1 □ Theories of Society & Sport

2 □ Social Theories
   • Theories are general views on how the world works, in a sense ideologies
   • Theories involve a combination of
     • Description - what to, how to
     • Reflection - what is important
     • Analysis - causes, connections
   • Theories have practical implication because they help us make choices
     • In a sense ideologies but ....

3 □ Personal vs. Sociological Theories
   • Social theories are like ideologies but
     • Personal theories are ideologies
   • Different
     • Not because not biased
     • All theories are biased
     • Must presume things about society
     • Different because explicit
     • Makes bias explicit
     • Exposes to criticism (by design)

4 □ Six (5?) Major Social Theories
   • Identified in Text
     • Functionalist theory
     • Conflict theory
     • Interactionist theory
     • Critical theories
     • Feminist theories
     • Figurational theory

5 □ Functionalist Theory
   • Society is an organized system of interrelated parts
   • Sports are studied in terms of their contributions to the system
   • Research "focuses on positive outcomes for individuals and society"
     [text]
     • But also how sports can be disfuntional
     • Aspects of deviant behaviour

6 □ Functionalist Theory (cont.)
   • Popular because assumes that shared values and agreement are the basis for social order
   • Those with power and influence often prefer it because it emphasizes stability and equilibrium in society
   • Media coverage often are based on the same assumptions as functionalist theory

7 □ Using Functionalist Theory
How sports promote social integration
- Development and growth of organized sports
- Sport participation and individual development
- Combat deviance though:
  - Elite programs as rôle models for the young

8  Weaknesses of Functionalist Theory
- Overstates the positive consequences of sport in society
- Assumes that all social groups benefit equally from sports
- "Does not recognize that sports are social constructions that privilege or disadvantage some people more than others"

9  Weaknesses of Functionalist Theory?
- Assumes all groups benefit equally?
  - In the overall picture
    - What's good for 'society' must be good for all its members
    - Argues that inequalities are good for society
  - "Does not recognize that sports are social constructions"?
    - No, just that society constructs
    - Not individuals, groups

10 Conflict [Marxist] Theory
- Society is determined by economic relations
  - Class relations
  - Exploitation
- Sports promote capitalism
- Research: how does sport perpetuate capitalism?

11 Conflict Theory (cont.)
- Those with power dislike because argues that power is source of problems in society
- Many people dislike because it argues that the social order is the problem
- Seldom used in sports discourse because it portrays sport as part of the problem, not solution

12 Using Conflict Theory
- Focus on class inequality and how it distorts sports
- Tries to show how athletes and spectators are exploited by capitalists
  - Alienation of athletes and spectators
- Argues that sports not for profit can benefit people

13 Weaknesses of Conflict Theory
- Assumes that all social life is "economically determined"
- Ignores the importance of gender, race & ethnicity, age, & other factors in social life
Ignores the possibility that sport might empower people
Can produce functionalist arguments

14 [Symbolic] Interactionist Theory
Society is created through social interaction
Sports are studied through the meanings, symbols, people create in social interactions
Research on how people experience sports, how identities are created

15 Interactionist Theory (cont.)
Uses “interpretive research methods”
- Social processes involved in becoming, being, and unbecoming an athlete
- How people create, negotiate, identities as athletes
- The meanings, symbols, people give to sports
- The characteristics of sport subcultures

16 Using Interactionist Theory
Change sports by changing the meanings we attach to sports
Trying to shape the meanings of events in sports
Question identity formation processes that involve the normalization of pain, injury, & substance use in sports

17 Weaknesses of Interactionist Theory
Does not explain how meaning, identity, and interaction are connected with social structures and materials conditions in society
Ignores issues of power and power relations in society and how they impact sport, sport participation, and sport experiences

18 Critical Theories
Society involves cultural production, power relations, & ideological struggles
Sports are social constructions that change as power relations change and as narratives and discourses change
Research focuses the meaning and organizations of sports, and on sports as sites for cultural transformation

19 Critical Theories (cont.)
Assume that sports are more than reflections of society/capitalism, study
- Struggles over the organization & meaning of sports
- How dominant narratives, images are used to construct and give meaning to sports
- How marginalized voices and perspectives are erased from the discourse of sports in society
- How dominant narratives, images, and power relations can be disrupted to promote progressive changes

20 Using Critical Theories
Use sports to challenge and transform exploitive and oppressive practices
Increase diversity in sport
Challenge the dominant discourses, ideology, in sports
Challenge those in power in sports and society
  • Speak for the marginalized

21 🔄 Weaknesses of Critical Theories
  • No clear guidelines for identifying and assessing forms of resistance and strategies for producing transformation
  • No unified strategies for dealing with social problems, conflicts, and injustice
    • Difficult to translate into practice
    • Difficult to translate into plain English

22 🔄 Feminist Theories
  • Social life is pervasively gendered
    • Patriarchy
  • Sports are gendered activities based on masculine values and experiences
  • Research how sports reproduce patriarchy through physicality, sexuality, and the body

23 🔄 Feminist Theories (cont.)
  • Feminist theorists study
    • How sports are involved in the production of ideas about masculinity and femininity
    • How women are (mis)represented in media coverage of sports
    • Strategies used by women to resist or challenge dominant gender ideology
    • The patriarchal structures of sports and sport organizations

24 🔄 Using Feminist Theories
  • Challenge aspects of sports that privilege men over women
  • Expose and transform sexism and homophobia in sports
  • Use sports as sites to empower women and promote forms of sport that reflect the interests of women
    • Speak for women

25 🔄 Weaknesses of Feminist Theories
  • Lack clear guidelines for assessing forms of resistance and the value of ideas and actions in producing social transformation
  • Assume that there is a unified "women's interest"
    • Many women argue that it is not their interest

26 🔄 Figurational Theory
  • Society consists of patterns of interdependencies, figurations, among individuals and groups
  • Development of society/sports linked to the civilizing process
• External, violent, restraints are replaced by internal, self-regulatory, ones
• Sports become less violent, brutal, and more organized

27 Figurational Theory (cont.)
✧Sports are important because
  • Development, the civilizing process exemplified in sport
    – Decrease in violence
    – Centralization or organization
  • Are exciting activities that relieve boredom and control violence

28 Figurational Theory (cont.)
✧Research focuses on developing knowledge that presents valid pictures of reality
✧Those who use it are concerned with
  • How social figurations emerge and change
  • How modern sports emerged and became important in certain societies
  • The complexities of global sports and local and national identities

29 Using Figurational Theory
✧Develop knowledge that may:
  • Give rise to strategies for controlling expressions of violence, exploitation, and the abuse of power
  • Increase access to sport participation among those who have lacked power through history

30 Weaknesses of Figurational Theory
✧Gives too little attention to problems & struggles that affect day-to-day lives
✧Understates the immediate personal consequences of oppressive power relations
✧Has not given enough attention to the experiences of women and the gender inequities that affect their lives

31 What Theories are Best?
✧Theories are tools that help us ask questions, collect and analyze information, and interpret the implications of the analyses
✧Our choice of theories is influenced by our goals and political agendas
✧The best theories are those that help us find ways to make the world more democratic and humane? [text]