Lecture 2: What is the sociology of sport?

- Some methodological issues, not specific to sports
  
  ▶ Definitions – conceptual and operational definitions.
  - conceptual definition, i.e., a shared understanding of the meaning of a word, especially an abstract idea
  - operational definition, i.e. an explicit measurement of the term that allows you to distinguish examples of the concept from non-examples
  - EXAMPLE: What is the most popular sport in the U.S.? Discussion.

  ▶ Quality of research
Theoretical approaches to the sociology of sport

 Definitions:
 - hypothesis
 - middle-range theory
 - paradigm

 "There is nothing so practical as a good theory". Why? Discussion.

 Two major paradigms in sociology: Functionalism and conflict theory
 - Functionalism – associated with Parsons
 - Conflict theory – Marx is the originator
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- **Functionalism**
  - General characterization: functionalism is a conservative theory that supports the status quo
  - Four things a social system needs to operate efficiently
    - 1. methods for teaching people in the system the basic values and rules they are supposed to live by
    - 2. social mechanisms for bringing people together
    - 3. methods for teaching people in the system appropriate goals and means to reach them
    - 4. mechanisms for handling social and environmental changes occurring outside the system
  - Example of research done in this paradigm
  - Problems with the paradigm
    - exaggerated statements about the positive effects of sports
    - tendency to overlook the possibility that sports may benefit some groups more than others
    - ignoring that sports are socially constructed, and that those in power do the constructing
  - Summary
Conflict theory

General characterization
- Society is an ever-changing set of relationships with inherent differences of economic interests. Conflict is endemic.
- Social order results from some groups – the rich and powerful using their power to maintain their advantage – sometimes by force but more often by control of the media, schools, and other institutions.
- To understand society one must understand political economy – how money and power are intertwined.
- Sports, like other aspects of society, are determined or shaped by the structure of the economic system in society.

Examples of topics studied in sports with a conflict theory perspective
- how athletes become alienated from their own bodies
- how sports can be "an opiate of the masses"
- sports and commercialism
- sports and militarism/nationalism
- Sports’ contribution to racism and sexism
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- The "sociology of" in general
  - Social structure refers to the organization of people within a web of social relationships – how people are linked to each other and how institutions are linked.
  - Social process refers to the repetitive and recurring interactional patterns characterizing individual and group transactions.
  - Culture means "the ways of life created by people in a particular society" in relationship to meanings of objects, relationships, and events, the organization of relationships, and the methods for satisfaction of needs.

- Why study sport? Isn't sport trivial? Non-serious?
  - Sport is a central part of people's lives, and appears to be increasingly so.
  - Sport is connected to major social institutions.
  - Sports influence culture
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- Critique of conflict theory
  - heavy emphasis on economic factors, ignoring other divisions as possible bases for inequality
  - "...no room for seeing people as anything but passive objects who are duped into meeting the 'needs' of capital"

- Summary
  - Basically, as your text says, sport from the functional perspective is good because it maintains the status quo and social order.
  - Conflict theories agree on the facts – sports do that – but not the evaluation. They see the exploitation of the powerless by the powerful.

- Other relevant theories
  - Critical theory (including feminist theory)
  - Symbolic interaction
Prehistoric sports

Sports in ancient urban civilizations
  ▶ Middle Eastern and Western
    – Sumeria (3rd-4th millennium B.C. or 5-6,000 years ago)
      – Why then?
      – What sports?
    – Egypt, from about 3,000 B.C.
    – Basic themes from these early urban states
  
  ▶ Eastern
    – China – little until Chou (1100-800 B.C.)
    – India
Lecture 2: The History of sport

- Mediterranean civilizations
  - Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations (1300-800 B.C.) from Homer's Odyssey
  - Early Greek and Trojan civilizations – evidence from the Iliad
    - Codes of conduct
    - Involvement of religion
  - Greek city states
    - Training and pay
    - Relationship to power and prestige
    - Mechanisms for insuring fairness
    - Women
    - Professionalization
  - Ancient Rome

- Meso-America – as early as 1500 B.C.,
Lecture 2: The History of sport

- What do we discover from looking at ancient urban civilizations?
  - Sport is:
    - 1. Connected to national (city/state) pride
    - 2. Related to war and militarism – athletes were often warriors
    - 3. Connected to religion; patronage from gods, sacrifices
    - 4. Sexist/classist in origins – wealthy males participated; women as prizes; women athletes disparaged
    - 5. Can be democratized when professionalized, but still controlled by those with money and power
    - 6. Has long been concerned with protecting fair play and sportsmanship; suggest a strong urge to cheat

- Sports in the middle ages and Renaissance, 500-1300 A.D.
  - division of sports by social class
  - VIDEO: History of tennis

- Renaissance → Enlightenment (1300-1800)
Lecture 2: The History of sport

- Industrial Revolution and post-industrial society (1800 → present)
  - What does your text say? Discussion

- Changes in the characteristics of sports across history
  - Secularization
  - Equality
  - Specialization
  - Rationalization
  - Bureaucratization
  - Quantification
  - Records