CHAPTER 1

FOUNDATIONS OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY[1]

George B. Cunningham and Jon Welty Peachey

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:
1. Define sport, physical activity, and sociology.
2. Differentiate between sociology and other related disciplines.
3. Identify the ways in which sport is a microcosm of society.

INTRODUCTION

Sport and physical activity are deeply embedded in American society. People routinely engage in these activities, either as participants, by talking about them with friends and family, or by watching them as spectators. Sport's cultural significance in the US is perhaps best illustrated by examining people's behaviors during mega-events, like the Super Bowl. According to Jamie Ballard (2019), over half of Americans watch the contest, and one-in-seven attend parties related to the event. Many people skip work the following day, likely as a form of recovery from the previous night's activities.

As this example illustrates, sport and physical activity represent some of the most pervasive cultural phenomena in North America, and they represent the focus of this book. Specifically, we adopt a sociological focus to critically examine the role of sport and physical activity in society and the role they play in people's lives. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a foundation of that discussion. In doing so, we define key constructs, outline the utility of adopting a sociological lens to study sport and physical activity, and close by discussing the ways in which sport and physical activity represent a microcosm of society.

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Sport and Physical Activity

People oftentimes have their own implicit definition of sport. By this, we mean that though they might not have formal classification schemes in place, they have a general understanding of what activities they consider sport. After all, sport represents a prominent institution, and people engage in, read about, discuss, or view it on a nearly daily basis.

Despite this general understanding, few people have a formal definition of sport. Because of this, disagreements often emerge concerning what is a sport and what is not. For instance, while most people consider soccer a sport, the water becomes murkier when considering other activities, like horseracing, racecar driving, or professional wrestling. In a recent exchange in an academic journal, scholars offered perspectives on whether e-sport was a sport (Cunningham et al., 2018; Funk et al., 2018; Hallmann & Giel, 2018; Heere, 2018). To add to the equivocality, television channels devoted to sports news and programming, like ESPN, will televise events that few might consider sport, like Spelling Bee competitions.

So, in what process does one engage to demarcate some of these activities as sport, but others as something else? For that matter, if soccer is considered a sport, is this true across all contexts? Certainly, one would consider elite soccer competitions, such as those that occur at the FIFA World Cup, as sport, but what about 5-year-olds kicking the soccer ball in their back yard?

Questions such as these have prompted scholars to develop formal definitions of sport. According to these authors:

- Sport is "an institutionalized competitive activity involving two or more opponents and stressing physical exertion by serious competitors who represent or are part of formally organized associations" (Nixon, 1984, p. 13).
- Sport is "a competitive activity involving at least two competitors, requiring physical skill, following formal rules, and occurring within a formal organizational framework" (LeUnes, 2008, p. 5).
- Sports represent "physical activities that involve challenges or competitive contest" (Coakley, 2015, p. 6).

We can draw several points from these definitions. First, sport is physical in nature. It involves physical exertion and participants demonstrating physical skill. This requirement rules out some activities that might be observed on sport-focused television programming, such as playing chess or competing in a spelling bee. Second, sport involves at least two people. Thus, a woman who runs 6 miles each morning before starting her day is not engaging in sport because she is not competing against others. Third, and related to the previous point, sport involves competition. This element not only excludes the woman who starts each day with a morning run, but it also excludes non-competitive forms of physical activity, such as professional wrestling. Fourth, sport is bound by formal rules of competition. The types and universality of rules might vary, ranging from guidelines set by international governing bodies to those set by a local parks and recreation department for their leagues. In either case, the rules and policies shape the nature of participation and provide boundaries for appropriate behaviors. This means that persons competing in the adult kickball league sponsored by the Austin Recreation Center are engaging in sport, while children causally kicking a ball to one another in their front yard are not.

In addition to considering the definition of sport, it is also instructive to examine other forms of movement. Consider the following:

- Physical activity refers to "any body movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure" (World Health Organization, n.d.)
- Exercise represents "a form of leisure physical activity (as opposed to occupational or household physical activity) that is undertaken in order to achieve a particular objective (e.g., improved appearance, improved cardiovascular fitness, reduced stress, fun)" (Lox et al., 2010, p. 4).

Inclusion of these terms allows for a broader investigation of how people are physically active and how doing so impacts their lives. That is, rather than limiting the examination to formal, competitive physical activities involving two or more people (i.e., focusing exclusively on sport), considering physical activity and exercise allows for examination into a variety of ways in which people are active. This includes teenagers playing a game of pick-up basketball, a girl swimming laps in the evenings, or an older adult who participates in Pilates three times a week. All of these represent certain forms of physical activity and warrant sociological analysis. As such, the chapters in this book evaluate the influence of both sport and physical activity in society.

Prevalence of Sport and Physical Activity
Sport is one of the most popular institutions in American society. As one illustrative example, consider the media attention devoted to major sport events, like the Super Bowl, Olympics, and World Cup, among others. According to the Nielson Company, an organization that tracks how many Americans watch different televisions shows, seven of the 10 most-watched television programs in 2018 were sports related. The prevalence of televised sport is seen elsewhere, too: multiple television stations are solely devoted to covering sports, and the major broadcast stations in the US (ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC) all dedicate much of their weekend programming to sports.

But television represents just one element of sports' media reach. Thousands of Internet websites focus exclusively on an array of sport and physical activity topics, including official team information, player profiles, education (e.g., swimming techniques, coaching strategies), college recruiting, and fantasy sports, to name but a few. As a testament to the popularity of these sites, there were over 59 million fantasy football users in 2017, and the industry generated over $7 billion (Rodriguez, 2017). Finally, large portions of print media are committed to sport and physical activity. As one well-known example, the *USA Today*, which has the largest circulation in America, reserves a quarter of the news coverage to sport and physical activity.

Not only is the media coverage substantial, but so too is the amount spent on sport and physical activity. Plunkett Research (n.d.) estimated the US sport industry to be $519 billion in 2017. The figure grows to $1.3 trillion when considering the sport industry worldwide. As if this statistic was not impressive enough, Plunkett also offers data about the growth of sports. Since 2007, the size of the industry has grown 32 percent (see Exhibit 1.1). Most of the economic activity comes from physical activity and exercise endeavors, or what Chelladurai (2014) refers to as participant sport. The latter point further illustrates the importance of considering the influence of both sport and physical activity in society.

Exhibit 1.1. Size of US Sport Industry, 2007-2017
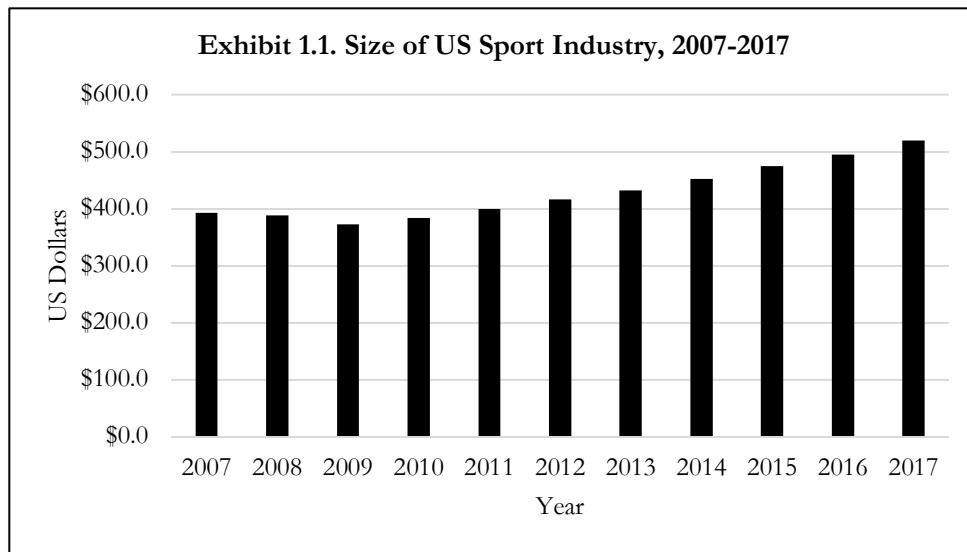
Sociology

The focus of this book is to examine sport and physical activity from a sociological perspective, and therefore it is important to define "sociology." Available definitions include:

- Sociology "is the systematic study of social behavior interpersonally, in groups, and in organizations" (Sage & Eitzen, 2013, p. 4).
- Sociology "is the study of social worlds that people create, organize, maintain, and change through their relationships with one another" (Coakley, 2015, p. 4).
- Sociology "is the analysis of the structure of social relationships as constituted by social interaction" (Abercrombie et al., 2000, p. 333).

Several themes appear in these definitions. First, sociology is an academic discipline aimed at scientifically studying phenomena. Second, sociologists examine people and the institutions these people create. By institutions, we are referring to the practices that are continually repeated, that are shaped by prevailing norms, values, and standards, and that have special meaning to those in a particular context. Finally, and

related to the previous point, researchers adopting a sociological lens primarily study social issues and the manner in which people engage and interact with one another.

Sociology is distinct from other, related scientific disciplines, such as biology and psychology. Biologists frequently focus on people and their behaviors but do so by examining factors internal to the individual, such as their genetics or physiological makeup. Psychologists, on the other hand, also examine people, their attitudes, and behaviors, but do so by focusing on mental processes and how these influence people's attitudes, values, and actions.

To better understand the nature of these differences, let us consider how biologists, psychologists, and sociologists might study a common topic in sport: sexual orientation. The biologist might examine this topic by considering how genetic and physiological factors are associated with one's sexual orientation. For instance, Hamer et al. (1993) observed that DNA markers on the X chromosome genetically influenced men's sexual orientation. Psychologists might approach the topic by focusing on people's attitudes and different mental processes. For instance, some researchers have argued that conceptualizing sexual orientation as only reflective of one's sexual partners is overly limited and does not consider other, meaningful factors. Instead, they suggest that one's sexual orientation is multidimensional, consisting of behaviors, attractions, fantasies, and self-image (Savin-Williams, 2016). Finally, unlike biological and psychological examinations of sexual orientation, with a focus on factors internal to the individual, a sociological approach would draw attention to cultural, environmental, and societal factors. For instance, Sartore and Cunningham (2010) observed how an organization's culture, policies, history, and leadership all served to stigmatize lesbians and heterosexual women presumed to be lesbian.

To better understand the nature of sociology, consider the three basic assumptions that undergird sociologists' outlook toward the world (Sage, Eitzen, & Beal, 2018). First, sociologists view people as social beings by their very nature. Consider that children enter the world completely dependent upon others for their survival and that throughout time, people have routinely found it more advantageous to cooperate with one another in order to provide basic functions, such as defense, food, and shelter. Second, sociologists maintain that people are largely socially determined, as they are products of their social environment. Various socialization agents, including friends, family, the church, and the media, among others, shape people's attitudes and their behaviors. Third, sociologists suggest that people create, shape, and challenge the social contexts in which they are situated. That is, social groups of all types, such as families, corporations, and societies, are formed by their members. As the group members interact with one another, they continually sustain and, through human agency, change their social environments.

Sociology of Sport and Physical Activity

Given this background, we can define the *sociology of sport and physical activity* as a subsection of sociology that studies sport and physical activity as social phenomena. Research in the sociology of sport and physical activity seeks to answer a number of questions, including:

- Why are some sports valued and promoted, while others are not? How does this vary by society?
- What are some of the ethical issues associated with sport and physical activity? How do these issues impact subsequent participation opportunities?
- What is the economic significance of sport and physical activity, and how does sport serve to reinforce classism?
- How do the media shape people's perceptions of sport and physical activity?
- How do sport and sport participants affect the environment, and what can they do to lessen any negative impact?
- What is the influence of being physically active on people's development, health, and well-being?
- How does sport and physical activity impact one's notion of masculinity and femininity, sexual orientation, class, race, religion, and politics?

These questions, and others like them, are more easily addressed by considering sport and physical activity as social constructions, or "parts of the social world that are created by people as they interact with one another under particular social, political, and economic conditions" (Coakley, 2015, p. 8). By adopting such a lens, one comes to see that participants, spectators, coaches, administrators, and all other persons involved collectively shape notions of sport and physical activity. How people think about sport and physical activity is not static; instead, these notions are created and recreated within a particular cultural milieu and, thus, intersect with other portions of society.

In short, studying sport and physical activity from a sociological perspective requires people to thoughtfully and critically analyze these social phenomena. It means moving beyond simply analyzing box scores or win-loss records to consider how sport, as a social construction, shapes people's lives and influences their well-being. It also means identifying prevalent issues within sport and physical activity and considering the controversies embedded in this context. In doing so, people can be better informed about the impact of sport and physical activity on society.

Adopting such a lens, while fruitful, is not always comfortable. Sport and physical activity are highly valued in society, and in many ways, represent microcosms of society—a point we highlight in the following section. People are also strongly attached to sport, and this means that they might see the articulation of sport's faults or shortcomings as a personal affront.

As an illustrative example, there is considerable evidence that, relative to boys and men, girls and women are under-represented in sport, receive fewer resources for their athletic endeavors, and are trivialized in the media, with an emphasis on their physical appearance rather than their athletic talents (for an overview, see Cunningham, 2019). These patterns suggest that structural changes are needed: not only should girls and women receive more resources and participation opportunities, but perhaps more importantly, people's beliefs about who should and should not participate in sport and physical activity require alteration. This position, while embraced by some, is frequently dismissed by men. After all, sport was created by men, for men, and men have historically had the most power and privilege in this context. Thus, it is hardly surprising that men will oftentimes point to alternative explanations (e.g., women have little interest in sport and physical activity) to justify the current structure and distribution of resources.

As the previous example illustrates, adopting a sociological perspective can spur controversies and debate. But while sometimes making people feel uneasy, these discussions are fruitful, as they bring to light the social implications of sport and physical activity and how these activities influence participants and spectators. In the following section, we continue this dialogue by considering the ways in which sport and physical activity serve as a microcosm of society.

SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AS A MICROCOSM OF SOCIETY
As we previously mentioned, sport is a microcosm of society. By this, we mean that sport is a window into, or a mirror which reflects the underlying values, beliefs and assumptions of a cultural group. Sport shows us what we as a society are committed to, and what our motivations are (Fahey, 2008). As an institution, sport provides a convenient laboratory, in many ways, for researchers to examine societal values, socialization, bureaucracy and other structures and processes that exist at the societal level. Whether examining the attitudes and behavior of professional sport fans, or the behavior of parents at youth soccer league matches, the types of sports, the way in which they are organized, who participates and who is excluded, all offer clues about the nature of society (Eitzen & Sage, 2009).

Sport and Societal Values
Sports are an integral aspect of the social and cultural contexts in which people live, and they engage more people in a shared experience than any other institution or cultural activity today (Coakley, 2015). Since the 19th century, academicians have contended that modern sport is infused with societal values and that sport then promotes and reinforces these value systems (Breivik, 1998; Digel, 1988). Values are "the criteria

people use to select and justify actions and to evaluate people (including the self) and events" (Schwartz, 1992, p. 1). They (a) are beliefs that transcend specific situations, (b) pertain to desirable end states or behaviors, (c) guide selection or evaluation of behavior or events, and (d) vary in terms of relative importance (Schwartz, 1992). They are what we deem to be worthwhile, interesting, excellent, desirable and important (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2003).

Essentially, the moral values that are the constitutive elements of sport are expressions and reflections of the basic moral values of society (Simon, Torres, & Hager, 2015). Our values are a social construction of reality, whereby our value systems are not independent and eternal, but ever changing, and created by human interaction in societies (Berger & Luckman, 1966). It follows that individuals in a society are then socialized through sports, as the structure and values of sport influence individuals' development and moral attitudes, for good or bad (Nucci & Young-Shim, 2005). As such, the sociology of sport and physical activity is important because people use sport to reaffirm ideas and beliefs that are important to them and widely held by others (Coakley, 2015). Because of this, an attack upon sport is often viewed as an attack upon society itself (Sage et al., 2018).

Our focus here will be on the predominant American values that are mirrored in sport, consistent with Sage and colleagues (2018). These values are success, competition, valued means to achieve, progress, materialism, and external conformity. It must be recognized that values are culturally derived, and sport will mirror values reflective of the society in which it operates. In other words, the American culture places a high degree of value on competition and materialism, which are not emphasized as much in more cooperative Asian cultures such as Japan and Korea. Thus, the values which sport mirrors may be different in America than in more cooperative societies.

We must also note that because sport reflects society, society and its values will influence sport in both good and bad ways (Breivik, 1998). Both good and bad actors and actions will be found in sport as they are in society. For instance, as will be described below, one of the negative consequences of American society's high value on competition is the win-at-all-costs mentality that pervades sport at all levels, resulting in deviance and various illegal activities and scandals. This win-at-all costs focus is at the root of the scandals involving performance enhancing drugs in professional sport, the recruiting and ethical violations in collegiate athletics, and the highly competitive professional sport model that is infiltrating youth sport resulting in parental misconduct and youth burnout. Nevertheless, for good or bad, sport is a microcosm of society, and because of this, the sociology of sport and physical activity is vitally important.

Success
In a competitive culture such as the U.S., society frames success and excellence as aspects that must be displayed and measured in the constant pursuit of human excellence (Russell, 2007). We value the self-made person, or the individual who has achieved money and status through his or her efforts in a highly competitive system (Sage et al., 2018). The metrics we use to gauge success are often economic in focus, such as income, personal wealth, and the amount of possessions that we attain. We idolize self-made figures in the business world such as Warren Buffet, Oprah Winfrey, and Sam Walton, or National Basketball Association (NBA) athletes such as LeBron James and the all-time great Michael Jordan, who have parleyed success on the field or court into material gain (e.g., luxury homes and cars, expensive jewelry). In fact, the most striking aspect of American culture could be that we identify standards of personal excellence with competitive occupational achievement (Williams, 1970).

The focus on competition and success is also seen in sport, where there is a preoccupation with winning (Woods, 2007). Americans want winners, whether they are in school, politics, business, sport, or any other endeavor, and this aim to win is reflective of society's value system (Russell, 2007). Thus, in sport, most persons who participate glorify winning. We oftentimes consider athletes and coaches who fail to win the "big" one as failures (Woods, 2016). Do we really ever remember who the runners-up were in a given year in the Super Bowl, World Series, or National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) men's and women's

basketball championships? Coaches and sport administrators, then, make it a priority to socialize their athletes with the value of winning, and reinforce this with rewards, status, praise, honor, and "perks" (Sage et al., 2018). This demand for winners is found at all levels of sport, from professional to grass roots community recreation leagues for children and youth, as evidenced by the mammoth attention given to the Little League World Series, the Gatorade "Punt, Pass, and Kick" contests, and other national sport competitions for youth.

Competition
Going hand in hand with success, American society values competition as a means to succeed and achieve. The moral values associated with competition support, stand for, and express familiar values in all institutions that exist to promote human excellence, and hence reflect societal values (Russell, 2007). Competition infuses almost all aspects of American society, from the corporate world to schools to the Boy and Girl Scouts to our sporting pursuits, resulting in a "survival of the fittest" mentality. Competition selects out those not perceived as fit to succeed or achieve, and thus, becomes synonymous with American society. Within this environment, there is subsequently a tendency to evaluate individuals based on their accomplishments, rather than on their personality, character and other more human qualities (Sage et al., 2018). Competitive sport, as it evolved in the 20th century, came to embody our society's competitive spirit and values, which then had bearing on how sport in North America was organized (Breivik, 1998).

However, as a result of the competitive process and the "survival of the fittest" approach to life and sport, people oftentimes reward winning disproportionally. When winning thus becomes the end all and be all, when winning becomes everything, coaches and players can turn to forms of cheating and deviance to achieve success and consequently take advantage of others in order to win, just as individuals and businesses outside of sport engage in illegal activities fueled by the drive to win-at-all-costs (Sage et al., 2018). This win-at-all-costs philosophy distorts our sense of values, and individuals believe that the ends justify the means. When this happens, we see athletes tempted to use performance-enhancing drugs to gain a competitive edge, coaches engaging in illegal recruiting practices to sign the star prodigy, and parents pushing their children beyond what is normal to succeed so that they can secure that college athletics scholarship. Thus, in a competitive society, competition is what drives us in life and sport, and because we have difficulty coming in second, we often engage in illegal and inappropriate activities to ensure that we do indeed finish first.

The Valued Means to Achieve
A third manner in which sport mirrors societal values is that sport embodies the characteristics and mechanisms reflecting the desired means to achieve that permeate a given society. For instance, in American society, there are three related and highly valued means to succeed (Sage et al., 2018). The first is the Puritan ideal of hard work. We value individuals who are industrious and make something of themselves out of nothing, such as the American story of an immigrant who came to this country with nothing and then through hard work and sacrifice, became a wealthy individual. On the other hand, we denigrate those who do not. Americans tend to believe that poor people deserve to be poor because they do not work as hard as middle- or upper- class individuals. Secondly, American society believes that a pathway to success is through continual striving for excellence. We believe that one should never give up, and that economic success is always possible (i.e., attainment of the American dream). Finally, deferred gratification is also valued as a means to achieve in American society. By this, we mean that individuals have a willingness to forsake immediate pleasure for the promise of later rewards. A successful individual in the U.S. is thus one who has the drive to stay in school, work two jobs, or go to night school for the prospect of attaining future rewards.

Sport, then, mirrors these societal values of means to achieve, as athletes presumably obtain individual achievements in sport through hard work, perseverance and sacrifice. Essentially, the American work ethic is the sport ethic (Sage et al., 2018). Sport embodies the most powerful principles of achievement-oriented, competitive societies. As Digel (1998) asserts, "The principle of achievement as it exists in the realm of

sport permits an almost utopistically pure presentation of competitive achievement such as cannot be found in any other spheres of life" (p. 180). Sport symbolically represents both individual motivation and achievement, and it is this principle of achievement and continual striving for excellence, which is the mechanism for the distribution of rewards, both in society and in sport (Digel, 1988; Woods, 2016). The top performers in sport are fueled and rewarded by the societal demand for increased achievement, and coaches promote the conservative American values of hard work, discipline, perseverance, and respect for authority (Woods, 2016). As such, competitive sport is a window into the valued means to achieve in a society.

Progress
Another way in which sport reflects societal values is through its emphasis on progress. Societies will differ with regards to their focus on the past, present, or future. American society places paramount importance upon the future. While not totally devaluing the past or present, Americans give greater emphasis to the future and progress, to obtaining a better job, a brighter future, a bigger home in a nice neighborhood, a college education for the children, and the like (Sage et al., 2018). Americans are not satisfied with the status quo, and continually strive for growth (i.e.., bigger is better). However, while progress connotes change, there are some aspects of society which many people feel should not be changed, such as the political system, economic system, and fundamental American values. Thus, many do not favor radical changes in the system.

Within the sport context, coaches, athletes, fans, the media and other stakeholders place a high degree of value on progress. Athletes and teams strive for continual improvement and progress towards goals, through setting records, winning more games and championships, or mastering new techniques to enhance performance. Society deems those who do not progress as failures, and thus we see coaches fired routinely for failing to have a winning record, or athletes traded because of poor performance in a given year. Therefore, the values of the sport system are rooted in society's focus on progress and on the rewards attainable to those who succeed and achieve.

Materialism
A fifth societal value mirrored in sport is the overwhelming emphasis on materialism. Americans believe that hard work and effort should result in increased economic standing, income, and in the acquisition and consumption of goods and services exceeding our basic needs of nutrition, medical care, shelter, and transportation (Sage et al., 2018). All of this indicates measures of success in the competitive struggle, and are aspects of what Americans consider to be the "good life." The acceptance of materialism is synonymous with the American dream (McDorman et al., 2006). Thus, the goal for many is to accumulate possessions that bring status and provide for a better way of life. This is realized in several ways, including our choices of homes, clothing styles, boats, prestigious neighborhoods in which we live, season tickets, and country club memberships, among others (Sage et al., 2018).

Sport, then, embodies this emphasis on materialism, is integrally tied to the material and economic conditions of society, and reinforces these materialistic value systems (Breivik, 1998). In the 19th and 20th centuries, as sport became more businesslike, the corporate model began infiltrating the organization of sport franchises and governing bodies (Woods, 2016). We see this evidenced by the fact that college and professional teams are driven by money concerns, such as lucrative television deals, professional teams relocating to more economically viable cities, and by the focus on profit as the bottom line. Within college sport, there is an arms race for bigger and better facilities. Athletes are also motivated by material considerations, and accumulating more money, perks and other rewards seems to be the mercenary motivation of many athletes rather than a pure love of the game or loyalty to the team and fans (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2003; Sage et al., 2018). Free agency has resulted in multi-million-dollar contracts, and the appeal of materialism for athletes is expressed in symbols such as contractual bonuses and huge television endorsements. The problem here is that these large payouts may cause athletes to lose perspective on the meaning of money and even complain about their "meager" salaries as compared to others (McDorman et al., 2006). Fans, too, are not immune to the trappings of materialism, as we are attracted to plush stadiums with the latest

amenities (such as the $1.5 billion Mercedes-Benz Stadium, home of the NFL's Atlanta Falcons), and by athletes and teams playing in contests with huge sums of money at stake. As such, materialism is all pervasive, in American society as well as sport.

External Conformity
Finally, sport also mirrors society with regards to the value the institution places on external conformity. Societies cannot tolerate total freedom by individuals, so to avoid disorder, societies socialize individuals into acceptable beliefs and practices (Sage et al., 2018). As individuals strive to be successful in the eyes of others, they seek validation through shared standards of achievement or conformity. Society, then, expects conformity, and not deviance. We can segment conformity in American society into two levels. On one level, Americans conform to the official expectations of the nation, state or community through the customs and laws. Deviations from these expectations are punished. On another level, individuals conform to expectations of closely-knit groups, such as families, peers or work groups. However, the bureaucratic trend in American society also forces individuals to conform. Bureaucracy is rational and values conformity to rules and procedures in order to accomplish organizational objectives. The interests of the organization supersede those of the individual. In fact, the values that emerge from this hierarchal form of organization have become core values of American society.

Within the sport context, conformity is highly valued. Coaches expect behavioral conformity of athletes to promote team unity and achieve team objectives. Coaches demand that players dress and speak in certain ways, behave in certain ways, conduct themselves appropriately in front of the media or on social media outlets, and expect the subordination of the self to team success, just as in all bureaucratic structures which reflect society's value on external conformity. In addition, athletes and players are expected to accept the authority of the coach without question. Those who challenge the coach's authority are labeled as insubordinate and are soon traded or dismissed from the team. This is another aspect of external conformity found in sport (Sage et al., 2018). Athletes should not challenge the systems, rules, and power structures of a coach or of sport in general, or they are considered deviant. Athletes are, in essence, viewed as instruments to achieve organizational goals, as a means to an end.

The Power of Sport to Shape Values and Change

Before concluding, we must recognize the fact that sports also have the potential to affect and change societal values. The social environment shapes members of society, but they can also change that environment. This process of human agency occurs when individuals actively shape social life by adapting to, negotiating with, and changing social structures (Sage et al., 2018). Sport and its value systems can influence society in both good and bad ways (Breivik, 1998), and sport can be a platform to point for the need for change in society (Woods, 2016). For instance, there is evidence that sport can foster the development of social capital, or "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that can facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1995, p. 66). Bonding social capital occurs when individuals form relationships with similar others (e.g., with peers, neighbors, individuals of the same social strata), whereas bridging social capital is when relationships and networks are formed with dissimilar others (e.g., with individuals from different social strata). An example of bridging social capital is when the homeless individuals playing on a soccer team through an intervention designed to use sport to help them get back on their feet, form close friendships with their volunteer coaches. These bridging relationships then help link the homeless players to other social services, such as housing, education and jobs (Welty Peachey, Borland, Lobpries, & Cohen, 2015).

Sport can increase the social capital of homeless soccer players in the Homeless World Cup (Sherry, 2010), and among participants in running events in the U.S. to stimulate community development (Zhou & Kaplanidou, 2018). In addition to developing social capital, sport has been used in Northern Ireland to promote interaction and break down barriers between Protestant and Catholic youth (Woods, 2016); with the World Scholar-Athlete Games to help with prejudice reduction among its youth participants (Welty

Peachey, Cunningham, Lyras, Cohen, & Bruening, 2015); in Israel to foster cross-cultural acceptance between Palestinians and Jews (Sugden, 2006); in Cyprus to foster peace and understanding between Greek and Turkish Cypriots on this divided island (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011); in Sri Lanka to work at peace building between different ethnic groups (Schulenkorf, 2010); as a way to foster women's and girl's empowerment (Seal & Sherry, 2018); and as a vehicle to combat urban unrest and juvenile delinquency in the U.S. and England (Coakley & Dunning, 2004). Thus, sports and sport interventions have the potential to influence social worlds and value systems if strategically designed and managed toward targeted outcomes (Coalter, 2013), which is another reason why the sociological study of sport and physical activity is so vitally important.

As has been shown, the American value system influences the structure, operation, and performance of sport, and sport in turn reinforces and mirrors these values. Sport also reaffirms our beliefs and ideas about gender, race and class, and can also serve as a site to challenge dominant ideologies and values of a given society, pointing to the need for change. Therefore, because sport is a microcosm of society and also a potential site for change, the sociological study of sport and physical activity is of high importance to academicians, students, practitioners, and all stakeholders involved in the production and consumption of contemporary sport and athletics.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the sociology of sport and physical activity. To do so, we first defined and discussed key terms, including sport, physical activity, and sociology. We then discussed how sociology differs from other disciplines, including biology and psychology. The chapter next turned to an analysis of how adopting a sociological lens to study sport and physical activity, while challenging at times, can provide novel insights. In the final section, we provided an outline of how sport and physical activity oftentimes serve as a microcosm of society. To do so, we focused on several values particularly salient within U.S. culture: success, competition, the valued means to achieve, progress, materialism, and external conformity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you define sport, and how does this definition impact whether you consider certain activities as sport?
2. Do you differentiate between sport and physical activity? Why or why not?
3. We provided several definitions of sociology. Which definition do you prefer and why?
4. How does sociology differ from other disciplines also aimed at understanding people's behaviors, such as biology and psychology?
5. In what ways do sport and physical activity serve as a microcosm of society?
6. Are there aspects of sport and physical activity that are unique to that context and not necessarily observed in other segments of society? If so, why is this the case?

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Abercrombie, N., Hill, S., & Turner, B.S. (2000). *The Penguin dictionary of sociology* (4th ed.). New York: Penguin Books. (A thorough reference that provides an overview of many sociological key terms.)

Sage, G. H., Eitzen, D. S., & Beal, B. (2018). *Sociology of North American sport* (11th ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. (An extensive text devoted to the sociological study of sport; includes information pertaining to sociological theory, violence, societal values, gender, race, politics, and religion, among others.)

Sociology of Sport Journal. (The official publication of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport; published by Human Kinetics, this journal offers contemporary research and analysis related to sport in society.)

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