



**Category: sport and socialization**



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## **SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT**

**Mrs. CH. ANITHA**

Lecturer in English, A.C. College, Guntur

Sport is a central part of peoples' lives, and appears to be increasingly so. It is connected to major social institutions and influence culture.

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 international 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.

Sociology of sport, alternately referred to as sports sociology, is a sub-discipline of sociology which focuses on sports as social phenomena. It is an area of study concerned with various socio-cultural structures, patterns, and organizations or groups involved with sport.

There are many perspectives through which sport can be viewed. Therefore, very often some binary divisions are stressed, such as: professional vs. amateur, mass vs. top-level, active vs. passive/spectator, men vs. women, sports vs. play (as an antithesis to organized and institutionalized activity). Following feminist or other reflexive and tradition-breaking paradigms sports are sometimes studied as contested activities, i.e. as activities in the centre of various people/groups interests.

The emergence of the sociology of sport dates from the end of the 19th century, when first social psychological experiments dealing with group effects of competition and pace-making took place. In 1970 sports sociology gained significant attention as an organized, legitimate field of study. The North American Society for the Sociology of Sport was formed in 1978 with the objective of studying the field. Its research outlet, the Sociology of Sport Journal, was formed in 1984.

Today, most sports sociologist identify with at least one of four essential theories that define the relationship between sports and society, namely structural functionalism, conflict theory, critical theory, and symbolic interactionism.

Sports sociology, is the studying of the relationship between sports and society. It examines how culture and values influence sports, how sports influences culture and values, and the relationship between sports and media, politics, economics, religion, race, gender, youth, etc. It also looks at the relationship between sports and social inequality and social mobility.

### **Sports and Gender**

A large area of study within the sociology of sports is gender, including gender inequality and the role that gender has played in sports throughout history. For example, in the 1800's, participation of women in sports was discouraged or banned and it was not until 1850 that physical education for women was introduced at colleges. Even though the 1930s, basketball, track and field, and softball were considered too masculine for proper women. The past several decades have seen tremendous change in this area and now women's participation in sports is approaching men's, though differences are still present.



## **Sports and Media**

Another area studied under the sociology of sports is the media. For example, sports viewership varies by gender. Men's sports that are typically viewed live or on television include basketball, football, hockey, baseball, pro wrestling, and boxing while the women's sports that are covered include gymnastics, figure skating, skiing, and diving. Men's sports are also covered often than women's sports both in print and on television.

## **Sports and Gender Identity**

Gender identity is another topic that is often examined under the sociology of sports. Sport reinforces gender-specific roles beginning at a young age. In T-ball for instance, girls are treated more harshly and ridiculed by boys and coaches. Further, male coaches do more coaching while female coaches perform more organizational duties. Also, participation in "masculine" sports creates gender identity conflict for females while participation in "feminine" sports creates gender identity conflict for males.

Sociology is the scientific study of human interaction. Human interaction can be divided into work, family and leisure activity. A small portion of the population directly participate in sport in highly industrialized societies and many people are interested in the activities related to sport.

A formal sociological definition of sport is physical activity which is fair competitive, non-deviant and is guided by rules, organization and tradition.

Sport is very important to society. Sports are deeply embedded in the culture and institutions. Sports stars are perceived as role models for young people in the society. Sport at the professional and college levels are major economic vehicles for cities.

Educational institutions and sport are unrelentingly intertwined. Sports teams can gain national recognition for an institution like no other aspect of education.

Sports has an intense relationship significant sociological elements including education, leisure, social stratification, social mobility race and gender issues.

## **Examples of significance of sports in society**

Media spends a great deal of its resources on sports. Major newspapers dedicate at least a quarter of its pages to sport. The sports columnist and reporter staff are as large as the news staffs to many major newspapers. Television and radio sports commentators achieve a high level of notoriety beyond the sports world such as ESPN, ESPN2 the Golf channel and Sports channel are cable television networks dedicated to sports programming. Business spends a great deal of money on sports. Many companies sponsor local professional and college sports teams.

Public schools use sports to socialize students and demonstrate the significance of the schools to the community with a winning team the students have an issue around which they can find a common bond.

## **Sport and Sociological Paradigm. Structural functional approach**

The culture is created and reinforced through the participating in sport in the following ways. The manifest functions of sport in a society are represented by physical fitness and the socialization of individuals to the value of hardwork, teamwork and competition. Latent functions include character development from participation in sport and an emotional release from the physical activity. Sport provides the motivation to be physically fit.

Sport is valued in as a method of building characters developing strong minds and bodies teaching teamwork and self-discipline which are highly valued in American Society.

Functional theorists also recognize dysfunctional consequences as well. The "win at all cost" strategies which some teams use has been generally condemned by the general public. The recruitment of athletes based on athletic ability rather than academic ability, falsify grades, majoring in eligibility, demanding



athletes participate in unauthorized practices leaving them little time for their studies and under the table payments are dysfunctional consequences of sport.

## **Social Conflict Analysis**

The social conflict view sees sport as a reflection of the inequalities in society and that it masks the true nature of the human condition. Sport serves as the 'Opium of masses'. Sport is seen as a social institution which the more powerful oppress, manipulate, coerce and exploit the less powerful.

## **Symbolic Interaction Paradigm**

The motivation to play sport varies for each individual. Persons are socialized to play particular sports which they believe reflect their status. Women do not play 'rough' sports such as football and boxing. Bowling, Billiards and softball are expressive outlets for the lower class while Polo, Cricket and Snow Skiing are upper class sport activities. Further run like a girl, throw like a girl, or swing like a girl serve as social controls for male behaviour in sport.

Wearing a special T-shirt, sweat shirt, hat and jacket in the exact team colours, logo and name are significant when attending a sports contest. A person can vicariously feel as if they are a part of the team while wearing their symbolic uniform. This behaviour shows a person's support for their team. Sport has also been symbolic of war between communities which brings group cohesion. Being a fan of the team representing the community reflects public support for the community as a whole. Non supporters are shunned and ridiculed.

## **The value of multiple paradigms**

Each paradigm provides an understanding and has shortcomings in the sociological analysis of sport. The functional approach focuses on the positive elements of sport in relation to the society as a whole but fails to acknowledge the conflict of interests among different segments.

The conflict approach is helpful determining the appropriate place for sport in society but ignores the personal satisfaction people gain from their participation in sport.

Finally the symbolic interactionist approach demonstrates how sport is experience but lacks an explanation of how and why sport functions for society as a whole.

## **Status and Role Conflict for Student Athletes**

The following are some of the observations demonstrate the status conflicts experienced by athletes:

1. Professors and other student perceptions are that athletes are not serious students.
2. Coaches expect disobedience to authority, suppress individual thinking for collective thinking.
3. Physical punishment for not following directors.
4. Minority athletes face the generalization that they are poorly prepared for college and are economically poor etc.

## **Racism in Sports**

Since Race is socially defined and controlled it is impossible to determine what biological characteristics are common among any one racial group. The physical variance within a racial category is as varied as between racial categories.

Physiological differences do not explain distribution of minorities in athletics compared to the general population. Social economic factors which influence the athlete selection process. Subjective Vs. Objective measures and social power / value are better explanations of racial dominance in sport. Minority athletes have been socialized to see the financial advantage of possible professional athletic careers via media coverage and encouragement in school. Other prestige career options are not encourage for these students by society. Colleges invest in seeking out the best minority athletes with little competition from other fields.

A quota system has been the method of limiting minority athletes participation in sports.