

The Great American Football Ritual: Reproducing Race, Class, and Gender Inequality

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An ethnographic study of one football season in a small South Texas town is presented to explore the extent that community sport is, as various critical theorists have suggested, a potential site for counterhegemonic cultural practices. Football is conceptualized as a major community ritual that socializes future generations of youth. This broad, holistic description of socialization also notes various moments of ethnic resistance engendered by the Chicano civil rights movement. Other moments of class and gender resistance to the football ritual are also noted. Finally, the way players generally resisted attempts to thoroughly rationalize their sport is also described. In spite of these moments of resistance, this study ultimately shows how deeply implicated community sport—in this case high school football—is in the reproduction of class, gender, and racial inequality. The white ruling class and the town's patriarchal system of gender relations are preserved in spite of concessions to the new ethnic challenges. When seen from a historical community perspective, sport may be less a site for progressive, counterhegemonic practices than critical sport theorists hope.

This analysis of a football season is part of a larger study of the popular culture practices of youth in one South Texas town (Foley, 1990). Theoretically, it has a great affinity with a Gramscian perspective (Crichter, 1986; Deem, 1988; Gruneau, 1983; Hargreaves, 1986; McKay, 1986; Whitson, 1984) of sport as a site of contested popular cultural practices. Although there are significant differences between these authors, the Gramscian perspective advocated by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) generally informs many new critical studies of sports. The cultural studies perspective has been employed to study a wide array of popular or leisure practices (Bennett, Mercer, & Wollacott, 1986; Chambers, 1986; Fiske, 1989a, 1989b). Increasingly, sport sociologists are arguing that sports must also be studied as an autonomous cultural activity with the potential to challenge the commercialization and rationalization of sports activities.

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This study seeks to ground recent critical perspectives of sports in the everyday cultural practices of one small, historical community. It explores the way high school sport reproduces social inequalities with the kind of detailed ethnographic data used in other microstudies of sport subcultures (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Fine, 1987). Like those microethnographic studies, this one is concerned with describing sports as a socialization process. Unlike other socialization studies, however, a historical¹ community with a social structure, not a group of people practicing a particular sport, is the focus. In addition, the reproduction and resistance perspective of popular culture theory is used rather than a functionalist or symbolic interactionist perspective (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Loy & Ingham, 1973).

The anthropological concept of a dramatic community ritual (Turner, 1974) is also used to give a holistic portrait of how major popular or leisure cultural practices (in this case, football) socialize people into community structures of inequality. The following description of the ritual complex surrounding high school football games concentrates on the rites, ceremonies, and events that socialize youth in the community and that symbolically stage class, gender, and racial inequality. Two basic premises not generally used in anthropological studies of ritual, but commonly shared by critical theorists of sport, guided this study. First, capitalist societies and their sport scenes are marked by multiple systems of dominance (Birrell, 1984, 1989; Deem, 1988; Hall, 1984, 1985; Messner, 1988). Consequently, a multiple-system-of-dominance perspective was used to explore the intersections of class, gender, and racial practices and relations and the way in which they are dialectically related in local community sport rituals. Second, any ideological hegemony constructed by a capitalist class is never secure and is often contested through various popular culture practices. Consequently, this study also explores the extent to which community sport scenes are sites of resistance and counterhegemonic popular or leisure cultural practices.

The setting of this field study was "North Town," a small (8,000 population) South Texas farming/ranching community with limited industry, considerable local poverty, and a population that was 80% Mexican-American. North Town was one of three towns in this winter-vegetable-producing area where a Chicano third party emerged to challenge the segregated racial order. The third party, the Partido Raza Unida, has since disbanded, but their impact was felt in all walks of life and sport was no exception. "North Town High" had an enrollment of 600 students and its sports teams played at the Triple-A level in a five-level state ranking system.

During the football season described here, I attended a number of practices, rode on the players' bus, and hung out with the coaches at the fieldhouse and with players during extensive classroom and lunchtime observations. I also participated in basketball and tennis practices and interviewed students extensively about student status groups, friendship, dating, and race relations. The participant-observation and interviewing in the sports scene involved hundreds of hours of fieldwork over a 12-month period. The larger community study² also included three full-time research assistants, and the fieldwork took place over a 2-year period. The traditional anthropological field methods used in this study are reported in great detail in Foley, Mota, Post, and Lozano (1988) and Foley (1990).

The Ritual Complex

The Weekly Pep Rally

Shortly after arriving in North Town I attended my first pep rally. Students, whether they liked football or not, looked forward to Friday afternoons. Regular 7th-period classes were let out early to hold a mass pep rally to support the team. Most students attended these events but a few used it to slip away from school early. During the day of this pep rally I overheard a number of students planning their trip to the game. Those in the school marching band (80) and in the pep club (50) were the most enthusiastic. Students were plotting secret rendezvous with boyfriends and girlfriends or were fantasizing about fateful meetings with their secret loves. Fewer students and townspeople than usual would follow the team on this first long road trip.

Nevertheless, as on most Fridays, teachers and students were talking about The Game. Some teachers engaged the players in lively banter during classes about "whipping" Larson City. In senior English class a long analysis of last year's bad calls, missed kicks, and fumbles ensued. The history of this event had already been reconstructed, and those students interested in it shared that moment with the players. Players and nonplayers collectively plotted and reveled in mythical feats of revenge. There was much brave talk about "kicking their asses this year."

Some high school students considered the idea of young males in padded armor crashing into each other as dumb and boring. Some adults also thought that the sport was silly or too rough or a waste of time. Generally, however, most North Town students, like the adults, looked forward to football season and the Friday night games. The games enlivened the community's social life. Adults, especially the local chamber of commerce types, articulated this view even more than the students. Community sports was the patriotic, neighborly thing to do. Many students felt deep loyalties to support their team, but others used these community events to express their disgust for the game and the players, hence for "respectable" mainstream society.

This Friday afternoon the pep rally started like most school pep rallies. As the last bell rang, the halls were crammed with students rushing to put books away and to find their friends. Various students claimed their rightful territory on the bleachers facing the microphones. Months later, when I knew them better, I could see the pattern to this mad scramble for seats: It was age-graded. The older, most prominent students took the center seats, thus signaling their status and loyalty. Younger first- and second-year students sat next to the leaders of the school activities if they were protégés of those leaders.

In sharp contrast, knots and clusters of the more socially marginal students, the "druggers," and the "punks and greasers," usually claimed the seats nearest the exits, thus signaling their indifference to all the rah-rah speeches they had to endure. The "nobodies" or "nerds," those dutiful, conforming students who were followers, tended to sit in the back of the center regions. Irrespective of the general territory, students usually sat with friends from their age group. Teachers strategically placed themselves at the margins and down in front to assist in crowd control.

The pep rally itself was dominated by the coaches and players, who were introduced to the audience to reflect upon the coming contest. In this particular pep rally the team captains led the team onto the stage. All the Anglo players entered first, followed by all the Mexicano players. Coach Trujillo started out with the classic pep talk that introduced the team captains, who in turn stepped forward and spoke in an awkward and self-effacing manner, thus enacting the ideal of a sportsman—a man of deeds, not words. They all stuttered through several “uhs” and “ers,” then quickly said, “I hope y’all come support us. Thanks.” Generally students expected their jocks to be inarticulate and, as the cliché goes, strong but silent types. Coach Trujillo then elaborated upon how hard work, loyalty, and dedication would bring the school victory. He also brought up last year’s defeat at the hands of Larson City to jibe the present seniors that this would be their “last chance to beat the Raiders.”

Between the brief comments made by players and coaches, the cheerleaders and pep squad tried to involve the student body through cheers. A small contingent of the 80-piece marching band tooted and banged out the proper drum rolls for the speakers and cheerleaders. Other band members dispersed among the crowd and helped the pep squad lead cheers. Being a part of the band was also an important way of establishing one’s loyalty to school and community. Later, during the game, the marching band would entertain the crowd at halftime while the players rested. Halftime performance also showcased the youth of North Town.

The Marching Band and Band Fags

The quality of the marching band was as carefully scrutinized as the football team by some community members. The band director, Dante Aguila, was keenly aware of maintaining an excellent winning band. Like sport teams, marching bands competed in local, district, and statewide contests and won rankings. The ultimate goal was winning a top rating at the state level. In addition, each band sent its best players of various instruments to district contests to compete for individual rankings. Individual band members could also achieve top rankings at the state level.

A certain segment of the student body began training for the high school marching band during their grade-school years. Band members had a much more positive view of their participation in band than the players did. The band was filled with students who tended to have better grades and came from the more affluent families. The more marginal, deviant students perceived band members as “goodie goodies,” “richies,” and “brains.” This characterization was not entirely true because the band boosters club did make an effort to raise money to help low-income students join the band. Not all band students were top students, but many were in the advanced or academic tracks. Band members were generally the students with school spirit who were proud to promote loyalty to the school and community. The marching band was also a major symbolic expression of the community’s unity and its future generation of good citizens and leaders.

The view that band members were the cream of the crop was not widely shared by the football players. Many female band members were socially prominent and “cool,” but some were also studious homebodies. On the other hand, “real men” supposedly did not sign up for the North Town band. According to the football players, the physically weaker, more effeminate males tended to

be in the band. Males in the band were called "band fags." The only exceptions were "cool guys" who did drugs, or had their own rock and roll band, or came from musical families and planned to become professional musicians. The males considered to be fags were sometimes derided and picked on as "sissies." Occasional gender jokes were made about their not having the "balls" to date the cute female band members.

The main masculinity test for band fags was to punch their biceps as hard as possible. If the victim returned this aggression with a defiant smile or smirk, he was a real man; if he winced and whined, he was a wimp or a fag. The other variations on punching the biceps were pinching the forearm and rapping the knuckles. North Town boys generally punched and pinched each other, but this kind of male play toward those considered fags was a daily ritual degradation. These were moments when physically dominant males picked on allegedly more effeminate males and reaffirmed their place in the male pecking order. Ironically, however, the players themselves rarely picked on those they called band fags. Males who emulated jocks and hoped to hang out with them were usually the hit men. The jocks signaled their real power and prestige by showing restraint toward obviously weaker males.

Cheerleaders and Pep Squads

As in most pep rallies, on the Friday I am describing, the cheerleaders were in front of the crowd on the gym floor doing dance and jumping routines in unison and shouting patriotic cheers to whip up enthusiasm for the team. The cheerleaders were acknowledged as some of the prettiest young women in the school and they aroused the envy of nobodies and nerds. Male students incessantly gossiped and fantasized about these young women and their reputations.

One frequently told story was about a pep rally when students started throwing pennies at Trini, a cheerleader. Initially this curious story made no sense to me. Trini struck me as the perfect all-American girl next door. She was widely acknowledged as cute and perky, got above average grades, and was on her way to college, a good career, and marriage. She also dated an Anglo from another town. That fact, and the relentless gossip about her being a "slut" and "gringo-loving whore," had hurt her; but being strong willed, she would not quietly accept these put-downs. She lashed back by criticizing people for being small-townish and small-minded.

The rest of the girls, four Mexicanas and two Anglos, were more or less alike both physical and socially. One Anglo girl was particularly athletic, which often prompted Anglos to make negative remarks about a Mexicana who was popular but considered a bit plump. Students invariably had their favorites to adore and/or ridicule. Yet they told contradictory stories about the cheerleaders. When privately reflecting on their physical attributes and social status, males saw going with a cheerleader as guaranteeing their coolness and masculinity. Particularly the less attractive males plotted the seduction of these young women and reveled in the idea of having them as girlfriends. When expressing their views of these young women to other males, however, they often accused the cheerleaders of being stuck-up or sluts.

This sharp contradiction in males' discourse about cheerleaders makes perfect sense, however, when seen as males talking about females as objects to possess and dominate and through which to gain status. Conversations among males about

cheerleaders were rhetorical performances that bonded males together and established their rank in this patriarchal order. In public conversations, males often expressed bravado about conquest of these "easy lays." In private conversations with intimate friends, they expressed their unabashed longing for, hence vulnerable emotional need for, these fantasized sexual objects. Hence, cheerleaders as highly prized females were dangerous, status-confirming creatures who were easier to relate to in rhetorical performances than in real life. Only those males with very high social status could actually risk relating to and being rejected by a cheerleader. The rest of the stories the young men told were simply male talk and fantasy.

Many young women were not athletic or attractive enough to be cheerleaders, nevertheless they wanted to be cheerleaders. Such young women often joined the pep squad as an alternative, and a strong esprit de corps developed among the pep squad members. They were a group of 50 young women in costume who came to the games and helped the cheerleaders arouse crowd enthusiasm. The pep squad also helped publicize and decorate the school and town with catchy team-spirit slogans such as "Smash the Seahawks" and "Spear the Javelinos." In addition, they helped organize after-the-game school dances. Their uniforms expressed loyalty to the team, and pep squad members were given a number of small status privileges in the school. They were sometimes released early for pep rallies and away games.

Teachers were often solicitous to pep squad members and labeled them good students. Pep squad members were usually students who conformed to the school rules and goals, thus were good citizens, but being in the pep squad also afforded them an opportunity to break home rules. Students and some teachers joked with pep squad members about "getting out of the house" to go to the games for romantic reasons. On road trips these young women momentarily escaped parental supervision and had opportunities to publicly attract and flirt with young men from other towns. This helped establish their gender status among other students as more "hip," even though being in the pep squad was a "straight" activity.

Homecoming: A Rite of Community Solidarity and Status

Ideally, North Town graduates would return to the homecoming bonfire and dance to reaffirm their support and commitment to the school and team. They would come back to be honored and to honor the new generation presently upholding the name and tradition of the community. In reality, however, few ex-graduates actually attended the pregame bonfire rally or postgame school dance. Typically, the game itself drew a larger crowd and the local paper played up the homecoming game more. College-bound youth were noticeably present at the informal beer party after the game. Some townspeople were also at the pregame bonfire rally, something that rarely happened during an ordinary school pep rally.

That afternoon, bands of Anglo males riding in pickup trucks began foraging for firewood. Other students not involved in hauling the wood gathered in the school parking lot. They wanted to watch what was brought for burning and meanwhile shared stories about stolen outdoor wooden outhouses, sheds, posts, and packing crates. It was important to the onlookers just which community members donated burnable objects, how cleverly objects were procured, and what outrageous objects were to be burnt this year. This was obviously a traditional event that entertained and bestowed status on both the procurers and donors of burnable objects.

Three groups of boys with pickup trucks eventually created a huge pile of scrap wood and burnable objects that had been donated. The cheerleaders, band, and pep squad members then conducted the bonfire ceremonies. Several hundred persons, approximately an equal number of Anglo and Mexicano students, showed up at the rally along with a fair sprinkling of older people and others who were not in high school. Nearly all of the leaders were Anglos and they were complaining that not enough students supported the school or them. The cheerleaders led cheers and sang the school fight song after brief inspirational speeches from the coaches and players. Unlike the school pep rally, the police arrived to survey the fire. Rumors circulated that the police were there to harass people because some crates might have been stolen from a local packing shed. It was also rumored that some of the football players were planning to get drunk after the bonfire died down.

The huge blazing fire in the school parking lot made this pep rally special. The fire added to the festive mood, which seemed partly adolescent high jinks and partly serious communion with the town's traditions. The collective energy of the youth had broken a property law or two to stage this event. Adults laughed about the "borrowed" packing crates and were pleased that others "donated" things from their stores and houses to feed the fire. The adults expressed no elaborate rationale for having a homecoming bonfire, which they considered nice, hot, and a good way to fire up the team.³ Gathering around the bonfire reunited all North Towners, past and present, for the special homecoming reunion and gridiron battle. Whatever the deeper symbolic meaning, those attending seemed to enjoy the pep rally. Several of the organizers and friends remained behind to watch the fire burn down. They gossiped about friends and acquaintances and told sport stories.

After the homecoming game, a school dance was held featuring a homecoming court complete with king and queen. The queen and her court and the king and his attendants, typically the most popular and attractive students, were elected by the student body. Ideally they represented the most attractive, popular, and successful youth. They were considered the best of a future generation of North Towners. Following tradition, the queen was crowned during halftime at midfield as the band played and the crowd cheered. According to tradition, the lovely queen and her court, dressed in formal gowns, were ceremoniously transported to the crowning in convertibles. The king and his attendants, who were often football players and dirty and sweaty at that, then came running from their halftime break to escort the young women from the convertibles and to their crowning. The king and his court lingered rather uneasily until the ceremony was over and then quickly returned to their team to rest and prepare for the second half.

This particular homecoming halftime ceremony took place as it always did, but with one major difference. The customary convertibles for the queen and her court were missing; consequently, the queen and her court, on this occasion all Mexicanas, had to walk to their crowning. This evoked numerous criticisms among Mexicano students and parents in attendance. Many felt it was a "gringo plot" to rob them of their chance to be leaders in the community. The *Chicano Times*, a radical San Antonio newspaper, screamed out headlines that accused the school officials of blatant discrimination. The administrators and teachers in charge of organizing the event denied these charges but were left embarrassed and without any acceptable defense.

In this particular instance, this rite of solidarity became instead a source

of divisiveness in North Town. A number of Better Government League (BGL) Anglos perceived the Mexicanos as politicizing the event and causing trouble. Another way of interpreting their criticism, however, was as an attempt to preserve the pomp and splendor of the ceremony that marked the social status of the town's future leaders. Those Mexicanos seeking to become integrated into and leaders of the community were not willing to be treated differently. They demanded that football and its homecoming ceremony serve its traditional purpose of creating continuity and unity. Mexicanos were trying to preserve a cultural tradition that would finally serve their children the way it had those of Anglos.

***The Powder-Puff Football Game:
Another Rite of Gender Reproduction***

A powder-puff football game was traditionally held in North Town on a Friday afternoon before the seniors' final game. A number of the senior football players dressed up as girls and acted as cheerleaders for the game. A number of the senior girls dressed up as football players and formed a touch football team that played the junior girls. The male football players served as coaches and referees and comprised much of the audience as well. Perhaps a quarter of the student body, mainly the active, popular, successful students, drifted in and out to have a laugh over this event. More boys than girls, both Anglo and Mexicano, attended the game.

The striking thing about this ritual was the gender difference in expressive manner. Males took the opportunity to act in silly and outrageous ways. They pranced around in high heels, smeared their faces with lipstick, and flaunted their padded breasts and posteriors in a sexually provocative manner. Everything, including the cheers they led, was done in a very playful, exaggerated, and burlesque manner.

In sharp contrast, the females donned the football jerseys and helmets of the players, sometimes those of their boyfriends, and proceeded to huff and puff soberly up and down the field under the watchful eyes of the boys. They played their part in the game as seriously as possible, blocking and shoving with considerable gusto. This farce went on for several scores, until one team was the clear winner and until the females were physically exhausted and the males were satiated with acting in a ridiculous manner.

When asked why they had powder-puff football games, most male students could not articulate a very deep meaning for the event. Most said things like, "It's good for a laugh," "It's fun," "It's a good break from school; school's boring." Others hinted at something more than recreation and teenage fun:

I don't know, I guess it gives guys a chance to have a little fun with the girls. . . . It makes the girls see how rough it is to play football. . . . The guys get to let off a little steam, tease their girlfriends a little, maybe show them who's the boss.

Some girls earnestly suggested the following meanings for the event:

It gives us a chance to show the guys that we can compete too. We aren't sissies. We can take getting hit too. . . . We can show them that football isn't just for guys. . . . Girls are athletic, too. We can run and throw the ball pretty good, too. . . . God, I don't know, just to have a break from sixth period. . . . The guys get to have all the fun, why shouldn't we?

Teachers tended to look on the game as a silly, harmless event that helped build school spirit. One boldly suggested that maybe these big jocks were putting on bras because they secretly wanted to be girls. That tongue-in-cheek interpretation of football players has already been seriously proposed by one prominent folklorist (Dundes, 1978). Alan Dundes understands the butt-slapping and talk about "hitting holes" and "penetrating the other team's endzone" as a form of male combat that masks latent homosexuality. Such an interpretation would undoubtedly shock North Towners, who generally regarded this sort of thing as simply fun and silliness.

This interpretation also completely misses the cultural significance of such an event. Anthropologists have come to call such curious practices "rituals of inversion" (Babcock, 1978), specially marked moments when people radically reverse everyday cultural roles and practices. During these events people break, or humorously play with, their own cultural rules. Such reversals are possible without suffering any sanctions or loss of face. These moments are clearly marked so that no one familiar with the culture will misread such reversals as anything more than a momentary break in daily life.

Males of North Town High used this moment of symbolic inversion to parody females in a burlesque and ridiculous manner. They took great liberties with the female role through this humorous form of expression. The power of these young males to appropriate and play with female symbols of sexuality was a statement about males' social and physical dominance. Conversely, the females took few liberties with their expression of the male role. They tried to play a serious game of football. The females tried earnestly to prove they were equal. Their lack of playfulness was a poignant testimony to their subordinate status in this small town.

This moment of gender role reversal was a reflection of sexual politics, not of sexual preference. A psychological interpretation overlooks the historical pattern of patriarchy in the entire football ritual. The powder-puff football game, although seemingly a minor event, was an important part of the total football ritual. This ritual generally socialized both sexes to assume their proper, traditional gender roles. On the other hand, one could argue that the assertive, serious way they played the game may also be teaching these young women some new lessons in competing with males. Perhaps the girls were also trying to invert this inversion ritual, thus turning boys into real rather than symbolic buffoons. Generally, however, the women seemed to participate unwittingly in staging this expression of male dominance and privilege.

The Coach: A Mexicano Coach on the Firing Line

The North Town adult primarily responsible for making high school football an important, well-attended ritual was the head coach. Unfortunately, a good deal of local politics made it difficult for Coach Roberto Trujillo, North Town's first Mexicano head coach, to do his job. Coach Trujillo's father ran a dance hall that alternately hosted Anglo country and western as well as Mexicano "conjunto" (country, polka, and Caribbean) music. More important, his father had been a charter member in the new BGL political organization, which opposed North Town's new Chicano civil rights organization, Partido Raza Unida (PRU). The Trujillos' alliance with the Anglo BGL made both father and son "vendidos" (sellouts) in the eyes of most Raza Unida members. Coach Trujillo,

in reality not a politically involved person, had a reputation as "a nice man but a little weak." He was the perfect compromise candidate for the BGL liberals who controlled the school board. He was a native son, college educated, polite, respectful, and generally mild mannered. His coaching record, though not exceptional, was considered acceptable. Most important, he was from a successful middle-class Mexicano family who renounced the extreme views of the PRU. Coach Trujillo was the BGL liberals' model of an accommodating, reasonable Mexican.

A number of other BGL Anglos were outraged, however, at his appointment over an Anglo coach, Jim Ryan, also a native son and one who had the distinction of leading North Town to their only regional finals. He was a likeable "good ole' boy" who was very approachable and had deep South Texas roots. Liberal BGLers viewed him as a poorly educated redneck who lacked the new ethnic tolerance they sought to project as school board leaders. Coach Ryan was a staunch conservative who constantly railed against what he termed communists, welfare loafers, and PRU radicals. Many Mexicano players actually considered him a good disciplinarian and coach, but a number of them also felt that he was indeed partial toward Anglo players.

Coach Trujillo, on the other hand, was considered too friendly and soft on the players. Stories circulated about his easy practices and indecisive play calling. What many of the critics wanted was a military-style coach, a stern disciplinarian. They constantly criticized the star North Town players as being lazy and too soft. Trujillo was in the proverbial coach's hot seat for all the classic reasons, and for uniquely racial ones as well. He had the double jeopardy of being neither manly enough nor white or brown enough to lead North Town youth into battle. He was constantly challenged to prove himself both to the Mexicano activists and to the more redneck Anglos.

Coaches as Storytellers: Reproducing and Resisting Inequality

The first out-of-town trip proved to be revealing on the subject of race relations. The players took their seats as if some crusading liberal had written the script. All the Mexicano players quietly seated themselves at the back of the bus. Then all the Anglo players brashly seated themselves in the front of the bus with the coaching staff. At first I was taken aback by this event, which seemed an unmistakable sign of Anglo racial dominance. Yet I wondered how such a seating arrangement could possibly signify subservience in a town full of politically assertive Mexicano adults. Before we reached Larson City, at least 10 racial jokes were hurled between the front and the back of the bus. One giant Anglo tackle, the high school principal's son, cracked perhaps the best joke. He belloyed out, "Shewt, if we lose this game, we are going to ride home in the back of the bus." This brought a nervous reply from Coach Trujillo that he might have to join them (the Anglos) there too. Having just heard the story of his compromised political position with Mexicanos, I thought the comment was his way of downplaying the controversy over him. Or perhaps he was as subservient to Anglos as the Raza Unida leaders claimed.

As we neared Larson City, to my great surprise Trujillo cracked the following joke with the Anglo players: "We are going to have to take some of you boys to Boystown to show you how the *other* half lives." Anyone familiar with Texas border culture knows that the whorehouse sections of Mexican border towns

are called Boystown. The classic rite of passage for South and West Texas males⁴ is to lose their virginity in one of these Boystowns. This embattled Mexicano coach was joking about Anglo males using Mexican prostitutes. He was suggesting to the Anglo players that they were about to become men and friends with his race, if they would let him make men out of them. The coach was evoking a common male bonding ritual and using humor to displace the racial tensions. He was also saying that they were all heading for "the border" of race relations in search of a new understanding.

During the fieldwork, I spent a great deal of time watching for examples of coaches serving as mediators of racial conflict, and at least one other coach and Coach Trujillo did indeed take it upon themselves to mediate racial attitudes and images. They directly intervened as peacemakers in at least two incidents of conflict between players and students. More important, they often tried to redefine the reality of North Town race relations by telling a story or homily to their players. An excellent example of their role in redefining racial/ethnic relations was a story I overheard Coach Trujillo tell several Anglo players after practice one day. He had just finished putting the boys through a brutal 2-1/2 hour full-pads scrimmage. This occurred during the dog days of late September and the temperature on the playing field was at least 100°F. The boys were exhausted and began joking and complaining about what a dictator the coach was. One quipped, "Man, I thought Hitler was a German."

Coach Trujillo read this ethnic reference as an invitation to launch into a racial treatise on the sense of equality and character of the Mexicano people, and himself in particular. Trujillo had been the first Mexicano player with a scholarship to play for a "lily-white" West Texas college. He then recounted his own version of the brutal two-a-day summer practice story that all football players tell. Usually this tale is told to illustrate one's pain threshold and ability to survive hot, sweaty practices. Often such practices do seem like the nightmarish inventions of a sadistic coach. Only "real men" survive these hot summer practices, and the worse the practices, the better the telling of the tale. Young players usually recount these practices to older relatives and former players who hang out in local gas stations and restaurants.

Coach Trujillo created an interesting variant of this tale that also had a racial lesson. After the exhausted players returned to the locker room, one of the Anglo players had the gall to toss the coach's equipment away from the coach's locker, thus invading his hard-earned resting space. The coach confronted the offending lockermate and reminded him that they were all in it together. They were all survivors of the football wars; consequently he was deserving of equal respect and space. With a twinkle in his eye, the coach explained, "I was telling this guy in a nice way, 'Hey, redneck, that's my space.'" According to Coach Trujillo, this bold, honest confrontation with the Anglo, and by extension American society, brought instant respect from the other players sitting nearby. They could see that he was ready to fight for his rights, which he had earned the hard way. Seeing this hulking white monster of a lineman being cowed by this little brown bulldog was a new experience for the Anglo players. They purportedly responded with warmth and admiration, and this was the beginning of the coach's acceptance among the Anglo players.

In a way, Coach Trujillo's story was much like the miraculous conversion tales born-again Christians often tell. In a trying and difficult moment, he acted

with courage and humility to be accepted as an equal. He risked everything and stood up for the ideal that the races should live together in harmony rather than discord. According to his tale, from that day forward a new era of race relations began for his college and their football team. He relived his past to model what he wanted for his own players. He was no Hitler, nor were his people any different from Anglos. Moreover, he and his people were ready to fight for their rights. The coach told several homilies like this one. It is not clear how effective such moral lessons were, but this was how he dealt with the race problem.

But in the end, Coach Trujillo said he "threw in the towel." Despite a good season, second in the conference, and a 7-4 record, he resigned and left his hometown feeling, in his own words, "sick of the strife and the pressure on my family." The coach claimed that he had "lost a lotta friends" and had gotten an ulcer. He compared the South Texas racial situation unfavorably to other places he had been, such as Colorado and Michigan, and feared that North Town might never change. Being a political centrist, he had very little good to say about either political group:

My daddy wants out of the BGL. He can see that the Anglos just won't change. They just want to use him, and one or two Anglo board members still think I am just a Meskin'. They'll never change. They always overreact to a Mexicano getting ahead. Look at the school elections. They handled the whole thing very poorly. Some kids were left off the ballot by mistake, and they should get rid of the rule that disqualified some of our best kids. They are just trying to protect their kids and hold us back. And the Anglos should not have quit the band trying to pressure the new Mexican-American band director. I'm sick of the Raza Unida too. They use these pressure tactics and call people "vendidos" and shoot off their mouths. The indictments of voters is real bad, and the Anglos are pressuring to control the school board votes, but Raza Unida has gone too far. I believe they did try to steal the city election, and they did shoot a gun at the mayor's house.

When Coach Trujillo reflected on his past, he came across as a man trapped in a painful process of cultural change. Unlike the new generation of students, he was not part of the civil rights movement and remained unsure how much to assert himself. The movement left him filled with a longing for change but a certain fear about breaking the cultural rules he hated. In the end, Coach Trujillo decided the situation was impossible to change or live with, so he moved on, but not without a great deal of sadness. He was unable to develop the type of relationship with North Town community leaders that would solidify his place in the local power structure.

Prominent Citizens and Their Booster Club: Reproducing Class Privileges

North Town was the type of community in which male teachers who had athletic or coaching backgrounds were more respected than other teachers. For their part, the other teachers often told "dumb coach" jokes and expressed resentment toward the school board's view of coaches. North Town school board members, many of them farmers and ranchers—rugged men of action—generally preferred that their school leaders be ex-coaches. Consequently a disproportionate

number of ex-coaches became school principals and superintendents. The superintendent, himself an ex-coach, sported a 1950s-style flattop and loved to hunt. The junior high principal, also a former coach, owned and operated a steak house. The high school principal was an ex-coach but he lacked the capital to start a business. Three of the present coaching staff had farms or small businesses. School board members invariably emphasized an ex-coach's ability to deal with the public and to discipline the youth.

Once gridiron warriors, coaches in small towns are ultimately forced to become organization men, budget administrators, and public relations experts. These administrative Minotaurs are half-man, half-bureaucrat who are paid a small sum of money for hundreds of hours of extra work. Ultimately they must appease local factions, school boards, administrators, booster clubs, angry parents, and rebellious teenagers. The successful North Town coaches invariably become excellent public relations men who live a "down home" rural lifestyle; they like to hunt and fish and join local coffee klatches or Saturday morning quarterback groups. They must be real men who like fraternizing with the entrepreneurs, politicians, and good ole' boys who actually run the town. This role as a local male leader creates a web of alliances and obligations that put most coaches in the debt of the prominent citizens and their booster club.

North Town's booster club, composed mainly of local merchants, farmers, and ranchers, had the all-important function of raising supplementary funds for improving the sports program and for holding a postseason awards banquet. The club was the most direct and formal link that coaches had with the principal North Town civic leaders. Some prominent merchants and ranchers were absent from these activities, however, because they disliked sports or because they left it to those with more time and enthusiasm. North Town had a long history of booster club and school board interference in coaching the team. One coach characterized North Town as follows: "One of the toughest towns around to keep a job. Folks here take their football seriously. They are used to winning, not everything, not the state, but conference and maybe bidistrict, and someday even regional. They put a lot of pressure on you to win here."

The booster club that coach Trujillo had to deal with was run by a small clique of Anglos whom the BGL liberals considered "good ole' boys and red-neck types." They became outspoken early in the season against their "weak Mexican coach." They fanned the fires of criticism in the coffee-drinking sessions over which of the two freshman quarterbacks should start, the "strong-armed Mexican boy" or the "all-around, smart Anglo boy." The Anglo boy was the son of a prominent car dealer and BGL and booster club activist. The Mexican boy was the son of a migrant worker and small grocery store manager. The freshman coach, Jim Ryan, chose the Anglo boy, and the PRU accused him of racial prejudice. In a similar vein, conflict also surfaced over the selection of the varsity quarterback. Coach Trujillo chose the son of an Anglo businessman, an underclassman, over a senior, the son of a less prominent Anglo. The less educated Anglo faction lambasted the coach for this decision, claiming he showed his preference for the children of the more socially and politically prominent BGL types.

One of Coach Trujillo's former players, who was a coach and community political leader, eloquently recounted to me "what physical education courses never teach you" about coaching:

I will never forget Coach Bowman. He was a hard-core sargeant-type who didn't give a damn about pleasing the booster club. During a real rough practice the Smith kid got beat up pretty bad by a Hispanic kid and Coach stopped starting him. His mother came into the office one day to chew out Coach Bowman, and she caught him sitting there in his shorts with his legs up on the desk puffing away on this stogie. He told her that her son was a "god-damn sissy and didn't deserve to start." From then on his days were numbered, and the booster club got him fired. . . . And it works both ways. Hispanics do the same thing. When we had the big school board change and Coach Fuentes was brought in, he gave me a list of three kids, a quarterback, line-backer, and running back, who he wanted me to play on the freshman team. They were all the kids of school board members or buddies of the politicians. It was bad, man. I threatened to walk off the field and let him coach, so he finally gave in.

The former player went on to explain how local pressures and influences on coaches get played out. He advised me to watch who got invited to the parties after the games and who got invited to hunt on certain ranches:

I'll tell you where you really see all this stuff, Doc. You never got invited to the parties, so you didn't see this. Every Friday night after the games, the prominent people in this town throw a barbecue and invite us coaches. The whole staff has gotta go and behave right if you wanna keep your job. That is where a coach can make or break himself. . . . No there wasn't but one or two Mexicanos at these parties. It was all Anglos, until the Mexicano school board came in. Then everything changed. Nobody invited Coach Fuentes and his staff to these parties. They started going to parties on the other side held by the Mexicano politicians. Most Anglos also dropped out of the booster club at that time too. . . . Really, there is no way that this town can have a good football program without a good mix of kids and the Anglo parents ramrodding the booster club. It is sad to say, but the Mexicanos will probably always be too divided to run the thing right. The booster club was in bad shape when they ran it. . . . The other important thing is getting invited by the people who have got money to hunt bird or deer on their land. It is kind of an honor for you to do this, and for them to have you. And if you've got good connections with star players and name coaches from the university or the pro ranks, then you bring them in to speak to the booster club. Local people like going hunting with a real sports celebrity even better. It's all part of the way it is down here, Doc. To survive, you gotta get along with certain people.

The pattern of community pressures observed in North Town was not particularly exceptional. A good deal of the public criticism and grumbling about choices of players had racial overtones. The debate over which Anglo varsity quarterback to play also reflected community class differences among Anglos. North Town students and adults often expressed their fears and suspicion that racial and class prejudices were operating. It would be an exaggeration, however, to portray the North Town football team as rife with racial conflict and disunity. Nor was it filled with class prejudice. On a day-to-day basis there was considerable harmony and unity. Mexicanos and Anglos played side by side with few incidents. A number of working-class Mexicano youths and a few low-income

Anglos were also members of the football program. At least in a general way, a surface harmony and equality seemed to prevail.

The only rupture of such public accommodations came when Coach Trujillo and Coach Ryan exchanged sharp words and nearly got into a fistfight during practice. This led to Trujillo making what many Mexicano political activists considered a humiliating public apology to Ryan. The two coaches were also severely reprimanded by the principal and superintendent. Ultimately everyone, especially the two feuding coaches, tried to downplay the conflict for the good of the team. Powerful social pressures controlled any public expression of racial disunity and class conflict on the team.

Local sports enthusiasts are fond of arguing that coaches select players objectively, without class or racial prejudices, because their personal interest, and that of the team, is served by winning. Unfortunately, this free-market view glosses over how sport actually functions in local communities. Small-town coaches are generally subjected to enormous pressures to play everyone's child, regardless of social class and race. Success in sport is an important symbolic representation of familial social position. Men can reaffirm their claim to leadership and prominence through the success of their offspring. A son's athletic exploits relive and display the past physical and present social dominance of the father. In displaying past and present familial prominence, the son lays claim to his future potential. Every North Town coach lived and died by his ability to win games *and* his social competence to handle the competing status claims of the parents and their children.

Socially prominent families, who want to maintain their social position, promote their interests through booster clubs. The fathers of future community leaders spend much time talking about and criticizing coaches in local coffee shops. These fathers are more likely to talk to the coaches privately. Coaches who have ambitions to be socially prominent are more likely to "network" with these sports-minded community leaders. A symbiotic relationship develops between coaches, especially native ones, and the traditional community leaders. Preferential treatment of the sons of prominent community leaders flows from this web of friendships, hunting privileges, Saturday morning joking, and other such exchanges.

Moreover, considerable pressure to favor the sons of prominent citizens comes from within the school as well. The school and its classrooms are also a primary social stage upon which students enact their social privilege. These youths establish themselves as leaders in academic, political, and social affairs, and teachers grant them a variety of privileges. This reinforces the influence of their parents in the PTA, the sports and band booster clubs, and the school board. Both generations, in their own way, advance the interests of the family on many fronts.

The Spectators: Male Socialization Through Ex-players

Another major aspect of the football ritual is how the spectators, the men in the community, socialize each new generation of players. In North Town, groups of middle-aged males with families and businesses were influential in socializing the new generation of males. These men congregated in various restaurants for their morning coffee and conversation about business, politics, the weather, and sports. Those leading citizens particularly interested in sports could be heard praising and criticizing "the boys" in almost a fatherly way. Some hired the players for part-time or summer jobs and were inclined to give them

special privileges. Athletes were more likely to get well-paying jobs as road-gang workers, machine operators, and crew leaders. Most players denied that they got any favors, but they clearly had more prestige than other high school students who worked. Nonplayers complained that jocks got the good jobs. On the job site the men regaled players with stories of male conquests in sports, romance, and business.

Many players reported these conversations, and I observed several during Saturday morning quarterback sessions in a local restaurant and gas station. One Saturday morning after the all-important Harris game, two starters and their good buddies came into the Cactus Bowl Café. One local rancher-businessman shouted, "Hey, Chuck, Jimmie, get over here! I want to talk to you boys about that Harris game!" He then launched into a litany of mistakes each boy and the team had made. Others in the group chimed in and hurled jokes at the boys about "wearing skirts" and being "wimps." Meanwhile the players stood slope-shouldered and "uh-huhed" their tormentors. One thing they had learned was never to argue back too vociferously. The players ridiculed such confrontations with "old-timers" privately, but the proper response from a good kid was tongue-biting deference.

This sort of pressure on players began early in the week with various good-natured jests and comments. The most critical groups were the cliques of ex-players who had recently graduated. Those who went off to college usually came back only a few weekends to watch games. If they continued to play, they returned as celebrities and tended to say very little. Being college players, they tended to be above any carping criticism of high school players. Usually, the more relentlessly critical groups were those ex-players who had never left town.

Some ex-players led the romanticized life of tough, brawling, womanizing young bachelors. These young men seemed suspended in a state of adolescence while avoiding becoming responsible family men. They could openly do things that the players had to control or hide because of training rules. Many of these ex-players were also able to physically dominate the younger high school players. But ex-players no longer had a stage upon which to perform heroics for the town. Consequently they often reminded current players of their past exploits and the superiority of players and teams in their era. Current players had to "learn" from these tormentors and take their place in local sports history.

Players Talking About Their Sport: The Meaning of Football

The preceding portrayal of the community sports scene has already suggested several major reasons why young males play football. Many of them are willing to endure considerable physical pain and sacrifice to achieve social prominence in their community. Only a very small percentage are skilled enough to play college football, and only one North Towner has ever made a living playing professional football. The social rewards from playing football are therefore mainly local and cultural.

However, there are other more immediate psychological rewards for playing football. When asked why they play football and why they like it, young North Town males gave a variety of answers. A few openly admitted that football was a way for them to achieve some social status and prominence, to "become somebody in this town." Many said football was fun, or "makes a man out of you," or "helps you get a cute chick." Others parroted a chamber of commerce view that it built character and trained them to have discipline, thus helping them be

successful in life. Finally, many evoked patriotic motives—to beat rival towns and to “show others that South Texas plays as good a football as East Texas.”

These explicit statements do not reveal the deeper psychological lessons learned in sports combat, however. In casual conversations, players used phrases that were particularly revealing. What they talked most about was “hitting” or “sticking” or “popping” someone. These were all things that coaches exhorted the players to do in practice. After a hard game, the supreme compliment was having a particular “lick” or “hit” singled out. Folkloric immortality, endless stories about that one great hit in the big game, was what players secretly strove for. For most coaches and players, really “laying a lick on” or “knocking somebody’s can off” or “taking a real lick” was that quintessential football moment. Somebody who could “take it” was someone who could bounce up off the ground as if he had hardly been hit. The supreme compliment, however, was to be called a hitter or head-hunter. A hitter made bone-crushing tackles that knocked out or hurt his opponent.

Players who consistently inflicted outstanding hits were called animals, studs, bulls, horses, or gorillas. A stud was a superior physical specimen who fearlessly dished out and took hits, who liked the physical contact, who could dominate other players physically. Other players idolized a “real stud,” because he seemed fearless and indomitable on the field. Off the field a stud was also cool, or at least imagined to be cool, with girls. Most players expected and wanted strong coaches and some studs to lead them into battle. They talked endlessly about who was a real stud and whether the coach “really kicks butt.”

The point of being a hitter and stud is proving that you have enough courage to inflict and take physical pain. Pain is a badge of honor. Playing with pain proves you are a man. In conventional society, pain is a warning to protect your body, but the opposite ethic rules in football. In North Town bandages and stitches and casts became medals worn proudly into battle. Players constantly told stories about overcoming injuries and “playing hurt.” A truly brave man was one who could fight on; his pain and wounds were simply greater obstacles to overcome. Scars were permanent traces of past battles won, or at the very least fought well. They became stories told to girlfriends and relatives.

The other, gentler, more social side of football was the emphasis on camaraderie, loyalty, friendship between players, and pulling together. Players also often mentioned how much fun it was to hang out with the guys. Some of them admitted to being locker room and “gym rats,” guys who were always hanging around the fieldhouse and gym. They told stories of their miraculous goal line stands, of last-minute comebacks against all odds, and of tearful, gut-wrenching losses on cold muddy fields. Most of the players talked about the value of teamwork and how satisfying it was to achieve something together with other guys. Difficult, negative experiences were also shared. Long grueling practices without water and shade, and painful injuries—these were part of being teammates. Only other football buddies who had been in the football wars could appreciate the sacrifice and physical courage demanded in practices and games.

There were also shining tales of good sportsmanship. Players told stories about being helped up and helped off the field by opponents. They also prided themselves in learning how to lose gracefully and be good sports. At the high school level, winning was still the most important thing, and most coaches drilled that into their players. But if you could not win, the very least you could do was

try as hard as possible, give all of yourself to the cause. The one cliché that North Town players constantly parroted back to me was “winners never quit, and quitters never win.” Most North Town players prided themselves on giving their best effort. If they did not, the townspeople would lose respect for them and grumble, as they did during two conference losses. As the chamber of commerce claimed, North Town youth acquire their aggressive, competitive spirit on the town’s athletic fields.

Another positive, pleasurable part of the game that most players mentioned was the emotional thrill of performing before large crowds. Many stories were told about “butterflies” and “getting the adrenalin pumping.” Players coming back to the bench during the game were quite aware of the crowd. They threw down their helmets in exaggerated anger and disgust. They shouted at each other, slapped high-fives, and smashed each others’ shoulder pads. Meanwhile they cast furtive glances at girls in the pep squad or at older brothers prowling the sidelines. They had to constantly express their spirit and commitment to the game, even during sideline breaks. Others limped and ice-packed their injuries and grimaced broadly for all to see.

Many players, particularly the skilled ones, described what might be called their aesthetic moments as the most rewarding thing about football. Players sitting around reviewing a game always talked about themselves or others as “making a good cut” and “running a good route,” or “trapping” and “blindsiding” someone. All these specific acts involved executing a particular type of body control and skill with perfection and excellence. Running backs made quick turns or cuts that left would-be tacklers grasping for thin air. Ends “ran routes” or a clever change of direction that freed them to leap into the air and catch a pass. Guards lay in wait for big opposing linemen or aggressive linebackers to enter their territory recklessly, only to be trapped or blindsided by them. Each position had a variety of assignments or moments when players used their strength and intelligence to defeat their opponents. The way this was done was beautiful to a player who had spent years perfecting the body control and timing to execute the play. Players talked about “feeling” the game and the ball and the pressure from an opponent.

Team sports, and especially American football, generally socialize males to be warriors. The young men of North Town were being socialized to measure themselves by their animal instincts and aggressiveness. Physicality, searching for pain, enduring pain, inflicting pain, and knowing one’s pain threshold emphasizes the biological, animal side of human beings. These are the instincts needed to work together and survive in military combat and, in capitalist ideology, in corporate, academic, and industrial combat. The language used—head-hunter, stick ’em, and various aggressive animal symbols—conjures up visions of Wall Street stockbrokers and real estate sharks chewing up their competition.

Other Males: Brains, Farm Kids, and Nobodies

What of those males who do not play high school football? Does this pervasive community ritual require the participation of all young males? Do all non-athletes end up in the category of effeminate “band fags”? To the contrary, several types of male students did not lose gender status for being unathletic. There were a small number of “brains” who were obviously not physically capable of being gridiron warriors. Some of them played other sports with less physical contact

such as basketball, tennis, track, or baseball. In this way they still upheld the ideal of being involved in some form of sport. Others, who were slight of physique, wore thick glasses, lacked hand-eye coordination, or ran and threw poorly, sometimes ended up hanging around jocks or helping them with their schoolwork. Others were loners who were labeled nerds and weirdos.

In addition, there were many farm kids or poor kids who did not participate in sports. They were generally homebodies who did not participate in many extracurricular activities. Some of them had to work to help support their families. Others had no transportation to attend practices. In the student peer groups they were often part of the great silent majority called "the nobodies."

Resistance to the Football Ritual: The Working-Class Chicano Rebels

There were also a number of Mexicano males who formed anti-school oriented peer groups. They were into a "hip" drug oriented lifestyle. These males, often called "vatos" (cool dudes), made it a point to be anti-sports, an activity they considered straight. Although some were quite physically capable of playing, they rarely tried out for any type of team sports. They made excuses for not playing such as needing a job to support their car or van or pickup. They considered sports "kids' stuff," and their hip lifestyle as more adult, cool, and fun.

Even for the vatos, however, sports events were important moments when they could publicly display their lifestyle and establish their reputation. A number of vatos always came to the games and even followed the team to other towns. They went to games to be tough guys and "enforcers" and to establish "reps" as fighters. The vatos also went to games to "hit on chicks from other towns." During one road game, after smoking several joints, they swaggered in with cocky smiles plastered on their faces. The idea was to attract attention from young women and hopefully provoke a fight while stealing another town's women. Unlike stealing watermelons or apples from a neighbor, stealing women was done openly and was a test of courage. A man faced this danger in front of his buddies and under the eyes of the enemy.

Ultimately, only one minor scuffle actually occurred at the Larson City game. Some days after the game the vatos told many tales about their foray into enemy territory. With great bravado they recounted every unanswered slight and insult they hurled at those "geeks." They also gloried in their mythical conquests of local young women. For the vatos, fighting, smoking pot, and chasing females were far better sport than huffing and puffing around for "some fucking coach." As the players battled on the field, the vatos battled on the sidelines. They were another kind of warrior that established North Town's community identity and territoriality through the sport of fighting over and chasing young women.

The Contradiction of Being "In Training"

In other ways, even the straight young men who played football also resisted certain aspects of the game. Young athletes were thrust into a real dilemma when their coaches sought to rationalize training techniques and forbade various pleasures of the flesh. Being in training meant no drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. It also meant eating well-balanced meals, getting at least 8 hours of sleep, and not wasting one's emotional and physical energy chasing women. These dictates were

extremely difficult to follow in a culture where drugs are used regularly and where sexual conquest and/or romantic love are popular cultural ideals. Add a combination of male adolescence and the overwhelming use of sex and women's bodies to sell commodities, and you have an environment not particularly conducive to making sacrifices for the coach and the team. North Town athletes envied the young bachelors who drank, smoked pot, and chased women late into the night. If they wanted to be males, American culture dictated that they break the rigid, unnatural training rules set for them.

Contrary to the vatos' caricature of jocks as straight and conformist, many North Town football players actually broke their training rules. They often drank and smoked pot at private teen parties. Unlike the rebellious vatos, who publicly flaunted their drinking and drugs, jocks avoided drinking in public. By acting like all-American boys, jocks won praise from adults for their conformity. Many of them publicly pretended to be sacrificing and denying themselves pleasure. They told the old-timers stories about their "rough practices" and "commitment to conditioning." Consequently, if jocks got caught breaking training, the men tended to overlook these infractions as slips or temptations. In short, cool jocks knew how to manage their public image as conformists and hide their private nonconformity.

One incident, when two of the players were caught drinking at a school livestock show, illustrates how many of the adults preferred to handle this cultural contradiction. The sons of two ranchers, Roddy, a senior tackle, and Bob, a senior linebacker, were suspended from school for this incident. Since football season was over, this only jeopardized their graduation, not the winning of a conference championship. The main line of argument made on their behalf was that "boys will be boys," and "these are good kids."⁵

Fathers who had experienced this training contradiction themselves made the boys-will-be-boys argument on behalf of their sons. They gave their sons and other players stern lectures about keeping in shape, *but* they were the first to chuckle at the heroic stories of playing with a hangover. They told these same stories about teammates or about themselves over a cup of coffee or a beer. As a result, unless their youth were outrageously indiscreet—for example passing out drunk on the main street or in class, getting a "trashy girl" pregnant—a "little drinking and screwing around" was overlooked. They simply wanted the school board to stop being hypocritical and acknowledge that drinking was all part of growing up to be a prominent male.

In the small sports world of North Town, a real jock actually enhances his public image of being in shape by occasionally being a "boozier" or "doper." Indeed, one of the most common genres of stories that jocks told was the "I played while drunk/stoned," or the "I got drunk/stoned the night before the game" tale. Olmo, a big bruising guard who is now a hard-living, hard-drinking bachelor, told me a classic version of this tale before the homecoming game:

Last night we really went out and hung one on. Me and Jaime and Arturo drank a six-pack apiece in a couple of hours. We were cruising around Daly City checking out the action. It was real dead. We didn't see nobody we knew except Arturo's cousin. We stopped at his place and drank some more and listened to some music. We stayed there till his old lady [mom] told us to go home. We got home pretty late, but before the sun come up, 'cause we're in training, ha ha.

Olmo told this story with a twinkle in his eye, especially the part about being in training. I asked him how it was possible to play well if he had "hung one on" the night before. This launched him into the story that he wanted to tell about drinking before and even during games. This story had become part of local sports lore because other players also told it to me. Stories of players' sexual exploits were recounted in the same vein that drinking stories were. A real man could be "in shape" because his extraordinary will could overcome these allegedly debilitating vices. A real man could have it all and become complete through drugs, sex, violence, and glory.

Most players secretly admired such rule-breaking behaviors. Olmo was a model of ideal male behavior and, to a degree, other players who were cool emulated him. Homebodies, the farm kids, and goodie-goodies rarely broke training, but the pressures on them to do so were enormous. Drinking parties, like North Town's post-homecoming bash, made celebrities out of the players. Kids clustered around the bonfire and around various pickups and shared beer and pot with their warriors who had beaten the enemy.

Conclusions: Some Theoretical Considerations

A number of critical sports theorists have begun to ask whether the legitimation of the ruling elites of both capitalist and communist states through mass sports rituals actually does create an ideological hegemony. Moreover, they ask, if sport is some dehumanizing form of ideological dominance, why do so many people enjoy and increasingly participate in organized popular sports? This raises the issue of whether sport scenes also become the site for resistance to ideological hegemony.

The answer that sports theorists (Crichter, 1986; Gruneau, 1983; Hargreaves 1986) give, following a Gramscian perspective of popular culture studies, is that ruling-class cultural hegemony is never secure. These theorists generally argue that popular and leisure cultural practices such as sports always have the potential for autonomy and resistance to ruling-class hegemony. This is so, not because sport is inherently ludic but because the politicization and commercialization of local sports practices provoke some form of class consciousness and class resistance. In other words, the elite are never quite successful at appropriating popular cultural practices such as sport and recreation and turning them into mind-numbing, nationalistic forms of political conformity.

Other social theorists sympathetic to this perspective of class dominance (Birrell, 1984, 1989; Hall, 1984, 1985; McKay, 1986; Messner, 1988) suggest even more emphatically than the previously cited critical theorists that the ground of resistance to mass sport must be situated in multiple forms of dominance. In this view, the cultural practices of gender and racial dominance must *also* be included with a class theory perspective of sports. A multiple-dominance view of sports suggests that the commercializing and rationalizing tendencies in sports can at least be mediated and somewhat democratized through the more active participation of previously marginalized groups. Some feminists also argue that since women are more nurturing and humanistic, a massive new presence of women in organized sports will at least have a humanizing effect.

Finally, other popular culture theorists (Fiske 1989a, 1989b) suggest an additional ground for resistance and autonomy that is more general than class,

gender, or racial consciousness. Fiske argues that all popular cultural forms have the potential to be pleasurable because they are profane, expressive cultural acts. Sport, like dance, music, or visual art, is a form of personal expression within a set of conventions or rules for self-expression. Within certain limits, these cultural performances manipulate the conventional symbols and expressive practices in new, self-gratifying ways. Students of popular cultural practices outside sport have shown a variety of creative resistance in the expressions of street graffiti, low-rider cars, pop art, informal clothes such as jeans, pop music, youth culture styles, and other unconventional popular expressive forms. This perspective generally suggests that the ultimate ground for resistance to the rationalization and commercialization of various expressive popular culture practices is the human preference to control and produce self-expression. Mass-produced overly standardized forms of self-expression such as commercialized art or sport will invariably run into some resistance because human beings are symbol-producing animals who invariably prefer to innovate with and invent expressive forms to represent themselves and create a social identity. Gruneau proposes some caution here that we "seem to have discovered resistance virtually everywhere in capitalist consumer cultures" (1988, p. 25).

This general question of how autonomous a cultural domain-organized sport is must be addressed, as Gruneau (1983) forcefully suggests, through historical studies of sport practices. Bourdieu (1988) also outlines a complementary programmatic statement for the sociology of sport that calls for intensive studies of the "habitus" of sport practices. I would add to these programmatic statements the addendum that a critical sociology of sport needs to conceptualize local studies of sports as historical community studies. Whatever resistance exists against sport rituals of socialization, it must be understood within the context of the local traditions of structural dominance.

In this particular study there were definitely signs of working-class resistance to the way the football ritual socializes youths to enact various forms of social inequality. The most dramatic example was the way the rebellious *vatos* used the games to parody football as a ritual of class and racial privilege. According to them, football was not the only way to prove one was a real man and warrior. Moreover, even the most straight, conformist youths who played football, especially those who knew they would never play beyond the community level, did not simply go along with the increasing rationalization of their sport. They were far less likely to follow modern scientific training practices than coaches and the booster club hoped. As Fiske (1989a, 1989b) suggests, leisure culture practices such as football have pleasurable expressive and aesthetic moments. The real joy of playing hometown football is still some kind of ludic or expressive moment that may survive more on the local level than in big-time college and professional sports.

In addition, in a town experiencing the Chicano civil rights movement, there were many signs of an ethnic resistance to the reproductive character of local sports. Many Mexicanos protested strongly when the Anglos enacted the homecoming ceremony in a way that marginalized them. The same could be said for the Mexicano players who defiantly sat in the back of the bus and who made it difficult for Anglo coaches to unquestioningly put Anglo players in the high

status positions. Moreover, Coach Trujillo clearly played a mediating role in resisting racial dominance until he was forced out. Finally, even the Mexicana cheerleader, Trini, was making her own statement about the reproductive character of the football ritual.

Yet, all of the previously mentioned signs of resistance notwithstanding, the football ritual remains a powerful metaphor of American capitalist culture. In North Town, football is still a popular cultural practice deeply implicated in the reproduction of the local ruling class of white males, hence class, patriarchal, and racial forms of dominance. The larger ethnographic study (Foley, 1990) details how the football ritual was also tied to student status groups, dating, friendship, and social mobility patterns. Local sports, especially football, are still central to the socialization of each new generation of youth and to the maintenance of the adolescent society's status system. In addition, this ritual is also central to the preservation of the community's adult status hierarchy. The local politics of the booster club, adult male peer groups, and Saturday morning coffee klatches ensnare coaches and turn a son's participation in the football ritual into an important symbolic reenactment of the father's social class and gender prominence.

Despite continuous claims about the autonomous and liberating effects of organized sports, this study appears to indicate that organized sports, as presently practiced at the community level, is still a rather archaic, conservative force in our society. This is not to claim that sport is an inherently conservative popular culture practice in the sense that Critcher (1986) seems to suggest. Following Gruneau (1983) and Bourdieu (1988), I would argue that sport, like all cultural practices, is never intrinsically reactionary or progressive. Each cultural context or habitus of practices has a history and set of traditions that can either endure or change, depending upon what the people living out that tradition choose to do. These data suggest the emergence of some forms of human agency and autonomy. There were Mexicano, female, and working-class challenges to the maintaining of traditional forms of dominance through local sports practices.

Nevertheless, it is clear that such challenges have done little to transform the everyday culture that this major community ritual enacts. The football ritual continues to stage North Town's contemporary system of class dominance and its archaic system of patriarchal dominance. The transformation of sports at the community level will require a deeper cultural change in this community socialization process that re-creates each new generation. Without political movements that are stronger than the Chicano civil rights movement, local sport scenes like North Town's will not easily become sites of progressive, counterhegemonic forces.

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Notes

¹The distinction here is between a community and a subculture or lifestyle group. A historical community is a geopolitical territory that has its own political, economic, and cultural systems—a collective of people who share a set of memories and traditions about past political, economic, and cultural practices. A subculture of sports enthusiasts such as surfers or skiers do not live in and share a community mode of production and its traditional social structure of class, gender, and racial dominance.

²The community study includes a historical analysis of how the county's political economy evolved into a fully capitalist mode of agricultural production and a major recombination of social classes. This economic transformation engenders ethnic politics and the gradual dismantling of this capitalist racial order. The community study also analyzes how these broader transformations affect the local youth scene and race relations in the high school.

³The firing-up-the-team pun was actually a fairly good explanation of the bonfire. It was a kind of tribal fire around which the community war dance was held. The event was preparing these young warriors for battle, and the cheerleaders and band replaced painted dancers and tom tom drums. In addition, the fire was a kind of community hearth. At least some people were literally returning to the "home fires" of their village and tribe.

⁴This South Texas rite of passage was beautifully portrayed in Peter Bogdanovich's *The Last Picture Show*, which is based on a novel by Larry McMurtry.

⁵This is of course the classic defense often used to condone the drinking and vandalism of privileged college fraternity kids.

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