

A Critique of Modern Sport: Issues in Brazilian and North American Realities

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ABSTRACT— *This study presents a discussion of the importance of sport at the present time. The intention of the paper is to compare sport and its influence in society, especially in education, under the theoretical perspective of Paulo Freire. Compares situations of sport in Brazil and the United States in relation to social inequalities in each reality. The reproduction of social inequalities is present in sport through the power of racial discrimination, men over women, and privileged over underprivileged. For the purpose of this research I explore these three important issues as defined by: Whiteness, Patriarchalism, and Capitalism.*

Keywords— Sports Critique, Sport in Brazil and USA, Sport in Society

1. INTRODUCTION

In society or in schools, sport helps in the development of the individual capacity of interest. However, this development is very difficult while school system reproduces social domination. In our society sport is also used as a form of domination by teaching students to respect the rules of the game (Nunes, 1985). Also, students are sometimes motivated for the wrong reason, such as social mobility because of the exaggerate importance of sport by the press. Children practice with the idea to win and with the dream to be a sport hero, becoming famous and rich. In some way, schools motivate this dream transforming pupils into champions, in the production of good grades, acceptance of rules and policies, and standardization of behavior.

In contemporary democracies the historical link is fundamental to the processes where the past is reconstructed and placed into memory. In the description of the past and present, sport has been used to maintain the social status social order. Freire (1970) calls this process “dehumanization”. This denies the possibility to educate human beings, promoting injustice, exploration, oppression, and violence of the oppressor. Social inequalities continue in sport through the power of racial discrimination, men over women, and privileged over underprivileged. For the purpose of this research I explore these three issues as defined by: Whiteness, Capitalism, and Patriarchalism.

2. WHITENESS

Whiteness is a conception where people consciously or unconsciously follow the dominant class. Whiteness is a concept of racism in which one ethnic group (white) is in a position of dominance over others (Kew, 1997). Whiteness, however, is not the same as ethnicity or race and function differently in society.

The cultural and racial values shape the lives of a specific culture. Our inclination to categorize people in terms of race or social class is influenced by our social surroundings, culture, customs, beliefs, and political associations, which in turn guides our conceptions of ourselves as well as others (Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds & Turner, 1999).

Many people in Brazil and in the United States suffer from white racism and economical discrimination (Sailes, 1998). One historical example in each country can serve as an explanation about whiteness in sport. In the beginning, soccer in Brazil was played by the elitist population. With the popularization, however, *futebol* was represented by popular classes. In 1923, Vasco da Gama won the state championship in Rio de Janeiro with a team composed of poor blacks and *mulatos*. It is relevant to say that Vasco da Gama had to use “rice powder” to keep blacks looking “more whites” and then be accepted by the club memberships (Daolio, 2000). Or according to the old rules, when a black made a foul on a white player, he had the right to fight back. To prevent fouls, blacks developed a different technique for dribbling that had a better ball control and escape from the whites and the discriminatory punishment. According to

researchers, this situation contributed to building foot capacity and may explain the unique ability of Brazilian soccer players.

In the U.S. a symbolic turning pointing for the racial desegregation of American sports came on March 19, 1966. In the presence of 14,253 basketball fans at the University of Maryland's Cole Field House and before a nationwide television audience, number-one ranked Kentucky sought their fifth NCAA championship against upstart Texas Western College of El Paso...all five starters on Texas Western Miners were black. Miners won by a score of 72 to 65 (Rader, 1999, p.294).

In spite of this discrimination, the oppressed people have the tendency to copy the white supremacy and thus become more oppressed. Racism entails a body of ideas which rationalizes and justifies various social practices that perpetuate an unequal distribution between racial groups. One of these ideas is the explanation that the black population is biologically prepared for sports. According to Kew (1997) the good black's performance in sport can be explained by innate anatomical, physiological, and psychological characteristics which give him/her inherent advantage in some sports. The logic is as follow: blacks have a natural ability in sport, and teachers, coaches, and sport organizers perpetuate discrimination when they send black children to focus on sport rather than academics.

According to Curry & Jiobu (1984) in the U.S., black culture, permeated with passion for sport, encourages, attracts, and pushes black youth into athletics much more than white culture does with white youth. White youths realistically aspire to careers in business, law, medicine, and so forth. A huge number of whites with athletic talent end up doing these jobs rather than trying to make careers in sports. For blacks those options do not exist to the same degree. Poverty, discrimination, lack of education, lack of training, and lack of cultural supports mean this: Most careers, while theoretically open to blacks, are closed to them in reality. The black community knows this, and so blacks flow into sports, just as the Irish, Italians, and Jews went into boxing during earlier times, and just as Hispanics now flow into baseball and boxing.

I can complete with the South Americans and Africans now succeeding into soccer. This is a generalization and again, is involving very a small number of people. Blacks do not flow into just any sport. Their dominance shows selectivity. Blacks are over represented in baseball, basketball, and American football. With some exceptions, blacks have gone into the money sports, the sports with professional outlets. Economic and social factors explain the lack of black dominance in money sports like tennis or golf: The ghetto has few tennis clubs and country clubs. Living in a sport-dominated subculture; having dreams of success; being hungry; having the opportunity to play; not having other opportunities. These are the reasons that blacks or poor people have gone into, and dominate, the money sports. It all makes perfect sociological sense.

Although this reality maybe true in the U. S. it does not necessarily mean that it applies to Brazil, which is a democratic way of giving equal opportunities to people who want to become players. This can be stated in a situation than occurred with the Brazilian soccer. In soccer racial problems are not an issue. Differently from other sectors of society in soccer, chances are given to everyone, independently of race or social class. This explains why there are so many black and poor people involved in soccer in Brazil. For instance, in the 2010 National Soccer Team, shows the racial Brazilian composition, where both the proportion of players from poor families (77%), and the proportion of black players (22%), are higher than the composition of the average Brazilian population, which 63% are poor and 6% are Black (IBGE, 2010).

Possibly, over-representation and blacks' outstanding results confirm and reproduce the validity of the original belief. This ideology denies and excludes blacks from access to valued social resources (Kew, 1997). Fame and money are a very rare product, and, perhaps sport becomes a mechanism of social control where only a few blacks will succeed in sports and the white society pushes blacks through sport at the expense of their academic education. According to Freeman (1992) the most unfortunate aspect of the interest in playing professional sport is that too many athletes neglect to prepare themselves to do anything else. Therefore, the over-representation of blacks in sport is evidence of institutional racism at work, rather than evidence of equality opportunity (Kew, 1997).

There are plenty of black people in sports such as soccer, boxing and athletics which suggest that sport is one of the few areas of social life where people from different gender or race can succeed. However, blacks, men and women, are under-represented in many sports such as golf, car racing, tennis, and swimming. Perhaps this happens because there is an inequality of access and opportunity for some sports. Certainly blacks were often discriminated against in order to protect the social exclusiveness from white sports.

Furthermore, as Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) explains, studies indicate that students in preschool and elementary schools have the inclination towards a pro-white bias in racial preference, attitude, and identification.

However, in a society that promotes negative images connected to poverty and racial issues, discriminated adolescents can find positive images in sports.

Discriminated adolescents identify their cultural or social affiliations with successful athletes from the same social class. Sailes (1984) asserts that many contemporary African-American athletes serve as role models, further perpetuating the migration of African-American male youths into sports. For African-American youths this means participation in sports in which they see other successful African-Americans participate (basketball, football, track and field), and for lower class youths in Brazil, the participation in sports, where they identify themselves with athletes who came from the same social class. In an effort to form a positive racial identity it is plausible to think they would adhere to and identify with what they perceive as positive stereotypical views in athletes from the same ethnicity or social background (Teich, 2002).

Consequently, many discriminated people see opportunities in sports. In other words, Sailes (1984) explains that for many of these people, sport appear to be one of the few allowable and available opportunities for success in a perceived racist and oppressive society.

Again, to decrease discrimination and promote ethnic integration in society, issues of race and racism must be discussed in schools. Teachers need to have a sound sociological understanding of how race, ethnicity and racism operate within society, school and in the curriculum. They need to engage in a critical reflection to question their own practice and that of their schools promoting social justice and egalitarianism raising issues of racism and anti-racism within the classroom. Teachers must become more self-reflective to understand racism and multiculturalism to promote racial equality in school through PE and sports.

3. CAPITALISM

The history of sports is also connected with professionalism and the bad influences caused by the Greeks. The Greeks' Ancient Games were considered a "Golden Age of Sports," but the problem of amateurism versus professionalism limited the participation of people without many economic resources (Coakley, 1990). The level of competition gradually changed. As the athletes competed for lavish prizes, professionalism grew. Men no longer competed for the honor of victory, but for the prizes that were offered by the city-states.

This professionalism became more prevalent after the Romans conquered the Greeks, and The Olympic Games began to die (Freeman, 1992). Romans saw sport as military training and as entertainment. They preferred highly skilled professionals rather than less skilled amateurs. The growth of professionalism in Roman Empire helped to destroy the sports system remained from the Greeks. As the Empire dissolved, the rich prizes were no longer available on a regular basis, and traditional, organized sports gradually disappeared.

Nowadays, the term "amateur" is no longer in use in elite sports. The International Olympic Committee, which sets and enforces Olympic policy, has struggled with the licensing and commercialization of the games, the need to schedule events to accommodate American television networks, whose broadcasting fees help underwrite the games, and the monitoring of athletes who seek illegal competitive advantages, often through the use of performance-enhancing drugs.

The popularity of sport grew in influences because of television. Television affected sports in many ways, such as popularity, culture and money capital. Television enhances the future prosperity of professional sports, the nationalization of sports and pumped millions of dollars into sports. Professional athletes demanded a large share of the revenues generated by sport, and sport became popular entertainment. Fans turned to sports news to escape news of wars, politics, violence, discrimination, and high finance (Rader, 1999).

With the advent of television, and all classes watch TV, sports grew in popularity and the fans at home rather than those in the arena became the ultimate arbiters of sports. To attract more television viewers and meet the demands of commercial sponsors, the moguls of sport altered the nature of the games by changing rules to make the games more attractive television spectacles (Rader, 1999).

This influence gives rise to an asymmetrical relationship in which the interest of commerce begins to outweigh the interest of sport. Sport functions as a sales adjunct to aid capital accumulation by the non-sporting commercial sector. Moreover, the commercial penetration of modern sports creates an environment which encourages the corruption of sport (Kew, 1997).

4. PATRIARCHALISM

In opposition to patriarchy, the Western “civilizing” process has been involved to some degree in shifting the balance of power between the sexes in a *gynarchic* (matriarchal) direction (Dunning, 1999). Both patriarchy and matriarchy are a demonstration of power. As Foucault notes, “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere” (1980, p. 93). He argues that power produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth (Foucault, 1977).

This aspect is difficult to accept in sport, since modern sport emerged as a male preserve, a fact which helps to account for the strength of male resistance to attempts by females to enter it or develop sporting enclaves of their own. Women inequality in sports remains the basis of which there are identifiable models of domination and subordination according to gender and that this has far-reaching consequences for sports and other institutional practice, the institutional bases of that power, and the values and practices which sports celebrate and reproduce (Kew, 1997). This characteristic is recognized in sports where it is common to hear “she plays like a man” and contributes with the *masculinization* of sports.

The discrimination against women is present in the history of humanity, as well as in sport. Greek society was not a classless society, and sports were practiced only for young, rich males. Women were not thought equal to men in this society, as they were property in a patriarchal family structure. Home life was directed by the man and carried out by the woman. For men, *arête* meant the ideal of excellence, physical, moral, and mental as for women *arête* meant modesty, chastity, obedience, and remaining inconspicuous (Spears & Swanson, 1988). The sports activities engaged in by Greek women, children, and older people were sporadically included in the festivals, but they were traditionally prohibited from participating in the Olympic Games.

Free men, slaves and young girls were able to watch the Games. Married women, however, could not even enter the playing areas or the stadium as spectators, under penalty of death. Freeman (1992) mentioned that women were banned, perhaps because Heracles was a warrior’s hero, and because the presence of women was thought to diminish the warriors’ power, and by custom, the athletes competed in the nude. Nudity survived in Greek athletics because it was supported by heroic traditions and religion (Mouratidis, 1985). Perhaps, all excuses maintaining women in irrelevant social importance.

Women were more important and equal in the Roman society than they had been in Greece. Despite the power of the paterfamilias, the status of women in the Roman Empire is relatively high compared with many other ancient societies. Women were seldom involved in Roman sports events. They were allowed in the arenas to watch and cheer male athletes, but few of them had any opportunities to develop their own athletic skills.

Nevertheless, women have acquired considerable rights, including control of their own property, and they are also able to divorce their husbands (Freeman, 1992). Women were seldom present at the savage melees of the twelfth century, increasing in pageantry coincided and interacted with the rise of romantic chivalry and the cult of courtly love. The men and women who sat in the pavilions were members of the ruling class. The tournaments that excluded the lower orders from the ranks of spectators as well as from the lists seem to have been rare (Guttman, 1981). Under the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church in which women had inferior status under a male centered family structure, a woman’s duty was to be obedient and submissive. With some exceptions, women seldom engaged in any sport activity. Gender roles were clearly differentiated, and upper-class women did little outside the walls of their dwellings, and their activities seldom involved physical exertion. Since women were subject to the control of men and often viewed as sex objects and models of beauty, their involvement in physical activities was limited (Coakley, 1990).

The Olympics of the New Era were held in Athens in 1896, and no events were planned for women. Olympic events for women made their first appearance in 1912. Coubertin’s bias, in the name of the Games’ tradition, kept women out of full participation in Olympics and sports at high levels for many years. In Olympics after Olympics the number of women increased slowly. Finally after the 1976 Montreal Games, a large increase in the number of sports offered to women began to appear. However, the number of participants in both sexes is still unequal today as it shows in the last Games (Athens, 2004) 46% of athletes were women (IOC, 2004).

Women’s participation and opportunity in sports has increased considerably over the past thirty years. However, there are identifiable patterns of domination and subordination according to gender, and this has far-reaching consequences for sport and other institutional practices (Kew, 1997).

The total number of women athletes is half that of men. Kew (1997) argues that responsibilities for child care, shortage of free time, lack of personal transport and money, and lower levels of self-confidence, are all reasons postulated for women having less opportunity than men to pursue sporting interest. However, this is no longer true. The real gender problem is a socially and historically constructed set of power relations (Hargreaves, 1995). In reality, traditionally the secondary physical education course has always placed greater emphasis upon creativity, the expressive and aesthetic elements of movement experienced in women, compared with adherence to fitness and the competitive-oriented curricula for men.

Moreover, the dynamic balance of power between the sexes in any society lies not only in the relative capacities of males and females to control economic, political and symbolic/ideological resources, but also their relative capacities to use violence and bestow sexual favors on each other or withhold them (Dunning, 1999, pg. 227).

Women's sports are comparatively neglected, receiving only 5% of all sport coverage by the entire media (Kew, 1997). The neglect means that few role models are provided for girls, and an image of female sport is perpetuated as being minor and unimportant.

Despite the failure of women to achieve equity in school, college and professional sports, the presence of women in sports was far more pervasive and conspicuous in the 2000's than it had been three decades earlier. Yet, while reduced, the dissonance between sports and womanhood had by no means been entirely eliminated (Rader, 1999).

To increase importance and equality for females in sport, the differences between the sexes would be unimportant, unnoticed. "Sport could be presented as a form of activity which emphasizes human similarity and not dissimilarity, a form of activity which isn't competitive and measured, a form of activity which expresses values which are indeed un-measurable, a form of activity which is concerned with individual well-being and satisfaction rather than with comparison" (Hargreaves, 1995).

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Modern sport in its ideal form was to be as the legacy of Pericles rather than Nero, of Olympia rather than the Roman Coliseum. Poverty, lack of education, and the absence of good connections did not disqualify anyone from becoming a prize professional player. At the top level of sport, an athlete earned considerably more money over a brief period of time than he/she could have at any other job.

Aspiring athletes tend not to look at the odds of making it to the top or at what happens afterwards, but only at their heroes. In an era of million-dollar salaries, certain youths do leap from the slum to the penthouse. In reality, however, the investment in time and the effort is so great, and the changes of success so remote, that almost all of the hardworking athletes are misappropriating their energies.

The concept of sport as a vehicle of social mobility is largely a cultural fiction unless young athletes are using sport as the instrument to secure school and college access and complete their education. In the U.S. the great tragedy of the past two decades is that not many elite athletes, be it for lack of preparation, ability, or interest, are benefiting from their free college education which is the best means for long-term vertical mobility that American sport offers the athletically gifted individual (Riess, 1990).

Besides the fact that sport is a democratic activity, mostly young male have taken advantage of that situation. Women's participation rate and importance is still unequal in relation to the men. Moreover, people in positions of power and influence within sport institutions are manipulating democratic access. For this reason, traditional sport practice reproduces social inequality. Societies may seek ways in which sport might be democratized in an otherwise disparate society (Kew, 1990).

To promote sport-education as a motivational factor to improve academics, teachers and coaches need to create a predominantly mastery climate for positive psychological outcomes (Zahariadis & Biddle, 2000). Second, at the individual level, interactions with peers in sport and Physical Education classes need to allow for personal choices by connected with the cultural identity of students and a critical comprehension of their role in society.

Freire's theories focus upon that education can aid in the social transformation by raising the critical consciousness of each person (Freire, 1973). Democratic learning opportunity for all students it is our responsibility as radical black people and people of color, and as white people, to construct models for social change (hooks, 1998, cited by Rorrer, 2001). This is the significant role of education that Dewey (1964) articulated "Unless the schools of the world can engage in a common effort to rebuild the spirit of common understanding, of mutual sympathy and goodwill

among all peoples and races, to exorcise the demon of prejudice, isolation, and hatred, the schools themselves are likely to be submerged by the general return to barbarism, which is the sure outcome of present tendencies if they go on unchecked by the forces which education alone can evoke and fortify” (p. 14).

Sport and education are closely related, designing appropriate curriculum to prepare all children for the benefits of this association is necessary and crucial. They could be included and motivated through sport without discrimination and exploitation, but they could also use sport to develop a critical and real vision without creating false perspectives. Freire’s theory of critical *conscientização* is a decoding reality to overcome false *conscientização*. Sport and false *conscientização* is the promotion of false dreams. Sport is one subject that can promote false and true *conscientização*. It is *true* when promoting democratic participation over “sports for all,” but it is *false* when excessive competitiveness exclude people with limited talented. It is *true* when used as a channel of opportunity for minorities, but it is *false* when it is used to maintain the status quo. It is *true* when promote attainable dreams, but it is *false* when promote unreasonable expectations and exploitation in schools where many athletes are failing academically. It is *true* when increase importance and equality for females in sport, but it is *false* when it is not neutral and explores the masculine image.

Sport is true *conscientização* when explores the socialization benefits, and false *conscientização* when the capital become more important. Under capitalist view, sport is discriminator and oppressor because related money over social. Sport in society is more connected with capital, where money is more important than ability, health, and passion. Money is the trophy and this make influences in children’s dream and in the educational and social systems. Many professional athletes are not looking back or inside themselves to understand the exploitation they are suffering besides of personal benefits. They believe in the benefits of sport in their own lives not as a social promoter for the general population.

The purity of purpose and nobility of sport happens under critical socialistic and democratic view, not capitalistic (socialism, only with the objective to promote equality). Under critical socialistic and democratic view, P.E. and sport must be used to promote inclusion and democratic participation to then promote the true *conscientização* of sport in society. Under critical socialistic and democratic view, children in sports are the subject of their own reality. “It is truly difficult to make democracy. Democracy, like any dream, is not made with spiritual words but with reflection and practice. It is not what I say that says I am a democratic, that I am not racist or *machista*, but what I do. What I say must not be contradicted but what I do” (Freire, 1998b, p. 67). For this to be possible, it is necessary a complete reformulation in school curriculum regarding P.E. and sports. Consciousness and prepare teachers to apply this “new” conception, and develop policies that can promote inclusion and democratic participation. School is the first place to start these ideas to then transform the society as a whole under true *conscientização*.

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