

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL CLASS AND SPORT¹

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Define social class and socioeconomic status.
2. Define class relations and how they influence sport participation.
3. Summarize the chances for social mobility through sport.

INTRODUCTION

Americans love success stories. As outlined in Chapter 1, many of the values embedded in American society perpetuate the notion of meritocracy, or that people who try hard enough can be successful. Another example is the championing of the US as the Land of Opportunity. School curricula, books, movies, work-place structures, and lessons passed along from parents, among other examples, all serve to reinforce these sentiments.

Sport is a space where these ideas are also firmly in place. Consider the case of LeBron James, who was born in Akron, Ohio, to a single mother. Living in poverty, he moved repeatedly during his childhood, often from one rundown dwelling to the next. But, as the story goes, basketball saved him. Through hard work and skill, he was able to hone his skills, and the Cleveland Cavaliers ultimately drafted him with the first pick of the 2003 National Basketball Association (NBA) draft. He has since parleyed his success into lucrative playing contracts and various endorsement deals. In 2018, Forbes estimated James' net worth as \$450 million (Kleinman, 2018).

How reasonable is it, though, to expect that sport can serve as a mechanism to move people from one social class to the next? According to economist Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, not very. He analyzed data from the NBA and found that growing up in a more affluent household was a strong predictor of making an NBA team. This was true for Blacks and for Whites. Further analyses showed that top performers were less likely to be born to a single mother or to a teenage one, like James was (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2013).

These data highlight two points. First, sport is not necessarily an equalizer. Stephens-Davidowitz showed that people from the most affluent households were most likely to reach the NBA, and we see similar patterns in broader society. Having financial means makes it more likely someone will be successful in other ventures, whether those activities involve dribbling a basketball, starting a business, performing in school, and the like. And, lacking resources makes success all the more challenging. Second, these dynamics make LeBron James' case all the more exceptional, as people from lower social classes, even when extraordinarily gifted, are unlikely to move up the social class ladder through their sport participation.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore issues of social class and sport in greater depth. I begin with a discussion of social class and socioeconomic status, differentiating between these terms. I then move to an analysis of class relations and how they influence sport participation and consumption. Finally, I analyze social class mobility, including the myths associated with sport participation and the ways in which sport might allow for such social movement.

¹ Cunningham, G. B. (2019). Social class and sport. In G. B. Cunningham & M. A. Dixon (Eds.), *Sociology of sport and physical activity* (3rd ed., pp. 29-40). College Station, TX: Center for Sport Management Research and Education.

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND SOCIAL CLASS

Discussions of money, opportunity, standing, and power frequently include one of two concepts: *socioeconomic status* and *social class* (APA, 2006; Smith, 2010). Journalists, students, and scholars will sometimes use these terms interchangeably; however, they have distinctly different meanings, as outlined in Exhibit 3.1.

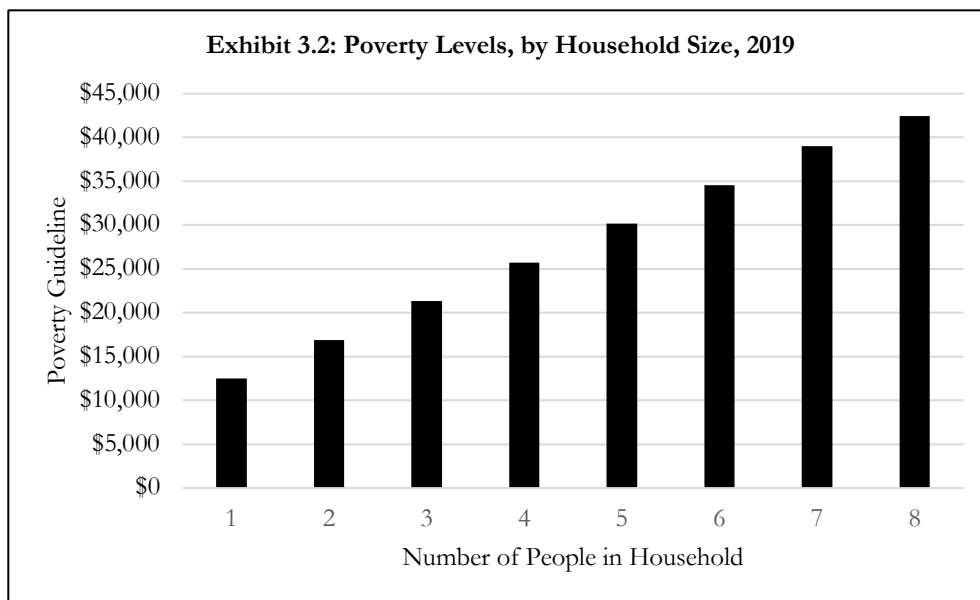
Exhibit 3.1. Socioeconomic Status and Social Class

Socioeconomic status: a focus on material possessions and resources, including one's educational attainment, occupation, and income.

Social class: a focus on power and privilege; includes discussions of income and occupation, but emphasizes the power, political action, and socially constructed realities that advantage some people over others.

Sources. American Psychological Association (2006), Smith (2010)

Socioeconomic status emphasizes one's income, educational attainment, and occupation. In many ways, income is the variable people consider when discussing opportunity and socioeconomic status, and for good reason. It is measurable, most people have experience generating income, and various agencies use income to determine aid. In the US, the Department of Health and Human Services determines poverty levels based on income and the size of the family. As seen in Exhibit 3.2, in 2019, the poverty level for a single person household in the US was \$12,490. For a family of four, this value increased to \$25,750. These figures are important as they frequently help determine the amount of aid individuals or families receive from the government.



Source. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>

Educational attainment is the second dimension of socioeconomic status. In general, as educational attainment increases, so too do desired life outcomes. For example, in a large-scale study in the Netherlands, Ilies, Yao, Curseu, and Liang (2019) collected data from over 3,000 participants. They found a significant,

positive association between education and life satisfaction. This relationship was due, in part, to the better jobs, financial situation, and health of better educated people, relative to their peers.

It is important to note that the relationship between education and life outcomes are discontinuous. That is, there are gains once people cross certain thresholds, such as earning a degree. Absent such credentialing, however, the increases are minimal. For example, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (<http://www.bls.gov>), people who earn a bachelor's degree earn 64% more than do those with a high school degree (\$1198 *v.* \$730, per week). However, people who go to college but do not finish earn just 10% more than their peers with a high school diploma (\$802 *v.* \$730, per week). People generally take on debt when they attend college in the US, and for college completers, the increase in salary might offset this financial burden. However, non-completers have the added debt but only a marginal increase in earnings; therefore, they are in a doubly precarious situation.

Finally, occupation is a good predictor of success and life chances. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has a classification scheme for US occupations, with 867 designations. The classification is helpful in knowing how many people are in a particular occupation, the need for additional people in that field, and their earnings, among other outcomes. For example, the Employment Development Department in California (<http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov>) uses the occupational guidelines to identify employment trends, describe occupational profiles, and offer additional data about various occupations. According to this source, coaches and scouts make about \$46,000 per year in that state, compared to athletes, who make over \$127,000.

Though many people and government agencies rely on the socioeconomic status perspective, it is not without its limitations. First, set guidelines do little to account for regional differences. An annual income of \$15,000 (above the poverty level for a single-member family) will have more spending power in Bryan, TX, than it will in New York, NY. Government agencies largely do not account for these differences (with the exception for Alaska and Hawaii, which have different poverty levels than do the contiguous 48 states).

Second, there are considerable differences in earning within a given occupational category. In fact, in the previous example, coaches and athletes are both within the larger Bureau classification of 27-0000—arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations. Yet, athletes in California earn, on average, about three times what coaches and scouts do.

Third, and most importantly, socioeconomic status does not consider differences in power, prestige, status, and political action. Smith (2008) commented:

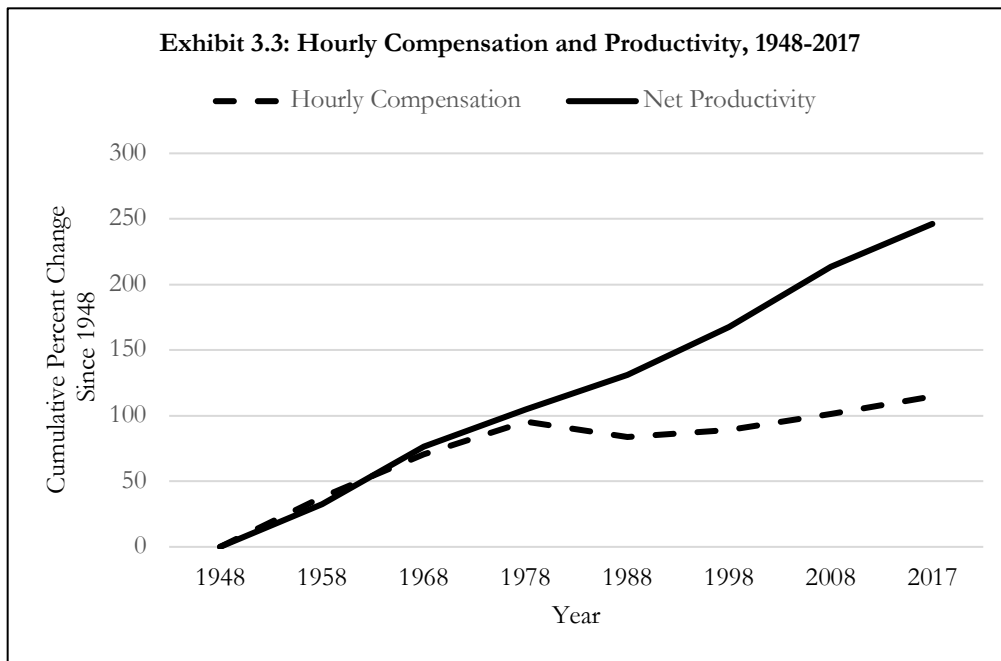
Creating class divisions according to [socioeconomic status] sidesteps the issue of relationship to (or distance from) sociocultural power and carries with it the implication that class-related experiences and oppressions are similar for all people who fall within the same numerical [socioeconomic status] classification. (p. 902)

Responding to these criticisms, many scholars have turned to a social class approach, where a person's class "reflects the social context he or she occupies, as defined by the resources that he or she holds and his or her subjective interpretation of that context (Loignon & Woehr, 2018, p. 62). From a social class perspective, oppression and inequality are a function of income, occupation, and education, *and* of privilege that some groups enjoy, as well as the accompanying power and subsequent domination of others (Cunningham, 2019).

Consider, for example, that US Senators and members of the House of Representatives are considerably more likely to be millionaires than are other US citizens. In fact, the median wealth of Republican Senators in 2018 was \$1.4 million (Hawkings, 2018). Or, consider that the average chief executive made *347 times more* than their average employee in 2016. At Nike, the average employee makes about \$25,000 a year—just

a fraction of chief executive Mark Parker’s salary of \$9,467,460. That is an income ratio of 379-to-1 (Destefano, 2018).

Some might argue that differences in income are reflective of productivity. Head coaches, chief executives, and other leaders deserve more money because they generate more resources. However, this argument ignores the fact that US productivity and hourly compensation have not increased at the same pace, as shown from data from the Economic Policy Institute (see Exhibit 3.3). From 1948 to 1973, hourly compensation and productivity increased at the same pace. After that time, however, productivity far outpaced the subsequent increases in hourly wages. Note, it was during this same timeframe that chief executive income ratio increased from 40-to-1 (1983) to 347-to-1 (2016). Thus, productivity increased and chief executive pay increased, but hourly compensation—the compensation for the people generating the increases—largely remained stagnated.



Source. Economic Policy Institute

These data, and others like them, show the importance of considering subjective perceptions alongside the objective measures of socioeconomic status. Therein rests the importance of a social class perspective—one adopted throughout the remainder of the chapter.

CLASS RELATIONS

Class relations refer to “the ways social class is incorporated into the organization of our everyday lives” (Coakley, 2015, p. 266). Sociologists typically focus on institutions, norms, and societal values; however, social class can impact people in a number of ways and at various levels (Cunningham, 2019). At the broader, societal level, value systems, educational systems, and housing can all influence the opportunities people enjoy. In sport organizations, the structure of the workplace, biases among decision makers, and sport delivery all shape people’s opportunities and experiences. Finally, demographics and psychological characteristics are factors specific to the individual that can shape their life chances and those of others.

Societal Factors

Societal factors are those that operate beyond the individual, specific groups, or organizations. Sociologists will frequently focus on institutions and *value systems*, such as the previously discussed notion of meritocracy. Consider the film *Hoosiers*, which relays the story of a boy's high school basketball team in Indiana. The team faced uncertainty and long odds. But, by working together, persevering, and working diligently, they were able to win the state championship. The depiction of the team's success is consistent with functional theory outlined in Chapter 2.

Meritocracy has three underlying assumptions (Daniels, 1978): merit is well-understood and measurable; people have equal opportunities to demonstrate their merit; and accordingly, any differences in success or standing are a function of corresponding variations in merit. Thus, those who reach the top are simply more meritorious than others.

While well known, not all people accept these three principles. Therein rests the importance of critically interrogating these frequently taken-for-granted assumptions. Scully and Blake-Beard (2007) noted that those with power are the ones who determine what is meritorious and what is not, as well as how to measure merit. Second, factors other than individual merit are actually better predictors of life success. Family class background is one example. Finally, the link between hard work and life success is tenuous, at best (Abrego, 2014). Millions of people work industriously using specialized skills that require considerable training and apprenticeship; nevertheless, they do not earn wages commensurate with their peers in other social classes.

School funding is another societal factor that influences class relations (Putnam, 2015). Property taxes are a primary mechanism to fund schools, but this arrangement serves to perpetuate class differences. Two communities—one rich and one poor—could have the same tax rates, but because of the differential property values, the revenues generated in the richer district would far outpace those in the poorer. To accommodate for such differences, it is possible to increase tax rates in the poorer district, but this approach is largely regressive, as people without means have a higher tax burden than do their richer counterparts. Another alternative is for richer districts to send monies to the state, which then redistributes those dollars to poorer districts. Lawmakers frequently refer to the “take from the rich and give to the poor” approach as a Robin Hood plan. In Texas, for example, this funding mechanism has been in place since 1993, but many constituents resent their tax monies used in other portions of the state (Swaby, 2019).

Despite the courts consistently ruling that states must provide quality education for all children, irrespective of their economic and social class backgrounds, inequalities persist. Putnam (2015) has shown that richer schools offer more advanced coursework and extracurricular activities than do their poorer counterparts. In fact, the differences are threefold. This means that, simply as a function of where one lives, students have different opportunities to nurture their talents, experience new activities, face challenging coursework, and ultimately succeed, both on and off the court.

Housing is another societal-level factor that influences people and their opportunities. Shelter and safety are fundamental needs that all people have (Maslow, 1943), yet they are commonly in jeopardy among people in lower social classes. Consider, for instance, that the median monthly rent of a two-bedroom apartment in the US was \$1149 in 2018 (Out of Reach, 2018). Most financial experts recommend spending no more than 30 percent of one's income on housing. To do so, one would need to earn over \$22 an hour, working 40 hours a week, each week of the year. Three adults within a given household could work full-time at the national minimum wage (\$7.25) and still not reach this mark. It is hardly surprising, then, that many working poor spend close to half of their paycheck on housing or experience homelessness (Desmond, 2016). Note, too, that these figures do much to dispel the myth that the poor or those in poverty do not work. Most do, but simply cannot make the necessary resources to support their families.

Housing affects class relations through displacement, as well. This occurs when poor and vulnerable individuals are removed from their homes so other structures can take their place. As shown in Exhibit 3.4, poor individuals frequently experience displacement when a city hosts the Olympics.

Exhibit 3.4: Displacement during the Olympics

Politicians, sports officials, and community organizers will frequently praise the Olympics as contests that benefit a community. International exposure, increased revenues and tax dollars, and more jobs—these are just some of the purported benefits. While these claims may or may not be accurate, one thing is clear—the Olympics routinely wreak havoc on the lives of lives of poor individuals.

The 2016 Summer Games held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, is one of many examples (Waldron & Maciel, 2016). Consider the small fishing village of Vila Autódromo, home to over 600 families when the International Olympic Committee chose Brazil to host the Games. By 2016, just 20 families remained. In their place were new roads, enabling fans, athletes, and officials to access the Olympic venues. About 90,000 people were displaced by government officials in the name of hosting the Games.

And, Brazil was not alone. Between 1988 and 2008, six Olympic Games were held, and 2 million people were forcibly evicted or displaced from their homes.

It is not just any person who faces displacement. Waldron and Maciel noted, “The neighborhoods that find themselves in the path of pre-Olympics bulldozers are almost always populated by low-income families. The neighborhoods that replace them are often see significant reductions in public housing that is replaced with higher-end homes geared toward people with larger incomes.”

Recognizing these trends, some community members have advocated for their cities to bypass the chance to host the Olympics. In Boston, for example, the activist group called “No Boston Olympics” argued that hosting the Olympics was too expensive and hurt the poor. Chris Dempsey, a member of that faction, commented, “If you’re going to do Olympic development, you’re going to displace poor people.” Their protests, and others like them, were ultimately successful, as Boston withdrew its bid.

Organizational Factors

Organizational factors can also influence class relations. *Organizational structure* is one such mechanism. Occupations linked with middle and owning class workers enjoy higher prestige and corresponding autonomy, benefits, stability, and pay (Loignon & Woehr, 2018). Consider, for instance, athletic directors and grounds crew workers employed at an intercollegiate athletics department. The two positions are likely to have the same health and retirement benefits given that they are situated within a university or school setting. However, the athletic director, relative to the grounds crew worker, probably enjoys greater autonomy to complete her tasks, has a higher salary, and enjoys more stability. The large income ratio of chief executives today is reflective of these disparities (Destefano, 2018).

Interestingly, even though income ratios and similar class-related disparities have increased over time, Americans largely prefer other class structures. Norton and Ariley (2011) gathered information from over 5,000 study participants. They presented information about three countries with the name of the country withheld, and asked which ones the participants preferred. In the first, the top quintile of earners controlled 84 percent of all wealth, a pattern similar to that found in the US. In the second country, the top quintile of earners controlled 18 percent of the wealth (similar to Sweden), while in the third, all five groups of earners controlled the same portion of wealth. The researchers found that most participants (92 percent) preferred the income distribution reflective of Sweden over that of the US. In another part of the study,

the researchers asked participants (a) how much wealth they thought the top quintile of earners in the US controlled, and (b) how much would be ideal. Results showed that the respondents under-estimated the income inequality in the US, suspecting that top earners controlled 59 percent of all wealth (compared to 84 percent they actually controlled). They also preferred the top earners to control 32 percent of the wealth, or roughly a third of what they currently do. The findings suggest that Americans underestimate income inequality in the US and prefer for more equitable distribution of resources.

Bias among decision makers represents another important organizational factor shaping class relations. For example, people frequently hold negative stereotypes about the poor, including notions that they are deceitful, maladroit, promiscuous, and seeking handouts from others (Volpato, Andrighetto, & Baldissarri, 2017). People are also likely to dehumanize the poor, associating them with wild animals (Loughnan, Haslam, Sutton, & Spencer, 2014) and garbage (Fiske, 2007).

In other cases, bias takes the form of classism, or the negative attitudes people in power hold toward those who lack power, capital, and social standing (Lott, 2012). Classism can be explicit in nature, such as when people make derogatory comments about the poor. It can also be implicit, whereby people profess to hold egalitarian, fair-minded attitudes, but nevertheless unconsciously harbor negative sentiments toward the poor. Implicit bias is particularly injurious because those who express it are not aware of their own prejudices.

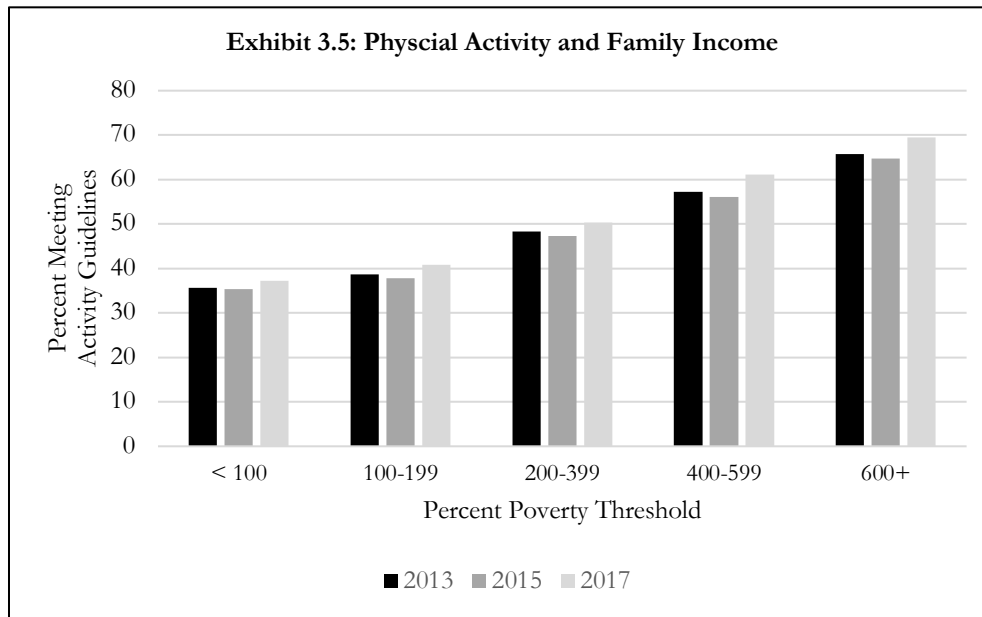
Bias can also take the form of discrimination, which is the behavioral component of bias. In sport organizations, decision makers might be reluctant to interview or hire poor job applicants because of the aforementioned stereotypes and prejudices. Even when they are hired, the poor are likely to be placed in low-pay and low-prestige positions, such as parking lot attendant or custodial staff (Loignon & Woehr, 2018). Thus, they experience occupational segregation.

The structure of *sport systems* represents a final organization factor influencing class relations. Exercise, sport, and other activities generally take two things—time and money. Middle- and upper-class individuals have both resources in greater supply than do their poorer counterparts. It is hardly surprising, then, that sport participation is higher among people who are highly educated, who work in jobs with high prestige, and who have considerable income (Sagas & Cunningham, 2014).

Data from Healthy People 2020 (<http://healthypeople.gov>) illustrate similar patterns for physical activity. This organization presented data for the proportion of US adults who meet activity guidelines: 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity, 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity, or a combination thereof, each week. As seen in Exhibit 15.5, there were considerable differences based on the family income. People from families below the poverty line (i.e., percent poverty threshold < 100) were unlikely to meet activity guidelines, with only 37 percent doing so in 2017. At the other extreme are people whose family is far above the poverty threshold (600 +), and they are about twice as likely to be active at the recommended levels (69.5 percent).

The structure of sport and sport systems represents a possible explanation for these trends. From childhood, participation in sport costs money. Even city-sponsored recreational leagues have participation fees, and club sports can cost several thousands of dollars each year. But entry fees tell just part of the story. Other costs include uniforms, shoes, and other equipment; travel to and from practices multiple times a week; travel to and from games; tournament fees, related travel, and accommodations; and private lessons. These costs, which used to be only for elite athletes later in their career, are now commonplace for children as young as 6 years. And, while public schools offer extracurricular athletics usually starting at Grade 7, thereby potentially mitigating the class-related effects, budget shortfalls and other cuts have forced many to start charging participation fees (Cunningham, 2019). The end result is a class-segmented sport system that privileges children from families with means.

These trends are important because health-related habits developed in childhood and adolescence carry over into adulthood. Thus, when one segment of the population (the poor) effectively is denied access to sport and physical activity as children, they are unlikely to then start those activities as adults. The patterns depicted in Exhibit 3.5 are illustrative of these outcomes.



Source: <http://healthypeople.gov>

Individual Factors

Finally, individual factors can influence class relations, including *demographics*. In this book, authors have written about various demographic and personal characteristics, including religion, gender, and race. Each of these can uniquely influence a person’s opportunities and life chances. But, there is also considerable evidence that people’s personal characteristics and identities can interact with one another. Scholars refer to this as intersectionality (Dagkas, 2016). For example, social class might influence physical activity patterns, but class and gender might also intersect to create unique patterns, whereby poor women have fewer opportunities than other women or men.

A number of factors intersect with social class to influence people’s opportunities and experiences, including their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, geography, and age (Cunningham, 2019). For example, in Texas, Whites represent 42 percent of the population but only 22 percent of those living in poverty. On the other hand, Latinos constitute 39 percent of the state population and 51 percent of those who live in poverty (Ura & Wang, 2018). Texas children are about twice as likely to live in poverty, relative to the statistics for the entire state. These differences are highest in border communities, like McAllen and Laredo, but they are present elsewhere, too, such as in Bryan and College Station (Ura & Wang, 2018). As these examples illustrate, focusing solely on social class would only tell part of the story; instead, it is instructive to consider how other identities relate with social class to affect class relations.

Psychological characteristics also influence class relations. For example, Claro, Paunesku, and Dweck (2016) examined whether people’s psychological mindset influenced the effects of poverty on academic performance. People with a fixed mindset believe that personal characteristics are largely stable, while people with a growth mindset hold that skills and attributes can change and be nurtured. Claro and colleagues collected data from Chilean students. They found that across all income levels, a growth mindset was predictive of

academic performance. People who think that improvement and change is possible do better in school. Others have found that cultivating a growth mindset can increase academic motivation, especially among girls in rural communities (Burnette, Russell, Hoyt, Orvidas, & Widman, 2018). These results suggest that mindsets interact with social class and structural determinants.

In other cases, psychological characteristics might shape how people respond to and view others from different classes. For example, some people support social hierarchies and offer justifications for class differences. These same individuals are likely to oppose government interventions designed to reduce income inequalities (Rodriguez-Bailon et al., 2017). Such perspectives could potentially relate to sport in several ways. For example, some sport organizations will offer differential participation fees based on income, with athletes from higher income families paying more. Others might cap a leader's pay as a way of reducing the income inequalities previously discussed. Both of these steps are likely to be met with resistance from people who support social hierarchies.

SOCIAL MOBILITY THROUGH SPORT

In the final section, I discuss social mobility through sport. As the opening scenario illustrated, there are instances where such progression occurs, such as with LeBron James. In other cases, though, people remain in their social class, even when they are exceptionally skilled. Why do these differences exist?

Sage and Eitzen (2013) identified a number of myths about sport and social mobility, offering evidence to debunk many of them. These include:

- *Myth 1: Sport is a way for athletes to receive a free education.* Some high school athletes go on to receive a full scholarship to play intercollegiate athletics. But, this is rare. About 3 percent of high school basketball players play on a college team, and this is the case for girls and boys. The numbers increase for baseball, soccer, and football players, but only to 6 percent. Further, few intercollegiate athletes receive full scholarships; instead, most receive partial support, ultimately paying at least a portion of their college bill.
- *Myth 2: Participation in sport leads to a college degree.* While many college athletes do graduate, more than 50 percent do not. The figures are even lower for racial minorities and for people who plan on playing professionally following their college careers. The inordinate time demands placed on athletes, being ill-prepared for a college curriculum, and failing to take advantage possible academic supports all contribute to the low graduation rates.
- *Myth 3: High school and college athletes are likely to have professional careers.* Many athletes believe they will play professionally. In one study from the Center for the Study of Sport in Society, about two-thirds of African American boys age 13 to 18 anticipated playing professionally. But these beliefs stand in stark contrast to national statistics. Just 3 in 10,000 boys who participate in high school basketball will play professionally, and 1 in 5,000 girls will do so. To put these numbers in perspective, people have a 1 in 3,000 chance of being struck by lightning during their lifetime.
- *Myth 4: Sport raises athletes out of poverty, especially among African Americans.* Despite representing just 13 percent of the US population, African Americans constitute over 70 percent of the participants in women's professional basketball, men's professional basketball, and football. Playing in these leagues can be lucrative, especially in the men's leagues. Thus, for these several hundred athletes, sport has provided a mechanism to leave poverty behind. What is problematic, though, is the false promise of professional sport for the millions of other African Americans. Sage and Eitzen noted that the false promise is harmful because "the odds are so slim—rendering extraordinary, sustained effort futile and misguided for the vast majority. If this effort (was) directed at areas having better odds of success, then upward mobility would occur for many more" (p. 287).
- *Myth 5: Women now have opportunities to use sport for social mobility.* As discussed in Chapter 14, girls and women participate in sport now more than they ever have before. These shifts are due to legal mandates, changes in cultural expectations, increased monies and resources devoted to women's

sports, and increased interest. Though participation figures have increased, social mobility through sport remains largely stagnant. Women have fewer opportunities than men do to play sport professionally, and the pay is just a fraction of what men earn. In some cases, these discrepancies exist despite women clearly outperforming men on the national and international stages, such as with the US Women's National Soccer Team. The sports where women can earn a substantial sum—tennis and golf—also require considerable investments during early participation years. Thus, financial rewards are reserved for those who are likely already from middle- and upper-class households.

- *Myth 6: Professional athletes have lifelong financial security.* Some professional athletes earn enough to last them for a lifetime—and then some. LeBron James' net worth of \$450 million (Kleinman, 2018) is one example. But, even among professional athletes, long-term financial security is not a certainty. Average playing careers are short and few athletes have the financial planning background to effectively manage their resources. Following their playing days, sport-related jobs include coaching, consulting, and announcing, among others, but these jobs are in short supply. Finally, beyond that financial considerations, athletes must also cope with transition from being a star athlete generating a large weekly paycheck, to a former athlete. They lose their identity, status, source of income, sense of community with their teammates, and what they have focused on for much of their lives. The transition, then, is a difficult one.

Sage and Eitzen (2013) painted a sobering picture of the relationship between sport and social mobility. But, does debunking these myths mean that social mobility is not possible? The evidence does not support this contention. Athletes in high school generally perform better academically, get into less trouble, are less likely to get pregnant, and are more likely to persist. Athletes reap benefits beyond high school, too, as they have better jobs with more pay than their non-athlete counterparts (Kniffin, 2014).

How do people reconcile this potentially conflicting information? Surveying the existing evidence suggests sport participation is likely to lead to improved life outcomes under certain conditions. Or, to use the theory parlance from Chapter 2, there are moderators that influence the relationship between being an athlete and subsequent life outcomes. Sport participation is likely to lead to the best outcomes when it:

- Is safe and does not result in major, lasting injuries. Serious injuries occur with alarming frequency, particularly at elite levels (Soligard et al., 2016). When the effects of these injuries carry over past their playing careers, athletes' health-related quality of life is likely to suffer.
- Allows for the development of lifelong physical activity habits. Many athletes stop participating in any sort of sport or physical activity following their careers. In some cases, continued participation in the sport of interest is not feasible (e.g., continued field hockey engagement). Ideally, though, athletes would develop other habits and practices they could maintain for a lifetime, ensuring their health and psychological well-being. These might include an understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet, the practice of regular exercise, and the like.
- Allows the athlete to earn a degree. Most college athletes do not earn a college degree. The figures drop even further among racial minorities and those in sports with a possibility of a lucrative professional career. The problem, as highlighted previously in this chapter, is that most athletes do not play professionally. Absent a college degree in hand, lifelong earning potential drops precipitously.
- Affords the athlete with the chance for a meaningful education. Academic clustering is common, where athletic academic advisors 'encourage' the athletes to pursue a limited number of majors, thought to be easy. Neither outcome serves the athlete well in the long term, nor are they likely to result in meaningful social mobility.
- Allows the athletes to increase their social capital (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015). Athletes who learn how to navigate difficult academic and social situations, and who develop strong social networks with athletes and other professionals are likely to realize increased success in life.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to investigate the relationships among social class, sport, and social mobility. I started with a discussion of social class and socioeconomic status, differentiating between these terms. I then moved to an analysis of class relations and how they influence sport participation and consumption. Finally, I analyze social class mobility, including the myths associated with sport participation and the ways in which sport might allow for such social movement.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are ways in which social class differs from socioeconomic status?
2. What are the pros and cons of focusing on social class instead of socioeconomic status?
3. List and explain the three broad categories of factors that impact class relations. Which of the specific categories within each factor do you consider most influential, and why?
4. The chapter included several viewpoints on whether sport can serve as a source of social mobility. Which viewpoint do you consider most persuasive, and why?

RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Desmond, M. (2016). *Evicted: Poverty and profit in the American city*. New York, NY: Broadway Books. (A gripping, compelling book emanating from Desmond's three years of ethnographic research in Milwaukee, WI (USA); details poverty in the American city.)
- Krugman, P. (2007). *The conscience of a liberal*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. (A provocative book from the Nobel Prize Laureate, providing an overview of economic inequalities in the United States and possible solutions to the problem.)
- Putnam, R. D. (2015). *Our kids: The American dream in crisis*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (A remarkable book from award-winning researcher and scholar; offers extensive data and analysis related to social class, education, opportunity, and access in America.)

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