Sport as Ritual: Interpretations from Durkheim to Goffman*

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is presented that sport is an important societal phenomenon because of its ritualistic overtones. The significance of sport as a ritual is based on the status of the athlete as exemplary role incumbent with power to mediate between the individuals who comprise the audience and the moral order of the community. Theoretical support is derived by a synthesis of Durkheim's social theory of religion and Goffman's theory of interaction ritual.

Sporting incidents singled out and applauded by the media as examples of heroic action are used to support the idea that athletes are significant social figures because they are capable of representing important societal values, i.e., courage, gameness, integrity, and poise.

Sociologists concerned with understanding the social significance of sport have proposed many theses. These have included explanations based on sport as a significant socializing agent; as an agent of social control; as an agent of assimilation or, conversely, of minority group identification and resistance to assimilation (cf. Pooley); and as a provider of controlled excitement in relatively unexciting societies (Elias and Dunning). Numerous psychological theories have also been advanced by sport psychologists and social psychologists.

Logical and persuasive as these theses are, this paper focuses instead on the thesis that sport can be understood as a significant aspect of society because of the ritualistic overtones it possesses. The thesis of sport as ritual is satisfying for several reasons. First, some historians feel the roots of many modern day sports can be found in the ritualistic practices associated with fertility festivals and other religious ceremonies (Henderson; Simri). In some important way, then, sport is a legacy of ritual. Over time, the religious *meaning* of sporting activities may have been lost, yet the *form* of those activities remains, ready to take on new meanings. Thus

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it is possible that conceptualizing sport as a ritual may help to establish the historic continuity of the meaning of sport in society.

Second, emphasizing the ritual power of sport draws attention to an explanation of sport which takes into account both the personal gratification obtained by the individual through sport involvement and the social needs of the community. Specifically, when one utilizes a framework derived from Durkheim, as is suggested below, one can readily understand the encompassing power of sport to join together the individual and the community for the mutual benefit of both.

Finally, strong theoretical traditions dealing with the nature and significance of ritual exist in the sociological, anthropological, and social psychological literature. These can profitably be utilized to provide a respectable base from which to generate ideas about the social significance of sport as ritual.

Anthropologists and sociologists interested in play and sport certainly have not ignored the potential of using theories of ritual to understand these phenomena. Beginning with Huizinga, whose *Homo Ludens* contains the strong suggestion that play and ritual grow together as dual focuses of the same process, those who study play and sport have assumed a fundamental relationship between those activities and the ritual process. It is significant that a major thrust of research papers and theoretical discussions fostered by The Association for the Anthropological Study of Play concerns the relationship of play and ritual (see e.g., *TAASP Newsletter*). Moreover, several highly suggestive studies attest to the potential of using models of ritual to understand sport (e.g., Cheska; Deegan and Stein; Fiske). However, any convincing argument about the usefulness of understanding sport as a social phenomenon with ritualistic overtones is ultimately dependent on establishing logical connections to respectable theories of ritual, the persuasiveness of the theory of social ritual involved, and the ability of that theory to encompass the phenomenon of sport within its explanatory structure. Not all discussions of sport as ritual have fully developed the theoretical rationale that underlies their interpretation.

The argument developed in this paper is that sport is a significant modern day ritual which can most profitably be analyzed by joining together Émile Durkheim's social theory of religion with Erving Goffman's ideas of everyday life interaction rituals as significant social ceremonies. As the argument unfolds it will be discovered that Goffman is an important heir to the Durkheimian tradition whose specific contribution is the study of everyday life as a ritual: a highly significant theoretical extension of the function ritual behavior plays in the preservation of moral order. Furthermore, it will be suggested that sport as ritual can be examined from at least two vantage points: as a social situation during which individuals engaged in problematic and consequential action communicate to one another that they understand the ideal demands their roles place on them, agree with

the values assumed by those ideals, and are capable of fulfilling role expectations; and as a social ceremony structurally capable of fulfilling social functions comparable to those of religious ceremonies, specifically by serving as an arena for the creation of symbolic leaders and the display of heroic action. Both aspects serve the same purpose: reaffirming the values of the social order.

Rituals and Symbolic Systems

THE DURKHEIMIAN TRADITION

The conceptual definition of *ritual*, and the related concept *symbolic system*, on which this discussion of sport is based, are most familiar from Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* where he presented his thesis concerning religion as a social rather than psychological experience. While Durkheim's treatment is perhaps the most integrated and complete, and certainly the best known, he was not the only scholar of his time to propound that thesis. Numa-Denys Fustel de Coulanges, an influential teacher of Durkheim, presented the thesis in less developed form in his work *The Ancient City*. Fustel argued that the social organization of Greek and Roman civilizations made little sense to the modern scholar unless they were understood as civic manifestations of religion. Using the *polis* as focal point, he delineated the nature of the intricate relationship between community and religion.

W. Robertson Smith, the Scottish anthropologist, presented a similar argument in his description of the Semite communities, and A. R. Radcliffe Brown's study of Andaaman Islanders led to the conclusion that: ". . .Rites can therefore be shown to have a specific social function when, and to the extent that, they have for their effect to regulate, maintain and transmit from one generation to another sentiments on which the constitution of the society depends" (66).

However, with the publication of *Elementary Forms*, the thesis was presented in its most complete form. Durkheim's strategy was to select "the most primitive and simple religion which is actually known" (13) as a model for understanding the nature of the religious in its most basic form. Deciding that totemism was the most elementary form extant, Durkheim made use of field studies of the totemic religions of the Australian Aborigines.

On the basis of his secondary analysis, Durkheim developed his ideas about religion. To Durkheim, the religious process is divided into two aspects: beliefs and rites. Beliefs are "states of opinion, and consist in representations" (51) while rites are "determined modes of action" (51).

According to Durkheim, all religious beliefs are founded on the

fundamental classification of things as either *profane* or *sacred*. Profane things are the things of everyday existence. Sacred things are special things, protected, isolated, separated, prohibited, inaccessible, apart from the mundane world: they are invested with special properties.

Although Durkheim argues that the two categories exist *a priori*, the contents of the categories are culturally designated and are not the result of *a priori* characteristics of the things themselves. For example, in a non-Christian society, a cross is merely two crossed sticks and therefore as profane as any two sticks. But in Christian communities, the cross carries a meaning beyond its own physical characteristics. It is encoded with meaning and treated as a sacred thing.

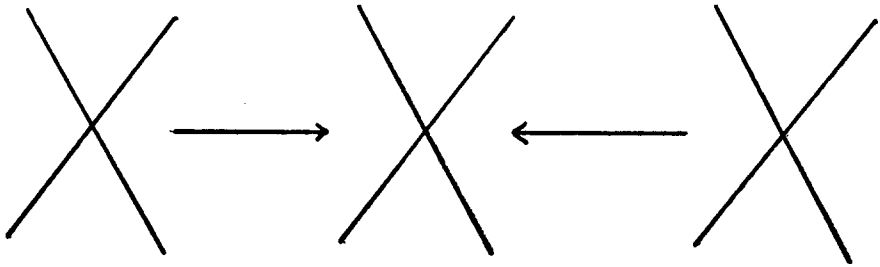
Thus the sacred may be more than the sacred idea itself (i.e., the belief in a Christian saviour) but usually includes symbols or representations of that special thing (i.e., the cross) which come to be treated as sacred. Symbols are, simply, things which stand for other abstractions. They are vehicles encoded with meanings, which serve as the basic units of meaning in rituals.

According to Durkheim, rituals are "rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of . . . scared objects" or their representations (56). Through ritual treatment of symbols of the sacred, the individual places self in respectful relationship to sacred things. Gradually, rituals become stylized patterns through which individuals express their respectful relationship to those objects or values designated as special or sacred.

Rituals are the *dynamics* of a process which joins together a system based on symbols. Durkheim conceives of this symbolic system as having three elements (see Figure 1). One element of the model is the individual member of a tribe or community. A second element is the moral order of the community, or the sacred: the values which are special to the community and worthy of respect and reverence. In other contexts this might be recognized as ideology. The third element is the symbol, a representation of the sacred which mediates between the individual and the moral order. Because it is difficult for the individual to pay homage to the abstract principle which constitutes the sacred, the symbol is a crucial element in the system. Through their treatment of the symbol, the individuals indicate affirmation for the abstract values for which it stands. Moreover, the symbol is a "collective representation" because it serves as a concrete reminder of the values of the community to which all individuals must subscribe and through which they maintain their community identity.

TRANSITIONS TO SECULAR RITUALS

Durkheim's conclusion about religion is that it is "an eminently collective thing" (63) and his definition of religion reflects that view: "A religion is a



*This model is adapted from Munn.

Figure 1. DURKHEIM'S MODEL OF SYMBOLIC SYSTEMS*

unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unites into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (62).

While Durkheim ostensibly focused attention on religious rituals, he fully realized that the principles he outlined were by no means confined to explaining phenomena labeled as religious. Clearly he viewed his thesis as a much more general one capable of explaining a class of phenomena of which religious phenomena were only one example. Thus, one of Durkheim's most significant contributions to social science is his thesis that religion must not be understood as a theological, philosophical, or psychological phenomenon, but as an experience which is eminently *social* in nature. The content of the symbolic system, the symbols venerated, the values and beliefs represented, all of these are relatively insignificant in relation to the fact that the ritual process itself serves to join the individual to a community of moral order. The *content* is not significant sociologically, but the *process* and the ceremonial effect are of profound significance.

Several scholars have built on Durkheim's general theory of ritual, emphasizing the preeminence of secular rituals. As part of his study of Yankee City, W. Lloyd Warner analyzed the Memorial Day celebration as "An American Sacred Ceremony." Warner conceived of Memorial Day as both a sacred and a secular ceremony. His thesis was that:

> . . . Memorial Day ceremonies and subsidiary rites (such as those of Armistice or Veterans' Day) of today, yesterday, and tomorrow are rituals of a sacred symbol

system which functions periodically to unify the whole community, with its conflicting symbols and its opposing, autonomous churches and associations. It is contended here that in the Memorial Day ceremonies the anxieties which man has about death are confronted with a system of sacred beliefs about death which gives the individuals involved and the collectivity of individuals a feeling of well-being (8).

In the same year, Shils and Young's essay "The Meaning of the Coronation" appeared. Steeped in the Durkheimian tradition, Shils and Young argued

. . . the Coronation was the ceremonial occasion for the affirmation of the moral values by which the society lives. It was an act of national communion. . . . The Coronation is exactly this kind of ceremonial in which the society reaffirms the moral values which constitute it as a society and renews its devotion to those values by an act of communion (67).

Both Warner and Shils and Young expand Durkheim's thesis to include secular aspects of ceremonies. However, it was left to Erving Goffman to take the thesis one step further and examine the interactions of everyday life as rituals of equal moral significance.

GOFFMAN AND INTERACTION RITUAL

One of the most significant and overlooked theoretical contributions made by Erving Goffman is his extension of Durkheim's ideas as clues for understanding the maintenance of social order. In a number of places throughout his work, Goffman acknowledges his debts to Durkheim and even makes explicit his intention to apply Durkheim's ideas to the study of everyday life. For example, in "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor" he states:

In this paper I want to explore some of the senses in which the person in our urban secular world is allotted a kind of sacredness that is displayed and confirmed by symbolic acts. An attempt will be made to build a conceptual scaffold by stretching and twisting some common anthropological terms. This will be used to support two concepts which I think are central to this area: deference and demeanor. Through these reformulations I will try to show that a version of Durkheim's social psychology can be effective in modern dress (c, 473).

In Durkheimian fashion, Goffman defines ritual as an activity which "represents a way in which the individual must guard and design the symbolic implications of his acts while in the immediate presence of an object that has special value for him" (b, 478; h, 62; k, 69). He also calls this, in true Goffman fashion, a "situated social fuss."

But unlike Durkheim, Goffman looks for ritual not in the eventful, exciting, or spectacular, but in the every minute, everyday-life interactions that comprise the bulk of social experience. To Goffman, those "objects that have special value" are not only crosses and waterholes and flags but

simply—and profoundly—the self and the other in everyday interaction. Goffman calls the process of communicating respect for the self and other the rituals of *demeanor* and *deference* respectively. These are ritually important because interacting individuals continually take on the responsibility of embodying important social roles. They attempt to portray the ideal qualities demanded of them in these roles—the loyal friend, the faithful lover, the loving parent, the efficient secretary, the dedicated scholar, the tough athlete. Through the idealization of performance, Goffman says, individuals are not attempting in a deceitful way to claim values for themselves that they do not in fact possess. They are attempting to demonstrate through their selves the ideal role characteristics valued by society. Through their behavior, they are reaffirming significant values of the moral order.

This reaffirmation of values takes place within the context of several specific forms of ritual delineated by Goffman with an eye toward the Durkheimian tradition. Communicating respect for the self, through rituals of demeanor, includes such practices as showing self-respect (b, 215), maintaining poise (a, 275; b, 215; d, 103), and demonstrating skills of impression management or facework (b, 216; e, 208). Communicating respect for others, through rituals of deference, hinges on identificatory sympathy (h, 66), presentational deference (c, 485), the rule of considerateness (b, 215), and giving face when others inadvertently lose theirs (b, 215). Together, rituals of demeanor and deference comprise *positive rituals*, a term clearly adopted from Durkheim by Goffman (h) to indicate rituals which affirm the sacred qualities of objects.

These positive rituals are complemented by *negative rituals* which dictate behaviors required to avoid contaminating the sacred (h). These interdictions or avoidance behaviors occur when some threat to demeanor or deference is perceived. In Goffman's terms, these negative rituals can be *preventive practices* (e, 13) which occur in order to avoid such threats becoming reality and *remedial practices* (h, 64; g, 365) used to restore order when profanation has inadvertently taken place. Preventive practices include exploratory communication (a, 333), overplay gloss (i, 134–5), circumspection gloss (i, 132), referential avoidance (c, 482), and no contest signs (i, 124). Remedial practices include the rule of open laughter (j, 372) and a six move remedial process: challenge, offering, remedy, relief, appreciation, and minimization (b, 220; i, 140–3; 1, 265).

In summary, in many essays Goffman concerns himself with the rituals of everyday interaction which celebrate the self and the other as significant moral beings. Clearly, Goffman's ideas of the significance of individuals in interaction build on Durkheim's model of religion. Figure 2 indicates that the concrete symbol within which societal values are encoded may very well take human form. In that special case, meanings are not encoded but embodied. Indeed, in Goffman's elaboration of Durkheim, every individual is a symbol; every individual is a collective representation

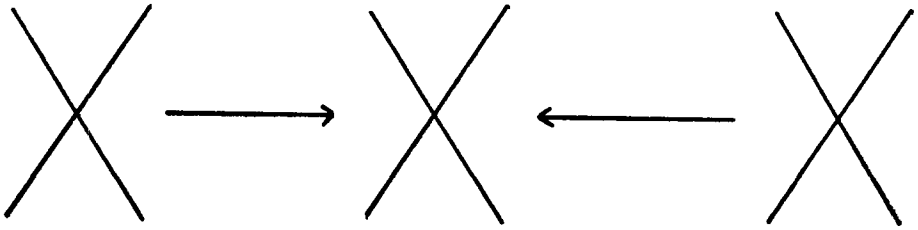


Figure 2. DURKHEIMIAN'S MODEL APPLIED TO GOFFMAN'S THESIS OF INTERACTION RITUAL

of moral values; every individual is sacred. Goffman is quite explicit about this in a number of places. For example, in his dissertation, he states:

For the actor, others may come to be seen as sacred objects. The social attributes of recipients must be constantly honored; where these attributes have been dishonored, propitiation must follow. The actor must conduct himself with great ritual care. . . . (a, 103).

. . . persons are ritually delicate objects which must be treated with care, with ceremonial offerings and propitiations (a, 175).

A few years later, in his essay on "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor," he reminds the reader of the Durkheimian heritage of his thesis by stating:

In this paper I have suggested that Durkheimian notions about primitive religion can be translated into concepts of deference and demeanor and that these concepts help us to grasp some aspects of urban secular living. The implication is that in one sense this secular world is not so irreligious as we might think. Many gods have been done away with, but the individual himself stubbornly remains as a deity of considerable importance. He walks with some dignity and is the recipient of many little offerings. He is jealous of the worship due him, yet, approached in the right spirit, he is ready to forgive those who may have offended him. Because of their status relative to his, some persons will find him contaminating while others will find they contaminate him, in either case finding that they must treat him with ritual care. Perhaps the individual is so viable a god because he can actually understand the ceremonial significance of the way he is treated, and quite on his own can respond dramatically to what is proffered him. In contacts between such deities

there is no need for middlemen; each of these gods is able to serve as his own priest (c, 499).

With such an undeniable moral current running throughout his work, it is difficult to understand the critiques of Goffman as a cynical purveyor of the alienation of man in society. Every encounter is conceived as a statement of moral reaffirmation.

Goffman's extension of the Durkheim tradition makes two major contributions. First, it extends the boundaries of ritual to include everyday life. Moreover, as Luckmann also contends, not only do interactions serve as the reaffirmation of societal values, they serve to recreate those values in negotiation. Thus encounters play a dynamic and not a passive part in the creation of the moral order.

The second contribution of Goffman is the emphasis on the individual as sacred. Interaction rituals in Goffman's work are interpersonal rituals, and the values reaffirmed are those related to the worth of individuals in the social order.

Sport as Ritual

THE INDIVIDUAL AS SACRED: THE HERO

Two ideas of ritual are at work here. One, the Durkheimian, focuses on the eventful, the exciting, the relatively infrequent homage paid to sacred values through ceremonial treatment. Such homage serves as a community act, i.e., an act which reaffirms the values which unite the community. The other, the Goffmanesque, focuses on the mundane, the trite, the commonplace everyday homage paid to idealized role performances presented in everyday interaction, i.e., the way actors perform their roles and react to others in theirs. This process represents a more private act, yet it is still an act of reaffirmation of values of significance to the community.

These two ideas are united in the concept of the individual in special situations, i.e., the hero as an exemplary interactant in social ceremonies. There are several developmental threads joined in this idea.

Weber's concept of *charisma* provides a link between Durkheim's concept of the sacred and Goffman's concept of character display. In its pure form, charisma is

> a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader (358–9).

Clearly the individual with charisma approaches what Durkheim means by

his designation of sacred: "set apart" "exceptional" "not accessible to the ordinary person" "exemplary."

Bendix notes that charisma "depend(s) on a belief in concrete persons whose authority is regarded as sacred and to whom followers or subjects feel bound in religious reverence and duty" (quoted in Nisbet, 255). Nisbet continues that it is through its qualities as sacred that charisma "becomes a major part of social and political systems" (255).

From these comments, one can see that Weber's conceptualization of the charismatic leader as mediator between individual men and the moral order furnishes a direct line between Durkheim's notion of the symbol or emblem as mediator between the individual and the social order and Goffman's conceptualization of the individual as a symbol of the moral order. A further step is taken with the introduction of Klapp's concept of symbolic leaders and his thesis of the dialectic origin of heroism.

Klapp focuses on the modern day celebrity and the enigmatic process through which the celebrity emerges. Klapp conceives of the symbolic leader as "an emergent phenomenon" (32), born out of the process of interaction. He identifies seven steps in the process which generally seems to entail an almost serendipitous discovery of an image or attitude that strikes a responsive chord in the audience. From the first stage the leader and the audience embark on a dialectic in which the leader responds to the reactions to his presented self by altering his image to be congruent with the audience demands. Thus by a process of negotiation, a celebrity is born.

Particularly important for the creation of symbolic leaders is the dramatic encounter: "The very essence of drama—the high point of its most important scenes—is usually a confrontation in which parties are thrown on their mettle, reveal and expose themselves, drop their defenses, call on their personal resources to meet a crisis" (70). This concept is not only labeled in Goffman-like manner, but is conceptually similar to what Goffman discusses as action situations.

Luckmann's concern with "the fate of the individual in modern society" (12) follows in a direct line from Durkheim's like concerns, and like Durkheim, Luckmann looks for understanding in the sociology of religion. Luckmann sees his work as an extension of the Durkheimian tradition; it also has much in common with the central thesis offered by Goffman in his writings about interaction rituals.

Both Durkheim and Luckmann can be approached through their different interpretations of the basic model presented in Figure 1 for both are concerned with the interrelationships of the three aspects of the symbolic system: the individual, the social order, and the symbolic order, or religion. But where Durkheim conceptualizes the symbolic order as a mediating force between the individual and the moral order, Luckmann sees the moral order, or world view, as the ultimate construction of individuals.

There are several elaborations of Durkheim here. One is that the interaction itself is symbolic, in the sense that meanings are conveyed through symbolic communications. Thus the symbolic order is both the construction of the social order and the tool or method of that construction. A second idea is that the symbolic order expands to become the social order, for the social order is itself constructed through the manipulation of symbols and meanings by individuals. Important here is the notion of the history of the individual in the company of others. The expectations of his behavior are based on his history of interactions with others to which he is accountable. His behavior, his Self as Luckmann refers to it (Goffman would say "face"), has been created through a symbolic interchange which is religious in nature, and his behavior, restricted by historical expectations and the feedback of others, becomes a part of the moral order.

The final idea is that of the interchange of the social past with the constructed present. Luckmann states that, empirically, man is born into a social order (a culture) which restricts the meanings he can manufacture for his own actions and those of others. On this point, a basic difference between Luckmann and Durkheim emerges. Where Durkheim implies a mediation through symbols between the individual and the moral order, he has also implied a more static model than Luckmann proposes. Luckmann's model pays attention to the moderate state of flux which surrounds individuals by explicitly attending to the active part they play in reasserting or reconstructing the moral order.

This distinction is carried out to a lesser extent through their different conceptualizations of the sacred and the profane. Durkheim sees the categories (structurally) as existing *a priori* while the contents are culturally designated. The idea of separation is a significant one which is carried out through attitudes or actions which indicate deference and respect. But Luckmann speaks of the sacred and profane "uncategorically" by implying that within the hierarchy of meanings which individuals construct, the notions of sacred and profane are located. Thus the profane is a concrete and unproblematic level of understanding while the transcendent world order, or cosmos, is sacred or religious in nature.

Like Klapp's more popular analysis, Luckmann describes the dialectical nature of the creation of the self, but Luckmann emphasizes the process as a fundamentally religious process. Moreover, Luckmann's thesis clearly unifies what Hook perceived as two divergent forces: in Luckmann's thesis, man is both the symbol and the creator of his own history.

Another important variation on Durkheim's thesis expounded by Luckmann is closely related to Goffman's perspective. Here a purely functionalist interpretation of religion is supplemented by tenets of symbolic interactionism, specifically the creative potential of the individual as interactant in shaping the moral order. Goffman's ideas about the rituals of interaction provide further insight into the scope of the thesis.

GOFFMAN'S CONCEPT OF CHARACTER

Goffman's extension of these notions of the hero emanates from his concept of exaggerated rituals or special situations in which the moral statements generated through interaction take on a public, generalizable, and dramatic nature. Goffman believes that generally individuals try to minimize unpleasantness and the possibility of dysphoric, disruptive interaction (Birrell, b). Individuals try to avoid embarrassment and negative experience. But in some cases, some individuals approach these potential situations with relish. In "Where the Action Is" Goffman labels these situations *action situations*, and he defines them as fateful, that is, situations which are both problematic (the outcome is uncertain) and consequential (the outcome will have an impact on future events). Some individuals willingly and willfully seek out these risky situations. Moreover, only in such situations can *character* be demonstrated.

Character is an exaggerated portrayal of demeanor. It is an individual's response to action situations and entails "capacities for standing correct and steady in the face of sudden pressure" (f, 217). Goffman notes, "they do not specify the *activity* of the individual but how he will *manage* himself in this activity" (f, 217).

In action situations, when the interaction ritual is public, the actor generates character which reflects not only on self but has social significance because it reflects the values of the community. Such a situation exists in sporting contests witnessed by the public.

In many situations, as in sport, assessment of character focuses on characteristics highly prized in the particular setting. Goffman distinguishes four motifs around which character contests in North America might revolve: courage, gameness, integrity, and composure. From Goffman's definitions one can immediately perceive their ready applicability to sport.

courage—the capacity to envisage immediate danger and yet proceed with the course of action that brings the danger on (218).
gameness—the capacity to stick to a line of activity and to continue to pour all effort into it regardless of set-backs, pain, or fatigue (219).
integrity—the propensity to resist temptation in situations where there would be much profit and some impunity in departing momentarily from moral standards (219).
composure—self-control, self-possession, or poise (222).

The social significance of the demonstration of these and other valued qualities lies in society's understanding of them as inherently moral and worthy of deep respect. Goffman notes that

Properties of character . . . are always judged from a moral perspective, simply because a capacity for mobilizing oneself for the moment is always subjected to

social evaluation. . . . character traits tend to be evaluated in the extremes, referring to failures in no way expected or successes out of the ordinary; mere conformance with usual standards is not at issue (218).

Moreover, the display of character not only makes a statement about the individual, but about the sanctity with which the abstract values he embodies should be treated. There is no question about the heritage of this idea in Goffman's work:

To the degree that a performance highlights the common official values of the society in which it occurs, we may look upon it, in the manner of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, as a ceremony—as an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community. Furthermore, insofar as the expressive bias of performances comes to be accepted as reality, then that which is accepted at the moment as reality will have some of the characteristics of a celebration (e, 35).

The following examples from the sport world are intended to substantiate the thesis that in sport, respectable qualities are demonstrated in dramatic and public situations, and that those demonstrations of character serve a dual purpose of establishing the character of the athlete and reaffirming the validity of the moral attributes the individual displays.

Courage

Because of the physical nature inherent in sport, it is not surprising that many sports have as their central feature the demonstration of physical courage. The most prominent examples are those sports in which death is a possible consequence. Bullfighting, if one considers it a sport, provides an excellent example, for the ethic of the bullfight demands that the matador take tremendous chances in order to prove his worth to the crowd. While generally the crowd is insatiable in its demands for danger (Zurcher and Meadow), some matadors display so much courage that the crowd begs them to be more careful. Such was the case with El Cordobes, the spectacular Spanish bullfighter, who demonstrated his courage by breaking into short pieces the barbed sticks (*banderillas*) the matador drives into the shoulders of the bull; by fighting in the center of the ring furthest from help, should he require it; by leaping over the back of the bull as it charged; and, on one fateful occasion, by refusing to cancel a fight although the sand in the stadium was soaked with rain, leaving him with poor footing.

Mountain and rock climbing and their kindred pursuits furnish another example. Along with the more traditional accounts (Hilary; Houston and Bates) of such daring, the public has recently been treated to a documentary relating one man's attempt to ski down Mt. Everest and a public drama in which a rock climber scaled the walls of the World Trade Center in New York City (Moses).

Auto racing is another world in which courage is prized. Drivers believe that someone who cannot demonstrate a minimal amount of cour-

age, here synonymous with speed, does not have the character to compete with the other racers. Richard Petty illustrates this opinion when he acknowledges that

> I've drafted cars that slowed down on me, and I've had to shove them a spell to get them going better. And a bunch of times I've come up behind somebody I've lapped maybe 10 or 15 times, and deliberately tapped him or maybe run him down off the track because he didn't belong out there racing (quoted in Libby, 62).

Much prestige or honor in football is related to how well one can demonstrate physical courage to the point of being macho, according to many (Meggysey; Shaw). Shaw claimed that at the University of Texas, a distinction was drawn between the hitters and the quitters. They even had a motto along this line: "if you're putting out you don't get hurt." Among hockey players, Faulkner (298) has noted a similar pattern: players use violence as a "presentational resource" for the display of honorable, respectable occupational behavior.

Hubert Green has shown that character based on courage can be demonstrated in the rather unlikely setting of a professional golf match. While leading by one stroke in the U.S. Open in 1977, Green was informed that the FBI had received word of a death threat against his life. Green decided to continue play. He finished the last three holes under police and FBI surveillance and won the Open title. As Dan Jenkins, writing for *Sports Illustrated*, put it ". . . now we know a bit more about his competitiveness as a golfer and an awful lot more about his nerve and his heart" (19).

Final examples might be drawn from the worlds of gambling. Scott states that bettors at a thoroughbred race track who bet the favorite are referred to with disrespect as "chalk-eaters" because they lack the courage to put their financial self on the line. Boyd notes that poker players classify one another as "tighties" or "loosies" according to the degree of chance they are willing to take; only the loosies are capable of displaying character, for only they are taking the big risks. Geertz discovered the same principle at work in the Balinesian cock fights. Geertz labeled the phenomenon "deep play," and described a sport setting in which it is customary to bet far more than one can afford to lose. According to Geertz's account, this system produces many poor but honorable Balinesians.

Gameness

Gameness is related to courage for it, too, represents overcoming physical odds in order to compete honorably. In sport, gameness means perseverance and spunk, and it is illustrated by cases in which the athlete has failed to live up to expectations of skill yet struggles valiantly to finish the task. To this athlete—the runner who has been hopelessly lapped by the competition or the gymnast who falls several times in one routine—the audience awards praise for gameness and applauds with sympathy and encourage-

ment. The classic example concerns the marathon runner in the 1972 Olympics who struggled on to finish the race—but not until after the closing ceremonies had taken place.

No doubt because of the heavy physical punishment involved, boxing furnishes a setting for many examples of gameness related to perseverance (Weinberg and Arond).

It is the demonstration of this quality that turns the final, painful scene in *Rocky* to a herioc battle. "Ain't gonna be no rematch" says the bloodied defender Apollo Creed. "Don't want one," replies Rocky who has proved to himself that, at least once in his life, he was able "to go the distance." On a smaller scale, Rau reported a Golden Gloves welterweight fight in which the loser was a spunky boy whom Rau had pulled out of a car wreck ten hours before. The match was so tough that both boxers received standing ovations from the crowd. X-rays later showed that the boy had fractured a vertebra during the auto accident.

Collins and Lapierre cite another extraordinary example of gameness. When El Cordobes, the idol of the bullring, was almost fatally gored during a fight, the crowd responded "with a waving field of white handkerchiefs, beseeching (the bull's) ears for the matador who now lay unconscious on an operating table while a surgeon struggled to save his life" (313). Collins and Lapierre note: "It was an extraordinary gesture because tradition of the bullring demands that its trophies be awarded only to a matador who has completed his task by killing his bulls" (315). El Cordobes, who had proven his courage and composure time after time, was rewarded here for his gameness.

Other examples of perseverance include the crosscountry skier who finished his race in the 1976 Olympics on only one ski; Jim Ryun getting up to finish the 1,500 meters after being knocked off balance during the 1968 Olympics; and the legendary refusal of athletes like Dave Cowens and Pete Rose to give less than 100 percent in any contest, regardless of the score.

In many sports, as in other realms of life, the ability to come back after a serious injury can generate respect for an individual. Few could match the example set by Nicki Lauda during the 1976 Grand Prix season. Involved in a fiery accident in Nurhurgring, Germany, Lauda was given the last rites. Not only did he survive, but six weeks later he returned to the racing circuit wearing a flameproof mask to protect his scarred face and challenged James Hunt for the lead in the Grand Prix standings. There are some apparently who feel Janet Guthrie's quest for respect from other drivers will not be fulfilled until she has survived and bounced back from a serious accident like Lauda's.

There are some men here who secretly may be hoping that Janet Guthrie does not return, that her car hits another machine and then the wall as Tom Sneva's car did two years ago, that it runs into a stalled racer on the track and explodes, as Mike Mosley's did in 1971, or that it loses a wheel and spins wildly out of control, as Al

Unser's did in 1968. Then they will wait to see if Guthrie comes back, as Sneva and Mosley and Unser have many times since their brushes with instant immolation. Only then, the hard-liners say will she have proved that she belongs here with the big boys (Abel, 49).

Integrity

Integrity is expected in sport, for without cooperative agreement to obey the rules and refrain from self-serving cheating, sport cannot continue; its nature is violated. Yet acts of integrity can be magnified in sport to provide a true test of character. The moral strength to follow the correct path when easier routes are available is constantly demanded of those who put themselves on the line in sport, for sport is an activity in which obstacles are purposely planted before one so that his or her reactions may be tested.

Goffman specifies two forms of integrity: self-discipline and gallantry. By *self-discipline* he means "the capacity to refrain from excessive involvement in the easy pleasures . . ." (f, 220). The self-discipline required by sport is such a catch word that it hardly needs to be documented. The most familiar examples center around the pain of training and the Spartan existence and self-denial necessary to shape a championship athlete. This form of physical self-discipline is such a commonplace in sport that it does not furnish as striking a basis for character display as do other aspects. Physical self-discipline is taken for granted in sport; it is expected of all top-calibre athletes; it is part of the bargain they make in their pursuit of physical excellence.

Moral self-discipline is another story. In some cases, this form of self-discipline can mean accepting one's defeat without excuses. Thus one writer was moved to commend Jimmy Connors for his restraint when, having lost two important tennis matches, he refrained from mentioning to the press that he was preoccupied with his father's serious illness ("A Man for A' That," 10).

Goffman defines *gallantry* as "the capacity to maintain the forms of courtesy when the forms are full of substance" (f, 220), i.e., when they really matter. In sport, this quality is often referred to as sportsmanship. Sportsmanship is a trait of moral character with a historical tie to social class and to sports whose clientele was drawn historically from the elite. In England during the middle of the nineteenth century, for instance, when football was the domain of the upper classes, umpires or referees were unheard of and unnecessary (McIntosh). A gentlemanly code of conduct was the norm and a sportsman was quick to acknowledge whatever unintentional fouls or violations he had committed, apologize to his opponent, and make restitution.

In a more modern example, Kroll has suggested that sportsmanship, indeed any moral decision, matters only when the stakes are highest, i.e., when the decision could determine the outcome of the match. It is demon-

strated whenever a player calls an undetectable but game-important foul on himself or when a player who has benefitted from an erroneous call restores the sporting balance, as in tennis when a player hits the next ball out of bounds after the lineman has wrongly called a point in her favor. More dramatic instances are exemplified by Lutz Long helping Jesse Owens qualify in the long jump in the 1936 Olympics, when Long knew that Owens was his toughest challenger (and indeed Owens went on to win the gold, Long the silver). (Another example is found in *Fair Play,* 4.)

Composure

Composure is a form of character emphasizing "self-control, self-possession, or poise." According to Goffman, composure has a "behavioral side, the capacity to execute physical tasks in a concerted, smooth, self-controlled fashion under fateful circumstances" (f, 222–3) and "an affective side, the emotional self-control required in dealing with others" (f, 224). Of all forms of character display, Goffman considers composure the most significant because the individual's capacity as a competent interactant is revealed in his or her ability to maintain proper demeanor, particularly in trying situations.

Goffman specifies three forms that composure may take: presence of mind, dignity, and stage confidence. *Presence of mind,* or mental calmness, is a prerequisite for many sports, particularly those self-paced tasks in which steadiness is necessary. Discussing this topic, the silver medalist in the 1976 Olympics small-bore, three-position rifle shooting competition Margaret Murdock stated:

> My emotional control is based on anticipation . . . I think out how I'm going to react, how I'm going to resist extraneous thoughts, how I'm going to deal with somebody coming up and telling me I'm behind or ahead, I prepare for all this, so the adrenalin doesn't go up and I stop thinking. One or two bad shots, and you're out of it (quoted in Fimrite).

Gymnasts, particularly those who compete on the balanced beam, experience the same thing (Birrell, a).

A second aspect of composure and one particularly important in sport is the demonstration of dignity. *Dignity* is a bodily form of composure which features "the capacity to sustain one's bodily decorum . . ." (f, 225). To exemplify this aspect of composure Goffman chooses surfing:

> Physical aplomb and dignity of upright posture must be maintained on a flat narrow board against rumbling forces that press to the limit the human capacity for this kind of bodily self-control. Here the maintenance of physical control is not merely a condition of effective performance but a central purpose of it (f, 226).

Of course all sports require some degree of dignity, or physical control; the term "natural athlete" seems to express the envy of those who must work

hard at maintaining dignity. Goffman mentions skiers as a sport group particularly prone to displays of—or lack of—dignity.

Yet it is only in the fan-packed arena that the two aspects of composure discussed—presence of mind and dignity—are combined with and intensified by the final form of composure: *stage confidence.* Only when an individual puts self on the line in a situation of heightened emotional stress is character truly tested. Thus weekend skiing presents a challenge to one's physical control, but skiing for an Olympic gold medal intensifies the challenge, as this account of Franz Klammer's bid for the downhill title in 1976 demonstrates.

> Pressure defines the essential nature of athletic heroism. If an athlete cannot contend with it, neither strength nor skill will avail him, and few athletes have borne a greater burden of pressure than the 22-year-old Austrian skier Franz Klammer in the Winter Olympic Games. . . . Klammer had drawn starting position No. 15, last among the top seeds in the downhill. All of his principal competitors had preceded him down the icy and irregular slope. The 27-year old Swiss skier Bernhard Russi was the leader at 1:46.06.
>
> Klammer almost literally flew out of the start and careened down the hill like a bouncing ball. Still, he was .19 of a second behind Russi's pace after the first half of the run. He took even more chances in the next section but slipped farther behind the pace. In the last 1,000 meters he was confronted by the Compression, a jump followed by a dip that had proved breathtakingly dangerous to his predecessors. The Johannesweg turn lay behind that and it had already claimed two skiers. As he ripped through this part of the course, Klammer nearly went out of control, but he regained his balance to execute the turn. Then he sailed over the last jump and sped to the finish. It was a daring run, but was it fast enough? Yes. The timer showed that Klammer had beaten Russi by .33 of a second. The mountain exploded in an avalanche of cheering (Fimrite).

Much of what is admired in sport can be summed up in one word: coolness. Scott illustrates this with some observations from the race track:

> The cool jockey can wait patiently with a horse in a pocket and get through on the inside, risking the possibility that there will be no opening. Coolness is waiting far back in the pack, risking the possibility that his horse will not 'get up' in time. Coolness is sparing the whip on a front-running horse when another animal has pressed into the lead, risking the possibility that once his horse is passed he will not get started again. All these activities are taken by observers as instances of a jockey's character. In short, moral character is coolness in risky situations (26).

Polsky observed the same coolness in the pool hall (45).

Another sport in which coolness is important is tennis, where Chris Evert plays with such presence of mind and dignity that she has been nicknamed "the ice maiden" and Bjorn Borg has been called "Ice Borg." Ironically, Evert's coolness is often held against her; she suffers particularly in comparison to the looser, less disciplined Evonne Goolagong, whose "walk-abouts" have earned her a contrasting reputation.

Coolness is important in most sports, but one would be hard put to find a group which exemplifies the demands of composure as well as gymnasts. For the gymnast, character hinges on poise, yet the gymnastics meet, by its very nature, seems designed to destroy one's composure. The irony of testing oneself to the very limit of one's ability while maintaining by face and posture the impression that one is coasting effortlessly and gracefully through a simple routine is not lost on the gymnasts. As more than one gymnast put it: "The object of gymnastics is to make something very difficult look very easy."

Cool competence is the trademark of the superior gymnast. The gymnast must give a solid performance, and her confidence in execution must be indicated by the absence of "major breaks" in the momentum of the routine as well as control over nervousness and unsteadiness. But sometimes poise is demonstrated by the gymnast's responses to problematic situations beyond her control. Bows can fall from her hair onto the mat where she must continue to perform as if its undesirable presence there is not an intrusion on her concentration; slippers can be lost during a balance beam routine leaving the gymnast with less purchase on the beam than she would desire; elaborate hairdos can become so disarranged that they hinder the sight or balance of the gymnast. Yet in all of these cases, the inconvenience must be totally ignored by the gymnast if she wishes to maintain her display of poise. In fact, kicking aside a bow or slipper or adjusting a falling hairdo are movements which the judges are likely to score as deductions from the "general impression" of the gymnast's performance.

An extreme example of character related to this sort of trying situation occurred to an injured gymnast during a meet. Because of her injury, she had an ace bandage wrapped around her knee. In the middle of her beam routine, the bandage became unwound and she finished the rest of the routine trailing the bandage. Even her dismount, which was a front somersault, she did with it flying through the air. To have touched the bandage would have permitted the judges the opportunity to deduct points under "general impression." Continuance of the routine, on the other hand, was actually quite dangerous, sparking an incredulous response from one observer "that the sport cannot make accommodations for things like that." But by continuing her performance, the gymnast demonstrated to all observing that she was a competent performer, able to maintain her composure in the face of the most unsettling challenges. Character thus has to do with keeping one's entire competitive self in order and under complete control at all times.

Conclusions

Sport has ritual significance when character based on valued social attributes is demonstrated. In such situations, the athlete is an exemplary figure who embodies the moral values of the community and thus serves as a symbol of those values. The salience of the incidents recounted here is evidenced by the very fact that they were reported by the mass media for the benefit of those who were not fortunate enough to witness the demonstrations in person. Publication of such deeds serves as institutionalized recognition that demonstration of character should be greeted with admiration, respect, and perhaps, worship.

An equally important indication of the strength of this thesis is the fact that individuals who fail to demonstrate character in sport after having made such exaggerated claims for themselves are regarded with disrespect and scorn. A dramatic example of the effects of losing character on the way in which others regard the individual can be found in this account of a young man's unsuccessful attempt to prove himself in the bullring:

> . . . To Juan Horrillo, Little Almond's horns seemed wider than the branches of an almond tree. . . . He felt he would never have the courage to confront the cow waiting for him in the ring. And yet he knew she was his to fight and kill, 'that filthy beast, before all those Palmenos with their dirty stares, looking like I would have to hang myself up on those horns before they would be happy.' Behind him, he could hear Manolo hissing, 'Go ahead, Juna, don't worry, I'll watch you.' Encouraged, he tried to go forward. But at each step, Horrillo felt his legs folding under him as though they were made of rubber. The arena began to spin around his eyes 'like a merry-go-round.' Many in the crowd sensing what they had come for, began to jeer. Still Horrillo couldn't move.
>
> 'I was paralyzed,' he could recall. 'I trembled all over. Those insults kept coming out and still I couldn't take a step. They began to throw stones and bottles at me. They started to yell *Fuera, fuera*—out, out. God, I hated it. And there was Almendrita in the middle of the ring staring at me with those murderous eyes of hers. Suddenly it happened. She came for me. I did a terrible thing then, an unforgivable thing. I dropped my muleta and ran. I ran as fast as I could for the *barrera*, as fast as I ever ran before from the Guardia Civil. When I got there, I jumped the *barrera* and fell into the *callejon*. As I lay there, shaking, they spat on me. I could hear them all screaming, whistling. It was horrible, I don't know how long I lay there listening, but I knew one thing: for me, everything was finished. I could never put on the suit of lights again' (Collins and Lapierre, 272–3).

One can lose one's character if one loses courage. And one can also lose character by failing to display integrity or poise. Ilie Nastase, the tennis player, is an example of this form of character loss: his outrageous antics on the court have irreparably damaged his reputation. A more classic example can be found in the young boy's legendary plea to his former baseball hero, accused of throwing the 1919 World Series: "Say it isn't so,

Joe." When character is so spectacularly lost, something else dies with it. If the moral order is to be preserved, those whose actions flagrantly violate the sanctity of systemic values must be regarded as villains or weaklings, just as those who spectacularly conform to moral values must be feted as heroes.

It may well be that an important aspect of the significance of sport as an arena for character lies in the fact that it is such a commonplace, everyday activity. It is true that in extraordinary cases an athlete comes to have enduring symbolic value; his or her deeds may become the basis of legends and his or her memory may be institutionally enshrined. However, an added significance of many of the examples offered above is the transient nature of the tales. The names may soon be forgotten, perhaps are never known, but the substance of the achievement has served its purpose by providing one of an endless number of reaffirmations of cultural values. Therefore it is the commonplace nature of sport that is one of the most significant attributes: on any given day people can approach the ballpark and witness not only an exciting, sport event, but also the display of attributes of character unseen in other areas of life.

Demonstration of character can be understood as something whose significance flows beyond the respect awarded to individuals by knowing peers—teammates and opponents. Character display has a more generalizable, public, and ceremonial significance. Thus the so-called "hero-worship" of athletes should not be regarded disparagingly as evidence of modern man's replacement of religious ideals with secular or even heathen images. The shift does not mark a fundamental change in social values but merely a substitution of the vessel in which they are contained.

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