

Marxist and neo marxist essay



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Contemporary sports are activities involving physical exertion and skill that is governed by a set of rules or customs and often undertaken competitively or as a recreational pastime. Marxism is a political and economical philosophy by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, here the concept of ‘class struggle’ plays a pivotal role in society, and leads to the development of society, and the uprising of the proletariat (the working class ‘those who sell their labour and do not own the means of production’ whom, Marx believed made the wealth of society, the buildings, furniture etc, and the downfall of the bourgeoisie or capitalist (‘those who own the means of production’ and therefore exploit the proletariat).

These ideologies can be applied to explain society’s actions on sport, such as how the working class are being priced out of going to football matches because the bourgeoisie (chairman) want to make more money from the proletariat (fans). A weakness in this theory is that it assumes all social life is driven by economic factors, and that the rich will always take advantage of the powerless poor, and it only takes into account economical and class aspects of society. Marxism can also affect a whole nation, the best recent example of this is Cuban sport, there has been a major change there since 1959, before then there was hardly any sport available, but where it was, it reflected the economy with such sports as horse racing or cock fighting, mainly due to betting opportunities for the poor. Boxing was promoted by the US in Cuba; it became popular in cities where the media met the masses. The elite sports such as sailing, polo, equestrianism etc were played by white middle-class men of Hispanic descent.

It was very much a capitalist country in which the rich got richer and the poor got poorer. In 1957 and 58 the Cuban Government only 0. 5% of the budget to sport and physical education, equality was almost non-existent in society let alone sport, so Cuba had limited facilities that were only available to a small rich, white, male section of the Cuban population. (Petavino; Pye 1996) Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba in 1959 and immediately rejected the capitalist ideologies of the U. S and found a new political and economic partner in the Soviet Union, and took on there ideologies and philosophies (Marxism, Communism) and support. From this template Castro adapted a centralised, bureaucratic political system and imposed it upon the Cuban people (Sugden, 1996).

This is giving sport back to the masses, as Marx stated, ‘ sport is the opiate of the masses’, this is an example of the way a Marxist and Neo Marxist philosophy affects they way a government organises sport on a large scale. Neo Marxism adds the ideas of social inequality such as status (in society a doctor has a higher ‘ social status than a factory worker for example), power (“ By power is meant that opportunity existing within a social relationship which permits one to carry out one’s own will even against resistance and regardless of the basis on which this opportunity rests. ” M. Weber 1906) and religion onto the Marxist theory. This allows for a wider research base for people trying to explain the social inequalities, instead of concentrating on economic and social class factors.

This can also be applied to sport. Golf Clubs often ask new members their profession and background to ensure they have the best clientele at their club (doctors, lawyers etc). A weakness of this that it totally ignores gender

issues, as does Marxism. The reason functionalism was chosen for the essay is because it takes different views of society from separate groups and draws conclusions from these views. Whereas Marxism and Neo Marxism do not take all of these things into account.

A broad spectrum of views is taken into consideration before any conclusion are drawn from the facts. The other theory this essay will analyse is Functionalism, Functionalists ‘assume it is possible to study society, discover scientific “truths” about how societies operate, and then develop a system of “social laws” that we might use to understand, control and even change society for the better’. Coakley 2001 pg32). Functionalists must take every aspect into consideration if the ‘natural consensus’ is to prevail, for example, if a football team was being studied the theorist using functionalism will take fans, players, manager, coach, chairman, staff (grounds men etc), FA, and any other aspect to find out what each part contributes to the running of the club efficiently. A functionalist approach may stress the importance of consensus amongst members of society whereas a Marxist approach may stress the importance of conflict between people. A weakness with this theory is that ‘it is based on the assumption that the needs of all groups within a society are the same as the needs of the society as a whole.

This causes us to underestimate the existence of differences and conflicts of interest within a society and to ignore cases where sports benefit some groups more than others. This limits our understanding of difference, conflict and dynamics of change in societies’. (Coakley 2001 pg35). Another is that it tends to overstate the positive consequences of sport.

Social inequalities means the different things that affect parts of society interacting or participating in society itself such as race, gender, age, religion, disability, ethnicity and class etc. Applied to sport its what stops people participating in sport, such as some people cannot afford to play some sport due to price of equipment or to actually use facilities (golf clubs, membership fees etc), some black people may find barriers to sports with a strong white tradition such as snooker, golf and tennis, with the exceptions of small group (Tiger Woods, Venus and Serena Williams) there had only been a handful of black sports stars in these sports. The fans have even boycotted the club and started United FC; a branch of fans who want to keep control of their club. This is a Marxist perspective on the situation as it concentrates on a class struggle (between chairman and fans) on the Chelsea side the fans are happy to pay the price to make their club successful, but the Manchester United fans have revolted against the board of their club, and are trying to create a change through a struggle of classes. In all societies, it is people who are the best educated, on the best income and belong in high status groups who have the highest rates of sport participation, attendance, and even watching sport on TV (Donnelly&Harvey, 1999).

This is a Neo Marxist perspective as it takes into account the status and education of society not just the income and class level, but it still is basically a class struggle. A functionalist however would look at the actions of all parties involved and the outcomes of the actions, then try to come up with a solution or explanation of the problem, much like the Chelsea fans have at their club. They have assessed the situation and are happy that both

sides (chairman and fans) can be successful and get what they want from the club whether it be money, success or just pride at supporting a winning team. The next social inequality that the essay will concentrate on will be gender, and how sports are biased toward men and reinforcing the thought that men are the dominant sex and women are weak.

A Marxist approach to this would only consider this a problem if rich middle class women could participate in certain sports with men such as yachting, poor working class women would not have the opportunity to participate on such levels, the most obvious Marxist perspective on gender in sports is the economical view, that women get less prize money than men, as Marxism will only take economic and class into account. However Ellen MacArthur the world's most famous yachtswoman didn't come from a rich background but needed and received funding and support from various different groups to overcome this problem, otherwise she would never have achieved the things she has. It took Ellen 2, 500 letters and 4 years of trying to find it, if a male comparison had applied to so many would it have taken so long to get support, because he would have been taken more serious by the sponsors. A Neo Marxist perspective would also take into consideration Ellen MacArthur's status as a sailor in comparison with other male counterparts and see any differences in how they are dealt with in society, the fact that Ellen MacArthur is seen as a 'hero' for strong females, and the amount of money received in comparison with her male counterparts (in many cases Ellen MacArthur has received more media attention than most men in sailing because she is a female and the first female to compete at the highest levels of the sport. A functionalist approach however will take all aspects into

account, the males, the females, the sport, the governing body, the sponsors and the public, to try and find a consensus amongst everybody.

A functionalist would probably try to conclude that Ellen Macarthur has opened the door to women wanting to compete with men at the highest level, and has become a symbol of strong feminism, but the reality is that she is an exception, that she has succeeded but not many other women will get the same opportunities she has had, as it is a mainly male dominated sport, but she is now a role model for thousands of other budding female sailors (this would a typical functionalist approach) In conclusion the social inequalities highlighted in this essay can be solved using a combination of the theories a lot more effectively than if one was used. This simply means society as a whole is so obscure and different from place to place that not one theory can explain all of the social phenomena that occur. Marxist approach concentrating on class and economic struggles, Neo Marxist approach also concentrates on these as well as status and power and the functionalist approach takes everyone into account to find a general consensus amongst society. However Coakley (2001) states that ‘ Theories are tools that provide us with the framework for asking questions, identifying problems, gathering information, explaining social life, prioritizing strategies to deal with problems and anticipating the consequences of our actions and interventions’. So they are still essential to society and helping us understand how we survive and interact with one another.