

SPORTS IN SOCIETY: ISSUES & CONTROVERSIES

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Undivisible Concept As Movement Is Life And Stoppage Is Death

Theoretical Perspectives

- What factors contribute to the popularity of certain sports?
- What motivates individuals in their adherence to sport?
- In what ways are sport opportunities influenced by race, gender, ethnicity, and Sex?
- How is sport controlled within various social institutions?

Social Theories

- **Theories** are based on questions about why the world is the way it is, and on ideas about how it might be different
- **Theories** involve a combination of
 - ❖ **Description**
 - ❖ **Reflection**
 - ❖ **Analysis**
- **Theories** have practical implication because they help us make choices

Five Major Social Theories Are Used to Study Sports in Society

- Functionalist theory
- Conflict theory
- Inter-actionist theory
- Critical theories
- Feminist theories



Functionalist Theory

- Society is an organized system of interrelated parts
- Sports are studied in terms of their contributions to the system
- Research focuses on sport participation and positive outcomes for individuals and society
- Many people like it because it assumes that shared values and agreement are the basis for social order
- Those with power and influence often prefer it because it emphasizes stability and equilibrium in society
- Everyday discussions and media coverage often are based on assumptions used in functionalist theory

Using Functionalist Theory to take social action

- Promote the development and growth of organized sports
- Increase sport participation opportunities to foster individual development
- Increase the supervision and control of athletes

- Mandate coaching education programs
- Highlight success in elite programs

Weaknesses of Functionalist Theory

- Overstates the positive consequences of sport in society
- Assumes that all social groups benefit equally from sports
- Does not recognize that sports are social constructions that privilege or disadvantage some people more than others

Conflict Theory

- Society is a system of structures & relationships shaped by economic forces
- Sports are studied in terms of how they promote economic exploitation and capitalist expansion
- Research focuses on how sports perpetuate the power and privilege of elite groups in society
- Those with power and influence dislike it because it emphasizes change and a redistribution of economic resources
- Many people dislike it because it identifies problems in society
- Seldom used in everyday conversations because it portrays sport as an opiate that deadens awareness of social issues

Using Conflict Theory to take social action

- Focus on class inequality and how it might be minimized or eliminated in and through sports
- Develop awareness of how athletes and spectators are used for the profit and personal gain of the economic elite
- More emphasis on play and less on commercial spectator sports

Weaknesses of Conflict Theory

- Assumes that all social life is “economically determined”
- Ignores the importance of gender, race & ethnicity, age, & other factors in social life
- Ignores the possibility that sport participation can be a personally and socially empowering experience

Inter-actionist Theory

- Society is created and maintained through social interaction
- Sports are studied in terms of how they are created and given meaning by people
- Research focuses on how people experience sports and how identities are related to sport participation and sport cultures
- Those who use it often employ “interpretive research methods” to study
 - Social processes associated with becoming involved, staying involved, and changing involvement in sports
 - How people develop and maintain identities as athletes
 - How people give meaning to sports
 - The characteristics of sport subcultures

Using Inter-actionist Theory to Take Social Action

- Change sports to match the perspectives and identities of those who play them
- Make sport organizations more democratic, less autocratic, and less hierarchically organized
- Question identity formation processes that involve the normalization of pain, injury, & substance use in sports

Weaknesses of Inter-actionist Theory

- Does not explain how meaning, identity, and interaction are connected with social structures and materials conditions in society
- Ignores issues of power and power relations in society and how they impact sport, sport participation, and sport experiences

Critical Theories

- Society involves cultural production, power relations, & ideological struggles
- Sports are social constructions that change as power relations change and as narratives and discourses change
- Research focuses the meaning and organizations of sports, and on sports as sites for cultural transformation
- Those who use them assume that sports are more than reflections of society, and they study
 - Struggles over the organization & meaning of sports
 - The narratives and images people use to construct and give meaning to sports
 - Whose voices and perspectives are used in narratives about sports in society
 - How dominant narratives, images, and power relations can be disrupted to promote progressive changes

SPORTS are more than reflections of society

- *Sports* consist of sets of relationships that are produced by people in society.
- *Sports* are the creations of people interacting with one another.
- *Sports* are the “social stuff” out of which society and culture come to be what they are.

Using Critical Theories to Take Social Action

- Use sports to challenge and transform exploitive and oppressive practices
- Increase the number and diversity of sport participation opportunities
- Challenge the ideological implications of the stories told about sports in a culture
- Challenge the voices and perspectives of those with power in sports and society

Weaknesses of Critical Theories

- No clear guidelines for identifying and assessing forms of resistance and strategies for producing transformation
- No unified strategies for dealing with social problems, conflicts, and injustice

Feminist Theories

- Society life is pervasively gendered
- Sports are gendered activities grounded primarily in the values and experiences of men with power and influence
- Research focuses how sports reproduce gendered ideas and practices related to physicality, sexuality, and the body



"HOW CAN FEMINISTS SAY THAT SPORTS ARE BASED ON THE VALUES AND INTERESTS OF MEN WITH POWER?"

- Those who use them study

- ❖ How sports are involved in the production of ideas about masculinity and femininity
- ❖ How women are represented in media coverage of sports
- ❖ Strategies used by women to resist or challenge dominant gender ideology
- ❖ The gendered dimensions of sports and sport organizations

Using Feminist Theories to Take Social Action

- Challenge aspects of sports that systematically privilege men over women
- Expose and transform oppressive forms of sexism and homophobia in sports
- Use sports as sites to empower women and promote the notion of partnership and competition *with* others

Weaknesses Feminist Theories

- Lack clear guidelines for assessing forms of resistance and the value of ideas and actions in producing social transformation
- Have not given enough attention to connections between gender and other categories of experience

WHAT THEORIES ARE BEST?

- Theories are tools that help us ask questions, collect and analyze information, and interpret the implications of the analyses.
- Our choice of theories is influenced by our goals and political agendas.
- The best theories are those that help us find ways to make the world more democratic and humane. (*Right?*)