

# **CHAPTER 1: SPORT AND PHYSICAL CULTURE IN CANADIAN SOCIETY**

## **LIST OF CHAPTER OBJECTIVES**

*After reading this chapter, students will be able to:*

1. EXPLAIN the social significance of sport and physical culture in Canada.
2. DISCUSS the differences between sociology and other disciplines in the social sciences.
3. EXPLAIN and DEFINE key sociological concepts.
4. DISCUSS the importance of having a “sociological imagination.”

## **CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

Chapter 1 is a foundational chapter designed to introduce students to the topic of sport sociology and its role in developing and enhancing our understanding of sport in society. Drs. Jay Scherer, Brian Wilson, and Jane Crossman detail the significance of sport and physical culture in Canada, guide students through the various key concepts and terms that they will encounter in subsequent chapters, and explain what sport sociologists do, and introduce the various issues tackled by sociologists and begin to illustrate the links between the social and the personal. The first chapter is a key good starting point for readers, especially those being newly introduced to critical and sociological thinking.

## **SUGGESTED ANSWERS TO CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS**

- 1. Discuss the reasons why a course in the sociology of sport and physical activity should be part of an undergraduate curriculum in a kinesiology/human kinetics/physical education/sport science program.**

Often, students in Kinesiology and connected programs also bring an overwhelmingly positive view of sport. It is important that they develop a critical understanding of sport in society and the various barriers that exist to participation for many others ‘out there’. A realistic approach to sport, stripped of any misconceptions about sport and appraised of its limitations, will give students a better idea of what is possible and what needs to be improved. An effective use of sport in society in any form requires critically thinking about sport’s positioning in society. Students can use sociology of sport to make sense of how various social and cultural forces around them shape their lives and those of others. As such, they can make connections between the personal and the public. As well, they can learn to gain an awareness of the socially constructed nature of their world and the world of sport, which is a necessary tool to navigate seemingly unchangeable ‘realities.’

- 2. How does the sociology of sport differ from sport psychology?**

Both sociology and psychology are social sciences focused on the study of human behaviour. However, while psychology is concerned with the inner, individual, intrinsic motivations of individuals involved in sport, sport sociology, on the other hand, is concerned with the social

behaviour of sport participants. Psychology, therefore, is focused on intrinsic factors while Sociology is concerned with extrinsic ones. This is premised on the notion that sport is greatly embedded within a given society's (here, Canadian) social and cultural life.

Sport sociology works to position behaviour in a societal and historical context to make sense of the structural effects of sport on sport agents, from athletes to administrators. Sport sociology is undertaken with the objective of making sense of the complex processes occurring between various agents within sport. That understanding may also be used to understand society in general.

**3. Provide examples of the three notable measures of the “power” of different social groups that need to be fully considered in the sociological analysis of sport.**

Sport is a social construction and because society is organized within often hierarchical structures which provide some with more influence than others. In that context, Richard Gruneau (1988) proposed three ways to measure the ‘power’ of the different social groups (p. 18). A given group has power if it is able to:

- a) structure sport in preferred ways and institutionalize these preferences in sports rules and organizations.
- b) establish selective sports traditions; and
- c) define the range of “legitimate” practices and meanings associated with dominant sports practices.

These measures will help one identify the key actors and forces at play during a sociological analysis.

**4. Discuss what is meant by the phrase “sport (formal and informal) is socially constructed.”**

Sport in any format, whether organized or impromptu, recreational or competitive, is interpreted according to specific social meaning that have been attached to it throughout time. Various people have participated in creating sport as we know it today; they have negotiated its meaning within their social lives, as they have with all social institutions that surround them. Therefore, what is ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ in sport, as well as what is ‘deviant’ and ‘disruptive’, can and should be questioned and problematized.

As a social construction, the shape and meaning of sport is also not fixed; it is subject to change from place to place and from one time period to another. Specific social, political, and economic circumstances have played a role in constructing sport and understanding this means it can be restructured. If those who came before us have had a hand in shaping sport, today's agents are also in a position to *reshape* it in turn. Societies evolve based on the “historical webs of meanings that they themselves continue to make and remake” (p. 11) and so anything they construct needs to be understood through that lens.

- 5. Discuss what it means to say that the physical body is biological, social, and cultural. Outline some examples of how bodies in sport are shaped by social and cultural factors.**

Societies assign specific meanings to the physical body and its movement, and these meanings are negotiated by various agents with differing levels of power throughout time and space. This happens as much through hegemony (through a top-down consent process) as well as through resistance (disadvantaged groups pushing boundaries and norms to redefine their practices). These meanings have power because they influence individuals' practices and assign value to their activities depending of which body they inhabit. This means that the social and cultural context within which it evolves matter and needs to be understood to make accurate analyses of the physical culture (sport). We cannot just conceptualize the body in its physical manifestation (the obvious one); its social and cultural dimensions need to also be taken into account.

- 6. a) Using your sociological imagination, explain how the exclusion of women's ski jumping was intimately connected to a host of public issues of social structure in Canadian society and beyond.**

The exclusion of women's ski jumping was predicated on the idea that it is not "normal" for women to participate. The rule against their participation rendered the issue a sociological one, because it was based on the social and cultural meaning attached to the sport; there was no concrete scientific evidence to justify women's exclusion and, therefore, any argument against their inclusion only existed at the socio-cultural level. It required a negotiation with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) about what sport is constructed as legitimate. The judge's decision in favour of the activists' argument that the decision was discriminatory, while declaring that the ultimate decision rested with the IOC (and not the Canadian Committee), also outlined the political dimension of sport: the IOC was readily permitted by the judge to violate the Canadian Charter Human Rights and Freedoms on Canadian soil with no consequence.

- b) How did those structures facilitate and restrict the agency of the women ski jumpers? Use each of the three measures of power in your answer.**

VANOC and the IOC represent the institutions that, for years, through arbitrary regulations excluded women from the sport at the Olympic level and that continue to limit their participation now that they can compete. They have the power to establish what is and is not legitimate, according to whether or not it benefits their financial interests. With this objective, maintaining this status quo is paramount, because gender equality is not perceived as an asset for improving that bottom line.

Being institutions that have traditionally been controlled by men and that continue to be overwhelmingly governed by men, Olympic committees have upheld patriarchal notions of sport participation. A prominent ideology is that men are best suited for sport, especially in its most physically demanding forms. This, historically, excluded women from various activities considered too masculine and established a 'norm' for what they could or could not engage in.

The IOC and VANOC are allowed to define what is, and what is not, ‘legitimate’ sport, based on standards that they have set themselves. Any government that maintains its support through public funds upholds any discrimination these bodies perpetuate through their rules. The definition of women’s ski jumping as illegitimate did not follow their own standards, considering that the athletes argued that the sport was not a new event. The judge’s decision and subsequent entry of women’s ski jumping, though limited, support the women’s argument that exclusion was inscribed in a pattern of gender inequity.

**c) What resources did the women need to challenge both VANOC’s and the IOC’s rules?**

They needed to procure a range of human, financial, and material resources. They had to approach various other agents to help build their case and bring it in front of the courts and they had to secure the necessary finances to be able to afford to launch the lawsuit.

**d) What rules worked in their favour? Which ones did not?**

As the Olympics are publicly funded, women should not be excluded on the basis of gender, especially as men were fully allowed to participate. The women were also able to demonstrate that their sport was not new and, therefore, should not be banned on the basis of not being fully established as a legitimate sport.

On the other hand, many of sport’s rules, i.e., the “internal assumptions and ideologies embraced by men and women as common sense—your practical consciousness—and the external laws, regulations, and policies that set limits and possibilities with respect to how we can act in our social lives” (p.17) worked against women ski jumpers. This conferred them less power in their case against the Olympic Committee. The IOC’s superseding power over VANOC meant that the judge’s decision did not have an impact on the IOC’s decision. The IOC’s nongovernmental status also protects the organization from government intervention, meaning that the Canadian court’s decision held no sway. Further, the structure of modern sport that requires that a regulatory body must enforce the rules of a sport put the women at a disadvantage; despite being competitive, their sport was considered illegitimate because it was institutionalized. Women ski-jumpers were also limited by the fact of gender-based rules enforced by the gender segregated sport structure. In this way, the athletes were subject to a separate standard.

**e) What role did gender ideology play in this debate?**

In this case, masculine hegemony in the sport meant that women were excluded, while no similar debate existed for men’s participation. The traditional dominance of men in ski jumping created an antecedent and also permitted men to control most of the institution. Men have, historically, been the ones with the power to decide whether women could participate, while women had to negotiate the legitimacy of playing alongside them.

Gender ideology maintains women in subordinate positions in relation to men and reinforces the interests of men. Unequal treatment reinforces differences and upholds men’s position of dominance. Banning women from participation, therefore, reinforces sport as a masculine

domain just as well as it reinforces the gender inequality. The sport is also characterized as incompatible with femininity and, within a patriarchal system, resistance is met with obstacles. The athlete activists were resisting the web of ideas that propose that women are not entitled to an equal place alongside the men in the sport based solely on the basis of sex and gender.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WITH SUGGESTED ANSWERS**

### **1. Why should we care about why people participate in sport, what happens to them in sport, and how they interpret their sport experiences?**

Sport a massive industry at all levels (from grassroot to elite). People are defined by sport, whether as athletes, coaches, fans, or other sport agent. It is also a very significant social institution which is shaped and is shaped, in turn, by socio-cultural forces. It is intertwined with various other institutions

### **2. Why is it important to define sport?**

When setting out to position sport within a social and cultural context, defining sport exposes the socially constructed nature of the concept. A definition demonstrates that while there is currently an agreed upon format, sport has the potential to be redefined and understood differently. For instance, the importance of the element of competition means that there is great importance placed on standardization and specific equipment, which grants power to certain entities with control of those elements (governing bodies in charge of rules and organization, corporations who manufacture equipment, etc.). A definition, especially when one understands that sport is a social construct at the outset, unveils how ways of playing and specific sports are established and taken for granted as ‘the’ way of doing sport. It is a starting point towards imagining sport differently.

Additionally, the study of sport would become convoluted without a consensus about what is, and what is not, sport and what might become sport. A definition ensures that all researchers’ focus is the same. Sport facilities and participation is also sometimes eligible for public funds, meaning that a set definition establishes which activities are eligible to receive public funds. Educational institutions also sponsor sport and for that purpose, the categorization of specific activities as sport ensure that there is consistency (Coakley and Donnelly, 2009).

### **3. Why is it naïve and inaccurate, as the authors state, to declare that Canadian sport is a unique entity that is not affected by external influences? Give a few examples sport events that, despite not involving Canadians, Canadians are likely to be highly invested in?**

Students can give various examples based on past or present sport controversies. Examples include:

- The 2010 women’s ski jumping case
- Hijabi girls being banned from playing soccer

- Hockey's class divide
- Sport participation preferences based on immigration status
- Rural vs urban access to sport
- Racial stereotypes in sport (The Black athlete, the Asian athlete, the Indigenous athlete, etc.)
- Indigenous Games and self-determined sport
- The place of athletes in culture, athletes as celebrities, and athlete hubris
- Concussion reports patterns by gender
- The debate over hockey fights
- Don Cherry as public figure
- The relative obscurity of parathletes and parasport compared to sport and able-bodied athletes
- Etc.

**4. The influence of access to resources and of ideology has been established as being particularly of interest to sociologists, as it determines who is able to participate and who is not. This is what sport sociologists question and attempt to address. The authors list a series of questions on page 4 and 5. Based on personal observations, what answers do you have to these questions? (These questions can be used to determine where students stand at the outset. Students can also revisit their answers at the end of the course, after having explored them in depth.)**

Why has participation in sport historically been stratified by age, gender, race and socioeconomic status?

Why is a power and performance model of sport privileged over alternative ways of playing sport?

Will leagues with high rates of concussions and other injuries, like the Canadian and National Football Leagues, still exist in two decades?

Why do so many cities invest significant amounts of public funds in “world-class” sports arenas and stadiums?

Why do countries spend billions of dollars to host the Olympic Games—and what are the social, economic, and environmental implications of such events?

Why do gay men hesitate to come out in professional sports environments?

**5. The sociology of sport has various goals which include identifying the mechanism of power in sport as well as the relationship between humans as social beings within sport. How are sociologists able to practically influence sport and society?**

The impact and influence of sport sociologists' work is detailed on p.6-7. Sport sociologists:

- Provide expert information to decision makers about various issues that arise in sport,
- advocate for athletes caught in disadvantageous positions in relation to more powerful agents,
- promote the restructuring of sport away from the performance model,
- work to ensure a healthy planet to guarantee that future generations,

## SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Developing a sociological imagination requires some practice. Several seemingly innocuous behaviours, however, when read sociologically can uncover the wide-reaching influence of social ideologies and norms. Examples include comparing how cis-gendered heterosexual men and women behave in a public washroom can tell us a lot about gender and even class norms; comparing how we speak to a group of good friends as opposed to the way we behave at a work function with colleagues; observing what taken for granted behaviour are revealed to be a 'Canadian thing' when we travel abroad.
2. Ask students to look up a sociology of sport journal and find three to five separate articles and write a summary of the variety of issue tackled by sociologists. Students can also pair up with another student to share findings, therefore enabling them to benefit from other people's findings.
3. Present students with a series of cases (e.g. the plight of Canadian women's hockey or of the US women's soccer team, the unresolved issue of concussions in high impact sport, doping and doping regulation in sport, etc.) that are of interest to sport sociology. Ask students to identify the entity wielding a form of power in each case and to determine how they are able to exert their power, using the three measures of 'power' applied.
4. Students can research a range of sport that are played by a substantial number of people but which are not currently Olympic sports. Students will be tasked with detailing what constitutes an Olympic sport and why a given sport fails to qualify as one. In relation to this, students can also research recent Olympic sports (such as skateboarding and golf) to determine how they came to be recognized as Olympic sports.
5. In relation to the above, students can focus on sports or disciplines that are not equally available for women and men at the competitive level and at the Olympics (e.g., four-man bobsled, synchronized swimming, heptathlon vs decathlon), compare the resources allocated to parasport and sport, or any other such source of contention in sport. This is designed to question sport as 'the great equalizer' by determining what delegitimizes a sport.

## LIST OF KEY TERMS

Term	Term
Agency	Resources
Culture	Rules
Democratization	Social construction
Hegemony	Social structure
Ideology	Society
Institutionalization	Sociology
Physical culture	Sociological imagination
Power	Sociology of sport
Practical consciousness	Sport