



Why Would Anyone Do That?: Lifestyle Sport in the Twenty-First Century (Critical Issues in Sport and Society)

Stephen C. Poulson

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Triathlons, such as the famously arduous Ironman Triathlon, and “extreme” mountain biking—hair-raising events held over exceedingly dangerous terrain—are prime examples of the new “lifestyle sports” that have grown in recent years from oddball pursuits, practiced by a handful of characters, into multi-million-dollar industries. In *Why Would Anyone Do That?* sociologist Stephen C. Poulson offers a fascinating exploration of these new and physically demanding sports, shedding light on why some people find them so compelling.

Drawing on interviews with lifestyle sport competitors, on his own experience as a participant, on advertising for lifestyle sport equipment, and on editorial content of adventure sport magazines, Poulson addresses a wide range of issues. He notes that these sports are often described as “authentic” challenges which help keep athletes sane given the demands they confront in their day-to-day lives. But is it really beneficial to “work” so hard at “play?” Is the discipline required to do these sports really an expression of freedom, or do these sports actually impose extraordinary degrees of conformity upon these athletes? *Why Would Anyone Do That?* grapples with these questions, and more generally with whether lifestyle sport should always be considered “good” for people.

Poulson also looks at what happens when a sport becomes a commodity—even a sport that may have begun as a reaction against corporate and professional sport—arguing that commodification inevitably plays a role in determining who plays, and also how and why the sport is played. It can even help provide the meaning that athletes assign to their participation in the sport. Finally, the book explores the intersections of race, class, and gender with respect to participation in lifestyle and endurance sports, noting in particular that there is a near complete absence of people of color in most of these contests. In addition, Poulson examines how concepts of masculinity in triathlons have changed as women’s roles in this sport increase.

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