

Power Played

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Introduction: Toward a Critical Criminology of Sport

Derek Silva and Liam Kennedy

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated, entrenched, and exposed a host of inequalities (e.g., Cheung 2020; Sen 2020; Wilson 2020). In this regard, the sporting world has not been immune. Indeed, COVID-19 has underscored the unequal and problematic power relations that characterize modern sport and their inextricable link to issues of violence, harm, deviance, and punishment. These are, at their core, critical criminological concerns. For instance, though the National Collegiate Athletic Association halted play in March 2020 as the number of COVID-19 cases began to increase in North America, it resumed play in the fall – oftentimes with thousands of fans in attendance – and continues to profit from the uncompensated athletic labour of young (predominantly) racialized men, a number of whom tested positive for the virus and suffered serious health effects such as myocarditis (Kalman-Lamb, Silva, and Mellis 2020). In addition, one fatality in the sporting world has been connected to the virus: Jamain Stephens, a twenty-year-old member of the California University of Pennsylvania’s football team, died from a blood clot after hospitalization for COVID-19 and pneumonia (Witz 2020).

Meanwhile, in the summer and fall of 2020, the National Hockey League (NHL), National Basketball Association (NBA), Women’s National Basketball Association, and Major League Soccer resumed (or began) play in “bubble” environments that restricted the movement of

athletic labourers, provided wearable technology that tracked various health indicators for players, coaches, and staff, and isolated them from friends and family. Some athlete labourers spoke of the mental and physical toll this experience took on them (Cole 2020; Hendricks 2020). In [Chapter 13](#) of this volume, Mark Norman begins to theorize these sites as carceral spaces. Moreover, individuals who used basketball courts (Chianello 2020), soccer fields (Frisque 2020), and public parks (*CBC News* 2020) during the pandemic have been fined for by-law infractions and some have had the police called on them for being too close to one another and thus violating COVID physical distancing protocols.

In this volume, we make the case for employing a critical criminological lens to study these and other issues in the sporting world. Although critical criminology is difficult to summarize due to its many strands, it generally distinguishes itself from “mainstream” criminology in several key ways: it questions, rather than takes for granted, state definitions of crime and pushes us to employ a harm-based approach; it prioritizes understanding and challenging the social structure that creates various inequalities; and it is principally concerned with how power relations affect processes and practices of criminalization and social control. We contend that using this lens reveals the myriad ways in which discourses and practices of crime and justice are embedded in sport and how they (re)produce various social inequalities. This collection seeks to challenge our narrow understandings of violence and harm in the context of sport and to outline the ways in which they are firmly rooted in sporting structure and culture.

While the pandemic may have illuminated some of the inequalities inherent in many sports, none of this is particularly new. To be sure, although sport has long been conceived of and promoted as a source of unity, solidarity, and community building, it has caused harm and worsened inequality for an equally lengthy period. For example, as first exposed in July of 2021 by investigative journalist Rick Westhead and further by *The Athletic’s* Scott Powers, former Chicago NHL team video coach Brad Aldrich was accused of engaging in disturbing sexual violence during his time with the hockey team from 2008 to 2012 (Westhead 2021a). At least two former players – one of which came out as Kyle Beach in October of 2021 – allege that Aldrich sent “inappropriate text

messages,” threatened at least one player “physically, financially, and emotionally” if he “did not engage in sexual activity,” invited a player to his apartment to watch pornography while Aldrich masturbated, and threatened his career in the NHL if he did not participate in the sexual assault (Westhead 2021b; Powers 2021). Recently surfaced lawsuits outline allegations that Aldrich also threatened an anonymous former player with a baseball bat before forcing him to have nonconsensual sex in May 2010 (Pope 2021). When Beach came out in October of 2021 as John Doe 1 in those lawsuits, he clearly articulated how the Chicago NHL franchise leadership, including general manager Stan Bowman and then head coach Joel Quenneville, as well as NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and National Hockey League Player Association (NHLPA) executive director Donald Fehr, all failed to protect him and provide a safe space free from sexual violence for players in locker rooms (TSN 2021). Not only did senior leadership of the Chicago NHL team fail to protect survivors of sexual violence, they also allowed Aldrich to take the Stanley Cup home for a day and provided the “most positive job reference” they could give *after* they had been informed of Aldrich’s conduct by Beach (Westhead 2021b). Further, as reported by TSN’s Westhead, these alleged assaults were “an open secret” within the franchise. Former player Nick Boynton told Westhead that investigators “asked me who knew [about the allegations] and I gave them names, basically everyone on the team.” He went on to say, “I said everybody fucking knew about it. I said you can talk to the coaches ... I said talk to [former assistant coach John Tochetti]. I called out Brian Campbell, and said talk to Patrick Sharp and talk to [Patrick Kane] ... the training staff knew. I’m sick of this wall of silence” (Westhead 2021c). This is the culture of silence and protection that has long been built into not only NHL management, but in hockey culture more generally.

From youth and university hockey to the minor and professional leagues, hockey has a long history of implicitly and explicitly endorsing or ignoring racism and xenophobia, sexual and physical violence, and discrimination, and protecting folks who have committed all of the above (even when laws have been broken) (Côté 2018; Gatehouse, McNair, Angelovski, and Zakreski 2021; Strang 2021). Take, for instance, the Montreal Canadiens drafting of Logan Mailloux, a player who was convicted of

nonconsensually distributing photos of a consensual sex act in Sweden in 2020 (Seravalli 2022). As Jashvina Shah (2021) has argued, Mailloux's actions were not a "mistake" by an immature young hockey player – they were deliberate, harmful, violent actions against a woman that will likely continue to traumatize her in innumerable and immeasurable ways for years to come. By Mailloux's own admission, the player didn't believe he had "demonstrated strong enough maturity or character to earn [the] privilege" to be drafted in 2021 and asked explicitly that "no one select me this upcoming weekend" (Jeffrey 2021). Despite this, with the 31st pick in the first round, then Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin called Mailloux's name, which was followed almost immediately by the release of a PR statement by the Canadiens' Twitter account. Indeed, Bergevin and the Canadiens were quick – perhaps too quick if this was an unplanned draft pick of happenstance and unpassable opportunity – to release a statement defending the selection by mentioning the victim of sexual violence a total of zero times and centering support for his personal journey rather than for the victim (NHL 2021). Canadiens' owner Geoff Molson then decided to justify Bergevin's draft strategy by releasing his own statement apologizing for the "pain that the selection has caused" and maintaining that their actions were "never intended to be disrespectful" (Rowe 2021). To be clear, this was not a "controversial" decision as some in hockey media have characterized. It was an unquestionably unethical decision to foreground a game and the revenue that it produces at the expense of victims of sexual violence. Examples like these clearly illustrate that sport is not disconnected from the harm and violence associated with criminality and deviance.

In a separate incident in September 2019, news broke that Auston Matthews, a forward for the Toronto Maple Leafs, had been charged with disorderly conduct and disruptive behaviour related to an incident in Scottsdale, Arizona, months earlier. According to police documents, a group of men – including Matthews – tried at 2 a.m. to enter the locked car of Fayola Dozithee, a female security guard employed by a condominium where Matthews resides. When Dozithee, who was in her car completing paperwork at the time, confronted the men, Matthews allegedly dropped his pants and grabbed his buttocks (Klinkenberg 2019). In discussing the case, news media regularly mentioned his status as a

recent first overall draft pick, as well as his goal-scoring prowess (e.g., Klinkenberg 2019). In his initial public statement, Matthews said that he regretted “the distraction on the team or the distress on any individual” by which he presumably meant Dozitheo (Kelly 2019). Subsequent media coverage emphasized his status with the team – his relationship with its management and his candidacy for captain – and his well-being (Koshan 2019b). When prompted about how the incident and ensuing media attention had affected his play and focus, Matthews said that “it’s been hard ... but I feel I’ve still got to go out there and do my job and try to block that out. As easy as it is to say, it’s not” (Karstens-Smith 2019, B1). In short, the press continued to accentuate his athletic abilities and how the event had affected him and the team rather than the harm caused to Dozitheo. Others minimized it entirely. Early in the 2019–20 season, for instance, a commentator on *Hockey Night in Canada* – the nation’s flagship hockey television broadcast – referred to Matthews’ conduct as his “alleged indiscretion” and “little problem” (Todd 2019b). With a few exceptions (e.g., Todd 2019a, 2019b), the media failed to condemn Matthews’ alleged behaviour. In the articles we examined, even those journalists (see Todd 2019a) who were critical of Matthews concentrated on his personal character – his supposed entitlement and lack of humility. They did not discuss systemic or cultural factors within the NHL or the sport of hockey that condone or celebrate misogynistic violence. After the charge was dismissed, Matthews noted that the episode helped him realize how one’s conduct “can affect other people” and that he “learned from [his] mistakes and [his] actions” (Koshan 2019a, A51).

For their part, the Toronto Maple Leafs stated that they were “committed to developing and promoting the qualities of good character, respect and equality” and that the conduct of Matthews “failed to meet expectations.” The Leafs appreciated his public apology and added they had “no doubt that he has learned a valuable lesson and will grow from this experience” (Koshan 2019a, A51). Less than one year later, Matthews was named the runner-up for the Lady Byng Award, which is voted on by the Professional Hockey Writers’ Association and doled out every season to the player who “best combines sportsmanship, gentlemanly conduct and ability” (Satriano 2020). A critical criminology is capable of illuminating the ways in which sporting culture – including media,

organizations, and the league itself – is implicated in the act of gendered violence against Dozitheo. Toxic masculinity is a feature of, rather than a glitch in, the system. Indeed, the hockey world is replete with stories of sexual violence and homophobia. As we and others have observed elsewhere (Allain 2008; Kennedy, Silva, Coelho, and Cipolli 2019; Robidoux 2002), the sport – especially in Canada – privileges particular expressions of hegemonic masculinity linked to aggression and stoicism and works to uphold white supremacy.

Not only does hockey marginalize racialized individuals, but it also subjects many of them to violence. In November 2019, for example, former NHL player Akim Aliu – described in some media coverage as “Nigerian-born” – accused Calgary Flames head coach Bill Peters of using racist language during a previous interaction with him. Peters was subsequently accused of kicking and punching other players during his tenure with another team (Wawrow 2019). Despite repeated NHL promises to combat racism, the Hockey Diversity Alliance – founded by a group of current and former NHL players striving to eliminate systemic racism and intolerance in the sport – quickly broke ties with the league, claiming that it was focused “on performative public relations efforts” and was “not prepared to make any measurable commitments” (Seravalli 2020). In other words, and as was the case with the Matthews incident, primary stakeholders seem unmotivated to change the sport’s culture or address the harms it causes to already marginalized populations.

Ice hockey is not the only sport that has a problem with racist violence. It is rampant at various levels of soccer. For decades, players have been subject to verbal abuse from both fans and players and have had objects thrown at them during matches (Blum 2020). Some ultras – groups of soccer fans – have dressed in team regalia while carrying weapons and wearing masks. Typically, they espouse racism and nationalism and engage in violence (Bandini 2019; Blum 2020).

Readers may also recall the series of events immediately following Game 6 of the 2019 NBA finals, played in Oakland, California, in which the Toronto Raptors won their first-ever NBA title. When Raptors president Masai Ujiri headed toward the court to celebrate with his team (as is customary), an Alameda County police officer asked him for his NBA credentials. As Ujiri reached for them, he was shoved twice by sheriff’s

deputy Alan Strickland, which video footage clearly shows (*CBC Sports* 2020). With his credentials in hand and after being pushed repeatedly by the officer, Ujiri pushed back in an altercation that was broken up by bystanders (*CBC Sports* 2020; Ransome 2019). The event was seen by many as an obvious example of racialized carding by police (see Domise 2019; Ransome 2019), and popular and legal debate swirled around racial profiling of Black men both *in* and *beyond* the sporting world. Building on criminological debates around racial profiling, carding, and discrimination that extend well outside of sports (see Owusu-Bempah 2017; Wortley and Owusu-Bempah 2011), responses to the attack against Ujiri clearly demonstrate the value of taking sport seriously in critical criminological analyses of phenomena and issues related to discrimination, police and penal abolition, and systemic racism.

At a broader level, a critical criminology can reveal the myriad social harms that are produced by participation in and exclusion from organized sport in both the professional and amateur realms. Indeed, research shows that the youth sport industry disproportionately excludes children from lower-income families, who then lose out on the benefits that accompany physical activity, including higher grades in school, better health, and a longer life expectancy (Flanagan 2017). In short, our task with this volume is to encourage a fresh and critical interrogation of the intersections of sport, crime, deviance, punishment, harm, and violence alongside the power relations that shape them. In making a case for the development of a *distinctly critical* criminology, we hope to provide impetus for scholars to examine the ways in which sport and sporting cultures contribute to the power structures that (re)produce and (re)enforce numerous forms of inequality, discrimination, and oppression.

In this introduction to the volume, we address four goals: to contextualize sport and sporting culture within a history of criminological engagement; to introduce readers to the field of critical criminology and describe how scholars who work in this tradition have been relatively hesitant to explore sport-related phenomena; to urge the further development of what could be a burgeoning field of critical criminology of sport; and to lay out the purpose of the book and summarize its contents. In so doing, we hope that students, researchers, practitioners, institutions, and even fans will be inspired to engage in critical analysis of the role

that sport plays in constructing cultural understandings of crime and deviance, as well as the ways in which it interacts with the criminal justice system to reinforce power structures that enable inequality, oppression, and discrimination.

Sport and Crime: Criminologies of Sport and Sporting Culture

The intersections of sport and crime have received much attention from scholars working predominantly in law and legal studies and, to some degree, in the sociology of sport. Indeed, legal scholars have considered the connections between sport (generally seen as organized competition that involves physical exertion and skill, typically to provide entertainment) and sporting cultures (the relationships between sport activities and cultural practices, images, sounds, symbols, and communications among social relations and actors) and discourses and practices related to crime, deviance, crime control, and punishment (Rowe 2004b). They have, for instance, taken care to document and theorize about the place of new legislative frameworks in the sporting world relating to corruption (Brooks, Aleem, and Button 2013; Mason Thibault, and Misener 2006; Masters 2015; McLaren 2008, 2010), performance-enhancing drugs (see, e.g., Hartley 2009), and large-scale sporting events (see Healey 2009). Along these lines, sports law is a well-established and growing field (see Barnes 1988; Beloff 2012; Gardiner et al. 2011).

For the most part, this body of research has documented cases of corruption, cheating, and illegal behaviour that occur away from the arena and outside the direct purview of sport (Brooks, Aleem, and Button 2013). Rarely, however, have criminologists considered how crime, deviance, and punishment in the sporting world produce and reproduce social inequalities. In other words, scholars have tended not to investigate the many ways that ideas, representations, and messages about crime, violence, and punishment in sport mirror broader relations of power in the greater world. This book provides a comprehensive overview of what the development of a critical criminology of sport might look like through empirically driven analyses that examine how both discourses and practices of crime and crime control operate in the field of sport.

Perhaps the most influential work in this vein is Nic Groombridge's *Sports Criminology* (2017), which argues that much of the literature

on sport and society misses genuine and nuanced engagement with criminological approaches that centre crime, deviance, and crime control in their analyses. Beyond this, Groombridge posits, a *critical* criminology is necessitated by the fact that scholarship has mostly failed to grapple with approaches that challenge traditional understandings, practices, false beliefs, and rhetoric that define contemporary crime and criminal justice. More specifically, he suggests that there remains a scarcity of empirical, theoretical, and conceptual work from critical theorists (such as conflict theorists, Marxists, feminists, and political economists) about the role that sport plays in contemporary understandings of crime, deviance, and their control. As Kevin Young (2015) points out, sport sociologists have long tended to focus on overly narrow conceptions of violence – exemplified by their concentration on football hooliganism or crowd violence – while ignoring the myriad manifestations of violence that occur elsewhere, both on the playing surface and off of it (and, importantly, perhaps due to sporting culture).

The present volume provides a useful entry to sports criminology and the complex issues of “sport(s)” and “crime,” yet it illuminates the dearth of truly *critical* engagements with sport as influential in the production and diffusion of practices and discourses that reproduce inequality. As Avi Brisman’s (2019, 392) review of Groombridge’s *Sports Criminology* highlights, this intervention represents not “a resounding final buzzer . . .” but is rather “more like an opening bell.” Our collection aims to build on Groombridge’s “first pitch” (Brisman 2019, 392) by illuminating some of the spots necessarily left dark during any first attempt. Specifically, we tackle important substantive discussions of sport(s) and crime through the interrogation of racial, sexual, religious, political, and class inequalities left uninterrupted by Groombridge, while also advancing themes of protest, social justice, and civic engagement as resistance. Thus, readers who are searching for answers to the question of “why athletes commit crime” may be inclined to close the book now; no such answers will be given here. Rather, this volume reveals the ways in which sport and sporting cultures contribute to and reflect problematic, harmful, and potentially misleading discourses and understandings of crime, deviance, and the criminal justice system.

Despite the recent development of sports criminology, almost all the criminological and legal scholarship examining the intersections between sport and punishment has dealt with incidents that occur off the playing field (see Atkinson and Young 2008; Brickman 1977). In addition, the role that punishment discourses play in responses to an athlete's criminal and/or deviant behaviour is receiving greater attention. In hockey, for instance, Côté (2018) analyzes media coverage of the suspension of the University of Ottawa men's team after two players were charged with sexual assault in 2014 and finds that media privileged the narratives of young male hockey players. Along these lines, Piquero and colleagues (2011) highlight the effects of race on public perceptions of criminal punishment following NFL player Michael Vick's conviction related to an illegal dogfighting ring. The general consensus in this body of work is that patterned trends of deviance and social control delineated along the lines of class, race, gender, and sexuality do exist and can be empirically traced in the sporting world – mirroring much of what exists elsewhere in society. It also reinforces the idea that the primary scholarly concern should be on deviance that occurs away from the game. What is missing, then, is a body of scholarly work that challenges notions of crime and deviance themselves and, more specifically, interrogates the manner in which sport and sporting culture contribute in problematic ways to public understandings of crime, punishment, and criminal justice and the practices and intervention that they justify (Kennedy and Silva 2019, 2020). In our view, we have much to gain from a critical criminological analysis of sport because it interrogates the troubling crime discourses and crime control practices that perpetuate inequalities both on and away from the playing surface.

Sport, Power, and Harm: Critical Theories of Crime and Sport

What might a *critical* criminology of sport look like? What is overlooked by more “traditional” approaches to criminology and criminal justice research but offered by more “critical” perspectives? How might critical criminology illuminate problematic (and potentially harmful) discourses and practices of crime and crime control in sport and sporting culture? Before we address these questions, it is important to briefly review the field of critical criminology in terms of its methodological and

conceptual foundations. An important goal of this chapter (and book more generally) is to make a case for the development of critical criminological scholarship that takes sport and sporting cultures seriously as units of analysis – therefore, it is important to sketch out the field.

Critical Criminology: On the Origins of Class Conflict and Sport

Critical criminology can perhaps best be described as a theoretical perspective within criminology that challenges traditional, mostly positivist, object-oriented understandings of crime, deviance, and criminal justice. It encompasses a broad range of scholarship that explores social, political, economic, and environmental justice from alternative perspectives, often including Marxist, cultural, feminist, intersectional, critical race, green, postmodern, abolitionist, and left-realist criminology. Departing from more traditional criminologies, which centre state definitions of crime and the interventions crafted to prevent criminal acts, it focuses on issues of social harm and social justice to highlight the intersections between race and racialization, class, gender, and sexuality. Critical criminologists do not promote relatively essentializing theories and methods, which treat crime as an ontological reality that can be studied “objectively” to deduce causes, be intervened upon, and documented empirically. Instead, they examine crime as a product of social structure. In other words, they often assert that “crime” is not an ontological reality, but a socially constructed phenomenon that upholds and reproduces structured inequalities of class society based primarily in class conflict.

This approach quite clearly points to the early influences of Marxism on many critical criminologists and the emergent neo-Marxist perspective that extends conflict theory to contemporary understandings of crime and deviance (Quinney 1970, 1974). Neo-Marxist theorists suggest that traditional Marxist dialectical materialism insufficiently addresses questions relating to both the *individual* and the structural factors that shape class conflict and that it sees revolution (often violent) as the only form of resistance. For example, it claims that laws are created (and thus “crime” is produced) by the powerful to oppress the lower class, who can resist this superstructure solely through violent revolution against the bourgeoisie.

By contrast, neo-Marxists lean toward dismantling the dichotomy between the bourgeoisie (ownership class) and the proletariat (working class) in favour of the intersections of inequality (race, class, gender, and sexuality) that condition economic and social oppression. They see ideological dissemination and cultural upheaval as the fundamental pathways to overcoming oppression, not necessarily the violent revolution proposed by orthodox Marxists. In other words, they typically work within the superstructure to challenge class conflict rather than proposing a revolutionary post-capitalist utopia. For instance, they might recognize that working-class folks who engage in criminal behaviour make active choices to break the law, but the “rationality” of those actors is conditioned by a superstructure that oppresses them in favour of the ownership class.

Among the most influential sport scholars working in the Marxist tradition, Ian McDonald has delineated a line of Marxist thinking about sport from other perspectives – including neo-Marxism, critical theory, and cultural studies. Exerting a profound impact in sports sociology, McDonald (2008) argues for deep engagement with “the revolutionary Marx” because it offers the unique concept of labour that is essential to any critique of the alienation that is inherent in sporting culture. In other words, Marxist analyses are necessary to gain a proper understanding of alienation not as an inevitable result of sport as a bodily practice, but as a fundamental and characteristic project of contemporary sport (McDonald 2008).

For a moment, consider big-time college athletics in our contemporary period – on the heels of social rebellion driven by the Black Lives Matter movement in response to systemic racism, white supremacy, and police lethality and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic that has disproportionately harmed Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (Tai et al. 2020). According to Marxist theory, labour is an alienating activity in the context of a class society because what should be a meaning-giving exercise has merely become a means to an end. In the context of big-time collegiate sport, the alienation of labour further intensifies class conflict because the athletic worker (the athlete) receives relatively little remuneration (a scholarship) in exchange for producing quite massive revenues for universities, athletic departments, and corporations. A Marxist

analysis lays bare this exploitation and highlights how it is produced and socially reproduced through bodily labour (Kalman-Lamb 2019). The Marxist tradition thus offers the most ostensibly focused critique of a superstructure that enables the extreme exploitation of predominantly young Black men to enrich the bourgeoisie class. But, as we shall see, Marxist approaches have typically ignored the intersections of oppression that condition the exploitation of *certain* bodies for economic gain.

Beyond Marxism: Critical Theory and Cultural Studies

Building on these traditions, proponents of critical theory, established primarily at the Frankfurt School during the 1930s and 1940s by Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, Walter Benjamin, and others, tend to focus on the reflexive analysis of society – largely through critiques of mass culture and ideology – to illuminate structures of power, authority, and subjugation. Indeed, critical theorists commonly launch their critique of capitalist society through culture – for which sport is but one modality. Widely adopting Theodor Adorno’s (1996) concept of *mass culture* and Antonio Gramsci’s concept of *cultural hegemony* – or the subjugation of the masses through ideology or cultural means – critical theorists offer acute analyses of how the ruling class (the bourgeoisie in the Marxist sense) establishes and maintains control over society through influencing values, norms, expectations, ideas, and beliefs. In contrast with the Marxist or even neo-Marxist approach, Gramsci posited an approach to the analysis of domination that goes beyond narrow economic interests and the monopoly of physical force. Instead, a Gramscian analysis uncovers the intellectual, ideological, and cultural processes that the powerful use to influence the everyday lives of the masses (Rowe 2004a).

In the context of sport, Morgan (1983, 24) was among the first to point to the value in critical theory for understanding how contemporary sport is “essentially an instrument of the social order whose central function is to further the economic and political interests of the various nation-states.” Arguing for the discursive, intersectional, relational, and contextual character of subjectivities within sport, Morgan positions identity construction as a focal point for neo-Marxist critical analyses of sport (Andrews 2007). In this way, critical

theory moves beyond superstructural analyses of sport's role in class conflict to concentrate on the ways in which subjugation to sporting practice enables systems of exploitation, oppression, discrimination, and harm that feed class conflict. For Morgan (1983, 26) and others, critical theory offers the "critical awareness of, and response to, the assimilative initiatives of mature capitalism" that the Frankfurt School had widely documented. For example, as Brohm (1978, 49) suggests, sport is "an exact reflection of capitalist [work] categories," and as such it operates as an important mediator in terms of identity formation in advanced capitalism. Just as Adorno (1973) found in the context of music and art (Adorno 1996; Adorno and Horkheimer 1944/2000), Brohm posits that sport operates as a pre-packaged, structured, mass culture that frames the possibilities (and impossibilities) of action. As David Inglis (2004, 94) contends, sport, as cultural form, is "found to contain seeds of hope within a shell of despair" – meaning, in our view, that contemporary capitalist sport is fundamentally oppressive and structured to (re)produce myriad inequalities but also possesses the emancipatory possibility to free it from such oppression in practice. How might this emancipation take shape? It involves, as critical theory requires, thinking about how sport *might* be, rather than merely accepting it as status quo (Inglis 2004).

The influence of Marxism on critical theory is widely documented. However, through the work of Gramsci and others, (neo-)Marxist approaches have perhaps been equally impactful on the field of cultural studies, particularly in connection with sport (Bairner 2007). Cultural studies, as a theoretical approach (or set of approaches), can perhaps best be seen as a field of theoretically political and empirically engaged analyses of contemporary culture (Hall 1980, 1981). It does not offer a singular grand theory of society. Instead, it provides a range of theoretical and methodological approaches to the critical study of the historical foundations, characteristics, conflicts, contingencies, paradoxes, and dynamism of culture and cultural practices. Drawing from many critical approaches, including sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, Marxism, feminism, and intersectionality, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, communication studies, literary and media theory, and political economy, it interrogates cultural

processes as both dynamic and contextual phenomena (more on some of these approaches later).

As Ben Carrington and Ian McDonald (2008, 16) hold, the field of cultural studies becomes “productive at precisely the moment where we reach the limits of orthodox Marxist analysis.” In other words, just as we reach the singular, static, utopian, revolutionary limits of Marxism, we must learn to appreciate sport’s protean and dynamic nature. For sport is at once a site of both domination and resistance, of happiness and despair, of liberty and subjectivity, and of creativity and routine (Carrington and McDonald 2001, 2008; Carrington 2008). Although Marxist understandings of the forces that subjugate us – and the exploitation, alienation, and conflict they produce – might still matter for cultural theorists, they are inevitably limited by deterministic devotion to the revolutionary Marx in original materialist form. Instead, cultural studies pushes us to think about the political, historical, and social dynamics of contemporary culture – a shift from a grand theory of superstructure to the more granular analysis of systems of power that operate through all levels of ideology, class, nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, and so on.

Undoubtedly critical by nature, the development of cultural studies has influenced the increasing attention paid to colonialism and settler colonial relationships that pervade systems of criminal justice (Blagg and Anthony 2019). Postcolonial criminologists assert that, to date, criminological theory and methods have failed to take into account crimes of the settler colonial state in lieu of focusing on crimes of individuals. Perhaps more importantly, they have failed to take seriously the influence of historical oppression and systemic racism on present realities for Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (Cunneen 2011). Only through the rejection of imperial regimes of truth (on which traditional criminology is largely based), postcolonial scholars assert, can criminology offer theories that attend to the dynamism and plurality of truths about crime, deviance, and their control (Cunneen 2011).

In addition to postcolonial studies, cultural studies has influenced the development of cultural criminology, which attends to the dynamics of meaning that (re)construct, underpin, reify, and distinguish processes in the criminal justice system (including the social construction of

crime itself). Cultural criminology is a pushback or opposition to more traditional positivist approaches and criminology's seeming preoccupation with facts, reason, and quantitative measures to predict crime. Put differently, criminology can perhaps best be seen as incorporating a "constellation of critiques designed to expose the distinctly *cultural* dynamics of late capitalism and its crimes" (Ferrell 2007, 91, emphasis added). By eschewing the more traditional dichotomy of agency/structure and concentrating on the structural realities that condition experience – and thus the possibilities of agency and resistance – cultural criminologists investigate the myriad dynamic processes by which crime and its transgression are embedded in collective and individual meaning (Ferrell 1999, 2007; Hayward and Young 2004).

Cultural criminologists criticize the discipline's general attempt to quantify the qualitative experiences of everyday life in the context of crime or enveloped by the criminal justice system. Generally, they contend that criminology's tendency to turn complex lives and experiences into datasets and empirical measures increasingly distances researchers from the people they study. In other words, cultural criminologists hold that traditional criminology has dehumanized the subject and has thus lost some of the nuances associated with human subjectivity (Ferrell 1999). Characterized as "a loose federation of outlaw intellectual critiques" (Ferrell 2007, 99), cultural criminology is by definition critical of "classical" approaches to the study of crime, deviance, and related phenomena.

As of yet, however, surprisingly little attention has been paid to how discourses and practices of crime and crime control that permeate sport and sporting cultures work to reify, legitimize, and perhaps even contribute to ongoing settler colonial relationships throughout the criminal justice system. Indeed, though the fields of cultural studies and cultural criminology are undeniably well developed in other areas, they have yet to widely address questions related to sport and crime (for some notable exceptions, see Henne and Ventresca 2019; Kennedy and Silva 2019). In the present volume, [Parts 2](#) and [3](#) address these gaps by tackling a number of important issues related to how race, class, gender, sexuality, and athletic violence are embedded and reproduce harm and inequality in contemporary sporting cultures.

Left-Realist Approaches to Crime

In the 1980s and 1990s, a distinct field emerged from conflict-based critical criminology. Known as “left-realism,” it took issue with two major contemporary trends in critical criminology for ignoring the real harm and victimization experienced as a result of crime and for not being grounded in the realities of crime and its control (Madfis and Cohen 2016; Jock Young 1991). The first trend was reformism, the idea that the criminal justice system is in need of a major reform in policy and practice. The second was left idealism, which rejected “mainstream” and right-leaning criminology and focused on how crime is radically socially constructed and thus tied with the established social structure that favours the rich at the expense of the poor.

For early left-realists, such as Jock Young (1991) and Pat Carlen (1992), critical criminology at the time was severely limited because of the left’s failure to take a practical approach to everyday crime. These scholars diverged from their Marxist colleagues in their belief that critical criminologists allowed conservative “right realism” to monopolize the political debate as it related to crime and crime control, which resulted in the emergence of “law-and-order” policies that disproportionately target the vulnerable – particularly racialized individuals, women, and the poor. In response to the reformist and left idealism that dominated critical criminology, they proposed basic principles to guide theoretical and political contributions within the field. For example, the triadic relationship between the offender, the state, and the victim must be attended to by explaining the social action and reaction of all three (Jock Young 1987). Crime must be seen as a *real* problem, especially to working-class people who suffer disproportionately from personal crime. The left should attempt to legitimize itself and produce credible theories to counter the law-and-order emphasis of the right. The purpose of criminological theory is to make practical interventions in criminal justice. And finally, if crime is to be reduced, greater cooperation must exist between the police and the public (Carlen 1992). In this way, left-realists propose engagements with popular and mainstream approaches to crime and justice – for example, rather than declaring that prisons must be abolished, they propose alternatives such as community service

orders, pre-emptive deterrence, decarceration where appropriate, and restorative justice schemes (Lea and Young 1984).

In the context of sport and crime, very little robust application of left-realism as an explanatory framework has been done to date. Indeed, as Groombridge (2017) demonstrates, left-realists have typically ignored sports crime. Outside of crime and deviance, the literature on left-realist approaches to sport is also quite anemic. However, there are a few notable contributions from the field. For instance, echoing left-realist criminologies of non-sport-related phenomena, proponents who study sport have mostly focused on how it can be used to promote social justice and human rights in divided societies (Sugden 2010). Similarly, Donnelly and Kidd (2000) note that those who are committed to humane sport must understand the importance of purposeful interventions that challenge the rules, governing bodies, and covenants that enshrine conduct in sport. McDonald (2002, 101) builds on this to suggest that “a radical sociology of sport should be seeking to assist the reconfiguration of the culture of sport by intervening against dominant relations of power.” Although McDonald does not specifically mention interventions against the criminal justice system, we hold that there is indeed room for such left-realist critique of crime and crime phenomena as constructed and understood in the world of sport – critique in which the authors of this volume engage (see [Chapter 3](#)).

Postmodern Approaches and the Social Harm Approach

Postmodern and poststructuralist approaches in criminology have primarily been concerned with understanding how ideas, discourses, systems of knowledge, and practices related to criminality (both crime and deviance and the institutions whose purpose is to control them) emerge and take shape, change and metamorphose, and reify power dynamics that structure everyday life. As such, postmodern criminologies can best be characterized as a set of diverse perspectives that reject the more traditional understandings of the classical school and depart from the position that people have free will and make rational choices to commit crimes. In rejecting modern criminology’s strict adherence to reason, rationality, and scientific positivism as a means to understand crime, postmodern criminologists stress the emergence of systems of

power that condition the behaviour of individuals who are excluded from them. In other words, they illuminate the ways that power relations condition the identity of the human subject and its relationship with other subjects, institutions, and practices of government without essentializing the crime or deviance. As a result, crime and the criminal justice system in this context are most certainly socially constructed and meant to subordinate the subject (i.e., the “criminal” or the “deviant”). There is nothing inherently criminal in any given act; criminality is not so much an ontological phenomenon as a social construct that has a historical, political, and protean character. Moving beyond Marxist interpretations of economic and class-based oppression, postmodern criminologists focus on discursive production and dissemination, suggesting that criminal law is a discursive formation that creates relationships of domination between the object and the subject.

To date, postmodern scholarship has not greatly examined sports and crime. That said, sports sociology has a long history of engagement with postmodern approaches to the study of sport and sporting cultures (see Andrews 1993; Giuliannoti 2016; Markula and Pringle 2007; Rail 2002). As Rail (2002) documents, in sociology (as well as sociology of sport), the critique of grand theories, such as Marxism or structural functionalism, has expanded to include the interrogation of modernist assumptions based on reason and rationality. An important part of this critique is that sports and bodies “are marked by a different cultural logic” and thus necessitate new social theories, epistemologies, methodologies, and cultural politics that differ from traditional theories (Rail 2002, 179). To scholars who work in this area, sport has been structured and constrained by the same modernist, positivist, heterosexist, and racist boundaries that condition the rest of the social system, which require deep interrogation and dismantling. Accordingly, sports sociologists blur modern binaries that are constructed and maintained by sport and that problematically structure everyday life.

In the context of sport and crime, Geoff Nichols (2007) discusses the role of sports in crime reduction among youth, arguing that the relationship between sport and crime reduction is not solely about the sporting intervention itself, but also the techniques, values, logics, assumptions, and rationales that go into it (by policy-makers, program officials, and

participants). Critically engaging with postmodern theory, Nichols highlights the historical and political contexts through which the moral conduct of participants is woven via dynamic rules, discourses, knowledges, etiquette, and practices of sport. Perhaps unsurprisingly, postmodern critical criminology and carceral geography have recently taken up an analysis of sport, particularly in the carceral context. Mark Norman (2017, 2019, 2020) and Rosie Meek (2014) advocate for the development of Foucauldian analyses of sport and prison that illuminate how “spaces of incarceration engender embodied practices and corporeal transformations that endure far beyond the period of confinement” (Norman 2020, 189). From this perspective, scholars have also scrutinized the multiple, sometimes contradictory, logics of governance in the sporting world that reflect and reify narrow understandings of crime, punishment, and the criminal justice system (Kennedy and Silva 2020). Importantly, this scholarship commonly approaches narratives, discourses, and practices of crime and crime control in an anti-essentialist manner. In other words, postmodern scholarship on sports and crime seeks to deconstruct the very ideas of “crime,” “criminality,” and deviance that shape and legitimize the criminal justice system.

In this way, the often overlooked field of zemiology – or the study of social harms – is particularly relevant because it posits that crime has “no ontological reality” and thus inevitably varies across time and space (Hillyard et al. 2004). Rather than approaching crime as an objective reality that must be controlled, then, zemiologists hold that since it is fundamentally a dynamic social construct, attempts to control it are doomed to fail because criminality has no central properties (Hillyard et al. 2004). Instead, they urge us to think about the ways in which the criminal justice system upholds, produces, and reproduces myriad social harms (such as revictimizing victims, failing to protect people from criminal harms while harming those in the system, and inflicting economic harms associated with the massive cost of prison sentences) (Hillyard et al. 2004).

As a direct critique of conservative law-and-order criminology, which sees crime as a serious threat that necessarily legitimizes the expansion of the criminal justice system, zemiologists propose that we view the system itself as complicit in social harm and thus call for a variety of

decriminalization policies, such as decarceration, penal and police abolition, and decriminalization of drugs and poverty. Although these debates have not yet widely penetrated the scholarly study of sport and sporting cultures, this volume offers an initial intervention that seeks to decentre “crime” as a unit of analysis and to focus on some of the harm associated with sport crime. For example, as we document elsewhere (Kennedy and Silva 2019, 2020), media coverage of deviance in the NHL contributes to problematic and harmful cultural understandings of the criminal justice system. These reinforce neoliberal capitalist approaches to crime control that disproportionately affect already vulnerable and marginalized people. Although not all are explicitly zemiological in their orientation, [Chapters 7, 10, and 13](#) in this volume reframe the critique of crime in sport as one of social harm.

*Intersections of Inequality: Feminism, Intersectionality,
and Critical Race Theory*

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a number of scholars worked to establish feminism as a legitimate lens through which to investigate sport. Developing the field of sport feminisms, Susan Birrell, Elaine Hall, and Sheila Scraton (among others) first challenged essentialist notions of femininity that reinforce the traditional male-female dichotomy of sporting culture (Scraton and Flintoff 2002). Within the sociology of sport, the main purpose of sport feminisms has been theorizing about gender relations in our patriarchal society as they manifest and reproduce through sport and other corporeal practices (Birrell 2000; Bordo 1994; Scraton 2013). Since sport is among the most obviously gendered social activities, feminist scholars have found sporting culture to be a particularly logical site for analyses of gendered power relations.

However, to suggest that feminism looks solely to gender as a vehicle through which power is manifest would be both an error and an underestimation of its value to the study of sport. Indeed, as Susan Birrell (1989) reminded us long ago, sport sociology would be wise to move away from atheoretical approaches to “race and sport” and toward a much more critical analysis of the racialized relations and interactions that pervade sport and sporting cultures. More recently, feminist scholars have broadened our understanding of the intersectional and overlapping

modalities of inequality that persist in sport, including race, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, class, and nation (Brown 2018). Heavily influenced by the postcolonial, postmodern, and poststructuralist “turn” in social science throughout the 1990s and 2000s, postfeminist and intersectional scholars have shifted their attention to the ways in which multiple identities intersect in a complex constellation that produces, reproduces, and configures hegemonic power relationships through the corporeal (Brown 2018; Davis 1983; Scraton and Flintoff 2002; Toffoletti and Thorpe 2018). Letisha Brown (2015, 8), by example, has explored the ways in which race and gender intersect in track and field to construct *certain bodies* – racialized women – as “sporting space invaders” that exist beyond particular sporting boundaries and are thus thought to be “out of place.” Intersectional scholars have illuminated the ways in which structural racism helps construct not only gender but also numerous other forms of identity in sporting cultures (Abel-Shehid and Kalman-Lamb 2011, 2017; Davis 1983).

Feminist scholars were undoubtedly among the first to truly disrupt the traditional epistemological and ontological starting points for the study of sport (Birrell 1989; Collins 1990; Hylton 2005; Messner 1992; Sheppard 2020). And though feminist theory has been influential in the social scientific study of sport, a number of scholars in the fields of intersectionality and critical race theory (CRT) have noted the systematic neglect of race in the relevant scholarly debates (Back, Crabbe, and Solomos 1999; Carrington and McDonald 2001; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, Thomas 1995; Floyd 1998; Hylton 2005, 2008). Intersectionality, as an analytical and theoretical framework for perceiving how overlapping social and political identities coalesce to create various modalities of discrimination and privilege, has been widely influential in developing our understanding of the ways that power manifests in advanced capitalism (Crenshaw 1989).

Building on intersectional approaches, CRT and race critical theories have been particularly influential in this respect, holding that scholars must advance anti-essentialist ideals about race and disrupt canonical views that avoid centralizing race and racism in critiques of the capitalist system (Hylton 2005). Founded in Marxist social philosophy, CRT views race as undeniably socially constructed to maintain hegemony and

argues that law is inherently racist. As a corollary, critical race theorists see sport as a mechanism through which systemic racism is coded and embedded into the social system. In so doing, CRT questions traditional methodologies and ideologies around race neutrality, colour-blindness, and meritocracy, proffering an epistemological viewpoint that gives a more accurate picture of the Black experience in society (Back, Crabbe, and Solomos 1999; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, Thomas 1995; Hylton 2005; Scraton 2001). Such transdisciplinary perspectives centre race and the experiences of racialized folks, offering alternatives to the relative ambivalence of other postmodern perspectives to issues of racial inequality.

CRT has been widely influential in illuminating contemporary issues related to crime and criminal justice systems, but few scholars have attempted to sketch out the role of sport vis-à-vis intersectional understandings of crime and deviance. Scholars have indeed focused on how patterns and narratives of racialized overrepresentation in the criminal justice system are depicted and replicated in the context of sport (Berry and Smith 2000; Mastro, Blecha, and Seate 2011). Following trends in the news media (Dixon and Azocar 2007; Dixon and Linz 2000; Dixon and Williams 2015), researchers consistently find that stereotypes *and* patterns of racialized overrepresentation in the criminal justice system are reproduced in the sports world (Anderson and Raney 2018; Blecha, and Seate 2011). Yet there is a relative lack of scholarship on the complex interconnectivities between intersectional modalities of inequality (including race) and crime, criminality, and the criminal justice system in sport and sporting cultures. To this end, chapters in [Part 2](#) of this volume address some of the issues that permeate at the nexus of sport, race, inequality, and crime.

Penal Abolition

Penal abolition is a counter-movement to the mass incarceration and penal expansion that occurred during the twentieth century throughout the Western world, particularly in the United States. Building on core tenets of the New Left (Duran and Simon 2019; Simon 2007), interdisciplinary critical scholars such as Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore worked tirelessly to establish a network of groups, activists, scholars, and

organizations that sought to reduce or eliminate police, prisons, and the prison system, replacing them with alternative forms of rehabilitation not grounded primarily in punishment and government institutionalization (Davis 2003; Shaw 2009). Unlike more traditional approaches to penal reform, penal abolitionists support decarceration and the radical and wide-ranging reconfiguration of the criminal justice system around core features of social justice, equity, and inclusion.

Scholars in this tradition believe that the massive expansion of carceral systems contributes to and sustains the oppression of Black, Indigenous, people of colour, and other racialized or politically marginalized groups to sustain the racial capitalist regime (Robinson 1983). As Dorothy Roberts (2019) documents, contemporary manifestations of policing and carceral punishment are indeed rooted in slavery and the regime of racial capitalism upon which it was founded and maintained (Robinson 1983). Abolitionists also suggest that we can create a more humane and democratic society that does not resort to victimizing the most marginalized people within a carceral state in order to deal with social problems. In these ways, penal abolition as a body of theoretical orientations that aim to reimagine the carceral state of advanced racial capitalism has been influenced not only by New Left theories of the 1980s and 1990s, but also by the increasing prominence of cultural studies and CRT within criminology and criminal justice.

Contemporary abolitionist debates have been reinvigorated by the rise of political and penal populism in North America that has long contributed to mass incarceration and the expansion of the carceral state (Maynard 2017; Simon 2007). As a counter to mass incarceration and police lethality against racialized groups, scholars in a variety of social scientific fields have been influenced by the scholar-activism of Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore and by renewed calls to revolutionize the penal and police state that disproportionately targets marginalized individuals and groups (Akbar 2020; Kaba 2020). Much of this discourse has pushed for total abolition of the police or, at least, diminishing their financial support, which is unprecedentedly high despite the fact that crime rates have steadily decreased since the 1990s (Beck and Goldstein 2018).

These social movements – abolition and the defunding of police – question the power and authority that has been vested in law enforcement

and point to the possibility and potential of alternative solutions to many problems that law enforcement is expected to address (Kaba 2020). For example, a number of scholar-activists have questioned why police officers are systematically sent to check on the wellness of people who are experiencing extreme stress, given that they have neither the training nor the resources to do so. Other professionals, such as social workers or mental health counsellors, are much better equipped to handle these social problems without approaching conflict with an enforcement-first priority. The core tenet of the movements to abolish or defund the police is to strip law enforcement of these roles, but people differ regarding how to replace them. Accordingly, police abolition means the total elimination of law enforcement as a profession and key priority of the carceral state (Maynard 2017; Vitale 2018). Defunding, on the other hand, means just that – the state monies allocated to law enforcement will be massively decreased and distributed to programs that ameliorate racial and economic justice, physical and mental health programming, restorative and alternative forms of communal justice, and reparations for the systematic and intentional targeting of marginalized individuals and groups within the criminal justice system.

These discussions have been particularly widespread since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the social and political uprisings of 2020, where calls for penal abolition as public policy penetrated sporting cultures, which have been criticized for upholding militaristic and nationalist ideas that support policing, punishment, and the criminal justice system more broadly (Jenkins 2013; Vasquez 2020). Abolitionist debates swelled during the pandemic and the political and social rebellions led by Black Lives Matter against police lethality in the aftermath of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, and the shooting of Jacob Blake in 2020 (Akbar 2020).

In the midst of a global pandemic not seen for at least a century and social and political upheaval not experienced in the United States since the Civil War, athletes themselves have pointed to penal abolition in their own political mobilizations. For example, former National Football League (NFL) quarterback Colin Kaepernick, whom the league ostracized for taking a stance against police lethality, has supported demands to abolish police, prisons, and the prison industrial complex for a number of years

but has been particularly vocal about abolition since 2020 (Brito 2020; Kaepernick 2020). In August 2020, the National Basketball Association was forced to postpone numerous playoff games after the Milwaukee Bucks refused to take the court in protest of police brutality and ongoing racial injustice across America (Taylor 2020). To set the stage for one of the most notable and widespread labour actions in sports history, games and practices were subsequently cancelled or postponed due to player strikes in the Women's National Basketball Association, who notably have long led advocacy against police lethality and racial injustice (Ayala 2020), the Women's Tennis Association, the NHL, Major League Baseball, the NFL, and Major League Soccer, among others. When asked why his team refused to play, Milwaukee Bucks guard George Hill said, "we're tired of the killings and the injustice," referring to the police shootings of unarmed Black people (Bontemps and Andrews 2020).

What the events of 2020 have demonstrated for all to see is the power of professional athletes in advocating for social justice and political reform in general, but perhaps more importantly in the context of this book, to influence mass criminal justice reforms that are inherently critical in nature. The future of critical criminological scholarship in exploring the intersections of sport and criminal justice reform thus holds immense potential.

Green Criminology

First developing in the early 1990s as a response to the increasing social, political, and cultural emphasis on climate change and global warming, green criminology is an interdisciplinary collection of perspectives that coalesce around the study of harms and crimes against the environment, affecting human and non-human life, ecosystems, and the planet itself (Brisman 2014; Lynch 1990). Initially proposed by Michael Lynch in 1990, green criminology has largely concentrated on "exposing specific types of criminal or harmful environmental actions or omissions ... such as the illegal trade of animals, illegal logging, dumping of toxic waste, air pollution, and threats to biodiversity" (White 2013, 27). Although it is not a "theory as such" (White 2008, 14), green criminology is a set of approaches that share concern with environmental issues, racial and social justice, biodiversity and ecological consciousness, and

corresponding critiques of advanced global capitalism, the nation-state, and regional, national, and international regulatory bodies (see Brisman 2014; South 2014; White 2013). Thus, like cultural criminology, green criminology is fundamentally *critical* in nature (Ferrell 2013). Rather than upholding more traditional criminological theories that seek to identify petty street crimes for the purpose of prevention, green criminology advances broad critiques of the social system – of advanced capitalism, crimes committed by powerful people and corporations, environmental harm caused by nation-states or government regulatory bodies – that reproduce inequality and discrimination on the basis of race, gender, class, sexuality, and a being's non-human status (Brisman 2014).

Green criminologists have yet to widely adopt sport or sport-related phenomena as units of analysis, but many important green criminological themes perhaps *should* be analyzed in that context. As Brisman (2019) notes, sport can contribute to – or even cause – environmental crimes and harm in a number of ways (see [Chapter 2](#) in this volume). For instance, scholars have demonstrated that popular sport can contribute to environmental harm by building up waste and pollution during sporting events, such as Association or American football (Dosumu, Colbeck, and Bragg 2014). Moreover, Collins and Rothe (2020) document that the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil required the swift construction of many new stadiums and public transportation infrastructure projects that forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of people. Indeed, similar patterns of relocation have occurred in other mega-events, including the Vancouver and London Olympics of 2010 and 2012 (Kennelly 2016; Kennelly and Watt 2011; see also [Chapter 12](#) in this volume).

Finally, sport and sporting culture have a long tradition of causing grotesque harm to non-human subjects in the pursuit of economic gain and/or capitalist entertainment. As Brisman notes in [Chapter 2](#) of this volume, horse racing is grounded in harm and violence toward horses to benefit humans. Also consider the notorious case of NFL player Michael Vick, who in 2008 pleaded guilty to a felony charge for his involvement in a dogfighting ring at one of his properties. In both horse racing and dogfighting, sport or sporting culture have harmed non-human creatures and thus should be the focus of criminologists who are interested in the environment and ecological consciousness.

The future of green criminology in relation to sport is ripe with scholarly potential. This is perhaps particularly true in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where researchers are just beginning to scratch the surface of sporting organizations' and government complicity in helping to spread the virus across the planet. In the early days of the pandemic, it was actually sport that thrust COVID-19 into the public sphere. Readers will probably recall the NBA's announcement of March 11, 2020, that its 2019–20 season would be suspended because Utah Jazz centre Rudy Gobert had tested positive for the virus. An imminent game between the Jazz and the Oklahoma City Thunder would also be cancelled. Two days earlier, Gobert had attended a press conference, where he had mocked anxieties about the virus by intentionally touching reporters' microphones (he later apologized for his behaviour). His cavalier attitude and lack of concern probably resonated with people outside of the sport.

Across the Atlantic, on the heels of the World Health Organization's declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic and while the virus was decimating much of Europe, English football giant Liverpool FC and La Liga's Atletico Madrid met in a highly anticipated UEFA Champions League match, which was played before more than fifty-two thousand fans at Anfield Stadium in the United Kingdom on March 11, 2020. On March 12, 2020, Spain's La Liga suspended all play, and one day later the English Premier League followed suit, triggering a mass suspension of professional athletic activities throughout the world. In the days following Gobert's positive test and the suspension of games in the NBA, NHL, Association Football, and other leagues, governments throughout the world announced lockdowns and state of emergency/stay-at-home orders to prevent further spread of the virus.

Our intent here is not to suggest that government officials and the general public were unaware of the risks associated with COVID-19, or that no government organization had acted prior to the shutdown of sports. Nonetheless, we do maintain that professional sport had an immediate and wide-reaching impact on public understanding of the virus in March of 2020. Indeed, in many ways the NBA suspension of the Utah Jazz–Oklahoma City Thunder game was a sobering moment that ushered in narratives about the very real and tangible threat that COVID-19 posed to the United States (Curtis 2020). What these examples

illustrate is the social power that major sporting events and organizations possess in informing a collective understanding of social, or in this case socio-medical, issues.

Why a Critical Criminology of Sport? Crime, Criminal Justice, and Inequality

Our point thus far is that the established fields of sport sociology and critical criminology (and the breadth of theories therein) have not approached the intersections of sport and crime as their analytical foci. Even fewer have interrogated the power structures, discourses, practices, and institutions that contribute to, produce, and reproduce the modalities of harm and inequality that disproportionately affect vulnerable individuals and groups. Although a vast literature treats these subjects outside of the sports-crime nexus, they have yet to widely penetrate scholarly discussions of sport, sporting culture, crime and/or deviance, and the criminal justice system.

But what does critical criminology offer in this context? As we have demonstrated throughout this chapter, it can produce nuanced, rigorous, and innovative epistemological, theoretical, and empirical analyses that uncover and make sense of the robust structures of power and privilege that manifest in sport and sporting cultures. Put differently, it is perhaps the scholarly discipline best suited to interrogate the ways in which sport contributes to structural oppression of individuals and groups. Through its diverse set of theoretical and epistemological approaches, as well as its nimble and dynamic arrangement of empirical entry points, critical criminology can and should take sport seriously as a modality through which crime is at once contextualized, understood, and even produced.

Of course, critical criminology is well suited to analyze and understand the political economy of power that lies at the centre of criminal justice systems throughout much of the world – that is one of its foundational characteristics – but one important question remains unanswered for this book: Why should criminologists care about sport? As we have illustrated here, not only is sport one of the most dominant and popular cultural forms in much of the world today, it is, importantly, also *complicit in* the (re)production of the very narratives, practices, and institutions whose power structures institutionalize criminality and deviance. In other words, sport and sporting culture *influence* how we make sense

of crime and deviance. In many ways, they *mediate* public understanding of the criminal justice system and contribute to interaction with it. Because sport is so important in popular culture and social life more generally, audiences and participants latently learn, create knowledge, and form beliefs about crime and deviance through sport that can then manifest in other areas of daily life. Thus, in our view, it is important – nay vital – for critical criminologists to finally take sport seriously in their analyses of the social.

Overview of Chapters

This book reimagines sport as an important critical criminological field that can help us better understand how discourses and practices of crime and justice produce and reinforce social inequalities. In doing so, it demonstrates how current developments in critical criminology can shed light on the various manifestations of crime and crime control within sporting cultures that both contribute to public understanding of criminal justice and reshape the justice system itself. Featuring sixteen original chapters, it advances criminological theories, methods, and analyses of the role that sport and sporting cultures play in cultural, political, and legal understandings of crime, deviance, and crime control.

The volume is divided into four parts. The first, which consists of three chapters, introduces readers to the field of criminology and sport, outlining some horizons on which a distinctly critical criminology of sport might be developed. In this introduction, Derek Silva and Liam Kennedy provide an overview. Next, [Chapter 1](#) argues for a critical victimology of sports violence, stating not only that few criminologists have acknowledged sport's central role in terms of crime and deviance, but also that traditional criminological approaches miss an opportunity to reconceptualize and thus understand sport-related violence. As it points out, violence and sport are invariably coupled, particularly at the professional level, and criminologists should thus work to illuminate violence in sports as a criminological phenomenon. In [Chapter 2](#), Avi Brisman documents the burgeoning field of green cultural criminology and, more specifically, what green criminologists offer in the context of sport. Outlining how sports are at once part of and complicit in an

advanced capitalist system that contributes to environmental crimes by both corporations and government, Brisman argues that sport has an important role in counteracting the erosion of the earth and the degradation of biodiversity. In [Chapter 3](#), Grace Gallacher proposes an ultra-realist examination to demonstrate how Norbert Elias' figurational sociology can be used to counter mainstream narratives that sport constitutes an ongoing civilizing process whereby societies evolve to be more or less capable of practising self-restraint to adhere to social standards and expectations (Elias and Dunning 1986). Gallacher makes the case that sport is actually a (de)civilizing agent that further ushers us into a hyper-capitalist society where athletes and consumers are coerced to reproduce themselves as commodities to be sold on the market.

[Part 2](#) of the book focuses on critical criminological contributions that meet somewhere within the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, power, and inequality in sport and sporting cultures. In [Chapter 4](#), Dale Spencer explores belt-whipping ceremonies, the rites of passage that remain prevalent in Brazilian jiu jitsu (BJJ) and mixed martial arts culture. Drawing on survey data, Spencer theorizes the role of such rituals in combat sport, arguing that they cannot be seen solely in negative, problematic terms. By understanding the belt-whipping ceremony (and thus other rites of passage) from the perspective of its practitioners, critical criminologists will be better positioned to critique its associated practices, which may be harmful and reinforce masochistic, misogynist, and gendered power relations. In [Chapter 5](#), Stacy Lorenz and Braeden McKenzie explore how Black NHL players are constructed as "outsiders" who exhibit a series of personality and character deficits. Explicating the ideal hockey identity – that of famous player Gordie Howe – against a backdrop of racialized othering of Black players, Lorenz and McKenzie draw attention to what they call "colour-bland racism" as a double standard for white and Black hockey players. In [Chapter 6](#), Bridgette Desjardins offers a much-needed interrogation of cisgender opposition to the participation of trans women athletes in a number of sports, including cycling, volleyball, and tennis. Desjardins examines the construction and prevalence of discourses of these athletes as transgressors, cheaters, bullies, and frauds that reinforce and perpetuate long-standing claims regarding queer criminality.

Part 3 shifts attention to two of the most harmful aspects of contemporary sport and sporting culture: head trauma and athletic violence. In **Chapter 7**, Matt Ventresca and Kathryn Henne present a case study of how a degenerative brain disease, chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), has been implicated in criminal lawsuits involving violence perpetrated by three well-known athletes. Examining media narratives around head trauma, CTE, and violence in sport, the chapter reveals that the “CTE defence” is much more than a legal strategy, but is actually a cultural discourse that shapes ideas about crime and disrupts traditional assumptions about the place of violence in contemporary sport. Similarly, in **Chapter 8**, Deana Simonetto, Stacey Hannem, and Erica Fae Thomson explore the role that sports-related concussions among professional athletes might play in domestic violence. Through an analysis of interviews with athletes and family members, the authors demonstrate that families become targets for verbal and physical violence, and that without robust institutional and social support may become more deeply embedded in this victimization. The authors argue that we cannot frame the abusive behaviour of athletes as a symptom of CTE or other traumatic brain injury, because such a stance ignores the role that sporting violence itself plays in the much larger culture of domestic violence. In **Chapter 9**, Karen Corteen discusses the woeful working conditions provided by the world’s largest wrestling conglomerate – World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) – and suggests that they enable it to perpetuate harmful actions as part of a climate of immunity, impunity, and decriminalization. Corteen views the WWE neglect of worker safety as a form of state-corporate crime that has been facilitated by WWE leaders, sponsors, and advertisers, and even the highest government officials, including President Donald Trump. In **Chapter 10**, Victoria Silverwood recontextualizes violence and harm in a case study of the NHL. She suggests that we move beyond the individual actions of on-ice “offenders,” which obfuscate the NHL complicity in harm, to scrutinize the culture and business of hockey at the structural level. Only then will we fully understand how violence is packaged up as a commercial product that contributes to the myriad of harms associated with the sport.

Part 4 of the book illuminates the practices of governance and regulation in sport, particularly in connection with surveillance and the penal

and post-penal contexts, where ideas about sport and athletic bodies are constructed. In [Chapter 11](#), Vida Bajc builds on previous work to argue that applying a critical criminological approach to the bureaucratic surveillance at the Olympics will expose the Games' complicity in reproducing inequalities. Bajc shows how organizational and managerial elements employ surveillance to create a hierarchical social order that disproportionality targets marginalized individuals and groups who live near Olympic venues. Similarly, in [Chapter 12](#) Jacqueline Kennelly examines the experiences of poor, working-class, racialized youth to illustrate how "security thinking" at the London 2012 Olympics justified the expansion of security and the corresponding erosion of civil liberty as necessary byproducts of hosting the Games. Such practices enabled a decade of incursion on the civil liberties of poor youth in the United Kingdom. The remaining chapters deal with punishment, penalty, and carcerality in sport and sporting culture. In [Chapter 13](#), Mark Norman examines the complex relationship of sport to the carceral, wherein prisons and other places of incarceration are often sites of diverse physical cultures and widespread engagement in sport. For Norman, sport is not only increasingly deployed as a tool of surveillance and social control that disproportionately affects racialized and marginalized groups, so too has it been embedded in similar ways in the carceral context. In [Chapter 14](#), Rosie Meek explores prison-based sporting initiatives in the United Kingdom and finds that criminal justice scholars and practitioners have been too fixated on the efficacy of such initiatives at the expense of the incarcerated. Suggesting that the emphasis should be on building opportunities for participation in sport for the sake of prisoners, rather than on preventing recidivism, Meek contributes to a broad discussion that places the subject of carcerality at the fore. Finally, in [Chapter 15](#), Jamie Crowther, Deborah Jump, and Hannah Smithson illuminate some of the potentialities of sport for youth justice in the future. Detailing a two-year project involving rugby, they highlight the dubiousness of the evidence that suggests sporting programs have significant impacts on youths interacting with the criminal justice system. They urge researchers and practitioners to shift from questions of efficacy toward equity, humanity, and social justice for those involved. Arguing that critical criminology at once can fundamentally acknowledge the role that

sport can play in the lives of youths entrenched in the criminal justice system, the authors maintain that researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers must first recognize the people who are most affected by sport programming. Finally, in the postscript, as a scholar who offered one of the “first pitch” attempts to develop a critical criminology of sport, Nic Groombridge provides a post-game analysis of this volume and what it means for the further development of the discipline as a whole.

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