unstable and require considerable effort and maintenance from their members. Hetherington offered a theory of sociality and sociation that pointed to the importance of the *emotional bases* of the collective experience of the activities involved and the forms this takes as distinctive lifestyles. Following Beck (1992/1986) he argued that this occurs through two processes: *deregulation*, or the modernisation and individualisation of modern forms of solidarity and identity formerly based on class occupation, locality and gender; and *recomposition* into 'tribal' identities and forms of sociation (along the lines indicated by Maffesoli 1996). Consumption is particularly important for holding the travellers' lifestyle together. Clothing, jewellery, hand-made objects, recreational drugs, alcohol and distinctive types of motorised vehicle all carry significance in creating solidarity. Their activities, directly and indirectly, create subsequent commercial practices – magazines, craft skills, musical and other entertainments and skills derived from living on the road.

Recent research into identity – and there has been an awful lot more – therefore suggests the following conclusions. First, that identities are claims made, contested and negotiated in particular contexts. Secondly, that identities are most likely to be contested at times of uncertainty and social change (otherwise for most of the time people do not think about who they are). Thirdly, that identities are neither fixed nor unproblematic. Identities can be considered as constructed and processed out of the mundane realities of everyday life.

Individuals construct national identities (as opposed to state identities) by using identity markers and identity rules. Postmodern theorists tend to view identities as products of lifestyle and consumption choices, whereas traditional or late modern analysts suggest that identities are still fashioned from class, gender, local and ethnic relations. 'Many collectively experienced and consumed popular cultural forms are far from a matter of individual choice' (Sugden and Tomlinson 1998b, p. 178). The debate between them is largely over the emphasis placed upon change or continuity in making sense of the present.

Body Styles, Lifestyles and Consumer Culture

How do dominant body stories or narratives available in a culture shape who we think we are (our identity) and which lifestyle we think we can develop? (Sparkes 1997, pp. 83ff.). Several social changes have contributed to the transformation of the role of exercise and sport in society. These have included shifts in the nature of work towards more sedentary forms of occupation, the development of a discourse which turns this change into a *problem*, and 'proposes as its remedy a systematised program of activities anchored in a lifestyle' (Bennett et al. 1999, p. 124). Bennett et al. (1999, p. 117) argue that a shift has also occurred with respect to the general understanding of the body since the 1980s in societies such as the UK, the USA and Australia. Like Giddens they argue that the body is now seen more as a project – rather than a given object – 'in which appearance, size, shape and even content are potentially open to reconstruction' (Sparkes 1997, p. 87). Bennett et al. (1999, p. 117) argue that two assumptions seem to underpin this shift. First, the idea 'that bodies are essentially malleable', and secondly that 'the shaping of the body is a matter of choice of lifestyle'.

Discourse about the body as personal and private has developed since the Renaissance. Today it appears obvious that it is so. There has been an individualisation and privatisation of the body in modern society. People invest more time and effort in the monitoring, control and appearance of their bodies – what Featherstone (1991) referred to as the 'look'. As a result in contemporary consumer culture the 'prime purpose of the maintenance of the inner body becomes the enhancement of the appearance of the outer body' (Sparkes 1997, p. 89). Advertisements for personal fitness machines, training devices and other equipment to help keep or get the body back into shape are regular features of weekend newspaper magazine supplements. A selection in *The Guardian Weekend Magazine* from January 2003, for example, urged readers to 'make a New Year's revolution', consider 'A New Year, A New You', and 'Get Your Sexy Body Back – Today!' (from *The Guardian Weekend Magazine* 4 January 2003).

These messages illustrate an argument put forward by several authors including David Kirk (1993). Kirk has shown how since the 1950s a number of ideas and discourses about body shape have been associated with concerns about consumerism and sedentariness and its links to heart disease. Body shape has become a critical sign of success, control, and personal worth, whilst fatness has become a metaphor for ugliness, indulgence, greed and sloth. In consumer culture those who can get their body to approximate the idealised images of youth, health, fitness and beauty can realise a higher economic exchange value than those that cannot or do not wish to.

Values and stylised images of the body are constructed and circulated through advertisements, the press, television and cinema. The emphasis is on body maintenance – like cars and other consumer goods the body requires servicing, regular care and attention to maintain maximum efficiency. People tend to transform free time into maintenance work. New technologies and disciplines are developed such as diets, exercise, chemicals and surgery that are aimed at physical transformation. The reward is an enhanced appearance and a more marketable self, rather than necessarily a more healthy body.

From a similar, Foucauldian, perspective Bennett et al. (1999, p. 115) argue that preoccupations with fat, diet and slenderness as part of exercise can be understood as 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1988, p. 18). They suggest that diet and exercise 'are ways of working on the body but also forms of moral exercise, intimately bound up with the shaping of the self'. They continue that 'to a large extent this is also true of the playing of sport, which serves instrumental ends such as fitness and health, as well as generating pleasure in the use of the body' (Bennett et al. 1999, p. 115). As Smith Maguire (2002) argues, exercise and participation in sport can be viewed as both responsible for the production of 'docile bodies' (Foucault 1977/1975) and empowered bodies. As those involved continually self-monitor, self-discipline and constantly strive for self-improvement and transformation, consumer culture can also help to produce fitness obsessions.

Sparkes (1997) argues that various ideologies about the body exist in consumer culture, such as mesomorphism, healthism and youthism, but at the heart of them is the notion of individualism. This idea is tied to the metatheoretical belief that individuals, rather than social structures, subcultures or other social forces, are responsible alone for their status in systems of social inequality. Ultimately this belief can lead to the view that those who do not have slim, healthy-looking, bodies are those who have chosen not to develop them. They only have themselves to blame for the consequences. This is a form of victim blaming, which also happens to fit very well with economic neo-liberalism (in Britain once referred to as 'Thatcherism'), the dominant political ideology of the past twenty-five years. The body becomes less a manifestation of identity and more of a site for its construction (Bennett et al. 1999, p. 117).

The 'Obesity Epidemic', Health and Physical Education

In a related argument Gard (2004) is critical of the increasingly widespread idea that Western societies currently face a general crisis of obesity. The most popular explanation appears to be that it is our lifestyles that are to blame. Yet Gard (2004) argues in fact that sedentary behaviour is able to coexist with physical activity. The problem as he sees it is actually lazy thinking – including the acceptance of reductionist science, leading to ineffective solutions and potentially oppressive social policies. By 'blaming', lifestyles in general attention is focussed on individuals and their lifestyles (that is, 'agents' rather than 'structures' or wider 'environments'). Often the problem is re-labelled as one of the 'diseases of affluence' or part of the problem 'modern Western lifestyles'. Yet if it is asked which people are most likely to be obese, and why, interesting social patterns emerge. In the USA African–American and Hispanic people – some of the poorest members of the society – are significantly over-represented in the overweight and obese groups. In the UK journalist Polly Toynbee (2004) has pointed out that 'Fat is a class issue.' Whilst many of the British middle class are overweight, 'most of the dangerously obese – the 22% with a body-mass index in the red zone – are to be found carless on council estates and not in the leafy suburbs where kids are driven to school in supertanker 4×4s'. She concludes that it is 'inequality and disrespect that makes people fat'.

Evans and Davies (2004) argue that in this context PE is often singled out as both the problem and the solution to contemporary body problems. PE teachers are regarded as not doing enough, whilst the school curriculum is meant to empower individuals to deal with the 'obesity epidemic'. This contradictory position is symptomatic of life in a risk society (Beck 1992/1986). The body becomes a central object of wider commercialising tendencies, whilst also offering the possibility of finding ontological security in an apparently more risky society. This situation creates the space for more claims to authority and expertise on the part of physical educators, health educators and fitness gurus (Giddens 1991, pp. 181–185).

A focus on the individual as an enterprising agent has developed as a result of these two developments. This has been underpinned by other ideologies such as 'healthism' – 'in which a hedonistic lifestyle is . . . combined with a preoccupation with ascetic practices aimed at the achievement or maintenance of an appearance of health, fitness and youthfulness' (Dutton 1995, p. 273). The result is another version of the view that the individual has a choice in preserving their own physical health. If people do not actively choose healthy living, then it is seen as a sign of the failure of someone to care for himself or herself. In this respect, 'healthism' places the fit or healthy body on a pedestal as one of the most desirable states of being in our society (Dutton 1995, p. 273). Associated ideas include: 'Fat is bad, therefore thin is good – and thus the thinner you are the better. Exercise promotes fitness – therefore the more you exercise the fitter you will be. Muscularity enhances the look of the male body – therefore the bigger the muscles the more attractive you become' (Dutton 1995, p. 273). As Dutton notes, 'goals which may in themselves be harmless or even beneficial can take such a hold of the individual that they dominate, and even to some extent define, the personality' (Dutton 1995). So one of the problems with contemporary consumer culture is that the health-oriented person can become an obsessed person. As Giddens (1999, p. 46) notes, 'A society living on the other side of nature and tradition – as nearly all Western countries now do – is one that calls for decision making, in everyday life as elsewhere. The dark side of decision making is the rise of addictions and compulsions.' He adds, 'addiction comes into play when choice, which should be driven by autonomy, is subverted by anxiety' (Giddens 1999, p. 47). Conventional economics overlooks the downside of the work that is consumption – 'There are no perplexed, harassed, tired, disappointed, crazy consumers in economics' (O'Neill 1985, p. 102).

The other side of healthism is that fitness is ultimately an unattainable goal. As Bauman and May (2001, p. 101) explain, 'Fitness is about transgressing norms, not adhering to them', whereas 'Health is about keeping the body in a normal, functioning condition in order to work, earn a living, be mobile, engage in some kind of social life.' As we have already noted, however, in these circumstances it is not enough for the body simply to be fit, it also has to be seen to be fit. Hence 'the suppliers of commercial goods are eager to help the body assume such appearances and to convey the impression of fitness' (Bauman and May 2001, p. 101). Thus the body in a risk society is brought back into consumer culture through the availability of a 'wide and constantly growing choice of jogging, gym- or tracksuits and training shoes to document the body's love of exercise and its versatility' (Bauman and May 2001, p. 101). Healthism, performance and perfectibilism (Dutton 1995, p. 274) remain the three dominant ideologies constructed in contemporary consumer culture with respect to the body. Evans and Davies (2004, p. 43) argue, with respect to PE, that it is important to pay attention to the way in which 'contemporary ideals of body shape, image and the discourse of "obesity" influence the policies and practices of teachers and pupils' embodied self, identity and health'. Such ideals can easily 'divert attention both from the educational purposes of physical activity and the social and cultural conditions that shape and constrain individual lives'.

So far this chapter has focussed less on what people do with sport in consumer culture and more on what discourses of lifestyle, identity and the body in consumer culture do to people. Recently researchers have attempted to redress this by investigating empirically the balance between choice and freedom and control and constraint in the development of identities, lifestyles and the consumption of sport. We will now review some of this research.

First, we will look at sport and identity, and then we will examine research into lifestyle sports (Wheaton 2004).

Sport and Identity

Pekka Sulkunen (1997, p. 4) has suggested that 'Sports are no longer contests between nation states but between international teams and their sponsors.' To what extent is Sulkunen correct? Boyle and Haynes (2000, p. 164) argue that sport remains 'an important cultural, political and commercial marker of boundaries, identities and markets'. Much attention has been placed on the construction of national identification through the mass media. A lot of work goes into the creation of a unified patriotic collectivity, including the use of personal pronouns ('we', 'us', 'our', in contrast with 'them', 'their' and so on). That national identity is fluid and a social construct rather than a natural state has been revealed in recent years by reference to the multi-accented national teams representing not just Scotland, Ireland, Wales and England, but even such supposedly homogeneous societies as Japan. As Tudor (1998, p. 154) suggests, sports reporting and other popular cultural discourses of difference are constant contributors to the process of the search for meaning.

When it comes to considering sport and identity in consumer culture it is still necessary to see how the context of competition generates a constant concern with 'difference'. The success or failure of 'our national team' offers plenty of opportunities for inquests and reflection on the state of the nation, as well as opportunities to show support for it by buying branded products. International events offer several examples of national and other stereotyping. Anderson (1991) has demonstrated that we perceive nations as 'imagined communities', or nations of the mind complete with selective histories and constructed rituals. Tudor (1998, p. 154) argues that 'in modern societies the spectacle of international sport has come to play a striking role in articulating the "naturalness", the pre-given solidity of our imagined communities', or what Blain et al. (1993, p. 18) call 'the daily reconstitution of cultures'. Sporting contests are portrayed in the media in terms of national stereotypes as numerous studies have shown (Nowell-Smith 1978, pp. 45–59, Whannel 1983, Blain et al. 1993). Nations are products of symbolic practices – mapping, flagging and storytelling – which are all mediated. National media systems are part of the constant marking and re-marking of difference. Hence in Britain (England? Scotland?) 'sports reporting has certainly played its role in articulating and circulating the cultural frameworks which make the political discourse (of generalised xenophobic nationalism) viable' (Tudor 1998, p. 154). As Blain et al. (1993) note, 'TV and the press need a variety of Europes'.

The globalising world is marked by a crisis of governance as nation-state institutions cannot reach out transnationally or worldwide, and worldwide institutions continue to be dominated by representatives of the leading states

of the world. This is a much more accurate assessment than the premature dismissal of the nation-state. First, the nation-state remains a primary source of identity building. It is where '*glocalisation*' – the combining of global and local themes in advertising – occurs. Secondly, states have been compliant with and supportive of the global reach of domestic capital for large parts of the modern era, and they still are, as they have command over the resources necessary to control domestic standards of labour, international financial transactions, and global development assistance. In this context Houlihan (2003b, p. 358) notes that sport has become a 'vehicle for the demonstration of differences' in a globalising world. Whilst economic factors dominate discussions of contemporary sport, he argues that sport/culture in general has some autonomy from these factors. He states that

> there is a danger of reading too much significance into the fact that such a high proportion of the world's population watch some part of the Olympic Games or the soccer World Cup. What is more significant is when the state intervenes to manipulate, support or impose emergent cultural trends. (Houlihan 2003b, p. 350)

Whilst we would agree with Houlihan's view, we also recognise that the actions of the state, and politics and policy in any one country, are increasingly 'conditioned, or even determined, by global economic forces' (Leys 2001, p. 1). Hence in conditions of market-driven politics, domains that were previously the preserve of the public sector 'become political flashpoints because they are also targets for global capital' (Leys 2001, p. 2). In these circumstances Leys argues that non-market spheres of life – on which social solidarity and active democracy depend – are constantly challenged by firms and capital. The latter seek ways of breaking out of the boundaries set by state regulations, including those that close off non-market spheres to commodification and profit-making. Whilst market forces attempt to gain influence over previously non-market sectors of the economy in the age of globalisation, they also transform ideological conceptions of self and identity, and sports teams and events offer a valuable vehicle for this (Jackson and Andrews 2005, Silk et al. 2005).

Lifestyle Sports and Identities

Globalisation does not mean that a sense of national identity disappears. Rather nationalism can be seen as the other side of the coin of globalisation (Bairner 2001). As global flows increase, an awareness of differences between nations and national identities also increases. Becoming aware of other cultures sharpens people' consciousness of their own domestic world and their distinctive national and cultural identities. Other identities apart from national are also developed through the consumption of sport and leisure. The relationship between personal, individual, identity and sport is therefore worth studying.

Contemporary social theorists have identified individualisation and reflexivity as central features of globalising late modernity (Giddens 1991, Lash and Urry 1994, Bauman and May 2001, pp. 152–162, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Whether we should consider the ensuing identity politics as a goldmine or a threat (Klein 2000a, p. 115) is open to debate, as we shall see.

Belinda Wheaton (2004) argues that growing commercialisation and popularity are at the centre of debates about what she calls 'lifestyle sports'. The term itself is used by practitioners, although elsewhere the same activities have been referred to as 'new', 'whiz', 'extreme', 'alternative' or 'postmodern' sports. As the collection of essays edited by Rinehart and Sydnor (2003) suggests, 'alternative' or 'extreme' sports offer a challenge to conventional and traditional sports in some way. Wheaton (2004, p. 4) argues that the growth of 'lifestyle sports' reflects some of the developments in advanced consumer capitalism/late modernity that we have mentioned earlier in this chapter and elsewhere in the book – especially that sport can be used as an expression of personal identity, individualisation and the increasing privatisation of consumption. At the same time, in commodified form what is sold to the consumer 'is not merely a sport or leisure activity but a complete style of life' (Wheaton 2004, p. 6).

In this respect lifestyle sports can be seen as part of the consumer activities and leisure industries of postmodern or late modern advanced capitalism. By 1999 world sales of the Quiksilver brand of surf-related products reached over US$450 million, and it was estimated in 2002 that the entire global surf industry was worth around US$2 billion (Wheaton 2004, p. 13). Lifestyle sports offer what Wheaton calls an 'alternative sportscape' although this is increasingly controlled and defined by transnational media corporations (like the US-based cable operator ESPN offering the 'X-Games' and NBC producing 'Gravity Games'). These have a 'counter-culture cachet', which 'made a mediated event like the X-Games so commercially successful' despite being derided initially as a form of 'pseudo-sport' (Wheaton 2004, p. 8).

Wheaton (2004, pp. 8–9) argues that the distinction between 'false consumer omnivores' and 'authentic members' appears in much of the media – magazines, websites, TV programmes and films and so on – concerning lifestyle sports. This is particularly marked in discussion of the component features of doing lifestyle sports – using and viewing particular media, argot, technical skills, attitude and fashion/dress sense. Wheaton argues, however, that a more productive approach is to 'investigate the meaning of, and dynamics within, these leisure subcultures, understanding how these social identities and forms of collective expression are constructed, performed and contested' since this 'recognises popular culture's significance as the basis of people's identities' (Wheaton 2004, pp. 8–9). She argues that lifestyle sport identities can form the site of identity politics around the right to be recognised.

Wheaton (2004, pp. 11–12) suggests that there are nine specific characteristics of lifestyle sports. First, they are historically recent developments – emerging in the last forty years or being adaptations of earlier residual sports. Secondly,

there is an emphasis on 'grass roots' participation. Thirdly, lifestyle sports are based on the consumption and use of new objects made possible by advances in new technology and materials. Fourthly, the sports require a commitment in time, money and lifestyle 'and forms of collective expression, attitudes and social identity that develops in and around the activity' (Wheaton 2004, p. 11). Fifthly, the sports are underpinned by a participatory ideology promoting fun, hedonism, involvement, self actualisation, 'flow' and other intrinsic rewards. Thus expressivity and performativity are prioritised rather than the consumption of a spectacle to be found in mainstream sports. Sixthly, whilst participants are predominantly white, male and middle class, Wheaton contends that they are less gender differentiated than traditional sports. Seventhly, lifestyle sports are mainly though not entirely individualistic in form and attitude, although some attempts are made to create teams of individuals. Eighthly, lifestyle sports are non-aggressive and generally non-contact sports but they 'embrace and fetishise notions of risk and danger' (Wheaton 2004, p. 12). Finally the spaces in which lifestyle sports occur are new or appropriated outdoor locations or 'liminal zones' (Shields 1992, p. 7) without rigidly defined boundaries.

For Wheaton, and several of the contributors to her collection of articles, lifestyle sports are both the product of commercialisation and constantly adapting to, and contesting, it. At the same time, Wheaton and her co-authors explore the impact of the new sports on identities, especially relating to gender. They ask whether the new sports challenge or maintain the gender roles, identities and power balances to be found in traditional sports. The answers are varied. Some argue that the new sports demonstrate that gender identity, understood as scripts for living, are multiple and not fixed. Hence participants in lifestyle sports can demonstrate different and potentially transformative gender identities. For example, in adventure racing (Kay and Laberge 2004) traditional male characteristics of physical toughness and risk-taking are challenged by more female-oriented ones of team building and risk management. Others suggest, however, that there remains a strong 'fratriarchal' culture, common to more traditional sports, in surfing, that brings men together, keeps men together and degrades women (Booth 2004, p. 100). As Wheaton (2004, p. 6) adds, most – if not all – of the consumers of lifestyle sports tend to be the 'privileged white male middle class'.

Like Crawford (2004) Wheaton argues for the need to move beyond the paradigm of incorporation/resistance in studying lifestyle sports. She argues that more empirical research into how people understand the exploration of identity in the choices and tensions of consumption is required. She not only recognises the 'centrality of consumer capitalism and the media industries in their very inception and meanings of the sports practice', but also believes that by attending to participants' contestation of the discourses that accompany commercialisation she can reveal the dialectical relationship between agency and structure. The danger is, as Warde (2002) points out, is that such research can turn into a celebration of consumerism if it does not fully recognise the

commercial context within which it is taking place. To consider this, we will briefly reprise a sketch of the place of sport in contemporary capitalism.

Sport in Contemporary Capitalism

For Marxists there have been several different forms of capitalism. 'Laissez-faire' capitalism in the 19th century was characterised by an unregulated market, small–medium-sized business enterprises and little state intervention. 'Organised' or 'monopoly capitalism' from the late 19th to mid-20th centuries had more regulated markets, large-scale enterprises, cartels and the growth of state intervention. Fordism was the regulatory feature of this period of capitalism. 'Disorganised capitalism' in the late 20th century featured flexible production, an emphasis on consumption and globalisation. Post-Fordism is the regulatory mode of this type of capitalism.

The neo-Marxist 'regulation school' offers an account of social change at the end of the 20th century that has informed sociologists interested in sport and leisure more generally (Henry 2001, King 2002/1998). Coates (1995, pp. 104–110) argues that Fordism augmented the *purchasing* power of consumers without significantly increasing their *market* power. Post-Fordism added to the power that consumers exercised over producers by giving them more money with which to choose, and competition from which to select a wider range of goods and services. It did not, however, constitute a major upheaval of the consumer capitalist status quo.

Under Fordism the key allocative devices linking producers and consumers were managed – big, hierarchically organised, firms provided goods in greater quantities to customers, using mass, standardised, assembly line production, and semi-/unskilled labour to customers with little experience of affluence in markets of their own design. The economic context was managed by governments keen to make purchasing and selling easier and based on nationally based macroeconomic policies (sometimes referred to as 'corporatism'). Different economic conditions prevailed from the 1980s onwards. Governments changed their role. Consumer confidence and purchasing power grew – to demand more and better things. Competition intensified and firms competed on quality and particularity, as much as quantity and cheapness. Post-Fordism thus witnessed niche marketing, up-skilling of workforces and state de-regulation under the auspices of neo-liberal economic policy and New Right political thought (in Britain called Thatcherism; in the USA, Reaganomics, as we have already noted). Although product differentiation is often very superficial and big supermarkets dominate much of the retailing market, new technologies have made it possible to stimulate and respond to increasingly varied consumer demands. Producers have had to reach out and capture markets in which product competition is intense.

Research into mass media audiences, for example, has suggested that the distinction between production and consumption has been breaking down (Ross and Nightingale 2003). As audiences become active and indeed interactive, there appears to be a transformation of the production–exchange–consumption cycle. However as Ross and Nightingale point out, inviting audiences to become more interactive is one of the best means of gaining knowledge about the audience (consumer). In the age of information capitalism (Castells 1996), knowledge/intelligence about consumers is essential and active participants, viewers and fans are the best sources of it. The opportunity to participate in the spectacle of an event may become an everyday experience as commercial interests seek to re-establish the production–consumption distinction.

In this context, sports, such as in the UK *association* football, can be seen as one of the quintessential spectacles of the contemporary era. The expansion of consumption is seen as one of the main means of increasing production and hence the accumulation of capital. Organised around the two-year cycle that separates the sport's largest mega events – the FIFA World Cup and the UEFA European Championship – considerable time and effort goes into the expansion of the football-driven economy. Products on offer in time for Euro 2004 in the UK for example, ranged from ready meals, inflatable chairs, shampoos, to watches, mini-refrigerators and tailor-made T-shirts for women. As Smith (1997, p. 180) suggests, football can be seen as the ideal sport of contemporary capitalism. He argues that football suits contemporary capitalism because

> There is no product as such, or in any traditional capitalist sense – only a short-lived event whose actual gate receipts constitute barely a small part of a top club's income. The event itself is sold for the time of its own consumption, as it were, and stands as a quintessential consumer-age product, with customers buying their own leisure time. The event is simply a performance by players who can then be used as spokesmen for endorsing other products, and which is sold to television, and which is also marginal to the big business of merchandising.

Bramlett and Sloan (2000) provide another example of a Marxist analysis of the position of the fan in contemporary sport consumption. They argue that professional team sport in the USA constitutes a distinctive economy in which team owners are capitalists, players are workers and spectators are consumers. Owners initially exploited workers until this led to conflict, unionisation and contract renegotiations that redistributed the surplus values (from gate receipts and media revenues) more evenly to players. Owners then turned to the exploitation of consumers through raising prices for tickets and merchandise. As players have become more powerful owners have sought to exploit fans even further. One example of their strategy is personal seat licenses (PSLs) in the NFL. PSLs (known as debentures or bonds in the UK) allow fans the right to buy season tickets for a price before the tickets go on sale to the wider public.

Bramlett and Sloan (2000) examine how the roles of worker, capitalist and consumer are played out in professional sport in America. The workers and the capitalists have always engaged in forms of struggle over the surpluses generated by sport. For example, the Chicago White Sox scandal in 1919, when members of the team were paid to lose the World Series baseball championship by a gambling syndicate, happened after the employers had increased the series to a 5-out-of-9 series from a 4-out-of-7 one, without an increase in pay. Players began to challenge employers through collective bargaining against the reserve clause and for free agency. Since the 1970s, in particular, there have been several work stoppages (due to either strikes by players or lockouts by employers) in all four major American professional sports (American football, baseball basketball, and, as noted earlier most recently, in NHL (ice) hockey). In the 1990s average MLB team revenue increased by nearly 31 per cent, whilst average MLB player costs per team increased from US$31.2 to US$35.4 million – a rise of only 13.4 per cent (Bramlett and Sloan 2000, p. 180).

As the business dimension of sport is increasingly elevated the spectators' ability to identify with a team and share emotional ownership with it is compromised. This is further developed by strategies that seek to exploit the sports consumer rather than the worker, including the sale of PSLs in which consumers pay for the right to buy seats. The Carolina Panthers were the first team to introduce these in 1993 as they sought to raise money for the construction of a new stadium in Charlotte (Bramlett and Sloan 2000, p. 186). The price paid for PSLs is not determined by the exploitation of the workers in the sport. PSLs have no labour directly involved in their production and are simply an added cost for the consumer.

There have been signs of reactions against commodification in sport but the launch of minority sports programmes on cable and satellite television cannot be considered as one of them. The sports featured – including snow boarding, billiards and motor boat racing – are equally susceptible to commodification as their apparel, equipment, goods and experiences are promoted, publicised and marketed as fashion. The sports market thrives on 'experiential' as well as material commodities (Lee 1993, p. 135).

Conclusion

We have noted in this chapter how ludic body styles, including, but not only, sports participation and consumption, have developed. Contemporary social theorists have identified individualisation and reflexivity as central features of globalising late modernity, affecting lifestyles and identities. Klein (2000a, p. 115) suggests that the growth of identity politics has been a goldmine for global corporations trying to promote their products to diverse markets, rather than a threat. The growth of the market for sports clothes, equipment, footwear and

fitness chic, discussed in Chapter 2, has been accompanied by concerns about diet and the moulding of the body (Howson 2004, Chs 3–4). Contemporary discourses about health and fitness (Bauman and May 2001, pp. 93–108) and the care of the body and the self suggest that somaticisation and embodiment (Turner 1991, 1992, 1996, Bennett et al. 1999, Turner and Rojek 2001) have become culturally central. In turn, risks associated with this – enhancing bodily performance through the use of drugs and other aids, for example – and injuries have also increased. Risk society also gives rise to consumer addictions, including body and eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and obesity (Dutton 1995). Whilst these risks appear to be more individualised, research suggests that social class, gender, the life course and ethnicity remain major influences on the consumption of lifestyle sports and body styles. The next chapter looks at social divisions in participation and involvement in sport as a means of examining some of these influences in more detail.