

CHAPTER 3

THE SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT AS A CAREER AND ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Introduction

As I grew up on the North side of Chicago, my early experiences revolved around sports. Most of those experiences consisted of playing informal games in parks and other spaces. I immersed myself into sandlot baseball and softball, swimming, ice hockey and speed skating, all forms of basketball competition, horseshoes, darts, tennis, table tennis, bike racing, street and garage hockey, and just about anything that involved physical challenges. I did play golf on “caddy day” at the country club where I carried clubs for wealthy members who I learned to dislike as a caddy and as a paid member of the grounds crew between the ages of 14 and 17 years.

The sports I played were clearly gendered, segregated by race and ethnicity and social class, and sponsored by schools, churches, local businesses, and civic organizations. They gave rise to no grand illusions about “the power of sport” to transform people or social and economic circumstances. They were physical challenges that offered fun, occasional flow, and reaffirmation of what it meant to be a male during the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. I saw “athletes” engage in various forms of deviant behavior and face serious trouble with law enforcement. I also witnessed the planning of crimes by some of the young

“athletes” with whom I played basketball at the DePaul Settlement House in Chicago.

I loved to play sports of all kinds, and I was drawn to them because of the joy associated with participation. I saw sports as an enjoyable life experience and never saw it as a magical elixir that produced social integration or character development, although I did develop bonds with certain teammates during my sport experiences, and I did learn things about myself as I faced challenges in connection with organizing and playing sports through and beyond my college years. These experiences combined with my interest in sociology attracted me to the sociology of sport.

Mentors and Influential Figures

While completing my PhD coursework at the University of Notre Dame in 1969, I had not heard of the sociology of sport. My degrees, including a BA and MA, were in sociology with a consistent emphasis on theory, methods, social psychology, urban sociology, and race and ethnicity. Eager to begin what I perceived as a teaching career in higher education, Nancy (my wife), our two children, and I departed from South Bend, Indiana in 1970 so I could assume a position as assistant professor in sociology at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona.

During my first year in Arizona, I read *Athletics for Athletes* (1969) and *The Athletic Revolution* (1971) by Jack Scott and *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (1969) by Harry Edwards. Having played basketball in college with a majority of black teammates in a nearly all-white institution, I had followed the media coverage of the boycott of the 1968 Olympic Games by black athletes and saw Edwards as an influential sociologist-activist in the civil rights movement. Experiences with my teammates primed me to agree with Edwards that sports at all levels were riddled with personal and systemic racism.

When I also read *Sport, Culture, and Society* edited by Loy and Kenyon (1969), *Aspects of Contemporary Sport Sociology* edited by Kenyon (1969), and *The Cross-Cultural Analysis of Sport and Games* edited by Lüschen (1970), I decided in 1971 to propose a one-off special studies seminar titled “Sport in Society” for advanced undergraduates. Over 50 students applied for the seminar and my department chair suggested that I choose the 15 who would make up the class. Without a system to prioritize the registrants, I chose students so that women comprised half the class; half were athletes (male and female), including four African American men; and five were students that I identified as “socially curious, open-minded thinkers.”

We met at my house which was close to the campus and spent the first two weeks reading selected sections from all the above sources. At the end of the second session the students identified 10 questions that they wanted to explore

through readings and discussions.¹ The seminar was a hit and this led me to propose, with the support of the sociology chair who was a strong faculty advocate, a sociology of sport course to the college curriculum committee. The proposal was promptly rejected, with the committee members concluding that the topic was frivolous.

During the same semester I was identified as a problem faculty member by the Board of Regents and the president of the university. This came about because I used material from Robin Morgan's anthology, *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings From The Women's Liberation Movement* (1970) in a race and ethnicity course I taught. The students in 1971 had a difficult time understanding that racism permeated American culture, so I shifted to the issue of sexism permeating the culture which was easier for them to grasp, especially with the examples in Morgan's book. Word that I was using this material traveled to the only female member of the Regents. She was offended by the material and convinced the other Regents that I was propagandizing students, especially the "innocent" females in my class.² Although I succeeded in showing the students how sexism and racism were features of American society and culture, I was less successful in convincing the Board of Regents and the university president that my use of Morgan's material was appropriate as a teaching tool. When I refused to apologize and cease using it, I could see that even the support of my department chair would not change the minds of people more aligned with the John Birch Society than with the notion of academic freedom.³ This coupled with a desire to return to Colorado where I had done my undergraduate degree and Nancy's family lived, led me to apply for the job of an assistant professor at the newly established campus of the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs (UCCS). I was hired and began the appointment in August, 1972.

Robert H. Hughes, who had left Northern Arizona University in 1971 as he sought increased academic freedom at the new campus, was the chair of our three-person department. In 1973, Hughes planned a way for me to offer a course in the sociology of sport in the Honors program, and then successfully propose a "Sociology of Leisure and Sport" course to the curriculum committee whose members enjoyed many outdoor leisure pursuits and thought that leisure was an appropriate topic of study. We had emphasized leisure more than sport in the proposal.

With Hughes as a mentor and advocate, I taught the leisure and sport course, which after two years was split into two courses dedicated to each of the topics, respectively. As the sociology of sport course attracted large numbers of students, and as I sought a book other than Harry Edwards' *Sociology of Sport* text (1973), Hughes encouraged me to propose a textbook and gave me release time to write the proposal and a few chapters while I taught only a sociology of sport course during the spring semester in 1975.

My thesis and dissertation advisor had been a mentor in graduate school, but Bob Hughes has been a mentor, colleague, and friend since 1972. His

political abilities as department chair enabled me to do much of what I have done in the sociology of sport.

Research Trajectory

My MA thesis and PhD dissertation focused primarily on race and ethnicity, urban sociology, and social psychology. The thesis (Coakley, 1968) was a study of the impact of a 1967 race-related civil disorder on community satisfaction and social cohesion in African American neighborhoods in South Bend, Indiana, and it furthered my interest in how the civil rights movement influenced the lives of African Americans. My dissertation (Coakley, 1972a) focused on the antecedents, current contexts, and everyday life consequences of the self-identification priorities (race vs. religious vocation) of Black Catholic priests in the United States during 1969. Unfortunately, personal circumstances interfered with publishing articles based on these studies – something that still bothers me when I glance at those bound volumes sitting in a bookcase in my home office.

My first two publications were a social historical account of “The Negro and the Catholic Church” (Lamanna & Coakley, 1969) and “Graduate Education: A Rationale for Change” (Coakley, 1970), a call for action research and courses on progressive change in sociology programs. Apart from an article in an edited collection (Coakley, 1972b), a co-authored article on the perception of mate-selection priorities among college students (Laner & Coakley, 1974), two book reviews, and an article on gaming and simulation in introductory sociology courses, I published nothing in sociology or sociology of sport journals prior to the late 1970s.

My research during the first few years after completing the dissertation focused on local issues in and around Colorado Springs. It led to policy- and program-related research reports for agencies and organizations, including the Colorado State prison, the United States Ski Coaches Association, and the Parks and Recreation Department and the Senior Center in the city. These studies were usually linked with my teaching and I included undergraduate students as research assistants.

I had a weak publication record when I proposed and wrote a few chapters for what became the first edition of *Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies* (1978). I did not know where to send this proposal, but I met an acquisitions editor at the 1975 conference of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (AAHPERD), and he said he would take a look at it. A few months later I was shocked to receive a contract offer, and with no critical forethought about the terms of the contract, I signed on the dotted line in 1976.⁴ With little professional writing experience, apart from

research reports, and no major publications, my naïveté and self-confidence led me to take on the textbook project.

George Sage served as a guide in this process. I met George at an AAHPERD conference and discovered that he had been a highly successful coach for a college basketball team that regularly played the team on which I played. He remembered me, as well as a scouting report on my on-court weaknesses, and we quickly became good friends. Even though he and sociologist D. Stanley Eitzen from Colorado State University were writing a sociology of sport text at the very same time, George gave me encouragement and we shared references from our respective projects.

The publication of *Sport in Society* in 1978 gave direction to my subsequent research and publication trajectory. Although UCCS was a teaching-oriented institution with an emphasis on community service, I scrambled for resources to support my research projects and often funded my own studies. Much of this research and related scholarly work focused on socialization, especially in connection with the play, games, and sport experiences of children and young adolescents. In addition to teaching a large section of introductory sociology most semesters, I also taught courses on race and ethnicity, social psychology, popular culture, the sociology of leisure, the sociology of aging, and urban sociology, as well as the sociology of sport.

When I learned in 1980 that a Tokyo publisher wanted to translate *Sport in Society* into Japanese, and that the C.V. Mosby Company (purchased by McGraw-Hill in 1990) wanted me to write a second edition, I was caught off-guard with a full teaching load and two kids in need of parenting. As I did the revision, I began to keep meticulous track of most publications in the sociology of sport and make sure that the text accurately represented and made sense of that research for students. This, combined with my involvement in the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS) beginning with its first conference in 1980, was the factor that led to me becoming the founding editor of the *Sociology of Sport Journal* in 1983.

Also important in my research career, 1980 marked the first time I traveled outside of North America. A trip to Germany in 1980 and to the Soviet Union in 1981 connected me with new colleagues and broadened my awareness of sports and sport scholarship and my research interests. Meeting Anita White, who earned her PhD at the University of Northern Colorado with George Sage and then founded the Sports Studies Department at the West Sussex Institute of Higher Education (now the University of Chichester), and having the opportunity to work with her in England during a sabbatical in 1985 also influenced my research. Our study of how young people made decisions about sport participation and the use of discretionary time led to presentations, publications, and a report widely used by people at the British Sports Council and leisure centers around the country.

Other research during this time in my career generally reflected my access to data – qualitative data that I collected in local self-funded projects and

quantitative data collected by others who wanted me to help them with analysis of sport-related variables. Apart from the research that Anita White and I did in England I never had a research grant of more than a couple hundred dollars. My research and publications have largely been opportunistic. But the regular revisions and relative popularity of the *Sport in Society* text afforded me many opportunities to work with and learn from colleagues worldwide.

Being in Colorado Springs where the United States Olympic Committee was established in 1978 and where at least 20 national governing bodies were located also provided me with research and learning opportunities. These experiences increased my overall knowledge of sports, leisure, and physical activities. They helped me as I developed and supervised a Master's degree in Coaching Education with colleagues in the School of Education. Relatedly, I founded and directed a Center for the Study of Sport and Leisure for 10 years from 1982 to 1992 and used it as the organizational framework for developing, staffing, and supervising a physical education curriculum on a campus that never had any programs or courses related to movement, health and well-being, and the body.

These experiences put me in touch with coaches, sport managers, exercise scientists, and athletic directors in local schools, all of who expanded my knowledge beyond the social dimensions of sports and physical activities.

ABOUT SPORT

Why Does Sport Matter?

Sports are multidimensional phenomena. From a sociological perspective, they matter because they are sites for: social interaction; socialization; identity formation and affirmation; commerce and power relations; mediated messages that influence what people think and talk about; the reification of nations and national identities; the reproduction of ideologies related to race, ethnicity, gender, social class, nationality, ability, the body, competition, violence, mobility, and meritocracy; and occasionally, the expression of progressive social activism, especially in symbolic (as opposed to substantive) terms. Culturally, they matter because they are sites at which people publicly tell stories about themselves, stories that influence ideas and actions in ways yet to be fully studied and understood by those of us in the sociology of sport.

Variations in the forms and organization of sports indicate that as cultural practises they serve a diverse range of social purposes and are given different meanings from time to time and place to place. Sociological research on these variations provides valuable insights into social processes, structures, and ideologies that constitute sports. In this sense, sports also serve as windows into social and cultural life. These windows provide vantage points for observations

and analysis that complement sociological observations and analyses done from other vantage points.

Overall, sports matter to the extent that they are connected with and integrated into the everyday life of individuals, relationships, and institutions. Of course, the social and cultural importance of sports and sport participation varies with social conditions and social processes. Research shows that sports are not so much a direct cause of socialization as they are a site at which people form and experience social relationships that shape the meanings given to sport-related experiences and influence their lives. This is an important point, because many people believe that sports, regardless of how they are organized and played are essentially pure and good activities that automatically lead to positive developmental outcomes at the personal and collective levels. This belief has discouraged critical thinking about sports and made it difficult to obtain funding for critical sociological research. At the same time, it has fostered exaggerated and uninformed assumptions about the social benefits of sports for individuals, schools, communities, and societies, and has led to using public and private funds to sponsor sports that fail to live up to expectations based on those assumptions. This makes critical sociological research on sports important, despite a scarcity of resources to fund such research.

How Should Sport be Studied?

As multidimensional phenomena, sports should be studied from multiple disciplinary perspectives and through the use of multiple methodologies. In the sociology of sport it is important to observe and analyze sports from multiple vantage points – not to discover ultimate truth about sports, but to understand the meanings and consequences of sports under varying social conditions for people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

As a critical pragmatist, I am concerned with the reliability, validity, and practical relevance of knowledge about sports. Additionally, I support various methods of producing knowledge and different theories for organizing, making sense of, and raising questions about that knowledge. Although I have done quantitative research and appreciate the importance of statistical description, relationships, and analysis, I prefer to do qualitative research. I enjoy observing sport situations in context, talking with people involved in sports, and connecting what people say with what they do. Identifying statistical patterns and relationships between variables in large populations is important and always needed in the sociology of sport, but I feel closer to the action when I do qualitative research.

Of course, the process of doing research and producing knowledge is strongly influenced by the contexts in which scholars work and the reward systems used to evaluate them. This is evident as more scholars worldwide publish

research on the social dimensions of sports and physical activities. There are clear variations in the historical, conceptual, and theoretical links between sports and related phenomena, such as leisure, physical education, recreation, outdoor activities, play, games, folk festivals, tourism, and physical culture in general. This, combined with the diversity of research in the field, has attracted scholars with research interests that may not be supported by the traditional disciplines of sociology and physical education. For me, this was and remains an attractive aspect of the sociology of sport: disciplinary boundaries are more fuzzy and permeable than in sociology generally and colleagues in the field are more likely to push those boundaries.

Additionally, as the field has grown, so too have the definitions of sports used by researchers. Initially, people in the sociology of sport defined sport as “an embodied, structured, goal-oriented, competitive, contest-based, ludic, physical activity” (Loy & Coakley, 2015). This definition was useful at a time when the field was seeking recognition among more established social sciences. It was important for the object of study to be identified precisely if scholars wanted to obtain academic and scientific legitimacy. But this definition overlooked that sports are socially constructed, contested, and dynamic physical activities that are collectively created, sustained, given meaning, and changed over time. Therefore, research today may focus on tai chi practised in a Beijing park, capoeira practised in a plaza in Rio de Janeiro, parkour practised in a Paris neighborhood, windsurfing on the water of Australia’s Gold Coast, or skateboarding on the concrete surfaces of neighborhoods in Oakland as much as it focuses on formally institutionalized, competitive physical activities. Research today also focuses on the body and physical culture more generally. However, research focused on the highly visible institutionalized, competitive, rule-governed physical activities in contemporary cultures often evokes the most interest and discussion in journal publications and classrooms.

Overall it is important that norms in the sociology of sport are supportive of work that pushes disciplinary boundaries so there are opportunities to learn from work done by scholars in related disciplines and encouragement for people in the field to be creative in how they conceptualize their own work.

Is Sport a Panacea for Social Problems?

Despite the long-accepted popular belief in North America and much of Europe that sports are a cure-all for social problems, this topic has not received the research attention it deserves in the sociology of sport. Maybe people enter the field with this belief and are slow to ask critical questions about it; maybe popular acceptance of the belief has undermined support for research to test it; and/or maybe the belief is so compatible with neoliberal ideas about personal responsibility as the driver of progress and change that people in the field

support programs despite a lack of evidence about their effectiveness. In any case, sports have been used over the past 120 years as interventions and facilitators of development, especially in the lives of young people perceived to lack self-control and “character,” as defined generally by the Protestant Ethic and specifically in cultures that value individualism.

The use of sports as a panacea is primarily a legacy of the complex class dynamics in late-nineteenth century England and the Progressive Era in the United States. For well over a century, it was widely assumed that “properly organized and controlled” youth sport programs could create in young men the energy, nationalism, and competitive spirit that would maintain personal health, fuel industrial expansion, and create strong and willing soldiers. Programs in selected team sports were used in early twentieth century US cities to Americanize immigrant children, convert unruly boys in crowded tenements into efficient and compliant workers, foster good health through exposure to the outdoors, prepare boys to serve in the military, and masculinize middle-class boys who were thought to lack political and business leadership qualities because they were raised in female-dominated households.

Fueled by anecdotal evidence, the personal testimonies of athletes, stories circulated through popular culture, and the pronouncements of physical educators and coaches, the belief that sports were a panacea became a taken-for-granted cultural truth in many Western societies. This belief goes hand-in-hand with the seldom questioned myth that sport is essentially pure and good and that all who participate in it share in that purity and goodness (Coakley, 2016). Armed with this essentialist belief, people assume that sports automatically produce positive outcomes for individuals, communities, and societies. Accordingly, parents, educators, community leaders, political officials, faith-based organizations, and a wide range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have allocated vast amounts of public and private resources to sports.

Even the task of global development and peacemaking has been recently assigned to sports. Because certain sports can be used to attract participants or spectators, and because participants and spectators often feel good when they share a common focus, it is assumed that sports can be used to transcend sources of structural differences, including poverty, oppression, differential access to opportunities, discrimination, and ethnic hatred and conflict in communities and societies.

Research is now questioning these assumptions and finding them in need of serious qualifications. It is also identifying the conditions, processes, relationships, and resources needed if sport programs are to be sites for effectively facilitating individual and community development. Emerging research also shows that sports do not cure social problems as much as they can be strategically organized as sites where people can be informed and empowered to engage in collective actions that lead to structural changes. As we are learning, this requires knowledge and experiences that do not magically pass onto people of

any age who learn to kick, throw, hit, and catch balls, or run fast and jump high and far.

ABOUT PRACTISING SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT

Is Teaching Sociology of Sport Easy?

All teaching is a challenge. It requires taking the role of students and learning what they know and how they will perceive the learning materials and information presented in a course. This challenge is intensified in sociology of sport courses because most students have feelings and information about sports that have been shaped by the ethos and narratives of commercial sports and the associated myth about the purity and goodness of sports. This causes them to resist asking critical questions and to become defensive in the face of critical analyses of sports.

My strategy for dealing with this is to acknowledge the reality of their experiences and to discuss them in connection with the context in which they occurred. Most classes are diverse enough that students begin to see connections between context, experiences, and the integration of experiences into a person's life. This cracks emotional and cognitive doors open enough to raise critical questions. However, knowing when and how much critical information to introduce is tricky. It depends on what they have said about their experiences, the extent to which their identities are linked directly to sports, and their responses to assigned readings that raise critical issues. Of course, using current sport events and media stories in discussions is important when introducing critical analyses.

This is not easy to do because every class is different and teachers are dealing on the spot with unanticipated class dynamics. Even after teaching a basic sociology of sport course over 60 times with second to fourth year undergraduates, I still struggled to meet this challenge. Strategies that work in one class may not work in the next. The narratives that students have heard about sports are grounded in strong commercial interests and the public witness given by athletes whose lives are organized around and dependent on sports. My goal is to help them see the limitations of these narratives and statements and become willing to consider alternatives. When their experiences can be used as points of departure for doing this, it is an advantage.

Overall, I equate teaching the sociology of sport to young people today, many of whom have identities and strong memories linked to sports, with teaching the sociology of religion to young people raised in families influenced by strong religious beliefs. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully work around the faith that has prevented them from asking critical questions or considering the merits of a critical analysis. To do so would threaten the foundation on

which much of their lives have been built. Sensitivity is required in this process lest future classes be small and attended only by those who already know much of what you want them to learn.

Do Sociologists of Sport Like Sport?

Most scholars in the field have had experiences that they feel give them insights into the social dimensions of sports. This is also true of scholars in many topic areas in sociology. However, the longer that scholars are exposed to critical analyses of that topic, ask critical questions in their research, and teach courses in which critical materials are included, the more likely they are to develop qualified or ambivalent feelings about the topic.

Like many of my students, my personal experiences with sports were generally positive, even though I knew that others had negative experiences or were excluded from sports due to lack of ability or opportunity. These “facts of life” became issues and problems worthy of study and action when I viewed sports through a sociological perspective. The longer I studied sports, the more I saw problems associated with them. This did not cause me to dislike them as much as it led me to see them through new eyes. In the process, I became less of a fan and more of an observer. I have always preferred to *play* sports than to watch or work at doing them, but when I watch them today I am more analytical than emotional and this often irritates people around me. My tendency to focus on relationships, social organization, and social processes does not interest others as much as it does me.

Moving from being a spectator or fan to an observer occurs over time with most scholars, although this is a topic in need of research. My hypothesis is that it takes time along with a strong commitment to observing the social aspects of sports to shed identification with favorite teams, to be less taken in by the tension excitement of a game or match, and to see and hear things extraneous to the physical actions in sport event. Although this has occurred with me, I continue to experience the joy of learning and doing physical activities. I still like to play and I lament the decline of a culture of play in highly rationalized and commercialized societies in which emotions are more tied to spectacle than to play.

Overall, I know less than I should about my colleagues on this issue. Maybe it will become a conversation topic at future conferences.

Is the Sociologist of Sport a “Public Intellectual”?

There are many ways to be a sociologist. We can produce knowledge about social worlds, synthesize and “teach” it to students, apply it in action research

or social programs, and make it understandable and useful to policy makers and the general public. To become actively involved in the public sphere as “experts,” opinion leaders, or agents of change is not something we learn in graduate school, nor is it something that most university-employers are anxious for us to do if our actions challenge the status quo or the interests of legislators and benefactors who support the university.

When we make sociological knowledge public we cannot escape the fact that social life is characterized by inequalities, power differences, and conflicts of interests that are meaningful and contentious. Therefore, going public with knowledge in the sociology of sport is not a simple process that automatically brings about equal and positive benefits for everyone. In fact, it is usually disruptive.

To be a public intellectual is to become a political actor. In many cases, this can have serious implications in our careers. Therefore, it is advisable to adopt protective strategies such as working behind the scenes in change-oriented organizations, allowing the organization to face the pushback created by public statements, and using the organization to increase legitimacy and influence. When an organization provides cover, it is possible to present research findings in sponsored statements and reports. This decreases the chances that an individual scholar becomes the target of responses and backlash.

An alternative strategy is to become an insider and help to shape sport-related policies and programs. Again, this requires an ability to be an effective political actor, an ability that scholars acquire only if they work at it and have knowledgeable mentors in the process. Unfortunately, this ability is not likely to be highly rewarded in most universities.

Finally, we are living at a time when access to information has exploded and many people have become skeptical of the veracity and usefulness of scientific knowledge. Science experts are increasingly identified as “elites” who are detached from everyday life. Therefore, people turn to their own social networks for information and “truth,” and it becomes more difficult to effectively demonstrate the usefulness of scientific knowledge. This is a challenge that goes far beyond the sociology of sport, and it is one that scholars in all disciplines must collectively confront.

ABOUT SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT IN THE ACADEMY

Does Sociology of Sport Face Institutional/Industry Barriers?

The sociology of sport struggles for acceptance in societies where many people accept the assumption that sports are pure and good and that all who play or consume them will share in this purity and goodness. This assumption leads to

the conclusion that it is not necessary to study and critically evaluate sport because it is essentially good as it is (Coakley, 2016).

Additionally, critical research done in the field often highlights problems related to the structure and organization of sports or the social worlds in which sports exist. Recommendations based on that research often threaten those who benefit from the status quo in sports. This leads some people to see the sociology of sport as controversial, which interferes with obtaining support for research. For example, I discovered this when I did research on burnout and concluded that among older adolescents it was grounded in the structure and power relations characteristic in high-performance sport organizations. But those who controlled these organizations were more willing to support and even fund research based on the assumption that burnout was caused by an athlete's inability to manage the stress associated with high-performance training and competition. For them, teaching athletes to better manage stress was preferable to changing the status hierarchy and system of control in their organizations.

Barriers in the academy itself exist, in part, because university-based knowledge production is grounded in historical and cultural traditions that assume mind–body distinctions. The enduring acceptance of the Cartesian mind–body dualism has sustained a research culture that ignores bodies or relegates them to the “repair shops” located in university medical schools, biology departments, or departments concerned with body mechanics and performance. This, of course, gives the physical sciences in kinesiology and related departments the upper hand as they make the case that their research merits priority over the research of their colleagues in social sciences. As a result, professional recognition, status, and job security flow in their direction.

The short supply of research money going to scholars proposing sociology of sport research has reduced the willingness of departments in tier-one universities to embrace scholars and courses on sports as social phenomena. Therefore, most sociologists listing sports as a primary research interest are not working in top-tier research universities where status and security depend on obtaining large research grants. Instead, they tend to have appointments in teaching-focused universities where sociology of sport courses attract students in campus competition for fund-eliciting enrollments and where securing research grants is not the highest priority evaluative criterion in promotion and tenure decisions. For example, my career would not have led to tenure in an R-1 university, and my textbook may have actually counted as a negative factor in the evaluation process.

Related to this is the fact that the United States-based American Sociological Association (ASA) does not recognize “Sports” among its 52 topic sections. Few ASA members give priority to research on sports for the reasons given above. And this continues to be why most scholars in the sociology of sport have university appointments in physical education, kinesiology, and

sports studies departments than in sociology departments. But they too are facing challenges in their departments and in the promotion and tenure process.

What is the Future of the Sociology of Sport?

The future of the sociology of sport depends greatly on professional associations that provide personal support, legitimacy, opportunities for making presentations, journals for publishing research, and contexts for coming together to deal with issues facing members. Without these things, knowledge production, distribution, and application would decline precipitously in the field.

The gradual expansion of scholars in the field over the past 40 years is due to these organizations around the world. Even as commercial sport forms have grown considerably over this time, these associations have supported and given legitimacy to the careers of those doing a wide range of research on sports and physical culture. But these organizations are self-funded and self-governed, so their future is hardly guaranteed. Survival depends on recruiting qualified officers, journal editors and reviewers, board members, and general members willing to pay dues, conference fees, and journal subscriptions – and all of this is becoming increasingly difficult as neoliberal universities increase workloads and limit salary increases for faculty members.

Until recently, I have claimed that growth of the field will continue as long as scholars do research and produce knowledge that people find useful as they make decisions about the role of sports in their personal lives, families, communities, and societies. However, it has become much more complicated than that, if it ever was that simple. As many in the field are learning that it is crucial to become effective political actors in their communities and nations to create a desired future, they are also learning that the same is required in their professional lives. Without such actions and a willingness to collectively support professional associations and all that they do, the future will not involve continued growth.

CONCLUSION

I cannot imagine a more satisfying career than the one I have had as a sociologist. But I was privileged by my gender, skin color, mixed European heritage, social class, and birth year. Born two years before the first baby boomer, I benefitted greatly due to my small birth year cohort, the expansion of higher education during the 1960s, a full athletic scholarship to college (even with monthly laundry money, an on-campus job, and permission to work off campus legally), a Cold War-related National Defense Education Act fellowship that paid all graduate school expenses plus basic living expenses with stipends

for spouse and children, and a job market that was expanding as I received my degrees. I chose jobs on the basis of geographical location and associated life-style, and I had the benefit of supportive colleagues, department chairs, and even a few deans and chancellors.

Due to my circumstances, I never worried or even thought about not receiving tenure, although I greatly appreciated the academic freedom that came with it. The autonomy that came with my appointment at the Colorado Springs campus of the University of Colorado allowed me to choose the sociology of sport as an area of interest, become involved in the field, and make contributions without worrying about my academic appointment. Such a career is largely a thing of the past, but 12 years after retiring I continue to write, do research, lecture here and there, and even teach a sociology of sport course when I wish.

NOTES

1. In slightly revised forms, those 10 questions would become chapter titles in the first edition of *Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies* that would be published in 1978.

2. The material was on a two-page handout and it included select items from a list of Barbarous Rituals that captured the socialization experiences of girls and women at the time. All of these were deemed offensive, including one stating, "Being a woman is ... 'getting pregnant, hearing all the earth mother shit from everyone, going around with a fixed smile on your terrified face.'" This was the only "ritual" that included an obscenity. Other selections were taken from a list entitled, "Know Your Enemy: A Sampling of Sexist Quotes." The Regents objected to identifying the famous men who had made blatantly sexist statements. One I included was from legendary functionalist social theorist, Talcott Parsons, who had written, "The woman's fundamental status is that of her husband's wife, the mother of his children ..."

3. The John Birch Society was a far-right advocacy group founded in the late 1950s. It was staunchly anticommunist and perpetuated conspiracy theories that were anti-Semitic, anti-African American, anti-women's liberation, anti-civil rights, and eventually, pro-white supremacist. Defined as "off the extreme right end of the political continuum" in the 1970s, it is experiencing a resurgence in the political climate of the United States in 2017.

4. This would haunt me years later as the publishing industry changed and I was bound "in perpetuity" by the contract's constricting terms.

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