## Cultural Analysis of Sport in the US

**KIN 507**  
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### Using Social Theories: How Can They Help Us Study Sports in Society?  
**Week I**

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Presentation Objectives</th>
<th>What Can We Learn From Social Theories About Society?</th>
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<td>❑ Identify and describe the theories used most widely to study sports in society.</td>
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<td>❑ Explain the ways that theories help us understand sports and the society in which we live.</td>
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<td>❑ Demonstrate how theories influence our view of sports and the practical actions we take in connection with sports.</td>
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<td>❑ Coakley, 2007, p. 32</td>
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<td>❑ The better developed and accurate a theory is the stronger its predictive power.</td>
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<td>❑ A theoretical framework assists the researcher or policy maker in formulating questions, looking for answers, taking action, and assessing the efficacy of the taken steps.</td>
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Theories are emerging explanations of what we know about social worlds at this time.

Sociological Theories
- Functionalist Theory
- Conflict Theory
- Critical Theory
- Feminist Theory
- Interactionist Theory

Most scholarly work over the past half century has been based on one or a combination of the above five major theories. (Coakley, 2007, pp. 32-33)

Sociological Theories: Functionalist Theory
- Social order is based on consensus and shared values, which hold the interrelated parts of society together.
- All social systems operate efficiently when each part of the system stays in synch with other parts.
- Émile Durkheim is considered by many to be the father of sociology.

http://www.emile-durkheim.com

Sociological Theories: Functionalist Theory
- The functionalist theory holds that inequality is a benefit to society as a whole because the promise of greater rewards, motivates people to take risks, pursue difficult goals, challenge existing ideas, innovate, and explore.

http://uweb.txsstate.edu/~rw04/intro/AGRICULTURE/functionalist.htm

"Only in a more egalitarian society is it possible to develop policies that are truly in the public interest, for only in such a society do enough citizens share enough interests so that these can be considered public interests."


Functional alternatives which would substitute for the functions of poverty would make poverty unnecessary.

Most important alternatives to poverty are themselves dysfunctional for the affluent, since they require some redistribution of income and power.

A functional analysis of poverty thus comes to many of the same conclusions as radical sociological analysis, demonstrating anew Merton's assertion that functionalism need not be conservative in ideological outlook or implication.

In any given instance, an item may have functional and dysfunctional consequences...

... the functional analyst ... considers socially deviant behaviour just as much a product of social structure as conformist behaviour...


Do sports and sport participation influence social and personal development?

Do sports participation foster the development of social integration in groups, communities, and societies?

Does sport participation contribute to success in other life related activities?

Is sport participation related to a healthier lifestyle and life?

Coakley (2001, pp. 33-34)
**Drawbacks of Functionalist Theory**

- Overemphasis on the positive in sports (often a result of oversimplification)
- Assumes that all individuals have similar needs (disregards special interests and conflict of interests)
- Overlooks the ways sports promote the existing power structure in society and help maintain the status quo

**Sociological Theories: Conflict Theory**

- Social order is based on economic interests and the use of economic power to exploit labor.
- Social class shapes social structures and relationships.

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**Conflict Theory**

Karl Marx (1818-83)

Conflict theory addresses the competition among the various social classes and the ways those who hold the power seek to maintain it. Social structures and relationships are ultimately shaped by economic forces.

**Conflict Theory and Research on Sports**

- How and when do athletes become alienated from their bodies?
- How do sports contribute to the existence of socioeconomic inequality in society?
- How do the processes of commercialization change sports and influence social relationships in society?
- How do people with economic power use sports to further their own interests?
**Drawbacks of Conflict Theory**

- Assumes that all social life is driven and shaped by economic factors and the needs of capital in society.
- Underestimates the influence of gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation, and physical ability (or disability) on the decision making process.
- Underestimates the creative and liberating experience inherent in sport participation.

**Sociological Theories**

**Critical Theory**

- Social order is negotiated through struggles over ideology, representation, and power.
- The focus is on social change, inequality, and subordination as experienced by:
  - race, gender, age, physical ability, sexual orientation, and social status (income)

**Critical Theory and Research on Sports**

- How is the funding of sports decided?
- When and how do sports maintain the power structure in society?
- How do sports support big business practices and the upper social class?
- When do sports become sites for challenging, resisting, and even transforming how social life is organized?

**Drawbacks of Critical Theory**

- Most critical theorists give a higher priority to analyzing problems and taking political action to promote change than they do to building a general theory of social life.
- Overemphasis on resistance and transgression and a tendency to see value in all resistant discourses.
- Critical theories are so diverse that it is often difficult to understand their similarities and differences.
Sociological Theories: Feminist Theory

Social order is based primarily on the values, experiences, and interests of men with power.

Social life and social order is gendered and based on patriarchal ideas.

Betty Friedan, feminist crusader and author of "The Feminine Mystique"

http://www.iep.utm.edu/b/beauvoir.htm

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986)

Sociological Theories: Feminist Theory

Social life and social order is gendered and based on patriarchal ideas.

“I will make most severe
Your pangs in childbearing;
In pain shall you bear children.
Yet your urge shall be for your husband,
And he shall rule over you.”

Lord God, Genesis 3

Masaccio (1401-1428)

http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/m/masaccio/brancacc/expulsio/expuls.html

Feminist Theory and Research on Sports

How do dominant forms of gender relations privilege men over women and some men over others?

How are women and men represented in media coverage of sports, and how do those representations reproduce or resist dominant gender ideology?

http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6422612.html

Drawbacks of Feminist Theory

There are no clear guidelines for identifying and assessing forms of resistance and the value of ideas and actions across situations.

Little attention is given to connections between gender and some other categories of experience.

e.g., elderly women, young girls, Muslim women
**Sociological Theories: Interactionist Theory**

- Social order is created by people as they interact with each other.
- Social life is grounded in social relationships and the meanings given to social reality.

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**Interactionist Theory**

**(Symbolic Interactions)**

- Interactionist Theory (Symbolic Interactions)
  - Choices and behaviors of individuals depend on the individual’s perceived effect of her/his actions on others.

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**Interactionist Theory**

**(Symbolic Interactions)**

- The learning process takes place through social interactions. Vygotsky proposed the zone of proximal development (ZPD), where learners construct a new language through socially mediated interaction (Brown, p. 287).
- Vygotsky’s social-interactionist theory was proposed about 80 years ago, and still serves as a strong foundation for the interactionists’ perspective today (Ariza and Hancock, 2003).”

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**Interactionist Theory and Research on Sports**

- What are the social processes through which people become involved in sports?
- How do people come to define themselves and be defined by others as athletes?
- How do people give meaning to and derive meaning from their experiences in sports?
- What happens when athletes retire?
- What are the characteristics of sport subcultures?

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Drawbacks of Interactionist Theory
- The connection between sport experiences and and sport subcultures is overlooked
- Systems of power and inequality in sport and society are ignored
- Lacks in critical insight into what society could and should do with regard to social organization

Figurational Theory and Research on Sports
- Focuses on the historical processes through which networks of interdependent people evolve and change over time.
- Human beings “can be understood only in terms of the various figurations to which they have belonged in the past and which they continue to form in the present” (Goudsblom, 1977, p. 7).

Figurational Theory and Research on Sports
- What are the historical, economic, political, and emotional factors that account for the emergence of modern sports during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in much of Europe?
- What are the historical and social processes through which sport participation became increasingly serious in people’s lives and through which sports became professionalized and commercialized in various societies during the twentieth century?

Drawbacks of Figurational Theory
- An over emphasis on the past gives little attention to the present and its issues
- Understates the immediate personal consequences of oppressive power relationships and the need for concrete political actions
The Application of Social Theories to the study of Social Issues

Often, different social theories are applied to the study of the same social issue.

An Example of the Application of two Different Social Theories to the study of one Social Issue

Often, Social-interactionists see language as a rule-governed cultural activity learned in interaction with others, while nativists perceive language ability as an innate capacity to generate syntactically correct sentences. Thus, Interactionists believe environmental factors are more dominant in language acquisition, while nativists believe inborn factors are more dominant.


Is there a “best” Theory?

- Ask a critical feminist, he/she will tell you...
- Ask a figurational theorist (if you can find one), he/she will tell you...
- What do you think? Explain.

Functionalist Versus Conflict Theory Approach to Problem Solving

- How would you use functionalism or conflict theory to assess the impact of varsity athletics on the chances of a disadvantaged (poor) athletic young African American child to acquire a college education?
- What would a feminist theorist’s view be about the same question?
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**Website Resources**

- www.mhhe.com/coakley9e
  - Sport in Society 9th ed.
- http://www.feminist.org/research/sports/sports2.html
  - Empowering Women in Sports
    - Feminist Majority Foundation
- http://www.hewett.norfolk.sch.uk/CURRIC/soc/topic1.htm
  - Sociology at Hewett