

Functionalist issues in sport essay sample

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Using the Functionalist perspective discuss how sport can be used as an avenue for socialisation and social mobility Introduction Sports! There are very small areas in society that can generate such passion and interest and elevate its participants to almost divine status and raise them from humble beginnings to lords and ladies of the manner. For this reason sports can be used as a powerful medium for socialisation; although not exclusively as other social interactions can have the same results. Sports importance in Britain with regards to its ability to give common ground and transcend age, culture and class and establish the traditional values that we all share as being British give prominence over other social constructions. Since participation in sport is predominately social and requires the interaction in small and large communities, factors that are inherently important to British culture can be instilled.

These factors or character traits such as honour, equality, fair play, respect for self and others, teamwork, Loyalty, patience, need for physical fitness, perseverance, responsibility, and self-control etc when socialised will result in a well balanced society. It is relevant however, who is doing the socialisation and what they are teaching (Coakley pp39). Therefore, sport alone does not instigate positive character traits or affect in the behaviour and attitudes of its participants. It can however be used as a powerful catalyst through programs developed by the societies, organisations, institutions and the significant others of the participants themselves (Coakley, pp93).

Through Sport, society and culture can change preconceptions of traditional patriarchal bias, which favours those with able bodies and minds. This can

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effect change in social mobility the effect of moving from one class stratification to another?, enabling self-betterment, a state of classlessness and the equality of gender, race and ability as regards to access to sports, facilities and funding (Jones, Armour 2000. pp71). These theories are well known and is the sociological module known as functionalism.

Discussion Sports and institutions are symbiotic, relying on each other to supply participants, administrators, facilities, organization, interaction, competition and social discourse etc. For this reason sports can be powerful sites for socialisation (Coakley 2000). Horne (1999 et al, p. 95) and Kay (1997, p 47) have defined socialisation as the means to which we as a society learn rules and social norms that enable us to take part and function in society. This is a continual process that is developed and adjusted on a day to day basis as a direct result of our experiences. Human beings are not genetically born able to socialize nor do they possess societies positive character traits, born cooperative, compassionate or competitive (Jones, Armour 1998). Socialisation occurs because people wish to ? fit in? and are eager for appreciation, and to achieve the expectations from our significant others; concisely socialisation is the communication of culture (COAKLEY, 2000).

It has been stated (Horne, et al, 1999 p) that socialisation is split into two groups, primary and secondary, with primary socialisation the social interaction at childhood, dealing with interaction between the family unit, schools, clubs and the media. As a child grows their experience of social interaction broadens with experiences from many life sites. Secondary

socialisation differs from primary insofar as adults are aware position in class stratification and any political-socio trends (HORNE, et al 1999).

This view in Britain of Sports being a powerful means to instill good character and cultural traits has long been established with individuals, institutions and organisations. British culture views sports as a catalyst to national mobility, and as something that showcases British spirit and excellence on an international scale. Juvenal's (circa, 55 AD ? 127 AD, cited www.ancienthistory.com) concept of 'a healthy mind in a healthy body' and his observations of his society was the forerunner of modern day functionalism conceived by Durkheim (www.reist.unuc.edu/durkheim/ visited 17 November 2003-12-09) in the 1800's. This philosophy was taken up by many public schools in Britain around the same era as a way to socialise the privileged class towards leadership and other cultural values of the day (HORNE et al 1999).

Although the British attitudes to sport and education in the late 1800's were enlightening, it took French educator and reformer, Baron De Coubertin, to fully realise sports potential for social and national mobility. In 1896, De Coubertin set up the International Olympic Committee and reintroduced the Olympic games in Athens, and with it their ideology of human spirit, chivalry and excellence. Although originally set out to promote the abilities of men, the Olympics have orchestrated the rise of women as athletes. This sporting event along with governments implementing functionalism as policy (Labour Party Mandate 2003 <http://www.labour.org.uk/culturemediasport/> visited 28 November 2003) has over recent years seen women's involvement in sporting and leisure activities increase <https://assignbuster.com/functionalist-issues-in-sport-essay-sample/>

astronomically. The esteem in which sports are held in modern times to provide positive character traits are highlighted in this abstract from a BBC radio program.

? We want people, young people particular, off the street corners, getting them away from frightening old lady's and breaking windows, and getting into sports areas where they come participate at their own level, have fun, and enjoy themselves and really feel that they are part of something that is totally enjoyable and that is being a Briton and enjoy life in Britain (Peter Lawson, speaking on BBC radio 4 programme, children and sports, March 1986).

Both Coubertin and Lawson, although decades apart, share as do many of their peers the view that participation in sport encourages its participants to learn valuable traits that benefit communities and culture and more directly better their selves. They also share the view that sports can transcend race, gender, class etc due to sports ability to show common ground, which is also endorsed by Horne et al (1999).

Depending on what social stratification class the individual stems from, indicates how they use sports and what traits can be transferred to them. As in the 1800's public school development, people from the upper social class's look to sports to pass on qualities such as leadership, middle class look to gain qualities such as teamwork and communication skills, while lower classes look to gain self esteem and community recognition.

Regardless of class stratification, all look to sports to instill positive values

that can be used for self betterment and to use experiences and contact with others as a way to move between class stratification (HORNE, 1999).

According to the functionalist perspective, sports offer the rare opportunity to move between classes. This is possible for a very few in today's arenas where media, sponsorship and wages allow professional players to move from humble beginnings to higher stratifications (COAKLEY, 2000). Although not so common for the majority in such a short time, it is according to Jones and Armour (1999) possible for a family to be socially mobile over a period of generations. Coakley (2000) states that the class of their father can also accurately predict the child's class stratification, and through sports involvement and interaction with significant others can gain opportunities allowing that stratification to change.

This ideology according to Coakley (2000) shows that sport offers that it is possible to orchestrate social change for the better and that society functions best when social mechanisms are maintained in a state of balance.

? This balance is achieved ? naturally? as groups of people develop consensus, common values, and coordinated organisations in the major spheres of social life, such as the family, education, the economy, and media, politics, religion, leisure, and sport.? (COAKLEY, 2000) Functionalist research in sport suggests that sport participation is related to a person's abilities and character to fulfil roles and the influence of significant others in determining the roles and the availability of opportunities to play & experience success in sports. This would support the view that regardless of social class the participant originated from, through participation in sport

they can achieve the social qualities deemed preferable and because of their ability and characteristics achieve higher social standing.

In having a greater number of participants involved in leisure activity and sport the country drains high health standards putting less resource on a health service, it aids for physical work force and also increases the longevity of life spans. As the social price that rises there is evidence to suggest to the social economic system in that year graphic air also begins to rise as investors more readily willing to developed new industrial areas and all the satellite systems that support them.

Conclusion Functionalist theory is familiar to most people views on the interaction of Sport within societies. This paper has disguised the involvement sport has as a component of socialisation process? s through the fundamentalists perspective. How society is a machine made up of many parts that function together for a common balance that enables people and communities growth. What this paper does not discuss is the functionalist theory downfalls, that it does not adequately address issues such as deviancy, racism, drugs, equality and feminist issues. Its assumes that these issues are required as part of human nature and therefor need not be addressed as the human self accepts class division, that there is a need for a patriarchal system.

Granted, womens involvement and acceptance in the sporting community has over the past decade increased, but women are still seen as inferior to men (HOURNE, 1999). Heroes abound while heroines are few and far between. Women? s sporting occasions are rarely viewed on TV and in many

cases funding through the governing bodies is disproportionate. Class and racial issues still abound despite education, stacking (CAOKLEY 2001) is still stereotypical of ethnic minorities. Handicapped sports are sidelined despite Britain having world champions in many of its disciplines, which fly? s in the face of what we deem to be important traits that make up being a Briton. Surly these people deserve our recognition and gratitude for flying the flag and showing the world that they too can compete.

Functionalist theory isn? t without supporters; most people can identify with its ethics that allow our culture to attain high goals and achievement. What function is theory does not concentrate on is the fact that sport alone does not build positive character traits. At the end of the season sportsmen and women regularly let their hair down and at these times deviant behaviour comes to the fore. Sport is, and should be taken as a fun recreational activity with the ability to instil certain traits. But surely its the responsibility of educators in the sports situations, of what they are socialising.

There is no denying that the stage of sport can be used for positive and negative in equal amounts. Sports offer small and large communities a sense of pride, that they no matter what their position is just as good if not better than the next. Sport is still subject to political intervention and subsequent bureaucracy, politics can never fully be removed from the sporting field however. Sports need some involvement from government in the way of a guiding hand, much like a father would guide a child. Government also has the ability to change governing body? s policies and supply funds for its participants. But should not the communities themselves decide what they want and where they want to go.

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