

What's the Relationship Between Sports and Society?

The sociology of sports, which is also referred to as sports sociology, is the study of the relationship between sports and society. It examines how culture and values influence sports, how sports influences culture and values, and the relationship between sports and the media, politics, economics, religion, race, gender, youth, etc. It also looks at the relationship between sports and social inequality and social mobility.

Gender Inequality

A large area of study within the sociology of sports is gender, including gender inequality and the role that gender has played in sports throughout history. For example, in the 1800s, the participation of cisgender women in sports was discouraged or banned. It was not until 1850 that physical education for cis women was introduced at colleges. In the 1930s, basketball, track and field, and softball were considered too masculine for women. Even as late as 1970, women were banned from running the marathon in the Olympics. This ban wasn't lifted until the 1980s.

Women runners were even banned from competing in regular marathon races. When Roberta Gibb sent in her entry for the 1966 Boston marathon, it was returned to her with a note saying that women were not physically capable of running the distance. So she hid behind a bush at the start line and snuck into the field once the race was underway. She was lauded by the media for her impressive 3:21:25 finish.

Runner Kathrine Switzer, inspired by Gibb's experience, was not so lucky the following year. Boston's race directors at one point tried to forcibly remove her from the race. She did finish, in 4:20 and some change, but the photo of the tussle is one of the most glaring instances of the gender gap in sports in existence.

However, by 1972, things began to change with the passage of Title IX, a federal law that states:

"No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

Title IX effectively makes it possible for athletes assigned female at birth attending schools that receive federal funding to compete in the sport or sports of their choice. And competition at the college level is very often a gateway to a professional career in athletics.

Despite the passing of Title IX, transgender athletes remained excluded from sports. The United States Tennis Association (USTA) disqualified Renée Richards, a transgender woman, from play after she refused to take a chromosome test to

confirm her sex assigned at birth. Richards sued the USTA and won the ability to compete in the 1977 U.S. Open. This was groundbreaking for transgender athletes.

Gender Identity

Today, gender equality in sports is making strides, though differences are still present. Sports reinforce binary, heterosexist, gender-specific roles beginning at a young age. For instance, schools do not have programs for cisgender girls in football, wrestling, and boxing. And few cisgender men sign up for dance programs. Some studies have shown that participation in "masculine" sports creates gender identity conflict for women while participation in "feminine" sports creates gender identity conflict for men.

The reinforcement of the gender binary in sports is especially harmful to athletes who are transgender, gender neutral, or gender nonconforming. Perhaps the most famous case is that of Caitlyn Jenner. In an interview with "Vanity Fair" magazine about her transition, Caitlyn shares the complications of achieving Olympic glory while the public perceived her as a cisgender man.

Media Revealed Biases

Those who study the sociology of sports also keep tabs on the role various media play in revealing biases. For instance, viewership of certain sports definitely varies by gender. Men typically view basketball, football, hockey, baseball, pro wrestling, and boxing. Women, on the other hand, tend to tune in to coverage of gymnastics, figure skating, skiing, and diving. Little research has been done on sport viewership behaviors of those who exist outside of sex and gender binaries. Nonetheless, men's sports are covered most often, both in print and on television.

Source

Bissinger, Buzz. "Caitlyn Jenner: The Full Story." Vanity Fair, July 2015.

Let's work!

1. Leer y extraer lo que ustedes crean son sustantivos.

2. Verdadero o falso?
 - A. The sociology of sports is the study of the relationship between sports and people. ____
 - B. A large area of study within the sociology of sports is gender ____
 - C. In 1070, women could run marathon in the Olympics. ____
 - D. Sports don't reinforce binary, heterosexist, gender-specific roles beginning at a young age. ____
 - E. Women, on the other hand, tend to tune in to coverage of gymnastics, figure skating, skiing, and diving ____