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STUDENT-ATHLETE ENGAGEMENT: AN EXAMINATION
OF PEER CULTURE IN
INTERCOLLEGIATE DIVISION I FOOTBALL

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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As I attempt to acknowledge those many individuals who have provided special assistance and support with the preparation of this dissertation, I am humbly reminded of being the beneficiary of wisdom, creativity, insight and much, much more. To my dissertation committee, especially my Chair, Dr. Charles Araki and my qualitative research advisor, Dr. Joanne Cooper, I am most grateful. I could not have formed a better committee. Their skills complemented each other and I owe my growth and progress to their interest and guidance. My professor, Dr. John Michel was an inspiration till his untimely passing and I thank him for good humor, good ideas and faith that it would happen. I am also indebted to my colleagues at Career Services, particularly the Director, Dr. Eleanor Len, for their unswerving faith and encouragement in my efforts.

The student-athletes in this study, however, are the ones to whom I owe the biggest debt. It was they who opened up their hearts to me and allowed me to share their thoughts and feelings about their childhood, their friendships, their football successes and failures, their fears and uncertainties, their college classes and their hopes and dreams. They are fine, young men in the best sense of those words, exemplifying the epitome of spirit, resiliency and perseverance. It was a privilege to get to know them as I

I'd like to thank my parents, Kit & Irene Kobayashi for their lifelong, loving support. I hope I can continue to convey their strong work ethic in all that I do. Most essentially, I recognize my family who shared in every aspect of this project and still have their stability and sense of humor to show for the lean years. My son, Scott fills my life with purpose, love, joy and more happiness than I thought possible. I could not have completed this work without the faith, confidence and support that came from my husband Mel who truly believed in me. These two special people in my life have my warmest thank yous.
This research develops an awareness and richer understanding of the college football peer culture by employing a symbolic interactionist perspective to the exploration and description of socializing patterns and influences of 8 student-athletes playing football for a Division I college team in the western U.S. Four questions were investigated: 1) What are the student-athletes’ perceptions of their football team experience? 2) Does the social world of collegiate athletes rest upon a system of beliefs, values and symbols that is shared by its members? If so, how? 3) According to select football student-athletes, what characterizes a state university’s Division I major football peer culture? 4) What patterns of group perspectives about football student-athletes as a culture are evidenced among this group of men?

Qualitative data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews. Other data collection methods included participant observation and document review. Data were analyzed inductively incorporating the grounded theory approach and coded for patterns and themes. Validity of the data was established by triangulating across multiple data sources and multiple methods, prolonged involvement in the study, member checks and presenting thick description. Four major themes were identified as fundamental
understandings present in the football peer culture which contribute to the engagement of student-athletes. They are: (a) camaraderie (b) save face mentality (c) us against the world and (d) failure can mean success. When viewed in total, it appears the football peer culture functions as the social base around which student-athletes center their interpersonal relationships as well as shape their cultural identities. The strong connections that student-athletes feel with others on the football team is a noteworthy conclusion. There is also some evidence to suggest that the structural constraints of intercollegiate athletics promotes and nurtures cohesiveness and unequivocal acceptance of members in the football peer culture. Additional conclusions and implications are also provided.
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CHAPTER I

PHENOMENON OF INTEREST

Introduction

The extent to which American colleges have accepted the custodial role of "in loco parentis" has diminished considerably and is almost non-existent in higher education today. Few universities have either the inclination or the resources to act in substitute parent roles in the day-to-day administration of college life. Instead college authorities have chosen to set only the broad parameters of collegiate behavior. Thus, structural and philosophical changes in college administration have altered the college student experience considerably. This is the stance that recent literature on the nature of the college experience strongly documents (Baird, 1988; Brown & Barr, 1990; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Yet an increasing amount of data attests to the importance of student culture and its influence on students' values.

For college students, the first step in achieving autonomy is disengagement from one's parents, a situation that generally occurs when one enters college (Craig-Bray, Adams, & Dobson, 1988; Davis, Hanson & Edson, 1992). Furthermore, when the first step is taken, students seek support from peers and nonparental adults (Lackovic-Grgin & Dekovic, 1990;
Roblberg (1975) and Perry (1966) wrote that college students are very dependent on opinions and values of their peers. When they need help or seek support and advice, college students have generally looked first to their peers (Newcomb & Wilson, 1966). Peer models, therefore, can affect many aspects of students' lives. Bandura (1986) acknowledged the importance of peer influence on the acquisition of skills, beliefs and behaviors. Years before, Festinger (1951) hypothesized that people evaluate themselves through comparisons with others and said some of the most accurate self-evaluations come about through comparisons with those who are similar in ability or characteristics.

Harold Riker (1984) in discussing residential learning in the college setting noted that:

*Important learning about oneself—about one's identity, interests, hopes and self-worth—can occur in conversation between roommates or within the context of a congenial group. Within such a group, students can clarify their values, identify their strengths and limitations, test new ideas, try new roles and, on the basis of these experiences, review and perhaps refocus their goals. (p. 673)*

Research on peer culture suggests that the values college students develop are strongly influenced by both the extent and intensity of their involvement with the college peer culture and also by the values prized in that culture (Astin, 1993; Braxton, Smart & Thieke, 1991; Eder & Parker, 1987; Magolda, 1992; Mueller & Cooper, 1986). Interestingly, more recent evidence shows that peer culture is quite divorced from
the academic community (Astin, 1965 and Boyer, 1987). Moreover, sitting in class is not the place where students get to know each other well. Today, supportive data indicates that student culture exists largely outside the classroom (Ewell, 1989; Horowitz, 1989; Kuh & Lyons, 1990). This is particularly true in larger institutions where class size is also large. Katz (1981) in his study of students reported that the academic environment was not the place where students said they got to know other students. The research also noted that to most faculty, staff and outsiders, the peer culture may not be easily visible. It is possible to see outward signs and symbols in such things as dress, behavior and language, but mostly peer culture influence is internal to students. Boyer (1987) said students frequently respond to the college environment with perceptions shaped largely by their peer culture. Clearly, few students, in their day-to-day campus activities, are immune to peer group influence.

Woodrow Wilson (1925), writing more than 65 years ago, made the following observation on relationships of students:

The real intellectual life of a body of undergraduates, if there be any, manifests itself, not in the classroom, but in what they do and talk of and set before themselves as their favorite objects between classes and lectures. You will see the true life of a college...where youths get together and let themselves go upon their favorite themes — in the effect their studies have upon them when no compulsion of any kind is on them and they are not thinking to be called to a reckoning of what they know. (p. 27)
In the college setting, then, a compelling research view is the belief that student or peer culture has substantial impact on student development. There also has been wide agreement that college is a socializing organization (Clark & Trow, 1966; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Wheeler, 1966). Tinto (1975) in his longitudinal process model of persistence or withdrawal from college suggested that there exist reciprocal relationships between academic and social integration. Stage (1989) in a subsequent study on the campus experience said:

Students entered an institution with a certain level of fixed characteristics and commitments to academic goals as well as to the institution. Upon interaction with the university environment students became differentially integrated into social and academic arenas. It was assumed that this varying integration led to changing commitments...(p. 517-518).

A series of studies testing Tinto's model strongly acknowledged that what happens to students in the college environment has more impact than what occurred before (Crouse, 1982; Getzler, Sedlacek, Kearney & Blackwell, 1984; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella, 1985; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1978; 1980b). Their findings also showed that "some subpopulations of the campus are more susceptible to specific influences of integration than others" (Boyle, 1989, p. 292). Given this claim, there is reason to extend the research by looking at these subpopulations and their social integration process.
With respect to campus alliances, one might expect to find that the formation of college subpopulations is frequently based on common interests, tasks and values and there is evidence to this effect (Dalton, 1989; D'Emilio, 1990; Daniels, 1991; Winiarski-Jones, 1988). A key generalization that appears warranted from the research is the notion that college students are most likely to develop close relationships with those who share common interests in a common environment.

Bronner (1990), Horowitz (1987), Kuh (1993), and Moffatt (1989) in speaking of the undergraduate culture say that it is well developed and influential in student learning and personal development. Thus, this immediate environment appears to have the most influence on students' behavior and occurs largely through their participation in formal and informal activities. Data patterns produced in investigations by Pascarella (1980) and Dill (1982) indicate that individuals change in the direction of reducing differences between themselves and generally either cohere around the task a group was organised to accomplish or around social functions the group or culture may be involved with.

Perceived Justification for Studying the Phenomenon

A major constituent group of the campus is the student-athlete cohort. As might be expected, this visible peer group has been the focus of many divergent and contradictory
findings (Astin, 1984; Davis, 1990; Ryan, 1989; Sprent, 1989; Waggoner, 1993). These findings have raised concerns related to the benefits of sports participation for student-athletes, particularly their academic success and developmental progress. Intercollegiate athletics, a setting where the student-athlete culture is said to thrive, is an organizational culture representing collective forms of social activity but also "constitutes an organization where resources and constraints in the forms of power, coercion, control, money, skill and personal identity are basic resources to be negotiated" (Snyder, 1986, p. 222).

For its members, culture has values, norms, philosophy, rules and climate that constitute a collective mindset. Other definitions have the common thread notion that culture is never neutral or detached. It has powerfully been expressed as being "the way we do things around here" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982) and as a fusion of individual identity with collective destiny (Meyer & Rowan, 1983). Anthropologists view culture and individuals within it as that of participating in rituals that transcend and order their everyday lives (Deegan, 1989). Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) define culture as a system: one that "embodies expressive and affective dimensions through shared symbols, ideology, values, myths, rites, rituals, customs, language, sagas, stories, legends, institutional logos, design and architecture" (p. 2).
While the recent focus of researchers and the popular media has been on questions of academic competence, integrity or scandalous behavior of student-athletes (Blum, 1994; Bradley, 1992; Lapchick, 1989; Lederman, 1990; Maloney & McCormick, 1993; Wiggins, 1991), hardly any attention has been given to the social interaction aspect of athletics. Some exceptions are Melnick (1986) who asserted that group structure plays an important role in accounting for and explaining collective behavior. Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston (1992) in discussing prejudice toward university student-athletes said that student-athletes themselves may best be able to shed light on their unique culture. As Engstrom & Sedlacek (1991) note: "They are able to bring alive the impact of their intense schedules, the stress created by juggling two major, often conflicting roles--that of student and that of athlete" (p. 192). This statement underscores the value of the individual's perception of his/her experiences and points toward the significance of seeing the lives and the college experience through the eyes of the student-athletes themselves.

However, student-athletes as a group and individually, continue to live under the shadow of an academic value system inherent with judgment and stereotyping. Public perception of student-athletes is disparate with general admiration for their athletic achievements and skepticism for their academic work. Such assumptions about student-athletes' academic
status can be odious because they usually imply a subjective and negative association of them (Dell, 1992; Parham, 1993; Soltz, 1986; Whidden, 1989; Whitner & Myers, 1986). Yet, this is the shroud that has encased student-athletes for years.

There is, then, a real need not only for specific studies of student-athletes, but also for research that examines their "culture as lived experience" (Apple & Weiss, 1983, p. 201). Given the salience of participation in school-sponsored athletics, it is important to also understand the structure of their social world from the student-athlete's perspective. The important roles that group structure and group environment play in accounting for and explaining connections, interactions and interrelationships of one's life and college experiences are points worth emphasizing. It is the engagement of select student-athletes in their athletic and academic contexts which this study seeks to address through the lens of organizational culture and symbolic interactionist analysis.

To do this, the intent of this study is not to prove a theory but to study a subculture in their setting over time and develop grounded theory. The framework for theory grounded in the data is rooted in symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), wherein it aims to understand how a group of people, in this case, football student-athletes, define their reality. In dealing with the fundamental
question of phenomenology, i.e., the question of what is this or that kind of experience like?, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism are keenly interested in the significant world of the human being (Manen, 1990). Further, Manen (1990) had an all-encompassing view of phenomenology. He said: "Anything that presents itself to consciousness is potentially of interest to phenomenology, whether the object is real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt" (p. 15). Fawcett (1991) afforded that grounded theorists assume that participants give them information that they, the participants consider accurate.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to provide a more complete picture of what student-athletes think about their lives and their college educational experience. In doing so, it will explore the social context of student-athletes' intercollegiate football experience from their own perspectives and to learn more about the unique role identity that student-athletes occupy at a major research university in the western half of the U.S. As noted by several researchers, the lives of special groups of college students as studied cohorts have been neglected until recently (Adams, 1992; Helms & Canter, 1990; Moses, 1990). They have either been ignored or lumped together with college students in general or studied with a comparative intent to obtain statistical
contrasts. This holds true for student-athletes; there is very little that is based on their own accounts concerning the actual behaviors or experiences of college students, and even less about student-athletes. Moreover, there is evidence as well as concern that "the needs of student-athletes can get diffused if they are treated like traditional students" (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991, p. 192). For years, there have been myths and stereotypes that range from the student-athlete being either viewed on a pedestal or as a "dumb jock". They are either revered or reproved, indicating people's views of them tend to fall on both ends of the spectrum rather than the mainstream or norm. Documenting and analyzing their experiences, open possibilities for generating new knowledge and for also challenging conventional thinking about the student-athlete heretofore documented.

This study seeks to discover those underlying factors that student-athletes see as important in their lives and to determine whether any major themes are generated. It focuses on the significance of the student-athlete culture and how this engagement compares/contrasts with the general campus culture. The intent is to provide a study of student-athletes in football as a separate cohort, apart from the general college student population and more importantly, free from presuppositions and possible stereotypical thinking. Everhart (1982) in his research on adolescents in the school setting noted: "What if we were to inquire about adolescent behavior
and perspective based not on pre-determined models, but based on what adolescents do and say about their own actions?" (p. 178). He called this a "bottom up" approach which also predicates my methodological objective. Leppo & Lustgraaf (1987-1988) concluded that sometimes cultural perspectives or misinformation held by people predispose them to act toward student-athletes in certain ways that need rectification. Hopefully, this research will bring the lives of football student-athletes to the forefront.

**Definitions Pertinent to Study**

The key terms powering this study are defined for clear understanding and because their parameters affect the scope and direction of the investigation. Also, definitions are considered necessary for the correct interpretation of data in its proper context.

1. The definition of culture selected for this study is Bensimon, Neumann & Birnbaum's (as cited in Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1989):

   "the dominant values, norms, philosophy, rules and climate that reflect fundamental and unquestioned assumptions that members of the organization have of themselves and their environment" (p. 189).

2. Student-athletes are so defined as to separate their special population from the general categorization
of college students. Throughout this study, they will be referred to by this title.

3. Engagement is defined as the sum of interactions that fall under the rubric of student-athletes' daily lives.

4. Student-athlete peer culture refers to the culture which generally evolves from social involvement initiated by commonly pursued interests. In this case, the members of this particular peer culture are student-athletes playing Division I college football at this "site" university.

5. The term "trash talk" refers to the verbal exchanges that occur between players in games and practices. These occurrences usually are used as a psychological ploy by a player to undermine confidence and gain mental superiority.

6. "Redshirt" student-athletes are members of the football team who are only allowed to practice but are ineligible for a variety of reasons from suiting up in a uniform and playing in games for one season. In practice, this group usually are part of the Scout Team. Coaches determine which players need more maturity, seasoning or concentration on school and officially request they sit out for a season. Typically, redshirt players are incoming freshmen. The following year, these individuals are called
redshirt freshmen to differentiate those who are true freshmen.
The term redshirt originally referred to injured players who were still expected to be on the sidelines at practice but wore red jerseys so they would not be mistakenly sent in to practice.

7. "Scout Team" refers to players who practice as the opponent for the starting Offensive and Defensive Teams. They are generally composed of redshirt players, walk-ons and those who are low on the player rankings.

8. Depth Chart indicates rankings (#1, #2...) given players by their position coaches for their performance. Ratings or grades are given each individual player for execution of particular assignments and plays. These are totaled and result in depth chart rankings that determine starters and back-up players.

Theoretical Framework

With the advent of social science research, the dominant perspective underlying the research on college students has been on their development as students and individuals. Psychological paradigms developed mainly since the late 1960's have been at the vanguard of the theories put forth. The
research conducted by psychologists focused primarily on processes of individual human growth (Bandura, 1971; Stagner, 1988). A second wave of models for the study of college students focused more on the environment or the sociological origins of change and development (Wagner, 1984). Whereas psychological and psychosocial theories concentrated on learning outcomes or on the nature of the student experience, sociologists directed their studies on the interaction of students and environmental characteristics. In examining sources of change and development, theorists with this view look at institutions, programs and services, students' experiences and faculty for data. The sport team is one of the most common social organizations in American life. For this reason, if for no other, sports teams provide a sociologically significant setting for understanding interaction.

There is increasing interest in looking at what gives student cultures their character and with social psychological theories, there is acknowledgment that peer group norms and collective values are essential to understanding culture (Pepitone & Triandis, 1987; Slawski, 1981; West, 1980). Such a perspective is, of course, the linchpin of the sociocultural approach. Further, social psychologists recognize the importance of the larger social and cultural context in helping to determine and shape unique cultural patterns. G.H. Mead in Mind, Self and Society (1934) said:
Social psychology studies the activity of behavior of the individual as it lies within the social process; the behavior of an individual can be understood only in terms of the behavior of the whole social group of which he is a member, since his individual acts are involved in larger, social acts which go beyond himself and which implicate the other members of that group. (pp. 6-7)

Fundamentally, the sociocultural viewpoint portrays people as rational individuals (Moreland & Levine, 1989). That is, individuals, in the whole context of their own personal needs, social structural positions and culture, rationally choose to fulfill the requirements of a role which they highly value or see as highly valued. This notion views being a part of student culture as a measure of involvement. Thus, in the case of student-athletes, well built physiques, hairstyles, dress, language are considered "badges" or "totems" of memberships in a close-knit society. These are some of the ways that student-athletes demonstrate that they belong to a culture and subscribe to its norms and values.

In studying the group life of student-athletes, a multiplicity of theoretical stances is an acceptable approach. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) said:

...any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed. Subjects or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they did and why. No single method can grasp the subtle variations in ongoing human experience. (p. 12)

This means in studying phenomena, the employment of a range of interconnected methods from interview, observation to
visual texts is believed to add rigor, breadth and depth to the investigation (Flick, 1992). In order to study the social world of student-athletes from a phenomenological perspective, Patton (1991) emphasized the necessity of understanding the meaning that events such as their football camps have for the persons being studied. In other words, the meaning that people attribute to their actions is not independent of the occasion in which these actions occur.

The hallmark position of phenomenology is to describe and understand the world as seen by the participants themselves (Nelson, Treichler & Grossberg, 1992). Because phenomenology attempts to address both human experience and meaning, its philosophy and approach are well suited to a cultural inquiry such as that of student-athletes. Schutz (1970), a proponent of social phenomenology said: "...language is the central medium for transmitting...meaning" (p. 263). Holstein & Gubrium (1994) in discussing the phenomenology of social life added that the task of language in cultural studies is to describe reality and to convey information.

As previously mentioned, the framework of organizational culture used in this study offers the viewpoint that organizations and cultures are made up of the interactions of their respective members. Mary Douglas (1986) went so far as to suggest "that human reason is organized and expressed through institutional thinking" (p. 268). Similarly, the symbolic interactionist approach views the role of the person
and of their social structure in determining behavior as important in the investigation. Moreover, this particular lens finds that the process of interaction usually happens in steps: "First, one thing, then another, with each succeeding step creating new conditions under which all the people and organizations involved must now negotiate the next step" (Becker & McCall, 1990, p. 6).

Symbolic interactionism, a social psychological theory that shares the common philosophy of phenomenology, attempts to describe the world of persons under study. Herbert Blumer (1959, p. 2), drawing on the work of G.H. Mead noted that symbolic interactionism is anchored on three premises: 1) people act toward others in their environment on the basis of meaning that these people have for them; 2) meanings arise from the social interaction between and among people, mostly through communication and 3) meanings are established and modified through interpretation. This framework first enunciated by Charles H. Cooley, John Dewey, George H. Mead and W.I. Thomas views the individual and society as inseparable units (Hewitt, 1988). They professed that in order to understand one completely, it is necessary to understand the other. Both are believed to influence the other; neither one is completely determined or the determiner. Cultural norms, status positions and role relationships are seen as the frameworks within which social action takes place. Symbolic interactionists believe that an
understanding of behavior and change requires knowing the cultural standards that form the context of behavior, individual or collective goals within the context and further, the individuals' perceptions of the consequences of various kinds of behavior. For example, the symbolic interactionist perspective views socialization as an active rather than passive process. DiRenzo (1977) stated that to fully understand the study of sport, the approach one uses should encompass elaboration of both the person and his social environment. Therefore, the motivation for research from this point of view is to examine the overt behaviors and behavior settings of student-athletes. As Denzin (1989) described: "Symbolic interactionists evince a profound respect for the empirical world" (p. 124). Considerable attention then is given to studying interaction of subjects in intercollegiate athletics to further understand how individuals and social structures manage to function.

According to Turner (1962) in his research on the self and roles, one of the concepts most critical to symbolic interactionism is the self. This framework looks at the people who are dealing with their unique roles and the way they engage in active role creation as well as role maintenance. The researchers who have been partisan to this view say symbolic interactionism takes a dynamic view of individuals in society, believing that they go beyond merely reproducing existing roles to collectively defining and
interpreting the meaning of their surroundings (Blumer, 1969; Cooley, 1962; Strauss, 1978). It is a richly informative approach because it enhances understandings of the forceful processes of human group life and the correlative relation between these processes and changes in the individual. Lofland (1976) summed up his view of symbolic interactionist thought with: "it emphasized the constructed, emergent, open-ended nature of experience, persons and social life" (p. 319).

G.H. Mead's (1934) analysis of organizations, cultures and social groups through symbolic interactionism was anchored by his concept of the self which he called "the generalized other". He said the definition of the self or the generalized other is "the ability to recognize the salience and motivating power of the social unit...can comprehend the development of social cohesion and shared goals" (p. 161). Finally, symbolic interactionists believe that self in an individual is developed when a person is able to take the attitudes of others into account as well as an awareness of how their shared activity is viewed.

In the college setting, student culture is said to set the framework of attitudes and activities with which students respond to opportunities and problems or the freedom and constraints provided by the institution. We can see that this cultural bond amplifies or attenuates; in essence, it defines for newcomers the accepted modes of interaction and behavior. The student culture has been known to interpret for
the uninitiated the range of deviancies tolerated and the likely consequences of stepping out of bounds. Each culture, whether it is intellectual, sorority, athletic or any other grouping may carry values and emphases of its own and these may be distinct from, in unity with or in opposition to those of the university.

The role of organized competitive sports in the social development of individuals lends itself well to looking at the interpersonal interaction experienced by student-athletes within the context of sport and academics. In particular, Bensimon, Neumann & Birnbaum's definition encompasses the frame of culture that anchors this study. Intercollegiate athletics is a particularly appropriate area of symbolic interactionistic analysis because numerous symbolic meanings are created within this social setting. Research on sport indicate that symbolic values, i.e. winning and losing, morality and sportsmanship, teamwork and individual performance are crucial to understanding. Since athletes are looked upon as potential role models, it seems appropriate to ask what is happening within the athletic world they function in and the academic world they also must deal with.

Thus, based on the theoretical viewpoint that collective behavior and individual conduct play both shaping and controlling roles in human relationships, a number of general assumptions further justify the research questions. Overall, the symbolic interactionist approach assumes that a culture
functions as an information processing body that focuses on incorporation and accommodation of individual views into a system of shared group norms, customs and values. Other broad assumptions guiding this study and dictating the research questions are:

1) Participation in intercollegiate athletics provides opportunities for student-athletes to develop collective perspectives about their collegiate experience.

2) Student-athletes operate in a very structured environment that orders their lives with friendships and relationships built around intercollegiate athletics.

3) Intercollegiate athletics is an organization of collective forms of social action where student-athletes acquire some basic notions of how they view themselves and others on the college campus.

4) Student-athletes' conduct, whatever it might be, would be a product of their interaction with each other when faced with the day-to-day problems of school and their future.
5) Concepts of group cohesion and self efficacy have positive links to performance success and persistence.

6) Participation in intercollegiate athletics signify to student-athletes a common way of life within the boundaries of playing major college sports.

7) Communication within this particular peer culture has features such as particular language, mannerisms and behavior that are unique to the group and identifiable through symbolic interactionism.

8) The revelations of the student-athlete participants reflect matters that they themselves consider important about their experiences as football student-athletes.

9) Participation in football influences masculine identification among student-athletes.

**Research Focus and Questions**

The central focus of this study concerns the socialization of football student-athletes in the
intercollegiate and academic settings. It looks at the nature of the interpersonal interaction experiences at a Division I state university according to selected football athletes. The key questions which attempt to illustrate the concept of shared meanings that emerge within the collective football student-athlete culture are:

1. What are the student-athletes' perceptions of their football team experience?

2. Does the social world of collegiate athletes rest upon a system of beliefs, values and symbols that is shared by its members? If so, how?

3. According to select football student-athletes, what characterizes a state university's Division I major football peer culture?

4. What patterns of group perspectives about football student-athletes as a culture are evidenced among this group of men?
CHAPTER II
PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The research on educational outcomes has been abundant, providing continuous debate as to their influences. A notion that is a widely cited one is that college influences go well beyond cognitive or intellectual development. Chickering's classic analysis of the influence of college on student development provided a benchmark impetus for research in this area (Chickering, 1969). In proposing a general model of college impacts, Chickering suggested comprehensive investigations of pre-enrollment or demographic characteristics of students, structural and organizational factors of an institution, and interactions between students and the primary agents of socialization on campus. Among the factors delineated in the literature that are related to interaction and socialization and pertinent to this researcher's study are: 1) College Impacts: Socializing Influences 2) Peer Groupings, College Student Life and Extracurricular Activities 3) Institutional Culture and 4) Student-Athletes and their Culture.

College Student Experiences: Socializing Influences

The recent large body of literature on the effects of college on students has generally been consistent with Heath's (1968) and Chickering's (1969) findings that motivation is
holistic in nature and embraces many facets of individual change. As posited by major theories of student development, the evidence indicates not only that individuals change developmentally but also that the changes are of a mutually consistent and supporting nature (Brown & Barr, 1990; Korn, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

There has been extensive research on the various effects that college has on students. Pascarella (1985, 1987, 1989, 1991) and Smart (1986 & 1987) have been fairly prolific in providing data on college student influences from on-campus living to on-campus work to freshman orientation to college. The literature points to a comprehensive synthesis of what is known about their impact, much of which is primarily based on studies measuring typical or average change in a certain sample or typical or average differences between samples. By focusing on average group differences, the findings of these longitudinal and cross-sectional studies tend to mask individual differences in patterns of change. Some students may change substantially during college, some may change little or not at all, and some may actually change in a direction counter to the typical movement of the group. Moreover, some students may change in one way on certain variables and in opposite ways on other variables. Thus, studies by Astin (1984) and Tinto (1975; 1987) for example, may have provided best estimates of the dominant shift or
development occurring in a group, but they also have limitations which need to be addressed.

The broad questions that drive this literature review are:

- What has been the impact of college student relationships?
- What has been the research on peer relationships in college?
- What are the affective-psychological outcomes of college student life? More specifically, what are the effects on one’s self-concept and satisfaction with college life for the student-athlete population?

Many studies have looked at students' psychosocial development but mostly in general or global ways. Pace (1990) in a national study of students' general personal development analyzed data from nonrandom undergraduates at seventy-four (74) colleges and universities throughout the United States. Through responses on the College Student Experience Questionnaire, Pace discovered that over 60% of students reported making substantial progress in developing their values and ethics through college participation. Similarly, a comprehensive model of college student maturity developed by Heath (1978) found that students matured most in their attitudes about themselves, their interpersonal relationships and values.
The findings of Ewell (1989) explored the influences of institutional variables such as student-faculty contacts, institutional culture and mission. Like Pace, Ewell found evidence that suggests the importance of interpersonal contacts and institutional environments in psychosocial change among students. While findings consistently advanced a strong relationship between the level of students' involvement in the institutional environment and positive change, Astin (1977, 1985) and Heath (1978) showed that intensive involvement in one aspect of college life may insulate students from the effects of other college experiences. Similar evidence exists with respect to students' interactions with their peers, particularly in the place of residence. It has been found that students in residence halls are likely to change more in their sociopolitical and religious views than are students living at home or off-campus (Astin, 1977; Chickering, 1974; Pascarella, 1985). However, little has been established about whether peer and institutional influences are exerted through frequent contact within these domains or through the nature of the contacts.

Throughout the literature, many researchers have commented on the contribution of significant others in matters such as self-esteem in college students (Canfield, 1990; Long, 1989; Prager, 1983; Vera & Betz, 1992) and their decision-making (Bonett, 1992; Chartrand, 1992; Fichten, 1987; Luzzo, 1993). The effects of college on personal
identity, the sense of self and self-esteem as mentioned above have dominated the research. In each of the above areas, the studies have generally shown positive growth for college students but not necessarily with linearity or consistent increase. That is, students as a group successfully resolved identity-related issues, became more positive about their academic and social competencies and developed a greater sense of self-worth and value (House, 1992; Lopez & Lent, 1991; Wooter, 1991). Earlier reports (Bird, 1975; Timmons, 1978; Wagner, 1970; Wright, 1973) on the other hand, showed that for some students college produced decreased self-system changes.

An additional line of research on students' relationships with others has suggested that social participation enhances one's social integration and interpersonal bonds with the institution, department or subgroup. From this viewpoint, participation in college extra-curricular activities serves the following functions: it exposes students to a social network of other similarly oriented peers who in turn may generate and reinforce common aspirations and goals; second, it facilitates the realization of these common pursuits by allowing students to share skills, self-confidence, knowledge and more (Brown & Barr, 1990; Hanks & Eckland, 1976; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

The research findings on peer modeling, another strand of socialization influence, has proposed that peers can foster
diverse behavioral changes in others (Bandura, 1986; Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 1978). Modeling, defined as behavioral changes derived primarily from observing others has been the focus of a number of studies conducted on primary and secondary age students. Bandura (1971) postulated that modeling may reflect acquisition of new behavioral patterns as well as the strengthening or weakening of behavioral inhibitions previously learned. Other reviews have found observational learning through modeling to be informative and motivational (Akamatsu & Thelen, 1974; Bandura, 1986).

There has also been some evidence that peers may be more effective models when students hold self-doubts about their learning or performance capabilities. Thus, viewing a peer successfully perform a task may raise another's self-efficacy for performing well (Lent, 1993; Lent, Brown, Larkin, 1987; Mitchell, 1992; Rooney & Osipow, 1992; Winiarski-Jones, 1988). These conclusions are still tentative because there have been few studies assessing student's own perceptions of such variables as self-efficacy or appropriate behavior. However, the processes of peer influences showing an increase in similarity of decisions made are being recognized increasingly by educators (Adelman, 1988; Berndt, Laychak & Park, 1990; Epstein, 1983; Sherkat & Blocker, 1993).

The weight of evidence has been reasonably clear that peer relationships or extracurricular involvement enhance educational attainment and even degree completion (Adelman,
However, studying participation in athletics and educational attainment in comparison with other students who may have entered college with similar precollege characteristics has not been fully investigated. The study by Pascarella and Smart (1991) sought to determine whether participation in intercollegiate athletics in general influenced college degree attainment. They found that male athletes had a slight edge over nonathlete peers in finishing a bachelor's degree within a nine-year period when factors such as family socioeconomic status, high school achievement, college grades among others were considered.

Several other new socializing influences center around diversity, racial identities and gender issues. Recently, studying minority or culturally-inclusive issues have caught the attention of researchers. Thus, their focus on the college student experience has provided information on specific topics such as ethnic perceptions (Dell, 1992; Garner, 1989; Howard-Hamilton, 1993; Solberg, 1993; Tierney, 1991), foreign student adjustments (Dodge, 1990; Selvadurai, 1992; Vall, 1992; Ward & Kennedy, 1993) and gender conflicts (Cravey, 1991; D'Emilio, 1990; Hackett, 1992; Stickel, 1991).

One of the most striking findings of the review is how despite the multitude of studies on college impact, researchers are still not confident about the unique effects
of college on students. What consistency exists in the
evidence of college effects on academic and social self-
concepts has been found in the growing body of literature that
says the most powerful forces of influence involve other
people and students' levels of involvement or integration
within the institution they attend. Peers appear to be
particularly influential. The nature of their influence,
researchers say continues to be suggestive (Battistich, 1993;
Bank, Slavings & Biddle, 1990; Epstein, 1983; Magolda, 1992;
Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Stage, 1989).

While the research on the college experience
proliferates, it continues to sustain the claim of many that
there has not been conclusive evidence of substantial and
direct collegiate effects on students (Pascarella &
Terenzini, 1991). At the same time, reasonably consistent data
have indicated that college attendance does make a difference
(House, 1993; Trippi & Cheatham, 1991). But its effects seem
at this time to be more indirect than direct and possibly more
a result of mediation by the academic and social interactions
that students have with one another and others. The evidence
suggests that while before-college characteristics are
important, what happens to a student after entering college
may have more impact than what occurred before. The dominant
source of within college effects appears to be the frequency
and nature of the contacts students have with the major agents
of socialization: their peers and faculty members (Bergman,
One area that has been the focus of considerable research is the concept of social identity, i.e. a person's sense of who she or he is in relation to others. F.H. Allport (1962) expressed the individual-group relationship by asking: "Is there more to groups than the sum of the individuals that comprise them?" Peer groupings, especially sports teams, friendship groups and club memberships are described by the literature as having not only solidarity and group cohesiveness but a significant impact on members' everyday lives (Astin, 1993; Brown, 1988; Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Magolda, 1992). Michael Hogg (1992) in his book on group cohesiveness summarized the research on group formation and functioning. He wrote:

Lewin (1948) believed that the "essence of a group is not the similarity or dissimilarity of its members, but their interdependence. A group can be characterized as a dynamical whole" (p. 84).

The Sherifs (1969) consider that: "cooperative interdependence in the pursuit of shared goals which cannot be achieved by an individual alone results in the
establishment of well-defined group structure (i.e. role relationships and shared rules of conduct), and it is this that distinguishes a group from a mere aggregate of individuals" (p. 132).

Lott and Lott's (1965) review and subsequent research revealed that "group cohesiveness is enhanced by:

1. relatively voluntary interaction/propinquity among people who do not differ too dramatically in terms of emotionally charged intergroup differences (e.g. race)

2. cooperative interaction or normatively prescribed competitive interaction

3. acceptance by others

4. externally imposed frustration or threat that is shared, not attributable to deficient skill or ability, and for which no individualistic avoidance strategy exists

5. homogeneity of status, high status, or the impossibility of upward status mobility

6. behavior and personality characteristics that appear to help the group to fulfill its specific functions

7. attitudinal, value and background similarities, and personality
compatibilities, that are relevant to the group's existence and purpose

8. unpleasant initiation rites (p. 40-41)

The focus on the powerful influence of the peer group in understanding student development was articulated by Newcomb and Wilson (1966). Their investigations centered on peer group effects on students primarily in the first six weeks of college. Subsequently, Feldman and Newcomb (1969) in "College Peer Groups", summarized the peer group influence in more specific terms. Highlights of their findings included the peer group offering students "general emotional support and fulfill needs not met by the curriculum, classroom, or faculty" and "give students practice in getting along with people, particularly those whose backgrounds, interests, and orientations differ from their own" (Moore, 1990, p. 10). More recent literature on peer groupings has honed in on student diversity as making it more difficult for institutions to create a cohesive campus community (Astin, 1993). College students differ widely in their needs, characteristics and even attendance patterns.

While there have been various terms used to refer to college student groupings ranging from the college student culture to the undergraduate culture to peer culture, they all refer to the interaction between students and the college environment. Newcomb (1962) found that in practically all
colleges, there are interest and activity groupings and informal circles of friends whose impact upon other members is often decisive. The well-known typology study by Clark and Trow (1966) has been deemed valuable in the research on the dynamics of student cultures and the reactions of students to college.

A consistent theme in the literature on the college student culture was the notion that acceptance by peers was a major concern for students. Thus, learning about and assimilating into a desired subculture has been a major educational experience that occurs in college (Epstein, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Sanford, 1964; Tinto, 1987). Contiguity and common interests together have been identified by the research as seeming to account for the establishment of many peer group relationships. Also, from the available evidence, formation of college culture groups tended to fall where frequent contacts are made, namely residential halls, dining areas, in athletics, student activities and even study halls and libraries. Tinto's model of student development (1975, 1987) has served as a standard for subsequent studies conducted to assess academic and social integration indicators. The evidence suggested that what happens to students after entering college has more impact than their precollege characteristics. Along this vein, several authors and the popular literature have confirmed that the student-athlete culture is an insular one, with well defined norms of
behavior. (Blann, 1985; Fine 1987; Telander, 1989; Zingg, 1982).

One might expect that it is students' attitudes rather than their general skills or personality or specific capacities that are most likely to be directly influenced by being a member of a defined culture and there has been some evidence for this conclusion (Baird, 1988; Baird & Hartnett, 1980; Friedlander & MacDougall, 1992; London, 1992; Newcomb, 1961). Additionally, investigations on culture group influences have revealed that members become more favorably disposed to each other and they come to adopt as their own, certain group-shared attitudes and feel that those norms are right and proper.

The well-documented summer camp studies conducted by Sherif and Sherif (1953) and Sherif et al (1961) purported that the likelihood of a group achieving its goals is enhanced by very positive attitudes toward its members, which in turn results in high morale and cohesion. The researchers discovered that while the subjects knew nothing of being observed for research or had not met each other until the camps, the groups "developed an internal structures and evolved mini-cultures of their own with their own group symbols and names..." (p.195).

College peer relationships today are tempered by more diversity among college students. The recent literature suggests that while diversity is desirable, differing needs,
characteristics and attendance patterns, make it difficult to create community and strong peer group relations. Thus, the documentation continues to focus on residential arrangements, employment, athletics, ethnic and special interest alliances as loci for prominent college relationship groupings (Astin, 1993; Magolda, 1992).

Institutional Culture: Ethos, Symbolism, Rituals, Ceremonies

While the days of in loco parentis at colleges and universities are foregone, the recent literature focuses on institutional energies directed toward the improvement of campus life through such means as creation and renewal of student clubs, athletics, mentoring programs, wellness activities and more (Hendershott, 1992; Monaghan, 1993). Culture with respect to how it is used in the groupings mentioned above, and how it is fostered and transmitted within a community like a college campus has garnered research interest among anthropologists and sociologists.

An important focus in the process of studying engagement in the institutional setting is culture. Waller (1932) stated that:

Schools have a culture that is definitely their own. There are, in the schools, complex rituals of personal relationships, a set of folkways, mores, and irrational sanctions, a moral code based upon them. There are games, which are sublimated wars, teams and an elaborate set of ceremonies concerning them. There are
Culture is seen as a produced entity in each institutional setting rather than as a given. This is the thinking of some researchers on culture who believe it is relatively autonomous and adaptive. In "Between Two Worlds", Weis (1985) studied students and their culture at Urban College. She concluded that "culture truly is lived; it is created and re-created on a daily basis and the elements of culture combine in ways unbeknown to its creators" (p. 129). In student culture research, Howard London (1978) and Paul Willis (1977) reported that student culture is more than looking at basic structural factors or institutional practices. Instead they see culture as a human process that is mediated by students, faculty and administration within the frames of their respective cultural or social perspectives.

Every college campus is indeed unique. The research on culture in higher education strongly supports this notion. Kuh and Whitt (1988) in "The Invisible Tapestry: Culture in American Colleges & Universities" wrote about this uniqueness citing the external environment, the subcultures and individuals and their roles as identifying dimensions. Helen Horowits (1989) in "The Changing Student Culture" reflected that each campus operates with a unique social presence supporting history-rich and varied research.

Throughout the literature, many researchers comment on the emergence of organizational culture as a management
approach. Studying the business community, researchers such as Dennis and Tierney, Deal and Kenneavy, Ouchi, Peters and Waterman (Tierney, 1991), have looked at managerial and organizational performance. They are also part of the research corps who view culture as a way of explaining happenings that occur in an organizational setting (Tierney, 1988). The significance of culture as a useful concept in explaining administrative management, i.e. strategic planning and management techniques seems to be well established.

Since the 1970s, Burton Clark attested that colleges have their own distinct cultures and said their stories are what give their institutions their unique identities (B. Clark, 1970; B. Clark, 1980). Boyer (1987) said:

The undergraduate college should be held together by something more than plumbing, a common grievance over parking, or football rallies in the fall. What students do in dining halls [and] on playing fields... combine to influence the outcome of the college education, and the challenges in the building of community is to see academic and nonacademic life as interlocked. (p. 177)

Culture or group identification is often marked by ceremony or ritual. Frequently, the socialization process can take various forms ranging from a warm welcome into a group or an embarrassing initiation or experience. Gennep (1960) representing an anthropological view termed these symbolic functions as "rites de passage" (p. 24). Other studies delved into the newcomer or apprenticeship roles in relation to one's incorporation into a culture or group. Van Maanen's
work (1984) on symbolic characteristics employed by groups related that they may choose to define themselves or their parameters or boundaries by unique and identifiable rites or markings. The literature also underscored peer distinctiveness by their clothing, their use of slang or other language, their hairdo, and other group-specific norms (Becker, 1961; Everhart, 1983; Moffatt, 1991).

Finally, those who examine cultures comparatively argue that the structure and environment of the social unit influences the culture produced. That is, germane to its sustenance include strong institutional ties, traditions, languages and symbols. (Kuh, 1991).

Student-Athlete Culture

The student-athlete group is a studied population, primarily in the areas of their athletic prowess, academic difficulties, recruiting practices, graduation rates, even racial problems. As a group, their difficulties in the classroom and off the field have been scrutinized to the point where the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics was created in 1989 to address reform in intercollegiate athletics. It seems the attention given the student-athlete's collegial successes and failures parallel the attempts that have been made to restore faith and integrity in intercollegiate athletics (Knight Foundation
Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, March 1991). Since 1989, institutions through "college and university presidents, the members of the NCAA, and the athletics leaders have addressed a single goal with singular concentration: restoring integrity to the games played in the university's name" (Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, March 1993).

U.S. Senator Bill Bradley, a former professional basketball player and Rhodes scholar is credited with the Student Athlete Right-To-Know Act (1990) whereby institutions of higher education are required to report the following: the number of students at the institution, the number of students receiving athletically related student aid, the average 4-year graduation rate for all students, the average 4-year graduation rate for students receiving athletically related student aid and the number and percentage of students receiving athletically related student aid who earned a bachelor's degree or its equivalent within 10 years of entering the school. The primary justification of the Act was to provide prospective student-athletes an opportunity to access data about graduation rates at particular schools before making a commitment.

Although there is ample research focusing on athletics operating as a business and with athletes caught in an academic versus eligibility dilemma, the evidence is not clear on what effects student-athletes' alleged insularity in
college has on their college experience (Engstrom and Sedlacek, 1991; Knapp, 1992; Maloney and McCormick, 1993; Sperber, 1990). In a paper presented at the Conference of the Southern Association of Institutional Research and the Society for College and University Planning (October 1990), J.A. Davis reported that student-athletes are frequently segregated from the rest of the campus community due to the high time demands of their respective sports and also due to the academic advising responsibilities assumed by intercollegiate athletics (Davis, Paper: Research Issues and Strategies in Regard to the Educational Treatment of the Black Athlete, Oct. 11, 1990).

Similar findings from a report submitted to the NCAA show that alienation and isolation are noted experiences of student-athletes (American Institutes for Research, 1988). Adler and Adler (1991) consider themselves forerunners in presenting in-depth, ethnographic research on college athletics. Their study encompassed five years and illuminated a participant-observer look at intercollegiate athletics, its coaches and its players. They began their research in 1980, at a time they said no systematic academic participant-observational studies had been conducted. There continues to be a dearth of research on the social dynamics and process of socialization in the world of student-athletes. A review of the literature, particularly in the qualitative study of student-athletes indicate minimal research in the social
dynamics of athletic programs. A few citations are documented below.

Besides Adler and Adler, Gary Fine has been fairly prolific in studying the preadolescent culture, particularly in Little League baseball settings. In "With The Boys", Fine (1987) based his report on participant-observation in five different communities and discovered the importance of understanding a student-athlete's identification with his/her own group. He reasoned that through his longitudinal study, he found "values, norms, behaviors, and artifacts constitute a subculture only if individuals see themselves as part of a community whose members give meaning to these 'objects'" (p. 182).

A salient point made by Michael Moffatt (1989) in "Coming Of Age In New Jersey" dealt with role conflicts expressed by college athletes in their athletic and social relationships. It appears that where Moffatt and the Adlers converge in their findings is in their analysis. They both say it still is premature to make a definitive assessment about "student-athlete's ability to achieve social mobility as a result of their involvement in sport" (Adler and Adler, 1991, p. 231).

While the research on the efficacy of the student-athlete as individuals is growing, the topic of team cohesion and factors for team success has already received more attention (Bandura, 1982; Carron, Widmeyer & Brawley, 1985; Escovar & Sim, 1974) Coaches and administrators in intercollegiate
athletics have long been interested in determining the factors that contribute to team success. Interestingly, the results of studies conducted on the relationship between team unity and performance have been equivocal. That is, some studies show that stronger team cohesion leads to success (Carron & Chelladurai, 1981; Shangi & Carron, 1987) while a few show lesser levels of cohesion leading to success and finally a number showing no relationship (Melnick & Chemers, 1974; Williams & Hacker, 1982).

Other researchers have studied the anticipated and unanticipated transitions faced by athletes and alluded that their developmental patterns and experiences were unique and substantially different from non-athletes (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Smallman, Sowa & Young, 1991). Recently, a number of universities have begun to offer a variety of support services outside the realm of intercollegiate athletics to assist student-athletes in handling their unique circumstances and supposedly to countermand the separatism experienced by student-athletes (Bergman & Surrey, 1993; Jordan & Denson, 1990; Lapchick and Malekoff, 1987; Slade, 1991). Also, the alleged conflict that continues to exist between athletics and academics has student-athletes unwittingly caught as pawns when one looks at the expressed mission and attendant accountability stance of higher education institutions. This vacillation the literature says, graphically reflect some authors' view of "the university as
a microcosm and society as a whole where football opens more doors than academics" (Singham & Cremins, 1989; Lapchick & Malekoff, 1987).

Summary

The review of related literature revealed a vast amount of historical and current research about the college student experience. In particular, the quality of student life and the effects of participation through extra-curricular, clubs, athletics, etc. seems to have garnered a great deal of research attention. Affective development of students coexist with the intellectual development of students in the literature and has made more compelling, the implications and impact of successful college experiences.

Culture and socialization of groups have provided topics of study for anthropologists and sociologists. Initially however, researchers described schools and institutions as containing a unique culture with characteristics similar to business organizations. The literature inferred that shared values, beliefs and ideals are fundamental to strong organizational culture. Further, conclusions have been made that past tradition tended to precipitate more occurrences of rituals, ceremonies and symbols than a set of shared values.

From our examination of student-athletes and their development, we find exigent concerns, issues and themes which
are very strong in the lives of those who participate in college athletics. The hallmark of intercollegiate athletics is proclaimed to be fair competition, constantly perpetuated, but in an ever-changing milieu. The student-athlete culture is a vibrant group that the limited research concludes is a unique body of individuals in a college setting. The evidence however, is strong that there is a significant peer relationship and bonding that student-athletes have among themselves which focuses on the structure of athletics and the content of socialization within athletics as cogent examination topics.

The most compelling notion derived from the literature review is the urgency to provide a forum for student-athletes to communicate to their peers about the life of a student-athlete. They are best able to bring alive the impact of their intense schedule, the stress created by juggling two major, often conflicting roles - that of a student and that of athlete.
Chapter III

THE METHOD OF INQUIRY

"There is no one 'meaning of life' but only the meaning which individuals have perceived in, or attributed to their own lives in terms of certain ideas and values" (Rickman, 1961 as cited in Charon, 1985 p. 85).

Introduction

As the quote above suggests, a student-athlete can be viewed in many different ways. He or she is often seen as a "dumb jock" or a nonentity in the classroom (Lapchick & Malekoff, 1987). Other researchers identify the student-athlete as a pawn in a business venture (Knapp, 1992; Parham, 1993). Another approach is to examine how the student-athlete defines and describes himself within the context of his environment. In selecting this method, it seemed appropriate to ask about their membership in the football peer culture and the details of this circumscription. The purpose of this study was not to judge whether the football student-athlete is a victim of stereotypes such as "dumb jocks"; rather, the objective was to shed more light on how a select group of Division I college football student-athletes functions within the college setting.

In this study, there were four basic research questions that guided the project:

1) What are the student-athletes' perceptions of their football team experience?
2) Does the social world of collegiate athletes rest upon a system of beliefs, values and symbols that is shared by its members? If so, how?

3) According to selected football student-athletes, what characterizes a Division I major college football peer culture in this institution?

4) What patterns of group perspectives about football student-athletes as a culture are evidenced among this group of men?

These four questions served as the umbrella issues that gave a focus to the range of questions asked during the interviews with the participants in the study.

The rest of the chapter will summarize the design or methodological framework, the sample of participants, data collection, data analysis and symbolic interactionism as the viewing lens.

**Emergent Design**

Qualitative methods were used in this study. The ambiguous nature of culture is difficult to examine in an experimental setting; therefore, a qualitative approach to the design of this study was established. Bogdan & Biklen (1982) noted: "The qualitative research approach demands that the world be approached with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what
is being studied" (p. 28). Within the qualitative paradigm, a symbolic interactionist grounded theory approach was used as the basis for modifying, trimming and shaping the actual conduct of the study.

As the researcher attempting to reconstruct their lives, my choice of a qualitative study is a deliberate and reasoned decision. According to Denzin & Lincoln (1994): "Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied" (p. 4). Kuh and Andreas (1987) have previously asserted that: "The guiding question in determining whether qualitative methods are appropriate is does the nature of the research, policy or evaluation question require in-depth, detailed descriptions...to accurately describe, understand and explain...?" (p. 398). Other researchers define conducting qualitative research as multimethod in focus and normally involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the subject matter.

The primary means chosen to investigate the four basic research questions guiding the study was the personal interview method, supplemented with observations and document review. The population interviewed was a group of eight (8) football student-athletes who were purposively selected for this study. I sought information on what happens to these participants during their 2-4 year tenure as student-athletes in football. In the case of qualitative research interviews,
because my interest was knowledge building through grounded theory and symbolic interactionism, I focused on their interaction within the football team culture and with the college student culture. As the researcher describing their revelations, I realized I needed and wanted to explain to others how these football athletes coped with tremendous demands of body, mind and spirit that went beyond the one-dimensional, stereotypical mindset that many of us have about them. I also elected to write in the first person as I wished to provide more of a direct, vicarious sense to the interview interactions that occurred.

In studying the lives of eight (8) student-athletes on a major college football team, I was particularly interested in their socialization within the sport team, their student-athlete culture, and their college experience. Kuh & Whitt (1988) describe socialization as cultural learning where "acquisition of values, knowledge, attitudes, skills and expectations appropriate to a particular culture" take place (p. 6). In employing a symbolic interactionist perspective, I felt it was important to study how student-athletes see themselves, how they see others and how they think others see them. Additionally, I wanted to be an inquirer who actively entered into the world of student-athletes so as to see their setting first-hand whenever possible.

A football team is a culture-producing group that has task-oriented goals (e.g. winning football games) and
socioemotional goals (e.g. status on campus, making friends and belonging to a group). It is also viewed to be self-contained and socially insular which according to Foon (1987) is conducive to symbolic interactionist thinking because "even an individual acting in isolation is bound by the symbolic rules governing all interactions". (p. 226).

The incentive to examine student-athletes who play football was compelling as I realized their experiences would provide an insider's point of view to a predominantly collaborative sport. Unlike individual sports like golf or diving, the football environment is regarded as highly interactional.

Therefore, in 1993, I initiated a qualitative study of the student-athlete culture at a medium-sized, comprehensive university in the Western United States. The institution participates in Division I intercollegiate athletics and is a member of the Western Athletic Conference. This investigation, encompassing over one and a half (1 1/2) years, focused on the visible features of the student-athlete culture, i.e. their norms, expressions, artifacts, rules and appearance. It also delved into the less obvious aspects of a cultural study, i.e., the symbolic content of their particular culture, concentrating on their values, perspectives, and beliefs.

Accordingly, related to individual and social consequences of culture through sports participation, the
study centered on finding out what was special about being a member of a Division I college football team. The symbolic interactionist approach asserts that the processes of socialization within athletics is a context inseparable from the study of the student-athletes themselves. Among the questions, some specific ones focused on why students play football and what were the most satisfying and disappointing aspects of their experiences. Related to their perceptions of their special culture, I looked at what cultural themes, e.g. attitudes, values, beliefs and norms were emphasized in their disclosures and what rituals and routines were emblematic to being football student-athletes.

The interview format of semi-structured questions followed the basic tenets of the research or respondent interview (Cohen & Manion, 1989; Denzin, 1989b; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Powney & Watt, 1987) where my goal was to better understand the phenomenon of being a Division I football student-athlete. Cohen & Manion (1989) said this type of interview is "one initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description... (p. 307). The group of eight (8) student-athletes selected play for a Division I college football at a major university in the Western United States. A fuller depiction of each participant will be provided in Chapter IV.
Sampling Process

While there are at least 15 major sports programs offered at the university with over 550 student-athletes participating, the rationale for selecting football players for the research was based on a number of factors. One was their population numbers; a typical team is made up of more than 100 players whose sample could then be derived through maximum variationism. Patton (1990) calls this process maximum variety sampling. The objective is "to deliberately select a heterogeneous sample and observe commonalities in their experiences" (p. 229). The second factor dealt with the team nature of the sport. Each position area on the team and each individual has particular responsibilities but ideally each functions better and meets with success to the degree that others handle their positions well. It truly is a team sport. Coaches constantly emphasize the importance of team play and try to mitigate the enhancement of individual stars. David Riesman (1961), in a sociological study viewed athletic teams as undergoing "antagonistic cooperation" (p. 88). Messner (1992) found in his interviews with college football players that learning to play a role on the team rather than needing to be a star was a valuable lesson they learned. Lastly, the amount of time devoted to making a contribution in football through weight training, conditioning camps, daily practices, team and position meetings and games is
considerable and therefore provided numerous opportunities
for bonding and grouping.

Participants in the study were selected according to the following criteria:

1. Sample must be made up of student-athletes that researcher had not met previously or had any dealings with.

2. Classified undergraduate or graduate student at the "site" university on the roster of the 1991, 1992 and 1993 football teams.

3. Member of the football team for at least one year (includes redshirt status).

4. Participants must include a mixture: those who had been in the football program for maximum number of years, i.e., 4-5 years as well as junior college transfers and redshirt freshmen.

5. Composition will include variation encompassing ethnic and geographical home base lines.

6. Composition will include both offensive and defensive position players.

Participants

The sample acquisition was purposive. Babbie (1989) states that purposive sampling enables a chance at getting the most comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. It is
a versatile technique as Strauss (1987) acknowledged: "...following the grounded theory approach, carry out initial sampling, and from analysis of results extend the sample in ways guided by their emerging theory" (p. 142). Student-athletes meeting the criteria previously listed were invited by either the academic advisor in Athletics Student Services office or coaching staff at the "site" university to participate in this study. Before nominations were solicited, I had primed the inviters on the mechanics of the investigation, particularly on the interview format and the limited but varied sample desired. The academic advisor extended his invitations mainly through individual contacts with football student-athletes when he saw them in the Athletics Student Services office. He said he informed them to call me if interested in participating and also got their telephone numbers if I wanted to contact them. One of the coaches undertook responsibility for informing the football student-athletes about this project and he too said he did this through informal contacts with them. Eight (8) football student-athletes responded but in staggered fashion. The first two (2) who contacted me said their coach told them about my study. I used all those who responded and did not turn anyone away but also terminated the search for more participants when I felt I had a representative sampling that fulfilled my selection criteria and accommodated the research
questions and my skills as the investigator (Morse, 1994).
Fortunately all participants completed the project.

While the majority of the eight (8) participants were selected using a purposive or status sampling technique, the snowball effect also played a role in the participant configuration when one player joined the study due to a recommendation from another participant. Hence, it was Hunter, initially Participant #1 who suggested that I contact Pepe, Participant #3 whom he felt had some unique and interesting experiences to convey because he had walked-on to football. Dobbert (1984) and Morse (1991b) called the use of snowball sampling effective for expanding the scope of the study and generating new lines of inquiry.

Privacy, including maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of data was adhered to throughout the study process. Thus, to protect participants’ identities, pseudonyms are used to refer to the eight (8) individuals. Of the eight participants, only Doc, B.C. and Knight provided their own nicknames. I labeled the rest with pseudonyms derived from behavioral or personal characteristics. For example, Flea was named for his constant body movements and fast talking.

Following the tenets of purposive sampling selection, the eight student-athletes in football who participated in the study reflected the following demographics when they began (the period of data gathering was an extended period covering
1½ years, therefore their class level and position assignment may have changed by the completion of interviews):

**Class Standing:**
1 Freshman
1 Sophomore
4 Juniors
1 Senior
1 Graduate Student

**Entry onto Team:**
1 Walk-on
4 Redshirt status during first year in football
1 Junior college transfer
2 Proposition 48 redshirt status during first year

**Offensive Team:**
5 (Quarterback, Guard, Tackle/Center (2), Wide Receiver)

**Defensive Team:**
2 (Defensive End, Cornerback/Strong Safety)

**Special Teams:**
1 (Wedge)

**Ethnicity:**
2 Blacks
1 Caucasian
1 Samoan
4 Mixed (Hawaiian-Caucasian, Japanese-Filipino-Caucasian, Hawaiian-Portuguese, Mexican-Filipino-Hawaiian and 5 other ethnicities).

**Geographical Home Base**
4 Western U.S.
1 American Samoa
3 Home State

**Pre-Data Collection Insights**

While the data for this study came from select student-athletes playing recent college football, my interest in finding out about the unique lives of college sports participants goes back to 1987 when I met a number of them.
through my area of work, career counseling. The first two that I met were seniors completing their last season as football players and contemplating graduation and their futures. They came in on their own, requesting assistance with exploring career possibilities and resume writing.

I began to meet more of them who came because these original two, B.N. and W.B. suggested meeting me. Therefore, although they are not the subjects of this study, this original group of student-athletes, many approaching 30 years of age, can claim to be the impelling force that ignited my strong interest in student-athletes as individuals and as a culture. B.N. is currently an Assistant Coach at the Naval Academy and W.B. after graduating from "site" university with his bachelor's degree in Economics received his MBA degree from Ohio State and is now a CPA with a national accounting firm.

Others, in similar fashion to regular college graduates, have found employment in a spectrum of areas that have or have not aligned with their goals. My association with them continues to this day. This prolonged engagement with student-athletes through meetings, informal contacts, graduation parties, their weddings has kept me focused on finding out from a newer cohort group, a more in-depth look at what their college and sports experience is like. I decided
that my dissertation study would be to gather data on the student-athlete culture through their perspective, cultural symbols and relationships.

Data Collection

The purpose of the study was revealed to each participant at the start, with assurances that participation would be voluntary and confidential. Interview times were set up around the subjects' class and athletic schedules. Data was primarily gathered through an average of four (4) audio recorded interviews, each lasting 1-1½ hours in length. I was the sole interviewer. The time spent with each subject ranged from a minimum of six hours to a maximum of twenty one hours. This window varied considerably due to each participant's time availability, spontaneity and verbal expansions. I also conducted observations, collected newspaper articles and other documents in an effort to accumulate data which would further shape the direction of my research. All eight participants readily agreed that the interviews could be tapperecorded and were also told any requests on their part to hear the tapes or review written copies would be honored. Each interview was a one-on-one situation where I led the subject through open-ended but topically structured questions. My intent was to have the participants describe their experiences with as wide a parameter as they wished them to be. Due to accessibility
and desire for confidentiality, most of the interviews were held in a private conference room in my place of employment. I did meet one of my participants off-campus at his practice teaching site at a local high school to better accommodate his time frame.

As previously mentioned, multiple methods were used to obtain data on the football student-athlete. According to the literature, using more than one method in an investigation is valuable in qualitative research where trustworthiness of data is a concern (Robson, 1993). Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed credibility of a qualitative study is enhanced when multiple techniques are utilized. Also, through triangulation (Mathison, 1988), i.e. the use of multiple-resourced evidence which in this case consisted of interviews, observations and written documents, I was able to search for and obtain experiential information from different perspectives and to cross-validate this data when possible.

While participant-observation and acquisition of artifacts formed parts of my triangulation approach to the study, it was a series of broad, guiding interview questions which enabled me to glean rich and fresh information. I considered it important to have the participants' responses as the catalytic means for setting the ensuing parameters.
Interview Procedures, Observations and Printed Data

All of the student-athletes participating in this study were interviewed at least four times, spread throughout 1½ years. This period for most of them, encompassed the off-season, spring drills, the football season itself and summer camp, thereby representing the peaks and valleys of their annual athletic and academic activities. Interview protocol included questions that allowed elicitation of responses exploring the thought processes student-athletes use when dealing with their lives as students and as athletes (See Appendices). Follow-up questions were concerned with how they acquired their ways of thinking, also how they felt their thinking may have changed and speculation through their own elaboration as to what the influencing factors may be.

As the research progressed, I was very comfortable with the elasticity of boundaries pertaining to the questions that were covered with each subject. However, I stayed fairly rigid on the topic areas discussed as I wanted some consistency with which to begin my analysis. The questions centered on such topics as their backgrounds, their recruitment into athletics, the stages of their football careers, their relations with others, their motivations, their lifestyles and their general impressions about being a part of the football grouping and intercollegiate athletic organization. For each series of interviews numbering between four (4) and seven (7), I had a set of questions that I was
hoping to get responses on, but freely made modifications in
the sequencing of questions, in their exact wording and in the
amount of time and attention given to different topics (See
Appendix A). As the research instrument, I depended on my
perceptions as to how an interview was developing and made on-
the-spot adjustments.

All interviews were tape recorded with permission; hand-
recorded notes were taken by this researcher as well. Tapes
were transcribed immediately or soon after and printed. The
researcher's notes, on many occasions fully verbatim, were
also typed up and reviewed.

These were semi-structured interviews which I deemed
conversations with a purpose (Robson, 1993). They centered on
a set of themes and topics which was designed to allow the
interviewees scope to develop their answers. For example, the
broad topical domains included academic life, social
relationships, childhood memories, friendships as well as
other subjects triggered from their responses. My approach
permitted student-athletes' views and feelings to emerge but
also gave me some control over the format. Since the
interviews concentrated on the subjective experiences of those
involved, the quality of the data depended to an extent on the
quality of the relationship between the interviewees and
myself (Basch, 1987; Cohen & Manion, 1989; Douglas, 1985;
Green, 1991). While it was true that I did not know the
participants personally until formally meeting them for this

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study, I found the process of developing trust less problematic than anticipated. With the meetings scheduled around the student-athletes' time allowances, we met at different times and with differing elapses of time between meetings. Therefore with each of them I was continuously at different levels in our developing relationships.

The second means of obtaining data on the student-athlete in football was through direct observation. Robson (1993) believed that watching what people do and listening to what they say is a complementary technique to interviewing as it can help validate or corroborate information obtained in interviews. As with all inquiry, the driving force behind the use of observations was my research questions, particularly Question #2 which looked for peer culture characteristics and Question #3 which sought evidence of group perspectives among football student-athletes. Using selective events to observe the participants, I essentially wanted to see them in a variety of settings that they frequent and note their friendship alliances, dress, mannerisms, etc. I chose their gathering places on campus such as the benches near the Campus Center, at the Snack Bar, and outside the Weight Room. I also observed them on defined occasions, namely their football games and at mandatory programs for (Name of Program) athletes.

There were other opportune but not prearranged moments: a wedding of a football student-athletes alumnus where I sat at
a table next to one of the participants, seeing them at the supermarket or at the shopping mall. Throughout, I kept an on-going narrative account or diary (Bakeman & Gottman, 1986; Shipman, 1988) with a record of running descriptions that included who the participant was with, their dress, appearance, any other noteworthy details of the physical scene, their language if attainable and personal impressions or reminders to look for or ask participants at future interviews. Baker (1988) called this form of recording observations "memory sparkers" (p. 24).

Apart from interviews and direct observations, I used a number of unobtrusive means to gather information. This included examining newspaper clippings from daily and campus newspapers, media guides, listening to and watching radio/TV talk shows featuring their coaches with highlights and interviews of players. According to a number of researchers, documents are useful sources of information because they can add to and support data collected and also impact the kinds of interview questions used for the study (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Whitt & Kuh, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Photocopied items from newspapers and magazines were denoted by date and student-athlete reference or topic.

Although my being a female researcher studying a males-only activity precluded me from observing participants in all their domains, I was allowed to see several key settings when
they were empty. I toured their locker room and noted first-hand, the hierarchical locker assignments they spoke about. I walked through their training room where their daily tapings took place and where therapy, physicals and injuries are handled. I stood in the nondescript classroom that served as a film room where I was told each position group held daily meetings from Monday through Friday during the football season. It was at these meetings that videotapes of the previous day's practice or the weekend's football games were shown with each player's performance dissected for praise or berating. One participant named Knight observed that scoldings at film viewing by the coaches were "worse than my parents' yelling". The unisex weightlifting room was most interesting as there were male and female student-athletes lifting weights.

In addition to student-athletes of both sexes, I observed regular college students and coaches in the room, all engrossed in their weightlifting plans. I was told there were blocks of time just for student-athlete use and also hours for all users. I happened to be there at general use times which in hindsight were more appropriate because they provided revealing socialization comparisons between student-athletes and students, student-athletes and coaches and finally, between male student-athletes and female student-athletes. While the aim of each weightroom user was apparently to
increase physical strength and simultaneously or tangentially to feel and look better, I discovered that lifting weights is not necessarily a solo activity; that partnering or teaming with someone provides a psychological and motivational edge as well as technique mentoring and safety monitoring.

In addition to the anecdotal information gathered, I maintained a journal of observations and impressions. The fact that the interviews were tape recorded did not obviate the need to note emerging themes and attitudes. I believe that in understanding and interpreting the data, any striking non verbal expressions made during an interview captured information beyond the words recorded and therefore added to the analysis. Along this vein, the subjects' dress and mannerisms were of obvious interest. In addition, I kept a record of all conversations conducted with the participants apart from the arranged interviews. For example, Smooth Red, Pepe and Doc dropped by on a number of occasions to say hello and to ask if I needed to talk to them further.

**Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, the practice of simultaneous data collection and analysis has been a customary method for researchers (Fetterman, 1989; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988). Recent research however has provided a more detailed definition of data.
analysis with its use of terms such as data collection, data reduction, data display and finally conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1984, 1994). I followed this process in my analysis but to be candid, have to report that I fell into it more out of a data management need than a predetermined effort. I felt compelled to bring some semblance of organization and meaning to the growing volume of data.

Data analysis consisted of two phases, a continuous process involving collection, reduction, and categories of information and a formal analytic process. As this was a planned multi-method study, I found that while interviewing participants and observing them in their activities I was also checking for content and meaning. It was anticipated that with emerging data from each round of interviews, any successive ones would strengthen and enlarge upon developing themes and this premise seemed to be substantiated as the interviews progressed.

Actually, as soon as my interviews began, I was thrust into the process of analysis. For one, when the data from an interview was transcribed, I typically started organizing it by underlining key words or terms that were descriptive or unique or interesting. I then compared this to my typed handwritten version which I recorded in the event the audiotapes turned out faulty or unusable. During the
interview as I handwrote their responses, I was asterisking items that I felt were significant for later comparison with the transcribed version. Thus, during data collection I was also summarizing, coding, finding theme and noting highlights which Miles & Huberman (1984, 1994) called data reduction. Other researchers have labeled this phases, data synthesis with specific descriptions such as "taking the average", "sifting" and "decontextualization" (Atkinson, 1992; Tripp-Reimer & Cohen, 1991).

As the interview meetings continued, the collected files for the eight participants rapidly thickened. The analysis of the data progressed to pattern coding, the process Miles & Huberman (1984) defined as attaching a label to words. This came about spontaneously as I re-read the transcripts, checked write-ups from personal observations and looked at written documents. The patterns or codes that emerged became category titles for Chapter IV, Emerging Analysis. It should be noted that the categorizations were not predetermined but evolved from significant and meaningful information that were also commonalities among the participants as I saw them. Robson (1993) and Strauss & Corbin (1990) said categories typically relate back to the research questions. In this study, they include labels such as Hierarchy, Football is a Business and Sense of Camaraderie. The recurring statement "when I'm playing nothing else matters but taking care of business"
showed me that it was important to listen to their evolution as football players and their singular commitment to the team's mission if I wanted to more fully understand their team orientation and subjugation.

During the data collection and concurrent analysis, I kept checking the literature as background resource. As Marshall & Rossman (1989) reported: "data collection and analysis go hand in hand to promote the emergence of substantive theory grounded in empirical data" (p. 113). In this phase, I knew while my collection of data was building I also had responsibility to analyze it because as Robson (1993) concluded: "generally speaking, data in their raw form do not speak for themselves" (p. 305). I was also very aware of the damage and problems that naive researchers can bring to a study, especially with adhering to the rigors of data collection (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973).

In the beginning, I tended to be overly sensitive to ethical issues and subjective interpretation of data. My development as a researcher underwent a period of self-imposed scrutiny as I kept asking myself whether the process I was embarking on was the best way and one the literature verifies. Making ultimate decisions about this study, especially about its narrative presentation and telling the participants' stories was a powerful dimension for me. I did not wish to be overly mechanistic in my role as researcher and in dealing
with the data itself, particularly with the unique and graphic ways they used to tell their stories. As categories began to emerge from field notes, documents and interviews, I found myself spontaneously immersed in the substance of the findings. The interviews were fascinating. In fact, I kept thinking to do justice to their culture meant using their words whenever possible.

According to the research on sociological and anthropological data gathering, finding categories and the relationships and patterns between and among categories leads to completeness in the narrative (Denzin, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Spradley, 1980). I expected to and did obtain data using situations, events or processes in the student-athletes' lives as topics for gleaning their thoughts. For example, information on their two-a-days summer camp, their weight training, their academic coursework and other topics provided abundant and fertile looks at their lives while at the same time springboarding to wider domains. Miles & Huberman (1984) suggested as an aid to analysis, doing a summary of data collected right after the transcriptions are made to help with the synthesis. I found this procedure helpful as it forced me to think and reflect not only on the mass of data but the highlights.

Miles (1979) described qualitative data as 'attractive nuisance' while others have used words such as 'rich', 'full'
and 'real' as contrasted with the thin abstractions of number aligned to quantitative data. Fetterman (1989) simply exhorted for clear thinking on the part of the analyst saying: "first and foremost, analysis is a test of the...ability to think--to process information in a meaningful and useful manner" (p.374).

The formal analytic process took place after all the interviews were completed. However, while compiling data from each interview, I discovered a rudimentary coding system taking shape whereby key words, phrases and ideas that seemed to consistently occur providing evolving or naturalistic patterns.

The data were analyzed incorporating symbolic interactionism and the grounded theory approach. Symbolic interactionism purports that meaning is socially constructed and negotiated. Therefore, in using the grounded theory technique of detailed, comprehensive, thick descriptions through interviews and observations, this processing of the data, converges well with eliciting a participant's story over time.

Rather than my starting with a theory to test, each participant generated data through several interviews in which he shared what meanings various facets of his life and football experiences had for him. I attempted to understand their meaning by looking for and noting signs that may reveal
cultural values, linkages to other concepts or contexts and
cohort patterns. As categories, patterns and themes converged
or diverged, symbolic interactionism not only allowed me to
elicit the individual student-athlete's meaning of his
experience but also to analyze how the student-athlete
interacted with his experience.

Limitations of Study

This study is limited in several ways. First, because of
sample limitations, the results can only be applied to
football student-athletes at the site university. Whether the
patterns of associations found with this sample of student-
athletes apply to student-athletes in the general domain of
postsecondary intercollegiate athletics is unclear. Therefore, no claim is made that the findings discussed in
this study, are necessarily applicable to other football
student-athletes in other universities in other times.
However, this particularity is one of this study's strengths,
given the complex nature of information about students in the
collegiate society. Thus, much is gained by the one-to-one
interview process conducted with the participants in terms of
the depth of the data to be discovered.

Second, the research focuses on the socialization
patterns of student-athlete peers. Although this is a
significant dimension of college impact, it is definitely not the only socializing outcome that could be investigated. A related limitation is that in reconstructing their communication patterns or shared talk for example, the fact that this assessment comes after student-athletes have been members of this particular culture for one, two, three, four and even five years must be remembered. Clearly, the question of degree and nature of peer group cohesion and immersion at the initial stages such as with newly involved freshmen student-athletes is not addressed.

Further, the particular population chosen for study in this project was, intentionally meant to be representative, not scientifically random. My primary purpose throughout this study was to choose a group of football student-athletes who displayed representative depth and breadth of data to allow for a rather detailed picture to be painted of how, why and to what extent their peer culture influenced their socialization. The diverse nature of football student-athletes participating certainly permitted such data to be collected.

The phenomenological orientation of the methods used, i.e., the focus on the experiences and the meanings those activities have to the student-athletes who engaged in them had heavier emphasis on the descriptive aspects of their lives rather than aiming for the discovery of normative data that would allow for broad generalizations about all football student-athletes as socialized people. The focus has been
upon new findings that can enhance understanding of both the
diversity and complexities of this one group of football
student-athletes in terms of how they individually and
collectively view their peer culture membership.

With this particular study, there are also obvious
restrictions affecting the scope of this study that provided
set boundaries and established perspectives for our inquiry.
General limitations are the following:

1. The study is limited to the qualitative examination
   of the student-athlete culture as contrasted with a
   college's student culture. It is recognized that
   college students are affected by many other existing
   cultures and subcultures; however investigating
   those are beyond the scope of this study.

2. The study is limited to the sample and selection
   parameters outlined in previous pages.

3. The existence of various subcultures within the
   student-athlete peer culture itself is acknowledged.
   While data relative to any ethnic subcultures, local
   and mainland subcultures, class standing subculture,
   player position subcultures and others will provide
   interesting information, the reporting will be
   comprehensive rather than isolate the component
   subcultures.

4. It will appear that there is a ready bias to this
   research, for intercollegiate athletics is seen
largely through the eyes of the student-athletes. The administration and coaches may not find their viewpoints fully acknowledged or expressed. The point is repeated that this account is how things look and feel to their student-athletes.

5. The sole researcher is female studying a males-only domain. There are certain areas of the study environment such as their locker rooms, lounge and medical/training room that were off-limits.

The following chapters allow Hunter, Pepe, Doc, Flea, Knight, Smooth Red, B.C. and Bull to tell their stories as patterns and themes weave in and out of their football team culture.

**Symbolic Interactionist View of Student-Athletes**

Central to describing the lives of student-athletes on a Division I football team from a symbolic interactionist perspective was an examination of how they made sense of their world. Thus, this was not only a study of college student-athletes, but also a study of the team culture and their social structure. While the findings have implications for such dimensions as race, multiculturalism, group think, social control and deviance, they were addressed as interwoven patterns of experience in the subsequent findings. As
mentioned earlier, because my main focus was on the culture of student-athletes, how they saw and expressed their experiences was very important. Attempts were made to understand their feelings and portrayals by reconstructing fully their expressions and descriptions.

Besides accomplishing a win-loss record, the football team typically creates shared meanings. Fine (1986) asserts that shared understandings are derived from interaction and culture, an implication of the symbolic interactionist approach. Accordingly, the view given to student-athletes' lives is a processual one. That is, I premised that they do things in relation to each other, they communicate, interact, change actions according to what other people in their culture do. According to Manen (1990), this is a foundation of symbolic interactionism. Woods (1992) pointed out that: "Groups in interaction develop a large number of symbols imbued with interrelated meaning that collectively constitute a culture or subculture. One of the first requirements of symbolic interactionist research is to understand the symbolic meanings that emerge in interactions and are attributed in situations over time" (p. 354-355).

Using the lens of symbolic interactionism to focus on the ethos or ambience of the football team culture was appropriate in my research as the rich symbolic expressions provided were clearly evident in the language of the participants. There were other means of communication that surfaced--gestures,
appearance, body language, nicknames, superstitions, rituals and more that will be detailed in Chapter IV.
CHAPTER IV
PARTICIPANT PROFILES: AN EMERGING ANALYSIS

Sport is an important agency of enculturation within the American schooling process. (Landers, 1976, p. 184)

Participants

Central to the following descriptive account of collegiate athletes and their engagement is their membership on a Division I football team. Football is a highly visible, revenue-producing program within collegiate athletics and partly through this means, has become a dominant focus of tradition, pride and power on college campuses. Fine (1987) who studied Little League Baseball teams said: "Cultural traditions are developed within social worlds. As a result, it is important to understand how the fact that boys are organized and organize themselves in small groups affects their behavior and culture" (p.2-3). He further offered that by preadolescence, boys ferry between several social worlds—male groups, cross-sex groups, the family and the school. Each require a different standard of behavior and socialization practice.

Interestingly, collegiate athletics as a socialization setting differs in both structure and content from other socialization settings, like the classroom or the family. In the athletics arena especially, student-athletes playing the sport of football are placed in a social situation where they
feel no real need or inclination to be on one's best behavior. Whiting and Whiting (1975) stressed that an environment such as theirs often militates against behavior and relationships commonly found in the classroom or the home. Nelson (1994) who wrote "The Stronger Women Get, The More Men Love Football" said: "Within a sports arena, a man can express racist, sexist and homophobic attitudes not tolerated in many other parts of society" (p. 7).

As expected, I collected an enormous amount of text. I found helpful Oakley's (1981) book on interviewing women, particularly when she suggested that interviewing has been a masculine paradigm but traits such as sensitivity and emotionality although culturally viewed as feminine know no gender boundaries. She further pointed out that in interviewing, there is "no intimacy without reciprocity" (p. 49). My natural inclination to forego the traditional hierarchical interviewing style was positively reinforced by the participants. That is, I was not solely a questioner and note-taker but in my estimation, an involved participant. The participants were candid, graphic and insightful. In the interviews, I spontaneously showed my human side too, answering their questions and expressing my feelings when I felt appropriate. For me, it was important to deal with the student-athletes as people. Still, I proceeded cautiously and continued reviewing the literature on qualitative research for reinforcement and confirmation.
Throughout, the emphasis upon understanding and dealing with participants on an individual basis rather than merely recording their responses was foremost. The mere presence of a tape recorder and my furious notetaking did not appear to deter us from having full and natural conversations that I believe went beyond the "I pose a question, he gives an answer" scenario. At the start of each subsequent meeting, the participants were asked if they had additional thoughts from the previous discussion. They were also aware that they could review the accumulated transcriptions and listen to the audiotapes at any time.

The interviews revealed both shared events and differing experiences in student-athletes' trajectories stretching from Pop Warner days to the present. They revealed information about each student-athlete's family and his relation to it, and was an opportunity to explore the student-athlete's decision-making and to hear reasons for particular choices having been made. While reading through the interview transcriptions, I cross-checked these with my field notes and other documents to compare the different perceptions of an event held by different participants and to obtain a degree of authenticity regarding the event, through triangulation.

The questions asked during the personal interviews with student-athletes were posed in fairly spontaneous fashion and not packaged by categories. However, they tended to revolve around these four broad areas:
1) Being an intercollegiate student-athlete
2) Being a football player on a Division I college team
3) Being a college student
4) Being an adult person with goals and aspiration

The first set of questions centered around student-athletes' lives in general. I got information on their backgrounds and interests and then their lives in the college environment; their adjustments, their classes, their school schedule, their professors and their academic concerns. The second set of questions dealt with playing football, the daily practices, team meetings, their feelings about playing college level football, their affiliations on the team, their conflicts and more. The third set of questions examined their interpersonal relationships within the campus community, their dealings with regular students, and their thoughts on academic life. The fourth set of questions examined the student-athletes' adult experiences or forecasts.

Some earlier research on student-athletes indicated that graduating from college and entering into professional careers ranked below the priority of becoming a professional sports player. (Slade, 1991). Short-term and long-term goals, financial survival issues and other decision-making questions were covered. Mixed into all the questions were inquiries intended to hone in on how the student-athlete functions in the college and athletic contexts. I was interested in matters such as role differentiations, i.e., their notions
about their academic roles, their social roles, their athletics roles and their views of self.

Participant Profiles

A description of each participant, condensed from their autobiographical sketches and written documents, my notes about our first contact and their verbatim words about themselves are next.

"Hunter" is a 22 year old junior offensive player (Quarterback, Slot Back). Born in Torrance, CA. Comes from family of eight children, ages 33 to 21; is seventh child in "close knit" African-American family where "we loved to sit around during holidays and reminisce". Criminology major. Listed in 1992 UN Football Media Guide as 6'1", 192 lbs. Was student body president at Jordan High School in Los Angeles. Voted Most Popular Guy, Coolest and Most Talkative.

My First Meeting with "Hunter": He was prompt for the 1st interview and came neatly dressed in tailored shorts, sport pullover, large gold chain, earphone draped around his neck and sneakers. Hunter was well-mannered and spoke in a soft but confident tone of voice. He smiled easily and seemed to enjoy being interviewed. He listened intently to my explanation of research interest and readily consented to
participate. His size was not imposing, yet he was muscular and well-built and looked the part of a physically fit college athlete.

"Hunter's" Self-description: "Normal person, lives like a hermit, has obsession of liking to be by myself. No drugs, funny, sensitive, humble, confident, an isolate person, don't party".

"Doc" is a 21 year old junior offensive player (Tackle). Born in Honolulu, HI. Moved to Hayward, CA at age two and then to San Jose shortly after and has lived there since then, except to leave home for college. Father married twice so has one full brother and two half siblings. Is Hawaiian/Caucasian ancestry. Majoring in Chemistry but started off in Engineering. Plans to apply to medical school. 1993 Football Media Guide listed him as 6'3" tall, 270 lbs. Was a Scholar-Athlete in high school and also at the university. Serves on the university's Student-Athlete Advisory Council.

My First Meeting with "Doc": The initial meeting time had to be rescheduled. "Doc" called a couple of hours after the appointed time apologizing that his best friend from high school called from Japan and he got crunched for time. When we finally did meet, he rushed in from a break during his Chemistry Lab. He explained he had to return there in an hour to check on his experiment.
"Doc" was a friendly and articulate football athlete. He had short brown hair, and a fair, lightly freckled complexion. He had bright eyes and an easy-going social grace for someone his size. Everything about him seemed big: his hands, his grip, his shoes and especially his thighs. His dress when we met was casual consisting of tee shirt, shorts and sneakers. When I explained my study intentions, he listened with interest and even asked questions about the degree I was seeking and about my reasons for selecting football over other sports. He was thorough in getting information before agreeing to participate.

"Doc's" Self-description: "Enjoy sports, hobbies are going to the beach, nightclubs. Have a coin collection from when I was a kid although I don't think it's worth much". (Sheepish, seemed to struggle for words).

"Smooth Red" is a 22 year old black junior defensive secondary player (Defensive Back, Strong Safety). Born in Akron, Ohio. Moved to Los Angeles at age seven with mother who was a single parent. Was academic casualty (Proposition 48) his first year. Majoring in Sociology. The 1992 Football Media Guide noted "Smooth Red" was "an extremely talented player with a lot of speed and potential" Also was a Super Prep All-American and was his Valley's Player-of-the-Year in high school.
My First Meeting with "Smooth Red": He was dressed in a flashy and colorful sweatsuit with a rope gold chain. He looked slight and wiry (listed in football records as 5'11", 177 lbs.) with a solemn, intense look. However, when we exchanged greeting I noted he had an infectious smile. He did look like his twenty two years had not been easy, but his answers reflected good and bad experiences. When the project was explained to him, he immediately affirmed his interest and involvement. He spoke a lot with his hands, often using them to emphasize his statements.

"Smooth Red's Self-description: "I'm moody, confident person".

"Flea" is a 20 year old Sophomore offensive player (Wide Receiver, Special Teams). From San Dimas, CA. Liberal arts major. Goal is to get into Business school. Now an only child; brother died August 3, 1991 of brain tumor. Redshirted his first college year. Of French, Comanche and Cherokee descents. Said he chose to attend this university "because of the up and coming football program, the coach, and the environment".

My First Meeting with "Flea": He strode confidently into our meeting room without knocking and said "I'm ____". Flea who is very thin and wiry (listed as 5'9", 153 lbs.) looked like a high school student until I heard his voice. It
is deep, resonant and melodious with added flavor of cockiness at times. He talked very fast, almost incessantly, squirmed constantly, and seemed to fit the word "hyperactive" very well.

"Flea’s Self-description: "Not a quitter, determined, want to be successful, fast. Likeable. Easy to get along with. Matured guy"."

"Bull" is 27 years old and a senior. Completed football career in 1992 as a Defensive Lineman and earlier as an Inside Linebacker. Born in American Samoa. Came to this state at age four. Family consists of seventeen children; father married three times. Moved to San Francisco with mother and stepfather and lived there for seven years. Transferred to this university as a junior with scholarship to play football. Majoring in Secondary Education. Doing his practice teaching at McKinley High School. Lives with his girlfriend and five year old son.

My First Meeting with "Bull": We met during his lunch hour at the high school he was doing his practice teaching. The setting was at a outdoor picnic table under a tree. His subject area is Physical Education so he was dressed in typical coaching garb: shorts, white school tee shirt, whistle and sneakers. "Bull" although out of playing football by the time this meeting took place, looked intimidating
physically where the slogan "no pain, no gain" would fit him well. Yet, by contrast he was very soft-spoken and polite, matured and goal-oriented. Because his football playing days were over, he was able to be reflective about them, saying that although his college student status was a priority now, his football memories were very special. He seemed very happy that his experiences would be covered to the degree I proposed.


"Pepe" is a 21 year old Junior. Is a Special Teams player (Kick-off/Punt Return Blocker; Back-up Quarterback). Born in Oceanside, CA. Lived in this state since age two when mother divorced and returned home. Is Mexican, Hawaiian, Filipino, Spanish, English, Chinese and American Indian descents. Was a premature baby. Sociology major. Walked on to football team. Graduate of McKinley High School.

My First Meeting with "Pepe": He was big and well-built (listed as 6'1", 220 lbs.) with a spiked and slicked back hairdo and a gold earring on his left earlobe. Although his dress was that of a college student, his shorts and collared pullover were trendy and name brands. He wore thick, rubber sandals with straps. His roommate is "Hunter" so he had some
information about this study and was eager to share his stories. His appearance, together with his assertive carriage and way of speaking, suggested he was clearly concerned about how he was viewed by others and still confident enough to be direct and forthright about his views and place on the football team. "Pepe" was very comfortable talking and was descriptive about his experiences. He especially liked the tape recorder and wanted to make sure his voice volume was appropriate.

*"Pepe's" Self-description:* "I'm confident about myself. Just the way I hold myself. Everything I do I try to do the best I can and I try not to sell myself short of anything and the reason I say that is I never want to leave myself in doubt of anything. You know when certain situations, certain thing that happen. Sometimes I feel try-if it doesn't work out at least I know what it is.

I'm funny at times. I have a sense of humor, I like to joke around. I'm real open minded. I guess you could say like my Mom always told me, "______, you're 21, going on 31" meaning since I didn't have a Dad, I had to grow up before my time in a sense. Being street-wise you know this and that. I feel I'm a caring person. I look at how other people feel and get a taste for myself. I look at how other people like to be treated. I put myself in their position to just "say what if I was in their position" before I come to a decision.
I'm competitive being a football player. I'm competitive not only in sports but in everything I do whether it's in a relationship with somebody or trying to get something I want as far as job, getting a grade or trying to get a girl.

I'm a very curious person. You know I like to know what's going on around me. You know I try to keep in touch with what's going on around me, in school too, you know what I mean. I don't say this to be conceited but I think I'm a well-rounded person.

"B.C." is 23 years old. Former offensive player (Center) who ended his UH football career after the 1992 season. Received his Masters degree in Political Science from this university in 1993 so had the distinction of playing his last season as a graduate student. Born and raised in this particular state, attended public schools and was a scholarship player for four years. Still indirectly involved in university's football through media work. Won the school's most prestigious annual athletic award, the Jack Bonham Award.

My First Meeting with "B.C.": From the first moments of our meeting, I felt he epitomized the well-rounded college student, one who seemed to have handled his student-athlete roles well. He spoke well, was well-mannered, was analytical and a pleasant person. Although broad and muscular, his size was not overpowering as what and how he said things were well-
addressed and articulate. He smiled and laughed easily even to some of his faults or not-so-pleasant experiences. He had a quiet confidence, yet his fingernails appeared bitten to the quick. "B.C." was well-groomed and had a neat, short haircut. He was very eager to participate in the study, asking after our first meeting if his answers were in line with my expectations. My reply was they definitely were if they had sense and meaning to him.

"B.C.'s" Self-description: "Uhm, I guess, the first thing I would use to describe myself is shy. I guess I'm kinda shy and once I get to know somebody I'll talk more freely but I'm kinda shy. I'll kinda hold opinions to myself. I'm not really you know, verbal about it. I like to think that when I want something I'll go get it and that you know, if I really want something I'll work hard enough to get it but I've been proven wrong on occasion but-other than that that's about it".

"Knight" is 19 years old and a one year letterman. He redshirted his freshman year and started as offensive lineman for the football team as a redshirt freshman. He is 6'2" and 275 lbs. He is considered "local" of Hawaiian and Portuguese ancestry. A private school product, Knight was an All-State lineman during his senior year. His father graduated from the same high school but played baseball. According to the 1994
Football Media Guide, Knight was recruited by Oregon State, Washington State, Mississippi State, Brigham Young and Idaho State.

My First Meeting with "Knight": Although I had not met "Knight" before, I felt I knew him because I had seen him playing baseball during his seventh and eighth grade years at the secondary school he attended. Back then, he was husky but not exceptionally tall player. Now his size is very noticeable. We met in the weight room office where he engulfed the standard sized chair he sat on but seemed to envelope the tiny room too. He had just come from a doctor's appointment 15 minutes late with apologies for his tardiness. I found Knight to be soft-spoken in voice but strong in convictions and with spontaneity that belied his stoic demeanor. He did not appear to be nervous, made good eye contact and was animated in facial expressions as well as his answers. I found him refreshing because he was articulate yet not trite or polished.

"Knight's" Self Description: "I'm a cocky person in a way. And I do feel good about myself so. But I don't think I go overboard in that but in a way it gets me ahead in my sport in every day. But at the same time I wouldn't want to scare anyone off to think that I'm too good for anybody because I'm not. But I feel I'm a pretty good friend and would help if anyone needed something".
As was indicated earlier, the participants, all football players were representative of several subgroups. A general description of the subgroups and specific profiles of the participants are provided.

By initial dissection, the football team had two major subgroups: the offense and the defense. Each participant also represented a position subgroup within the football team. The position subgroups included Quarterback, Receiver, Special Team, Defensive Line, Offensive Line and Secondary. Additionally, the lines of definition centered around first year players (the Rookies) to those held out of competition for a year (the Redshirts) to second, third and fourth year players (the Veterans). According to the participants, besides the structured or arranged associations, there were informal subgroups of a loosely arranged nature that may have been subscribed by race or ethnicity, geographic origins, marital status and even hobbies or interests.

From their reflections, it was established that student-athletes' acculturation into a Division I college football team was mainly through the core group of their position, a unit they interfaced most often with. Each position subgrouping consists of at least four (4) players as with the Quarterbacks and over twelve (12) with Special Teams. The Offensive and Defensive Lines and the Defensive Secondary have
eight (8) to ten (10) members each with the Defensive Ends, Wide Receivers and Slotbacks having about four (4) assignees.

Players like Hunter and Flea belong to several position groups because they can play different positions in a game. Hunter for example is a quarterback, slotback and punt return specialist. Flea plays wide receiver, slot back and returns kickoffs. Their intertwining within the team and across subgroups are more fluid as they cross several position lines than Doc, B.C. or Knight who anchor with the offensive line position subgroup only. Smooth Red roams the defensive backfield and has had strong safety and cornerback assignments. Bull says: I've always been on the defensive side of the ball, even as a kid.

I discovered there is more, much more to the assignments given players in their respective positions than the normal spectator would know about. For example, Hunter and Pepe mentioned that the quarterback is the equivalent to a general in battle or a conductor in an orchestra.

Hunter: Quarterback has to know a lot. Must be solid - make the right reads, run best play against the defense.

Pepe: Lot of people think you go in and do whatever. You have the stereotype of an athlete being big and stupid! You gotta have some kind of head on your shoulders to memorize all this stuff.

As to the widespread claim among offensive linemen that they are the unsung heroes of the football team, B.C., Knight and Doc readily agreed, to the point where they separately
echoed this notion without any prompting. Becker & Geer (1970) labeled this cultural property as an example of verbal artifacts whereas Kuh et al (1991) based on their research calls it a term of endearment. Louis (1983) said: "Subcultures are distinctive social units...what we are doing together in this particular group, appropriate ways of doing in and among members of the group...and languages and other symbolic vehicles for expressing common understandings" (p. 39).

The participants perceived their own position as important to team success but also gave more than tacit acknowledgment to the offensive line's slogan of "unsung heroes". Hunter gave credit by saying: "They make the rest of us look good but they don't get the credit or the print".

Knight illuminated on being an unsung hero with the following:

...it's something like in a game there's about 70-80 plays--some you use over and over. For the offensive lineman, one play could have 5 different ways to block it--depends on what kind of defense you're running--what opponent you're going to play against--so I mean there's a lot of thinking that's involved. It's not just going out there and hit each other. It's like it gets down to how technical where the coaches yell at you and say "where's your head to the opponent's body". It's just instinctive and a lot of things happen so quickly. One play to next in less than a minute, so you have to think play to play clearly and logically.

Doc made no bones about his confidence level with being an offensive lineman:
...we're the smartest guys on the team because we have to remember all the plays, especially because of the triple option.

The Meaning of Being A Student-Athlete:
Details and Highlights

One of the concepts most applicable to symbolic interactionism is the study of the individual and interpersonal relationships. Herbert Blumer (1969), a prominent proponent of this approach asserted that shared patterns of attribution and self-reflections form the basis for an individual creating his/her social meanings. These self-perceptions vary and change; its salience and prominence corresponding to a given situation or interaction. According to Cooley (1962) and Mead (1934) "the self is the thinking and feeling being connecting the various roles and identities individuals put forth in different situations ". (p. 29).

As the following sections show, the role of relationships for one and the gendered nature of those relationships for another began to emerge as their involvement in football increased. The participants found correlative factors attached to their skills in playing sports. That is, the better they were at sports, the more interest and admiration there were from other males.

The fact that they are Division I college athletes epitomized for them "making it to the second highest level."
In their eyes, the highest level of play would be as a professional athlete. The participants all resoundingly agreed that reaching even the college level of play was not a fluke or luck alone but their dedicated toil. For me, the fact that this particular sampling of participants was playing Division I college football was an assumption-cultural. I came to this conclusion because surprisingly, these young men were not all "career" athletes. Of the eight participants, only three played organized football before reaching their teenage years while the remaining five said they were freshmen and sophomores in high school when they turned out. Yet seven of them were given scholarships to enroll at this university; the eighth, Pepe got his scholarship in his 4th and last year of college eligibility. It was apparent then, that the majority of the participants reached "the second highest level of playing football" without the grooming of Pop Warner fundamentals.

3-Point Stance: The Player, His Family and His Peers

In the interviews with student-athletes, they seemed to put strong emphasis on receiving social validation for playing sports from others, especially family. Those who played organized athletics since their elementary school years said they developed a conception of themselves as "good athletes" and were identified as such by parents, friends, coaches and
the community they participated in. The high school years were referenced by each participant as "real good--where I pretty much was the big man on campus". Eitzen's (1975) study of adolescent culture found that athletic prowess was still the single most important factor for status in high school male peer groups in the mid 1970s.

The three participants who started playing organized sports in their elementary school years said they found they acquired a certain status in class and on the playground. They mentioned that this meant almost automatic captaincy selection whenever teams were chosen in class physical education periods or informal pick-up games before and after school. It seems their early identified athletic prowess on the playing field followed their ascent up the school ladder. They said their reputations preceded them so each year even if there was a new mix of students in the class, Bull and others were already exalted. As the interviews momentarily moved from their college athlete years back to their youth, discussion on peer relationships and even student-teacher relationships surfaced. For one thing, the participants, Bull, Knight and Smooth Red noted their "Top Gun" or "Smooth, can I be on your team?" status made them more confident that they indeed were "good athletes". They identified factors such as their size, maturity, physical skills and even fighting ability as influencing classmates and even teachers to praise them.
Snyder (1986) discussed role identity using the symbolic interactionist lens saying:

one's identity is invested in a role. Consequently,...the depth, intensity and continuity of one's identity invested in a role reflect the level of commitment that in turn serves to maintain an adherence to the role—including the expenditure of time, energy or other valuables to the role (p. 212).

It was easy for these youthful student-athletes to equate esteem, popularity and even adulation with success at sports. Smooth Red especially felt the playing field was "my ticket to being somebody". He said his validating experiences, that is, those activities that he regarded as personally rewarding took place playing football. They fueled his confidence as an athlete and whetted his desire to "show 'em what I got".

Bull on the other hand, did not like football when he first started as a 6th grader. He said since he was big he was placed on the defensive line and "I was not very successful the first two years". When asked his reasons for playing at a young age, he replied: "I was pushed to play by relatives who thought it a tradition to play. After that, they didn't have to because I really loved it and was very motivated to play". Like Smooth Red, he began to be looked up to by others and this encouraged him more. The capstone for Bull will be when his young son joins sports "because I want him to get the same benefits that I've had...". Knight's first experience playing football was short-lived, lasting one week. He quit because he wanted to be with the neighborhood friends who were not playing football. He was nine years old
at that time. His second try at football two years later, has become a career endeavor lasting over eight years.

Doc and Pepe were the only two participants who did not have the preadolescent experience of playing football because they exceeded the weight limitation for their age. In their words, they were "real chubby" and "fat like you wouldn't believe!". Pepe said: "I was fat and short and I was never the eye of anybody but was just this fat, little kid". Instead he played soccer for nine years. Doc's reasons were multiple: "I was always too heavy for the Pop Warner or kids leagues. Also my mom did not want me to play football". B.C. did not start playing football until he was a sophomore in high school when he said: "I was in ROTC and my friend talked me into coming out for the team...".

More Childhood Recollections

As the participants traveled down their respective memory lanes, beside school and peer relationships, they described in varying degree, their families and influences of their home environment. Chickering (1984) and Havighurst (1972) acknowledged that the examination of childhood highlights is congruent with understanding human development as a process that begins from infancy and continues throughout one's life span.
In the first series of interviews, several of the student-athletes made reference to their early childhood life as preparation to play Division I college football. It seems that for them, looking back at their growing years, there were impacting connections with their current experiences; "My mother always worked, in fact she still has three jobs now" or "I grew up in Watts—not too good an area" or "My parents came to every game my brother and I played" to "My older brother was playing football...and I always looked up to my brother so I thought that was the thing to do". Thus, to understand the significance of their college experience and football achievements, it becomes important to look at their childhood for any major antecedental patterns.

Smooth Red hardly recalls when his Mom was not working to make ends meet. His admiration for her work ethic runs very deep as he believes she prepared him for the realities of life. He says he "didn't get street-wise for nothing". His goals are clear and the main one is to reach that "highest level of football" so that he can get his Mom out of poverty. Yet, his early years fraught with matter-of-fact descriptions of seeing friends dying in gang warfare and drug problems, leave him no recourse but to say "life is very unfair" and to aspire for status through his athletic ability.

"Letting my family down" is something Knight cannot ever see himself doing again. With chagrin, he explained that when he chose playing with neighborhood kids over playing Pee Wee
football, his "Dad was depressed and hurt". He realizes that what probably affected his family the most was his quitting after only a one week commitment. Although he continued to play Little League baseball during that time which softened his quitting football a little, he is resolved not to make another hasty decision.

Knight, Smooth Red, and Bull experienced competition at a young age and learned that sports of various kinds are the avenue for recognition from parents, siblings and peers. Thus, as Knight divulged, athletes, particularly youngsters, are not entirely free to establish their own standards that fit individual interests and abilities nor can they remain immune to judgments of parents, teachers and peers.

A basic premise of symbolic interactionism explains that meanings are redefined and modified through social interaction. The student-athletes in this study indicated that their social networks consisting of family, friends, fellow players, coaches, the media, the school and the general community have configured to a significant degree in their decision-making and experiences.

X's and O's in the Football Kindred

On the football team, it seems friendships turn on many different axes. For one thing, student-athletes enter a
football team from many walks of life. Earlier, I mentioned that on this university's team, their diversification included ethnicity, family demographics, geographic origins, length of time on the team, whether they are on scholarship or walk-ons. The participants frequently mentioned their position grouping as their nucleus, i.e. teammates they get to know best. They said forging these alliances come naturally, especially given the amount of time spent with each other. One said: "Individual groups are tighter than the group as a whole". It came as a surprise to me however, that all eight participants professed to not knowing all their fellow teammates by name. Beyond recognizing that they belong to the university's football team, they said remembering 130+ names and faces is a monumental task. Yet they were quick to add that their mission as a team was not in the least diminished by not knowing everyone's names. B.C. perhaps summed everyone's thoughts on this matter best when he said:

I think you know everybody, just to a point. As far as knowing everybody's stories, you don't yeah. And you have the cliques, like the walk-ons hang out and you know. But you know uh--I forget his name but he--I was reading a quote that he had in the papers--that magic, that special something that comes together when you know all the players are striving for one goal--it's magical yeah. And it's something that you know you sweat, you fight and you all cry together, you know, it's hard to what is that?--it's hard to duplicate or replicate outside of athletics. I don't know, it probably happens in other sports too, but I can only talk about football.

The consistent point made by all the participants was the cohesion they said they felt with the student-athletes
assigned to the same position. I found their commentary fascinating in that each prefaced their explanations with a caveat, i.e., their ability to get along with others was intact, irregardless of race, where players were from or the length of time in the program. However, Pepe put his thoughts this way:

It's more by position I'd say. Yeah because we have team meetings, position meetings and we're around each other more. In hotels when we travel as well as here because over here, when we're here we always stay at a hotel the night before the game.

I asked: "With the position people?"

Pepe continued:

Yeah that's it and the guy you always travel with on the road is always your roommate where you go so you're always around the same people all the time and I guess you know like we can kid around more--joke with each other. You know it's more a closeness thing but like I still got close friends that I'm not with in the position. Basically, being around like the quarterbacks, I guess you learn their ways and how they are. And where with the things they do, that would get to normal people, people that are around would not get to you because you know that's how they are. You know like with Hunter, I'll be home, music on and everything, he'll come and tell me 'what you Mexican!' see he'll kid me around being Mexican right? but see I know that's Hunter so you know so I just laugh at him and it doesn't get to me and after it gets kinda funny and I tease him about being from Watts and stuff like that. See we just laugh about it and that's the good thing about it. And uhmm--I guess in a sense too, you get to relate these people. You get to like them and understand their ways but at the same time you also gain this respect for each other, and I think that's real important. I've learned that--sometimes--I think respect is a lot because sometimes you're not going to like a person for what they do or what they are but if you respect them, that's something real different. Like my high school coach, I didn't like him but I respected him and I think that's all he wanted was respect. I'm not--you know what I mean by the difference yeah? There's a closeness and as a
person I don't expect people to like me, I don't expect you know, they can think whatever they want of me but to respect me that's what I want. Hunter, (another position player) and (another position player) they know me.

Knight also spoke on the popularity of position-generated relationships and also clarified identifying with the whole team:

Yeh, I mean it's not like we have anything against anybody else. It's just that you feel comfortable with that group of guys and it's not like you don't know the other guys but you just feel more comfortable with those guys and they understand you. Because you're with 'em more than anybody else on the team, you know what I mean. You work together, your friendships get a lot more deeper at your position.

In his study of small group dynamics, Widmeyer (1986) attributed the process to be tenuous and volatile for the most part because of the continual ebb and flow of membership. Thus he said: "...knowing about the stages that groups pass through could explain why relationships between variables such as cohesion and success are strong in some situations and weak in others" (p. 181). Bull unwittingly described a confirming situation among his experiences. He and Smooth Red played defense; one on the defensive line, the other in the defensive secondary. One was a senior and the other was a redshirt freshman. This is what Bull said:

... as the years go by, you have a new class coming in so for instance, there's a popular guy now--Smooth Red, when I was up there, I never knew him. He was a redshirt freshman, something like that. When I got out, Smooth Red, Smooth Red. I don't know because they really work you during practice time. You have your Scouts and you have your Starters. So you're around with people who are starters more. You don't really get to know incoming freshmen that well.
Melnick (1986) reviewed Widmeyer's work and targets social interaction among group members as the key element in effective interpersonal attraction, team performance, group performance, clique formation and even coach-athlete compatibility.

The local and newer participants, alluding to some acclimation factors, reported that they continued to "hang" with players from their high school because they felt comfortable with them and "because they know my ways". These times and situations were not many however, as their free time was quite limited, necessitating more opportunities for new liaisons. Still, when the high school buddies "hung out", they said their prior knowledge and common experiences with each other were common bonds to their charter membership in their particular subculture.

Just as childhood memories are meaningful to many, so are high school relationships. As Knight attested, the football affiliations, particularly for adolescents become long-standing. They are continually fueled by mutual interests, lifestyles and common goals. In his case, because he came into this college football program with five (5) others from his high school, he remembers cohering for support as a way to alleviate the intimidation and insecurities of entering a different level of play.

Flea cited with delight, a relational tie he established with a fellow recruit before both had even decided to attend
this university. He said he came on a recruiting trip with R.B. when both were high school seniors from two areas of California. Three years later, they continue to value their friendship and the occasion that originally brought them together. "R.B. and me came on this recruiting trip together. Even though he plays defense and I play offense and we go against each other every day at practice, we're good friends".

Doc spoke about long-term friendships outside of football stressing that football players are also like regular people in that they do maintain other close friendships apart from the sports arena. He added that the sports world is structured and demanding and therefore tends to be ubiquitous at times but for him he counts those relationships outside of the football team as important too. One friend is someone he has known since both were four years old. They have gone separate paths but Doc said: "He's a Marine in Japan who may be transferred to (this city) so I'm really looking forward to this".

Ye Olde Pecking Order

It is common knowledge that the success of intercollegiate athletics at major universities is determined primarily by their win-loss records and gate receipts. Coaches then, have responsibility for the team's performance and are constantly motivated to get the most they can out of
individual players. For football, given the sheer numbers that they work with and the constitution of intercollegiate athletics as an organization, a hierarchical modus operandi has evolved and is being maintained. The participants in this study accept this as the way things are or the way things get done, a basic organizational culture mindset. According to Snyder (1986) one characteristic of symbolic interactionism is that "an athletic organization is not a static structure 'out there'" (p. 223). Instead, there are many negotiable factors such as power, money, skill, conflict and personal identity that determine the social context that athletes function in.

One of the earliest ways, the participants experienced hierarchy or order was through a classification system. For example, they said the differentiation between players on scholarship and players who walked-on is physically, structurally and functionally evident. There are also subtle delineations made that are related to matters like longevity in the program or categorization by depth charting.

Perhaps emulating the highest level of sports, professional football, I found the class system operating full tilt too at the college level. There are several situations that define their deliberate segmentation. One example is the annual summer camps. First year players called rookies or new recruits show up at least two days earlier to start their conditioning, physicals and other tests. Then the oldtimers or veteran players begin the same regimen. Participants say
this separate groupings are designed to maintain order for the staff to accomplish the tasks involved and to space the workload of orienting the mass of players by coaches and staff.

The participants mentioned the locker assignments are segregated except for isolated cases. That is, the scholarship players are at the front section, an area closest to the entrance. The walk-ons, players who essentially are paying for their schooling and participating in football without an administrative invitation are assigned lockers in the back section of the room. Pepe, the only one in this study who experienced walk-on status expressed himself this way:

You know there's a lot of walk-ons. I don't know if I told you this but they separate the scholarship players from the walk-ons. I'm in the back locker room. Okay. Scholarship players are in the front locker room. Okay. Now so we have a couple of walk-ons in the front but the majority are all scholarship.

B.C. on the pecking order:

You know the pecking order of course, on the bottom you're going to have the walk-ons you know, the people who are trying to get the opportunity versus the scholarship players. I mean they're divided--they have separate locker rooms, the walk-ons have a locker room across--down the hall and the scholarship players have their own locker room and you know I guess there is a pecking order. Then you have the starters, the second team, like I said the cliques on the team. You know it kinda crosses those boundaries too yeah.

A common practice used by Athletic Administration is to request the Student Housing Office to assign players in the
same position as roommates or campus apartment mates. This often is at the behest of players themselves and coaches who have reasons of their own. The rationale according to Hunter is to furnish ample opportunities to talk football, to go over particular plays and to jell as teammates through their living arrangements. One year all of Hunter's roommates were all quarterbacks:

We're all quarterbacks and we're very close knit. We work out together. They all go out together. I don't go with 'em. They all go out to a club or something. You know, they know me, they respect me but they say "you know Hunter ain't going" because I don't go out. They'll ask me but they'll joke although they know I'm not going. We get along real well. It's unusual because a lot of teams on the other areas of the U.S.)--they're there on the same position but they don't talk or nothing. It's different. I don't know why it's different. We get along, we play the same position. We support each other you know.

Pepe and Hunter were not scheduled to room together, even though they played the same position. They believe the fact that Pepe was non-scholarship bore on the pairings. By some wheeling and dealing, they feel they made it a reality. Pepe's words are graphic and exemplifies more about the compartmentalization.

See Hunter was originally living in (dorm name), the round dorms and he was going to stay there but he got moved to the apartments and he didn't want to stay there, so when I came back for Fall semester and I came to register for my dorm, they didn't have me on the list for some reason, cuz I wasn't on scholarship at that time. See when you're not on scholarship you take care of your housing and everything by yourself so I got into (another dorm name), a temporary room that wasn't occupied, moved into there and they promised that first-come, first-served cuz what happened they put me on the wrong list. See there's two lists, the list on the first day and the second day. The first day is the
athletes, the athletes can check in before everybody. Then the next day... You know they put me to a room nobody checked in, it was a spare room. I had my choice of room so I chose the room in (dorm name) and then _ Hunter didn't want to stay where he was. If you have a mutual agreement which you want to switch rooms, you can do that.

Do they put you with regular students too?

No, they put you with, they're not athletes sometimes but they have some relationship to athletics like the basketball coach's son. They mix football, basketball players. Even though you write down you want to be with a certain guy, there's no guarantee. I think you want somebody you can relate to. I would never want to be in a room with all football players. The studying, whatever and... uhm... stuff like that.

Rank distinctions that are played out between veterans and rookies provide scintillating if not disparaging aspects of their football experiences. The freshmen are immediately aware of their low status on the team. They claim in a matter of months, they went from being a high school star, respected and adulated by others to an unknown person, not yet accorded a "player" labeling by the rest. For them, the realization, mainly the urgency to "fit into the team" concept and "to pay my dues" just like the others did invoke their immediate attention and action. Knight expressed the move from high school to college football this way:

Small, I felt kinda lost. I felt like... out of high school I was somebody. I was somebody that everybody knew, little above. But coming over here, it's just brought me down to earth, gave me the sense that you're nobody over here and like that. It felt weird too, because a lot of guys that I looked up to, like guys were playing at this university already and now I'm on the same football team and going practice with them, so it was in a sense it felt weird because you looked up to them and now you're on the same team. But then it made me feel good that I accomplished something. I'm with
people I always looked up to and now I'm where I always wanted to be, you know what I mean?

Knight continued by analyzing the differences between playing college football and high school football:

Well the competitors that you play against are a lot more experienced, they're bigger, quicker. Like in high school I used to always look at guys and then if they're big and you know like for example the experience I had when I first came, those guys are big, period! So I thought they're probably slower than the smaller guys but the bigger guys are just as quick as all the other guys. And this, they're a lot stronger. Also this is more a mental game in college. Just like in high school it's a little more physical, I mean in the sense of physically like, it's a lot more mental in college. You have to think a lot more about what your opponent is going to do and what you're going to do to counter opponents' moves. In high school I noticed I used to just play, just play, you know what I mean it's just physical, you don't have to think about what that guy is going to do or what you're going to do, and in college you have to think about it because not all the time are you going to be physically dominant over the other guy so you know you have to be physically quicker and after that you have to do other things and think what he is doing.

Pepe on the topic of freshman memories sagely said:

See when I came here I knew it wouldn't be no cakewalk. I knew it was no cakewalk and a lot of guys coming here think it is because they were the stars in high school and when you go to college it's a different level. Like I never had honors as far as All-Star, All-State or anything. My team was a losing team, basically when you have a losing team, even when you have outstanding players you don't get recognized.....like I came here with no known credentials compared to everybody else but I can compete just as well as them.

Flea chose to recall being a recruit through the experiences of his roommate and a friend, both freshmen players. He said he does not remember his own first year of
college football very well due to a tragedy in his family that occurred just weeks before fall semester began.

Flea said:

Yeah, one's a kicker and the other is a linebacker and the kicker played this year as a true freshman so he got to see, he got to--he had a good time because he got to play but my other friend, the linebacker, he hated it, everyday he wanted to go home, because he wasn't playing. Okay, he came to be a star like he was in Arizona. Here he was a nothing you know, he went through the thing where 'coaches don't like me and they never say anything to me', 'ignoring me' and I felt that too but I didn't care. I just wanted to be here. And my first semester I just went out and I practiced everyday and I didn't complain and I just ah--you know I was just there. I didn't really think about it. You know my mind wasn't there but my body was, that kind of thing.

Smooth Red, whom I noted was very succinct in his talk simply said of his first days as a rookie: "I was quiet as a church mouse. Nervous, wanted to show my stuff".

B.C. asserts the following happened just as he described and truly represented for him his initiation into the college football hierarchy. He said this incident typified an "us-them" posture or rites of passage that made him want to persevere even more. This is what happened:

I was with (N.K., a second year player, still considered a rookie). Well, I remember the first time you know, he played for (a local powerhouse football school). I heard about him. I never met 'em and we had our first lunch together. Yeah, we sat together and we were both on the Scout Team, you know the scrubs and I guess, (star quarterback) at the time came up and we were sitting together and he came up and said to me "Oh, what position do you play?" and I answered "offensive line" and at that time I was 215 lbs. and he laughed! And he laughed at me right and said "right!", he said something like that and he said "From now on I want you to call me
Mr. (his last name)". I said "Oh whatever" and (N.K.)
I don't know he said something softly "we go beat
'em up, lick 'em" or something and then after that N.K.
and I really bonded yeah. We thought 'Hey, this guy!'
you know what I mean and so we kinda got a chuckle at
that you know but N.K.'s personality, he's kinda quiet
like me and then something like that sets him off and
you know he'll go get it too.

Elliot (1986) reflected on the dual aspects of group
consciousness saying in human groupings, a sense of we-ness
and they-ness exist. He said labels or symbols identifying an
individual or a group are important for signifying what people
are to others. Using his characterization then, labels of
distinctiveness in football are terms I have heard the
participants use such as "the vets", "babes", "the bruddahs".

The converse view of group incorporation of new and old
players is that held by the oldtimers or veterans. The notion
of "paying dues" and "taking the usual lumps", much like
hazing rituals of fraternity initiates serve as subtle but
consequential measuring sticks that veterans use to gauge how
rookies will fare. I asked Flea for his thoughts on being a
veteran dealing with fledglings:

It’s not going to--as they come in I’ll be there no
matter what, if they need something. But I’m not going
to baby them and that’s what they want. Yeah, that’s
what they want—to be babied—and this irritates me a lot
because they come in and think they’re the best. They
have all the stories they bring, all their turf videos
and "look, this is what I did in high school" and it
doesn't matter. This is a whole new level
(emphatically). It's different game now. You're
going to see guys who done more than you, who are better
than you, faster than you, bigger than you, who hit
harder than you so you gotta start over again. You're a
freshman. You gotta remember that. You're a freshman.
That's what they call a freshman. But if you're
fortunate enough to be as good as you are your senior year in college, you might go to the NFL. Only 25% of all incoming freshmen go into the NFL so it's a slim number.

Doc saw rookies as:

New face. Don't know techniques. At meetings might be goofing off more than other athletes. Not as focused...

And finally, Smooth Red said:

When you're a rookie it's harder because you're learning. And a veteran builds more tolerance with the coaches. You know and they know how much you can give and expect.

Pepe provided an example of an unwritten but nevertheless consistently arranged scheme that involved the young players:

Usually a freshman, when they first time travel on the traveling team, they're the guys that carry the video cameras...I never had to do that but a lot of guys have to do that or they say 'ok you're in charge of this during the whole trip' and which is hard because some are big baggages and some don't even have handles so you gotta carry 'em like this (demonstrates with arms). You know that's one of the ways you pay your dues. Another is you gotta pay your dues as far as respect with everybody else. You know as far as your attitude, your performance on the field. It's not a cake walk.

As a junior college transfer, Pull is one of a select few who made the transition onto a major college football team on scholarship as a scholastic junior. He contends his assimilation into the football culture was not totally difficult as he had grown up in this area before moving away, but he did find breaking into the defined subcultures such as the position groupings and the local group a bit delicate. He believes that in his case, it was his racial subculture, the Samoan players who accepted him into their fold unequivocally. He said:
...from junior college I was an All-American linebacker. I could have come here and said "I want an S on my shirt."

I then asked: S meaning what?

Superman. Means I want to be the man. From San Francisco City College I was a Junior College All-American linebacker. Okay, I came here. I didn't start my first year. But I didn't quit. I knew I had to work hard. Those in front of me are faster than I am. I'm stronger and I thought I was a better tackler but they're faster. And I accept that. And I look at the defense—the strategy—quickness by the linebackers is really important. I didn't have that. Not that 4.5 speed. And I didn't have that and I accepted it. But what I do is I try my best and I put my trust in that they will find a position for me, which they did. Defensive end—like a tackle. But I was more a linebacker-tackle. I was off the ball a lot. So I could run around back there. So they did find a position for me. And I started my senior year. But I didn't quit because if there is somebody better than me, I accept it.

The term, depth chart is one the participants claim marks their rankings in their positions and ultimately their standing on the team. To be sure, they did not use these words to consciously disparage the system. For them, it was viewed as sine qua non, an essential feature. Organizationally, the depth chart process does appear to be a helpful rubric for describing the functional order that player rankings foster. As Knight said: "You know who is behind you and if anyone is ahead of you". The participants spoke about it being a carefully orchestrated strategy of grading players at practices and at games by the coaches. The starters or those ranked Number 1 on the depth chart generally saw this process as fair, objective and motivational.
Bull who worked his way into a starting position feels this way:

Players think they should be playing but can't understand when they aren't. They think it's politics. I feel coaches really know who should be playing, know who are the talented players and know who puts out more and get the job done.

Bull also feels strongly that the depth chart is not cemented at any point and that players can work their way up. He said:

Players recognize competition when you don't want to lose, don't want to lose your position or you are competing to move up in depth. Intensity might control that. You don't make it a personal thing. Once the practice is over, you leave it there.

Others feel the coaches' rallying speech that emphasize the healthiness of competition and the chance to truly work your way up are "just talk". The non-starters, especially those rated Numbers 4 and 5, say their chance to shine and to distinguish themselves is only at practices where often they are assigned to the Scout Team. As a member of the Scout Team, players portray the university's next opponent "running through plays that help the starters get ready". Walk-ons and redshirts make up the Scout Team where they are coached by a graduate assistant. As they see it, their main task is to ready the starting offensive and defensive players for the coming game. Scout Teamers figure their chance to "smell game" is usually nil.
Pepe quickly reminded me that like living itself, a student-athlete's experience in football is also beset in politics. He said there is more to their "stories" than my reporting on teamwork, competition and their jock image. He maintained that in the hierarchical world of football, a permeation of insecurity where "if you can't do the job, bring on the next guy" holds true but so does a coach saying "we didn't pick you so why should you play?". He very candidly pointed out that climbing up the pecking order, to a large degree lies in the tenuous domain of coaches' sense of politics and their objectivity. In his view, this is not a balanced equation. Here is his expose:

A lot of guys on the team who are walk-ons who are worthy of getting some playing time but they don't get the opportunity because they're not on scholarship. Because it's kinda the coaches will protect themselves before they will protect anybody, because if, because how does it make them look if they gave a guy without no scholarship that they didn't recruit, he came out on his own before a guy that they did recruit. You know, makes them look bad and the reason, the way I look at it is-hey if there's a walk-on that's better than a scholarship player, give him a chance to play and if it comes down to cuz my pride is hurt or I don't want to look bad, it's a team thing. Not no—I, there's no I in team right? And it's whatever's best for the team. That's what I always thought. That's the only thing I guess I dislike about football.

When asked their goals for participating in a grueling and time-consuming sport like football, the walk-ons expressed a number of reasons. Two of them were consistent ones: a love of football and a chance to eventually earn a school scholarship through perseverance. The starters offered other eye-opening objectives for walk-ons staying in football. In
doing so, they opened themselves up to a bit of self-reflection, noting their own insecurities if they were walk-ons. It seems their admiration for walk-ons and their acceptance of their limited roles on the team is genuine. Knight put himself in their place in answering the question:

**Why do you think players walk on?**

Yeah, even I think about it cuz like I'm on scholarship and everything is paid for and stuff. And sometimes I think I'm playing and stuff and it's still hard. Then I think those guys are doing it for...I guess they're doing it because they love it or something. I mean I love the sport and sometimes though I think back and if I didn't get a scholarship if I would, whether I still would wanna play.

No—I give them credit that way, the guys that do walk on and they fight through it yeah and go through everything and not even get any credit for it...Sometimes when you're on scholarship you feel like a spoiled guy but then at the same time you still complain because it's hard like anything else.

Finally, the pecking order notwithstanding, the participants concluded that to the student body and within the state itself, college football players have a certain amount of status. They say the general public naturally accords the "stars" of the team more stature but others, including the walk-ons are also viewed with validation. Several of the young men I interviewed said this badge of reverence may be due to the fact that the "site" university is the only Division I school in the state and there are no professional football teams operating out of this state. Pep explained:

**Football at (university) is like playing for a pro team...because we're the top team here.**
When Smooth Red hears "Hey, Smooth Red" on campus and around town he says it signifies to him, recognition and perhaps respect from people he does not know personally.

Flea who is on the small, slender side directed his remarks on being recognized by those who identify and relate with his size:

...what make people gravitate to you too--this is just an observation on my part but we see in ourselves a chance to do it too if you can and there are a lot of players who are on the smaller side here in [this state] and when they see you doing all these remarkable things they get uplifted.

He also highlighted the recognition:

It's just being known as a household name where I can go to a restaurant and people recognize me and say "that's Flea" and ask me for my autograph. That's like the lady that works at the Post office here. I mean I go to the Post Office a lot to send my Mom and Dad quite a bit of stuff. So her and I got to know each other and she said her son was 16 and hadn't reach puberty yet. So he's kinda small, smaller than me so I told her "Boy, don't worry because I didn't reach puberty till I was 16, 17 and then I started developing so and once you do that, you gotta apply yourself".

If Playing Football Is A Business, Then Am I A Pawn Or Commodity? Am I A Student-Athlete Or Am Athlete-Student?

The regimentation and structure that football student-athletes' experience as team members give dramatic testimony to them functioning under constraints as well as constant flux. Their schedules and procedures are dictated by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) accompanied by continual reforms intended to reshape the intercollegiate
athletic environment (Knight Foundation Commission, 1993). To the student-athlete and their coaches, when Fall conditioning can begin as well as the number of days they can practice are consequential matters. When Hunter was asked what a typical practice is like, his answer reflected the tight parameters they operate under:

I call it a process we go through. Told not to have classes after 1:30 unless it's in your major and you need it. After 1:30, we weigh in, everyday we weigh in. Then we have individual position meetings. Around 2:15, we talk about the coming game, watch films, analyze who the good players are. Then we go to the training room, where we get taped—ankles and wrists. We put on our pads for practice and go out to the field around 3:30. We practice till around 5:30, then we have conditioning. Then the whole team meets to hear the coaches.

There are also legal policies related to recruiting and drug testing for example, that impact or impede attainment of a winning season. The players say they do not have to directly be involved with profit or loss, or power and politics to feel their impingement.

Each participant spoke of these binding dictates as a way of life in athletics. They described feeling caught between NCAA regulations and the grip of their institution's pursuit of ranking, revenue and recognition. B.C. remembers changes in the number of scholarships available to players in a given year and thinking how his coaches would deal with winnowing from approximately 90+ awards to 85 or less. Snyder (1986) wrote that the symbolic interactionist perspective appeared to be appropriate for focusing on the interplay between imposed structure and personal identities. He said:
"Intercollegiate athletics feature constant stressful situations among individuals and groups, within and between organisations" (p. 222). Further, he saw this lens as providing opportunity for 'close up' views of how individuals reflect upon their contextual environment and their roles.

Drug testing of student-athletes has become an NCAA mandate. There has been a great deal of furor and media attention on the "drugs in sports" issue, especially when it has involved high profile athletes. The recent literature on this topic disparages the societal pressures placed upon athletes not only to win, but to be bigger, faster and stronger athletes (Dull, 1992; Fudala, 1994; Myers, 1994). In attempting to get an edge over others, an athlete may look to performance-enhancing drugs and painkillers for help. This abuse is what has precipitated the requirement of mandatory drug testing at every Division I school. It is another example the participants say is indicative of the branding they go through as student-athletes. One in the study whom I have decided will go unnamed answered the question Drug testing—do you think it's necessary? with:

Yeah, I do...A lot of players do street drugs or anabolic steroids...They have street drugs I say, predominantly marijuana....a lot of times during the season they do random tests so they take any 35 whether you're a starter or whether you don't even play at all...lot of times those guys who smoke marijuana during the season or off-season...they drink something. I don't know what it's called but some kind of detox...put a blockage on the marijuana. Last year guys would smoke...take a drug test and come out negative because they drank the "t"....but who knows they may come out with another drug test that
will go through that "t" and that's why I don't even—-I tried it once in my life when I was young, just to try.

The participants agreed that drug testing was a necessity in athletic programs today. Hunter found it a pain because:

I am really iffy on drug testing because I don't smoke, drink or do drugs so it is like I can't be bothered with being tested. I don't think there is a lot of worry by the team about it.

Additionally, when asked the punishment meted out for drug abuse by football players, they felt the (site university) does not have a big problem and were even unsure what happens to an athlete who fails a drug test. Pepe surmised that:

I haven't heard of anybody on the team that had tested positive for any kind of drugs. But if so they get brought in for questioning and asked "Were you on da-da-da" and I think they get suspended.

B.C., a veteran with longevity in the program knows of teammates who have taken a drug test and "the next thing you know they're on suspension so you kinda wonder...you're never told but...assume it's drugs". His comments on alcohol use are enlightening:

I saw a lot of drinking and stuff but I mean that's normal for college too...I haven't seen any cases of drug abuse as being under the influence although I have seen cases where alcohol abuse—they've come to practice and they smell like a brewery and...all buzzing. You look at that and you laugh and say "Eh, look at that"...lot of times the coaches don't even notice...the players, we're living, breathing, sweating, I mean you're so close to each other and like in the huddle and you smell somebody's breath and it's like HO! (laughter).
As expected, the participants did not implicate themselves on drug use and meandered around the point of alcohol use or abuse. They did speak in specific details about the urine taking process, explaining they undergo annual and mandatory screening as well as random tests throughout the year. Their so-called peripheral statements on this subject, leave food for thought, particularly when Flea, Pepe and Knight said "College ball is a whole new level of play" and others reiterated how size and skill are formidable entities when comparing themselves to their teammates. It makes one wonder the lengths student-athletes may go through to achieve success for the team. They also clarified "having the edge" as striving for even short-term efficiency or bulk that will make someone be competitive fast. Interestingly, they spoke out of their usual first person perspective with an example being: "People have said that ..." or "Somebody told me that...."

Participants' narratives reveal they see college football as a business proposition as much as a sport venue. They say the institution of sport is hierarchical and superimposes the structural functions they undergo as football players. For example, one of its highest values is to win, to be "Number One". Across the recent literature on athletics, portraits of the big monies from television, bowl games and tournaments flowing toward winning teams are readily apparent (Adler & Adler, 1991; Eitzen, 1986; Messner, 1992).
Winning and the money generated are paramount in athletics, but especially so at the college and professional levels. Taubman (1978) also said it is a perverse system:

At places like Ohio State, ...Notre Dame,...Michigan and Oklahoma, they've forgotten football is just a game. It has become a big business, completely disconnected from the fundamental purposes of academic institutions. The goal of college ball is no longer for young men to test and strengthen their bodies, to learn about teamwork, and to have a good time. All that matters is winning, moving up the national rankings and grabbing a bigger share of the TV dollar...(p. 91).

Their season record plus attendance at games are constant reminders to the participants that their performance does impact their lives, not only from the standpoint of glory but their scholarships and the betterment of facilities and support services provided them. They say they feel this pervading tension and tremendous weight on their individual and collective shoulders but understand they are in it with "their eyes wide open".

_Doc_ and _Smooth Red_, both men who make their points powerfully but succinctly saw their sports participation as joyful, yet shrouded in capitalism. As _Smooth Red_ remarked, it is more like work:

...college ball was a learning experience...had a chip on my shoulder...found out college football is a business, not at all like in high school.

_Doc_ spoke about the control of athletics over a football player's life:

...can't get negative publicity for the school...if you flunk out, your scholarship is taken...must get
permission from coaches to see profs for office visits if in the afternoons.

College football, they found, is laden with mixed symbolic messages that as players they feel can be compromising at times. They say the line between success and failure is thin when viewed from team, position and especially individual standards as despite the undercurrent of emphasis on fair play, sportsmanship and healthy competition, the unrelenting pressures to win are dominant.

One of the ways, B.C. and Pepe felt compromised is with the strains or often pull of really knowing what their identity is on the college campus. In high school they said they handled the pressures of school and sports fairly well. That is, the demands of both were balanced as far as time and emphasis. The college scholarship offers them a tuition-free educational experience that also has requirements that they liken to a contracted job. Bull offered that this responsibility brought demands on his time and energy. He cited meetings, practices, workouts and conditioning. He said in the beginning, he did not know how to handle the expectations because other than being taught "the plays, blocks and game stuff", he had to deal with the ambiguous nature of being a college student and a college athlete. He concluded: "College and playing football is a business".

Pepe used the word expendable to describe what Doc labeled as commodity. B.C. called his frame of reference on this topic "what have you done for me lately?" syndrome.
These particular young men said they grappled with disparate feelings related to their value to the university and the athletic program. For them, the bottom line question dealt with: How am I really viewed as a person? Are my insecurities understood by those outside of the football student-athlete culture?

Their poignant stories follow:

The expendability notion is one Pepe said he experienced discomfort with but rationalized that the team concept means more to him than to "make waves". He said:

I'll do whatever. I'm not really worried about my individual position. Whatever it takes for the team to win. For me, I don't like when the coaches think I'm expendable. I'm the only walk-on quarterback that I know of that's on the team. Like I play kickoff return, you know what is kickoff return? Well, I set the back wedge. There's a front wedge and the back wedge. The back wedge—I set it. I'm in the middle and I gotta take on guys that are heavier than me or just as heavy or even lighter but they have a 50 yard headstart and I gotta take them on and hit them right?—which I don't mind, but at the same time, being the position I am at they would never put any of the other quarterbacks in. I mean, but me, they put me on special teams, make me run over people. Like I said I don't mind but I look at it as I'm expendable. Like "Oh, let's put Pepe there. He'll do a good job". They'll never put a quarterback in there!.

Doc's perception of being a commodity or pawn centers around the idea of statistics. As he said: "As the won/loss record goes, so goes ticket sales. It's exciting to play in front of a lot of people but you also feel like a commodity".

The issue of injury and value had a lot of merged significance for B.C. who said he experienced knee and
shoulder injuries that kept him off the playing field for varying lengths of time. His experiences have been:

Well, from my personal experience you know ultimately the train of thought is "what have you done for me lately?" as far as coaching, coaches and players. Which brings me this topic of being injured. Once you're injured things drop off. You're on the back burner now.

B.C. before elaborating on his knee injury bemoaned the mental anguish that he faced in rehabilitating his physical problem. He said:

...my left knee--that was the one that just devastated me. I was so depressed. I trained all summer--I mean it was my senior year and I was looking forward to it and I was at a point physically that I could really play good yeah. And then I hurt my left knee and I find out I'm supposed to make a decision about what I'm going to do cuz I knew I wasn't going to be playing football for the rest of my life so I had to make a decision then--what?--do I play next week and maybe not walk later on or keep that hope alive and walk in. But mentally it really affects you.

Regarding the short-range versus long-range decision-making that he was faced with, I asked him a contextual follow-up question:

Do you deal with this sort of thing yourself--is it where your coaches, your team can get really into the thinking, analysis?

Well, when you get an injury like that, you're kinda removed from the system. You start hanging out with the trainers yeah and you're not with the team as much and you every player will tell you is that--when you get hurt--it's like the coaches don't talk to you. So it's what have you done for me lately syndrome. You're not getting the attention you once got. I don't know if you can fault the coaches because again I just gotta come back to--it's a big system. And the coaches--that's their job--is to win football games and not matter what they're going to do it right? And a player can't play well....
B.C. summed up with: "Yeah, but you get injured and people stop talking to you, you know. And your trainer becomes your best friend".

It is clear that for this group of men, some of their experiences and emotions reverberated around winning or losing, having playing time or sitting on the bench. Most felt their scholarships were not "free rides", instead their bodies and skills were the tradeoffs. They say their talk of being objects, pawns, commodities, cattle or other labels are far from complaints but telling it like it is. Their commitment is a choice, an informed choice.

Interestingly, research over the last two decades have addressed the incongruities between progressive strides made on college campuses regarding student rights and the continued thwarting of the rights of student-athlete to acquire a normal education. Rafferty (1971) discussed attitudes toward individual rights with:

"There are two great national institutions which simply cannot tolerate either internal dissension or external interference: our armed forces, and our interscholastic sports program. Both are of necessity benevolent dictatorships" (p. 15).

A final point related to the notion of being "used" is the statement made by Shields & Bredemeier (1995) who said modern sport has been "commodified and commercialized...young athletes are paraded as heroes, athletic teams have bought
into uniforms and special equipment and the whole organizational structure has become bureaucratized, rationalized and commercialized" (p. 192).

The controversy with the student-athlete or athlete-student distinction is a matter the participants attributed to football operating more as a business enterprise than an extra-curricular activity. The participants spoke at length about their educational expectations which contradicts the general public's stereotypical suggestions that athletes attend college for the sole purpose of playing their sport. Their commentary indicated that obtaining a degree is a goal. One of the questions asked of them was:

On the whole, do student-athletes want to be known on campus as football players in college or students who also play football? What has this experience been like for you?

**Doc:** For myself, I like being recognized as a football player but I want to be known more as a student. But yes, it is more difficult to make people realize I am competitive as a student too.

**Hunter:** Well, I can sum it all up this way. I think there's been 5 cases of where there was a party next door to me or right above me and somebody will come in my room and they would see me sitting there studying. A bunch of volleyball players came down and they said "all you do is study". Everybody knows how I am. I try to keep my head in the books. My Momma always reminds me when she calls. It's just as a student I just want to get it done. I don't want to slack. I want to graduate.

**B.C.:** I think I'd want both but I think I was viewed as an athlete more. If I had to generalize, I think definitely an athlete more because I was 280 lbs. and your average student is not 280 lbs. and I'm sitting there and it's hard to physically
not notice somebody and you already associate them with doing something. Your professors who don't know will say 'Do you play football?' and I gotta answer "yeah" and you know already people's minds are turned.

The student-athlete/athlete-student dichotomy is a sensitive one the participants say, in view of their repeated experiences with being referred to as "dumb jocks". Their experiences in the classroom have been frustrating at times where they say they encounter barriers resulting from perpetual misinformation, stereotyping, fear and conscious and unconscious prejudicial attitudes and behaviors by students and faculty. As Knight explained:

I hope they feel I'm an interesting person, diverse and not just some, a "jock" who had no brains or something. Even though I want people to know me for my athletic ability or something but I also want them to know me in other ways. Like my personality.

Hunter said he experienced both cynicism and interest from both faculty and students but has learned to look inward as well as to evaluate the impact of athletics and the college community. He feels it is helpful when there are opportunities to get to know others better and he tries to do that with students in his class and to visit his professors when he has questions. The rest of his thoughts are:

Some see us as super human beings, that we have talents...others I found their impression of us football players is that because they're football players they're conceited or some things like that. But then when we get in a group they find I'm not like that. I admit there are players like that on the team...I don't think I'm a big shot or anything like that. So in a lot of classes, we have discussions and we talk about our courses. [Site university] does offer a lot of chances where students
can get to know each other whether you're an athlete or just normal person.

B.C., when asked his views on the question: How do you think faculty view student-athletes? said:

It's been my experience that some of them are very favorable and some are very negative and you just gotta avoid the ones that are negative because it's hard to prove somebody wrong and you kinda know. You know I mean to put it bluntly certain professors can be just assholes about it. Three excused absences and you're already down a grade and they won't allow for road trips and you know that's where I think the faculty and administration have to work together on this. Student-athletes, this is something they're obligated to as far as road trips and stuff...committing themselves and I think if it is handled properly, it can benefit everybody.

But I think professors, some of them think the athletes are on a pedestal and that's accurate to a certain extent but not necessarily by their own choosing. So they think they're on a pedestal and they're not going to give them any breaks. They're going to scrutinize the athlete that much more and that could be very detrimental as far as grades, but you know by the same token there are professors who are very accommodating and they realize and mainly it's the ones who are football fans you know.

Hunter who grew up in a tough, impoverished inner city neighborhood is quick to see positiveness in many of his experiences. He readily gave credit to his family, his coaches, his fellow teammates and fellow students too for making his life as meaningful as he claims it has been. In fact, at the second interview with him, he wanted to elaborate a little more about his high school experience, particularly his association with gang members. Here's his elaboration:

I want to say I grew up in (name of inner city district) where there are hundreds of gangs operating. I never joined or was even tempted to join nor did gang members try to enlist me. Yet I had friends who belong to gangs. The point I want to make is that although they were gang
members, they were very supportive of me, came to my games and cheered for me. I want it known that individually they are "good people". I know the impressions the public has of gangs is naturally more negative but my dealings with them have been positive. Although my family moved to (another area outside of inner city district), I still visit the old neighborhood whenever I go home.

It appears that while frequently troubled by their inabilitys to receive more demonstrated acceptance for their student-athlete roles by the campus constituents, these student-athletes tend to put on a facade of toughness and stoicism to counter their insecurities. They again mentioned being identified only for their athleticism whereas they longed to be able to join in school and class activities without being seen and known as oddities. They claim to be unhappy about the stereotyping and labeling that seems to be focused on their population more than other groups. It is little wonder they say, that their football culture and subgroups have become their main support network. Knight made a point that he truly feels is to cope with the highs and lows of being a college athlete:

I've learned a lot more about how to communicate with people and to be more open with people and to be more outgoing. I also find there's two different ways, some students look at you and they look up to you and look at you in a good way. Other students look at you in a bad way--"that's an athlete they think they can do whatever they want to--they think they're better than the average guy--they feel they should be treated differently". Some want nothing to do with us. You know it's something that athletes stay together in school because they associate better...It's not always but you know people put that tag on for one or two bad apples and spoil everything.
The analytical mind of Doc deduced that abrogating the student-athlete/athlete-student mindsets will never be realized as long as the attitudes and behaviors of both the players and the student body and faculty are not addressed. He feels each group needs to introspect before doing any finger pointing. For example, for himself and his fellow players, his advice is:

We need to learn to balance academics and athletics but we also need to pick it up a level. Even I view myself as an athlete first, but I know I am using my athletic ability to finish school so I'm not forgetting that part. I want to hang around with winners in life and not just for football.

Flea sometimes feels like giving up on his academic work saying it's been a "rock slide". This particular semester, he is on the "bubble" in three classes and said with bad grades comes a "don't care" attitude. Flea paraphrased what his father told him when he heard about his school difficulties:

"If you screw up, it's your own fault".

Flea then added:

I'm 20 years old, I'll be 21 in December. My father was killing people in Vietnam when he was my age so he's all mad...so you know he says you gotta grow up fast. If you screw this up, you're not going to die over it. Just gotta come back and rebound. So I've got to do decent in those finals.

Harry Edwards (1984) in his work on sociological patterns argued that: "The 'dumb jock' is not born; he is systematically being created" (p. 7). He said athletes who perceive that others define them as 'dumb jocks' often make
that a self-fulfilling prophecy by developing low self-esteem, doubts and bad attitudes about academic achievement.

B.C. made a salient point in his interview regarding the compounding effects of handling college studies and Division I football competition at the same time. He felt while a person's confidence and successes in football may take an ascending path as the college years roll by, the academics part may not work the same way. He also said the connotation of "dumb jock" wears heavily and may be paranoic for some. He gave an example of size being a distinction worthy of note. He said a college football player is at an age where his body is matured and his height has stabilized so the ability and the means to bulk up, adding weight and muscle are very possible. This happens to many of them where by the time they are 3rd and 4th year veterans they are very noticeable physically. B.C. started off as a college freshman at 210 lbs. and bulked up to 280–285 lbs. by the time he was a junior. He speculates that sheer size plus students' and professors' embedded stereotyped ideas of "all bulk/no brain" raise havoc on their already shaky self-concept in the classroom. He tried to evaluate his own initiation into college, then his views on priorities as a student and as an athlete:

Well, college isn't for everybody. I didn't think it was for me when I first came. I don't know—when you look at the effort that athletes put out academically, I'm not saying I was a model. I'm not saying that by any means but you kinda wonder sometimes how come you know all it takes is you gotta put in just the minimum amount...it
would help and I don't know if some of 'em are doing that. Makes you wonder what it is, they think they're going to play professional football later or they don't know about studying or they're only thinking football.

B.C. continues:

Like I mentioned earlier, the label student-athlete is not entirely valid. It's athlete first, student second. The reason I say that is the time spent—the actual time spent in the classroom and the time spent in athletics. What do they recommend? One hour of study a night for each class. It's almost two to one, you know you have to make a conscious decision to study, to make that commitment to school, to get good grades and work hard. I had problems with this initially. I fall behind easily. It's easy for me to fall behind.

Once I got into a system of doing my homework on time, reading my assignments on time, just keeping to a schedule was much easier for me. You gotta remember, we don't have the kind of support link other students have to each other as far as class stuff goes. Funny it was much more productive like I always got better grades during the football season for some reason. During the spring I had so much free time I didn't know what to do with myself so I would procrastinate. I would end up doing a real mediocre job. During the fall, your schedule is so regimented that you have to make the commitments that you have to study now. You better do it. That is why a lot of people—they get better grades during the football year.

His major in Chemistry with its required weekly three-hour labs requires Doc to interact and work with fellow students who seldom know him prior to meeting in class. Therefore, he is the only participant to form alliances from a purely academic connotation. He conveyed that he felt very much the student in those labs where conversations with other students centered primarily on the subject area. He was tickled that he was respected for his knowledge in Chemistry and hardly remembers being asked about football in class. The rest of the participants claim they have not gotten to know
students in their classes. They recognize their faces as being in their classes but rarely know them by name.

Bull has also developed interpersonal relationships with fellow majors in their field of study. Bull's major is Physical Education so he views this as somewhat related to athletics in that some of his classmates are also athletes.

Bull concluded:

With football, I had a lot more in common with the people I played with but with teaching there's that little professionalism that you gotta sort of keep up. About football players being "dumb jocks" I feel this is partly true. Some don't think of themselves as students but only want to play football. I don't let it bother me because I don't feel I am dumb.

B.C.'s final point on this topic is one he adamantly believes is true and epitomizes the self-imposed decision they make to be accountable as a student-athlete/athlete-student:

I think you know athlete, student-athletes prioritize their day and of course football I don't care what anybody else tells you is going to be the priority.

Smooth Red described the proudest and least proud moments for him as a student-athlete playing college football.

I am most proud that I made it this far. That I lived to age 21. Young black athletes are an endangered species, you know what I mean? School is what I'm least proud of. Wish I could do better than I am. It's so hard, you know.

In reconstructing participants' thoughts and experiences with respect to their feeling caught in a business venture, I feel they themselves have ambivalent views as to their being central figures in the process but otherwise powerless. To them, the commercialized nature of college athletes,
especially in the big money winnings of football have much
historic tradition that is hard to change and therefore offer
little solution. Yet as earlier mentioned, they are in it
"with their eyes wide open". That the formula in football
must include "winning is everything" presents tremendous
pressure that resurrects for them, questions as to whether
their value also includes their successes as academic
participants on campus. They tended toward wanting to be
known as students as much as they are known as athletes. They
clearly knew that push has come to shove and for them,
athletics has so far been the shover.

Conflict: On A Given Day In The Football Culture: It's Like
Dealing With Apples and Oranges

Conflicts are an inevitable part of playing a team sport
like football. The participants see them as basic to meshing
as a unit and preliminary as well as ongoing to bonding in the
manner a family group would. On top of the demands of being
in football, players are thrust into a setting of tremendous
competition, structural conformity, and constant physical
contact. They say this type of milieu promotes aggression and
anger. The spontaneous ways these are handled they say are
positive because closure takes place quickly and they can move
on. A number of those I studied claimed the practice or
playing field is where the tensions of the moment are usually resolved because that's usually where they arise.

Perhaps most striking is the perception they hold that conflicts among their football peer culture are among like-minded, goal oriented individuals where their problems are not considered personal or friendship-based. Pepe believes competition fosters conflicts but also elevates the belief among them that there is respect for each other:

I think a lot of sports and football, if the competition wasn't there, it won't really be the same. Because it's so easy to go out there and play and do your assignments. But if you've got people trying to prevent you from what you're doing I guess that brings out the best out of you.

So we squabble, the pushing matches, it just releases the frustration. You've got all these pads. You have all this gear so the coaches let it go for a little while because that's where they release the energy. And they don't--then when they get in and they have to do their assignment, then their heads are all not screwed up because they're mad, still frustrated.

Like I said you have your pads on, you're really not going to get hurt because guys get hit harder than what a punch can do. So the coaches will finally break it up and say take a walk and you take a walk and come back. Yeah, like you know the thing about football, what's on field is left on the field. Then you come back because basically when you're on the field you got no friends. You compete against each other. Hey, whoever is in front of you or back of you, you got the idea 'I'm going to beat the guy in front of me and I'm not letting the guy in back catch me.

Research on sports aggression reveal that the clearly defined system of rules that govern the interactions of participants provide a code of conduct that allows for respect, reverence and safeguards against violence (Sabo & Panepinto, 1990). These same authors said:
Within an athletic context, young males can develop a certain kind of closeness with each other while not having to deal with the kinds of (intimate) attachments that they tend to fear. Without the rules, there would be chaos—both physical and psychological; there would be frightening need to negotiate and renegotiate relationships constantly (p. 68).

Bull’s thoughts on conflict and even his personal example seems to fit within Sabo & Panepinto’s theory:

Say for instance we were lining up ready to play against each other. Okay, there’s a conflict where there’s a fight with a cheap shot or late hit. Punch will probably be thrown back and forth but it would never interfere with (meaning the football relationships) because that’s what we were taught and constantly reminded to do...So we leave personal—our football things on the field.

I was involved in one of them. It was a cheap shot, somebody comes up in back of me and hits me like that (demonstrates), just for nothing because I did a good job or something made 'em look bad. I would turn around and grab his face mask and we would get down and fire off at each other but 10-15 minutes, come together, and we say "small kind, small kind" and we end it.

Other participants also talked about conflict as no different than what occurs with any organization. They tended to believe the majority of their conflicts occurred in the context of "the heat of the moment" and "nothing personal" unlike their impressions of subtle and simmering tensions that occur in some organizations.

While most within-team conflicts occur on the playing field and as the participants have described are settled then and there, other types of conflict involving either players and coaches or individual players with problems occasionally happen. The participants, tongue-in-cheek commented that these conflicts could not be settled with fisticuffs! As a
way to deal with conflicts of this nature, the coaches have devised a procedure for reporting these through an established medium. Each class (freshmen to seniors) of football athletes selects two fellow players to act as their player-representatives for a year. These player-reps act as liaisons between the players and the coaches, bringing issues and problems they want dealt with. Usually a player may feel some sensitivity about bringing up a matter directly with a coach so would communicate this through the player-rep. Examples that the participants cited were situations where a player felt he was being treated unfairly by a coach or was thinking of quitting the team but might have been persuaded to wait until the player-rep brought it to the attention of the coaches. The coaches likewise, use the player-reps to communicate information back to the players.

Some of the participants reported this intermediary process works well, others call it a farce. Bull believes it is effective and has seen player-reps bring matters to the coaches' attention that worked toward the betterment of the team. He gave the example of a player, a very good player who had an attitude problem and was causing morale to go down. The player-reps laid out the situation to the coaches who in this case, after several attempts at resolution decided to let the entire team decide whether to keep this player on or not. Bull felt:

He (the player) doesn't want to come to practice, he puts an "S" on his shirt. The coach finally told us, "okay I
know how he is, I don't want him back on but it's your team, it's your football team, you vote". We voted against (player). Majority ruled, he was off.

Knight feels a player has a set assignment on the football field no matter what the play is. That assignment is to one-on-one "get your man". He obviously expects that conflicts or problems be handled the same way: the direct path. He said with some scoffing that:

Like when I have a problem...I go right to the guy...But some...everybody has their own deal so. If it's with the coaches,...anybody can go to Coach (Head Coach) and give him a piece of, I mean not a piece of--but say how he feels.

Hardly any of the participants described overt racial conflicts, yet most did say that informal friendship networks on the team seemed to be organized along racial or ethnic lines. As discussed earlier, the subgroupings fell into place by structural parameters, i.e. position groupings. It was when describing what happens with their limited free time that I found their ethnicity and race became a significant dimension in looking at their socialization and cultural influences.

This is the one perspective the participants were less able to articulate on. They described racial stratification in more general ways concluding that situations where they felt race was an element were subjective interpretations on their part. It was nice they said to be with those who "jived or pidgin-talked". In other instances, they attributed some racial overtones clouding some decisions made by their coaches.
and thought they were "unfair". Some were quick to add that this kind of experience is magnified among those who were not so secure in their positions on the team and thus, had reasons to spin tales of differences with coaches on their abilities and personalities.

When asked the question of racial harmony on the team, Smooth Red said: "Oh, I don't see it (meaning racial friction), I used to see it. Used to see it but not no more". In almost the next breath, he mentioned players from his racial group getting together to commiserate and talk "our talk" as comforting. He said:

So I mean you almost totally lose your culture if you don't kinda just have some type of base, you know what I mean? That's why we have barbeques and we do some things.

Other participants' comments provide a sense of the authority they realize coaches have over them with reminders that they have human fallacies too:

Pepe said:

In football—in this world right here with the (site university), with the coaches you know, quote, unquote "he's kind of God" (meaning head coach). You know what I mean, so like it or not...

Doc said:

I hate the baloney from coaches who do power trips saying "you're not going to play if....". I wouldn't want to be a head coach--too much baloney.

In the main, the participants affirm that conflicts while present in their culture and their football experience, are seldom divisive. Even their racial groupings have not created
intra-cultural problems and they feel their racial connections overlap with geographical origins and there are no strong demarcations. Hunter related that when he first joined the football team, he hung out with the Samoans because at that time, he found black athletes to be loud and vocal and he was not. The participants generally feel there are no strong sentiments against and between racial groups.

Playing Football Is Not Exactly the Military:

We Can Be Expressive

Within their collective football culture, the concept of shared meanings (symbols) abound. I have already described the bounded experiences of the student-athlete with their rules, regulations and structure. I would now like to relate their creative reflections and expressions that exemplify ways they have forged their individual and collective adaptations to their collegiate experience.

The participants were very conscious of maintaining a masculine image, especially in the public eye. Turner (1962) who discussed symbolic interactionism and the body pointed out "the choice to present one's self in particular ways is almost inevitably a product of dominant discourse about what constitutes a desirable self" (p. 27).
As Doc indicated their persona comes with a responsibility more than a privilege. He said in a letter in the university's newspaper:

Athletes must act favorably as representatives of the university at all times...There are few, if any at all, students at the [site university] who can claim that they are scrutinized as strongly ("Doc", personal communication, January 13, 1994).

The participants say playing college football gives them an identity, i.e., as warriors excelling in a contact sport; it also brought them into the limelight. Bull, Smooth Red, and Knight explained when they first played the sport, it was a good means to connect with other people--male peers, brothers and fathers. As the years went by, their identities became directly tied to continued public success. They still feel being recognized and being called role models by admiring fans are the rewards for "busting my ass every day" not to mention "having your butt kicked by the coaches".

While projecting the masculine image in the marketplace is desirable and the "who wouldn't want to do that if you can?" notion operating, some of the less flashy participants added a disclaimer to their stories. Hunter said: "I'm not with my nose in the air. I'm relaxed...I don't think I'm a big shot or anything like that". B.C. added: "Well, we're viewed as the prima donnas of society...free spirits...some are rah-rah, but yeah, we're aware of being in the eye and so some may go overboard".

Adler and Adler (1991) studied basketball athletes for a
period of time and found them trying to posture themselves so as to accommodate both their own rising self-image and conservative societal norms. This held true with the participants of this study, although they claimed they showed off their macho-ism more when in a group situation. They said when they were alone in public they were not as bold.

For players, their teammates are key or dominant members of their college social world. What began for them as a kind of working relationship on the team has developed into a cohesion similar to fighting a war together. This is akin to the wise words of Sadaharu Oh, an ex-professional baseball player who said: "What you do on a team has consequences for everyone else, not just for yourself...Ties are created between players that are deep and lasting" (Syer, 1986, p. 93).

I found that the province of expression among this particular group of student-athletes to be strong although I had no basis of comparison except my own preconceived notions. Both their verbal and non-verbal expressions supported the way they seemed to view themselves as members of a unique culture. In particular, when asked how they felt they expressed their masculine identity, their descriptions encompassed how they project themselves (words such as courageous, physically fit, confident, proud, disciplined came up), how they think they look to others (great body, good looks, fashionable, flashy,
colorful) and how they express themselves (our own ethnic
talk, some football talk, our own ways of talking).

Their examples of the many symbolic elements present
within their football culture are antithetical to their
earlier described depictions of the caste system they function
under and the authoritative structure of intercollegiate
athletics. Through my meetings with them I was able to see
and hear them for prolonged periods of time and found through
their tales and scenarios, revelations covering both affective
and expressive dimensions. They covered cultural norms, some
rituals, some values, creeds and their individuality.

The student-athletes I studied all concede that they are
an insular group as compared to other students. They also
accept that the order and regimen required to make their team
a competitive one contributes to their isolation from the rest
of the campus. The good they say that comes from this
insularity is their almost impenetrable web of solidarity that
surrounds the members. This "tightness" as they called this
permeation was difficult for them to fully conceptualize in
words. The way it was described was "the way we fall in" or
"an attitude, a feeling our heads are locked". Bull saw this
as:

...family, unity and we have a goal...There's some
distractions or disruptions to that goal...but that's what
you call team, we work together.

They believe their "rally the wagons" attitude is
spontaneous. They talked about their team huddles before and
after a game as indicators of their belief in the whole. They feel they never lose sight of the continual pursuit of their mission or the fostering of respect, appreciation and trust they have for the team. When speaking on this topic, pomposity, cockiness and showmanship fell by the wayside for these young men. Their awareness of image, their public image was a detractor for outsiders to see. These were times when these big, beefy men showed what sweat, toil but most importantly, a sense of belonging meant to them. Their emotions about being on the team were evident. They predicted that their football playing days will measure very high in the memories of their lives. One of them described their cultural bond as largely "we all know what we're there to do, we understand that". Others described their union as spiritual. This was explained by Smooth Red as "Hell, we're all on the same page". By this he meant, nobody ever has to school the student-athletes on how to deal with each other either on the field or off the field. They claim to be less confident and accustomed to collaborating with others outside sports.

Another point they made is that their total team culture always superimposes any of their subcultures, whether they are position, racial, ethnic, local or mainland. They do not believe subcultures within the main culture will ever "get out of hand" because they feel a football player's motto is "There is no I in team". Hunter went so far as to say "Eleven guys don't win games".

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When questioned on the paradoxical nature of their competing and interpersonal mentalities, the players speculated that although unspoken, their definition of competition is not personal and as they graphically put forth "it's not--I'm going to beat out Junior Boy or Samson" but "Number 63 better know I want his number (meaning position)". The message they seemed to all make was it was part of their job, nothing more!

The creative and often uninhibited side of their cultural immersion seemed to emerge during their "hang times", for example during free moments, in the weight room, between classes, at the dorms, in the campus cafeteria and naturally wherever they could showcase themselves. B.C. put it best when he said:

Athletes, I think the public view athletes in general as free wheeling, free spirit, party hearty and (laughing) we know how to be.

The earring that Pepe wears has a story behind it that he related with a mixture of flash and chagrin. First, he alleged, piercing his ear was something he had to do, inasmuch as a teammate friend coaxed him till he agreed and he didn't want to be a "chicken". His mother's role in this makes his tale not only an interesting one but one documenting the "little boy" qualities that succumb to maternal bond despite group influences or size.

My good friend said "Pepe you should put an earring on" and I didn't know how my Mom was going to like it. He said "c'mon you're almost 21" so I said ok,ok. So one
day...I had a diamond stud--real small and you can only see it from certain angles. So I was at home eating dinner and my Mom goes "what's that in your ear?" so I turned the other way and softly said earring. She kinda looked at me and shook her head.

It was another time I had a hoop on, you know gold rings and she told me again "what's that in your ear?" and when I said earring, she said "take it off, you look like a girl". I took it off and never put it on around her.

While the student-athletes in football are provided a lot of definition in terms of their schedules and expectations, there are a few cosmetic details about their appearance that they define for themselves. They say herein lies the beauty of various races and ethnic groups blending together because they all bring their unique talk, mannerisms, clothes and traditions into the mix. They feel their cultural pot is a rich, educative one. Pepe's example of wearing an earring apparently has been a popular choice with studs, danglings, hoops and other creations appearing in football players' ears. Pepe said they also have a choice as to whether they wish to wear earrings under their helmets or not. "Yeah, it's up to us--we can but we may have to take it off--sometimes when I take the helmet off, it can grab so".

Others pointed out the selections of haircuts and hairdos that student-athletes work on to make statements about their particular culture. Each year, part of the fun at summer camp is to see either position groups come in with matching haircuts or individuals with bold and outlandish looks to either their hair or their body. Tattoos have become symbolic and popular. Besides the symbolic convergence of a group,
perhaps deciding to wear a cupie doll ponytail with shaved edges for example, they say it is their opportunity to enjoy, laugh, admire and even ridicule their creative expressions. They say ridiculing from within their ranks is not the same as ridicule from outside the football culture. Appearance, at least at the outset of the season has become a ritual for many of them. One year the entire offensive line shaved their heads signifying a united front and readiness. They say once the season starts, the tone changes--it's all business. Cultural expressions center less on the visible such as the artifacts and physical appearance but more on "Are we ready to kick butt?" type of psychological boosting and attitudinal unity.

In reconstructing their conversations with me, I found the topic of trash talk somewhat problematic. As universal a practice as trash talk has become, I am reluctant to label it a norm. It certainly has become emblematic of team sports where the objective is to get the edge or to demoralize and weaken an opponent. In football especially, the players say trash talking is like the "12th man on the field". All eight participants gave their thoughts and experiences on trash talk. Some of them claim the extent that players do this tends to fall more under geographical lines and less under ethnic origins. For example:

B.C.: I'd say it's universal..not tied to any ethnic group.. but local players are more reserved..not into preach-
ing--others are more rah-rah...you can go at it all
game and after the game shake hands...it's over and
everything's ok.

Knight: I mean if the guy (his opponent) starts to talk,
then I might say something. But is there talking,
oh yeah. Sometimes it's hilarious what they
say. For me, I just laugh in their face.

Flea: Yeah, when you get me excited, I'll talk a little
header. I'll talk trash, where I come from we
all do.

Smooth Red:
...never did it but now this is part of social
change. Smooth Red is good at it--I'm trying
to perfect it...you know be more subtle--when
me and the wide receiver are going back to
our huddles, I might be whispering some things, you
know confuse 'em.

While there are differing approaches and degrees to the
use of trash talk among the participants of this study, when
asked if this is part of their team culture, they really felt
it was. Perhaps their view of this form of expression may be
colored by one of comparison. That is, their peer culture has
an avenue through which this particular act can be cultivated
whereas with other comparative groups, it would be
inappropriate. The student-athletes conclude that trash talk
not only identifies their football culture, it is a unique
feature of sports in general and a big part of their masculine
identity.

Another cultural element the participants mentioned that
was not a dictate was giving nicknames to each other.
Certainly no group or culture would be precluded from
nicknames but with the football culture, they are not only
commonplace but widely used among team members and even
coaches. They are not given to be whispered behind one's back but used "up front and to your face" and again "nothing personal, that's you". The participants delightfully told how their coaches fell into their fold so to speak because they used them too. They say this small act was a large conquest to them because in using their nicknames, the coaches in effect legitimized something created from within the peer culture group and not because they were told to do so. They explained that some players' nicknames "stuck" more than others and usually evolved from some mannerism, habit, function possibly appropriate or inappropriate. They said their intent at labeling was again not on the chalkboard but just what feels okay to the group. Their team culture "tightness" precludes over-sensitivity. Being part of the family makes a nickname one of acceptance and even status. Here are a few:

One of the eight participants has a nickname of "Pretty Boy". He said: "because the way I dress, always do my hair". He talked about another teammate who they called "Moana" because "every time he comes into a big crowd he always does imitations". Doc's nickname relates to his intent to go to medical school. Smooth Red is supposedly cool, smooth and flashy.

The nicknames the football peer give to their coaches are hardly broadcast in the same fashion they spoke about theirs. These are shared amongst team or position and ethnic
subcultures and have become a functional means to vent group and individual frustrations without fear of reprisal. These nicknames for coaches while not revealed are purposefully assigned and they say "not always flattering and may include profanity". This particular ploy of "name-calling" seems to have an inverse value as it provides the players with another means to share beliefs that they feel are secure within their boundaries.

Finally, Fine (1986) who wrote about studying small groups, most notably Little League baseball teams said: "Culture is not given to the team but rather it emerges...creates a set of meanings" (p. 167). The participants of this study would heartily agree that as restrictive as football team membership is, their bondage with each other is "no bullshit!". I could not close this section any better than with their own words. Bull seems to have spoken for the collective when he said: "We can be ourselves with each other, all the time, all the time".

Summary

My examination of the lives of the eight participants telegraphs that student-athletes are not passively shaped by their social environment nor are they passive shapers of their cultural group. In developing an analysis of the major thrusts in their lives as Division I college football
athletes, my objective was to cover domains of experiences that were significant to them. Thus, their early years, college entry and adjustments, their sense of football, athletics and the future were addressed. My rationale for presenting the data through their language was an attempt to get glimpses of their culture in practice. It was also to more fully realize the system that structures their football world and to look at ways of living that the student-athletes devise within it.
CHAPTER V

REFINING THE ANALYSIS: MAJOR INDUCTIONS

The locker room had become a kind of home to me...I often enter tense and uneasy, disturbed by some event of the day. Slowly my worries fade as I see their unimportance to my male peers. I relax, my concerns lost among relationships that are warm and real, but never intimate, lost among the constants of an athlete's life. Athletes may be crude and immature, but they are genuine when it comes to loyalty. The lines of communication are clear and simple...We are at ease in the setting of satin uniforms and shower nozzles (Bradley, 1977 as cited in Messner, 1992, p. 85).

Through sport, participants learn cultural values and behaviors such as competition, toughness and winning at all costs (Adler & Adler, 1988; Fine, 1987; Tutko & Bruns, 1976). For the men in my study, the rule-bound structure of intercollegiate football became a context in which they constructed their individual and cultural identities. Largely based on their identities as student-athletes in a Division I football culture, their experiences within the solidly constructed world of organized sports and the more nebulously defined environment of their academic world were documented.

All of the participants in this study, namely Hunter, Doc, Pepe, Smooth Red, Knight, B.C., Bull and Flea described the emotional salience of their earliest experiences in sports in terms of relationships with other males. Bradley whose quote introduces this chapter reflects on this same notion concluding similarly that there is hardly any artificiality
within a male athletic culture. Yet, there is ambivalence; competition and respect for teammates allow them to develop a powerful bond but by the same token, not an intimate one. Messner (1992) described this as: "since men friends tend to 'do things' with each other, rather than spending their time talking about their inner lives, they are judged to be engaged in bonding without intimacy" (p. 92). The major pattern that evolved over the course of this study concerns the development of this group of student-athletes within their college football culture. The interview questions they were asked examined their entry, immersion and exit from this unique peer culture. They also delved into their relationships within their culture, with their coaches, with fellow students and faculty. Through analysis of their responses, their dress, their carriage and demeanor, their encounters with others that I was able to observe and poring through media guides and other written documents and through the lens of symbolic interactionism, I arrived at a number of prominent inductions.

Four major themes or patterns emerged from the data analysis in this study of football student-athlete culture.

First theme: Camaraderie
Second theme: Save Face Mentality
Third theme: Us Against the World
Fourth theme: Failure Can Mean Success
Camaraderie

The first and perhaps most important, can be described in general terms as camaraderie, the largely unspoken bonding that results from being a member of a football culture. Research on group cohesion has variously described this dynamic as esprit de corps, solidarity, camaraderie, attraction (Mudrack, 1989b; Russell, 1993). All eight (8) participants not only referenced this dominant value concept but used the term, camaraderie in their separate interviews. That fact in itself, i.e. acknowledging the deep sense of belonging, caring and sharing is noteworthy but so is their vocabulary for it. For one, they were always interviewed individually and with the exception of Hunter and Pepe being roommates were not aware of who the rest of the participants were. Yet, each of them paid homage to their team family and categorized their feelings and attitudes as camaraderie. This prevailing ideology has been described by Andrew Pettigrew (1979) as "socially built and maintained, language embodies implicit exhortations and social evaluations. By acquiring the categories of a language, we acquire the structured 'ways' of a group, and ...the value implication of those ways" (p. 94).

Bull proudly compared his Samoan origin, especially his culture's strong sense of family with his experiences in the collegiate football culture. The upshot of this likeness is
that he feels both develop their own collective system of tradition, meanings and interpretations that guide their dealings with each other. To Samoans, pride, honor and shame reflect on their entire ethnic group and not just the individual. The football team too, is sensitive to the same collective thinking. Camaraderie to Samoans and football players corresponds to a deep sense of belonging and identification. All the participants recognized that group cohesion and harmony permeate when there is unequivocal commitment to their goals. The following exemplify some of the participants' views on camaraderie:

**B.C.**: "If I had to pick one thing (about my football experience) it would probably be camaraderie, camaraderie-ship with the guys. Otherwise it's like one big blip on the screen".

**Pepe:** "I think the players are totally themselves. That's how they are".

**Doc:** "The camaraderie is a definite plus, you're friends for a long time. Can help younger players with employment, etc".

**Bull:** "Can be yourself- nothing to hide".

**Hunter:** "Wonderful experience, the camaraderie, guys so relaxed".

**Knight:** "The team is the players...not the coaches".

Camaraderie was also described in several other ways. It began with the rookies or the young pups as they are nicknamed
going through initiation similar to pledging rites that fraternity hopefuls go through. Yet, unlike Greek pledging, the football players' initiation is subtle and unspoken, more an orientation to a "this is how things are" mindset. The participants recalled this period as entering the brotherhood or "paying our dues". The assimilation between the veterans and the rookies were described as sharing ups and downs, highs and lows with each other.

Participants identified the concept of camaraderie as a closeness that is shared even out of the athletic context. They speculated that their trust and understanding of each other would best be described in terms that reflected a real family. Another acknowledgment of their being in a peer culture is that their "best friends" are primarily members of this football culture. They indicated that they would not have chosen each other as friends had they not been on the team. The research on peer culture by Astin (1977a), Dey (1988) and Pascarella (1980) suggests that the level of involvement in an aspect of college life is positively related among other factors, to peer influence and value change.

Another way they described their intense connection was through sharing similar experiences, traditions and stories. For a first year player like Knight, his heroes were the veterans who were teaching him things about the game, about college and about life. For a walk-on like Pepe, the rest of his teammates gave him respect for "being tough" and viewed
his value to them as a vital part of their football tradition. Doc said "Walk-ons have no glory on the outside (meaning to the public) but they are a big part of the war".

For those who are out-of-state college players, the phenomenon of becoming personally involved with people from different ethnic groups and backgrounds makes the sense of belonging even more symbolic. Flea, Hunter, Smooth Red and Doc spoke of their football experience as providing an avenue to initially adjust to vast changes in their lives such as alleviating loneliness, fitting in to dorm living and making friends. Later they said the symbolism or image identity with being a Division I college football member took on a collective significance. They indicated that at this site institution, there did not appear to be a dominant ethnic group in football which they surmised allowed for easier infusion into the major peer culture, the football team.

An interesting consensus emerged from the participants regarding ethnic group subcultures. While recognizing that friendship networks on the team tended to be organized along racial lines or by positions, the players, particularly the black participants, felt they gained most through acculturation with the main football culture. Through college football, Smooth Red and Hunter said they had their first real contact with people from different racial groups. It has been the context by which they have nurtured and maintained cross-racial relationships. The rest of the participants also paid
reverence to the educative value of ethnic heterogeneity within the football team. On the light side, their tales about out-of-state players speaking pidgin English and in-state players wearing Malcolm X hats and trying to "act Black" were always accompanied with a lot of laughter and enjoyment. B.C. had the following comment:

It's kinda fascinating. You kinda trip out--a lot of local players start talking like that (meaning Blacks). It's kinda neat, like you know you have like a cultural exchange yeah. And then you have (out-of-state) players trying to talk pidgin--"Hey brah!", it's kinda funny. I think that's one of the good parts about it. You get to experience the different cultures to a certain extent...

From their vantage however, because the foundation of camaraderie among them is so strong, their jests and mockery of each other are viewed as simply levity.

Bull, in espousing the abiding belief that football is a test of personal resolve, toughness and allegiance to peers, provided an example of Cube, a young man who suffers from Down's Syndrome. Cube is not a player but hung around the team at practices and games till he became part of the team. He was then given a special responsibility and that was to run to midfield during games to pick up the football tee after kickoffs. He apparently performs this with some personal dramatics. Bull offered this information about Cube to point out the extent of camaraderie that is shared:

It's like Cube—you know Cube? The guy who runs out on the field and tumbles down. He has a sense of belonging—that's why he's around. Because we all accept him and we treat him—we don't treat him like he has a problem. Hey! he wants to tease us, we're going to tease him right back you know. He pulls our shorts down, we do the same.
He comes around because he knows he belongs. That's what most of the guys do.

The participants cited subcultures within the football team as influencing their view of camaraderie. They indicated that interrelationships with their ethnic, positions and geographic subgroups added to their sense of identity and pride. They were quick to add, however, their belief that there are certain things about team loyalties and awareness that cross racial lines. I found in all their openness, this topic seemed to touch a raw nerve. That is, while they clearly expressed the powerful feelings they had for members of their subgroups, they also described their sensitivity to labeling of them by outsiders. For example, Smooth Red said he had heard talk about the different races on the team not getting along with each other but thought it was "absurd because I don't see it at all". He further indicated that their Black subgroup definitely feels more comfortable with each other but said:

...that's a different situation in that we coming from (area in U.S.) anyway. So I mean you almost totally lose your culture if you don't kinda just have some type of base. That's why we have barbeques and we do some things.

Another important factor that provided a sense of connection was the within-culture effects that exist. Despite the "pay dues" routines that were quasi-ceremonial and traditional at the start of each football season, the veteran/rookie relationship was described as paramount to the
development of camaraderie. The veterans placed themselves as role models and mentors and the rookies felt knowing and playing with those they looked up to contributed to a comfortable inclusive affiliation.

The submersion of individuality in favor of group interest is viewed by the participants as unconscious or in their own wording "something that's automatic". They pointed out that the pecking order that dictates their organizational structure is exclusive of their interrelationships with each other. They say off the playing field, they do not label each other by position ranking. Despite the tight parameters that govern their football lives and despite a caste-type organization designed to promote a competitive divisiveness among them, the participants to a man, feel they instead serve to unify them. Adler & Adler (1988) observed that "organizations in which members are highly interdependent and in which performance might require unswerving commitments from members" include athletic teams, astronaut groups, and surgical teams (p. 402).

**Save Face Mentality**

In contrast to their seemingly idyllic view of life as football athletes in college, the participants suggested that they felt their lives and activities were compromised in some ways. They revealed that they understand the public image of
a football athlete that they are expected to uphold. They spoke about the media pouncing on information about players' escapades especially, and blowing them out of proportion. Interestingly too, they acknowledged being discriminating about when their so-called public image is necessary and when their individual identities are acceptable. Some said they handled this constant turmoil by becoming actors playing roles.

As a way to individually salvage their often self-inflicted turmoil with their roles, they discussed developing an outer veneer, a deliberate external stoicism that sustain them through disappointments and the politics of athletics. This abstraction is labeled as saving face and primarily reflects coping with imposed expectations about their priorities.

Many of the meanings that the participants reportedly attached to football revolved around toughness, emotional self-control, physical size and strength. Further, they interpreted their tenure as football student-athletes as a "business enterprise", "love for the sport", "the most important thing in my life", "a chance to get my education". They described with clarity, their ambivalence with commodifying themselves for a chance to participate in something they love and enjoy. They commented on having to subsume their academic pursuits whenever football priorities interfered.
Their primary response to feeling like pawns is one of full acknowledgment of their choice. They say they had signed on for the "full nine yards". With great sensitivity, the participants cited that they all covet athletic excellence and achievement of this requires "training of the body" but it also involves a "head game". Throughout intense and continuous competition where one teammate's success might mean another player's demotion, the participants say they have had to develop their own ways of dealing with the realities of being a Division I college football player. Pepe described a situation that was very personal, one he said he felt anger, then sorrow, then uncertainty and finally acceptance. Interestingly, this range of emotions was felt in the time span of several minutes. He said the team was on a road trip and during the game, the #1 and #2 quarterbacks succumbed to injuries and had to leave the game. On the sidelines, both Pepe, #4 in ranking and the #3 quarterback, a rookie player who "hadn't taken a game snap" were eagerly awaiting "the call". Pepe said he wanted to go in so badly even knowing "two of my friends went down". He said he knew he could do the job and he wanted to finally prove he could step in and carry the team. He described the anticipation and atmosphere on the sidelines as nervewracking. Then the Coach called #3's number. Pepe was crushed! He bares his innermost thoughts and feelings in finishing this story. He wanted to slam his helmet down and stomp off. He said next: "If I could've, I
would have dropped a tear or two but I knew that was no good". So he joined his teammates to encourage #3 who was "nervous like heck" to carry the team forward. Pepe labeled his heartwrenching experience as "the lump in my throat was so big" because he was so emotional. After years of toil, he finally thought he had his chance. He said: "I came so close to getting my foot in the door". He felt this situation tested his personal goals to perform: "I was confident in my mind that I could compete...when it comes to football I know what I can do--I just needed something to prove myself". Unfortunately, he was not given the opportunity. He felt his teammates continued to respect him for his competitive spirit, leadership and team attitudes.

For most, the support and non-judgmental nature of the football peer culture assist with saving face. For a few, their inability or disinterest in being a team player prevails, so they quit football. Russell (1993) observed that: "Disillusioned members of a team no longer pursue their common interest, effort lags and some members start to drift away..." (p. 74).

For the participants, the playing field is the main battleground. As Hunter described: "I want to be a class in competing. It's nothing personal...off the field I can put that aside...actually competition brought us close". All agreed that as competitors they want to beat each other out of positions and at practices they indeed attempt this, but
otherwise their team face is a silent witness to their allegiance to the total team effort.

B.C., Doc and Flea talked about face saving in a personal way. They said they felt forced to project wellness when in fact they were playing hurt. They talked about playing with pain as the norm in football. It seems it was described as a badge of toughness and commitment. Their desire to avoid demotion or to be shunned by coaches compelled them to continue to minimize their injuries, claiming their logic was to save face within the depth chart order. Flea described his situation with injuries:

...I can play with pain. I play through that. If I sit out like that I won't be playing. I gotta play tough. Otherwise I won't be on the field as much and so I'm able to play through the pain and suck it up when times get rough.

Again, the bottom line goal of winning games is the bond that fosters the save face concept among the participants. They say it mitigates any individual goals they may have over that of emphasizing the importance of team play. As complicated as this point of view may appear to outsiders, the participants claimed it wasn't, primarily because teamwork and sense of togetherness superseded any solitary notions of success.

Regardless of how hard they fought for rankings, recognition and star status in practice and perhaps came out on the short end, they felt their cohesion as a team allowed them to respectfully and gracefully share in all that came
their team's way. They added that "getting our butts kicked" and being "swore at" and "screamed at" by coaches is "no party by no means" and for some embarrassing and degrading yet they offered that these experiences were common among them and scoldings and beratings were an everyday occurrence. Lenk (1969) said: "A team is a unit with a task that no individual members can do alone" (p. 37). Football players heartily agree that this knowledge predicates their acceptance of and participation in the saving face mentality.

Us Against the World

Collectively, the participants shared their uneasiness with discrimination against the student-athlete culture by students, faculty and others on the campus. A study conducted by Engstrom & Sedlacek (1991) of freshmen students' attitudes of student-athletes at a public university in eastern U.S. suggested that they perceived student-athletes negatively in situations dealing with academics. My study's participants had similarly experienced "attitudes" from fellow students and professors in the classroom setting.

The third induction from their experiences is conceptualized as Us Against the World, referring to the imposed or directed disengagement they say they experienced in the college academic world. Knight believes the perpetuation of misinformation, stereotyping and even fear is proverbial;
a label given the entire group of student-athletes for the actions of "one or two bad apples". He claims their academic experiences as student-athletes parallel those of regular students in that wrongs such as cheating, cutting class, tardiness and later papers are committed by both groups. He said: "I mean sometimes there are athletes who may want to cheat or want to get something off somebody else but so do non-athletes".

In an interview quote contained in a letter Doc wrote to the school newspaper, Head Coach (name) of the (site university's football team) cites the major difference between a student-athlete and a regular student: "An athlete's lifestyle is viewed under a microscope. If an athlete does something wrong, they will most likely make the front page of the newspaper and the six o'clock news" (Head Coach, personal communications, January 13, 1994).

Nevertheless, the participants stopped short of calling this prejudice. Instead, they said they felt an inclination toward viewing their collegiate world as we-ness and they-ness. Interestingly, the participants were very willing to look within their cultural bonds for explanations to this assertion. In their view, the academic arena was not where their peer culture mediated their actions as it did in athletics. They found the academic environment different; one where the focus was on individual commitment and decisions and one where student-athletes were dispersed to their own
pursuits. They admit their encounters with the classroom have not always been well-received and therefore, have tended to appreciate the comfort zone offered by their football peers even more. Elliott (1986) had the following thoughts on the notion of group consciousness:

Just as the individual acquires an individual identity under his own name...so too social identity requires the awareness of belonging to a distinctively named group in contrast to other groups...These are all the end-product of the collective identification of individuals (p. 6).

The participants spoke candidly about being victims of stereotyping and negativism but also about being their own self-perpetuators. They realize the burden they bear has elements of truth to it particularly knowing some of their teammates are on campus just to play football and appear to be frivolous about school. Pepe and others decry the lack of realism in their goals:

So basically, you get a scholarship, you're not here to play football, you're here to get a degree, then football...with some guys, the majority, 85--90% on the team, are not going to the pros. Are not going to play and a lot of 'em think they are, a lot of 'em think when I get to the League, I'm going to make this much and this much money and sometimes I feel like telling 'em 'Eh, buddy, you better wake up. Get your degree first, you know if it happens, it happens' but if not you have something to fall back.

B.C. added:

I'm sure everybody on the team has that dream..I mean everybody has a dream of playing professional football...but inside of you--there's gotta be-- there's a dreamer and a realist--or idealist and I think some of them have a problem differentiating between those two. I never quite understood that.
B.C. offered another dimension that he felt often interferes with their attempts to juggle a major conflict role—that of student. He proposed that despite the rhetoric about student-athlete education being foremost, the fundamental design of intercollegiate athletics within a higher education institution is that of preservation of the student-athletes' status. He believes that this business-oriented process of keeping student-athletes eligible contributes to segregation from the mainstream for one, and secondly, to continual misunderstandings. He pointed out that Athletics have their own academic advisors for athletes, although B.C. said a student-athlete who is purposeful may elect to get advising from his respective college academic services. It also seems to be a common practice for academic advisors in Athletics to handle student-athletes' financial aid documents and to get them registered for classes, especially during the fall football season. These actions, participants agree, tag them as not only different but mistakenly privileged.

B.C. said: "Yeah, you know everybody is part of the system....I'm not saying (site university) does this but if they gotta keep the kids in basketweaving or coin counting, so be it".

Flea and Pepe used symbolism in their comments on feeling targeted and subtly ostracized by fellow students. They believe that other students and faculty generally conclude
that student-athletes bring into the classroom the same attitudes that they successfully execute on the playing field. That is, that they brim with confidence, cockiness, arrogance and self-importance. Pepe almost apologetically said: "I guess we have this aura about us... Maybe it sometimes come across each other as negative, but it's just, it comes with the territory".

In actuality, they say they hardly feel the classroom offers them a pedestal to be admired or adulated and if students truly got to know them, they would find student-athletes to be equally as anxious about the professor, apprehensive about the grading in class and socially perplexed about making friends. It is hardly a wonder they add that they find salvation in networking with any or all student-athletes who are in their class.

**Failure Can Mean Success**

The fact that a defeat ultimately becomes a win is a revolutionary concept that the participants concluded was an outcome that reflected their coping with dual roles of being a student and being an athlete. This particular analysis portrayed their perceptions that an adverse relationship exists for football student-athletes in general. They said it has proven difficult for them to achieve equal success in both demands, school and athletics. In communicating about the
life of a student-athlete, they expressed with experiential awareness, the intensities and requirements of their schedules in both these areas. They felt being a student-athlete in Division I football was truly an either-or predicament. That is, the majority of them are more successful in one of these areas and unfortunately, hardly in both.

For example, they described encountering failure or mediocrity as an athlete often motivated or inspired them to concentrate on schoolwork. They further admitted that this turnaround in thinking and action sometimes occurs after an injury that sidelines them for a length of time. Besides the inability to play they say they are faced with a reality check, mainly the pros and cons of lifelong debilitation if they continued in college football. Their revelations, colored by the ebbs and flows of a football season reflect postures of sensitivity and susceptibility that I had not fathomed would be their experience. B.C. spoke with compassion about his injuries and their impact on his future:

...I think that the emphasis on the student-athletes is more looked upon as a product. As you know, once you’re used up and like for me and again I’m speaking from my own experiences that you know a lot of my injuries that I had during football will be with me the rest of my life. And once your eligibility is up you know they are no longer accountable for what happened.

And I think you know in other areas you have workmen's compensation, you get hurt on the job and stuff and for me I think it kinda leaves a bad taste in my mouth, like my shoulders, knees...I realized I entered into a commitment that would put
myself in jeopardy, you know by the same token I was representing the [site university] and I was giving it my all and I feel like you know...there needs to be a little bit more personable individual emphasis on it but I don't know if that's a possibility just because it's based so much on money...it's everything is money...

Pepe who is grateful for his scholarship award after three years of depending on his Mom for tuition money said he did not want to fail in his classwork and be left in a lurch. He said he knows he has no chance for a professional football career. This is how he views his emphasis on academics:
"...what I'm looking for now is something that can lead me in the right direction, where I'm exposed and get the experience so I can write up something and get a job".

On the other hand, the participants explain they are aware of student-athletes who excell on the football field at the expense of the classroom and still may come out a winner. For these select few, failure can mean success serves as a sign or symbol that the possibility that "they'll be playing on Sundays" is great. What they mean is that they may be poor students but they are superstar athletes and may be chosen for a professional football career which guarantees they'll play Sunday games. Smooth Red and Flea aspire for professional football careers and are forthright about their desires. They are focusing their time and efforts to fulfill the dream of future stardom. They say they realize school is a distant second among their priorities but it is a deliberate choice.
An interesting study by Messner (1992) on ex-athletes compared athletic aspirations among middle and lower-class males. He revealed that: "boys from lower-class backgrounds would see athletics as the career option rather than a career option" (p. 52). The crystallization of professional football pursuits for Smooth Red reverts back to his early childhood admissions of poverty and hardships and the urgency of removing his mother from this continued existence. On page 91 of this text, he mentioned his Mom working three jobs as long as he can remember. Flea is responding to not only his dream but that of his father who wants that for Flea. He said:

I want to play professional ball. I really do and it starts now. I've already been lifting...I usually go home during Spring Break but...I'm going to stay here and work out.

My Dad has a lot of knowledge about teams and stuff and coaches. He sees Scouts at the games. He says "Flea, it's there. It's there for the taking". But anyway...I've got two more football seasons left and I want to make the most of it.

Another point the veteran participants especially made was that this theoretical stance was an evolving and consequential process. They explained that when entering into academia and athletics as freshmen, they may have naively believed they could master both demands without much difficulty. Knight said it was logical that they thought in this manner because being scholarship players they were "big names" in high school and thought their fame would continue in college. On the academic side, they thought college classes would be a continuation of high school classes.
All of the participants, speaking not necessarily for themselves but for the team, pointed out that the first year is often tumultuous, with adjustments to both a Division I football program and school simultaneously. The next phase in the earlier mentioned evolution of adjustment may lead players to focus their attention on one area over the other. Those who were #1 on the Depth Charts want to hold their starting positions and generally work hard at continuing their football success. They believe that football student-athletes will work extremely hard to fulfill their football promise until injuries, strong indications from coaches or personal problems make it impossible. They also said failure, especially in the sports arena is difficult for them to admit but they have unexpectedly found that can lead to academic and ultimately, career advancement.

Summary

The four emergent themes: Camaraderie, Save Face Mentality, Us Against the World and Failure Can Mean Success center on intrinsic and extrinsic explanations given by the participants as to what their Division I college football experience is like. That is, they made known some of their innermost thoughts as well as showed their personalities and carriage. As they conceptualized how their lives revolve around football and their peer culture, the participants
demonstrated that their peer culture encompasses external conformity as seen in their dress, uniforms, expressions, slogans and public demeanor. They also showed convergent thinking in their values orientation and beliefs. They are powerfully homogeneous as a team culture that views subordination of self to the team, acceptance of strict discipline and pain as an inevitable part of sport. Additionally, they endorse aggressiveness and competitive spirit on the playing field. The participants on the other hand, also alluded to tenderness and compassion being important qualities that they willingly shared among each other off the playing field.

Their claim is that intercollegiate athletics tended to foster their dehumanization while their peer culture cherished student-athletes' individuality completely. The participants unequivocally placed major primacy on bonding with people who care and share. Camaraderie emerged as the single most significant value affecting their peer culture. They indicated they felt psychologically safe with their football peers, believing they were able to trust teammates in their environment and have close relationships with those who shared this common interest.

Testimony to the power of solidarity was discussed in the context of the volatile athletic environment and social isolation of the classroom. Solidarity among members as a value in its own right, provided the parameters for
nonjudgmental thinking and actions by the peer culture. They said this permeated within the culture a sense of team equality that allowed student-athletes to save face when faced with haranguing and humiliation by coaches for example or difficulties in the classroom.

Then, their views of their own cultural group as compared with the general college student population showed that they felt socially, emotionally and academically isolated. It was clear they felt they were classified as intellectually lacking and socially inept. Partly in reaction to this, they spoke articulately with an us against the world attitude.

Finally, a characteristic of the pluses and minuses of playing football was perceived by the student-athletes as a winning equation after all. They concluded that a few among them may meet athletic success and more would focus on their academics and become productive members of the work world.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This has been a stimulating study for me because of the open-ended qualitative approach that has allowed the information to emerge in a fresh way. The eight (8) participants are a select group, but, in another sense, they are not. They were not randomly chosen, but were selected because they fit the profile desired: members of (site university's) football team for at least one year; representative numbers from offensive and defensive positions; representative numbers from ethnic/racial groupings; representative numbers from various geographical home bases.

While the intent of this qualitative study was not to make predictions about football student-athletes, other football student-athletes reading this study are likely to discover parts of themselves in their fellow participants' experiences and to feel some connectedness.

The participants, select student-athletes in football, continue to grow and develop as college student-athletes and members of society. By this writing, four (4) have graduated, three (3) are on the current roster of the (site university's) football team and one (1) after finishing his football eligibility has dropped out of school. I consider it my privilege to have this opportunity to reconstruct their lives and give direct glimpses into their socialized peer culture.
Unlike Chapter V which illustrates cumulative insights and inferences through their own reflections, this section provides my views as the researcher/interviewer as well as what I consider points worthy of future attention. I provide these with some reservation because I feel the experiences these student-athletes shared cannot be manipulated to provide meaning. In traditional forms of educational research, raw data are not enough. They become meaningful through mathematical manipulation and analysis. In qualitative research like this study, there are a number of implications for both theory and practice. Therefore, rather than try to take words out of their mouths by substituting my own, this chapter responds to the meaning that is already present in their stories, from individual and collective perspectives.

Condensed Summary of Study

This descriptive study of football student-athletes in one Western U.S. university has sought to provide a concrete examination of their relations with others within the institutional setting by addressing the four research questions that guided the analysis.

The four research questions centering on the student-athlete culture and experiences were occasioned by such studies as Adler & Adler (1991), Engstrom & Sedlacek (1991), Messner (1992) as well as the Knight Foundation Commission on
Intercollegiate Athletes' reports (1991, 1992, 1993). These studies suggest that collegiate athletics occupies a significant place in higher education activities but also emphasizes how little is known about the nature of peer culture that emerges within sport settings.

In keeping with qualitative research, this study employed naturalistic methods, primarily personal experience interviews and observations. In particular, a total of at least thirty five (35) personal interviews were conducted with eight (8) select student-athletes, averaging four (4) interviews per participant. My aim was to go beyond reconstructing their individual experiences but to also add to the general understanding about playing football and the development of their culture.

The qualitative examination of the culture and experiences of this group of men through their perceptions has allowed some important issues to emerge concerning their status as student-athletes, particularly as they believe others see them and as they see themselves and each other. There are also a number of conclusive statements that I feel can be made from the collected data.

Responses to the Research Questions

Research Question #1: What are the student-athletes' perceptions of their football team experience?
Playing football for a Division I college football team is a pendulous experience to the participants. This is the overall view I offer when I take into account the insecurities of playing the sport itself to more fully grasping the apparently secure warmth of their peer culture. Consequently, the earlier described themes of camaraderie, failure equals success and saving face have prominence in understanding their ambivalent feelings about certain aspects of their football team experience.

For each participant, their college football experience is noteworthy, especially in their growth as team players and as vibrant, intuitive individuals. Despite the powerful impact of "winning is everything" ethic that is encouraged, it can be argued that these student-athletes are not "dumb jocks", "air-heads" or "blank slates" onto which the public, the media and non-athletes can permanently imprint these labels.

As fully appreciated as their college football careers are for them, it is crucial to examine how the ambivalences and insecurities of playing the sport digress from the values, attitudes and acceptance they experience in a close-knit network as the football peer culture offers. This dichotomy, expressed by the student-athletes in the study very matter-of-factly as a way of life for them, was an integral part of their total football experience. In order to play football and juggle academics, they undertake the responsibility to
center their lives around football, sometimes at the expense of other important relationships. Doc mentioned his girlfriend "is understanding but if she ever asked me to quit football, I'd say goodbye to her". This posture, perhaps a standard expectation in athletics, nonetheless, is discordant in a number of ways. For one, it hardly allows choices and for another, it creates confusion on the student-athlete role. For example, from earlier revelations, the participants discussed and concluded that many people see, expect and thus treat them as athlete-students. This role confusion is marked by tensions and conflicts between student-athletes and regular students and between student-athletes and faculty. It also encourages the student-athlete to differentiate himself from others outside his group.

Their revelations showed that they responded spontaneously to the demands, pressures, competition and painful agonies of failure in playing the sport, mostly because they accepted the challenge and partly because they felt their scholarships were contractual obligations to the university. Collectively, the student-athletes have shared an essential ingredient of the human condition that is a frightening one to face—vulnerability. The demands and activities they face on the playing field especially, are unremitting reminders to them of their vulnerability. Inasmuch as their peer culture unity was considered to be empathic and enabling, the participants identified fears,
frustrations, failures and even isolationism as potential disabling barriers to success. They walk a tightrope, trying to eke out a balance to survive what is expected of them. They are sometimes defenseless.

A strong theme, almost a plea, permeated my conversations with the eight (8) student-athletes: "We are not that different from other students or anyone else". Sometimes this reminder was expressed in words; more often it was implied in the accounts of the experiences, football and academic to be specific, they have encountered. Although the participants wish to be known as regular college students on campus, their actions and behavior are sometimes contrary to this expressed desire. They tend to be clique-ish in the classroom and have been observed using their size and status as football players to intimidate others. Their comfort level with blending into the college community is still quite low and their contrived aloofness often interferes with their assimilation. Finally, the participants see football in the long-range as good because they see it as "life's training". As surly Smooth Red put it: "There ain't no such thing as fair in life".

**Research Question #2:** Does the social world of collegiate athletes rest upon a system of beliefs, values and symbols that is shared by its members? If so, how?

In order to answer the second research question regarding a shared system of beliefs, values and symbols among student-
athletes, it is necessary to 1) summarize the affinity that exists between the team sport of football and student-athletes' developing identities and 2) look at the development of their sport relationships and how it fosters shared meaning.

Initially, as boys, the student-athletes in my study were first attracted to playing football because it was a primary means to connect with other people, especially male peers. But as they became successful on the playing field, their interest turned less toward "being with the guys" and more toward vying with each other for recognition and success.

Later, as the student-athletes became committed to playing college football and were recruited to do so, the competitive hierarchy of athletics actually advanced the development of team bonding and closer identities with other football athletes. They said the higher level of play at the college level fosters their socialization because as mentioned earlier, "there is no I in team". They also became socially conditioned to convey a team unity in all that they did and thus their relationships and interactions with other male football athletes spilled into the classroom as well. This homogeneity amongst them was their culture, a security net that they kept themselves enshrouded under to better deal with their football encounters as well as the world outside of football.
Therefore, playing on a Division I major college football team fostered an emergence of distinct cultural bonds that they had not experienced earlier. In high school, their athletic prowess and recognition were individually accorded where they said the stars got the limelight with the team often a second thought. As college players, the complicated level of play required a team approach at all times. No one seems to dispute the point that an individual player alone cannot win games for a college team. In fact, several of the participants said learning to "play a role on the team", rather than needing to be the star, was a valuable lesson they learned through the college sport program. Additionally, college football with its business-oriented ethic began to eclipse the more traditional emphasis of character building and playing to have fun and supplanted this with a system of conditional self-worth. In other words, when B.C. recounted his "what have you done for me lately?" syndrome and Knight alluded to "you're only as good as your last game" fears, a constant in the student-athletes' social world was the sense of insecurity and worry about the next game, the next practice, even the next team meeting.

To fully understand male sport relationships, a noted sociologist, Don Sabo (1987) said in a newspaper article (as cited in Sabo & Panepinto, 1990): "There's a very intimate relationship between sport and a man's inner sense of his identity as a male. Part of that definition of being a man is
you're supposed to be in charge, in control of the environment and destiny.

At the college level, the participants felt that competition and unity were concepts that marked their cultural system and further defined for them the manner in which they handled themselves on the field. Other entities that they valued may appear nebulous to non-athletes but were articulated by the participants as powerful. For one, they believe in emotion control. They said this is a deliberate masculine persona that involves rational considerations related to not losing face, fulfilling expectations of coaches and fans and of appearing fearless. Related to saving face is the value they place on martyrdom. I discovered they felt pain and violence were part of being a football player and they upheld this point of view through their very actions. B.C., Flea, and Doc spoke on this matter directly; Bull and Smooth Red alluded to the nobility of playing with injuries. To all the participants, the supreme compliment on the football field was to be called a "hitter" or "headhunter".

From my research, the answer to Research Question #2 is yes. With this particular participant group, the how is best portrayed through the ways they validate and support relationships and decisions made by fellow team members. Snyder & Spreitser (1978) wrote on locker room dynamics and used the following slogan as a graphic depiction of shared philosophy in athletics: "Cooperation--remember the banana,
every time it leaves the bunch it gets skinned (p. 192). The norms of brotherhood for the student-athletes in the study also support Snyder's quote. Their loyalty, solidarity and cohesiveness are without question and their boundaries are not even magical--It's belonging to the team, first and foremost.

Research Question #3: According to selected football student-athletes, what characterizes a state university Division I major college football peer culture?

According to the select football student-athletes, their football peer culture is characterized by strong cultural identities. In addition to affiliation with like-minded individuals, there is solid evidence that student-athletes in the study use their cultural membership to exhibit a uniquely expressive style of masculinity. This affectation or pose is externally visible; their individual physiques, the people they "hang out" with and their vociferous talk are symbolic stamps indicating their football association.

Less telltale are values and perspectives they regard highly. In order to understand these characteristics, it is necessary to examine their attitudes about being a member of this peer culture and how their relationships are shaped. It is not uncommon to hear these student-athletes talk almost reverently of their relationships with teammates. They very aptly characterized their peer culture as camaraderie-ship. This sense that close friendships between them are forged in
mutual adversity was a common theme in their discussions about playing the sport and working as a team.

Throughout, the participants have unhesitatingly affirmed the sense of camaraderie and bonding that they feel exists within their peer culture. Relationships within this peer culture that they develop easily fill any family voids they may feel as well as take care of college adjustments. However, they have come to realize that this cohesion sometimes works against them with the outside world, particularly in the classroom and in public. Thus, the theme of "Us Against the World" poignantly portrays the "fitting in" or assimilating problems they discussed. Other than this point of their peer culture being narrowly insular, the fact that over 100 student-athletes from diverse backgrounds and settings can come together and coexist as football teammates is a remarkable feat.

As members of an interacting group of individuals entering the team culture in staggered fashion, with players coming and going, the spirit of community that sustains them is through shared rituals and customs. They talked about initiation rites, summer camps, their statement-making fashions and appearances and identifying names that deepened their bonds.

Along with the view of dues willingly paid and acceptance into the football peer culture, another interesting consensus
point of view that was evident, was the belief that injuries, pain and health risks are like paying dues, a "necessary evil". As a group, they value a tough masculine identity and want to uphold this standard unequivocally.

With this particular Division I college football peer culture, besides the significance they placed on comradeship and team goals, they identified themselves as an egalitarian culture of sorts. The social philosophy that is a binding, acculturating factor is the view that within the cultural bounds, there is a feeling of equality based on their being members of the football team.

Without exception, they noted that being a football student-athlete meant "no free time", "always trying to be better", "a lot of pressure" and "doing what I can for the team". A significant part of this study drew upon how they coped with diverse expectations as students and athletes. I found they gravitated toward insulation where the athletic organizational structure readily accommodated this need with rules, rules and more rules for them. Their emotional insulation was provided by their football peer culture with its universal acceptance of teammates irregardless of size, rank, status or popularity. Along the lines of a past slogan popularized by a professional football team for its defensive line, the participants felt safe and secure within the confines of their peer culture's "steel curtain".

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Research Question #4: What patterns of group perspectives about football student-athletes as a culture are evidenced among this group of men?

The key issue that was interwoven throughout the study is the mediating pattern of socialization that dramatizes either successful or unsuccessful immersion into school, into athletics or both. In the process of negotiating their student-athlete roles, they divulged attempts at reconciling political, sports roles and academic expectations. My interpretation of the data in this particular area concerns their internalization of a crisis matter such as the student-athlete dilemma and then their handling of it. Perhaps, for the first time in their lives as student-athletes, they encounter a situation where they may have had to make a major decision that did not please certain constituencies. I discovered that the participants knew college football was demanding and expected to be the major focus of their lives and identities. They accepted this commitment wholeheartedly. However, their guilt and insecurities began to increase as they privately questioned the kind of focus that academics could have in their lives that would not jeopardize their football identities.

This decision is further exacerbated because the student-athlete does not ever feel he has a secure position on the team and therefore, unless injured, very disinclined to reveal or discuss seeking personal priorities that are not in sports.
I understand this layer or veneer often does not rise to the surface until student-athletes become ex-athletes. According to the participants, a good number of them are reluctant to risk losing their scholarships. This particular group perspective revealed the fragile position they occupy as they yo-yo their way through college and football. They concluded that while they are active participants they have too much at stake to jeopardize all their hard work by conceding a weakness.

Another group perspective that is undeniably attractive to them is the aspiration for athletic stardom and a professional athlete status. The prospect of realizing their boyhood dream is hardly disputed by the motivated, hardworking young men who participate in this grueling sport for this reason. Recognition and especially respect were very important constructs in their football world because the participants noted, those values are a big part of what separates success and failure for them. However, the hard lesson they learned is that entry into football does not automatically guarantee success. Moreover, the participants have found the difference between success and failure in football lies in a combination of structural opportunities, e.g. availability of spots in a position, "working harder than the next guy" and of course, luck.

To the participants, their unwavering love, interest and dedication to play the sport of football was evidence of group
solidarity. They spoke of this almost as often as they described camaraderie. Theirs is such a deep commitment, given the physical and mental rigors, the time and the priorities that govern their lives. This perspective suggests a powerful psychological and emotional merging of individuals who are dedicated to the same mission.

As a group, they generally accept patriotism, meritocracy and even violence as essential themes in their hierarchical world. A salient belief around which symbolic meaning emanates is their universal identification with football being a male sport and that college athletes playing Division I football are tough, aggressive, and powerful. Their masculine superiority over other non-athlete males and females is misconstrued, especially in the classroom where their sensitivities to being maligned, seems to have cultivated the gulf between student-athletes and the rest of the campus community.

In effect, the words of the participants themselves pointed toward their football indoctrination as learning about and adjusting to life within the male dominated hierarchy of the sport itself and the structural order of college and academics. They became part of a rule governed athletic organization interspersed with the cultural ethos that linked them to membership in the football team. This led to an
examination of both their global views of being college student-athletes and their individual reconciliation with this dualism.

As they tried to come to terms with their respective ascending or descending status in sport and then in academics, it can be said that engagement or disengagement became exclusively important. That the choice of engagement in a football career meant total investment in it still demonstrated for Flea and Smooth Red, a rational choice on their part. That Pepe had no choice but to disengage from his athletic career because of a season-ending back injury, made his changed focus on schoolwork, an appropriate one. What may be inconclusive but nevertheless, noteworthy is the extent and magnitude of team loyalty and devotion that may preclude individual team members from developing their own identities. Regarding Pepe's action, Charles Cooley, sociologist called this the "looking glass self" (1962). He said:

If we view the athletic activity and the crowd as a sort of mirror into which the athlete gazes, we can begin to understand how devastating it can be when that looking glass is suddenly and permanently shattered, leaving the man alone, isolated, and disconnected.

Conclusions

While I endeavored to bring forth my major deductions for each of the four research questions, my conclusions clearly overlap across the questions and by no means reflect any
separation of viewpoints. When viewed in total, some interesting aggregates from the four areas just addressed are:

Conclusion #1: The football peer culture is a prevailing and absorbing social body that serves, among its many functions, as a substitute family for its members.

Conclusion #2: The football peer culture and college athletics have aims that are often at cross-purposes; one centers on the interpersonal and immersion, the other rests on subjugation and dehumanization. However, where and how these aims intertwine describe the (site university's cultural ethos.

Conclusion #3: While the primacy of playing a team sport is foremost in the minds of football student-athletes, they also have individual goals of self-glory or education that sometimes conflict with team goals.

Conclusion #4: The football peer culture is maintained by its members largely
through its nonjudgmental interest and support of the individual members.

Conclusion #5: The delimiting role of the self in the football arena confuses and penalizes the student-athlete in his student role.

Conclusion #6: Football student-athletes at this (site university) view playing at the Division I college level as the next step to playing professional football.

Conclusion #7: Survival and especially success in the football program as well as in academics compels the student-athletes to create a carefree veneer to ward off pain, failure and other emotions.

Conclusion #8: There is the perception among the participants of this study that the overriding concern of the institution and coaches is still the successes of the team rather than the welfare and education of the individual athlete.
Summary of Major Findings

In summary, this descriptive study found that the football student-athlete peer culture did function as the main social support network for the participants. Findings generally indicate that the primary point of contact for the student-athletes in both their scholastic and athletic environments lie within the membership ranks of their football culture.

The participants maintained that there are distinguishing differences between their experiences and relationships within the football peer culture and the football program. For one, they perceived that college football places greatest emphasis on the team, the common goals, the victory and thus, the individual is secondary to the goal of winning. To their peer culture however, each person is worthy in his own right.

The football peer culture was also seen as a positive influence on their self-esteem. The participants identified their unconditional acceptance by peers that contrasted with the contingency standard of performance, winning and improvement that marked the football hierarchy.

Another significant difference between the football peer culture and the sport of football is categorized under hierarchical and competitive relationships. Football stresses verticality and intense competition; their peer culture stresses lateral relationships. Peer members are very
reluctant to relate to someone else in their group as higher or lower in power, prestige or position. Since each individual is regarded as worthwhile and unique, top-down order is avoided. In the world of sport, the participants felt the emphases on goal attainment, enforcement of conformity on the playing field, hierarchy, authority, and universal pursuit of success ran counter to cultural perspectives. They concluded that in order to succeed as a student-athlete in Division I college football, one must learn to accept authority, follow institutionalized procedures and rules, and adapt to team standards.

In football, the finding that one necessarily becomes a different person from what he is at home, in the classroom, on a date or with friends is a concern. While the participants noted that the mix of scholastics and athletics is still fragmented and requires different facets of their personalities to prevail, they have learned to move adequately into and out of different roles, identities and behavior. Their use of different "masks" is problematic; nonetheless, the participants view their different roles as good preparation for survival in society.

**Implications for Theory, Research and Practice**

The findings of this study lend support to the assumption that their peer culture interactions influence the overt
behavior of student-athletes to a large extent, while not necessarily influencing individual internal attitudes and beliefs. A major concern then, is how an individual who thinks or believes one thing, can be persuaded by his group or the environment he functions in, to do another thing.

While it is probable that the environment, intercollegiate athletics, denies the advancement of individual decision-making, the questions that still persist are: Is the need for survival as a student-athlete or is the need for acceptance within the football structure or within the peer culture so strong as to create a situation of conflict within an individual over his beliefs and interests?

Through a description of select student-athlete experiences in football, in college and with others, key factors and circumstances have been identified via the earlier discussed major themes. First, an implication of the study is that development is interdependent and must be balanced in order for student-athletes to grow in a well-rounded way. Certainly, with disparate academic and athletic expectations, and athletics having the heavier emphasis among student-athletes, it is important to focus more strategically on their intellectual, interpersonal and self-concept development.

This may be an appropriate time to conduct cultural audits and interventions as Kuh (1993) suggests for higher education institutions interested in gaining a better understanding of special populations like student-athletes.
The ethnography of the student-athlete as an area of study has hardly begun. I believe it is a rich area to explore. The student-athlete culture is a group discriminated against as noted by some values held by the college community and society as a whole. They have consistently been either revered or reproved. Yet, they have not been studied as a unique social group whose position and role in society reflect some of the values of society. For example, the football program and campus community hold winning games as their measurement for supporting and honoring team play just as the general public does.

Studying the football student-athlete in terms of their total lifestyle would give material for comparing patterns of culture formation, communication, value retention and the addition of other values, beliefs and customs. Close focus and analysis of both conversation and activities of the student-athlete in different college communities are essential to yield interesting information about their coping techniques and means to achieve and maintain their self-determination.

Another implication that has both theoretical and practical connotations centers on the recruitment and education of the student-athlete. There are student-athletes who continue to view academics only as a means to stay eligible and play football. Educators and administrators most directly responsible for student-athletes must be willing and able to develop individual and group interventions that
respond to their educational needs. The transitional difficulties between the athlete to student roles were explained articulately by the participants, thus predicking an urgency at this (site university) to respond to their special needs. It appears to be timely that this (site university) implement a comprehensive student development program for student-athletes. Its goals would be to provide not only current advising services that are already in place, but to plan for a tracking system, personal and career counseling, college readiness assistance and other student activities.

A specific implication of this study is that the qualitatively focused, personal interview does appear to be an appropriate and feasible method for studying the lives of student-athletes. This study is one among few studies of the football student-athlete to primarily employ the interview technique to obtain data about them. There was some concern about whether the student-athletes would be willing to allow entry into the private sanctums of their lives. The findings of this study found in Chapter IV, suggest that research of this nature among college football athletes is both possible and productive. Fine (1987) in studying preadolescent sport culture through qualitative research remarked on its "rich and dirty" fullness (p. 2).

Another implication of this study is that the interplay between structural constraints of playing football and the
dynamics of culture creation may not be fully understood. While studies on the student-athlete have focused heavily upon their graduation rates and college readiness, the findings here indicate that the student-athlete has legitimate survival and personal concerns that they may not have had a chance to express before. Perhaps a more explicit and extended longitudinal study with comparative groups of student-athletes participating in a variety of sports may allow for inferences about their roles as college student-athletes. Perhaps more emphasis needs to be placed by college administrators on encouraging articulation about this special population. As Kuh (1993) in "Cultural Perspectives in Student Affairs Work" noted:

...symbols often evoke many interpretations, ideas and actions...many types of student culture exist...celebrated, nurtured and communicated through multivocal symbols...The culturally competent administrator remains open-minded about various interpretations of symbols as well as encourages discussion about the multiple meanings of those symbols (p. 103).

The issue of exploitation, that is, feeling like pawns and commodities, surfaces yet another implication of this study. Some of them said they were very aware of their conditions of existence and the uses to which their labor is put. The student-athletes in this study revealed that this is a problematic matter for them. They accept this as unavoidable in athletics and the pursuit of winning games. Still, that they disclosed their sensitivity about these
impressions, requires conscious awareness, if not direct attention.

Finally, this study has suggested that the social integration of football student-athletes in their sport peer culture is the central source of interaction for them. The participants' claim that their affiliations in both academic and athletic arenas generally were with members of the football team. This points to insulation or detachment from the mainstream collegiate world.

This means that campus constituencies, including the student-athletes themselves, need to be aware of the validating and shaping roles that the university itself can play in the lives of students, especially special populations. Perhaps the most fascinating point the participants make is that their football pads, helmets and other gear are not their only protection from adversity. It is their own self-created facade that shields them from a world who still view them as carefree, free-wheeling individuals.
APPENDIX A

Name________________________

Date____________________

Time____________________

Brief description of study

Obtain brief history of participant: Age____

Birthplace____________________

Family make-up____________________

Early childhood?

High School____________________

College major____________________

1. Tell me a little about yourself.

2. How would you describe yourself?

3. How would others describe you?

4. College experience - What has it been like? 
   Highlights? Negative?

5. Football: When started? 
   Significance

6. First day as a college player: what was it like?

7. What has your experience as a member of the football 
   team been like?

8. What about as a student?

9. Free time activities?

10. Most rewarding experience to date?

11. Most disappointing
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions About Self as a Person

1. How would others describe you?
2. When did you first start playing football?
3. What was your high school experience like? Anything significant? Interesting?
4. Do you think you've changed as a person since football came into your life? In what ways?
5. What about in the school part?
6. What made you select (site university)?
7. Did you know anybody on the team before coming here?
8. Did other people influence you on your choice?
9. How has your experience here on the football team been?
10. Is football all that you expected and wanted it to be?
11. How is (student-athlete) as a student?
12. What do you remember about your first day as a (team nickname)?
13. What are your thoughts about being a student-athlete?
14. Who are your best friends on the team?
15. What about friendships with non-football players?
16. What about when you go to classes, do you have a chance to get to know others?
17. What are the living arrangements that are set up for football student-athletes?
18. How are your roommates selected?
19. What do you do in your free time? (if you have any that is!)
20. Do you think (name of student-athlete, Hunter), your fellow athletes understand the real (Hunter)?
21. What is important to you about being in college?

22. What about being on the football team?

23. How do you get to know the 100+ guys on the team?

24. What do you see for yourself in the future, like after you graduate?
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions focusing on finding out about college football

1. During football season, what is a typical school day like for you?
2. During the off-season, what is your school day like?
3. What happens at summer camp?
4. What is a typical practice like?
5. Who are your coaches? Describe them. What are their responsibilities?
6. With so many players, how are you grouped or organized?
7. What impressions do you think the general public has of football players?
8. What do you like about playing football?
9. Anything you don’t like about playing football?
10. What goes on during conditioning?
11. What about the weight room?
12. What would you like to tell me about the position you play?
13. What happens for game weekends here?
14. Who goes on road trips and what are they typically like?
15. Can you recall details about your first road trip?
16. How comfortable are you with fellow football team members? With other students? With coaches?
17. Who is or has been your role model?
18. What goes on in the film room?
19. What do you think about the depth chart?
20. In a game, what happens to you if you miss your assignment?
21. What do you like about playing football?

22. What don't you like?

23. What does your family think about your being a college football athlete?

24. How important is race on the football team?

25. Do players themselves stereotype each other?

26. What role/significance does trash talk play in football?

27. What are your thoughts about drug testing?

28. Those who quit the team for whatever reason, what are the feelings about them by other players?

29. What are your thoughts on politics in athletics?

30. What are your thoughts on power in athletics?

31. What are the main differences between a scholarship player and a walk-on.
Interview Questions about being a student-athlete

Date_______ Time_______

1. Describe a typical student-athlete

2. Rookies. Think back to when you were one. What are identifying traits/characteristics that distinguish them from the veteran players?

3. Do you see instances where s-a use or abuse their status as football players?

4. How do you as a football player define the word, respect? Examples?

5. On the whole, how do student-athlete want to be viewed? As football players in college or students who also play football?

6. If you could change anything about intercollegiate athletics, what might it be?

7. Have you changed since coming to site university? If so, how?

8. When student-athletes are together, what goes on? What do you talk about?

9. How do you think others--students, faculty, the public view student-athletes?

10. What specific goals do you have for yourself, both short-range and long-range?


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