

# Lecture 2: What is the sociology of sport?

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- 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

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- 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

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## ■ 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

# Lecture 2: The History of sport

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- 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

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- 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.,



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- 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)

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- 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