

Chapter 15

Sport

Sections

1. The Nature of Sport
2. Theoretical Perspectives and Sport
3. Social Issues in Sport

Learning Objectives


After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- justify sport as an American institution.
- compare and contrast sport in America from a functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist perspective.
- understand the relationship between American sport and social mobility.
- cite evidence of sexism and racism in American sport.





Applying Sociology



All of a sudden I find I'm stronger than anyone else in the place—all the girls and practically all of the guys The boys respected me right away, and that's important. They all act like they're so tough, then you go in and lift more than they can. They can't ignore that there's a girl over in the corner doing more than them

As this quote from a young power lifter shows, participating in a sport can positively affect a girl's self-image. Achieving this benefit was one of the motivations behind passage of Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendment Act. The law made gender discrimination illegal in any educational institution that received federal funds. Since 1972, more and more girls and young women have participated in athletic programs. Critics argue that male athletic programs have suffered as a result, but others say females can gain opportunities without adversely affecting those of males (Hannon, 2003).

Some sociologists refer to social institutions such as sport and the entertainment industry as *secondary institutions*. This chapter looks at how sport affects American society.



Chapter Overview

Visit the *Sociology and You* Web site at glencoe.com and click on **Chapter 15—Chapter Overviews** to preview chapter information.

The Nature of Sport

Key Terms

- **sport** (p. 496)
- **sport subculture** (p. 500)

- **sport**
a set of competitive activities in which winners and losers are determined by physical performance within a set of established rules

Section Preview

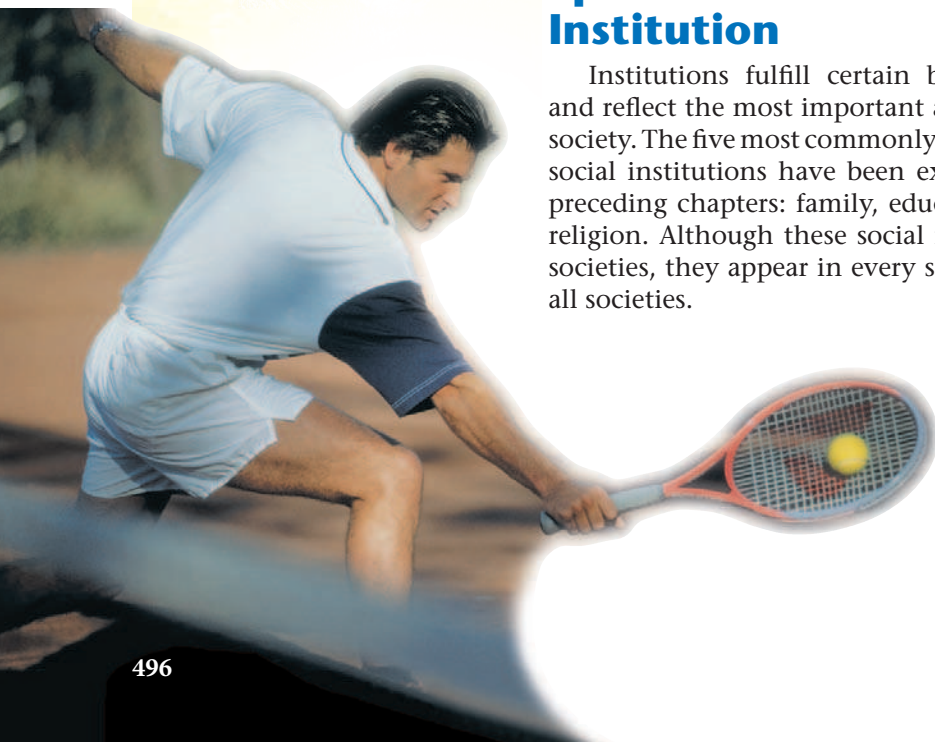
As a social institution, sport fulfills some important societal needs. One of these is helping individuals identify with other members of society. Sport subcultures have developed around both team and individual sports. For this reason, sport is a reflection of society.

A Definition of Sport

For most people, sport consists of certain leisure activities, exercise, and spectator events. It is actually more complex than that. Sociologists define **sport** as a set of competitive activities in which winners and losers are determined by physical performance within a set of established rules. While sport is an important aspect of recreation, many forms of recreation do not involve sport. Sport sociologist Jay J. Coakley (2004) sees a spontaneous race between two skiers as more of a contest than a sport. Although a contest between skiers involves physical activity and competition, it does not involve definite rules or standardized conditions.

Sport as a Social Institution

Institutions fulfill certain basic needs and reflect the most important aspects of a society. The five most commonly recognized social institutions have been examined in preceding chapters: family, education, government, economic systems, and religion. Although these social institutions take different forms in different societies, they appear in every society because they fulfill needs common to all societies.



What is the difference between a sport and a game?



Sport teaches basic values and aids in socialization.

Because societies have additional needs, there are additional social institutions. Sport is one of these. Sport teaches some of the basic values of society. It also promotes attachment to society. For example, a society requires that its members identify with it. Members must feel that belonging to the society is an important part of who they are. Sport aids in this identification of self with society.

Chariot racing in ancient Rome is a clear illustration of this social identification. Athletes would risk their lives in this dangerous sport in part to reflect their self-identification as Romans.

The individual, even when free, did not belong to himself; he was strictly subordinated to the city. His life, his death, were only episodes in the history of the group. To confront death was not an act of exceptional heroism; it was the normal way of proving oneself a Roman (Auguet, 1972:198).

Sport, Culture, and Society

Sport plays a central role in American society in part because it reflects the culture's emphasis on achievement.

People who visit the United States from other countries are often amazed at the extent to which competition [in sport] is used to distribute rewards and evaluate the work of human beings (Coakley, 2004:82).





As women's place in American society changes, their place in sport also changes. Women's soccer and basketball teams in particular have received a great deal of attention in recent years.

The prevailing American view of sport is the one reportedly expressed by the late Vince Lombardi, coach of the Green Bay Packers of the National Football League during

the 1960s: "Winning is not everything. It is the only thing." For the most part, sport continues to be dominated by achievement-oriented values.

Sport reflects society, so it is not surprising that males dominate the sports world just as they do many other aspects of American society. Females are second to men overall in power, income, and job opportunities in sports just as they are in business, education, medicine, and law (Eitzen, 2003).

Some progress toward equality is being made, however, especially on the college level. The women's basketball teams at both the University of Tennessee and the University of Connecticut have at different times held the best single season record in men's or women's basketball history. Women are making inroads in professional golf and tennis, and the women's professional basketball league (WNBA) has many fans. Women's place in athletics was given a healthy boost in 1999 when Mia Hamm and her teammates won soccer's World Cup. Equality of opportunity for women in sports, though, remains a distant goal.



Another Time



Racing in Rome

The chariot races of the Roman Empire, made famous in America by the movie Ben Hur, involved considerable skill and courage. Charioteers delivered the violence required to please the crowd.

At the end of a race, the charioteers drove abreast, wheel against wheel, for the whole length of the track, whipping their horses madly to gain the half-length which might assure their victory. At this point skill turned into pure violence; each charioteer was no longer content merely to hamper his adversary but took the risk of overturning him by driving his chariot against him in order to break its axle, or of destroying him by whipping his horses into the rear of his chariot. To ward off his maneuver the charioteer so threatened no longer leaned forward but literally "hung on the necks of his horses." He had no need to turn round to see what was happening. He could already feel the breath of his pursuers and the rhythmic shock of their hooves shaking the back of his chariot. A few seconds later, if he had not succeeded in gaining a little ground, there would no longer be either rival, chariot or team, but only an amorphous mass littering the middle of the track.

It was the most spectacular and most popular of all the events of the circus; so much that charioteers did their utmost to involve their rivals in this maneuver in front of the imperial box. For a Roman it summed up all the poetry of the circus; with a sharp, dry crack the fragile box carrying a man was reduced to powder at full speed; the overheated axle collapsed and splinters flew in all directions; the horses crashed into the sand head over heels in a clutter of straps or, seized with panic, broke away from the harness which held them. Before the final catastrophe, the charioteer had to draw the dagger at his waist and cut the reins which, wound about him, bound him to his team; if he succeeded in doing this he had a chance of emerging from the wreck merely bruised, his body full of splinters.



But sometimes he was pitched out head first by the violence of the impact. Then he had no time for this simple act and, if the horses did not fall, was dragged across the circus. As he wore nothing but a tunic held by a set of straps across the chest, his only protection was a leather helmet, insufficient to save his life in such circumstances. But the aggressor did not always emerge unscathed; at the moment of impact his horses reared up and came down again with their forefeet between the spokes of the wheel of the damaged chariot which was turning in the air; they crashed down, their bones broken, whinnying with pain, and the charioteer, halted in full career, ran the same risks as his rival.

Source: Roland Auguet, *Cruelty and Civilization: The Roman Games* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1972), pp. 131–132. Reprinted by permission.

Thinking It Over

Some athletes today engage in "extreme sports" such as sky surfing, street luge, and snowboarding. The criteria for an extreme sport is that it is nonmotorized; has a sanctioning body; is deemed as extreme or unusual; and requires learned skills, conditioning, and practice. Do you think chariot racing of ancient Rome is similar to the extreme sports of today? Why or why not?

Sport Subcultures

● sport subculture

a group with distinct roles, values, norms, and beliefs that is organized around a sport activity

The relationship between sport, society, and culture can also be seen in *sport subcultures*. A **sport subculture** is a group within the larger context of sport that has some of its own distinct roles, values, and norms. These subcultures are organized around a sport activity and beliefs vary widely. Sociologist Michael Smith (1979) wanted to know if violence among hockey players is due to involvement in a “subculture of violence.” In this kind of subculture, violence is the expected response to a perceived challenge or insult—a jostle, a glance, or an offensive remark. Following this norm is essential in acquiring and maintaining honor, especially when challenges are associated with masculinity.

Smith found that hockey players favor violence more than nonplayers. Because of the expectations of coaches and teammates, many hockey players act violently during games. In fact, players criticize teammates who aren’t violent. As one National Hockey League player put it:

I don’t think that there’s anything wrong with guys getting excited in a game and squaring off and throwing a few punches. That’s just part of the game. It always has been. And you know if you tried to eliminate it, you wouldn’t have hockey any more. You look at hockey from the time it was begun, guys gets excited and just fight, and it’s always been like that (Eitzen, 1996:165).

Kent Pearson (1981) researched subcultures involving water-related sports in Australia and New Zealand. He found major cultural differences between surfboard riders and surf lifesavers. Surfboard riders avoid formal organizations, work with loose and flexible definitions of the territory in which their sport will occur, place a heavy emphasis on physical prowess and individualism, and generally oppose the larger society. In contrast, surf lifesaving clubs are highly organized entities that stage competitions

involving swimming, boating, and lifesaving. The territory for such competitions is precisely defined, and formal rules are employed.

Even in nonteam sports, subcultures emerge. Thoroughbred jockeys have developed a subculture with a strong emphasis on displaying dignity, poise, and integrity. The ideal within the subculture of jockeys is a fiery animal with a cool rider.

The cool jockey can wait patiently with a horse in a pocket and get through on the inside, risking the possibility that there will be no opening. Coolness is waiting far back in the pack, risking the possibility that his horse will not “get up” in time. Coolness is sparing the whip on a front-running horse when another animal has pressed into the lead, risking the possibility that once his horse is passed he will not get started again. All these activities are taken by observers as instances of a jockey’s character. In short, moral character is coolness in risky situations (Scott, 1981:146–147).



Even though boxing is the essence of a violent sport, former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson broke the rules when he bit opponent Evander Holyfield on the ear. After the incident, boxing officials fined Tyson \$3 million and revoked his license.



What values are at the center of the unique jockey subculture?

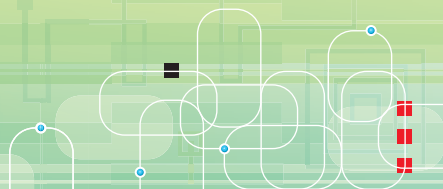
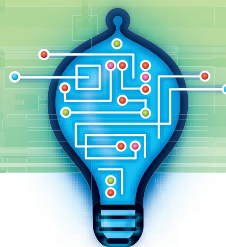
Jockeys take such chances partly because their subculture requires it. Jockeys who fail to display gallantry, integrity, and coolness—qualities expected of them by horse owners, trainers, and other jockeys—do not receive their choice of horses and therefore win few races. Failing to take risks leads to lost opportunities.

Section 1 Assessment

1. Do you agree that in order for an activity to be a sport, it should include a defined set of rules? Why or why not?
2. Which of the following is not an example of sport?
 - a. a baseball game between two major league teams
 - b. a baseball game between two minor league teams
 - c. a spontaneous race between two cyclists
 - d. a swim meet involving amateur athletes

Critical Thinking

3. **Analyzing Information** Think about sports in your school. How is the cultural value of achievement reflected in the behavior of athletes, peers, teachers, and parents? Give some specific examples.



Mass Media and Sports



Some critics fear that the mass media and entertainment promoters are ruining the integrity of sport in America.

Sport fulfills two functions. It teaches some of the basic values of society, and it promotes attachment to society. During televised sports events, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the National Football League (NFL) regularly show student athletes and professional sports stars working with children and disadvantaged persons, behavior reflecting both of these functions.

How do we square this positive picture of sport with the “dark” side of sport that is continuously fed the public by the mass media? Much of the media coverage of modern sports now focuses on the bad, tough-guy image of athletes, coaches, and owners. Not only is “winning the only thing,” as Vince Lombardi, legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, said. Now, the winners are expected to have an attitude.

Dennis Rodman, a former forward in the National Basketball Association (NBA), gained fame from media attention of his cross-dressing and physical assaults. Former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson achieved negative recognition when he bit off a chunk of an opponent's ear and for a number of other physical attacks.

It is hard to believe that these are the “respectable” sports! The newer events covered by the mass media—such as Roller Derby and Wrestle Mania—are going much further. Look at the names of events that World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), formerly known as the World Wrestling Federation (WWF), has recently sponsored: “Road Rage Tour” and “Smack-Down.” Its biggest television draws include individuals with stage names such as “Boogeyman,” “Road Warrior Animal,” and “The Undertaker.” Women have also achieved star status in wrestling. Former wrestler Chyna was known as “the ninth wonder of the world,” and Jacquelyn, two-time women's champion, draws many fans.

So, does mass-media sports coverage reflect basic social values and promote societal identification? Where is the coverage of teamwork, sportsmanship, and character development? Do we simply celebrate with the media the message of unrivaled competition and winning at any cost? At times, it appears the latter is the case, especially when everyday behavior seems to mirror the negative presentation of sport.

Analyzing the Trends

1. Based on how they are presented in the media, would you analyze sports in America from the functionalist or the conflict theory perspective? What perspective do you believe is reflected in the media presentation of sports?
2. “Fake” wrestling grew in popularity after it began being marketed as sports entertainment. In what ways is the role WWE wrestling plays in society similar to and different from the Roman chariot races?

Theoretical Perspectives and Sport

Section Preview

Functionalists see sport positively, as a means for socializing young people, promoting social integration, providing a release for tensions, and developing sound character. Conflict theorists believe that organized sports can be harmful to character development. Symbolic interactionists focus on the self-concepts and relationships developed through sport activities.

Culture and Sport

Sport is a major social activity through which culture is created and reinforced. As noted earlier, sociologists recognize this important aspect of sport.

American sport embodies American values—striving for excellence, winning, individual and team competition, and materialism. Parents want their children to participate in sport because participation teaches them the basic values of American society and builds character (Eitzen, 1999:3).

Although sociologists agree that sport mirrors society, and that the relationship is complex, they disagree over the social implications of sport. Sport sociologist Stanley Eitzen has written a book on the paradoxes, or contradictions, of sport in America. (See Figure 15.1 on page 504.) Functionalists, who tend to concentrate on the benefits of sport, are represented in Eitzen's book. So are conflict theorists, who see a social downside to sport. Symbolic interactionists focus on personal meanings derived from sport.



Sport has long been an important basis for stratification in high schools.

Figure 15.1 Sport Paradoxes

Stanley Eitzen, a highly respected sport sociologist, argues that sport is inherently contradictory. Here are a few of the paradoxes Eitzen identifies. Do you agree with Eitzen that these paradoxes exist?

Social Integration

- Sport can unite different social classes and racial/ethnic groups
but
- sport can heighten barriers that separate groups.

Fair Play

- Sport promotes fair play by teaching the importance of following the rules
but
- sport's emphasis on winning tempts people to cheat.

Physical Fitness

- Sport promotes muscle strength, weight control, endurance, and coordination
but
- sport can lead to the use of steroids and other drugs, excessive weight loss or gain, and injuries.

Academics

- Sport contributes to higher education through scholarships and fund raising
but
- sport takes money away from academics and emphasizes athletic performance over learning and graduation.

Social Mobility

- Sport allows athletes who might otherwise not attend college to obtain an education
but
- only a few can achieve the promise of fame and wealth in the professional ranks.

Source: D. Stanley Eitzen, *Fair and Foul* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2003), pp. 4–7.

Functionalism

How do functionalists view the role of sport in society?

Functionalists think sport is important primarily because it helps society work more smoothly. It does this by performing the following functions (Eitzen and Sage, 2002).

- *Sport teaches basic beliefs, norms, and values.* Sport readies us for adult roles. Games, for instance, prepare participating athletes for work in organizations. Young people who are exposed to competitive sport become more achievement motivated than those who are not. And the earlier the exposure occurs, the higher the orientation towards achievement. This is important because achievement-motivation is essential to productivity in the modern economy.
- *Sport promotes a sense of social identification.* A team binds people to their community and nation. Clevelanders are united in their love of the Browns, Indians, and Cavaliers. During recent baseball seasons, Americans seemed to divide into Red Sox and Yankee fans. The Atlanta Braves have become “America’s team.” Higher social integration results.



Cleveland Browns fans identified so strongly with their city's football team that the city brought suit to keep the team name and colors from leaving town.

- *Sport offers a safe release of aggressive feelings generated by the frustrations, anxieties, and strains of modern life.* It is socially acceptable to yell and scream for an athletic team. Similar behavior directed at a teacher, principal, parent, or employer can have negative consequences.
- *Sport encourages the development of character.* Coaches, school officials, and parents often draw a parallel between sport and “life.” “When the going gets tough, the tough get going” is a sentiment expressed in most locker rooms. The hard work, discipline, and self-sacrifice demanded by team sports become part of an athlete’s value system.

What are the social dysfunctions of sport? Functionalists have identified some drawbacks to sport. Because sport reflects society, it draws on achievement-oriented values that can be intensified to an extreme degree (Kohn, 1992). When achievement and winning come to be seen as the primary goals of sport, any method of winning—including violence and cheating—may be encouraged.

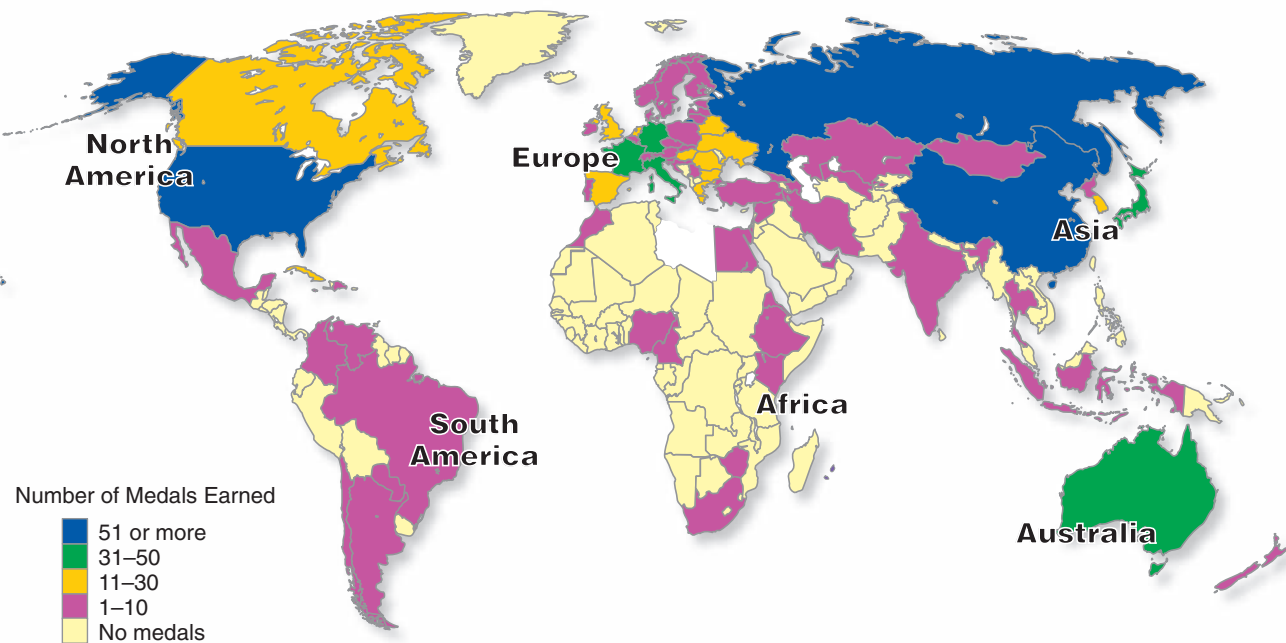
We need not look far to see examples of violence in sport. Coaches and fans expect athletes to place their physical well-being on the line. Players in many sports are expected to resort to violence. In high school football, aggressive behavior is defended as preparation for “real-life” competition. Pressures are intensified at the professional level, where many sports have developed the informal role of *enforcer*—a team member whose major responsibility is to intimidate, provoke, and even injure opponents (Coakley, 2004). Boston Bruins hockey player Marty McSorley used his hockey stick to deliver a vicious blindside slash to the head of opposing player Donald Brashear in February of 2000. The attack was the culmination of a game marked by injuries and was the result of the long-standing rivalry between two “top enforcers.”

World View



Olympic Success

Sport also plays an important role in today's global society. For some time, the winning of Olympic medals has been a source of regional and global prestige. This map shows the number of medals earned by each country in the 2004 Summer Olympic Games.



Interpreting the Map

1. Why do you think there is such wide variation in the number of Olympic medals earned?
2. Do the Olympics illustrate a connection between sport and politics? Explain.

Source: *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2005.*

Cheating may not be as easy as violent behavior to identify, but is often present, nonetheless. Cheating was no doubt involved when American Olympic skater Nancy Kerrigan was struck on the right leg with a metal rod by an assailant later linked to her competitor, Tonya Harding. In 2000, the Atlanta Braves were penalized for signing a player before his sixteenth birthday. The use of steroids by professional athletes in any sport is cheating. Cheating can even extend beyond players, as when a Utah state committee used illegal inducements to attract the 2002 Winter Olympics.

Conflict Theory

Some sociologists have raised disturbing questions about the effects of sport on society. These questions are best understood through the conflict perspective. Conflict theorists are interested in who has the power and how elites use power to satisfy their own interests. To conflict theorists, sport is a social institution in which the most powerful oppress, manipulate, coerce, and exploit others. Conflict theorists highlight the ways in which sport mirrors the unequal distribution of power and money in society. They also emphasize the role of sport in maintaining inequality (Cozzillio, 2005).

While functionalists see sport as contributing to the unification of society, conflict theorists do not. While people from all major segments of a community or society may join in cheering for the same team, their union is only temporary.

When the game is over, the enthusiasm dies, the solidarity runs short, and disharmony in other relations reasserts itself. Much as one hour a week cannot answer to the religious impulse, one game a week cannot answer to the solidarity needs of a racist, sexist, or elitist society (Young, 1986).

Basic social class divisions, in other words, will continue to exist and to affect social relationships in a community even if the local team has just won the World Series or the Super Bowl.

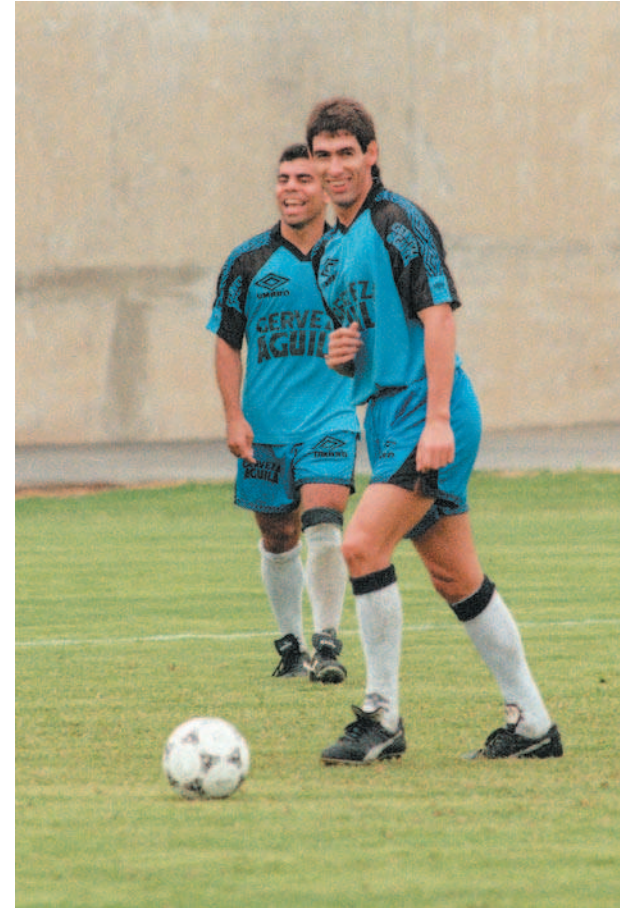
The contribution sport makes in forming good character is also questioned by conflict theorists. Among college athletes, studies have shown that the degree of sportsmanship apparently declines as athletes become more involved in the sports system. As sociologist Stanley Eitzen (2004) notes, nonscholarship athletes display greater sportsmanship than those with athletic scholarships, and those who have not earned letters exhibit more sportsmanship than letter winners.

Conflict theorists can point to any number of past and present scandals in both the college and professional ranks. Americans are constantly reading in the sports section of the daily newspaper about athletes, from high school to the professional level, who are taking drugs, cheating in school, or accepting illegitimate cash “gifts.” One university after another is being investigated and penalized by the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Coaches as well as players are involved in misconduct.

Athletes may use performance-enhancing drugs such as steroids and amphetamines to achieve a “competitive edge.” . . . Big-time college coaches in their zeal to win have been found guilty of exploiting athletes, falsifying transcripts, providing illegal payments, hiring surrogate test takers, paying athletes for nonexistent summer jobs, and illegally using government Pell grants and work study monies for athletes. So much, I would argue, for the myth that “sport builds character” (Eitzen, 1996:189).

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism also contributes to our understanding of sport as a social institution. This theoretical perspective concentrates on personal meanings, social relationships, and self-identity processes. Symbolic interactionists are concerned with the symbols of sports. The meanings and interpretations



In some cultures, sport is so important lives may depend on it. In 1994, Colombian soccer player Andres Escobar was gunned down, apparently for scoring against his own team in the World Cup soccer match against the United States. (Colombia lost, 2–1.)

of these symbols are important because they affect the self-concepts, as well as the relationships, of those involved.

The social context of Little League baseball illustrates this perspective. For three years, Gary Alan Fine (1987) studied American adolescent suburban males who played Little League baseball. He discovered and documented a variety of ways in which the boys assigned meanings to their team activities. In addition, he described how these meanings and interpretations influenced the boys' social interactions and affected their self-definitions.

What were these meanings? Much of the activity of coaches and parents centered on teaching the rules of the game and teaching values, such as team play, hard work, fair play, competition, and winning. But these ten- to twelve-year-old boys formed their own interpretations of these messages. The boys misinterpreted the adult values of hard work, competition, and so forth as the "masculine" values of dominance, "toughness," and risky behavior.

How were social interaction and self-concepts affected?

In the first place, the boys' behavior convinced coaches and parents that the youngsters understood and accepted their values. For example, the aggressive behavior that the boys considered as evidence of their masculinity was seen by the coaches and parents as evidence of "hustle," dedication to competition, and the desire to win. The boys were praised for this behavior, which encouraged them to continue it. "Weaker" peers, younger children, and girls in general frequently experienced the disdain of these Little Leaguers. This disrespect often led to a loss of self-esteem for children who suffered the brunt of the Little Leaguers' scorn.

What are some limitations of each perspective? The functionalist perspective makes important points regarding the positive and negative role of sport in society. Its critics, however, contend that many sports have become so closely tied to elite interests that they contribute more to private profit than to the general well-being of society. To investigate this point, the conflict perspective concentrates on some major concerns of sport, such as racism and sexism (discussed in the next section). On the other hand, conflict theorists tend to overlook the positive contributions of sport to society. They are accused of placing too much emphasis on the extent to which sport is manipulated and controlled by the elite. Their critics also claim that

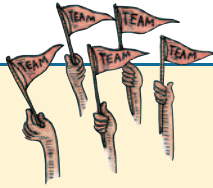


This young boy might be misinterpreting what his coach is trying to teach him about sportsmanship.





Figure 15.2 Social Effects of Sport

This table illustrates how each theoretical perspective might study an issue involving sport. For each assumption, provide a specific example from your own experience or from a team you follow.

Theoretical Perspective	Concept	Assumption	
Functionalism	Social integration	Athletic teams promote togetherness and belonging in a community.	
Conflict Theory	Social conflict	Deep social conflict exists within a community and persists despite widespread attachment to athletic teams.	
Symbolic Interactionism	Social concept	Participation in a team sport may promote or harm self-esteem depending upon factors such as emphasis on winning and fair play.	

conflict theorists underestimate the character-building benefit of team sports. Symbolic interactionism contributes greatly to understanding the socialization process in sport. But, because it concentrates on social interaction, it fails to include the broader social and cultural context. For example, symbolic interactionism does not address the functions of sport in society or explore sport within the context of power and social inequality.

Section 2 Assessment

1. What is the relationship between sport and achievement-oriented values?
2. Name three roles that sport plays in society, according to functionalists.
3. Summarize in one sentence the overall attitude of the conflict perspective toward sport.

Critical Thinking

4. **Finding the Main Idea** Has your self-concept been affected by sports? Explain the effects from the symbolic interactionist viewpoint.

Focus on Research



Case Study: Tough Guys, Wimps, and Weenies

Remember Donna Eder's study of middle-school stratification? (See pages 66–67.) She also researched the nature of middle-school sports. Using the framework of symbolic interactionism, Eder assumes that the social world of teenagers is constructed through interaction with others. Thus, everyday exchanges—insults, greetings, gossip—give teenagers a sense of their social world.

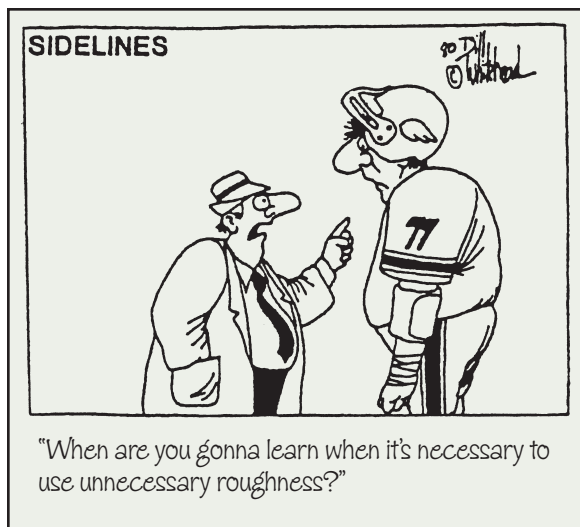
Middle-school coaches accented the value of toughness. In the world of athletics, having a “mean” attitude is masculine, and being nice is effeminate. Wrestlers, for example, were told to make opponents “suffer.” Football coaches did not tolerate fighting off the field, but as a means to handle conflict among athletes, these same coaches encouraged physical force on the field.

I said that I had heard that Coach Paulson wasn't pleased with the way the team played. Walter and Carl both agreed. Walter [the team manager] said that the team didn't hit like they should have and that made the coach mad. Carl said, “Yeah, but I really socked that guy. Man, I threw him down on the concrete. Did you hear Coach James yelling, “Way to go, Orville”?” (Eder, 1995:62)

Evidence of weakness was greeted by derogatory names like “wuss,” “wimp,” and “girl.” Ritual insults promoted stereotypically masculine behavior, particularly among higher-status boys. Stories of physical force in sports were repeated with pride. Even soccer players bragged about kicking opponents in the shins or throwing a ball into an opponent's face.

The most forcefully combative boys were the most respected. Although the coaches tried to curb physical violence outside of games and matches, many players considered fighting an appropriate way to handle all peer conflicts.

[The] importance of being tough extended to behavior off the playing field as well as on it. Boys were continually challenged to develop more aspects of toughness, including the ability to deny pain and suppress feelings as well as respond combatively to verbal and physical attacks. Boys who rejected these messages were sometimes subject to ridicule by girls as well as boys, showing the difficulty boys faced when trying to escape the pressures of being masculine within this school setting (Eder, 1995:72).





Future sociologists may study the effect that team sports plays on women's aggression.

Insult exchanges could be won by getting another boy to become angry. By losing his cool, the other boy lost his image of toughness. Some boys would insult another boy just to look good to others. An example is provided by one of the researcher's notes on Hank, the highest-status boy in the seventh grade, who had a reputation for verbal assault.

Hank does seem to enjoy conflict or competition on a one-on-one basis. A couple of times today he left the table just to go down and abuse some kid at the end of the table, calling him a pud, a squirt, or a wimp. Then he would come back and tell the group how the guy had done nothing when he had said this. Hank would get a big smile on his face and was really pleased (Eder, 1995:73–74).

Insults and counter-insults delivered several messages. First, boys learned not to care about the feelings of others. Second, insulting, or even humiliating, their peers was a socially approved means of achieving or displaying higher status. Third, boys who humiliated low-status peers were rewarded with social recognition. This was true even if the target of ridicule had a disability or was overweight.

Working with the Research

1. Do you think this study describes sports at your school? Explain.
2. Do female athletes treat each other differently from the way boys treat each other? Explain.

Social Issues in Sport

Key Term

- **stacking** (p. 514)

Section Preview

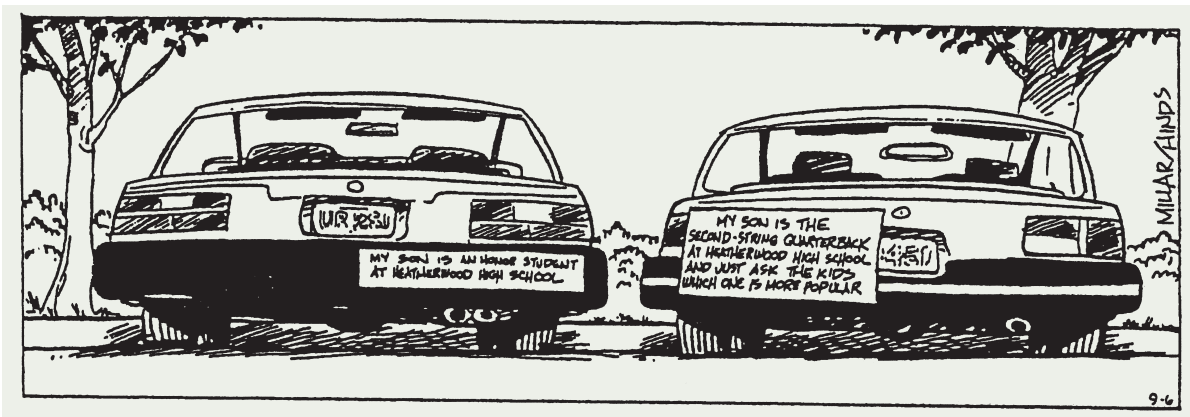
Sport contributes to upward mobility among collegiate athletes, but the opportunities are too few. Minorities still face discrimination in sport. Women in sport suffer from gender-based stereotypes. Intercollegiate female athletes do not receive treatment equal to the treatment received by males, although this situation is slowly improving.

Sport and Social Mobility

The autobiographies of star athletes often point to sport as their way out of poverty. One educator once predicted that “football would enable a whole generation of young men in the coal fields of Pennsylvania to turn their backs on the mines that employed their fathers” (Rudolph, 1962:378). Many athletes do use sport as a means out of their equivalent “coal fields,” and many minority members work their way out of poverty through sport. It is also true that the average salaries of professional athletes are very high (Leonard, 1998). Even so, let’s examine this alleged relationship between sport and social mobility.

Does sport really promote social mobility? Participating in sport increases the likelihood of improving a person’s place in the stratification structure. Whatever sport they play, college athletes tend to be better educated, earn more money, and have higher occupational prestige than their fathers. This is the very definition of upward social mobility. And in these terms, college athletes as a whole are more successful than college students who do not participate in sports (Leonard, 1998). Although this finding is meaningful, it has not settled the debate regarding how much sport promotes upward mobility for minorities.

Sports have long been an important basis for stratification in high schools.

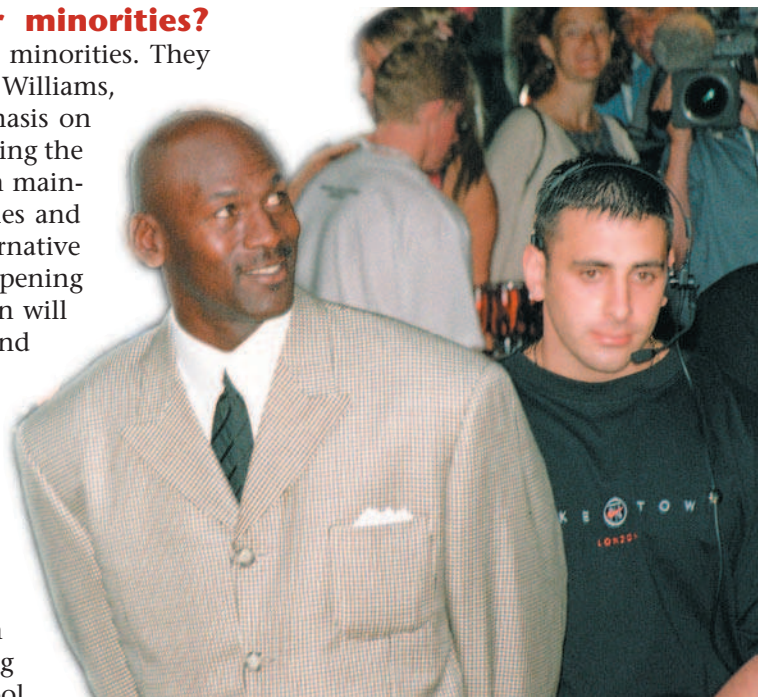


Does sport promote upward mobility for minorities?

Some people argue that sport is a social class escalator for minorities. They point to Tiger Woods, Michael Vick, and Venus and Serena Williams, among others. A different viewpoint argues that the emphasis on sport is harmful because it diverts attention away from learning the academic and business-related skills necessary for success in mainstream American society. Because of the lure of high salaries and prestige, many aspiring minority athletes fail to develop alternative career plans. Minority members who spend their youth sharpening their athletic skills at the expense of their general education will very likely be casualties of an unrealizable dream of wealth and glory (Lapchick and Matthews, 1999; Lapchick, 2004).

Some convincing evidence supports those who see sport as a barrier to upward mobility for minorities. Figure 15.3 shows that there are over one million high school football players. Just under 60,000 of these players become college football players. And 1,600 of these college players become professional players. Thus, the probability that a high school football player will make it to the pros is less than two-tenths of one percent. Similarly, a high school baseball player has a 0.2 percent chance of becoming a major leaguer. The odds are even worse for a high school basketball player, who has a 0.1 percent probability of making it to the National Basketball Association. Moreover, those who become professional athletes have short careers on the average: one to seven years for baseball players, four to six years for basketball players, and four and one-half years for football players.

Of course, this does not mean minority athletes should not enjoy the benefits of a collegiate sport. To be sure, some athletes have received good college educations who may otherwise not have had the chance. It does argue, however, that no high school athlete—minority or white, for that matter—should rely solely on sport as a ticket up the stratification structure.



The phenomenal success of basketball star Michael Jordan is frequently used to prove that sport is a path of upward mobility for minorities. Is Jordan a typical example?

	Number of Players in High School	Percentage Advancing from High School to College	Number of Players in College	Percentage Advancing from College to Professional Level	Number of Players at Professional Level	Percentage Advancing from High School to Professional Level
MALES						
Football	1,002,734	6%	57,593	3%	1,643	0.16%
Basketball	541,130	3%	15,874	2%	348	0.06%
Baseball	451,701	6%	25,938	3%	750	0.17%
Ice hockey	27,245	13%	3,647	18%	648	2.38%
Total	2,022,811	5%	103,052	3%	3,389	0.17%
FEMALES						
Basketball	451,600	3%	14,445	1%	132	0.03%
Golf	49,690	6%	3,108	2%	52	0.10%
Tennis	159,740	5%	8,314	2%	150	0.09%
Total	661,030	4%	25,867	1%	334	0.05%
Grand Total	2,683,841	5%	128,919	3%	3,723	0.14%

Figure 15.3

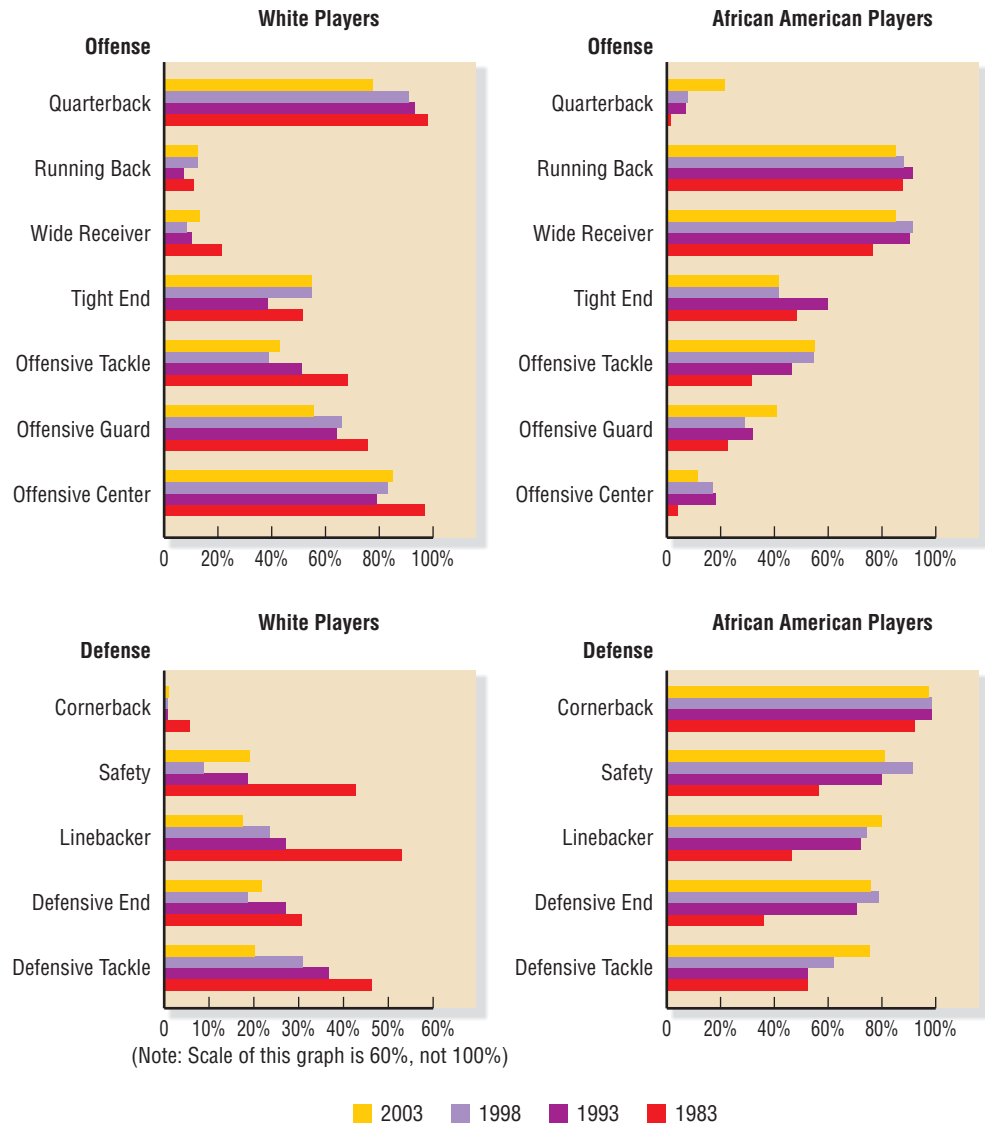
High School Athletes' Chances of Advancing to the Pros

This table shows the slim chance that high school athletes have to play a professional sport. Does this surprise you?

Sources: National Federation of State High School Associations, 1999–2000.

Figure 15.4 National Football League Positions, by Race
Do you think that these data support the presence of stacking in the NFL?

Source: The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, 2004.



Sport and Racism

- **stacking**
assignment of players to less central positions on the basis of race or ethnicity

One sign of systematic discrimination shows up in what is called stacking. In **stacking**, players are assigned to less central positions on the basis of race or ethnicity. “Central” positions are those that involve leadership and decision-making responsibilities and thus offer a greater likelihood of influencing the outcome of the game. Historically, minorities have more often been assigned to positions requiring relatively little interaction and coordination with other players. In football, for example, African American quarterbacks traditionally have been rare, while the proportions of African Americans in many defensive and other less central positions have been high. (See Figure 15.4.)

Such discrimination has important economic consequences, because the positions occupied by most African Americans have high injury rates that cut careers short. Both salaries and pension benefits are reduced as a result.

Is there salary fairness in professional sports? Discrimination in salary at the professional level exists. African Americans in the major professional sports are, on the average, paid as much as or more than their white counterparts. It is only when level of performance is controlled that discrimination appears—African Americans have lower average salaries than whites for the same level of performance. In other words, African Americans must perform better than whites to avoid pay discrimination (Eitzen and Sage, 2002).

What other areas of discrimination have been found? Minority former athletes profit much less than their white colleagues from personal appearances and commercial endorsements. They also lose out in sports-related careers when their playing days are over. While approximately 76 percent of players in the National Basketball Association (NBA) are black, only about 17 percent of radio and television NBA sports announcers are African American, and only about 8 percent of the announcers are Latino.

At the professional level, there are few minorities represented in the power structure—head coaches, general managers, owners, executives, commissioners. In 1989, Bill White became the first African American to head a major professional sports league. As of 2004, only two major sport franchises in the U.S. were owned by minorities. And only four minorities in the NFL and Major League Baseball were general managers, presidents, or CEOs. In 2000, Michael Jordan became president of basketball operations for the NBA's Washington Wizards. In the following year, despite the fact that the deal would give him partial ownership of the team, Jordan resigned and signed a player's contract. There were only three African American head coaches in professional football in 2003, and only three African American baseball managers and four Latino baseball managers in 2004. However, 37 percent of NBA head coaches were members of minority groups in 2004.



Student Web Activity

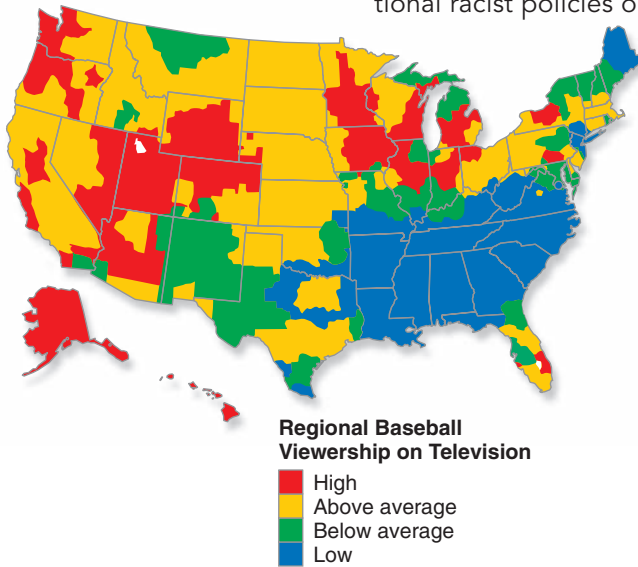
Visit the *Sociology and You* Web site at glencoe.com and click on **Chapter 15—Student Web Activities** for an activity on sport and sexism.

Minorities are well represented as players in major U.S. sports. However, after their playing days are over, minorities are underrepresented in positions of power within their sport.

Snapshot of America

Who Are the Biggest Baseball Fans?

Baseball fans used to be young working-class white males. Today's fans are older and more affluent but still predominantly white and male. The relative lack of African American fans might be traced to baseball's traditional racist policies on the field and in the front office.



Interpreting the Map

1. Do you see any regional patterns in the rates of baseball viewership? Describe.
2. How do you explain these patterns?
3. As a baseball fan, are you similar to or different from the general pattern in your state? Why?

Adapted from *Latitudes and Attitudes: An Atlas of American Tastes, Trends, Politics, and Passions*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Sexism in Sport

Racial and ethnic minorities have not been the only victims of prejudice and discrimination in sport. Women have experienced sexism in athletics. The cultural roots of sexism date back at least as far as the ancient Greeks. Greek gods were depicted as athletic, strong, powerful, competitive, rational, physical, and intellectual. Many Greek goddesses were passive, beautiful, physically weak, supportive, unathletic, and sexually attractive. (The few active, strong goddesses were usually not attractive to nor attracted by men. To Greek males, women who were physically or intellectually superior to them were unfeminine.) These gender definitions have survived in large part for the past 2,500 years. Their influence is felt in sport just as it is in other aspects of social life.

What are some of the consequences of sexism? Stereotypes have traditionally discouraged females from playing sports. For centuries, the idea that playing sports makes females more masculine has been widespread. To be an athlete, females were told, is to be unfeminine. This stigma

discouraged many females from participating in athletics and tyrannized many of those who did. Another barrier was the old, discredited argument that sports harm a woman's health, particularly her ability to have children.

Sexism has denied females equal access to organized sports. At the local level, resistance to female participation in sports continues to exist. It was not until the mid-1970s that, under legal threat, the national Little League organization ended its males-only policy. Only when the 1972 Educational Amendment Act (Title IX) was passed were public high schools and colleges required to offer females equal access to sports. Originally, Title IX was interpreted as providing equal opportunity in "all" sport programs of institutions receiving federal funds. Ambiguities in Title IX have led to many legal suits. Important issues remain unresolved. Currently, the courts favor matching the ratio of males and females in a school's athletic programs to their proportionate numbers in the student body of that school (Hannon, 2003).

Why has the percentage of women coaching women's programs declined?

Women are still denied equal access to the power structure of sport (Lapchick and Matthews, 2001). What's more, although Title IX increased equality for female athletes, it led to a decrease in the number of coaching and administrative positions held by women. In the early 1970s, women's intercollegiate teams were headed almost entirely by women. As of 2004, more than half of the NCAA women's teams were coached by men. (See Figure 15.5 on page 518.) Less than 19 percent of all women's programs were headed by a female administrator, and females held only 41 percent of all administrative jobs in women's programs (Acosta and Carpenter, 2004).

Ironically, Title IX may be one reason for this decline. As the money and prestige associated with women's programs have increased, men have found these coaching jobs much more attractive. And conflict theorists believe that men, who are overwhelmingly in charge of athletic programs and who have the power to make hiring decisions, are more likely to choose men as coaches (Nixon and Frey, 1996; Fazioli, 2004).

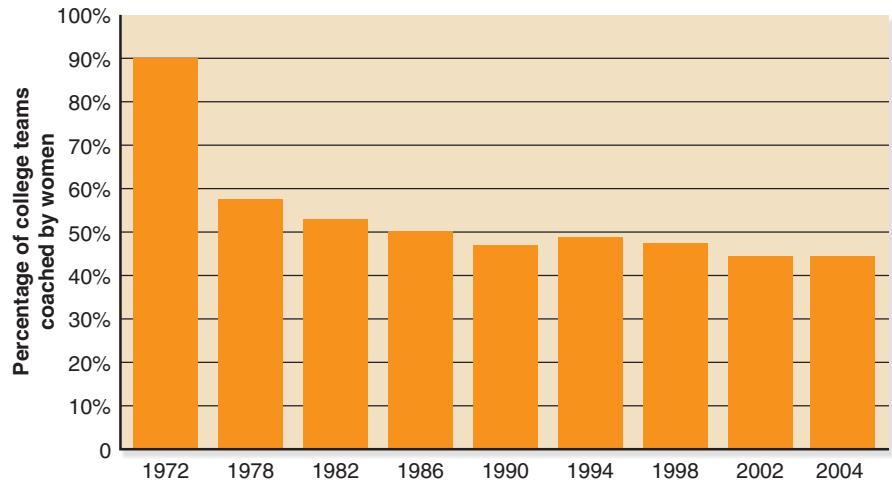
Although sexism in sports has been decreasing, women athletes continue to suffer from inequalities.



Figure 15.5 Percentage of College Women's Athletic Teams Coached by Women

What is most interesting to you about these data?

Source: R. Vivian Acosta and Linda Jean Carpenter, "Women in Intercollegiate Sport." Brooklyn College, 2004.



Are women represented at the national level? Currently, professional sports for women include a Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), a volleyball league, a golf tour, and a tennis circuit. As we have already seen, few women athletes make it to the professional ranks. Even those women who become professionals earn significantly less than their male counterparts (Levin, 1996; Fazioli, 2004). Golf, for example, is one of the few professional sports offering significant opportunities for women. Still, the leading money winner on the men's tour earns far more than twice as much as the leading money winner on the women's tour. This disparity is reflected in the total prize money for the Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) and the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tours—\$250 million for men in 2005; \$45 million for women.

There are some positive, if small, signs of change. In addition to her Nike endorsement, U.S. soccer star Mia Hamm has a lucrative deal with Gatorade. Tennis sensation Venus Williams has product endorsement contracts with American Express, McDonald's, and Wilson Racquet Sports. In 2003, Serena Williams signed a five-year contract with Nike worth close to \$40 million. And shortly after 16-year-old golfer Michelle Wie turned professional in 2005, she signed endorsement deals worth \$10 million a year.

Section 3 Assessment

1. What advice would you give to a young man or woman planning to become a professional athlete? Use the information in this chapter in your response.
2. How did the Educational Amendment Act of 1972 (Title IX) affect women's sport programs?

Critical Thinking

3. Analyzing Information

"American females experience more prejudice and discrimination in sport than males." Explain why you agree or disagree with this statement.

Sociology Today

How to Avoid Bigotry in Sport

Sports sociologist J. Coakley supports the concerns of many Native Americans on the issue of team names. He wrote the following article about this issue.



Most of us are not very concerned about the use of Native American names by many athletic teams. But to Native Americans, war whoops and tomahawk chopping portray negative stereotypes.

Using stereotypes to characterize Native Americans in the U.S. is so common that most people don't even realize they are doing it. . . . When these stereotypes are used as a basis for team names, mascots, and logos, sports become a way of perpetuating an ideology that exploits, trivializes, and demeans the history and cultural heritage of Native Americans.

If teachers, administrators, and students in U.S. schools had a deep knowledge of the rich and diverse cultures of Native Americans and realized the discrimination native peoples currently face, they would not use names such as Indians, Redskins, Chiefs, Braves, Savages, Tribe, and Redmen for their teams; they would not allow Anglo students to entertain fans by dressing up as caricatures of Native Americans; and they would not allow fans to mimic Native American chants or act out demeaning stereotypes of war-whooping, tomahawk-chopping Native Americans.

Schools should not use any Native American name or symbol in connection with sport teams unless they do the following:

1. Sponsor a special curriculum to inform students of the history, cultural heritage, and current living conditions of the native group after which their sport teams are named. Unless 70 percent of the students can pass annual tests on this information, schools should drop the names they say are used to "honor" native people.
2. Publish two press releases per year in which information about the heritage and current circumstances of the native peoples honored by their team names is described and analyzed; publish similar materials annually in school newspapers and yearbooks.
3. Once per year, during homecoming or a major sport event, sponsor a special ceremony designed by and for native peoples in the local area, with the purpose of informing students and parents about the people they say they honor with their team names.

Source: Jay J. Coakley, *Sport in Society*, 6th ed. Boston: Irwin McGraw-Hill, 1998, pp. 272–273.

Doing Sociology

Is there a sport symbol in your community or state that might be offensive to Native Americans? Has the existence of this offensive symbol hurt your community or state economically? Explain.

Chapter 15

Assessment

Summary

Section 1: The Nature of Sport

Main Idea: As a social institution, sport fulfills some important societal needs. One of these is helping individuals identify with others members of society. Sport subcultures have developed around both team and individual sports. For this reason, sport is a reflection of society.

Section 2: Theoretical Perspectives and Sport

Main Idea: Functionalists see sport positively, as a means for socializing young people, promoting social integration, providing a release for tensions, and developing sound character. Conflict theorists believe that organized sports can be harmful to character development. Symbolic interactionists focus on the self-concepts and relationships developed through sport activities.

Section 3: Social Issues in Sport

Main Idea: Sport contributes to upward mobility among collegiate athletes, but the opportunities are too few. Minorities still face discrimination in sport. Women in sport suffer from gender-based stereotypes. Intercollegiate female athletes do not receive treatment equal to the treatment received by males, although this situation is slowly improving.



Self-Check Quiz

Visit the *Sociology and You* Web site at glencoe.com and click on **Chapter 15—Self-Check Quizzes** to prepare for the chapter test.

Reviewing Vocabulary

Complete each sentence using each term once.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| a. sport | f. symbolic interactionist perspective |
| b. Title IX | on sport |
| c. sports subculture | g. social mobility in sport |
| d. functionalist perspective on sport | h. stacking |
| e. conflict perspective on sport | i. salary equity |
| | j. sexism in sport |

1. The assumption that all athletes are paid based on level of performance is known as _____.
2. The perspective that is most concerned with the relationships of those involved is called _____.
3. Using sport to improve a position in the stratification structure is known as _____.
4. _____ is the assigning of less central positions to minorities.
5. _____ is the perspective that emphasizes the positive contributions of sport to society.
6. A set of norms that surround a particular sport is called _____.
7. _____ is the perspective that sees sport as an institution in which the most powerful oppress, manipulate, coerce, and exploit others.
8. _____ is a set of competitive activities in which winners and losers are determined by physical performance within a set of established rules.
9. _____ was established with the intent of increasing opportunity for female athletes in school settings.
10. The defining of sport as a masculine activity is known as _____.

Reviewing the Facts

11. Why does sport play an important role in American society?
12. According to the functionalists, what is one purpose of sport?
13. What is the conflict theorists' view of sport as an institution?

14. Outline and summarize sport from the three sociological perspectives. Create a diagram similar to the one below to record your answer.

Perspective	Summary
Functionalist	
Conflict Theorist	
Symbolic Interactionist	

15. Identify the relationship between sport and social mobility.

Thinking Critically

16. Drawing Conclusions

High school athletes with superior skills are often given extraordinary help in meeting college entrance requirements. Many students feel this is unfair to those who have higher grades but aren't accepted. Others point out that athletics bring in lots of money for colleges. They also say that athletes have skills as rare as high intelligence and so deserve their sports scholarships. What do you think?

17. Analyzing Information

Some schools have made efforts to change their school nicknames and mascots so as not to offend various groups that might have been negatively portrayed by these mascots and nicknames. Do you think that schools and teams have an obligation to take such actions? Or should teams be allowed to retain their traditional nicknames and mascots?

18. Evaluating Information

In the National Basketball Association draft, the best players go to the teams that completed the previous season with the worst records. Why do you think the NBA uses this approach instead of allowing the best players to go to the teams with the most prestige, status, and monetary resources?



Copyright 2006 Mike Lester/Cagle Cartoons

19. Analyzing Visuals

In this chapter, you read about how two different sociological perspectives—the functionalists and the conflict theorists—see sports in American culture. Patrick Chappatte's cartoon could be said to represent both of these perspectives. How might a functionalist "read" the cartoon? And how might a conflict theorist see it?

20. Applying Concepts

Here's a thought experiment to try. Using your answer to number 18 above, see if you can apply your reasoning to the institution of the family. Imagine that NBA teams are like families in various social classes and that each generation is like a season of professional basketball. Wouldn't it be fair to ask the winning families (those at the top of the social class ladder) not to pass on their advantages to their offspring? In other words, for the competition to be fair, wealthier families should not be allowed to go to the best schools but instead should be sent to the schools with the fewest resources. The logic used here is that the best and most talented succeed anywhere. What is the fallacy in this argument?

Chapter 15

Assessment

21. Drawing Conclusions

In referring to the way a crowd of people can motivate a team of players, Emile Durkheim once said, "There are occasions when this strengthening and vivifying action of society is especially apparent. In the midst of an assembly animated by a common passion, we become susceptible of acts and sentiments of which we are incapable when reduced to our own forces." Do you believe that a home court or home field advantage really exists? Do players rise to the occasion when cheered on by the home crowd? Are there ever times when athletes might play better when not at home?

22. Evaluating Information

Pretend that you are attending a professional tennis match with an economist, a political scientist, a psychologist, and a sociologist. Link each of the questions below to the discipline most likely to give a complete answer.

- How did the hot dogs get to be five dollars?
- Why do some athletes fall apart after a bad call?
- What is the socioeconomic status of the players?
- Does tennis reflect mainstream values?
- How did Americans lose their dominance in this sport?
- Why does it seem that all tennis courts are located in wealthy neighborhoods?

Sociology Projects

23. Sports and Statistics

The sports section is a great place to examine how statistics are used. For one week follow a team in any sport that is currently in season. Track several team and individual statistics. Do dramatic changes occur in the statistics, or are the changes insignificant? Can you offer any reason for the change or lack of change? Compare your team's statistics with those of a classmate's team. Analyze the validity of the statistics. Do they accurately tell the story, or can statistics deceive us?

24. Analyzing the Effects of Sport Attendance

The table below provides information on attendance for some of the most popular sports in the United States. Work with another student to develop a list of the positive and negative effects of people's attending high school sporting events. Next develop a list of possible effects for other sports in the table. To stimulate your thinking, look at community and national media sources. (Your list might include community spirit, violence, television time, and advertising dollars.) As a class, discuss your lists. Try to see if there are any major differences for effects among different sports.

Adult Attendance at Sports Events, 2004 (in thousands)		
Sports Event	Attend once or more often a month	Attend once a month or less
NASCAR	2,251	6,653
Baseball	8,524	16,217
Professional Basketball	2,853	7,397
Professional Football	5,730	11,330
High School Sports	11,578	6,658
Ice Hockey	2,576	5,731
Soccer	2,848	2,929
Tennis	841	2,291
Golf	1,737	3,629
Professional Wrestling	1,158	2,387

Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2006*

25. Minorities in Coaching and Management

The text discusses underrepresentation of minorities in coaching and management positions. To find out whether this pattern still holds, conduct a quick survey of your own. Concentrating on professional sports, what are the names of coaches and managers from all the teams in a national league? Use the Internet

to find answers to these questions. Identify as many of the coaches and managers as possible by race and ethnicity. What is the proportion of minority coaches and managers in your sample?

26. The Home Court Advantage

Interview athletes who participate in several of your school's sports. Ask the following questions.

- a. What are the advantages of playing at home?
- b. What are the disadvantages of playing on the road?
- c. What factors contribute to home court advantage?
- d. What factors hinder better performances on the road?
- e. Do you ever prefer to play at home?
- f. Compare your notes with those of your classmates to see if there is consensus.

27. The Cost of Sports

Research suggests that participation in sports reflects geographic location and economic conditions. For instance, basketball is an urban game that does not require a lot of money to play. All one needs is a ball and a place to shoot. Conduct research on other major sports—football, baseball, hockey, skiing, tennis, and golf. Try to determine where and by

whom these sports tend to be played. How much does it cost an individual who is not professional to play these sports? Share your results with the class.

28. Sports in Film

Numerous movie videos deal with sports themes. Select a video, and write a report on it using concepts discussed in the chapter. For example, the film *Jerry McGuire* touches on player salaries and issues of race, among other themes. Present your report to the class.

Technology Activity

29. Using your favorite search engine, do a search for “sociology of sport.”
 - a. How many web page matches did your search find? What does that indicate to you about the importance of this subject?
 - b. Go to the Web site for the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport at www.nass.org. Find the link to NASSS newsletters and review a recent issue. From what you can see there, what types of topics interest sports sociologists?
 - c. Click on Overview. Where is this journal published? Why was it started?



Enrichment Reading



We Don't Like Football, Do We?

by D. Stanley Eitzen

● **relishing**
being pleased with or gratified by

● **prerequisite**
required as a prior condition to something

● **insidiously**
developing in a stealthy and harmful manner so gradually as to become established before being apparent

If you grew up female in America, you heard this: Sports are unfeminine. And this: Girls who play sports are tomboys. You got this message: Real women don't spend their free time sliding feet-first into home plate or smacking their fists into soft leather gloves.

So you didn't play or you did play and either way you didn't quite fit. You didn't fit in your body—didn't learn to live there, breathe there, feel dynamic and capable. Or maybe you fell madly, passionately in love with sports but didn't quite fit in society, never saw yourself—basketball player, cyclist, golfer—reflected in movies, billboards, magazines.

Or you took a middle ground, shying away at first but then later sprinting toward aerobics and weight lifting and in-line skating, **relishing** your increasing endurance and grace and strength. Even then, though, you sensed that something was wrong: all the ads and articles seemed to focus on weight loss and beauty. While those may have inspired you to get fit in the first place, there are more important things, you now know, than how you looked. No one seemed to be talking about pride, pleasure, power, possibility.

If you grew up male in America, you heard this: Boys who don't play sports are sissies or . . . [homosexuals]. And this: Don't throw like a girl. You got this message: Sports are a male initiation rite, as fundamental and natural as shaving and deep voices—a **prerequisite**, somehow, to becoming an American man. So you played football or soccer or baseball and felt competent, strong, and bonded with your male buddies. Or you didn't play and risked ridicule.

Whether we were inspired by Babe Ruth or Babe Didrikson or neither, and whether we played kickball with our brothers or sisters or both, all of us, female and male, learned to associate sports prowess and sports privilege with masculinity. Even if the best athlete in the neighborhood was a girl, we learned from newspapers, television, and from our own parents' prejudices that batting, catching, throwing, and jumping are not neutral, human activities, but somehow more naturally a male domain. **Insidiously** our culture's reverence for men's professional sports and its silence about women's athletic accomplishments shaped, defined, and limited how we felt about ourselves as women and men.

. . . You may have noticed that boys are no longer the only ones shooting baskets in public parks. One girl often joins the boys now, her hair dark with sweat, her body alert as a squirrel's. Maybe they don't pass her the ball. Maybe she grabs it anyway, squeezes mightily through the barricade of bodies, leaps skyward, feet flying.

Or she teams with other girls. Gyms fill these days with the rowdy sounds of women hard at play: basketballs seized by calloused hands, sneakers squealing like shocked mice. The players' high, urgent voices



This West Virginia high school student is a starter on her school's only varsity basketball team.

resonate, too—"Here!" "Go!"—and right then nothing exists for them except the ball, the shifting constellation of women, the chance to be fluid, smooth, alive.

What does this mean? What does it mean that everywhere, women are running, shooting baskets, getting sweaty and exhausted and euphoric? What changes when a woman becomes an athlete?

Everything.

On playing fields and in gyms across America, women are engaged in a contest with higher stakes than trophies or ribbons or even prize money. Through women's play, and through their huddles behind the scenes, they are deciding who American women will be. Not just what games they will play, but what role they will play in this still-young nation. Not only what their bodies will look like, but what their bodies can do.

Adapted from Mariah Burton Nelson. "We Don't Like Football, Do We?" in D. Stanley Eitzen, *Sport in Contemporary Society: An Anthology*, 5th ed., St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1996, pp. 25–26.

Read and React

1. State briefly the main point of this article.
2. What do you think is the author's viewpoint on the relationship between gender and sport? Do you agree with him?
3. Do you believe that attitudes in the United States regarding female participation in sport are changing? Explain.
4. From which theoretical perspective is the author writing? Use examples to illustrate that perspective.