

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

Lecture 2: What is the sociology of sport?

- 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

Lecture 2: What is the sociology of sport?

■ 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

Lecture 2: What is the sociology of sport?

■ 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

Lecture 2: What is the sociology of sport?

- 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

Lecture 2: What is the sociology of sport?

- ▶ 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

Lecture 2: The History of sport

- 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