SPORT & MEANING
Dr. Masucci
Department of Kinesiology, SJSU

Search for Meaning
- We seem to search for meaning in two important ways:
  1. Seek to identify our own uniqueness, measure oneself ‘against the world’ in an attempt to answer the question: Who am I? (p. 89)
     - Think about what we do and what we have done
     - Act in accordance with ‘who we are’
     - Relies on introspection
  2. Finding the purpose to life or death
     - Often (as existentialists suggest) we seek out activities that provide a justification for life.

A Word about Existentialism
- A philosophical and cultural movement that developed in Europe in the 1940s
- Individual humans create meaning in their lives

A Word about Existentialism
- Was a move against more systematic philosophical frameworks like rationalism, or empiricism
- The starting point, according to Heidegger is “being in the World”
- Sartre’s concept sums this up: Existence Precedes Essence: Basically implying that meaning is decided in and through (physical) existing itself

A Word about Existentialism
- Major concepts include:
  - Transcendence: person “goes beyond” what simply is toward what can be
  - Alienation: the world itself is not brought into being through my actions of meaning creation; it retains it otherness
  - Authenticity: defines a condition on self-making: do I succeed in making myself, or will who I am merely be a function of the roles I find myself in?
  - Anxiety, Nothingness, the Absurd: The world makes sense if we believe in the “order” supposed by it – however, if we relinquish that notion – how do we make sense of our existence?
    - undermines the taken-for-granted sense of things
    - like repeating a word until it loses meaning

Thomas: Sport & Meaning
- Potential for Self-Understanding
- Potential for achieving a sense of purpose
- Stages of Sport Participation (Thomas, p. 94-106)
  - Intent
  - Preparation
  - Involvement
  - Commitment
  - Resolution
Sport & Meaning (cont.)

- Possible Meanings found in sport:
  - The pursuit of excellence
  - Defining personal limits
  - Taking chances
  - Expression/creativity
  - “Altered states” & “Mystical unions”
    - Union of subject and object
      - Often called ‘flow’/‘peak experience’/‘inner game’/‘oneness’