Chapter Objectives

• Explain what a sociologist of physical activity does.
• Identify the goals of sociology of physical activity.
• Discuss the origins of sociology of physical activity.
• Explain how research is conducted in sociology of physical activity.
• Examine what research tells us about inequitable power relations relevant to physical activity, especially gender relations, ethnic and racial relations, and socioeconomic relations.
Goals of Sociology of Physical Activity in Kinesiology

• To look at physical activity with a penetrating gaze that goes beyond our common understanding of social life

• To identify and analyze patterns of change and stability in physical activity

• To critique physical activity programs in order to identify problems and recommend changes to enhance equality and human well-being
Why Use Sociology of Physical Activity?

- It allows us to look more closely at the social arrangements (social practices and shared beliefs) that underlie physical activity.
- Helps us gain insight about ourselves and our culture.
- It gives us intellectual tools that we can develop in order to look beyond the physical in human physical activity.
What Do Sociologists of Physical Activity Do?

• Teach
• Research
• Service
History of Sociology of Physical Activity

• International Committee for the Sociology of Sport founded in 1964; *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* in 1966 and *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* in 1977

• North American Society for the Sociology of Sport formed 1978; *Sociology of Sport Journal* in 1984

• Expanding the subdiscipline: mid-1970s to present
  • Socioeconomic, gender, racial, and ethnic inequities in sport
  • Global, national, and local relations in sport
  • Exercise and societal conceptions of human bodies
  • Disabilities and abilities
  • Obesity
Research Methods for Sociology of Physical Activity

- Survey research
- Interviewing (focus groups)
- Thematic analysis (content analysis, textual analysis)
- Ethnography (becoming a participant)
- Societal analysis (broad and complex)
- Collection of quantitative and qualitative data using a variety of methodologies
Overview of Knowledge in Sociology of Physical Activity

- Power relationships
- Gender relationships
- Sexuality and sports
- Participation patterns
- Leadership roles
- Cultural differences
- Ethnic (cultural heritage) and racial relations
- Sport and politics
- Mass media and sport
Power and Power Relationships

- Power is ability to do what you want without being stopped.
- Power relations underlie social inequalities.
- Power relations affect quality of life, chances for better life.
- “[S]tories of sport are almost exclusively stories of those in power” (Hargreaves, 2001).
- Material aspects of societal power for study and for purpose of creating change:
  - Participation
  - Leadership
  - Cultural expression
Gender Relations

• Gender
  • Gender is distinct from sex.
  • Gender is a set of norms or expectations about how we should behave that are linked to societal understandings of sexuality and procreation.

• In U.S. society, men typically hold more power in gender hierarchy although this relationship can change.
Gender Relations (continued)

- Participation
  - Title IX legislation
  - More girls and women participating
  - Societal perceptions of gender-appropriate physical activities

- Leadership
  - Decrease in percentage of women coaching girls’ and women’s teams
  - Reasons for the decrease

- Cultural expression
Racial and Ethnic Relations

• An ethnic group is a group of people who share important and distinct cultural traditions.

• A race is a group of people who are defined by society as different from others on the basis of genetically inherited traits – traits that WE select; it is not a natural or biological category or difference.

• Participation
  • African American overrepresentation among athletes in popular male team sports
  • Access to facilities and coaching

(continued)
Leadership
- Low proportion of African American coaches at elite levels, relative to the number of players
- Several reasons for this low proportion

Cultural Expression
- “Cool pose”
- Deception of African American boys concerning likelihood of becoming a professional athlete
- Media portrayals (racial connotation of brains vs. brawn)
- Racial identity
- Stereotypes
The Challenge for Kinesiologists

- Kinesiologists must identify the underlying causes at play and understand how to work through social conditions and inequalities in order to make meaningful physical activity available to all societal members.
Socioeconomic Relations

• Socioeconomic status: social position based on wealth, education, and occupational prestige

• Social categories of race, class, and gender operate not independently but interdependently.

• Participation
  • Types and amounts of physical activity among people at different socioeconomic levels
  • Likelihood of becoming a professional athlete is very slim (but privileged in society are often better prepared for alternatives)

(continued)
Socioeconomic Relations (continued)

• Leadership
  • People who control elite sport are very wealthy.
  • Influential leaders in sport are well paid.
  • Less affluent people have opportunities for leadership in grassroots sport.

• Cultural expression
  • Expensive sports
  • Lean, taut bodies
  • Sport expresses messages about importance of winning, discipline, obedience, and hard work, suggesting that the rich and poor both deserve whatever wealth they have.
Wrap-Up

- Illuminates societal patterns of change and stability, identifies social problems, and urges modifications aimed at enhancing equality and human well-being.
- Primarily focused on sport, but interest in exercise, fitness, and societal conceptions of the human body is increasing.
- Provides information that kinesiologists can use to increase our understanding both of our own experiences (as participants, spectators, and professionals) and of the experiences of others.
Wrap-Up

• Helps us think more clearly about the changes we would like to make in physical activity programs, as well as the things that we would keep the same.

• Invites an ongoing, critical engagement with the changing social conditions in which kinesiologists do their work.