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Sport Sciences

André Matthias Müller, Mahdi Esfahani & Selina Khoo

Introduction

The impact of sport as a mass phenomenon that reaches out to almost everywhere is highly visible on many levels of society. Athletes become celebrities and enter the households of millions, mega sport events boost economies and sport is promoted as a viable way to improve health and peace. The recent scientification of sport unveiled its multiple realities and new disciplines within the broad area of sport science, acknowledging its influence in a growing number of sectors. Hence, it is no surprise that sport science is an interdisciplinary field of study that utilizes and adapts theories from the natural and social sciences in order to guide research and build knowledge. In this chapter, popular and widely used theories of sport sociology, sport psychology and sport management will be presented and further narrated in order to provide a snapshot of the diverse approaches used to unveil, understand, explain and influence sport as a system that involves billions of protagonists on multiple levels. These theories have been chosen because they are relevant in the broad area of sports with outreach to other parts of society. This chapter will first introduce theories from sport sociology starting with macro-level theories, continuing with meso- and micro-level approaches to a history-based theory widely unknown outside of Europe. Four sport psychology and one sport management approach will complete this chapter on sport and its theories.

Sport Sociology Theories

Functionalist Theory

Structural-Functional Theory, as a macro-level approach was first introduced in the 19th century by Émile Durkheim (1858-1917). He proposed that society is built on essential segments that fit together into a well-functioning whole. Hence, the main assumption of functionalism is that all parts of the social structure (groups, organizations, institutions), culture (values, beliefs) and social processes (e.g. socialization) work together to make the whole society run smoothly (Ballantine and Roberts 2012). As introduced by Talcott Parsons

and further developed by Niklas Luhmann, functional differentiation, a phenomenon necessary in dealing with the complexity of modern societies means that every system is internally closed and develops self-reference (a binary code) but also has its distinct contribution to society and can interact with other systems in various ways (Luhmann 1987). Hence, it can be asked how the sport system as part of society (structure) interacts with other parts, how sport influences social processes, and how sport contributes (functions) towards a smoothly running society?

The sport system as well as any other system is ultimately concerned with its own creation and maintenance (autopoiesis) that is achieved through consensus building about (predominantly) goals, values and beliefs among its members who are dependent on the respective system. Once consensus about the sport system specific constitutional dichotomy of winning and losing is established the system is autopoietic, ordered and predictable in its functioning (Bette and Schimank 2006). Athletes who adhere to this consensus are naturally working towards the confirmation of the dichotomy and thus system preservation. This intra-system commitment of the sport system plays an integral role in maintaining overall social stability because goals, values and beliefs that lead to preservation of traditional values in society are usually promoted within the system. Thus, functionalists insist that sport builds a character that is valued in society and is therefore important for its functioning (Coakley and Pike 2009).

Consequently, functionalist research focuses on sport and sport participation and its positive outcomes for individuals and for the society and on how it supports other systems. Sport can be applied to learn about individualism or collectivism depending on the respective society. Sport also serves as a source of health and well-being and is therefore important for the medical as well as the economic system. Functionalists further see sport as means of social inclusion of vulnerable groups or propose its value in preventing youth delinquency (Hartmann and Depro 2006). Finally, Stichweh (2013) in a recent analysis applied Functionalist Theory to provide a clear picture on how sport is separated from other parts of society, and how sport is also strongly interrelated with other function systems.

Conflict Theory

Conflict Theory is based on the assumption that social conflict is mainly related to the distribution of economic power. It was developed by the German philosopher and founder of class theory Karl Marx (1818-1883) when he observed the economic inequality between wealthy factory owners and their underclass workers in 19th century England (Ballantine

and Roberts 2012). Inequality and domination is manifested because the “haves” protect their wealth and position by intentionally or unintentionally using their power to keep those without resources in their place and to manipulate their views (Gruneau 1999). According to Marx, capitalism is the source of this inequality and conflict is the necessary as well as logical consequence that will continue until the underclass (or “have nots”) has access to the profits of their labor. With this, recent research argues that conflict also strengthens society as it produces pressure for necessary adaptations concerning the needs of the people and unfolds their potential. In that sense Conflict Theory, based on the thoughts of Marx, is descriptive but at the same time urges the people to change the society they live in (Bairner 2007).

The sport system is significantly shaped by existing social and cultural conditions and sport activities can therefore be regarded as part of the making and remaking of these conditions (Gruneau 1999). In that sense, sport also promotes the interests of agents who own power and money, and spectator events are organized for those with low resources to address their emotions and distract their attention from the need to change society (Coakley and Pike 2009). Whenever oppression that attacks the rules and dominant interpretations of sport arises, it usually lacks effectiveness due to the type and range of resources that the respective agents possess (Gruneau 1999). Modern sport as a form of institutionalized social practice that mirrors the surrounding social conditions of capitalism, glorifies meritocratic standards and subordinates the body to the machine. Athletes who are exploited and alienated from their own body, because they use their body as a tool to obtain resources, represent the divide between those who own sports and those who execute it. Athletes are not given control of their own sport and their bodies (Coakley and Pike 2009). Sport is therefore only a real activity for those directly involved, for the others it talks about status relationships (Gruneau 1999).

Conflict Theory focuses mainly on the negative aspects of modern sport and advocates for radical changes that need to be initiated by those who are actively playing. Economic benefits should be eradicated and sport should become a source of expression, creativity and well-being, and therefore an ultimate empowering activity for its participants. Modern professional sport which inherently reproduces class inequalities might not be compatible with these radical changes. Singer and Buford May (2011) show in their case study how sport relates to social economic inequality in the society. They reported that African-American high school students, who usually come from low social economic strata, see a professional sport career as the only hope for social mobility. They take high risks (extreme physical strain and drop-out from the educational system) to become a professional

athlete. On the contrary the majority White population who is usually wealthier, experienced more opportunities for social mobility and did not need to take unnecessary risks to become an athlete.

The relevance of Conflict Theory does not only account for professional sport that takes its character from the surrounding capitalistic system (Gruneau 1999). Class and therefore economic resources determine not only choice and preference to participate in a certain sport activity, but they also determine the ability to realize those choices and preferences. Hence, people in the lower social economic strata are general victims (Bairner 2007).

Critical Theories

Critical Theories, a more recent (sport) sociological development account for human agency, are cross-disciplinary and find application by many contemporary researchers who study sport in society. In contrast to aforementioned macro-level theories, critical theories explain that social life is not generally understandable and the relation between sport and society is never the same for all times (Coakley and Pike 2009). Sport evolved unsteadily and changes as other dimensions, like education, technology, political systems or dominant ideas in society change. Since there is no general Critical Theory to explain sport as a social phenomenon, researchers are interested in how sport is presently interrelated with and partially constructed through other dimensions of society and to generate new ideas how to define, organize and play sport. Therefore, issues and problems are identified and action oriented research is conducted to bring about fairness, democracy and openness into the world of sport (Coakley and Pike 2009).

Thus, Critical Theories stimulate thought about what sport does with different groups of people and they encourage reflection on the ways in which sport produces and also reproduces social characteristics and dynamics (Hargreaves and MacDonald 2006). The goal is to create awareness that common and well accepted conditions and perceptions in and of sport are not necessarily fair, good or that they even oppress certain groups of people. Consequently, they deal with sport related to social stratification dimensions like gender, age, disability, race or sexual orientation and suggest a wide range of sport activities available for all groups of society to account for diversity and initiate system transformation.

Critical Feminist Theories that use gender as the major category of analysis are most popular among the various Critical Theories (Birrell 2006). They assume that gender is a primary organizing concept in most societies, privileging men over women, and that social

life and human behavior is shaped by the meaning people place on gender (Ballantine and Roberts, 2012). Feminist researchers usually state that sport and physical activity are sites for constructed gender ideology (Jarvie 2006). With that, sport activities appear to be gendered (Birrell 2006) because meaning, organization, purpose and media coverage of sport is based on the values and experiences of men, who generally possess more power and resources and influence society significantly more than women. As a result of the over attribution of male traits, sport and exercise participation is lower among girls and women in almost all age groups (Ballantine and Roberts 2012).

Research that focusses on the quantity and quality of media coverage of women's sport has been conducted by a number of scholars (e.g. Cooky, Messner and Hextrum 2013; Godoy-Pressland 2014). Results show that women's sport news receive only minimal media attention, while most lead stories are about male athletes. The authors concluded that sport is and continues to be by, for and about men.

Interactionist Theory

Interactionist Theory emphasizes active agency in the way that human behavior involves choices and that these choices are based on definitions of reality that people form as they interact with others and gain experience (Coakley and Pike 2009). Symbolic Interactionist Theory, as the major reference is a result of the work done by G.H. Mead (1863-1931), who argued that people create shared meanings of symbols (including language) and events beyond their pure existence based on (interactive) observations and subsequent interdependent interpretations of the social world (Gillespie 2005). These meanings build a framework for further actions and interactions in the social context (e.g. in groups, organizations, societies) and help humans to learn about social roles and to develop their identity (Ballantine and Roberts 2012). Researchers who apply Interactionist Theory intend to understand the world from the perspective of those who are involved and hence develop explanations on how reality is constructed, defined and applied by different agents.

Sport sociologists who use Interactionist Theory are interested in the reality that exists in the minds of athletes, coaches, spectators and others involved in sport and how these realities are related to their actions and interactions. Questions on how athletes see their identity and why athletes use prohibited substances to enhance their performance are of paramount interest because they are connected to their definition of sport that is shaped by interactions with others (Coakley and Pike 2009, Ohl et al. 2013). Additionally, interactionists argue that sport groups socialize (build shared meanings) individuals in a way

that reproduces the competitive sport logic of winning or losing. The constructed competition-based reality is also a driving force in the larger society. In that sense sport is associated with values that are important in a larger context, but this reality was and continues to be constructed through interactions with others in sport.

Figurational Theory

The close link between the individual and society is emphasized in Figurational Sociology that was first introduced by the German sociologist Norbert Elias (1897-1990) and found wide application in Europe. Elias argued that it is absurd to believe that the individual can be without society and that society can be without individuals. He further stated that individual human beings are bound to each other in a plurality that is society (Elias, Jephcott, and Schröter 2010). The main notions are: a) The never completed structure of present societies is a result of historic transformations which came to being through the actions of many people, but were not intended or planned by them; b) Individuals form a unity in itself, but are born into and continue to live in dynamic social networks of interdependent individuals (figurations) that are based on functions that one person has for others and vice versa. Therefore, individuals are tied in invisible but elastic, variable and changeable chains to other people (society) that they form and that forms them; c) Individual behavior is strongly determined by the relations of people to each other; d) The growing dependence of division of functions at certain stages of societal development is accompanied by the feeling that in order to maintain the position in the human network individuals must allow their natural truths (instincts, behavior) to wither. Finally, Elias and co-workers concluded that human psyche, the structure of human society and human history are complementary and can only be understood if we apply a single human science (Elias, Jephcott, and Schröter 2010).

Eric Dunning applied Figurational Theory in sport related research and demonstrated that the evolvement and continuous change of sport is strongly related to spatio-temporal interdependency chains and networks (Dunning 1999). Sport is a result of the civilizing process that is based on broad figurations. One of the major themes is that the increasing social control, which was historically imposed externally and became more internal, is responsible for the desire to break out of controlled and routinized urban-industrial society because the organism needs stimulation (Dunning 1999). Hence, sport and leisure can be a means of excitement and a proper tool against “leisure starvation” (Dunning 1999, 29). Since sport developed rules and regulations, Figurational Theorists usually talk about a controlled de-controlling of emotional controls that takes place in sports (Dunning 1999). Finally, sport

will never reach a final stage because it always needs to be on the edge between boredom and tension –a line between de-routinization or de-controlling and civilized control–.

Sport Psychology Theories

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior can be described as an approach that links belief and behavior. It was developed by Isaac Ajzen and has its origin in the Theory of Reasoned Action. The earlier theory stated that a person's intention and the following behavior are dependent on two separate constructs: 1) The attitude toward behavior represents how far a person is or is not in favor of a specific behavior; 2) The subjective norm determines how far the social environment (friends, family) encourages or recommends the behavior (Ajzen 1991). If behavioral attitudes as well as subjective norms are positive toward the prospective behavior, an intention is developing and translation into actual behavior is likely. However, in the TPB a construct called perceived behavior control was added to account for the likelihood of performing a behavior related to non-volitional circumstances, because not every intention results in behavior. Perceived behavioral control, originating from self-efficacy theory (Bandura, Adams, and Beyer 1977) refers to the ease or difficulty to perform specifically and it also includes past experiences like anticipated obstacles (Ajzen 1991). According to the TPB, perceived behavioral control and intention can be directly linked to predict a behavior.

Ajzen and Driver (1992) published some work in which TPB was applied. In one study, college students answered a questionnaire on involvement, attitudes, moods, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and intention towards five leisure activities. After the one year study period behavior frequency of the activities was assessed. The analysis revealed that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control were reliable predictors of intentions, and intentions and perceived behavioral control predicted behavior. A more recent qualitative study by Belanger-Gravel et al. (2013) applied the TPB in overweight and obese older adults to examine their physical activity beliefs. The researchers revealed the perceived behavioral benefits toward physical activity were improved fitness and psychological well-being. Beliefs concerning the social environment were related to the family, whereas believed barriers were time, exercising alone, weather and health problems.

Expectancy-Value Theory

The Expectancy-Value Theory is a popular theory that helps researchers to explain motivation toward achievement based on individuals' expectation for success and the value

they have for succeeding (Wigfield and Eccles 1992). The framework of this theory incorporates three components that are believed necessary to understand motivational processes: expectancy, instrumentality and value (Shepperd 2001).

Expectancy refers to the anticipation that success or failure depends on effort and competence. For example, if an athlete believes in the worthiness of hard and frequent practice that leads competence and therefore to success in a competition it is more likely that the athlete will be successful (high effort expectancy). On the other hand, athletes who believe that success is highly unlikely based on their perceived low competence level, and hence come to the conclusion that the intensity and frequency of practice is not worthwhile will unlikely be successful (low effort expectancy).

Instrumentality refers to the anticipated outcomes of the performance. High instrumentality means that the performance is attributed to be primarily responsible for the result. For instance, an athlete may believe that a good performance will result in a high score in a competition. Alternatively, a weak performance is believed to cause a low score. In contrast, low instrumentality means that the performance itself is not the major contributor to the result of the performance. An athlete may view his coach as erratic and hence conclude that he cannot create a reasonable relationship between the quality of the performance and the given result.

The construct value within the Expectancy-Value Theory refers to the final outcome attached to the achievement of a particular performance and how this outcome meets the needs of an individual on various levels. For example the score in a certain exercise has a strong influence on the final score in a competition, thus making the respective exercise score more important (high value) while another score of a different exercise influences the final score only slightly (low value). When these three components are viewed together the resulting effort motivation can be accessed. With this, Guillet et al. (2006) applied the Expectancy-Value Theory to study female sport participation and continuation in a typical male sport.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

The psychologists Deci and Ryan (1985) proposed a theory to study motivation in terms of performance behavior across several domains including physical activity. The Self-Determination Theory is a macro theory that is concerned with the motivation of humans and the importance of social contexts for motivation and personal growth. With this, SDT addresses the two global forms of motivation, namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal inclination toward activities and behaviors and it serves as a source of enjoyment and it is accompanied by the desire to continue with the respective activity. Extrinsic motivation means behavioral inclination based on external rewards or pressures, and hence, continuing an activity that is extrinsically motivated is completely instrumental. A study by Kimiecik (2002) mirrored the predictive role of intrinsic motivation in terms of exercise participation. People with intrinsic motivation for exercise participated frequently and regularly in physical activities whereas people who are extrinsically motivated were only motivated for a short time.

According to Deci and Ryan (2000) every human being has a positive attitude towards achievement (inherent growth tendencies, intrinsic motivation) that can be actualized in a specific domain when three psychological needs within the domain are satisfied: autonomy, competence and relatedness with others. Increased autonomy in the form of choices, acknowledgement of feelings and opportunities for self-direction allows the feelings of competence to be translated into stronger intrinsic motivation. In case of the loss of autonomy, extrinsic motivation in the form of external rewards, pressures and threats is necessary to proceed with the particular activity (Deci and Ryan 1985). Despite the importance of competence and autonomy it was shown that a secure relational base is essential for intrinsic motivation.

Sport, exercise and physical activity are proposed to have strong self-determination or intrinsic potentials. The autonomous engagement in sport and exercise for the sake of the activity itself is highly self-determined. Developing movement skills and receiving feedback from professionals can serve as a source toward competence feelings, whereas playing in a team with like-minded individuals or connecting to others in an exercise class can serve as a major source of relatedness and security. Researchers therefore propose that the magnitude of needs support in an exercise or sport setting explains how far people have an active lifestyle. A recent systematic review which included 66 primary studies examined the relationship between the aforementioned SDT constructs and exercise outcomes (Teixeira et al. 2012).

Sport Management Theory

Expectation Disconfirmation Theory

According to the Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory developed by Oliver (1980), customer satisfaction is considered to have a strong relationship with disconfirmation (D), which is defined as the difference between a consumer's pre-purchase expectations (E) and the post-purchase performance (P) of a product or service (formulated as $D = P - E$) (Liao, Chen, and

Yen 2007). Consumers develop expectations about a product before they purchase it. Moreover, consumers usually compare between actual performance and their preceding expectations. Positive disconfirmation is present if the actual performance is better than expected. Thus, the consumer becomes highly satisfied and will probably purchase the product again. On the other hand, negative disconfirmation and dissatisfaction will occur if the actual performance is weaker than expected. The unsatisfied consumer will probably not purchase the product again (Yoon and Uysal 2005). The Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory suggests that satisfaction is related to the interplay of a customer's perceptions, expectations, and intentions.

Chi and Qu (2008) stated that this model can be used for studies that conduct research about tourist behavior. Satisfied tourists are more willing to recommend a respective destination to others or revisit the same place again. Additionally, they are more likely to share their experience with their relatives and friends. An important segment in tourism is the rapidly developing sport tourism. Sport tourists who want to make a decision to participate in a competition as an actual athlete or as spectator, or who want to find a location for other sport-related activities will compare between their previous images and actual feelings of the destination and achievement goals at the destination. A decision is made based on these reflections. Other areas of research can also be approached as shown by the study conducted by Santos (2012) who used the Expectation Disconfirmation Theory to study the consumer behavior in the context of sporting events.

Conclusion

Theories introduced in this chapter are widely used in sport studies, but they only offer a snapshot of the various sport realities. Highlighting sociological, psychological and management approaches and neglecting theories from training science, biomechanics and other natural sciences does not imply that the latter are less important for the explanation of sport. It simply indicates that sport science, including sport studies, as an academic field, is insightful in many ways and that it can inform researchers in a wide array of respects. In the future, existing theories from other fields need to be further adjusted, while also attempting to generate own theoretical approaches in order to specifically account for the needs of a young and innovative scientific discipline called sport studies.

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