



# Teaching about the Sociology of Sport: Key Concepts



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Submission: March 18, 2024; Published: April 19, 2024

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## Abstract

This paper examines some of the key concepts that can be used to teach the sociology of sport. Those concepts include sport, sports, sociology of sport, sport sociologists, sociological imagination, sociological theory, sociological research methods, status, role, and social interaction. Other concepts covered in the paper are sociology, social conditions, micro, middle, macro, social environment, institution, sociological perspectives, fountainheads of sociology, empirical research, empirical data, research techniques, variable, hypothesis, race, class, sex, gender, racism, sexism, etc.

**Keywords:** Sociology; Social environment; Gender; Racism; Sports

## Introduction

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Harry Edwards [1,2] pioneered the sociological study of sport as an institution. As he engaged in grand theory, Edwards developed concepts and constructs to look at sport through the lens of sociology. One of his actions was to develop a typology of sport versus sports. Edwards explained that he saw sport as an institution with a stable structure of statuses and roles. In contrast, Edwards explained that he saw sports as a set of physical activities organized around individual and team competition. This paper will examine some of the key concepts that can be used to teach the sociology of sport. Those concepts include sport, sports, sociology of sport, sport sociologists, sociological imagination, sociological theory, sociological research methods, status, and role. Other concepts covered in the paper are sociology, social conditions, micro, middle, macro, social environment, institution, sociological perspectives, fountainheads of sociology, empirical research, empirical data, research techniques, variable, hypothesis, race, class, sex, gender, racism, sexism, etc. As Edwards [1,2] has shown, sociological concepts can be used to analyze the social environment, including sport as an institution and sports as an athletic activity.

## Examination of The Concepts

The term sport refers to an institution with a complex of values, positions, roles, and other accoutrements related to athletic

activity. The values include ideas about that is right or wrong. The positions include many statuses related to athletic activity such as coach, player, teammates, athletic director, equipment manager, referee, umpire, etc. The roles include actions that people carryout in their statuses [2].

In this paper, the term sports refer to athletic activity and is synonymous with athletics. One type of sports is track and field. A second type of sports is baseball. A third type of sports is football. A fourth type of sports is basketball [2]. As used here, the term sociology of sport is a subfield of the discipline of sociology which focuses on sport as an institution. It was pioneered by Harry Edwards. In the case of Edwards [1], he wrote a dissertation titled *Sport in America: Its Myths and Realities*. Edwards [2] followed that up with a book titled *Sociology of Sport*. Within that dissertation, Edwards delineated many ideas that reflected his approach sociological approach to the study of sport as an institution and sports as an athletic activity. After completing his dissertation, Edwards eventually became a full professor of sociology. The term sport sociologists refers to sociologists who research, write, and teach about sport as an institution. One sport sociologist is Harry Edwards. A second sport sociologist is John C. Phillips [3]. A third sport sociologist is Earl Smith [4].

In this paper, the term sociological imagination refers to the ability of people to participate in social life and step back

and analyze the broader meanings of what is going by using sociological concepts [5]. Mills has noted that, "The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society" (p. 6). He also noted that "by means of the sociological imagination that men now hope to grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society" (p. 7). Mills delineated a mind possessing the sociological imagination may inevitably raise these three questions: (1) What is the structure of this particular society as a whole? (2) Where does this society stand in human history? (3) What varieties of men and women prevail in this society and in this period? (p. 7). As used here, the term sociological theory refers to a set of ideas and concepts regarding social conditions and the social world [4,6]. One sociological theory is the theory of the Talented Tenth by W.E.B. Du Bois [7-11] A second sociological theory is the theory of the Protestant Ethic by Max Weber [12]. A third sociological theory is the theory of the Red Record by Ida B. Wells-Barnett [13,14].

The term sociological research methods refer to research processes used by sociologists to collect qualitative and quantitative information and data. Five basic sociological methods are a survey, observation, experiment, case study, and secondary data analysis. The survey is a research method that uses questionnaires and interviews as research techniques. The two types of surveys include a total population survey and a sample survey. Observation is a research method that uses participant observation and unobtrusive measures as research techniques. The experiment is a research method that uses the study of control groups and experimental groups as a research technique. The case study is a research method that uses documents as research techniques. The secondary data analysis is a research method that uses documents as research techniques [15].

In this paper, status refers to "any institutionally defined position of an individual in the social structure" [16]<sup>1</sup>. Linton [17] asserted that, "Any status, as distinct from the individuals whom society may designate to occupy it, is simply a collection of rights and duties" (p. 257). He also explained that a status "is a position in a particular pattern" of a person and that it involves "the sum total of all the statuses which he occupies" (p. 113). For example, one

position can be high status or low status. In addition, Linton made a distinction between the ascribed status and the achieved status. As used here, the term role refers to the rights and duties a person has in a status [17-19]. Linton stated that, "A role represents the dynamic aspect of a status. The individual is socially assigned to a status and occupies it with relation to other statuses" (p. 114). He said that, "When he puts the rights and duties which constitute the status into effect, he is performing a role" (p. 114). Thus, the status is the position one has, and the role is what one performs or does in that position.

The term social interaction refers to a process by which people influence one another [20]. Harrison pointed out that social interaction "makes all other forms of social life possible" and people "interact on the basis of shared interests and expectations." He also noted that there are four basic principles of interaction. One is the pleasure principle and it is based on the notion that people seek "pleasure and avoid pain." A second is the rationality principle and it is based on the notion that "people change their behavior according to whether they think they will be worse or better off as a consequence." A third is the fairness principle based on the notion that, "We tend to expect certain treatment from others, and tend to become angry when we do not receive it." As Harrison further related, "We all have a sense of what is fair, and we get upset when we feel we are being treated unfairly." A fourth is the reciprocity principle and it is based on the notion that if people have helped you, you should be willing to help others.

In this paper, the term sociology refers to the "scientific study of human social behavior" [18]. Theodorson and Theodorson stated that sociology "studies the processes and patterns of individual and group interaction, the forms of organization of social groups, the relationships among them, and group influences on individual behavior" (p. 401). Jary and Jary said that sociology has gained wide currency as "the systematic study of the functioning, organization, development, and types of human societies" (p. 588). In the case of Harrison [21], he stated that sociology "provides tools that can help us understand the forces at work in society." As used here, the term social conditions refer to the realities of life that people create as they interact [21]. Sociologists like W.E.B. Du Bois [22] and Max Weber [12] reported in a very explicit way that they analyzed social conditions. In his essay "The

<sup>1</sup>Parsons (1949/1954) made it clear that he was following Linton (1936) in his definition of status.

<sup>2</sup>Babbie (2004), Jary and Jary (2000), and Theodorson and Theodorson (1969) have discussed similar concepts in sociology. Babbie mentioned "macrotheory" and "microtheory" (p. 35). He defined macrotheory as: "A theory aimed at understanding the 'big picture' of institutions, whole societies, and the interactions among societies" (p. 35). Babbie stated that, "Karl Marx's examination of the class struggle is an example of macrotheory" (p. 35). Regarding microtheory, Babbie defined it as: "A theory aimed at understanding social life at the intimate level of individuals and their interactions" (p. 35). Babbie said that, "Examining how the play behavior of girls differs from that of boys would be an example of microtheory" (p. 35). Jary and Jary mentioned "macrosociology" and "microsociology" (pp. 357, 388). They defined macrosociology as "the level of sociological analysis concerned with the analysis of whole societies, social structures at large, and social systems" (p. 357). In contrast, Jary and Jary defined microsociology as "the level of sociological analysis in which the focus is on face-to-face interactions in everyday life, on behaviour in groups, etc." (p. 388). Theodorson and Theodorson mentioned "macro-sociology" and "micro-sociology" (pp. 238, 256). On the one and, Theodorson and Theodorson defined macro-sociology as: "The study of large-scale social systems and patterns of interrelationships within and between these systems, including, for example, national and international forms of social organization" (p. 238). On the other hand, Theodorson and Theodorson defined micro-sociology as: "The study of small groups" (p. 256).

Study of the Negro Problems,” Du Bois mentioned his analysis of a “social condition” (p. 20). He expressed concern regarding the racial prejudice Black people faced in the USA. Weber, in his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, mentioned his analysis of “social conditions” (p. 183). He expressed his concern how the Protestant ethic influenced the development of capitalism and how Protestant Asceticism was influenced by social conditions of multiple nature, including economic factors. Du Bois, Weber, and other fountainheads of sociology demonstrated that analyses could be conducted at the macro as well as middle and micro levels. The term micro refers to a level of analysis or complexity that involves looking at social behavior in small groups of people [21]<sup>2</sup>. One example is an analysis of a family. A second example is an analysis of a peer group. A third example is an analysis of a dyad consisting of two people or a triad consisting of three people.

In this paper, the term middle is a level of analysis or complexity that deals with looking at social behavior in one neighborhood, one city, one county, or one state [21]. An example of this type is East Oakland or West Oakland. A second example of this type is San Pablo, California. A third example of this type is Contra Costa College. A fourth example of this type is the state of California. As used here, the term macro refers to a level of analysis or complexity that concerns looking at social behavior at the national or international level [21]. One example is an analysis of the teenage pregnancy rate in the USA. A second example is an analysis of the teenage pregnancy rate in Canada. A third example is an analysis of the teenage pregnancy rate in Mexico. A fourth example is an analysis of the migration of people from one country to another.

The term social environment, also known as the social world, involves: “That part of the environment consisting of interacting persons and groups, and including social expectations, patterns of social organization, and all other aspects of society” [18]. According to Theodorson and Theodorson, the social environment “includes social expectations internalized by the individual, and thus even when the individual is alone he still has a social environment” (p. 132). Harrison [23] asserted that, “Our social world influences our choices and decisions” (p. 1). He also noted that, “Sociology developed from the concept that individual choice is greatly influenced by one’s social environment.” The social environment includes the micro, middle, and macro levels, as Harrison pointed out.

In this paper, the term institution, also known as a social institution, refers to an “interrelated system of social roles and norms organized about the satisfaction of an important social need or function” [18]. Theodorson and Theodorson [18] asserted that, “The social roles and norms comprising the social institution define proper and expected behavior oriented to the fulfillment of the particular social need, such as the provision of food and other

material goods” (pp. 206-207). Jary and Jary [19] described an institution as “an established order comprising rule-bound and standardized behavior or patterns” (p. 306). Harrison [24,25] defined an institution as “a stable structure of roles and statuses” (p. 1). An example of an institution is the family. A second example of an institution is a church. A third example of an institution is a college. A fourth example is sport.

As used here, the term sociological perspectives (aka theoretical perspectives) are sets of concepts and theories [23]. Three core or major sociological perspectives include conflict, functionalist, and interactionist perspective. The conflict perspective is based on the insights and theories of Karl Marx and he is its fountainhead. A key concept of that perspective is conflict. The functionalist is based on the insights of Emile Durkheim and he is its fountainhead. Function is a key concept of that perspective. The interactionist perspective is based on the insights and theories of Max Weber and he is its fountainhead. A key concept of that perspective is social interaction [18,19,26,27]<sup>3</sup>.

The term fountainheads of sociology refer to seven men and women who pioneered the scientific study of social conditions at macro, middle, and/or micro levels of analysis. The three main fountainheads of sociology include Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim. They had the following three things in common: (1) All three were White men from Europe; (2) all three were political activists; and (4) all three were interested in social change at the macro level. In contrast, the four peripheral fountainheads of sociology include W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Jane Addams, and Harriet Martineau. They had the following two things in common: (1) All four have not gotten their full due and credit in sociology because of racism and/or sexism; and (2) all four were political activists. Thus, all seven fountainheads were involved with empirical research as well as political activities [18,19].

In this paper, the term empirical research, or an empirical study, refers to a research study which has been conducted in a careful and systematic manner and uses methodology that can be replicated by another researcher [15]. Empirical research also uses methodology that can also be replicated by another researcher. The types of research methods can include studies related to education. Likewise, the types of research methods can include studies related to poverty [18,19]. An example of empirical research was the type conducted by the present writer for his dissertation at the University of San Francisco (Cromartie, 1993). As used here, the term empirical data, which is also known as empirical evidence, refers to data that has been collected in a systematic and careful manner. In the case of empirical data, the methodology with which it was collected can be replicated by another researcher. Whereas empirical research involves one or several of the sociological methods, empirical data involve one or several sociological techniques. Without empirical research, there

<sup>3</sup>For key works by the three major fountainheads, see Marx (1867/1976, 1885/1978, 1894/1981); Weber (1920/1958); and Durkheim (1897/1952).

cannot be empirical data [18,19]. Empirical data was the type of data collected by the present writer for his dissertation at the University of San Francisco (Cromartie, 1993).

The term research techniques refer to the procedures involved with the process by which sociologists collect data during both quantitative and qualitative research. One example of a research technique in sociology is a questionnaire and the two types of questions are open questions and closed questions. A second example of a research technique in sociology is an interview and the two types of interviews are structured interviews and unstructured interviews. A third example of a research technique is observation and the types can include field notes, cassette tapes, video tapes, photographs, etc. A fourth example of a research technique in sociology is documents and the types can consist of autobiographies, biographies, government reports, scholarly articles, and scholarly books [15,28].

In this paper, the term variable refers to characteristics of a person or a group that can vary from one case to another. One example of a variable includes race. A second example is sex. A third example includes social class. A fourth example includes religion. A fifth example is age [15,28]. As used here, the term hypothesis refers to a statement about a relationship between two or more variables. The hypothesis consists of two types of variables. One type is a dependent variable. It is the variable which the researcher is trying to explain in the hypothesis. The other type is the independent variable. It is the variable which causes a change in another variable. One example of a hypothesis is as follows: drunk driving causes car accidents. A second example of a hypothesis is as follows: driving under the influence of marijuana causes car accidents [15,28].

The term race refers to a social construction based on biology and physical characteristics [18,29,30]. Cox described a race as a group of people with "significant physical characteristics" that are accepted as marks of distinction (p. 317). Theodorson and Theodorson [18] related that Homo Sapiens belong to the same species, but can be divided into several classifications or divisions based on "hereditary characteristics" (p. 328). Harrison reported that race is a social construction because the definition can vary from one society or country to another. Racial group is a term synonymous with the race concept and is a social construction that refers to a group of people based on biology and physical characteristics. Racial relations refer to the social interaction between racial groups in the USA and elsewhere. Races and racial groups in the USA include White people; Black people; Asian people; Native Hawaiian and Alaska Native people; and American Indian and Alaska Native people. It also includes the Some Other

Race category people [31-36]. As Ennis et al. [37] has pointed, the Hispanic and other Latino people are an ethnic group and not a racial group in the USA.

In this paper, class, also known as social class, refers to a concept or social rank based on a combination of occupational prestige, income, level of education, and wealth [38]. Over the years sociologists have defined class in different ways. Marx [39] believed that class ranking is based on whether people can be placed in the bourgeoisie, petit bourgeoisie, proletariat, or lumpenproletariat. Weber [12] believed that class ranking is based on wealth, power, and prestige and in turn that determines whether one is upper, middle, or lower class. Cox [29] believed that the class system involved a "variant of that social-status order which followed the breakdown and atomization of the European estate system" (p. 143). Cox exclaimed that social-class systems "are phenomena peculiar to capitalism" (p. 143). Examples of class include upper class, middle class, working class, and lower class [38]<sup>4</sup>.

As used here, the term sex refers to "the biological divisional function between male and female into major statuses upon which behavior is differentiated in all societies" [18]. Theodorson and Theodorson stated that, "Sex is the first element in the division of labor in society and the social status most central to self-identity, particularly in adults" (p. 378). One example of sex is the male population. A second example of sex is the female population.

The term gender refers to a social construction based on culture to distinguish the traditional masculine qualities associated with males and the traditional feminine qualities associated with females [19,40]. Jary and Jary noted that gender is often used synonymously with the term sex. However, sex is based on biology in contrast to gender. Nevertheless, Jary and Jary pointed out that in "common usage" gender also includes "the distinction between males and females according to anatomical sex" (p. 243). Related concepts in sociology include gender socialization, gender identity, gender roles, and gender stratification.

In this paper, the term racism refers to an "ideology based on the belief that an observable, supposedly inherited trait is a mark of inferiority that justifies discrimination against people with that trait" [30]. Racism is also an ideology based on power which holds that one race is superior to another race. As an ideology, racism has been used to deny equality to racial minorities by the dominant White race in the USA. The dominant White race has used institutions to deny equal opportunities in the areas of jobs, contracts, and educational slots. Racial minorities have sought to resist White racism by using racial nationalism around economic,

<sup>4</sup>Social stratification is a concept related to social class. Cf. Theodorson and Theodorson (1969), Bonacich (1972), Schoen (1978), Jary and Jary (2000), Harrison (2002p), Kim (2003), McDonald (2005), and Valenzuela et al. (2017). For other discussions of social class, see Martineau (1838), Nkrumah (1965/1984, 1970), Du Bois (1899, 1968), and W.J. Wilson (1978/1980, 1987).

political, and cultural matters [26,27,30,41-49]. It should be noted that Knowles and Prewitt [50] and Atuahene [44] have made a distinction between institutional racism and individual racism<sup>5</sup>.

As used here, the term sexism refers to “any attitudes and actions which overtly or covertly discriminates against women or men on the grounds of their sex or gender” [19]. Jary and Jary state that both women and men can be a victim of sexism. One example of sexism is a situation wherein women are paid less than men for doing the same work. A second example of sexism is women being denied certain positions although they can perform the duties of the job. Whereas some women face misogyny from some men who hate women, some men face misandry (aka pisogyny) from some women who hate men. Thus, sexism can involve discrimination against females because they are females. Sexism can also involve discrimination against males because they are males<sup>6</sup>.

### Implications of this Research

One significant consequence of this research is that it has identified key sociological concepts that provide a lens through which one can teach and view sport as an institution. Those concepts include social interaction, social relationship, and social structure. A second significant consequence of this research is that it identified key sociological concepts to analyze the life and times

of athletes. Among those concepts are race, class, and gender. The following discussion will cover some of the finest athletes to have performed in their chosen athletic activities, namely Babe Didrikson, Paul Robeson, and Jim Thorpe.

In the case of Babe Didrikson, the Associated Press, in 1950, declared her to be the finest female athlete of the first half of the 20th century. Didrikson was a White woman born in 1911 and died in 1956. She came from a working-class family of the nuclear type. Her father Ole Didrikson was a ship carpenter and furniture refinisher. In contrast, her mother Hannah Marie Olson Didrikson was a homemaker. Didrikson excelled in high school in track and basketball. That success attracted the attention of Employers Casualty Company which offered her a job as a clerk-typist and a position on its Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) basketball team and track team (Didrikson Zaharis & Paxton, 1955). Didrikson took advantage of that opportunity by leading the Employers Casualty Company basketball team to an AAU National Championship in 1931 and the Employers Casualty Company track team to a national championship in 1932. During the latter year, Didrikson was selected for the U.S. Olympic Track Team and won two gold medals and a silver medal. Those accomplishments boosted her to stardom and widespread attention in the media (Didrikson Zaharis & Paxton, 1955).

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<sup>5</sup>To address racism against Black people and later some other groups, the government of the USA implemented affirmative action programs. For discussions of affirmative action, see King (1961), Kennedy (1961), Carter (1991), Ball (2000), Katznelson (2005), T.C. Wilson (2006), Wise (2007), Kohn (2013), DiAngelo (2018), Rotem et al. (2020), Friedersdorf (2020), and Maes et al. (2021). In the case of Katznelson and Wise, they point out how White people benefitted from preference programs based on White skin privilege long before affirmative action programs were developed during the 1960s and 1970s to help address racism against Black people. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1961) reported that he had a favorable view towards affirmative action in India for the “untouchables” based upon their history of differential and unequal treatment. He wrote:

A recent visit to India revealed to me the vast opportunities open to a government determined to end discrimination. When it confronted the problem of centuries-old discrimination against the “untouchables,” India began its thinking at a point that we have not yet reached. Probing its moral responsibilities, it concluded that the country must atone for the immense injustices imposed upon the untouchables. It therefore made provision not alone for equality, but for special treatment to enable the victims of discrimination to leap the gap from backwardness to competence. Thus, millions of rupees are set aside each year to provide scholarships, financial grants and special employment opportunities for the untouchables. To the argument that this is a new form of discrimination inflicted upon the majority population, the Indian people respond by saying that this is their way of atoning for the injustices and indignities heaped in the past upon their seventy million untouchable brothers. (p. 95)

King continued:

Although discrimination has not yet been eliminated in India, the atmosphere there differs sharply from that in our country. In India, it is a crime punishable by imprisonment to practice discrimination against an untouchable. But even without this coercion, so successfully has the government made the issue a matter of moral and ethical responsibility that no government figure or political leader on any level would dare defend discriminatory practices. One could wish that we here in the United States had reached this level of morality. (p. 95)

In the view of King, Black people could benefit from the same type of special treatment program sponsored by the government of the USA that would help them leap the gap caused by centuries-old racial discrimination. He made it clear that it was fine for him for Black people to receive scholarships, financial grants, and special employment opportunities to address years of racial discrimination. King took the position that it was fine for a country to provide special treatment for a people to atone for the injustices and indignities heaped in the past. The article by King was published as the cover story in the *Nation*. Shortly, afterwards John F. Kennedy (1961) signed his affirmative action executive order regarding the provision of special treatment for Black people because of past discrimination against the group. Whereas King called it special treatment, Kennedy called it preferential treatment. Further, it should be noted that the . The system of White supremacy has had a nefarious impact on non-White people and some White people around the world. For some more discussions of this phenomenon, see Du Bois (1935/1992), Frazier (1947), Cole and Cole (1954), Robeson (1958/1988), Fanon (1961/1968, 1961/2004), Fuller (1964), Malcolm X (1965), Rodney (1973/2018), Brightman (1974), Cress Welsing (1991), A. Wilson (1993), Fackenheim (1999), Saad (2000), Weisbord (2003), Marvin X (2008), Bush (2009), and Gates (2014).

<sup>6</sup>The Feminist Movement, led by many White women over the years like Harriet Martineau and Jane Addams, emerged as a social movement to fight for female equality with males. See Collins (1990) who also mentions the Womanist Movement, a social movement led by Black women who trace their roots to Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Mary McLeod Bethune, who all spoke truth to power. It should be noted that Collins has discussed both social movements through the lens of sociology. The record is clear that sociologists were in both camps. See Martineau (1837b, 1837c, 1838), Addams (1895), Cooper (1892), and Wells-Barnett (1895, 1970).

Grantland Rice, a sportswriter, met Didrikson in 1932 and their social interaction developed into a strong social relationship. Didrikson was introduced to the game of golf by Rice and by 1934 she was a champion golfer. In fact, Didrikson was the most dominant woman in the sport of golf between 1935 and 1955, which was one year before her death. Before her death from cancer in 1956, Didrikson won many golf tournaments, including the U.S. Women's Open in 1948, 1950, and 1954. Didrikson won three of the five U.S. Women's Open tournaments she played in. Didrikson also developed a social structure with her husband George Zaharis, a professional wrestler. They first met in 1938 and married less than a year later in St. Louis. Although the couple did not have any children, they had a strong and loving marriage (Didrikson Zaharis & Paxton, 1955) [51].

As for Paul Robeson, Walter Camp, around 1918, declared that he was the finest end who had ever played up to that point in time. Robeson was a Black man born in 1898 and died in 1976. He came from a working-class family of the nuclear type. On the one hand, his father W.D. Robeson escaped from slavery in 1861 and later became a pastor of a small African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ Church). His mother was a teacher who died when Robeson was nine. After that, the family struggled to make ends meet. Despite those hardships, he excelled in high school as a student in the classroom and an athlete in various sports [52,53]. Robeson graduated from high school as the valedictorian and won a scholarship to Rutgers University after finishing in the first-place spot of a statewide examination for high school students. Upon his arrival at Rutgers, Robeson continued his excellence in the classroom and his excellence in sports. Robeson performed on the football, basketball, baseball, and track teams at Rutgers. Based on his dominating performances, Robeson was selected for the All-American football team 1917 and 1918. He also earned a Phi Beta Kappa key because of his excellence in the classroom. As was the case in high school, Robeson finished his B.A. degree at Rutgers as the valedictorian [52,54,55].

Following his receipt of the B.A. degree at Rutgers, Robeson headed to Columbia University Law School. To help pay for his expenses, Robeson began to play professional football. Eslanda Goode, later Elanda Goode Robeson, encouraged her then boyfriend to try his hand at acting in plays. Robeson took up that challenge became the most celebrated Black actor in the world. He proceeded to act in many plays and films as well as become a celebrated concert singer. Although he earned his law degree, Robeson only practiced law for a short stint. Nevertheless, Robeson had a profound love for literature and a great ability to learn different languages [52,56].

During his undergraduate college days, Robeson was featured by W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Crisis* as an up-and-coming young person with tremendous potential. Eventually, their social interaction led to a social relationship wherein Du Bois was the ultimate role

model to the younger Robeson. As the Cold War developed in the 1940s and the USA moved more to right than the left, Robeson and Du Bois became comrades in an organization known as the Council on African Affairs. Although people like Joe McCarthy did all they could to destroy the professional careers of Robeson and Du Bois, the two men withered the right-wing storm by supporting each other during a trying time [52,54,56].

In the case of Jim Thorpe, the Associated Press, in 1950, declared him to be the finest male athlete of the first half of the 20th century. Thorpe was an American Indian man born in 1887 and died in 1953. He came from a working-class family of the nuclear type. His father Hiram Thorpe was a horse trainer, horse breeder, and alcohol bootlegger. Charlotte Vieux Thorpe, the mother of Jim Thorpe was a homemaker. She died in 1900 when Jim Thorpe was around 13 years old. After initially attending Haskell Indian School, Thorpe went to Carlisle Indian School for both high school and college [57,58]. While at Carlisle, Thorpe excelled in track and football. His football coach was the legendary Glenn S. "Pop" Warner who had social interaction with Thorpe based on mutual respect and admiration. Under the tutelage of Warner, Thorpe became a dominant figure in college football. Thorpe led Carlisle to many victories over teams with top players like future president Dwight Eisenhower. Based on his dominating performances, Thorpe was selected by Walter Camp for the All-American football teams in 1911 and 1912 [55,57,58].

In 1912, Thorpe was selected for the U.S. Olympic Track Team and won two gold medals. Thorpe earned those medals by winning the pentathlon and the decathlon. Whereas the pentathlon consisted of five events, the decathlon. Thorpe finished first in 4 of the 5 pentathlon events and 4 of the 10 decathlon events. Just one month after the Olympics ended, Thorpe was charged by the AAU with having ineligible for his medals because he played minor league professional baseball in 1909 for the Rocky Mount Railroaders and in 1910 for the Fayetteville Highlanders for a small sum of expense money. In January 1913, officials of the AAU and the American Olympic Committee chose to rescind all prizes won by Thorpe eliminate his records from the books because of the accusations made in a newspaper report. Although 180 days had passed since he won the pentathlon and decathlon, Thorpe was stripped of his medals.

During the following year, the International Olympic Committee ruled that Thorpe was ineligible for the two gold medals and removed his name as an Olympic champion. Thorpe spent the remainder of his life trying to overturn the decision, but that did not happen until 1982 almost 30 years after his death. Following the restoration of Thorpe's amateur status on October 12, 1982, the International Olympic Committee presented his family with duplicate medals on January 18, 1983. However, the trophies Thorpe won as prizes were not returned and International Olympic Committee refused to modify the records and list him

as the sole winner of the pentathlon and decathlon. Instead, the International Olympic Committee listed him as co-champion along the two runners-up. This status was finally changed in 2022 when the International Olympic Committee decided to list Thorpe as the sole winner of the 1912 pentathlon and decathlon. That change was made after a successful advocacy campaign by Anita DeFrantz, a member of the International Olympic Committee, and the Bright Path Strong organization [57-60].

After the Olympics, the immensely talented Thorpe played professional baseball and professional football. His professional baseball teams included the New York Giants and the Boston Braves. The professional football teams Thorpe suited up for were the Canton Bulldogs, Cleveland Indians, Oorang Indians, Rock Island Independents, New York Giants, and Chicago Cardinals. He also served as a player and coach of the Canton Bulldogs and was the first president of the American Professional Football Association which later became the National Football League. Before he retired as an active player in 1928, Thorpe displayed a combination of dynamic combination of speed and power on the baseball field and the football field. Thorpe was more successful in sports, than he was with marriage. He was married three times to these women: Iva Margaret Miller Thorpe; Freeda "Libby" Kirkpatrick Thorpe; and Patricia "Patsy" Gladys Woodbury Askew Thorpe. Thorpe was the father of the following children: Carl Phillip "Phil" Thorpe; Charlotte Thorpe; Dick Thorpe; Gail Margaret Thorpe; Grace Frances Thorpe; Jack Thorpe; James "Jim" Francis Thorpe, Jr.; and William "Billy" Thorpe [57,58].

In sum, the record indicates that Didrikson, Robeson, and Thorpe were distinguished athletes who had significant social interactions with influential people. The three athletes also developed meaningful social relationships with people they encountered who admired their skillset and provided help along the way. Rice [51] has written that all three athletes had worthy careers deserving of the collective memory of people-and so it is. The view here is that sociology can play a role in helping people to understand statuses and roles of Didrikson, Robeson, and Thorpe. Likewise, sociology can help people to understand social interactions and social relationships as described by Harrison [20].

### Summary and Conclusion

This paper has examined some of the key concepts that can be used to teach the sociology of sport. Those concepts include sport, sports, sociology of sport, sport sociologists, sociological imagination, sociological theory, sociological research methods, status, and role. Other concepts covered in the paper are sociology, social conditions, micro, middle, macro, social environment, institution, sociological perspectives, fountainheads of sociology, empirical research, empirical data, research techniques, variable,

hypothesis, race, class, sex, gender, racism, sexism, etc. Sociological concepts, as Edwards [1,2] has noted, can be used to analyze the social environment, including sport as an institution and sports as an athletic activity.

When Edwards [1] completed his dissertation on the sociology of sport at Cornell University in 1970, he became one of the first sociologists to do so. The committee for his dissertation was composed of Gordon Stride, Robin Williams, and William Foote White, as Edwards pointed out to Wilmot [61]. In that same interview, Edwards disclosed that he had to write four different versions of his dissertation before it was accepted. Edwards also disclosed to Wilmot that the central thesis of his dissertation was that sport was an ignored institution in society. He argued that sport is a separate institutional configuration (Edwards quoted in Wilmot, 2020, p. 88). For Edwards, sport is an institution as is "the family, education, religion, politics, economics, the military, mass media, what have you" (Quoted in Wilmot [61], p. 88). Edwards took the position that sport "has a vital connection to all of the other institutional processes, such as reaffirming and re-enforcing secular values and sentiments" [61]. He noted that sport plays a vital role in "providing occupations millions, whether they be coaches, physical education teachers, whether they be athletes, whether they be public relations A people, marketing people, advertisers, providing jobs for millions of people" (Edwards quoted in Wilmot, [61], p. 88). According to Edwards, sport has an economic dimension as well as a political dimension.

Edwards acknowledged that other people followed him in the study of sport as an institution. However, Edwards stated that "the sociology of sport was an area of academic interest that my dissertation substantially established" (p. 114). Edwards also said that he wrote the "first integrated textbook in the sociology of sport" (Quoted in Wilmot, [61], p. 92). By 2005, Edwards reported that, "By this time, twenty-five years later, almost every campus in the country had a sociology of sport class, or a sport and culture class, or something in sociology or social studies that related to sport" (Quoted in Wilmot, 2005, p. 87). Edwards added: "And a lot of it used my work, or people who came after me and developed their dissertations and so forth around that area. So, that was the atmosphere within which I was developing my dissertation" (Quoted in Wilmot, 2005, p.87). As a sociologist, Edward made an important mark in the discipline by being the pioneer of the sociology of sport as an important subfield<sup>7</sup>. Amen and so it is [62-120].

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DOI: [10.19080/ASM.2024.10.555785](https://doi.org/10.19080/ASM.2024.10.555785)

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