Issues associated with sport violence have been unevenly examined within the fields of sociology and criminology, including within the sociology of sport. Fan violence, especially hooliganism, has been examined frequently, while other issues, such as violence against animals, have been largely ignored. In *Sport, Violence and Society*, Kevin Young (2012) seeks to broaden the scope of what we understand as sport-related violence, while also examining the “sociological threads” (p. x) connecting various types of sport-related violence. The aim of this book “is to reconsider how best to define, think about and make sense of sport-related violence” (p. xii).

Young’s work here builds upon a career of examining sport-related violence (SRV) in the widest sense. In the mid-1980s, Young examined the way the media reported the violence associated with the 1985 Heysel Stadium Riot (Young, 1986). Later, he assessed the feasibility of using victimology and cultural studies to explain male professional athletes as victims of violence within their workplaces (Young, 1991). More recently, Young and Michael Atkinson (2005) examined greyhound racing from a figurationalist perspective, arguing that there is value in understanding this often-violent activity from a sociological perspective, as it has links to other forms of abuse. In 2012, Atkinson and Young published a piece that examined media reports about the potential for terrorist attacks on mega-sports events in the post-September 11th context. Drawing on Baudrillard’s concept of the “non-event”, they argued that sensationalist reporting of threats to public safety at sporting events act as “a powerful tool of social control” (p. 303). In his earlier work, Young called for a broad examination of sport-related violence, arguing that we will only be able to understand it “when the socially, culturally and historically embedded character of sport is closely scrutinized” (Young, 1991, cited in Atkinson & Young, 2005). Not surprisingly, *Sport, Violence and Society* reflects this position, showing the breadth, interconnectedness and imbedded nature of violence in sport. Young states:

The time…seems right for an examination of violence in sport that does not represent an isolated snapshot of any single component of sports-related aggression, violence or victimization, but is, rather, sensitive to the fact that ostensibly unlinked and apparently disparate behaviors share sociological things in common. (Young, 2012, p. xii)

Throughout the book, Young does show that all manner of sports-related violence share some sociological commonalities; the most significant of these is that many people, including fans, athletes, coaches, media representatives, are generally complicit with these various forms of violence.
Young opens by providing us with both a historical overview and a critique of the ways that violence has been examined academically. He starts his examination by looking at biological and psychological approaches like instinct theory, frustration-aggression hypothesis, hostile and instrumental aggression, catharsis, and reversal theory. Young carefully pulls apart these theoretical positions, rejecting them for their lack of sociological perspective, their reductionist tendencies, the simplicity of their examinations of complex human actions, and their lack of predictability or empirical validity. Young then catalogues sociological approaches to violence: social learning theory, the techniques of neutralization approach, violent subcultures, figurational sociology, victimology, and the sport ethics perspective. As he does in his examination of the biological and psychological approaches, he offers critiques of the sociological approaches, but here the critiques include discussion of the ways in which Young finds the sociological perspectives useful. His analysis here is not novel, but it helps to lay the groundwork for his own understanding of sport-related violence, which he defines as:

1) direct acts of physical violence contained within or outside the rules of the game that result in injury to persons, animals or property; and 2) harmful or potentially harmful acts conducted in the context of sport that threaten or produce injury or that violate human justices and civil liberties. (p. 15)

After examining the treatment of sport-related violence in the literature and explaining his own approach, Young summarizes and analyzes different forms of sport-related violence. He begins by looking at the type of violence that has been examined most frequently by sport sociologists: athlete and crowd violence. After a brief analysis of the sociological perspectives on athlete violence, Young focuses on the rise in litigation related to athletes’ involvement in on-field violence, problematizing notions of consent that are often used to defend athlete violence when it takes place on the playing surface. Young finds that although there are more cases involving athlete violence brought to court each year,

the authorities remain uncertain as to how to act and how to act consistently, as may be witnessed in the apparent dissonance between the number of cases in which charges are laid and the still relatively lenient way such cases are treated when they finally ‘get to court’. (p. 41)

Young then turns his attention to crowd violence. Making clear that this kind of violence is not homogenous, he discusses manifestations ranging from stadium violence in British soccer to crowd riots and “missile-throwing” in North America. Noting that there has been an abundance of literature produced on hooliganism in Europe, Young argues that fan violence globally has been under-examined.

Next, Young “considers the scope of SRV in a much wider focus” (p. 70). He lists 18 different “formations of sport-related violence” (p. 71): 1) player violence; 2) crowd violence; 3) individualized fan-player violence; 4) player violence away from the game; 5) street crimes; 6) violence against the self; 7) athlete initiation/hazing; 8) harassment, stalking and threat; 9) sexual assault; 10) partner abuse/domestic violence; 11) offences by coaches/administrators/medical staff; 12) parental abuse; 13) sexism/racism; 14) other identity violence; 15) animal abuse; 16) political violence/terrorism; 17) offences against workers and the public; 18)
offences against the environment (p. 71). Young considers these formations in turn, providing examples for each. He argues that they are not the only aspects of sport-related violence that sociologists might study, nor should they be thought of as static or singular. He also emphasizes, rightly, how various forms of violence in and around sport are related to each other, demonstrating that many incidents of sport-related violence cross over several of the 18 categories listed above. It is here that we begin to see Young’s main argument in this text. Specifically,

the cells [categories] demonstrate one critical feature in common: they all unite violent, harmful or victimizing practices through sport—this is to say, sport (rather than, for instance, other social institutions such as the workplace, the family, the church or education etc.) is the context of, and common denominator for, these activities. (p. 95)

Chapter 7 provides a good example of the kind of argument that Young is making throughout the book. Here Young explores an example of the relationship between sport-related violence and social control, presenting a case study on the Canadian media (both print and television) and their representations of the National Hockey League (NHL) and Canadian Football League (CFL). Young demonstrates that most people’s experiences with sport-related violence are “mediated” (p. 137) through the press. He shows that media outlets oftentimes uncritically celebrate or downplay violence in sport. Slow motion replays, humorous language about violence, and editing choices (i.e., frequently reproducing images of hockey fights as opposed to other images, such as goal scoring), allow the media to support, legitimate, and justify various sorts of sports violence, including aggressive and injurious play on the field.

In the final chapter of this text, Young examines the ways “SRV is stratified” (p. 161). Although he mentions a variety of socially-structured categories here, including, “religion, age and social class” (p. 161), Young chooses to use gender as the prime example to explore this process. Without a doubt, issues of gender, and masculinity in particular, are important when attempting to understand the ways that sport-related violence operates. While Young mentions the relationship between sport-related violence and different expressions of masculinity in earlier chapters of this book, this chapter is the first in which he explores this relationship in detail. Importantly, Young does not ignore the various ways that women contribute to sport-related violence; he also acknowledges that different groups of men contribute to it differently.

The way that Young frames sport-related violence—especially his use of the 18-point list—raises some important questions. Although he is careful to state that this list is not conclusive, I would argue that the very act of providing a list at all renders some issues visible, while obscuring others. It also prompts the reader to think about sport-related violence in relatively fixed ways. For instance, by not naming the types of violence that are directed against people’s identities—class-based violence, ableism, ageism, homophobia, and even patriarchy—Young runs the risk of minimizing some of the most pernicious structural forms of violence that operate within the context of sport. Furthermore, although Young references the abundant literature on these issues, notably works produced by feminist scholars (see below), it is unclear, particularly in his work on sport, violence and masculinity,
what is novel about his perspective. Thinkers such as Michael Messner (1992), Nancy Theberge (1989), and Raewyn Connell (1995) (each of whom are referenced in the text) have made complex connections between the institution of sport, gender and various forms of sport-related violence.

Young’s description of “political violence/terrorism” also overlooks various expressions of violence that have been key elements of sporting cultures in the modern era. In this category, Young includes the crackdown of the Mexican army against students at the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games, the fascist spectacles at 1936 Nazi Games in Berlin, the bombing at the 1996 Atlanta Games, and the arming of sports events, including the Olympics, FIFA World Cup and Commonwealth Games, in the post-September 11th era. What Young fails to mention are the ways that organized sport has been used, and continues to be used as a tool of colonialism, particularly as a means of control and assimilation against indigenous communities. It is important to recognize that, historically, these acts have been met with various forms of resistance, and furthermore, that some of these acts of resistance have included things Young identifies as sport-related violence. In this regard, the recent Vancouver Olympic Games provides an example of the ways colonialism works through organized sport. The games were “hosted on unceded and non-surrendered indigenous lands” (O’Bonsawin, 2010, p. 148), while organizations such as No Olympics on Stolen Native Land and the Olympic Resistance Network and other activists staged direct action including protest rallies, efforts to block the passage of the Olympic torch, public acts of vandalism and conflict with the police, in the months leading up to and during the Games.

*Sport, Violence and Society* covers a broad research area; there are benefits and drawbacks to this. Young’s work offers us a rich and detailed analysis of the literature on sport and violence. Covering a vast amount of empirical data, providing detailed examples and analysis of numerous theoretical approaches, Young encourages sport sociologists (and others) to understand seemingly disconnected actions as inter-related through acts of violence. For example, according to Young there is a relationship between such seemingly disparate acts such as environmental degradation, animal abuse and violence against one’s own body, when these actions happen within the context of sport. For Young, it is important that we recognize the various and multiple ways that those involved in sport are complicit with the multiple forms of violence found therein. Young also provides an impressive analysis of the media’s role in producing, as well as perpetuating, sport-related violence, particularly within the Canadian context. Importantly, this text offers its readers a guide to the ways that sport-related violence has been studied—highlighting research deficiencies in the field. In this regard, as Young suggests, his work here will be a valuable resource in the undergraduate classroom; it is an important starting point for those who are beginning to think about sport and violence generally. I would argue that it also reminds more established scholars of areas of research that are in need of further attention.

**References**


