7

Sport and Social Divisions in Consumer Culture

Introduction: Two Views of the Changing Social Context

The economic and social historian Eric Hobsbawm recounts how the 'short twentieth century' (1914–1991) saw several major social changes taking place in class structure and gender relations. We shall briefly outline these before looking at the relationship with sports participation and involvement. From the 1980s onwards in the UK and other advanced capitalist countries there has been a marked numerical decline in the industrial working class. This has been due to changes in the process of production that we have already referred to as 'Post-Fordism'. Hobsbawm (1994, p. 305) argues that this transformation was not so much a crisis 'of the class, but of its consciousness'. From being coherent and organised it became incoherent and disorganised (in this respect he shares the analysis of Lash and Urry 1987). Hobsbawm (1994, p. 306) concludes that 'conscious working-class cohesiveness reached its peak, in older developed countries, at the end of the Second World War'. The post-war economic boom, rising living standards and mass consumption that began in the 1950s 'utterly transformed the lives of working class people in the developed countries' (Hobsbawm 1994, p. 306). The availability of full employment and the emergence of 'a consumer society aimed at a genuine mass market placed most of the working class in the older developed countries, at least for part of their lives, well above the threshold below which their fathers, or they themselves, had once lived' (Hobsbawm 1994, p. 307).

Under these circumstances divisions within the working class appeared and widened from the late 1970s onwards. On the one hand, this was fuelled by the creation of the idea of an 'underclass', the resurrection of Victorian (19th century) ideas about the gap between the 'respectable' and the 'unrespectable' poor. The existence of a 'residuum' in the late 19th century implied exclusion from normal society, and a century later the same ideas were circulated. On the other hand, the impression of the collapse of unified social classes gave rise to the belief that society was underpinned by disunity in the

shape of diverse communities of interest. The skilled and respectable working class supported the election of neo-liberal, right wing, governments led by Margaret Thatcher in the UK, for example. At the same time, mass migration brought about ethnic and social diversification of the working class and sowed the basis for conflicts within it. The working class became increasingly 'fragmented' (Roberts et al. 1977) as 'changes in production, the emergence of the "two-thirds society" and the changing, and increasingly fuzzy frontiers between what was "manual" and what was "non-manual" work, diffused and dissolved the formerly clear outlines of "the proletariat"' (Hobsbawm 1994, p. 310).

Changes in the involvement of women, especially married women, in the labour market, have also been significant. In the space of thirty years, from less than one-fifth to over one-half of married women now work in paid employment in the UK. More women than men are studying for undergraduate degrees in universities. The rise of 'second wave' feminism in the 1960s helped to bring more equal rights for women, as legislation and social horizons changed. These changes have brought about other issues as well that confront 'third wave' feminism, in sport and elsewhere (Hargreaves 2004). Women's autonomy and freedom are still compromised by the residual patriarchal assumptions about women's 'natural' place as wives and mothers. Many women carry the dual burden of private domestic responsibilities and public employment. A cultural backlash in the form of 'new laddism' and the fact that many of the enticing consumer cultural aspirations can only be achieved through dual incomes continue to impact on the position of men and women differently.

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman is seen by many as one of the key theorists of consumption. His reflections on the state of society after the end of the cold war in the late 1980s and early 1990s offer an interesting contrast with Hobsbawm. Bauman (2000) refers to postmodernity as 'light' or 'liquid modernity' as opposed to 'solid modernity'. Fordism was the 'self-consciousness of modern society in its "heavy", "bully", or "immobile"' phase (Bauman 2000, p. 56). He argues that whilst solid modernity attempted to construct a rational social order, and failed, 'light capitalism is bound to be value obsessed' (Bauman 2000, p. 61), agonising about the choice of goals or ends. Liquid modernity offers a world full of possibilities where little is predetermined. Yet here is the problem: 'the consumers' misery derives from the surfeit, not the dearth of choices' (Bauman 2000, p. 63). In these social conditions consumption replaces production as the key site of social control and social order. Hence Bauman replaces the disciplining emphasis of Foucault's early work whilst adopting his relational conception of power and freedom. The political implications of Bauman's work are also close to those of the Frankfurt School.

Bauman uses the metaphor of the race to describe contemporary consumer society. 'In the consumer race the finishing line always moves faster than the

fastest of runners; but most runners forced onto the track have muscles too flabby and lungs too small to run fast' (Bauman 2000, pp. 72–73). The archetype of the race is 'the activity of shopping' (Bauman 2000, p. 73). Seduction replaces subjugation for most of the population. 'Postmodern society engages its members primarily in their capacity as consumers rather than producers' (Bauman 2000, p. 76). Identity formation and physicality acquire new meanings. Sexuality involves risk, fun, harassment and abuse. New patterns of coping with death develop. Shopping is underpinned by the desire for desiring – which is insatiable. Whereas the society of producers was based upon normative regulation, aiming at conformity and health, the society of consumers aims to seduce, but without any benchmark with which to measure conformity. Hence adequacy – being ready to go for more – or 'fitness' becomes the leading motif.

As Bauman (2000, p. 77) notes, health and fitness are not synonymous – 'not all fitness regimes are good for one's health and that what helps one to stay healthy does not necessarily make one fit'. Health relates to norms and abnormality, whereas fitness relates to being ready 'to live through sensations not yet tried and impossible to specify in advance'. Fitness implies 'the capacity to break all norms' (Bauman 2000, p. 78). Furthermore, 'The pursuit of fitness is a chase after a quarry which one cannot describe until it is reached; however one has no means to decide that the quarry has indeed been reached, but every reason to suspect that it has not' (Bauman 2000, p. 78). Hence 'life organized around the pursuit of fitness promises a lot of victorious skirmishes, but never the final triumph' (Bauman 2000, p. 78). The pursuit of fitness thus leads to a state of 'perpetual self-scrutiny, self-reproach and self-deprecation, and so also of continuous anxiety' (Bauman 2000, p. 78). In liquid modernity health becomes similar to the pursuit of fitness and uncertainty prevails. Activities like 'weight watching' remain popular and the pursuit of health itself becomes a pathogenic factor (Illich quoted in Bauman 2000, p. 80). In this respect Bauman follows a similar argument to that of Giddens (1992, pp. 65–86) over many of the contradictions of contemporary living.

The individualisation of consumption leads to the creation of groups and processes of inclusion and exclusion. Advertising has the ability to stimulate desire and assuage anxiety by provoking needs and providing product solutions. Consumption makes life a series of individualised hurdles to be solved (sometimes with expert help). This can lead to not only the formation of neo-tribes and lifestyle cliques defined by their relationship to consumption practices and identities, but also insatiability ('shopaholics' or compulsive shoppers). The twin driving forces of consumer society are pleasure and insecurity (desire and anxiety). The 'flaneur' ('stroller'), tourist, vagabond or game player replaces the pilgrim ('hopeful seeker') as the central figure of liquid modernity. Sensation-seekers replace soldier-workers as the ideal bodies (Bauman 1998). Shopping becomes 'a rite of exorcism'. Even though society

is divided into 'the seduced' and 'the repressed' – the financially secure and socially included and the dependent and socially excluded – all members of society experience this world of choosing as the social ideal. Consumer society thus expresses the ambivalence of liquid modernity – in which pleasures are not only seductive, but also loaded with coercion and control – with no obvious solution to the problems it creates.

Bauman offers a dystopian vision of consumer society (Edwards 2000, p. 39). He raises important questions – to what extent does consumption plays the major role in the formation of personal and social identities? To what extent does consumption alleviate the anxiety and uncertainty induced by contemporary 'risk society'? To what extent does advertising induce more than it helps to resolve questions of identity and anxiety? Bauman's ability to write compelling social criticism is unquestioned but whether he has identified the key determinants of the problems he identifies is questionable – at least until research can be carried out to investigate his claims. In the rest of this chapter we will consider some of this research.

Social Divisions Inside the Culture of the Market

In consumer culture people tend not to talk about social inequalities or divisions, preferring to use phrases like 'social exclusion' or the need for greater 'social inclusion', even though accounts are frequently published in the press and on television about the vast gaps between haves and have-nots within society. On the day that this chapter was first drafted, for example, the BBC reported that researchers had found a stark 'north–south' divide in the UK from data contained in the 2001 census. Cultural intermediaries also continue to create classifications of consumers for use by marketing companies, which often appear to blur divisions whilst also revealing aspects of inequality. It could be argued that the concept of consumer culture itself masks the existence of capitalist relations of production and exchange. By adopting the production of consumption approach throughout this book we hope to have shown how consumer culture is a product of capitalist relations. This is not to say that only economic relationships matter, rather it is to counteract the drift of the past ten to fifteen years towards a focus on identities associated with the postmodern turn to culture.

Smart (2003, p. 163) argues that 'virtually everyone is now living inside the culture of the market'. Consumer society blurs the social distinctions by making material goods and lifestyles available to more people. Consumer society appears to individualise social experience. In the UK, for example, rising home ownership enables people to spend money by borrowing against the equity (value if sold) of their house or apartment. In the third quarter of 2002, for example, the equivalent of US$19 billion was borrowed in this way to finance consumption (Harvey 2005, p. 113). In the same year in the USA

20 per cent of GDP growth was attributed to consumers refinancing their mortgage debts for immediate consumption (Harvey 2005, p. 112). As Harvey (2005, pp. 112–113) notes, 'what happens if and when this property bubble bursts is a matter of serious concern'. So considerable risks remain and these are not evenly spread around the population. Some social groups are more exposed to risk than others. These developments are underpinned by three major features of the experience of consumption since the middle of the last century.

First, there has been a steady and general transformation in the quality of everyday life brought about by (initially) a 'Fordist regime of accumulation' (Coates 1995, p. 105). As Coates outlines it, there were 'Improvements in basic food and clothing (in the 1950s), the spread of basic consumer durables (in the 1960s), the beginning of the leisure boom (in the 1970s) and increasingly sophisticated domestic consumption and leisure experience in the 1980s and 1990s' (Coates 1995, p. 105). Secondly, however, not everyone has participated in the consumer society equally. As affluence has grown, a sizeable minority have lagged steadily behind. The gap between the highest and the lowest earners in the UK increased to its greatest in the 20th century in the 1990s. Holt and Schor (2000, pp. vii–viii) identify similar divisions in the USA, where the top 1 per cent of households owned 40 per cent of the wealth and the top 20 per cent of households were responsible for 50 per cent of consumer spending in 2000. In short, the growth of consumer culture and consumption in the UK, and elsewhere in the advanced capitalist world in the second half of the 20th century, has been marked by economic and social polarisation. The financing and organisation of consumption is the third key feature of contemporary social life under Post-Fordist principles. It was not until the 1980s that the UK experienced a credit revolution, in terms of its availability, scale and distribution. Money went 'plastic', saving became a possibility and banks and building societies grew to absorb the savings and reprocess them as credit. Personal liabilities (household debt including mortgages and credit card borrowing) reached £1 trillion for the first time in July 2004.

As we have seen in earlier chapters commodities now circulate with much greater speed (Harvey 1989, pp. 285–385). Advertising, marketing and branding techniques and strategies have helped to accelerate consumption first by promoting different and changing styles and fashions, and secondly by maintaining the propensity to consume by promising personal fulfilment through consumption. That there are limits to the accumulation and turnover of physical goods actually makes good business sense. No one wants to have unreliable goods. But there has been substantial growth in personal, business, educational, and health services, and sectors such as entertainment, leisure, sport and tourism that are all 'experiential commodities' of one sort or another. It is for these reasons that consumption has increased in significance in society as we have seen (Ritzer 1993, p. 118, Bauman 1998). As consumption has become 'the structural basis of western societies' (Lash and Urry 1994, p. 296), the corollary has been the production of new forms of social exclusion.

The Divisiveness of Social Exclusion

One form of exclusion is that faced by those people who lack the means to engage with consumer society. As Bauman (1998, p. 39) notes, 'Desiring comes free, but to desire realistically . . . requires resources.' The further implication is that in consumer society those who do not, or are unable to, consume are 'flawed consumers' and thus 'purely and simply a worry and a nuisance' (Bauman 1998, pp. 90–91). Such people become part of the consumer culture 'waste land' (see Bauman 2004b). A second form of exclusion, which focus on the idea of consumer society helps to maintain, is encountered by those who produce goods consumed in the developed world. Multinational corporations have located production in distant locations well away from shopping malls (Klein 2000a, pp. 205–206). The multinationals behave like corporate consumers searching for the best bargains where they can get their designs produced most cheaply (Klein 2000a, p. 211).

Castells (1998) also notes the unregulated nature of contemporary production relations. Work becomes more precarious and individualised, amidst rising patterns of social inequality. There is a growing global polarisation of income and wealth distribution, occurring both between and within countries (Castells 1998, pp. 161–165). A third form of exclusion exists within societies in which comfortable middle-class people experience economic security and relative social exclusion in 'a society of "risky freedom"' (Beck 2000, p. 106). Despite higher incomes, better health and much greater opportunities for women in general, British people often appear increasingly depressed, unhappy in their relationships and alienated from civil society in surveys into quality of life.

Research has confirmed the connections between income and health. The death rates for coronary heart disease are about 40 per cent higher for manual workers than non-manual workers. Life expectancy is increasing but the rich benefit more than the poor (by six years between 1972 and 1996 for the rich compared with two years for the poor). Wilkinson (1996) argues that the health of a society is not dependent on its wealth so much as the degree of inequality in a society – Greece is a poorer country than the USA but life expectancy is longer there. In the USA slightly fewer than 36 million people (12 per cent of the population) currently live below the poverty line (*The Guardian* 27 August 2004, p. 18). Of these, 12.9 million are children (17.6 per cent of the under-18 population) and 25 per cent are African–American. Wealth distribution in the USA is heavily skewed by ethnicity with white households being 11–14 times wealthier than African–American families (*The Guardian* 17 October 2004, p. 16). For our purposes what

need to be examined are not so much the conditions but the systems of inequality, and how far the patterns of inequality are produced and reproduced in involvement in and consumption of sport (Abercrombie 2004). Once again we will focus on the UK.

Sport and Social Divisions of Class

A research project on *The Development of Sporting Talent 1997* (English Sports Council 1998) produced information about GB's top sportsmen and women in 11 sports – athletics, cricket (male and female), cycling, hockey, judo, netball, rowing, rugby league, rugby union (male and female), sailing and swimming. The interviewees were mostly elite or pre-elite performers – members of a senior national squad or someone who had represented below this level, at under 21 or in the 'A' squads. There were 924 interviews (approximately 500 men and 420 women) conducted between March and June 1997. Athletics produced the 'most typical elite sports people' – some one educationally well qualified, from a higher socio-economic group, who had had a family member involved in sport. Twenty-nine per cent were from the professional and managerial social class (AB), 32 per cent were from the clerical and non-manual class (C1), 28 per cent were from the skilled manual (C2) and 12 per cent were from semi- and unskilled manual classes (DE). This compared with 19 per cent AB, 34 per cent C1, 21 per cent C2 and 25 per cent DE in the GB population as a whole. Judo produced a profile 'most representative of the Great Britain population' as a whole. Excluding Judo 68 per cent of elite athletes came from non-manual social classes (37 per cent from social class AB). Amongst the Judo-ka 16 per cent were from AB, 33 per cent were from C1, 35 per cent were from C2 and 16 per cent were from DE. In rowing over 50 per cent of elite rowers were educated at private school compared to only 5 per cent of the GB population as a whole. Rugby league had the most manual/working-class profile (67 per cent were C2, D or E), whilst in rugby union – 41 per cent of elite male rugby union players and 24 per cent of elite female rugby union players were educated at private school compared to 5 per cent of the GB population. Of elite sailing athletes, 24 per cent were educated at private school compared to 5 per cent of the GB population. Sixty-one per cent were from AB, 22 per cent were from C1, 17 per cent were from C2 and none came from D or E social class backgrounds. Swimming contained the most 'upper class' profile of all the sports and 21 per cent of whom had attended private school. Sixty-nine per cent were from AB, 24 per cent were from C1 and only 6 per cent were from C2, D or E social classes.

The authors of a report that summarised the data concluded that the chances of becoming an elite or pre-elite performer were 'two times greater for individuals from professional classes than they were for those from manual classes' (English Sports Council 1998, p. 3). They also noted that the opportunity to realise sporting potential was still significantly influenced by an individual's social background. They concluded

> a precociously talented youngster born in an affluent family with sport-loving parents, one of whom has (probably) achieved high levels of sporting success, and attending an independent/private school, has a 'first-class ticket' to the sporting podium. His or her counterpart, equally talented but born in less favoured circumstances, at best has a third class ticket and at worst no ticket at all. (English Sports Council 1998, p. 13)

Their conclusions were further underscored following the Sydney Summer Olympic Games in 2000, when a survey suggested that 80 per cent of British medal winners at the games went to private schools (*The Guardian* 21 August 2004, p. 4). Collins and Buller (2003) have suggested that this situation of social inequity at a national level is mirrored at a local level. They studied an elite sport programme operated in one English region for cricket, table tennis and squash, and concluded that 'social stratification provides a filter of who gets in at the base/beginning of the selection process' for these programmes (Collins and Buller 2003, p. 438).

The supposed growth of individualisation has not greatly altered participation rates in recreational sport either. Data from Holt and Mason (2000, pp. 6–9), the *General Household Survey 1996* and **sport**scotland (2002) all show the continuance of stratified sports cultures in Britain. In the UK Collins with Kay (2003, p. 33) have shown how the gap between the professional and managerial social classes and the unskilled manual classes in terms of participation has not closed substantially since the 1960s (Table 7.1). The over-representation

Table 7.1 *Inequalities in participation in sport by social class: 1960s–1990s*

	Visiting sport centres (%)		*Any sport in past four weeks (%)*	
Social Class	1960s	1990s	1987	1996
A (professional)	20	40	65	63
B (managerial)	n.d.	52	52	52
C1 (junior non-manual)	44	33	45	47
C2 (skilled manual)	27	20	48	45
D (semi-skilled)	7	8	34	37
E (unskilled)	n.d.	n.d.	26	23
Total			45	46
Difference A and E	*13*	*32*	*40*	*40*

n.d. – no data.
Source: Adapted from Collins with Kay (2003), Table 3.4, p. 33.

of people from social classes AB and the under-representation of people from social classes DE in sport and physical activity continues.

Trends in adult participation in sport in England since the late 1980s (also available at www.sportengland.org) show that participation in sport has declined, and continues to vary considerably between social classes, men and women, and ethnic groups (Rowe and Moore 2004). Between 1990 and 2002 overall participation in sport declined from 46 to 43 per cent of adults (defined as people over 16 years of age). In 1990, 58 per cent of men and 39 per cent of women had participated in some form of sport or physical activity (excluding walking) during the survey periods. By 2002 the percentages were 50 and 37 per cent respectively. The most pronounced reduction was in the active participation of young adults – from 82 to 72 per cent of 16–19-year-olds and from 72 to 61 per cent of 20–24-year-olds. The most popular sports generally were swimming, keep fit/yoga (including aerobics and exercise dance), cycling and cue sports. Men preferred cue sports (15 per cent), swimming and cycling (12 per cent), and football (10 per cent). Women preferred keep fit/yoga (16 per cent), swimming (15 per cent) and cycling (6 per cent). Reflecting changes in the classification of occupations, it was found that people in the top categories of 'large employer' and 'higher managerial' were most likely to participate in sport (59 per cent) whilst those in the lowest grouping – 'routine' – participated least (30 per cent).

Rowe and Moore (2004) suggest three reasons for the decline in participation since the 1990s: people have competing demands on their time, people have a greater number of leisure choices, many of which promote more sedentary behaviour, and the quality of the sports infrastructure (for participants) has been declining. As a consequence of lack of investment over the past thirty years, 500 recreational sports centres have closed and local authorities estimate that they require £500 million to upgrade existing facilities (*The Guardian* 21 August 2004, p. 4).

Stroot (2002, pp. 137–140) discusses data collected by the United States Census Bureau in 2000 that demonstrates the relationships between income levels and participation in sport in the USA. She found that 28.3 per cent of people with annual household incomes above US$75,000 participated in 'exercising with equipment', whilst only 10.8 per cent of people with annual household incomes below US$15,000 did so. The percentage difference (in the previous example 17.5 per cent) increased in sports where the costs are greater (golf, club membership, boating). Even in popular team sports in the USA – basketball, soccer, baseball, softball (a version of baseball) and touch football – where the sports may be available through community recreation programmes and percentage differences are less, people from higher income households were more likely to participate in the sport.

Bennett et al. (1999, pp. 115–144) provide evidence of a more analytical kind regarding involvement in sport and exercise in Australia, where facilities are much more abundant than the UK. They argue that gender, class, education

level and age are the four most important influences on choices and values in the context of diet, exercise and sport, but provide considerable evidence for the continuing influence of social class on participation. With respect to exercise they discuss walking, cycling, jogging, power-walking, weight-training, membership of health and sporting organisations and aerobics (Bennett et al. 1999, pp. 125–128).

In their survey and interviews they found that the ten most popular sports played (in descending order of popularity) in Australia in the 1990s were tennis, golf, swimming, walking, squash, touch football, cricket, lawn bowls, netball and aerobics (Bennett et al. 1999, p. 129). They found a considerable discrepancy between the sports that people played and watched at live venues. The top ten of these later included Australian Rules football, cricket, rugby league, tennis, swimming, motor car racing, basketball, soccer, golf and horse racing. Only cricket, tennis, swimming and golf were common to both lists. With respect to social class they found that 'Those classes like the professionals and para-professionals which had scored very high on the playing of sport score very low on watching it, whereas manual workers, who play little sport, watch it a great deal' (Bennett et al. 1999, p. 139).

In some respects Bennett et al. (1999) may have found empirical evidence for the persistence of something previously noted by Bourdieu (1978, p. 830). That it is through 'the division it makes between professionals, the virtuosi of an esoteric technique, and laymen, reduced to the role of mere consumers, a division that tends to become a deep structure of the collective consciousness, that sport produces its most decisive political effects'. The argument that sport provides different kinds of positive and negative 'cultural capital' to different groups and classes is a familiar argument of Bourdieu's. In the next section we shall look at what many consider to be an equally, if not more, important influence on sports participation and consumption – gender.

Gender, Sport and Consumer Culture

Legislative reforms in Britain thirty years ago – the Equal Pay Act (1970/1975) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) – brought about some legal support to women, but how effective has this equality package been? Reflecting on nearly thirty years of legislation reveals a mixed impact. The importance of work and family in women's (leisure) lives remains clear. Women continue to receive less pay than men, and violence at the hands of men continues. Women carry an additional burden – paid employment – with the rise of the dual income family as a necessity. Most women also retain primary responsibility for domestic work.

Lury (1996, p. 121) has noted that in much marketing and advertising it was taken for granted that the role of the consumer was a feminine one – typically women do the shopping and make the majority of consumption

decisions in households. But some feminist writers have been suspicious of the concept of consumer culture for being insufficiently gender-aware (Lury 1996, Ch. 5). They argue that the broader economy should be considered in relation to the family and domestic economy – since it is there that much of the work (housework) is done on the goods bought by women in routine shopping. Lury (1996, p. 124) observes that 'The suggestion is that while there may have been changes in the commodification of objects, unless the interrelationship of these changes with the system of production and exchange that operate in domestic life are explored it is difficult to say what their impact is upon society as a whole.' The invisibility of women has been debated in the social sciences for the past thirty years. In the study of sport in society much research has looked at the under-representation of women in sport, rather than the involvement of disadvantaged women (Kay 2003, pp. 97–112). Kay (2003, p. 97) considers the links between women's experiences in sport and social exclusion. She argues that the ideology that constructs the gender order in society first 'positions women primarily as mothers and carers' and secondly 'values and rewards those roles less than that of paid work'. Such expectations of sex-appropriate behaviour remain influential in sport. Yet just as sport is a prime site for the reproduction of beliefs in the supposedly natural (that is biological) differences in the physicality (that is power) of men and women, it is also a place where these ideas could be challenged.

Wernick (1991, pp. 48–49), on the other hand, suggests that in the last quarter of the 20th century promotional or consumer culture has brought about a change in the relationship of men to advertising. There has been an extension to men of 'consumer status' and in the range of commodities aimed at them: 'Seventy years after women went through something similar, men as private people... have been targeted for economic development' (Wernick 1991, p. 49). He argues that the 'possessive individual of early capitalism has transmuted today into a more advanced variant: the promotional individual' (Wernick 1991, p. 66). Women and men are increasingly encouraged to increase their 'value as circulating tokens of exchange' rather than 'self-activating subjects' (Wernick 1991, p. 68). In the process, masculinity and femininity have become floating signifiers that can be substituted for each other (Wernick 1991, pp. 63–64). Our view is that the 'consumerisation' of men is a useful concept by which to understand this process of creating consumers for goods and services previously not widely available as commodities on the market. As several writers have noted, consumerisation has been occurring in sport with respect to spectating, and the products associated with sports sponsorship, but we can also note its development in terms of the consumption of sports goods and services such as health clubs.

Pronger (1990) has argued persuasively that since the mid-19th century sport has been one of the pre-eminent 'signs' of masculinity. The sport

arena as well as the gymnasium are two of the major sites for the display and cultural reproduction of masculinities. Indeed 'the ultra-masculinity of particular sporting practices (especially those that celebrate and reward physicality and aggression) is evident as a cultural phenomenon that transcends some national and cultural boundaries' (Horne and Fleming 2000, p. v). It has been shown that manliness and forms of masculinity can be expressed in many different ways since they are a product of rich and complex cultural processes (Gilmore 1993, Gelder and Thornton 1997). Hence first and foremost in investigating masculinity is the question of the social, economic, political and cultural forces that shape manhood. In the realm of leisure, studies of femininity and women have developed since the 1980s (Deem 1986, Wimbush and Talbot 1989, Green et al. 1990) as have studies of women, sport and physical activity (Scraton 1993; Hargreaves 1994, 2000, Clarke and Humberstone 1997). These studies suggest that it is misleading to think of masculinity (or femininity) as a single undifferentiated given entity.

Connell (1993) suggested that the study of masculinity should be located historically. Industrialisation in the 18th and 19th centuries may have provided the basis for 'hegemonic' masculinity – emphasising physical strength, solidarity forged through struggles against employers and managers, and the patriarchal organisation of the home. In the late 20th century, however, it has been argued that 'hegemonic' masculinity has been threatened by Post-Fordist work practices, leading to a declining 'core' of full-time workers and an increased 'periphery' of (largely female) casualised workers (Faludi 1999). In the last twenty-five years, as young men have faced economic restructuring, including the prospect of long-term structural unemployment, their responses have either been to try harder, accept the situation or fight against it in symbolic ways. This latter, 'consumption as compensation', thesis suggests that 'Men use the plasticity of consumer identity construction to forge atavistic masculine identities based upon an imagined life of self-reliant, premodern men who lived outside the confines of cities, families, and work bureaucracies' (Holt and Thompson 2004, p. 426).

Similar to Wheaton (2004) in the previous chapter, therefore, Holt and Thompson (2004) argue that claims made about the power of messages need to be understood as filtered by active and interactive audiences and consumers. However, for Holt and Thompson social structuring continues to influence the way in which consumption occurs – hence social class will impact on how the consumption of different sports and leisure activities by men and women actually occurs as well as on its frequency. Drawing on their research in the USA, Holt and Thompson argue that there is a need to understand men's 'socially situated consumption practices, that is how men variously interpret and act on the mass culture discourse in their consumption' (Holt and Thompson 2004, p. 427).

The Gendered Consumption of Sport

Some writers suggest that one hundred years after its formation, modern sport is a 'rather less reliable ally of hegemonic masculinity' (Rowe 1995, p. 130). Others argue that sport, via its links with consumer culture, continues to play a part in the assertion and affirmation of specific hegemonic ideals of masculinity (Day 1990). Only analysis of the social meanings and interactions of specific subcultural groups and the gendered consumption of sport can reveal the nature of women's and men's practices and settle these kinds of questions (for example, Wellard 2002 and Fleming 1995).

It can be argued that the consumption of sport involves participation, as well as watching and following. Fischer and Gainer (1994, pp. 90–91) identified four themes in research into gender and sport. First, the consumption of sports helps men to develop and reinforce their masculine self-identities. Strength, muscularity, skills and knowledge are all empowering for men, but less so for women (less value). An ideal body image of slender and narrow hips (ultra-thinness) is sought by girls (often from as young as 9-years old). Men and boys have begun to exhibit body image concerns, similar to girls and young women, since the 1980s (Hargreaves 1994). Secondly, the consumption of sports promotes and reinforces a hierarchical form of social bonding among men. Competition with rather than working with men. Thirdly, through their choices in the consumption of sports, men will display a varied range of masculinities. Involvement in a wider range of sports allows men to exhibit hegemonic and subordinate masculinities, as well as women to exhibit more established femininity. Fourthly, women will experience feelings of marginalisation and possibly denigration in their consumption of organised sports. Fischer and Gainer (1994, p. 101) concluded that 'the consumption of sports is deeply associated with defining what is masculine and, concurrently, what is not feminine. It has been noted that participating in and watching sports lead to a range of masculinities, and each of them relies for its definition on being distinct from femininity.'

This conclusion is shared by historical studies of sport that have emphasised how sport was a gender distinguishing activity, related to a changing gender order, for example in the USA between the 1840s and 1890s, and in UK between the 1820s and 1880s (Whitson 1994, Burstyn 1999). The 'gendering' of sport by men involved techniques including: definition; direct control; ignoring, and/or the trivialising of women's sport or their involvement in sport. For men, sport was a primary socialising experience – into masculine identities, hierarchical social bonding and various forms of masculinity. Hence women faced marginalisation in their consumption of sport. The macho (or 'fratriarchal') culture of sport is repeatedly reinforced with every media report of the sexual misbehaviour of young male elite athletes or men associated with the administration of the sport (Booth 2004).

With regard to adults Benson (1994) argues that as sports spectators and participants women compared with men were much fewer in the mid-1960s – only 4 per cent of women watched football regularly. In recent years there has been a claim that an increasing numbers of women (and middle class) supporters are now watching football at the expense of 'traditional' football fans. Has the pattern changed? Malcolm et al. (2000) suggest that there is not much empirical evidence to support this. But further research is needed into fans. Certainly women's participation in sport grew generally between 1977 and 1986, and 1987 and 1993. Like men's, women's participation in sport fell between 1996 and 2002 in England, but at a slower rate. There appears to have been an individualisation of activity over the past fifteen years (Coalter 1999). This has involved a shift from engagement in team and partner sports towards less competitive, individual, flexible, fitness and lifestyle-oriented activities. Women's participation in sport and physical activities has grown at a faster rate than men's over this time. For example, between 1987 and 2002, in Scotland, adult women's participation rose from 50 per cent to 60 per cent (**sport**scotland 2002). Yet women's participation as a proportion of men's remains lower – at about 68 per cent – and women's participation remains segregated and confined within a much narrower range of activities than men's – as we noted earlier in the survey data from Sport England. In Scotland only 6 activities attracted more than 5 per cent of women, compared to 12 activities in which men engaged. The favourite activities for women are walking, keep fit-related activities and swimming. Each of these is relatively cheap, flexible, has limited needs for partners and can be fitted in around childcare.

The marketing of exercise – as evidenced in heath and fitness magazines as well as mainstream women's magazines – is often not for physiological fitness or psychological health, but in pursuit of physical perfection – sexual attractiveness. Women are more likely to engage in exercise – non-competitive physical activity – rather than sport. Is this related to the widespread imagery of the 'look' in consumer culture – in which appearance, fashion and physique are prioritised far more for women than sporting accomplishments? Does this leave the body – sporting or at least worked on, in the gym – as the 'last refuge of masculinity?' Or are these rigid divisions – femininity and masculinity, heterosexual and homosexual – no longer so apparent? The image making and commercialisation of the sexual body in sport has developed for both men and women athletes (Whannel 1999) but does it have an equal impact? Research by Sassatelli (1999) and Fishwick (2001) suggests that some women are able to find in exercise and health clubs an important space for self-development lacking in other parts of their lives. Yet few opportunities exist for women to work in professional sport. Sport offers women new ways of spending leisure time and exercising economic power. But it also helps to confirm and reinforce their role and position in society. It offers both liberation and constraint, challenging some social norms or

conventions whilst incorporating some people into others. The recent attempt to encourage women as consumers of sportswear, as well as spectators at big events, may suggest a decline in the peripherality of sport to women compared with men. But there are many ways that women remain on the outside of sport in consumer culture. Clearly there is a need for more research into their involvement, as participants and consumers, of sport.

'Race', Consumer Culture and Sport

Studies since the 1990s have focussed on the historical and contemporary extent of racism in various British sports – athletics, basketball, cricket, rugby league and union, football, hockey, boxing and others (for example, see Chappell 2002 and the collections edited by Carrington and McDonald 2001 and Jarvie 1991). Few systematic studies into non-white peoples' participation in sport at grassroots level have been undertaken (however see Verma and Darby 1994). It is apparent that levels of participation in sport are not equal for all ethnic groups. In 1996, 46 per cent of white adults participated in one activity (excluding walking) during the previous 4 weeks, compared with 41 per cent of Black people (Caribbean, African or Black Other), 37 per cent of Indians and 25 per cent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis (Sport England 1999a). Ethnic minorities are also under-represented in their use of local authority swimming pools (Sport England 1999b).

Analysis of sports-specific participation by ethnic minorities has not been possible due to the small sample sizes but in 2000 Sport England published *Sports Participation and Ethnicity in England National Survey 1999/2000.* This was the first large-scale survey (with 3000 non-white adult respondents) focussing on England. It found that 49 per cent of ethnic minority men compared with 54 per cent of white men participated in sport in the previous 4 weeks. Thirty-two per cent of ethnic minority women compared with thirty-nine per cent of white women participated in sport in the previous 4 weeks. Sixty per cent of 'Black Other' people (compared with 46 per cent of the total population) participated in sport in the previous 4 weeks. The survey found that 39 per cent of Black Caribbean and Indian people, 31 per cent of Pakistani people and 30 per cent of Bangladeshi people participated in sport. Compared with the general population, few ethnic minorities declared walking as a physical activity (for example, only 19 per cent of Bangladeshi women compared to 44 per cent of the total population). The findings showed differences between the participation of men and women. Swimming had a low priority – only 2 per cent of Black Other men and 5 per cent of Pakistani women – whereas football involvement amongst men was about the national average (10 per cent).

Research into the physical activity of black and minority ethnic people – in Britain as elsewhere – has tended to focus on two main themes. On the one hand are *equity issues* – to do with what Coakley (2003) calls the 'sports opportunity structure', the preserving of prejudices despite black excellence in sport, and 'stacking', the over-representation of black athletes in certain positions in team sports deemed to require less intelligence. Various anti-racism campaigns (for example, 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' in 1993/1994, 'Hit Racism for Six!' in cricket in 1995 and 'Football against Racism in Europe' (FARE) in 2002) have developed in response to these issues. On the other hand, research has begun to look at resistance or accommodation with racism through the consumption of sport. Whilst some black people have used sport as a route of black cultural resistance to racism and positive identity formation (Carrington and McDonald 2001), others, especially male youth in the USA, have been enticed into following their 'hoop dreams' (Brooks-Buck and Anderson 2001).

According to Brookes (2002, pp. 107ff.), research into representation has developed in the past twenty years to challenge the conceptual notion of stereotyping. The increasing commodification of sport has affected the way black people are represented in the sports media and targeted as consumers. These ideas relate to developments in the conception of identity that have emerged in the past fifteen years, especially the idea that identity is a ongoing process (see Chapter 6). The notion of the 'floating racial signifier' introduced by Stuart Hall is used by David Andrews to analyse the image of Michael Jordan in corporate advertising (1996, p. 126). This questions the value of the concept of stereotype, and suggests instead that 'racial identity is not stable, essential or consistent; it is dynamic, complex and contradictory'.

Research into black and minority ethnic groups as consumers of sport is underdeveloped in the UK, although some surveys have demonstrated the white majority among football fans. In the USA Armstrong (2004) has discussed how sportswear corporation Nike has been at the forefront of using advertisements, endorsements and sponsorship aimed at black audiences and consumers to differentiate its products from similar ones produced by other sportswear and equipment companies. Armstrong (2004) demonstrates the way that Nike targeted black audiences in the US by identifying what were considered to be appropriate symbols and images. A debate over whether black consumer purchases comprised 30 per cent (US$669 million) or 13.6 per cent (US$303 million) of Nike sales in the USA was stimulated by concerns over the exploitation of blacks by the Corporation. 'Race' has been central to many of Nike's campaigns, for example 'Spikey and Mikey' (Goldman and Papson 1998, Ch. 3). Cashmore (1997, p. 1) argues that black culture has also been converted into a commodity which certain whites are happy to consume. Blacks 'have been permitted to excel in entertainment only on the condition that they conform to whites' images of blacks'. Kusz (2004) alternatively suggests that Nike exploits black culture in order to sell their products to white youth.

Lury (1996, pp. 156ff) argues that the history of consumer culture is bound up with processes of imperialism, colonialism and the creation of the hierarchical categories of 'race'. Consumer culture has also helped to transform understandings of self and other, whiteness and blackness and 'race' itself. Images of black people helped shape the development of imperialism and consumer culture. These images were designed not for the consumption of black people but for communication between white people. As consumer culture has developed, images of black and minority ethnic people in advertising and in sport have altered. The film 'Bend it Like Beckham', released in 2002 to coincide with the World Cup in Japan and South Korea, portrayed women, Asian (Parminder Nagra) and white (Keira Knightly), as enthusiastic soccer players and fans. In the USA, where it grossed US$32 million at the box office, the film also marked a 'turning point for the sport in cinema'. At least eight more soccer films were set for release in the run up to the World Cup to be held in Germany in 2006 (*The Guardian* 1 March 2005, p. 33). As Lury (1996, p. 191) suggests, in various ways black and minority ethnic people have acted as 'key cultural intermediaries in the development of consumer culture' (Lury 1996, p. 191).

Age, Generation and the Life Course of Consumption

Childhood and youth are key periods for the construction of identity and selfhood. They are also absolutely central concerns of advertisers and marketers. Livingstone (2002, p. 116) notes how 'as traditional structures which confer identity . . . are being undermined, others are actively sought by young people, and these are readily addressed by the market'. She argues that young people seeking to make a life project today face a context in which leisure culture is being increasingly transformed into promotional culture. Sports fans 'play football, watch their team play, watch football on the television, buy the associated clothing and bedroom décor, and visit the football web sites' (Livingstone 2002, p. 115). In short, 'modern marketing directs flows of popular culture, identity is refashioned through consumption and the citizen (or viewer) is transformed into a consumer'. In this context being a fan – of not only pop stars but also sports stars – provides 'the "glue" which connects personal identity, social and peer relations, and taste preferences within a media-rich environment' of late modernity (Livingstone 2002, p. 115).

It might be assumed that younger consumers would spend more money on playing and watching sport whilst older consumers would spend more on reading and gambling on it. Benson's figures suggested that the young themselves did not spend more. As sportswear has become leisurewear the relationship with age has become more complex. As he writes, 'the most active consumers of nearly all types of sporting goods and services were young, male adults in their late teens, twenties or thirties' (Benson 1994, p. 125). Unlike other cultural activities, especially pop music, sport has arguably been less important in fostering distinctive youth cultures since it serves more as a bridge rather than a barrier between generations. The involvement of adults as coaches, trainers, teachers and so on could lead to resentment and rejection by some if not most young people. As Benson notes of male youth involved in sport (1994, p. 173), 'the fact that they played with adults meant that they were inculcated, more than non-participants, into an adult culture that stressed hard work, fair play, social drinking and male bonding'.

However, from the 1960s 'the distinction between sporting goods and fashion goods became blurred' and sports 'participation, consumption and youth culture became . . . interrelated' (Benson 1994, p. 173). England's success in the 1966 football World Cup final was a major contributor to this re-casting of sport as fashionable, throughout the UK. It became fashionable to follow football, and to wear track suits, trainers and other types of sports clothing. Yet this new relationship between sport and consumption alone did not create a distinct youth culture which transcended divisions based upon place, gender or social class.

The social construction of age and the life course – through such conceptions as 'the young' as thin and fit and 'the old' as flabby and sick – is a central feature of consumer culture and discourses of sport. Deborah Lupton's (1995, pp. 148–149) cameos demonstrate how discourses of fitness, healthism, self-discipline and asceticism can at one stage of the life course make a person feel 'attractive and vital, in control', and at another 'constitute him (or her) as lazy, unattractive, a loser, out of control' (Lupton 1995, p. 149). In other words, ideas about health, fitness, exercise and sport are 'not stable. The ways in which discourses are taken up and integrated into self-identity are at least partially contingent on the flux of individuals' positions in the workforce, in the lifecycle and the interaction of institutions such as the economy, the family, the school' (Lupton 1995, p. 149). They are also dependent on who the cultural intermediaries wish to reach with their messages. Although it is clear that some older people represent a lucrative consumption sector in their own right (Hepworth and Featherstone 1982, Featherstone and Wernick 1995, Blaikie 1999), it could be argued that young people are at the centre of debates about sport in consumer culture today.

Catching Them Young?

As we noted in the previous chapter the moral panic over the 'obesity epidemic' continues a series of concerns that have been expressed about the condition of youth, their physical and moral health and well-being, for at least the past fifty years. An alternative contemporary concern is that children and

young people are being created as market segments and specifically targeted for advertising. As Antorini (2003, p. 212) noted,

> Whereas the key to the children's market used to be the products, the branding and the marketing, tomorrow's winners will be those that first find ways to make children true stakeholders of the company and so part of the company's destiny. Tomorrow's winners are those that realise that they need children to reach children.

In support of this trend Michael Moore (2002, pp. 102ff.) describes the encroachment of commercialism into US schools using data from the US-based Center for the Analysis of Commercialism in Education (CACE). The social construction of 'pester power' – 4–12-year-olds' influence on their parents purchasing decisions – in the USA, through 'cradle to grave' marketing via TV commercials, poster advertisements, logos and product placement, creates most concern (Schor 2004).

At six months of age it has been reported that babies in the US are forming mental images of corporate logos and mascots (McNeal and Yeh 1993). Brand loyalty may begin as early as 2 years of age (www.newdream.org), and by 3 years one in five American children are making specific requests for brand-name products (www.newdream.org). The children's (4–12-year-olds) market has grown so that US$8.6 billion was spent and US$31.3 billion was received from allowances and gifts in the late 1990s. In 2001 US teenagers spent US$172 billion. Market researchers estimated that 'pester power' was worth US$3000 billion in 2001 (McNeal 1998). Similar concerns are being investigated in the UK (Quart 2003). Contributors to a collection of articles edited by Lindstrom and Seybold (2003) reported on the formation of 'tweenagers' (8–14-year-olds) in 14 different countries. In addition they found that 3-year-olds could recognise brand logos and brand loyalty could be influenced by the age of two. The average British, Australian and American child would be exposed to between 20,000 and 40,000 advertisements per year. American children spent 60 per cent more time in front of a TV screen each year than they did at school. School playgrounds have become 'brand showrooms'. Brands take the place of religion in more secular societies. The coolest of all brands are the 'anti-brands' – those that dismiss phoney, false, pompous claims.

The media can be seen as central to this, especially television in America where the average child (aged 2–17 years) watches 17 hours 30 minutes of TV each week and over 20,000 TV commercials each year (over 50 per day). On average 2–18-year-olds spend 5 hours 30 minutes each day consuming media (TV, music, magazines, video games and the Internet). The increasingly commercialised school environments include brand logos on sports uniforms, textbooks and drink and fast food vending machines filled with brand names. Often children attend sponsored lessons. The response from some children is to develop critical skills as Kenway and Bullen (2001, pp. 114–116) point out in their study of Australian schoolchildren. However, whilst critical of products they are not critical of consumerism as a way of life (Kenway and Bullen 2001, pp. 119–120).

Conclusion

When 'virtually everyone is now living inside the culture of the market' (Smart 2003, p. 163), are social divisions based on traditional social categories blurred? Social experience may have become more individualised as it has become more commercialised. This creates opportunities and new risks. It also allows continuities amidst the more loudly proclaimed changes, as this chapter has suggested. Sports marketing specialists recognise that corporate sponsorship allows companies to reach 'new target markets' (Shank 2002, p. 411). Sponsors trying to reach new and 'difficult-to-capture audiences' have used the X-Games, to reach 'Generation X-ers', and another 'target market that has been neglected includes the millions of disabled Americans' (Shank 2002, p. 412). With the growth of the Paralympic Games, and in the USA programmes such as 'Sporting Chance', which provide disabled people with opportunities to participate in sport, 'marketers are now addressing this market', according to Shank (2002, p. 412). In the USA Nixon notes (2000, p. 425) that 'We have even seen athletes with disabilities on "Wheaties" cereal boxes, a site where some of the most prominent American sports heroes have been displayed'! It can be argued that the development of the Paralympic Games has involved a transformation of their purpose from making disabled people into good worker-citizens, via participation in wholesome sport, into making them good consumer-citizens through their consumption of the expanded sports spectacle. Sport may become a major conduit for the production of what can be termed 'commodity disabilism' or the treatment of disability as a commodity. This will be accompanied by changes in the representation of disabled athletes in the media in all its forms. Some researchers suggest that this is already underway (Duncan and Aycock 2005).

In the next, final, chapter we summarise the contents of the book and consider how far it is possible to develop a politics of sport in consumer culture.