A COMMUNITY IN A COW PASTURE: FOOTBALL AT PENN STATE

Benjamin Paul Phillips

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Committee:

Marilyn Motz, Advisor

Esther Clinton
ABSTRACT

Marilyn Motz, Advisor

In this thesis, Benjamin Phillips explored how community is created around Penn State football. Phillips explored why an event like a Penn State football game inspires thousands of people to unite around it and turn a sixty minute game played by twenty-odd young athletes (with whom the fans have little to no contact) into a multiple day celebration of community. For those who choose to define themselves in part by their sports allegiance, it is Phillips’ contention that they exhibit the characteristics of the imagined community described by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, expanding the discourse beyond natural identities and communities. Because of the perceived ubiquity and normalcy of sports, Penn State football provides an excellent site for the exploration of created identities and communities. This thesis provides an academic look at the cultural significance of the community created through Penn State fandom and the broader implications of a community created around sports.

The research was specifically centered on Phillips’ interviews with fans of Penn State football about stadium atmosphere, music, and tailgating. The actual game is not the only aspect which inspires fandom and pride within post-millennial college football. Instead, team histories, nostalgia, stadiums, stadium traditions, fan activities, songs, cheers, and geography all play a role in creating “football experiences.” The first chapter of the thesis focused on the postmodern *bricolage* of media and genres used in stadium videos and cheers that work to create feelings of belonging and community. The second chapter concentrated on the role fight songs and contemporary popular songs play in the creation of nostalgia and community. The third chapter explored tailgating at Penn State football games and examined the function of food and tradition
outside of the stadium, turning a sixty minute game into a multi-day celebration of community.

It also examined the traditions of current students within the tent city of “Paternoville.”
To my parents for their constant love and support, for inspiring me to ask questions, and for molding me into the man I am today. I thank you, and I love you.
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Cheers
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INTRODUCTION

For many of us, our identities are highly influenced by the area where we grew up, the people who inhabited that area, and the culture intrinsic to it. For me, Central Pennsylvania inspired an interest in history, Civil War battles, long stretches of forests, and Phillies baseball. But, above all of these things, my passion has long been Penn State Nittany Lions football. Penn State posters adorned my bedroom walls. I collected the football cards, learned the fight songs, and proudly wore my Nittany Lions jerseys and t-shirts to school. To me, autumn means crowds, marching bands, fight songs, and Penn State football. My childhood weekends were spent watching Penn State at parties thrown by my parents and their friends. During halftime and after the game, the kids would play football, taking on the personas of their favorite Nittany Lions. When we had a little extra cash and were lucky enough to find tickets, we battled the forty miles of bumper-to-bumper traffic over the Seven Mountains to see Penn State live. We tailgated with my parents’ friends, ate way too much food, and played football between the rows of cars, trucks, and RV’s in the cow fields surrounding Beaver Stadium. I still remember the Northwestern game in the undefeated season of 1994 when Ki-Jana Carter ran right past my seat (at least, that’s how I remember it) to the end zone.

When I enrolled at The Pennsylvania State University in 2003, my association with Penn State football changed; it became more intense. In four years, I never missed a home game and made sure to arrive at the stadium early enough to get tickets in the first five rows of the student section. I camped out for games and screamed myself hoarse. I joined the Glee Club and reveled in singing the fight songs of my University for students, alumni, fans, and various audiences throughout the world. Now, in graduate school in Ohio, my friends know not to
expect me to do anything on fall Saturdays that involves leaving the viewing area of the television. I still try to go back to State College for at least one game a year, and often try to go to an away game or two now that I live deeper in Big 10 country.

So, why have I spent a page describing my affinity for Penn State football? Was it to brag about my fanhood? Well, yes, I would be lying if I denied it. We all have passions that take up much of our spare time and energy (often leaking into our not-so-spare time). These passions often form an integral part of a person’s sense of self. Moreover, these passions can engender a sense of similarity and community among those who share them. Growing up in central Pennsylvania, I could feel the effect Penn State had on many people’s lives. For many of the people with whom I grew up, Penn State meant more than a football team. Penn State games were a rite of season, a chance to catch up with friends, a conversation starter, and so much more. Birthday parties, Christmas, and baby showers most likely included at least one Penn State item, and getting your picture taken with the Nittany Lion was an occasion to celebrate. However, all of these things transcended the actual football games. Penn State football fandom is not just about loyalty to a football team. It is about a loyalty to an ideology: an ideology of family, small-town Americana, community, pride, success, friendship, and “doing things the right way.” Penn State fandom makes up a part of my identity every bit as important to me as my American citizenship or my particular faith. For this reason, after reading Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, I grew fascinated with the idea of created communities and chosen identities that allow us the opportunity to define who we are. Anderson did a wonderful job describing the phenomena of national pride and natural identities based on Althusser’s concept of interpellation. When we are born, we are often “always-already” defined by gender, nationality, class, ethnicity, or even religion (Althusser 344). While we can (to some extent)
challenge the preconceived perceptions that these identities carry with them, we have little or no choice in these identities. While we can choose not to celebrate or acknowledge them, many people will still define us by them. While the nation and other identities and communities into which we are born create a deep devotion and make up a large part of the individual, Anderson questions why chosen identities that we are not automatically interpellated into by society do not often inspire the same kind of devotion and importance within our identities.

One of his questions really stuck with me: “Who will willingly die for Comecon or the EEC” (Anderson 53). While I agree with Anderson that few people are willing to die for their allegiance to a company, from my own experience and observations, I see sports as an arena in which chosen identities and communities inspire extreme devotion to the point of fanaticism (and sometimes violence). In 2007, an Oklahoma Sooner fan (who also happened to be a church deacon) tore open a Texas fan’s scrotum because he dared to wear his Longhorn apparel in Oklahoma (Marks). In one of the most well known occurrences of sporting devotion gone too far, Columbia’s goalie Andres Escobar was shot to death by an assailant in 1994 after allowing an own-goal in the World Cup. The assailant shot him twelve times, reportedly shouting “Goal!” after each shot fired (World Cup). While the nationalism inherent in the second example is quite striking, the first carries just as much meaning behind it. Although both speak to the extremes sports rivalries can display, the first example describes a perceived identity disregarding nationalism. Both parties were presumably American, yet their sports allegiances superseded this similarity. While one could argue that nationalism has merely been replaced with regionalism in this example, I disagree. Sports fandom has no borders, as firm, geographical boundaries do not separate one rival from another. Texas fans live in Oklahoma. For that matter, they also live in many other states. Moreover, some rivalries occur in the same state, as
my cousins who live in a house divided by support for the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech can attest. While one’s birthplace appears forever on forms and identification cards, that birthplace does not necessarily define which teams we will support. Judging from the amount of baby apparel sold at stores in State College, there is a great deal of interpellation going on for many fans from a young age. My niece or nephew will most certainly be encouraged to have Penn State pride. Be that as it may, there is still a choice in whether or not they will continue to support “their” team as they grow up. More importantly, they have a choice in whether or not their allegiance to Penn State will define them and constitute a part of their identity. While supporters of a team may feel that their team and their traditions are supreme, they more readily accept that people can choose other allegiances, more so than in the seemingly fixed identities of nationality or religion. Choosing to disown one’s team can be a contentious issue for members of the community, but it does not seem to create the kind of alarm denouncing one’s nationality or religion might. For those who choose to define themselves in part by their sports allegiance, it is my contention that they do exhibit the characteristics of the imagined community described by Anderson, expanding the discourse beyond natural identities and communities.

Fandom has often fascinated scholars within cultural studies. Henry Jenkins explores the idea of fandom in his book *Textual Poachers*. Fandoms for television shows, comic books, movies, and various other cultural texts are often quite involved and interesting. Jenkins argues that fans actively create meaning from cultural texts through manipulating plots, characters, and ideas from within the text into new productions of their own making. By manipulating and creating new forms of the texts, the fans gain a form of agency. Fans’ devotion to texts is quite deep and makes up a large part of their identities. In graduate school, I have met people who get tattoos of their favorite television shows, look at you funny if you do not like Joss Whedon’s
works, or herald the greatness of Apple at every turn. We are not born into these identities, but they still allow for the formation of communities. Millions of people tune into *American Idol* and text in their votes every week during the spring. There are multiple message boards devoted to television shows where excited viewers put forth their theories and decry the latest couplings. These message boards and electronic forums take the place of (or supplement) the mailing lists and zines of fandom and provide a medium for the expression of community.

While Jenkins argues that sports fandom does not operate in the same ways, I have been to way too many sporting events to agree with him. While there are sports fans\(^1\) that merely sit at home on their couch and watch the game, many find themselves thinking about their team beyond the duration of the game. They actively make decisions about the teams they will root for and go to live events. The live events provide an avenue for agency as those in attendance can have an effect on the outcome through their interaction with the game. Much has been written on fandom, communities, and tradition, yet because sports are so ubiquitous within our society their contributions to these phenomena are often overlooked or unanalyzed. The pervasiveness of sports in our society structures it outside of the often ridiculed realm of media fandom. Fan videos, conventions, artwork, and dressing up for sporting events (while not entirely accepted) are perceived as more *normal* than *Star Trek* fans learning Klingon or *Harry Potter* fans dressing up in wizard robes. Because of this perceived ubiquity and normalcy, I believe that sports provide an excellent site for the exploration of created identities and communities. I argue that the very omnipresence of sports within society demands a cultural exploration. John Nauright argues that “sport is one of the most significant shapers of collective

\(^1\) In this instance, I am not referring to the fandom of active production and manipulation of meaning discussed by Henry Jenkins in *Textual Poachers* (1992), but rather the general idea in sports of a fan being a supporter of a certain team. For simplicity’s sake, I will use the general idea of a fan being a supporter of a team throughout the rest of this paper, unless otherwise specified.
or group identity in the contemporary world and is a powerful force in virtually every society” (35). Most local newscasts include a sports segment in their daily broadcasts, while newspapers devote whole sections to sports. The major networks as well as cable channels broadcast various sporting events all year round, while ESPN and its various incarnations as well as Fox Sports Net allocate their entire programming to sports and sports related topics. Millions of children, adolescents, and adults play or watch sports every day. But what makes sports so appealing? Why does an event like a Penn State football game inspire thousands of people to unite around it and turn a sixty minute game played by twenty-odd young athletes (with whom the travelers have little to no contact) into a multiple day celebration of community?

College football has long been an important aspect of American life. Gerald Gems writes: “The pageantry and spectacle of football games celebrate American life and symbolically portray its characteristics in a pervasive manner” (192). He continues: “Such binding rituals portray traditional values, the belief in the work ethic, self-sacrifice, and success, and produce a collective identity that unifies schools, communities, and generations in a cultural tradition” (193). While football originally held elitist connotations, due to the class privilege inherent in those who could afford college in the late nineteenth-century, any perceived elitism has faded from view, allowing many to celebrate it as level ground for class, ethnicity, etc. At Penn State this is no different, and football often serves as a mark of distinction for the University. While many may not know where State College is, they probably have heard about Joe Paterno and the football team. Douglas Toma writes:

[Penn State is] …symbolized by its “solid” and “honest” plain blue and white football uniforms, the logo featuring a proud lion atop a rock, and their coach known for winning with integrity. In short, “good football done the right way” is part of the Penn State brand—both Penn State as a football team and as an institution (198-199).
Throughout this thesis, many of my informants echo the sentiments of Toma and internalize these aspects of what Penn State supposedly means into their own identities.

In this thesis, I will explore how community is created around Penn State football. Drawing from Anthony Cohen’s description, I define community as consisting of common bonds which unite its members, as well as common bonds which distinguish them in some significant way from members of other possible communities (12). Moreover, borrowing from Anderson, I describe these “common bonds” as “deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). In other words, I define community as a group of people bonded by common beliefs which unite them toward a common goal or purpose. At the same time, these “common bonds” serve as a boundary which also excludes others from the community if they do not share these same common beliefs. I am not looking at the game or the players. I am looking at that which literally surrounds the game: the fans. Growing up forty miles from Happy Valley, I have had a good deal of first-hand experience watching Penn State football, talking with tailgaters, and even tailgating myself. Throughout my childhood, my family and I tailgated two or three times a season every year with several other families. I spent many Saturday mornings sitting in “Penn State traffic” while journeying to Beaver Stadium. I have tailgated in parking lots and cow pastures and eaten my fair share of burgers, brats, and hot dogs. Through four years of undergraduate work at Penn State, I camped outside of Beaver Stadium for tickets through warm weather, tropical storms, and snow flurries. I went on road trips with friends to tailgate at and attend away games and bowl games. As a graduate, I have travelled back to Happy Valley and tailgated again with new groups, while combing the area for old acquaintances. Penn State remains a large part of my identity. For these reasons, I feel that I am adequately qualified to share my own experiences and observations on the subject. Yet, I also realize that this familiarity with and affinity for Penn
State brings up the question of my own objectivity. I admit that my attachment to the community shapes my views on fandom, but at the same time, my personal knowledge provides insights into that very community. Balancing these two factors will always be a Herculean task when writing about a subject to which one has a personal attachment. One always runs the risk of someone uttering the words offered as a worrisome critique by Raymond Williams: “No, that isn’t really what it’s like; it is your version” (38). My hope is that the result rests somewhere in the middle ground, providing an insightful look at the cultural significance of the community created through Penn State fandom and the broader implications of a community created around sports.

I am often very wary of auto-ethnography. While I certainly enjoy analyzing texts and sharing my own thoughts, I believe that self-reflexive observations are too narrow and can easily miss vitally important information. For this reason, my research is specifically centered on my own ethnographic research. Through personal contacts and information garnered from central Pennsylvanian newspapers about Penn State football, I contacted ten Penn State fans. Four were female, ranging from age twenty-one to thirty. Two of them were students attending The Pennsylvania State University, while the other two informants were alumni. Of the male informants, two were recent graduates in their mid-twenties, and another was an alumnus in his upper-twenties. One informant was a faculty member at Penn State in his mid-thirties who had grown up in the United Kingdom and received his Master’s and Doctorial degrees from two sizable state universities. One informant in his upper-fifties had attended Penn State for a few years, but transferred to another school before graduating. The last male informant was in his upper-sixties and had never attended Penn State. I also had five informants answer a call for help from the message boards at fightonstate.com. Of these informants, who completed internet
questionnaires, four were male and one was female. The female informant was a current
Master’s student (although she earned her Bachelor’s elsewhere) in her upper-thirties. The male
informants were all alumni of Penn State and their ages ranged from the mid-twenties to the mid-
thirties. In total, I interviewed fifteen informants: five females and ten males, with all but one of
them having attended or taught at Penn State. As is the problem with any ethnographic research,
there is a risk of over-representing certain groups and allowing a few voices to stand in for the
whole. Due to time constraints, I chose to only interview ten subjects in person and tried to keep
a fairly even ratio between men and women (6:4). However, the data which I collected through
internet questionnaires is perceivably skewed toward male informants (4:1), since I had no
control over who would answer my call for informants. Seven of those interviewed in person
were acquaintances I had known from Penn State. Because of this, most of my informants were
affiliated with the University in some way. Two of the informants were married to each other,
but I interviewed them separately so that their answers to my questions would not be influenced
by their spouse’s answers. I utilized the same strategy for all of my informants: one-on-one
interviews. I found the other three informants through an article on tailgating in the Lewistown
Sentinel, a newspaper in my home county of Mifflin.

Because I was interested in the perspective of fans, I mostly interviewed those who
identified themselves as such. I did interview one female student who I had known was not a fan
of football, but was a fan of Penn State as a University, to provide a counter-perspective. I felt
that her views on Penn State football fandom would be helpful to my research and my
objectivity. I am not claiming that my informants are representative of those who watch or
attend Penn State football games (or even a representative sample of committed fans). I am
interested in the informants’ perceptions and definitions of their experiences and attitudes and
their description of the pleasure they derive; I am not trying to determine the accuracy of those views. With their approval, I have used their answers to general questions about stadium atmosphere, music, and tailgating as the centerpiece of this thesis.  While I went to each interview armed with my digital tape recorder and my sample questions, the responses given to me exceeded my expectations. At times, I pressed the “Record” button and sat back as my informants anticipated later questions and provided me with quotations that went way beyond “yes” or “no” answers. Never has “work” been so enjoyable. I have used the information provided by my informants to create the basis of my arguments. I have tried to use my own personal experience sparingly, and only when I felt that it would provide an adequate addition.

I have used theories on tradition, identity, and community from various cultural theorists to situate and analyze the responses provided by my informants. As I have already mentioned, Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* served as an inspiration and an instrument in my analysis of the created community. I also draw from de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*, incorporating his ideas on agency through tactics, *bricolage*, and the everyday. Mikhail Bakhtin’s “Carnival and the Carnivalesque” turned out to be an excellent resource in explaining the atmosphere within and around Beaver Stadium. Bakhtin stressed the idea of those gathered at a carnival as a whole group, rather than as individuals separated by socioeconomics, class, or political differences. At Penn State tailgates and within the stadium, this group identity (in the minds of the fans) transcends all of those categories, as well as race, gender, and religion. I have also incorporated theories from books written on sports and sports culture. While there have been many books written on European football and its fans, American football (and especially college football) remains largely unexplored. For this reason, many of my sources concentrate

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2 The sample questions can be viewed in Appendix A.
on European soccer. For information about Penn State football, I turned to magazines, local newspapers, and personal experience.

My first chapter addresses the atmosphere within Beaver Stadium on game days. I discuss the role media has played in the creation of the Penn State fan, such as with homemade signs, body painting, popular music, and the quest for a fleeting moment of TV time. This chapter deals with the postmodern *bricolage* of media coverage, stadium videos, and cheers within Beaver Stadium. The second chapter concentrates on the role music plays in creating the Penn State football experience. I explore how fight songs and lyrics written decades ago still remain popular and relevant in the twenty-first century. The nostalgia inspired by these texts still remains powerful. I analyze how the fight songs of Penn State are utilized within and outside of game days to encourage community and create identity. In much the same way, I describe how popular songs not specific to Penn State are adopted by the community and used to construct familiarity. I examine how mass produced songs can be given new meaning in a different setting. The final chapter examines the role tailgating plays in creating a Penn State football community. While thousands of official Nittany Lions products decorate tailgates around Beaver Stadium, I argue that this is a demonstration of tradition and support, rather than merely a display of mass production. I delve into the argument over textual poaching developed by Henry Jenkins through the discussion of the different decorations utilized in tailgating. I address how these various store-bought products (such as decorations, clothing, grills, etc.) form a *bricolage* celebrating the idea of Penn State and football while stirring up nostalgia for prior seasons or experiences at Penn State. While not everyone shares the same tailgating traditions, they all share the memory of tailgating and the sense of belonging that comes with it.
The game itself serves as the catalyst and the source for the community, but it is not the only source. The game stripped of all pomp, pageantry, and patronage is merely a game. This thesis will argue, using Penn State football as a test case, that the actual game, while essential as the original referent, is not the only aspect which inspires fandom and pride and creates identity and community within post-millennial college football. Instead, team histories, nostalgia, stadiums, stadium traditions, fan activities, songs, cheers, and geography all play a role in creating “football experiences” and identity. In essence, Penn State football provides an example of how identities and communities are created. In no way do I argue that “natural” identities are any less important or relevant in an ever-changing world. I do strongly believe that created identities are equally important. When people choose how they want to be perceived and with what they want to associate themselves, I believe that this choice holds far greater meaning than we often grant to it. In popular culture studies, where we are often fixated on the question of “agency,” created identities and communities provide an excellent avenue to examine agency. People are not forced to accept the “pre-digested” products of the Culture Industry. We have a choice. Not only that, we have the chance to take those products and incorporate them into our own interests or appropriate them for our own devices. While many dismiss sports for its omnipresence within our society, I argue that we should analyze that omnipresence and better understand how individuals use and appropriate sports.
During Fall 2003, my first year at Penn State, the football team struggled through its worst season since 1938, posting a record of three wins and nine losses. Coming off of a nine-win season that saw the Nittany Lions in a New Year’s Day bowl, this was not the season many were expecting. According to memories from my childhood, Penn State did not lose. Until back-to-back losing seasons in 2000 and 2001, the Nittany Lions had experienced only one losing season since 1938, a streak that contained six undefeated seasons and two national championships. While the 2000 and 2001 teams frustrated many fans, both of those squads stood only one game away from avoiding a losing season, and when the Lions responded with nine wins in 2002, these seasons were relegated to distant memories. However, 2003’s results were unfathomable and the moo in Beaver Stadium reflected it. While the stadium still filled with around 100,000 fans, the mood was quite reserved. Though the student section and alumni continued to cheer on the home team, it became increasingly difficult to watch Penn State struggle week after week. This chapter will argue that the intersection of administration-led changes and fan-based initiatives beginning in 2004 created a new kind of visible and active Penn State experience, though one still based in community and tradition. This revitalization, created from “borrowed” parts, generated a product which has been recognized nationally by the media and imitated by other universities attempting to create a more active “home-field advantage.” This chapter will explore the atmosphere created in Beaver Stadium, and how community is created within its walls.
The current incarnation of Beaver Stadium sits on the eastern side of the campus in an area which now includes the Bryce Jordan Center, Jeffrey Field, and Medlar Field at Lubrano Park, home to the University’s basketball, soccer, and baseball teams respectively. The original New Beaver Field sat on the west side of campus, but the University moved the structure in 1960 to its present location (“Beaver Stadium”). That year, the stadium’s capacity stood at 46,284. During the following decades, the University expanded Beaver Stadium’s capacity. In 1978 the “stadium was cut into sections” and “raised eighteen feet by hydraulic jacks.” 1985 saw the addition of lights, and an expansion in 2001 brought Beaver Stadium’s capacity to 107,292 (“Beaver Stadium”). For at least a few years, Beaver Stadium now holds the title for the largest (non-racing) stadium in the country (Fortuna). Shockingly, this also makes Beaver Stadium the third largest (non-racing) stadium in the world behind Rungrado May Day Stadium in P'yŏngyang, North Korea and Saltlake Stadium in Kolkata, India (“100,000+ Stadiums”). P'yŏngyang, Kolkata, and University Park, PA: it reminds me of the classic Sesame Street song, “Which One of These Things is Not Like the Other Things?” Yet, despite its bucolic setting in rural Central Pennsylvania, the stadium routinely fills with well over 100,000 people on football Saturdays, often exceeding the listed capacity (“Beaver Stadium”). Something draws these thousands of attendants from all over Pennsylvania and beyond. Sure, the short answer is football, but people can watch Penn State football. Yet, thousands still travel to Happy Valley.

Scholars have critiqued both the television experience and the stadium experience, and I will draw from their arguments. Paul Virilio comments: “At a sports event no two people see the same thing (because no two people can occupy exactly the same place) whereas the game on TV is exactly what the camera saw” (qtd. in Bale 88). Virilio speaks to the problem (some might argue a benefit) of the stadium experience. The television broadcast provides multiple angles,
in-depth commentary, and (in the age of TiVo) pauses and instant replay on demand.

Conversely, the stadium experience limits visibility (depending on the viewer’s seat and surroundings) and lessens the fans’ ability to analyze plays as they occur. Sometimes, the viewers at the stadium are left out of the loop entirely. For instance, while television viewers enjoy the ability to see instant replays during challenged plays, viewers within the stadium are denied the same privilege, so as not to influence the referee’s decision or (more often) create an outcry of boisterous disapproval if the outcome displeases the crowd. This latter event led Jean Baudrillard, in *The Transparency of Evil*, to envision sports devoid of crowds in which teams faced off against each other in empty stadiums whilst television broadcast the results to the absent viewers (Baudrillard 79). If sporting matches were played at a neutral site to an empty stadium, the outcomes of many athletic events would surely have different outcomes. However, without the “home-field advantage” created through crowd participation, traditions, stadium lore, and noise, would sports be such an integral part of so many fans’ identities? It is my contention that the stadium experience contributes a great deal toward creating a community around Penn State football. The game itself, with its rules and skillful execution of plays, is still quite intriguing. However, for my informants (and myself), this “home-field advantage” is exactly what led them to speak so excitedly about their experiences at Beaver Stadium rather than solely on the outcome of the game. As one recent male graduate told me, winning “doesn’t matter, because it’s more than just winning and losing; it’s about the whole experience of what Penn State football has become.” When it comes to their stadium experience, winning is nice, but as the old adage goes, it is far from everything.

Devoid of spectators, Beaver Stadium could be considered a *place*, in accordance with Michel de Certeau’s definition:
A place is the order in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. The law of the “proper” rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated on its own “proper” and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability (117).

In other words, despite the many differences between stadiums throughout the country, they all share a few common elements: the dimensions of the playing surface, the rules of the game, and the ability to house spectators. The structures themselves, whether cavernous or cozy, domed or open air, containing artificial turf or natural grass, provide no real “home-field advantage,” other than the one gained from practicing and playing there frequently. If given the opportunity to play on the turf at Beaver Stadium week in and week out, the Michigan Wolverines, Auburn Tigers, or Rice Owls would have the same advantage as the Nittany Lions. The true “home-field advantage” comes from the supportive crowds which inhabit the stadiums. If these same Wolverines, Tigers, and Owls played in front of a rabid pro-Penn State crowd, the results would most likely be quite different from the ones created in an empty stadium. The crowd turns de Certeau’s place into a space:

[…]. space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it… on this view, in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts (117).

Through crowd participation, the place becomes the space. The anticipated becomes the spontaneous and the variable. While the builders of stadiums surely anticipate that crowds will cheer and make the space their own, each set of fans does this in its own unique way.

The home crowd gives each stadium its own personality. Rather than homogenizing the game with non-distinct stadiums and muted crowds, “what could have become sports spaces
were clearly reclaimed as meaningful *places* by the crowd” (Bale 86). Although Bale seems to reverse de Certeau’s definitions of *place* and *space*, he makes an excellent point. While Shakespearean plays, ballets, and other stage productions in the United States during the late 1800’s became more standardized through the exclusion and discouragement of crowd participation, football and other sports took a different path (Levine 157-197). The fans at Beaver Stadium do not merely *watch* a performance of college football; they have the ability to *interact* and *influence* the performance. A female informant revealed that, although her short stature should probably make watching the game on television more ideal, it is “not the same feel, because you’re not with thousands and thousands of other people,” continuing “I like the camaraderie, I guess; the companionship.”

Raymond Boyles and Richard Haynes argue that “despite the globalization of major sporting events, the distinctive locale in which viewers engage with these events remains vital” (204). The structure itself elicited strong emotions from many of my informants. The geographical location of the stadium adds to its grandeur in the eyes of many fans. Richard Giulianotti describes this deep affection toward social spaces or places as *topophilia* (69). One recent male graduate remarked: “There is no place on the planet like Beaver Stadium. The scenery around it; Mount Nittany and the rolling hills of rural Pennsylvania; you’re never going to find a more picturesque setting than that place.” A Penn State professor told me the stadium reminded him of Mecca. While not a religious site, Beaver Stadium does have some kind of sacred quality. Whether one drives into State College from Interstate 80 or Route 322, Beaver Stadium seems to appear out of nowhere: a proverbial “shining city on a hill.” Surrounded on every side by hundreds of miles of pastures, valleys, and wooded mountains, the largest stadium in the Western Hemisphere seems out of place in a predominantly rural area. When asked how
other stadiums compared to Beaver Stadium, many of my informants could not put it into words, but they assured me that there was “something different” and better about Beaver Stadium. Bale writes that “the sports arena was not a space where one discriminatingly attended a ‘performance’; it became a meaningful place to support ‘our’ team” (86). For the Penn State community, the structure where “our” team plays becomes “our” structure, summoning the feelings and stories associated with the team.

The stadium is surrounded by placards and banners proclaiming the history and glories of past seasons. Recently, significant years (undefeated seasons, conference championships, and National Championships) were added in large numerals to the press box, and the wall which surrounds the field was covered in Pennsylvania limestone (“Beaver Stadium”). The physical structure of the stadium combined with the multimedia texts employed by the University within the stadium influence how the fans feel and act. By no means is every act of the crowd spontaneous. Much of the crowd’s response is anticipated and encouraged by music, videos, signs, and cheers orchestrated by employees of the University, cheerleaders, and the Blue Band. However, while the University anticipates a response, the crowd determines whether or how they respond. While few fans would view the relationship as such, those in charge of the music and experiences within Beaver Stadium act as producers and the crowd responds as consumers. The products: certain songs, videos, and cheers, are offered to the crowd which then determines said products’ popularity and success through positive or negative responses. Through this repeated process, the most pleasing and effective product thrives within the stadium. If the process replicated itself only in this one-way model, I would be wary to grant much agency to the fans as manipulators and creators of their own community and of stadium atmosphere. However, the stadium allows a much more active role for community members to create their own experience...
(though still limited by stadium rules and procedures). In the following pages, I will examine the ways in which both the University and the fans play active roles in the creation of the stadium experience and the creation of community.

As in many college stadiums, fans have ample opportunity to participate (Rader 278). Before the game begins, The Pennsylvania State University Marching Blue Band marches onto the field in precise formations while playing the Penn State fight songs. The Blue Band Silks (colorguard), the Touch of Blue (majorettes), and the Blue Sapphire (lead majorette) add to the fanfare as the Drum Major high-steps his way through the rows of musicians to midfield. Fans are encouraged to sing and clap along to the music. The drum major performs two front flips (one at midfield and one in the endzone) and lands in a split. According to Penn State lore, the outcome of the game rests on the success of the drum major’s flips. For this reason, the crowd responds to the success or failure of his attempts. In this vein, many of the songs played by the Blue Band incorporate opportunities for crowd interaction, whether they are in the form of call and response or prompted cheers from the cheerleaders.

The Blue Band’s pregame music also elicits originally unintended interaction. During the playing of “The Nittany Lion,” a majority of the women in the crowd yell “And women!” after the line “Molder of men.” Whether read as a playful tweak of a song written before the greater acceptance of feminism or as a critique of the inferred representation of all by the word “men,” it represents an originally spontaneous moment of agency that over time has become traditional. Moreover, a lapsed tradition from my sister’s time at Penn State (1998-2002) included a large portion of the student section singing, “We don’t know the God damn words,” repeatedly for each verse of the Alma Mater. I would assume that this was also a moment of

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1 For more on music and its ties to the Penn State community, see Chapter Two.
unintended fan interaction. Furthermore, during the *Star-Spangled Banner*, many students pump their fist and scream the word “O!” for the last line of the song. Fans take the opportunity to make these University approved songs their own through the seizing of the moment de Certeau labels “tactics.”

De Certeau describes *tactics* as spur-of-the-moment tricks employed by the weak to gain temporary power over the strong (xix). He argues that these *tactics* are tolerated by the more powerful because they do not upset the system. While I am arguing neither that the fans feel powerless nor that they are unhappy with the system, I would argue that fans employ these *tactics* to personalize and leave their mark on the system. They want to toy with the system and be heard. While the referees are the enforcers of the rules of football within the stadium, fans at Beaver Stadium often voice their opinions when they disagree with a referee’s decisions. By showering the referee with the refrain of “Bullshit!” the fans do not change the outcome of the call. The system remains. However, the moment allows for the fans to voice their opinions and be heard, in a way they cannot through a television screen (or in the work place or classroom). The ability to gain some form of agency makes the rigidity and the seeming unjustness of the system more bearable. De Certeau also describes how *tactics* must continuously reinvent themselves in order to circumvent the restrictions of the more powerful (xx). According to one informant, many students used to bring marshmallows to the game to throw in the stands and on the field. After whole cups of soda soon joined the fray, the University banned the throwing of objects in Beaver Stadium (although the quarterback is exempt). Soon, some students brought blowup dolls into the stadium to pass throughout the section, which were quickly confiscated and deflated until another one surfaced, restarting the process. As each act of rebellion is squashed, new ones spring up to challenge the rules.
Other times, fans toy with their own created traditions to keep them fresh and exciting. While “the wave” has long been a popular crowd experience throughout American sporting events, I witnessed a twist I had not seen before at Beaver Stadium when I visited for the Illinois game in September of ’08. After a few rotations around the stadium earlier in the game, the wave sprung up once more. However, instead of moving at its normal speed, a group of students had convinced their section to start it off at an incredibly reduced velocity. The rest of the stadium followed suit, and it seemed that many paid more attention to the wave than to the game. Later, the students also introduced a fast wave which enraptured the attention of a large portion of the crowd once more. Even the most mundane and ubiquitous (though originally quite creative) event provides the opportunity for creative reinvention.

Many communities (especially in sports) define themselves by what they are not. In college football, this often takes the form of rivalries. Within Beaver Stadium, those who are not a part of the community stand out by their lack of knowledge, their attire, or their overt rejection of traditions due to their allegiance to another team. “Thus the fan identity is socially and culturally constructed in the sense that a fan and her/his fan identity is defined in relation to her/his anti-fan and all the socio-historical baggage the counterforce carries” according to Theodoropoulou (321). Regardless of the validity of these opinions, the prevailing belief of the community is that Pitt is “city” compared to Penn State’s “country,” Michigan is condescending to Penn State’s likability, Ohio State is rude to Penn State’s amiability, and various schools are corrupt to Penn State’s virtuousness. While it is unfair to stereotype any fan base due to the antics of a few individuals, that does not stop such judgments from happening. Within the stadium, the rejection of rivals is visible in the introduction of the visiting team at the beginning

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2 For a closer look at rivalries, see Chapter Three.
of the game. The visitors usually run out of their tunnel near the end of Penn State’s entrance. Many in the crowd immediately switch from singing and cheering to booing the interlopers. The same instantaneous switch occurs during “the wave.” As “the wave” makes its way around the stadium, the community cheers it forward, until it reaches the northeast corner where the visiting team sits (and where, during White Outs, the visiting fans can clearly be seen). After booing for the entirety of “the wave’s” time in the visiting section, the crowd instantaneously changes to a “Yea!” of approval as it cascades through the student section once more. This rejection of those from outside of the community can audibly be seen and heard within the student section when fans of the visiting school attempt to sit amongst the Penn State students. Cries of “asshole” reign down upon them until they leave or take off their team’s apparel. During one game, the “offending” Central Michigan fan’s girlfriend tried to explain that he was with her. The cries soon switched to “Dump him!”

For some informants, this defining of the community by what it is not can seem intimidating and unnecessary. A recent female graduate described how she felt ostracized because she did not really care about Penn State football. She described a summer session for incoming freshmen where one of the student workers decided (although the University did not suggest this) to show the freshmen the “Linkin Park video” described below. In a vivid example of how traditions can be both inclusive and exclusive, she relates:

And it’s just like, ‘You have all of these different backgrounds, but now you have the same dreams and the same goal and one life’ and it’s just ridiculous and I think it’s terrible. It’s exclusive and alienating for a huge, maybe not huge here, but generally a huge portion of the population would just be like, ‘Oh, well, if you don’t like football then you must not belong here.’

She later revealed that she thought it was a travesty to put so much emphasis on football, seeing that the University is so much more than its football team. Within the stadium, the context of the
video makes more sense, due to its focus on football. However, due to the prevalence of football at Penn State, this mentality does not always stay within Beaver Stadium. One professor who earned his doctorate from the University of Michigan and his master’s from Florida State University revealed: “I think the Penn State folks wear their support a little more openly… coming from Michigan, there are times where I mention that, and I get shouted down or it’s seen as being offensive. I haven’t experienced that elsewhere.” Here, the passion encouraged by videos, music, and advertisements spills out of the confines of Beaver Stadium and into “real” life. Even so, the professor made sure to acknowledge that within the stadium Penn State’s crowd support was quite impressive and probably more impassioned than the support at either Michigan or Florida State. However, such passion can escape the bounds of Penn State football and enter other facets of one’s identity. When this occurs, the congenial banter often expected and accepted within the stadium seems out of place.

I would be remiss if I did not discuss the University initiated aspects of the stadium atmosphere, since they make up a large portion of the environment. To revive the Penn State football experience after the losing seasons of the early 2000’s, Penn State hired Guido D’Elia as its “Director of Communications and Branding for Football” (Lapointe, Paterno Making a Grand Comeback). D’Elia, the founder of media consulting firm Mind Over Media, came in with the goal of reinvigorating the atmosphere at Beaver Stadium. Penn State’s athletic director, Tim Curley, said of D’Elia: “He probably moves at a faster pace in terms of change than what we had traditionally done before. He's not afraid to make changes” (Lapointe, No Time). For a school that prides itself on “old school” uniforms which lack names on the jerseys, any change is monumental. Broadcaster Jack Ham, a former Nittany Lion and Pittsburgh Steeler, said of Beaver Stadium: “The fans would show up and sip their Chardonnay” (Cook). While obviously
hyperbole, as the tailgating drink of choice in Happy Valley is Yuengling Lager, the crowds in central Pennsylvania had grown almost complacent after years of watching winning football seasons. The University hired D’Elia to turn “an Opera crowd” into a more involved fan base. In most team sports, in contrast to opera, crowd noise and participation are encouraged and expected, and Penn State football was no different, relying on cheerleader-led call-and-response cheers of “We Are … Penn State,” video board animations, and songs played by the Blue Band to get the fans involved. While such efforts had worked in the past to create an invigorated crowd, without a winning football team, fan spirit dwindled. Immediately, D’Elia worked to change this and create an active Penn State football experience.

Before the first game of the season kicked off in 2004, D’Elia organized a pep rally at Beaver Stadium for September 3, 2004. Called Penn State Football Eve, the event gave Nittany Lions fans a glimpse into the changes D’Elia planned to implement. Through a combined effort of new videos to be played on the scoreboards and more modern songs pumped through the loudspeakers, D’Elia created a new atmosphere. Like Marshall McLuhan’s contention that “the medium is the message,” while the information presented in the videos and songs was surely important, the medium itself was key (McLuhan). With a student population weaned on a culture of music videos and The Simpsons, D’Elia’s strategy of implementing a combination of post-modern videos and newer music was effective. Growing up in a post-modern world, the students responded to post-modern media. D’Elia said: "They had a lot going on with the band and the cheerleaders and the video board, but it wasn't very coordinated. I was dumb enough to say that everything was wrong. They said, 'OK, big mouth, pull it all together’” (Cook).

D’Elia’s videos, such as “the Gladiator Video,” which featured music from the 2000 Oscar winner, Gladiator, utilized game footage from past seasons and highlights from Penn
State’s history tied together with flashing messages in white lettering over a black background. While the idea of showing highlights was not revolutionary at Penn State, the way in which D’Elia presented the message was. *Gladiator*’s emotional score, combined with adrenaline-inducing past glories, near-subliminal messages that played on Penn State’s adherence to tradition, heart, and community, and a finale that ended with Penn State’s motto, “We Are Penn State,” created a feeling of unity among the fans in attendance. Nestor Garcia Canclini describes video as “the most intrinsically postmodern genre” for its mixing of media representation and history, and this describes D’Elia’s “Gladiator Video” perfectly (430). By showing snippets of past Penn State glories juxtaposed with modern music which was written for a movie that depicts an ancient era, his video relies on viewers conditioned by post-modern styles. Those unfamiliar with past Nittany Lions or their accomplishments can still comprehend the video and be emotionally moved by it. Boyles and Haynes explain the importance of telling a compelling story: “One of the particular appeals of sport, for both the media and supporters, is the extent to which the narratives or stories which surround sport act as a bridge between the present and the past. Sporting events need to have a history and a longevity to feel important” (Boyle and Haynes 22). The video adds historical context to the game and situates the game within the greater narrative of Penn State football.

By choosing the theme from *Gladiator*, D’Elia captured the nostalgia of many Penn State fans. *Gladiator* tells the story of a great and powerful warrior, embarrassed and forgotten by his empire. This warrior rises from the wallows of despair, fighting his way back to national prominence through his victories in a sporting arena. Without showing any footage from the film, D’Elia’s use of *Gladiator*’s score in his video translated the glories of a gladiator from

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3 The phrase “We Are… Penn State!” will be analyzed in greater detail in Chapter Two.
ancient Rome into the hopes for the Penn State football team. D'Elia emphasized the proud
tradition of Penn State football, its coach, and its fans, promising through the analogy of
*Gladiator* that a return to glory was coming. With such a *bricolage* of visual and audio images
broadcast on the big screen at Beaver Stadium in such a small amount of time, many fans were
not really sure what they had witnessed, but they understood the meaning behind it. Though the
music from *Gladiator* belongs to a larger, commercial culture, it evoked a personal, emotional
response in Penn State fans, longing for their football team’s return to glory. To the crowd, the
music did not describe Maximus’ rise, but Penn State’s. I remember a cheer sprung up from the
crowd still stinging from a dismal season. While it is true that “hope springs eternal” in most
sports fans, many felt this was the start of something new and the return to a long, victorious
past. Each year, D’Elia updates the video with new footage in order to achieve a similar
response from the crowd. One of my male informants remarked: “the music and the video that
was shown before the game, set to the Gladiator music, with the greats clips… it’s just very
emotional and I hope they never stop doing that. Keep making more of those.” In this instance,
the product elicited a positive response from the crowd, and the “*Gladiator* video” remains an
integral (though recent) pre-game tradition within the stadium.

As David Lowenthal discusses in *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, the
modern trend is toward reinventing events of history to fit the heritage we want to claim. Players
from years past can fit easily into the image of Penn State football. Just as our modern
conception of Greek culture encompasses everything from Homer onwards, Penn State football
players of the 1920’s can be associated with “Success with Honor,” just as the banners outside of
the stadium proclaim today (Lowenthal 138). In reality, community and identity are built much

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4 I am using Claude Lévi-Strauss’ definition which describes the creation of something new through combination of
dissimilar objects.
more on heritage than history. Lowenthal describes “heritage” as a “declaration of faith in the past” (121). As in Stephen Colbert’s satire, when it comes to aspects of our identity, it matters more if it feels true than if it actually is true. In 1946 Wally Triplett was the first African-American starter at Penn State, and in a moment of solidarity the team voted against playing a road game at the segregated University of Miami (Fla.) in 1946 (“Destined”). While I am not suggesting that such a momentous occurrence is not worthy of recognition and celebration, I would suggest that the decision did not meet with unanimous approval from the entire Penn State community at the time (before the Civil Rights movement). The prevailing feeling in our country today probably falls on the side of the Penn State team. Through celebrating the team’s protest in the present, the community can claim part of the struggle for equality as their own.

Boyles and Haynes argue that fans see the team’s history as their history: “It is not simply a case of one version of history versus another, but of how the clubs come to symbolize a sense of history, place and belonging to supporters who often view themselves as an integral part of the club and its historical narrative” (202). Heritage celebrates the past “by garbing its scenes and actors in present-day guise. It highlights and enhances aspects of the past now felt admirable [and] it expunges what seems shameful or harmful by consigning it to ridicule or oblivion” (148). Owing to our membership within the community, we celebrate past victories and accomplishments from before our time. On the flip side, we safely avoid the criticism and risks which went hand-in-hand with those past memories. Moreover, we can set unwanted memories to the side through the always handy excuse that “it was before my time.” When it comes to our communal identity, we tend to selectively pick and choose what will be remembered, forgotten, celebrated, or condemned.
Many fans had quite cheery recollections of the games and their times in Beaver Stadium. They made sure to regale me with stories of witnessing games in hurricanes and blizzards, sweltering heat and bone-numbing cold. However, these stories usually ended with “and I’d do it again in a heartbeat.” John Nauright describes nostalgia as “memory with the pain removed” (Nauright 38). His description is quite apt. Even now, when I reminisce about all of the games I sat through, I think first to the high-fives, the hugs, and the goosebumps. Digging a little deeper, I begin to remember the frozen feet, aching throat, gut-wrenching losses, and sunburns that scorched only half of my face due to where my seat was. Nostalgia is a conservative force (39). Players are never appreciated more than they are after they leave. Informants talk about the “good old days” and worry about the effects of alcohol on night games. It is presumably safe to say that alcohol has always had an effect on crowds. The “good old days” had their problems just as the present ones do. However, nostalgia can work in a more taxing way on the wallet. One informant remarked that the rising ticket prices make the weekend trip over to State College an expensive one. In order to relive the memories he made with his family over the last four decades, he has to pay more money. Through advertisements and videos which speak to the family atmosphere of Penn State and utilize footage from years past, the University plays on the power of nostalgia in order to tie past and present together and increase revenue.

D’Elia (who attended Penn State) emphasizes Penn State’s traditions and history. Although he does it with a post-modern flare congruous with a post-modern society, the Penn State message is still the same: community. Said D’Elia of Penn State football:

I think for a while there was some fear. There was some fear that perhaps it couldn't be done the right way. That perhaps our days are over… It's the kind of anxiety and fear you might have for a loved one if they were sick (Kunkel).
Though an outside consultant, D’Elia is hardly an outsider to Penn State. D’Elia emphasizes the idea of a Penn State family united through Penn State football. While his additions to Penn State tradition are post-modern, the message of community and tradition is the same.

Throughout the 2004 season, D’Elia planted the seeds for a new atmosphere in Beaver Stadium. While Penn State struggled through another losing season, D’Elia used it as a period of trial and error to find what inspired the crowd and what did not. He played his “Gladiator Video” before the team came out of the tunnel at the start of every game. However, instead of changing everything, he mixed and matched. With the addition of the Gladiator Video, he retained the Blue Band’s tradition of playing “Rock ‘n’ Roll: Part II” while the team ran out of the tunnel. Along with the Penn State fight songs and marching band standards, he pumped in a combination of rap, hip-hop, pop, and rock music to reach and stir a younger audience in the players and the students. As the season progressed, D’Elia introduced another video which utilized Linkin Park’s “Somewhere I Belong” and informed Penn State fans that their “Saturdays are taken… forever.” The 110,000 fans in Beaver Stadium did not all share the same gender, class, race, home state, or even nationality, but they did share a love for Penn State football. D’Elia’s videos emphasized this shared bond in order to turn the crowd into a united community. When the video states “your Saturdays are taken… forever,” those in attendance realize that they are being hailed. Their attachment to Penn State football is not a four-year fling, but a life-long commitment. Even those who cannot attend the games are “forever” a part of Penn State football. After student tickets sold out in fifty-nine minutes this season, many students were willing to pay hefty sums for scalped tickets. On football Saturdays, Beaver Stadium becomes the third largest city in Pennsylvania (as multiple informants were quite excited to tell me) as
tens of thousands remain in the parking lots and pastures to tailgate during the game. Weddings, including my sister’s, are planned to avoid Penn State football weekends, both home and away. With the largest dues-paying alumni association in the country, many Penn Staters remain proud of their university well after graduation and meet at local sports bars and homes to watch football games together (“About Us”). D’Elia’s videos rely on that loyalty and pride.

Not all of D’Elia’s ideas worked during the 2004 season, just as not every product succeeds in the marketplace. He attempted to get the student section to wear blue shirts for a few of the games to create a more dominating atmosphere, but it never really went anywhere. The same occurred with a German techno song by Zombie Nation entitled “Kernkraft 400.” I remember that when D’Elia first tried out the song, a few people bobbed their heads to the beat or sang along to the chant in the song, but most did not know what to make of it. Throughout the year, D’Elia played the song over and over again, but with limited results. Seeing that the Lions were not winning, the crowd had little to cheer about.

However, after a victory at Indiana, the Lions returned with a bit of momentum for the season finale against Michigan State. After two years of ineptitude on offense, everything clicked against the Spartans, as the Lions went on to win 37-13. For the first time all year, when “Kernkraft 400” blasted out of the speakers after big plays and the scoreboard flashed “BOUNCE!,” students responded by jumping on the bleachers and singing along with the song’s chant. Even though the team finished the season with only four wins, Penn State fans were invigorated. Now, “Zombie Nation” (as many fans incorrectly label the song) is played after big defensive plays at every Penn State football game, and nearly all of my informants mentioned it as a game day tradition.
Henry Jenkins argues that fans of movies and television shows are both critical and supportive: “The fans' response typically involves not simply fascination or adoration but also frustration and antagonism, and it is the combination of the two responses which motivates their active engagement with the media” (“Television Fans” 508). The same is true in college football, but it is expressed differently. While support is easily noticeable both visibly and audibly through cheering and singing, criticism can be less evident. While criticism in professional sports is often identified with heckling and booing, there is an unwritten code of restraint among most fans at Beaver Stadium. Seeing that the members of the Penn State football team are students and members of their own community, most fans find booing and heckling inappropriate. Instead, disapproval is expressed through a lack of energy. This should not be confused with apathy, since the fans still pay to watch the team live, rather than on television. If it were truly apathy, the Nittany Lions would play in front of a few thousand spectators, while the rest tune in from somewhere else or not at all. Instead, disapproval of the product on the field is expressed through a lack of enthusiasm. Not surprisingly, success translates to a willingness to be more involved during the game. If fans like the product they are seeing in front of them, they approve by aiding their team through cheering.

Unlike the media fans described by Jenkins or sports fans who watch the game on television, the fans at Beaver Stadium can have a real impact on the game. A boisterous and deafening crowd can cause confusion for the offense which can result in intimidation, false starts, the inability to hear the play called, delay of game penalties, or even a lack of concentration by the players on the field. For this reason, the fans refrain from cheering when their own offense is on the field, instead cheering after big plays. However, when the other team’s offense is on the field, the fans at Beaver Stadium scream, hit railings,
and stomp the bleachers to create a confusing wall of sound. Fan-created mistakes by the opposition can stop momentum, ruin scoring opportunities, and create turnovers, actively helping to determine the outcome of the game. Through the seeds sown by D’Elia’s post-modern media, the fans had been immersed in a culture that encouraged them to become more active throughout the 2004 season, so that the team’s eventual success at the end of the season acted as a stimulus for a more active fan culture at Beaver Stadium in subsequent years.

As Jenkins describes, fans are “active producers and manipulators of meaning” (“Television Fans” 506). The residents of Paternoville could surely be described as fans. Paternoville (named in 2005) is a tent city of Penn State students which springs up outside of Gate A at Beaver Stadium before home games. Many of the campers create fan groups devoted to specific players and vie for front row seats in order to display their creations. Many of the groups write their group’s name on bed sheets and hang them on the front row railings of the student section. In my years at Penn State and annual trips back, I have witnessed groups for Deon Butler, Lydell Sargeant, Paul Poslusnzy, and Evan Royster (Butler’s Maids, Lydell’s Sargeants, Poz’s Posse, and Blue Röyster Cult respectively), just to name a few. Most of these groups decorate their signs and dress in some manner reflective of their group. For instance, Butler’s Maids dressed in tuxedo shirts or maid costumes, while Lydell’s Sargeants wore camouflage and patrol caps. The excitement of Paternoville combined with the success of the football team created an electric atmosphere for the Ohio State game in 2005. That game and games since have demonstrated the ability of crowds to create space out of place. Football could actually be played on any flat surface, but the fans create the atmosphere. Music and videos can be pumped into a stadium, but the fans create the response. Games are broadcast by TV stations,
but the fans create the passion. Local and national media outlets soon gravitated to Paternoville for the 2005 Ohio State game, with *Cold Pizza* holding a live broadcast from Gate A. Rather than just the football game, the fans shared the spotlight.

D’Elia promoted his idea of a student section bedecked in a single color. On game day, the students almost uniformly obliged and wore XL white shirts over their multiple layers of clothing, and some painted themselves white and went shirtless in the chilly, rain-soaked night. Although the “white out” idea had failed in the past, it all came together at the Ohio State game thanks to reminders in the school paper, posts on football message boards, and groups on Facebook. Like other administration-sponsored ideas from D’Elia, the “White Out” required student participation for it to succeed. In a vivid example of the process Paul Willis identifies in *Common Culture* as the production of new meanings from ordinary objects, students adorned in t-shirts, hoodies, jackets, garbage bags, and body paint shared the common goal of becoming one entity through the use of the color white. They were no longer just individual students, but part of a group capable of much more than its individual parts. As D’Elia described it, they were a “mob” (Cook). With the students bouncing and singing along with “Kernkraft 400” after big defensive plays, Beaver Stadium literally shook so much that the University investigated whether it was structurally sound enough to continue to play the techno song (Horan). Even the older fans in attendance bounced and sang along. Fans saw the impact they could have on the game. Tom Bradley related: “I remember (linebacker) Paul Posluszny standing next to me on the sideline and asking me a question, and I had to read his lips” (Cook). Analyst (and Ohio State alum) Kirk Herbstreit christened Penn State’s student section the greatest in the nation. The noise reached a decibel level equivalent to a jet engine for brief moments and consistently stayed above the level at which hearing loss can occur (Fernandez). The Nittany Lions won the game
17-10 and went on to finish third in the nation. The broadcast itself set records for its providers. The atmosphere created by the administration, video/audio images, and the fans, combined with the clash between two football teams with long, storied histories, added up to the highest ranked College Gameday preview show ever and the second most watched game in ESPN history (Fitzgerald).

Many informants described “the noise” as their favorite or most memorable aspect of the stadium experience. While television broadcasts provide more comfort and information, the lack of “realness” keeps it a notch below “the real thing.” One recent male graduate described the noise:

Maybe it’s because I’m musical and I’m sort of in tune to that sort of thing, I enjoy a lot of things that involve different sounds and experiences. And certainly, the roar at Beaver Stadium, and not just the roar of the crowd, but also the music like Zombie nation, it certainly makes a difference.

Yet another recollected:

There is a collective energy in that place that you’re not gonna find anywhere else. There are other big stadiums in the country, but you’re just not gonna get the energy that you have at a Penn State football game, and that’s what I like. You can feel it. Energy isn’t something that you can really see, but you can sense it and you can feel it. That’s what I love.

Giulianotti writes that “the more intense the ‘atmosphere,’ the more pleasurable the game” (69). To many of the informants, the noise and energy present within the stadium do not transfer through the television broadcast. One informant remarked: “You have to be there to believe it.” The younger informants (recent graduates and current students) were far more likely to brag about the noise than older ones. While older fans frequently mentioned the recent spike in crowd noise, many younger fans were quick to remind me of Herbstreit’s proclamation and describe how their ears still hurt the next day. It seems that the younger generation embraces the identity like earlier generations had, and just as previous generations, the younger ones want to add to
that identity with new traditions. As Lowenthal describes, this sharing of a legacy binds the community together (2). The younger fans added to the legacy, but not by disregarding it.

These changes worked to create excitement and reinvigorate a weary fan base. In a dizzying display of postmodernism, D’Elia combined musical genres in his stadium music and videos. Over the next two years, D’Elia added new videos that incorporated modern songs from artists like Coldplay and Kanye West with standards from U2, Aerosmith, Journey, and even the score from Last of the Mohicans. Inspired by these videos, many fans have created their own motivational videos, integrating the same style of postmodernism through an amalgam of musical genres and video and audio clips that do not always originate from Penn State football. These videos are posted on YouTube and often make their rounds on Penn State message boards during the offseason to keep interest and excitement high. In fact, the boards, such as FightOnState.com, BlueWhiteIllustrated.com, and PennLive.com, serve as a breeding ground for grassroots movements. Realizing the potential of over twenty-thousand students, Bill Solomon and George Thompson, students at Penn State, used Facebook to transform Penn State’s Blue and White football game in April of 2007 into a tribute to those affected by the shootings at Virginia Tech. Solomon had the idea to turn the “S-Zone,” which is normally a blue ‘S’ set off by a rectangle of white through the use of colored t-shirts, into a “VT Zone.” After gaining support for the idea on Facebook, Thompson combined his idea of having students wear the Hokies’ colors of orange and maroon, rather than the traditional Penn State blue and white with Solomon’s “VT-Zone” (Jones). The plan inspired local Penn State merchants to sell orange and maroon shirts for charity. Through this grassroots effort, Family Clothesline raised $110,000, which they donated to the families affected by the tragedy (Maslowsky). From an idea generated by students and spread through the use of the internet, the Blue and White game became a tribute
to Virginia Tech, complete with a memorial delivered by a member of the football team, the playing of the Virginia Tech fight song and “Amazing Grace” by the Blue Band, and a stadium-wide cheer of “Go Hokies!” Once again, the Penn State football community was united for something bigger than the individual.

D’Elia wanted to create a more active fan base and many of his additions helped to do just that. As the self-proclaimed “designated trouble-stirrer of change,” D’Elia continued to expand upon his ideas (Lapointe, No Time). In 2007, he worked to turn Beaver Stadium into the “White House” for the Notre Dame game by advertising the game for months and even sending out reminders with the season tickets. This resulted in well over 100,000 fans showing up clad in white. That night the crowd caused five false-start penalties and two delay of game penalties (Cook). They actively participated in a game normally decided by the players, coaches, and referees on the field. Multiple students walked around in white shirts proclaiming “We determine the snap count!,” reveling in the idea that the fans can make a difference in the outcome of games, just like the players on the field. Moreover, the continually growing popularity of recruiting sites like rivals.com and scout.com allowed fans to recognize highly touted recruits and cheer for them when they visit Beaver Stadium, giving the recruits a taste of what it would be like to play in front of 110,000 screaming fans and possibly have their own fan club. In this way, fans even had an effect on the recruiting process of the football team. Through the efforts of D’Elia, the fans, and the utilization of the internet and other modern media, the Penn State football experience was reinvented.

While Penn State borrowed many of the aspects responsible for the renaissance of active fan participation within Beaver Stadium, all of these separate aspects combined to create a more modern Penn State football experience. Many other universities are trying to capture that same
atmosphere. While Nebraska fans and other sports fans previously wore the same color in support of their school (the Winnipeg Jets even held a “White Out” in 1987), it has become commonplace since Penn State demonstrated its effectiveness in 2005, with Georgia and Ohio State specifically referencing Penn State’s efforts (Powers; Donahue). While Penn State was not the first school to utilize “Kernkraft 400,” the song became nearly universal at American sporting events since getting national play during the Penn State/Ohio State game in 2005. Within the last few months, I have heard the song played at games at Akron, Georgia Tech, Oklahoma State, Colorado, Arizona State, Boston College, Virginia, and even in the stadiums of the Colts, Giants, and Bears of the NFL. The students borrowed the idea of Paternoville from Duke, where K-Ville has long existed, but made it their own. Within a month, Paternoville became the number one thing to do on the East Coast before you graduate (“102 More Things”). This combination of parts worked at Penn State and created a colorful bricolage that other schools are emulating.

Steve Redhead discusses post-fandom in his book Post-Fandom and the Millennial Blues. He argues “being there” at the game is quite similar to watching the game at home with “giant video screens” and instantaneous replays (30). In a world where “post-fans” can view multiple games without leaving the comfort of their home or the local bar, the corporate businesses of the media have created a postmodern sports culture. Redhead refers to soccer, but the same case could be made for college football or most other sports. However, while some scholars regard this as negative and claim it detracts from tradition, I do not believe that this has to be the case. In his criticism of sport in America, Malcolm Bradbury claims that America’s “alliance with local culture or national heritage is diminishing, and the power of culture as considered expression, or a form of thought, is replaced by its power as embracing visual image” (38-39).
While I agree Penn State football has embraced the visual image, I would argue that this has occurred without a diminishment of local culture. All the changes to Penn State football games involved a postmodern combination of images and sounds, but still emphasized the tradition of the University. While Penn State fans bounce to “Kernkraft 400,” they incorporate the cheer “We Are Penn State” within the song. The videos utilize modern music, but they rely on footage of Penn State football games to create feelings of community. Since the visual image is local while the songs are borrowed, the connection between the “visual image” and the power of local culture does not have to be a zero-sum relationship. No matter how post-modern college football becomes, teams can still be tied to their traditions and individual personas. The changes to the stadium experience have been made through the combined efforts of both the University and the fan community. Fans belong to their team just as the team belongs to its fans. Although he spoke of soccer, Eric Cantona’s words ring true for college football: “Football is perhaps the last spectacle which is able to create an open and intense social relationship. Nobody is forced to come to the stadium. Nobody is made to sing” (qtd. in Robinson 32). When the loudspeakers blasted “Kernkraft 400” after Penn State came up with a fumble in the closing minutes of the Ohio State game in 2005, fans felt united in a community that transcended race, class, and gender. I argue that the belief in such ideals matters. With a university system that contains 84,000 students of differing backgrounds and a fanbase which reaches across the United States and beyond, Penn State fandom provides a common ground and creates a community. While the speakers blasted a new song and the video board played a graphic absent just two years earlier, I still experienced the feelings students before my time had felt. As I dug my way out of a dogpile of fans in the second row of the student section, confused over which way was up, I received
hugs and high-fives from people I did not even know. We were Penn State… and we wanted to sing.
CHAPTER TWO

“SING OUR LOVE AND LOYALTY”:

AN EXPLORATION OF MUSIC’S ROLE IN THE CREATION OF COMMUNITY

The previous chapter ended with an anecdote about the willingness and need to sing during certain circumstances in Beaver Stadium. Surely, singing and (more frequently) music play a large role in American sports and in college football particularly. Marching bands blast fight songs and radio “classics,” fans chant along to stadium anthems, and music pours out of vehicles in tailgates surrounding stadiums. According to Tom Clark, “The songs and chants that accompany football matches are central to many a match-day experience. Indeed, to many fans it is implicitly involved in the attraction of the game itself” (495). While Clark writes about English soccer, I argue that his words ring just as true in American college football. For many of my informants, music played a huge role in their perception of Penn State football and seemed intrinsic to their experiences on football Saturdays. It is my contention that music plays a vital role in the creation of community and identity in and around Beaver Stadium. Through a description and examination of the music associated with Penn State football (fight songs, Blue Band songs, stadium anthems, cheers, and parodies), this chapter will explore how various music is utilized at different times on football Saturdays to elicit diverse feelings and create a unified community.

When I prompted my informants with the query “What traditions would you associate with Beaver Stadium?,” most quickly brought up the Blue Band. The Pennsylvania State University Marching Blue Band contains 310 members (as of the 2008-2009 season) and performs at numerous events throughout the year (“Blue Band”). Founded in 1899, the Blue Band plays a large role in Penn State home games and various away games and bowl games.
Arguably, while the football games are highly unpredictable, the Blue Band remains relatively unchanging, performing the same rituals and traditions week after week. Each pre-game follows the same formula until the game itself starts. As one recent male graduate related to me, “they [the Blue Band] are the most important people inside the stadium other than the team, because they bring the crowd together.” He further described why, in part, he comes for those very traditions, noting that their unchangingness is comforting. “If they miss something or forget something, your day is affected. Your mindset is affected. You go to experience a tradition like no other.”

The festivities kick off as the Nittany Lion (Penn State’s anthropomorphic mascot) runs to midfield and, through gestures to different quadrants of the stadium, directs portions of the crowd to cheer. The crowd responds with guttural screaming, the shaking of pom-poms, and the striking of metal railings in order to outdo the previous quadrant. Finally, the Lion motions for the whole crowd to respond, while the Blue Band’s drum line takes the field, calling the band to attention and beating out a rhythm for the rest of the band. The Blue Band and the crowd chant along to the beat, repeating the phrase “Oh… Oh… Oh… Let’s Go State!” as the Drum Major sprints down the field into a running front-flip, landing in a split as the Band breaks into “Lion Fanfare and Downfield.” The music and the visuals tied to the music create a feeling of unity within the stadium. The crowd, regardless of age, gender, race, class, or religion, clap, scream, and chant to the music of the Blue Band. A professor of music at Penn State described the music as “very rhythmic, almost primal,” and likened it to the use of drum and bugle corps in the military. He felt that the music of the pregame deliberately calls the crowd to attention and prepares them for the “battle” about to ensue. In a similar vein, a recent male graduate told me that the pregame reminded him of air shows where marches and patriotic music play as aircraft
perform stunts overhead. Not surprisingly, certain pregames also involve “flyovers” in which jets or large airplanes fly over the stadium as the Blue Band finishes the “Star-Spangled Banner.” The homogeneity of the Blue Band, with their identical uniforms, pristine drills, and drum and brass-heavy music, has a very militaristic flare to it. However, instead of invoking patriotism for America, the Band and their music invite the crowd to celebrate a loyalty toward the University and “pledge allegiance” to the Nittany Lion.

Aside from the playing of the “Star-Spangled Banner” and “Rock and Roll,” the music during the pregame is specifically tied to Penn State. Since the late nineteenth century, colleges have celebrated their might and importance through “fight songs” (Studwell). While many fight songs extol the violence and carnage which will be wrecked upon their opponents or the raucous drinking which will arise after the game, Penn State’s focus is more on proclaiming the glory of the football team and the university (Thomas). Of course, that does not exclude the previously mentioned motifs. However, violent imagery and descriptions of excessive retribution are notably absent. While Alabama’s song implores the Tide to “drown ‘em” or send them to a “watery grave” and Georgia Tech’s speaks of dropping the “battle-axe on Georgia’s head,” Penn State’s fight songs describe how the Nittany Lion is “the best they’ve ever seen” and speak of rolling up the score. Despite the lack of graphic violence, fight songs serve the same purpose at Penn State. The songs speak to the perceived superiority of the University, the football team, and the fans. The collective singing and celebrating of the sentiments within the songs brings the crowd together and defines them. It gives them a bonding tie to one another and to those who sang the songs before them.

However, as in most acts of definition and inclusion, what “we are” goes hand in hand with what “we are not.” In the song “The Nittany Lion,” fans learn that we are not “Pittsburgh
with its Panther,” “Princeton with its Tiger,” “the Wildcats from Northwestern,” or “the Spartans on attack” (Range and Smith 232). Such is the practice of fight songs and fan bases. In order to carve out an identity for the community, what “we are” must be defined. Benedict Anderson described the community as a “deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7). It is not surprising that the Penn State community’s most well-known cheer/slogan is “We Are… Penn State.” Throughout Happy Valley on football Saturdays, one can hear this call and response cheer echoing in and around Beaver Stadium. First, the cheer emphasizes the idea of a community: we are, rather than I am. This inclusiveness argues that the individual is part of a larger community, a community confident in its identity. Secondly, the cheer stresses that they are Penn State. They do not just cheer for, like, or watch Penn State, they are Penn State. Not only does this distinction imply an active, living process, but it highlights the crucial position everyone within the community holds. Rebecca Kraus argues that “when one is made to feel part of the organization, and not just a spectator, the need for belonging is fulfilled, and the recognition that an individual who shares sentiments for a team (which is representing the town and inhabitants) with others must also serve to enforce communal bonds” (84). However, as Penn State is more than a team, but also a geographic location and an academic institution, it is not just a “need for belonging” that is fulfilled but a broader purpose. Since the community members are Penn State, they do not just belong to it; they create it. Mikhail Bakhtin, in his description of the carnival, writes:

All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people. This is a very important aspect of a carnival sense of the world. People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square (251).
“Free and familiar contact” blossoms within the stadium as fans voice the same sentiments and cheer the same team. Fans from varied backgrounds with varied beliefs become united through song.

While in many instances spontaneous singing would seem out of place or embarrassing, it is quite acceptable and even encouraged on football Saturdays. Fans are invited by the stadium announcer to sing and clap along to the fight songs as the lyrics flash on the scoreboard. Because most of the lyrics of the songs were written in a world a century removed from our own, some problems arise in their continued use. Most notably, the early days of college football were rife with the celebration of Muscular Christianity and masculinity at the expense of women (Zirin 35). This led to lines like: “Penn State forever, molder of men” within the song “The Nittany Lion.” However, most female fans remedy this exclusion through shouting “And Women!” after the word men. A similar amendment occurred in 1975, when the phrases “boyhood’s gate” and being molded “into men” within the University’s Alma Mater were replaced with “childhood’s gate” and a refrain of “Dear Old State” (“Alma Mater”). While football remains quite tied to masculinity, some progress to remedy gender privileging in the lyrics has been made in Penn State’s songs.

Perhaps a more audible divide for listeners and singers exists in the old-fashioned lyrics of the songs. “Fight On, State” tells the players to “strike your gait and win,” while the “Penn State Alma Mater” uses words like “thou” and “didst.” Steve Chapman, a writer for the Chicago Tribune, humorously observes:

Much of the appeal is that it [fight songs] allows the public expression of simple and even excruciatingly hokey sentiments, at high volume, without fear of embarrassment. Traditional virtues may be out of fashion

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1 Muscular Christianity was a movement during the Victorian Era for a more athletic Christianity which would create health of mind and body in its followers and reaffirm the values and ideologies associated with masculinity.
in many venues, but on any autumn Saturday you can find youngsters with body piercings and strangely
colored hair celebrating loyalty, teamwork, and reverence for those who have gone before, not to mention
such quaint traits as ‘vim’ and ‘steam.’

When I asked my informants if there was a disconnect between the lyrics of the Penn State songs
and the twenty-first century, most adamantly argued that the lyrics still applied and did not seem out of touch. One female student, who confessed that she didn’t know “all” of the lyrics, felt that the lyrics “absolutely apply and that people are definitely pushing the whole ‘May no act of ours bring shame’ [a line from the “Penn State Alma Mater”] thing, and that’s something we should embrace, and I think it does apply now.” A recent male graduate stated that he believed they were still relevant “because a lot of the values that I think most Penn Staters would purport to hold even if they don’t live them every day are in those fight songs. It’s not just about ‘Fight, fight, fight,’ but I think there’s an attitude about it that we’re scrappy.” A female informant remarked:

The fight songs and the Alma Mater are all about honor and being proud of the University. One part of the one song that’s kind of funny is that it talks about men only, so all of the girls shout “and women!” so that doesn’t necessarily reflect today’s image very well, but the values of the songs are still the same and it’s all about being proud of the university and fighting for the honor of the team or of the group. I think those traditions are still upheld.

Throughout their responses, my informants referenced lyrics which point toward honor, hard work, pride, and personal growth. While they were not completely confident in all of the lyrics (excluding ex-Glee Clubbers), the songs were still able to reach and influence them in some way. As George Lipsitz argues: “Musical forms have meaning only as they can be interpreted by knowing subjects” (109). The lyrics, which (in the case of “Fight On, State”) one informant described as “quite square,” have greater meaning within the Penn State community because they can place them in the context of a football game, a University, and an experience. The songs
belong to them and hold great meaning to them. When the topic of “Which fight songs do you like the best?” comes up from time to time on the message boards of fightonstate.com, I am amused that one stipulation is always included: “besides Penn State’s fight songs.” The posters are well aware that Penn State fans will inevitably have a greater attachment to songs which celebrate their team, rendering their objectivity moot.

A common response to my query about the relevance of the fight songs included a reference to the importance of tradition. Steve Chapman echoes this sentiment when he proclaims that “our age suffers from a shortage of satisfying rituals, and the fight song is one that is open to any and all, anytime. It lets you simultaneously proclaim your allegiance to something greater than yourself and feel at one with those around you doing likewise. It makes you feel good doing it.” The traditions in the Penn State pregame rituals become entrenched in and inseparable from the experience at Beaver Stadium. As Boyles and Haynes note, “The linkage between tradition and the selective interpretation of history is important, as it sustains particular discourses and allows them an ahistorical position: they become ‘given’ and ‘natural’ (Boyle and Haynes 201). As I argued that the video footage of past players helps to put the current players into historical context and affix them to the ahistorical Penn State football story, the traditions and rituals of the pregame provide a bond to the continuing Penn State community. The ritualized pregame gives the impression that fans have cheered for the same routines and songs countless times, as if they always were, are, and will be there. While the band members change, they play the same songs as their predecessors in the pregame. The Drum Major graduates, but a new one will still attempt to successfully land a flip at midfield. John Nauright argues that the seeming stability of the traditions allows for nostalgia to work its comforting magic:

We engage with the past to give us a sense of security in the present or to guide us in shaping our future. Increasingly, the past has been used in a nostalgic sense to provide us with a sense of who “we” are as
The quaint lyrics of the fight songs, the repetition of the pregame rituals, and the repeated stadium cheer of “We Are… Penn State!” allow for nostalgia for the “good old days” of the early twentieth century, decades past, or the not so distant college days of a recent graduate. In tradition and ritual, the community remembers the past while celebrating the present. As in most instances, these traditions and rituals celebrate and recreate communal memories devoid of problems or pain. As Lowenthal explains, our society excels at creating our own pot-luck heritages. While the Penn State of 1855 may not have stood for equality and diversity, the songs, traditions, and rituals of the present can drape the ahistorical Penn State in such contemporary beliefs. Chapman explains: “The unusual blend of ancestor worship, free-flowing sentiment, and martial fervor found in college fight songs doesn't work just anywhere. But where it works, nothing works better.”

After playing the “Star-Spangled Banner,” in accordance with Big Ten tradition, the Blue Band performs the fight song of the visiting team while facing the “away” section of the stadium and spelling out the first letter of the visiting school. However, this moment of familiarity for the visiting fans (often filled with boos from the student section) quickly fades away as the ritual music of Penn State once again takes prominence. Immediately after playing the visiting team’s fight song, the Blue Band once more breaks into a Penn State fight song (“New Fight On, State”). If the music alone left any doubts about the “homefield advantage,” the band performs various drills which visually showcase the audible rituals of the music. Spelling out “P-S-U” in formation (and “L-I-O-N-S” in another song), the band plays the “Penn State Alma Mater,” and the crowd is asked to stand and take off their hats in deference. The hymn-tune “Lead Me On” echoes around the stadium as students, graduates, and supporters (and possibly the visiting
team’s fans) stand and sing their allegiance to the Pennsylvania State University (“Alma Mater”).

Once more, any differences which may exist between individuals in the crowd are ceremonially forgotten (or at least put to the side) as the Penn State community sings as one. The identity taken up through the singing of the song assumes a loyalty to Penn State, regardless of education, age, or background. The ideals espoused by the song appear in other contexts around the campus. Signs read “May No Act of Ours Bring Shame” within the Hintz Alumni Center, and references to “Dear Old State” can be seen across the campus and in advertisements and promotions. More than a few of my informants even specifically referenced the line “May No Act of Ours Bring Shame” when discussing alcohol consumption around the stadium, respect for visiting fans, or the importance of Penn State songs. The repetition of the songs in the rituals of every pregame reinforces these beliefs throughout the community.

As a former member of the Penn State Glee Club, I had the opportunity to learn and sing a large number of the school’s fight songs, including ones which are not performed on game days within Beaver Stadium. Many of the songs that are not sung are quite gendered, referencing sons and men quite a bit. I believe that a song like “Blue and White,” with its slower tempo and unoriginal tune, remains absent from the stadium due to its inability to “pump up” a crowd. As Chapman describes, a college fight song is “one of the most powerful mood enhancers ever devised.” While the song “Victory” is played after touchdowns and extra points, the song exists without words for many fans. None of my informants mentioned the lyrics to the song, instead focusing on the pause within the song which prompts the crowd to chant “We Are Penn State!” The lyrics to the song neither flash on the big screen nor can they be heard regularly within the stadium. I believe that this absence of lyrics relates to the song’s overemphasis on attending the school, rather than supporting it. The opening lyric reads “Come now classmates let us sing,”
limiting the community to only those who currently attend the University. While the “Penn State Alma Mater,” “Fight On, State,” and “The Nittany Lion” make passing references to the University, they do not specifically hail Penn State students or alumni in the lyrics. I would argue that for this reason the tune of the song “Victory” remains an integral part of the game day experience but the lyrics are downplayed or entirely absent. Other fight songs, like “The Pennsylvania State College Song,” “Hail! Oh Hail!,” or “We’re the Pennsylvania State University,” are almost entirely forgotten, unknown to everyone outside of the Glee Club. These songs, while actually fairly effective at engendering pride and emotion, all share a mixture of references to college life and antiquated vocabulary, making them ineffective at creating community for all Penn State fans within Beaver Stadium.

The band finishes the pregame rituals with a march into a tunnel formation surrounding the players’ entranceway to the field to the cheers of “Let’s Go State! Let’s Go State! Let’s Go State! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!” Up until this point (with the exception of the “Star-Spangled Banner” and the visiting team’s fight song), the music played by the band has been created entirely for Penn State. Once in formation, the band begins to play an altered version of Gary Glitter’s “Rock and Roll Part 2.” The exercise of playing “Rock and Roll Part 2” marks a clear separation from the previous music. The crowd spells out “P-S-U!” and screams “Let’s Go, P-S-U!” A call and response chant follows, and the whole process is repeated. On the upbeats, the fans raise their fists or pom-poms into the air, and the crowd often sings along to the instrumentation of the song. At the end of the song, the football team runs through the tunnel made by the Blue Band and the game soon starts. The question of whether non-Penn State songs can contribute to the identity of a Penn State fan is a fair one. However, the inclusion of Penn State cheers and rituals within the playing of the song allows for the appropriation of the song by the Penn State
community. As Clark observed for soccer fans, the song “becomes a way of representing a specific place identity and the social life associated with it” (501).

The same appropriation occurs through the playing of rock and pop hits by the Blue Band throughout the game. Between the third and fourth quarters, the band traditionally plays “Hey! Baby” by Bruce Channel as the crowd sings along. Other traditions include the playing of “Pinball Wizard” by The Who and “Livin’ on a Prayer” by Bon Jovi. For many of my informants, these songs brought back memories of Penn State football whenever they heard them played on the radio. A Penn State professor, who had been raised in another country, remarked: “It’s interesting, because I hear these songs played and I think that they’re Penn State specific, but then you hear some of these pop songs at other football stadiums. And that, in some ways, seems disappointing that other places use them.” For many fans, the songs become Penn State songs, despite having few actual ties to Penn State other than their repeated playing. Regardless of any actual connection to the University, the singing of songs by the crowd acts as a communal bond:

…the symbolic act of singing transforms the potentiality of difference into the appearance of similarity and this front stage similarity serves to act as a boundary marker to differentiate the collectivity from the opposition. Thus the imaginary similarity within the group is turned into a social reality as they differentiate themselves from the other (Clark 500).

“We are Penn State” because we sing together. A few of my informants noted that other teams’ fans sing some of the same songs, but “it’s not the same” because “you’re ripping us off.” However, after voicing these opinions, these same informants all tempered their statements, admitting that this is not really the case, but they still felt saddened by the puncturing of a belief in their “uniqueness.”
This “uniqueness” was an important quality for many of my informants. They shared the opinion that the fight songs were more important than other songs to the identity of Penn State fans because they “are ours” in a way that music from the radio is not. One male graduate remarked: “Any time I want to go back and remember an Autumn Saturday, when I was in college and a part of that, I just pop the fight songs in and it’s almost like I’m there again.” A female fan admitted that she and her husband regularly played a CD of Blue Band music before each Penn State game to get them ready for the game. Another male graduate insisted that “the uniqueness of the fight songs and the uniqueness of the Blue Band make them certainly more special than any old rock ‘n’ roll song that they’re gonna play. I think it’s better to have that uniqueness.” One male informant revealed that the password to his computer is actually a lyric from one of the fight songs, so he finds himself whistling the fight songs every morning. The “uniqueness” of the fight songs and their specificity to Penn State led some of my informants to use them as psychological weapons. A male graduate who worked with Ohio State fans played the Penn State fight songs to get under their skin. A female graduate in Michigan played them on the way to a farmer’s market to show her pride in Penn State. Another female graduate described how her principal often played the fight songs over the intercom of the middle school in which she worked. I have to confess that I too blasted them out of my car window while driving through Ann Arbor, MI after Penn State clinched the Big 10 Championship. Clark describes how fans “also seek to differentiate between the other fans’ experience of being from their particular locality and their own real or imagined experience” (503). In these examples, the fight songs provide an avenue for defining what it means to be a Penn State fan in opposition to other fans. The fight songs provide an outlet for the community created within Beaver Stadium to express itself outside of the stadium.
The “uniqueness” and recognizability of the songs as belonging to Penn State and the sentiments within the lyrics allow the defined community to exist beyond the walls of Beaver Stadium. Nauright argues that “for many people sports and major sporting events form important parts of their collective and individual identity and they are integral to their ways of seeing the world around them” (35). The fight songs and cheers of Penn State put forth a very detailed picture of what being a part of the Penn State community means. They speak to honor, pride, success, tenacity, community, family, stability, history, and tradition. Beyond that, the songs differentiate Beaver Stadium from other collegiate stadiums. College football, much like soccer, has strict rules about down and distance, field length and width measurements, fouls, and various other standardizations which exist from stadium to stadium. But “in even the most sterile stadium the crowd acts as a form of ‘noise,’ creating a place out of nothing” (Bale 86). The fight songs give specificity to Beaver Stadium and the community within the structure.

While standardized painted boundaries separate the playing surface from the stands and spectators without field passes are physically disconnected from the field, sound refuses to be contained. Sustained screaming by a majority of the crowd will be heard not only within the stands. It will transgress the physical barriers of the railing and the painted lines of the football field. Through noise, fans can make themselves be heard and become active participants and creators of meaning. While songs blast out of the speakers, an active response through singing increases the noise and demonstrates an audible participation. Robert David Stack writes that “the boundary communicates the notion of territoriality—the imposition of power over space by point and lines, segments and arcs” (qtd. in Bale 86). Through noise, the community can make the stadium their own and give it meaning. As Clark argues, “Fans have never accepted the
notion that the contest is confined to the pitch and spatial boundaries are constantly being violated” (500).

Because fans can have such a dynamic effect on the environment and the game itself, stadium music is often pumped into the stadium to elicit more powerful responses. A music professor at Penn State told me: “It seems to be a very American thing that there’s always something going on. The players will stop, and the band will be playing; the cheerleaders are doing something. That notion that it’s more entertainment.” He went on to describe how odd stadium music can seem since it lacks a real tie to the University. Many informants echoed his sentiments, preferring fight songs and Blue Band music over generic stadium music. One female student lamented that “it [stadium music] just isn’t the same [as Penn State specific music].” A male graduate, while admitting that the “canned” music can create exhilarating feelings, mostly appreciated the time and effort that went into the live music performed by the Blue Band. For him, that made the music more special and more effective. Another male graduate remarked that the Blue Band music is “more tradition-based and the other music is about hype.” Here, a distinction is made, separating “real” feelings from ones generated through hype. Yet another male graduate went so far as to say:

I don’t think the songs themselves really represent Penn State. I think they have to do with the Pop Culture, media-type atmosphere that sports stadiums want to sell themselves as. If it’s a feel good song, a song that gets the crowd pumped up, or it’s got a broad appeal, then they’re gonna play it. I don’t care what stadium you’re at, that’s the case. I think that has less to do with Penn State than sports in general. He makes a point to critique highly mediated American sports, referencing hype and “inauthentic” music. For many of the informants, the “canned” music lacks the “uniqueness” of Penn State songs, and this makes it quotidian and less meaningful.
However, not every informant condemned “canned” music. A female graduate stated: “I don’t think it really matters. They both get you really excited… During the game, I think it’s just as exciting to hear the loudspeakers as it is to hear the Blue Band.” A professor of music explained: “The whole notion of the community being brought together for a specific purpose. It’s the kind of thing where I may not know the person standing next to me, but here I am singing. The fact that they sing … might be because they know those songs anyway.” Singing is not specific to just Beaver Stadium, college football, or American sports. Throughout the world, fans in stadiums sway and sing hymns, bar tunes, anthems, and pop songs. A member of the band 808 State said about football:

> You can have, like, periods of boredom, almost static play … then there’s an attack … then there’s a counter-attack. Then a shout goes out, then you hear a response to the shout. Then when you score, everybody screams and shouts. It’s the same on the dance floor as on the terraces. It’s that sense of belonging that spills over into ecstasy (qtd. in Redhead 70).

Steve Redhead argues that there is something inherently musical about sport. Regardless of the song, sporting crowds seem inclined to sing. In *Post-Fandom and the Millennial Blues*, Redhead describes numerous songs of various genres sung for football clubs throughout Britain. Some of the songs include: “I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles,” “Wonderwall,” “Ferry Cross the Mersey,” and Puccini’s “Nessun Dorma.” The same holds true for Penn State crowds. During the same game, I’ve heard music from Bon Jovi, Journey, Linkin Park, The Who, Kanye West, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and Hans Zimmer. As I discussed in the previous chapter, if the music works and gets a positive response, Guido D’Elia will continue to play it.

However, decades earlier, this would not have been the case. David Rowe argues that “sport and rock are incontestably two of the most significant forms of popular culture and share a preoccupation with the physical display of youth. Yet in the sixties and seventies, with some
signal exceptions, sport and rock, as institutions, were on largely divergent paths” (9). To many, sports were the bastion of conservatism where (predominantly white) football players were expected to exemplify the status quo. As late as 1968, Columbia called upon its football players to break up protest rallies (Zang 5). However, as the Vietnam War progressed, more college athletes spoke out and joined the building protest against the war. During the 1970’s and 1980’s rock music could be heard in stadiums as rock became more corporate and sports became more industrialized (Rowe 22; 104). Today, sport and music seem to go hand in hand, as evidenced by the Super Bowl and its star-studded half-time shows. Some songs seem to be made specifically for sporting events. Here, I think back to the 1990’s and the fairly popular *Jock Jams* CD’s.

Despite the lack of “uniqueness” in much of the stadium music in Beaver Stadium, fans still sing along. When I visited Beaver Stadium for the Illinois game in September, 2008, a light rain fell on the crowd for much of the game. While it rarely turned into a strong rain, it fell down consistently enough to be somewhat annoying. During a particularly misty part of the game, the loudspeakers blared “Have You Ever Seen the Rain?” by Creedence Clearwater Revival. Without being prompted to do so, the crowd began to spiritedly sing along. In this case, despite whatever meaning was intended by John Fogerty, the crowd used it to respond to their annoyance with the rain and their happiness with the ongoing result of the game. As Henry Jenkins writes of media fandom, fans “appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests” (*Textual Poachers* 23). While Fogerty assuredly had a deeper meaning in mind in the lyrics of the song, for those in the crowd that evening, the lyrics stood as an ironic statement about the weather. Something about the song led them to sing. In today’s world, where 1960’s protest songs are used to sell cars, food, and numerous other consumer goods without any hint of irony, it is not a stretch to argue that rock songs played in stadiums can be
appropriated and given new meaning. The song “Livin’ on a Prayer” by Bon Jovi, besides being fun to sing, speaks to trying your best and (for a large portion of Penn State fans) being from New Jersey. Moreover, many informants referenced the song’s ties to Penn State Dance Marathon, a student fundraising event which has raised over $59 million for children with cancer since 1977 (“THON”).

But, with all of the songs played over the loudspeakers, many informants grappled over their specificity to Penn State. While they thought they were fun and did bring people together as a community, they were troubled with the use of the songs in other stadiums and events. A male graduate revealed:

I was watching a Boston Red Sox game and they played Zombie Nation and it was so out of place but it still got me pumped up and there were flashbacks to Beaver Stadium. And even though it was a different sport, a very different place, and a different atmosphere, it still had the same effect.

As much as he struggled with how much specific meaning the song had for the Penn State community, it still had a Pavlovian effect on him when he heard the song played elsewhere. My informants had a hard time defining how unique and important “Kernkraft 400” by Zombie Nation was to the Penn State community. Many informants mentioned it as a tradition they associated with Penn State, but later expressed their discomfort with its over-exposure throughout sporting events. A male graduate remarked: “We add our own little twists on things that make them kind of unique to Penn State in a way. But overall, I still think it’s not the unique flavor that is Penn State.” He returns to the “uniqueness” factor once again. The song has become part of the rituals at Beaver Stadium. When it is played after huge defensive plays, the crowd immediately starts bouncing up and down and sings “Oh” along with the chant of the song. Now, it even includes a spot in which the crowd chants “We Are Penn State!” to the beat
of the song. The crowd even sings it without prompting during the game, sans accompaniment, along with chanting to the base beat of “Seven Nation Army” by the White Stripes.

Members of the Penn State football community seem to favor Blue Band music over pumped in music, but they respond to both. As a professor of music at Penn State explained:

It’s very interesting, because having done a presentation on music and identity, a lot of the comments I receive from alumni are: ‘It’s a shame that pumped in music now is as important as it is,’ because it kind of overshadows the band now because they can’t get to the same volume. So there’s something about live music as opposed to pumped in music. I think why they use the pumped in music is because you can turn the volume up more. It also can get responses that maybe the Blue Band can’t.

Fans worry about the “uniqueness” of the music because it helps to define who they are as a community. If stadiums play “Kernkraft 400” all over the country, then the song loses its specificity to the Penn State community. However, I would argue that the song’s universality throughout sporting events does not have to diminish its importance to a community. It serves as an avenue to express feelings generated through the electricity of the crowd and the action on the field. The song merely provides a rhythm and a catchy tune. The response and actions of the community give the song meaning, rather than the song giving meaning to the community.

Before games, many students sing songs to pass the time before the gates open. Aside from Penn State fight songs and pop classics, students also appropriate other songs for their own use. One such instance involves singing the song “99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall,” but replacing the numbers with players’ names to each corresponding number. For instance, it would not be “Seventeen bottles of beer on the wall,” but “Daryll Clark bottles of beer on the wall.” In years past, other songs were incorporated where applicable. For instance, when Levi Brown’s number came up, students would break into “Well it’s Big Bad Levi Brown.” Despite serving as a community building event and a way to eat up time before the gates opened, the song also
required a great deal of Penn State knowledge. In a way, I would argue that the song was a chance to “show off” your familiarity with the game and the team. While any and all could join in with the singing, it could be quite embarrassing if you visibly blanked on a star player’s number.

An equally (if not more) interesting event transpires at the student gate before the game as well. Students sing quite graphic and bawdy parodies of the fight song of the Big Ten team Penn State will play that day, along with the always present versions of the fight songs of Michigan and Ohio State. Usually consisting of a profusion of a certain colloquial term for fornicating and various other descriptions of sexual acts, the parodies serve the purpose of defining an “us versus them” mentality among the students. Here, the songs position Penn State students as the “norm” within a patriarchal heteronormative society. T. Clark describes that “Bahktin suggests that carnivalesque behaviour takes the form of ritual spectacles, verbal compositions and curses/oaths; it is excessive, in bad taste, offensive and degrading” (503). The point of the songs is not to make a truthful statement about the opponent or critique society. The songs are meant to be as offensive as possible to express how “unlike us” the opponent is. I would argue that it is problematic that the shock value also comes from an “othering” of identities outside of heteronormativity. However, in a society which enacts laws against “counter” sexualities and centers countless movies and jokes on differences from the status quo, it is not surprising that the lyrics of the songs draw from this outlet in order to create shock and degradation.

A female graduate told me that the music “creates the excitement in the stadium. So, without the music, it would just be a bunch of people yelling, and I don’t think it would be nearly as effective at creating an exciting atmosphere.” The music at Penn State games plays an
incredibly important role in creating the atmosphere and engendering community. Clark describes: “Crowds at team sports undeniably influence performance; they contribute greatly to the ‘home-field advantage’” (86). A music professor discussed the effect the Penn State music had on him at his first official event at Penn State, Be a Part from the Start:

We were singing the fight songs there. I took my wife and two kids. I was not really sure what to expect, but I was certainly going along with it as part of my duty. But I was very surprised how quickly I was sucked into Penn State sport. The Blue Band was there, the cheerleaders were there, the Lion was there. Joe Paterno spoke, and it’s quite an incredible thing because here’s this icon working at the same place I am. But it was just incredible; there was a genuine love of the place and the students believed it. By the end of the evening I felt proud to be associated with Penn State and hadn’t even attended a class yet.

The fight songs and “Penn State Alma Mater,” with their quaint lyrics and calls for loyalty and victory, still hold deep meaning for community members. For the community, the “uniqueness” of the music is deeply important. The ritualistic playing of the songs in Beaver Stadium can turn any song into a cherished tradition as Penn State songs are combined with appropriated popular songs to form a *bricolage* of sound which serves as the soundtrack for the Penn State football community.
CHAPTER THREE
COME EARLY; STAY LATE:
THE CREATION OF COMMUNITY THROUGH TAILGATING

Penn State football brings well over 100,000 visitors to University Park, Pennsylvania on football Saturdays (Cook). One visitor remarked that “I don’t take extended vacations or cruises;” for this individual, and many others, Penn State football is their release, their passion, and their vacation from ordinary life (Heath). In his book Football U., Douglas Toma writes:

The institutional meaning and social significance of spectator sports is thus not especially about football games themselves, or the student-athletes or coaches who participate in them. It is instead about what surrounds games on football Saturdays – the uses of these events for institutions and their importance for supporters (Toma 14).

With this observation in mind this chapter explores what literally surrounds games on football Saturdays: tailgating. Tailgating refers to the activity of preparing food and conversing while sitting on or near the tailgate of a truck when attending a concert or sporting event. In regards to Penn State, the act of tailgating is not limited to trucks and their tailgates, but includes the act of eating and conversing in the parking lots and pastures surrounding Beaver Stadium before, during, and after the game. Six to eight times a year, parking lots normally filled with vehicles of faculty, staff, and commuters instead host banquets, reunions, parties, and social gatherings. From Thursday to Sunday on football weekends, instead of cows grazing in the pastures, people mill about the fields as traffic cops direct travelers to their tailgating destinations. Students and faculty mingle with alumni and supporters in anticipation of the approaching game. Yet the experience of tailgating is an experience separate from the game. While the game is the catalyst that brings these fans to the same geographic place, there is something besides the game that
draws tailgaters together. Not every visitor who attends the game tailgates, and not every
tailgater attends the game. Some remain in the parking lots and pastures during the game to
listen to the game on the radio, watch it on TV, eat, and converse with fellow tailgaters. Since
not every tailgater attends the game, and the act of tailgating occurs regardless of the quality of
the football team and its opponent playing in Beaver Stadium, I am interested in exploring what
tailgaters get out of the experience and the extent to which tailgaters should be considered a
created community.

In Benedict Anderson’s classic book *Imagined Communities*, he describes communities
as “always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). This camaraderie is evident to
people walking around Beaver Stadium or talking with tailgaters. There is clearly a common
bond connecting the thousands of tailgaters more deeply than just inhabiting the same parking
area in anticipation of a football game. While Anderson’s book theorizes about the nation, I
believe that his idea of the imagined community is not applicable only to national communities
into which one is born. Rather, his theories could be utilized just as usefully in the discussion of
communities one chooses. He used the term “imagined” because “… the members of even the
smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them,
yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). The Penn State community is
both an imagined and a real community. The realness exists through the face-to-face interactions
in tailgating (those fans dining together or chatting at nearby tailgates), yet simultaneously, Penn
State tailgating is an imagined community. With over 100,000 individuals gathering, it is
impossible to truly comprehend the entirety of the community or pinpoint an exact number or
roster, since fans often choose different games to attend. Yet, despite this fluidity, the tailgaters
are certain that those around them cherish the same traditions, memories, and rituals tied to Penn
State tailgating. Moreover, like Anderson’s vision of the nation in which there is a shared belief of belonging and camaraderie despite the inability to see or identify each citizen, the community created through tailgating could also be considered “limited.” As I will discuss later, one distinguishing factor of the Penn State tailgating community is found in its members’ fondness for Penn State. Because of this, those who do not share in this passion are not a part of the community, thus limiting the universality of the Penn State tailgating community.

In her discussion of Minor League Baseball, Rebecca Kraus argues that communities “encompass more than the geographical limitations of an area. Communities comprise systems and networks of ideas, persons, and relationships” (Kraus 73). The community is not dependent on the area around Beaver Stadium. In theory, Penn State tailgating could occur separate from the geographic area of Happy Valley. In fact, this happens during away games and bowl trips, when thousands of Penn State tailgaters drive or fly great distances to tailgate in golf courses, high school parking lots, and stadium grounds in other cities. Since the tailgating community is constantly in flux, as tailgaters miss certain games due to illness, a lack of funds, high ticket demand, busy lives, or a long-distance move, there is no official roster or census of tailgaters. So it is not the frequency of participation or “officialness” that defines the tailgating community, but something else.

It would be easy to relate a love of Penn State football or Penn State in general to what creates this community. Enough evidence exists to safely put forth such a claim. Toma argues that, on football Saturdays, the “community displays its culture in tangible and unique forms – its colors, logos, and mascots; songs and slogans; stories, legends… and rituals and ceremonies” (9). Examples of the tangible culture which is showcased and created by tailgaters will be described and examined throughout this chapter. Yet, the tendency of many Penn State tailgaters
to invite casual observers, strangers, and opposing fans to join in on their tailgate might cause some to question whether a love of Penn State and its football team is the sole component necessary to be a part of this community. Certainly, for many within the community, a general fondness for Penn State or college football is an important aspect, but it does not seem to be the only necessity. Rather, the willingness to converse, dine, and partake in a relaxed atmosphere of revelry around whatever venue the Nittany Lions play seems to be the most uniting factor. That being said, I would suggest that, if not a fondness for Penn State, a general respect for the university and its team is necessary to be accepted by the community. Anthony Cohen, a social anthropologist interested in the importance of communities, argues that the community consists of common bonds which unite its members, as well as common bonds which distinguish them in some significant way from members of other possible communities (12). I argue that these unifying communal bonds exist in the conversation, dining, and revelry of the tailgates, while the fondness for Penn State serves as the distinguishing factor which differentiates the community from other communities. For this reason, I am going to limit the community created through Penn State tailgating to those tailgaters who cheer for Penn State. While non-fans of Penn State can still participate as guests and partake in the conversations and imbibing present at the tailgate, since Penn State football is the original referent, being a fan of Penn State is essential to and distinctive of the community.

The community creates traditions and experiences separate from those within Beaver Stadium during the actual game. It would be irresponsible (and might I add difficult) to discuss the community created through Penn State tailgating without entering into a discourse of the extent to which Penn State football culture and its traditions play a part in the experience of tailgating. In a fast-paced world of changing jobs, economic stresses, and increasingly
complicated daily lives, sports provide an anchor for many people. While other aspects of their lives are in flux, fans can be sure that August and September will bring with them Penn State football. Boyle and Haynes argue that “football teams are always changing (players, managers and the like all come and go), yet the club exists in a space that is in part untouched by these changes” (202). In contrast to the coaches of some team’s fan bases, Penn State’s coach, Joe Paterno, has also remained a constant for over forty years. The team itself continues to play in Beaver Stadium each fall in their plain blue and white uniforms. The lack of names on the backs of the jerseys, while promoting unity, also helps to keep the team timeless. While the numbers “31,” “22,” and “1” are worn by different players throughout the years, the numbers are still on display on the gridiron, while the players on the field remain apparently nameless. The fight songs, chants, and cheers stay roughly the same. Though the stadium expands, it remains Beaver Stadium, and tailgaters can still park in the same assigned spot or in “first come, first serve” fields. These unchanging traditions and spaces serve as predictable markers for the calendar year and comforting aspects to daily lives. More than that, these traditions and spaces become a part of and help define many of the individuals who partake in and celebrate them. A recent male graduate revealed that he enjoyed “… just being with a bunch of people that have the same goal as you. It’s a time to just have fun. There are really no worries or cares in the world.” While the outside world suffers through economic crises and disasters, the world of Penn State football remains fairly constant. Outside worries melt away, if only for a Saturday afternoon, to make room for fond memories or less life-shattering worries.

John Nauright argues that sports operate “nostalgically at local levels and many communities of fans seek to maintain local identity through their sporting teams and the collective memories of past performances” (36). This local identity for Penn State tailgaters is
created through the celebration of Penn State and its football team and the traditions that have come to be part of the tailgating experience. For many who identify themselves as Penn State tailgaters, it is often a deep-seated identification and one that connects them to other tailgaters. Nauright echoes this sentiment when he argues: “For many people sports and major sporting events form important parts of their collective and individual identity and they are integral to their ways of seeing the world around them” (35).

In the tailgating community, people of different socio-economic backgrounds all contribute to the creation of Penn State. Every member of the community performs the traditions and rituals and adds to them individually. Although the community does not fully embody all of Bakhtin’s descriptions of the “carnivalesque,” such as hierarchal reversals by gender, social position, etc., the playfulness and celebration evident in the tailgates, along with a spirit of connectivity, give credence to describing it as embodying the overall feeling of a carnivalesque community. The contributions of individual tailgates or tailgaters and the interactions throughout the tailgates allow members to form bonds with other tailgaters and fulfill the need for a sense of belonging and a sense of acceptance, regardless of one’s position in society.

Elizabeth Frazier, an Oxford Fellow and Tutor in Politics, writes:

On occasion or at such times members experience a centred and bounded entity that includes the self as such; they engage in exchanges and sharing that are personalized; the orientation to each other and to the whole engages the person and, as some are tempted to put it, his or her soul. It is from such occasions that ‘the spirit of community’ or ‘sense of community’ is achieved. Here I think we have the ‘pay-off’ of community… In the relation of community concrete patterns of material social relations are felt to be transcended… [T]he aspiration to community is an aspiration to a kind of connectedness that transcends the mundane and concrete tangle of social relationships (83).
For many tailgaters, their relationship with Penn State is an intense one. One tailgater in a central Pennsylvania newspaper article offered: “I’m sick, I guess. I just love Penn State” (Sunderland). Earlier in the article, the tailgater had revealed that he had not attended the university, but still felt a deep connection with the school and its team. According to Douglas Toma: “Football is what many outsiders know and like about an institution… Spectator sports make insiders out of local communities, who become passionate advocates for, and supporters of, “their” university on the basis of identification with “their” teams” (5). Anyone can become an insider: a member of the community through Penn State football and tailgating. The “sense of community” creates a connectedness that transcends the mundane aspects of life as well as the University itself. As mentioned above, the interpersonal interactions with other members of the community anchor the individual within the community, while adding to the overall strengthening and continuation of the community. Though some tailgaters may not have studied in Paterno Library or taken classes on campus, they are part of the school through their community involvement. A male tailgater and fan of forty years told me that he never attended Penn State, but he had played football in high school and felt drawn to the Nittany Lions. Over the years, many of his children and relatives went to Penn State, and he donated thousands of dollars and time to an institution he had never attended. Penn State football became a huge part of his life: he and his wife missed only two games in five decades for their fiftieth high school reunions. His community membership does not require alumni status. This membership comes through fandom and the process of tailgating.

As I have already discussed, Penn State football serves as a recurring, seasonal marker in a complicated world. Yet its repetitiveness does not mean that each new game and tailgate is an unremarkable event. Dan Jenkins, a sportswriter, remarks that he would:
assure anyone who is uncertain about it that there is no drama, suspense, excitement, thrill or feeling of
necessity in sport that can equal the countdown to an opening kickoff between two great teams or
contenders for that elusive, cantankerous, agonizing, dreadful and wonderful thing called No. 1 (qtd. in
Rader 277).

Theoretically, a football game could be just that: a game. Spectators could arrive minutes before
the game, watch the game, and head home with their sole focus on the sixty minutes of actual
game-play. Taking it one step further, football could be played in an empty stadium with a
hyperreality created by multiple camera angles broadcasting games to passive viewers watching
television from afar, as Jean Baudrillard described in his work *The Transparency of Evil*. This
“realer than real” hyper-attention to detail would indeed capture the action of the game, but it
would strip the game of its (for lack of a better word) magic. The “magic” of college football
games is not just in the action that occurs on the field. A symbiotic relationship between the
game and the spectators creates the pomp and pageantry that surrounds football. A male
informant and long-time tailgater stressed that he might not even attend games anymore if they
outlawed tailgating. For him and many like him, tailgating holds just as much (if not more)
importance than the actual football game. The game can be watched at home, but thousands of
fans choose to actively participate and add to the experience that they, as a community, help to
create. Part of this created experience is constructed within the stadium during the game and is
discussed in the first chapter. Now, I will focus on the experience and traditions created by the
tailgating community.

A portion of the suspense and excitement of the college football game is captured in the
tailgate preparations. Thousands of tailgaters from all over Pennsylvania, the Northeast, and
even other parts of the country travel to Happy Valley for football weekends. RV’s pull into the
lots surrounding Beaver Stadium starting on Thursdays to prepare for a game still a few days away. At least one tailgater rides his bicycle 150 miles from Scranton to University Park to participate (Franklin). While the game serves as the catalyst for these tailgaters, the game is not the only incentive for the trip. Though other tailgaters may stay in hotel rooms, homes, or friends’ rooms rather than RV’s, they too create an event surrounding the match-ups on Saturdays. The length of the pre-game tailgate is dependent upon kickoff time. For example, for noon kickoffs, many tailgaters set up camp around 8 o’clock in the morning (Heath). For 3:30 kickoffs, many tailgaters set up in the late morning, but enjoy more time for tailgating before the game than they would for an early kickoff. Night games provide a day-long time period for tailgating, but often lead to a rushed or non-existent post-game tailgate. A majority of my informants agreed that 3:30 kickoffs were ideal, since they allowed for an adequate amount of time for setup, relaxation, and conversation.

The setup typically includes tables, chairs, and canopies, often emblazoned with the Penn State logo and festooned in the university’s blue and white. Depending on the ambitions of the tailgate group and the collective funds, tailgates can range from one family or a few friends to groups of fifty to several hundred attendees. The seasoned tailgaters’ tables are adorned with blue and white napkins, plates, and silverware, while Penn State posters, pictures, and pompoms hang on the sides of vehicles and rest on the tables. One might wonder how creativity and agency can be gained through a display of store-bought goods. Is the tradition of setting up tailgating camps and decorating them truly an act of creation? I argue that it is. As Jack Santino argued that Halloween displays are a *folk assemblage* of found objects joined together as three-dimensional artwork, or what Claude Lévi-Strauss labeled *bricolage*, tailgating displays function in similar ways (Santino 158). While the posters, pictures, and other decorations may
materialize from mass culture, each individual tailgate is an expression of specific tailgaters. As each tailgate is on constant display within the community, its construction and appearance are a reflection of those who created it. For instance, one informant described his “Penn State van” painted in Penn State colors and used to ferry tailgating goods to the parking lot. He and his wife, along with a large group of friends, own two reserved parking spaces and spend around $5000 annually for the spaces and season tickets. He described a tailgating neighbor who owned a $750,000 RV and put out multiple HD TV’s to watch other football games through a subscription to DirecTV. Another informant described a tailgating group who set up different themed tailgates every week. When I visited Penn State for the Illinois game in September, they had a Hawaiian themed tailgate with multiple TV’s, a sandpit with a Nittany Lion statue, tiki torches, grass skirts, Hawaiian shirts, stereo equipment, and a cardboard cutout next to which passersby could pose.

The term “tailgating” reflects the original process of preparing food on the tailgate of a vehicle, demonstrating that food is an essential part of the created tailgate. However, the quantity, elaborateness, and variety of the food depend on the desires and traditions of the tailgaters. For many students, including myself when I attended Penn State, this might mean food purchased while still in a waking stupor from The Big Onion in East Halls or snack foods. According to my informants, other tailgaters might stick with the central Pennsylvania standards of burgers, brats, hot dogs, and various mayonnaise-based salads, while others might add clams or crabs to their grills. Some tailgaters choose to use pre-prepared foods or have their tailgate catered, while others barbeque ribs and grill New York strip steaks. Whatever the case, food in some form is indispensable to the tailgate. According to my informants, many tailgaters depend on each member of the group to contribute a dish, snack, or beverage to the smorgasbord on a
weekly basis. In a perceptible display of community, the act of tailgating is a kind of pot-luck communion in which every participant plays a part. One tailgater is in charge of the meatballs, another brings the sandwich buns, still another brings the soup, and a meal is produced through the group’s combined efforts. However, tradition need not mean that the meals are unchanging. In our conversations, tailgaters often remarked on how the menu changed for each game. While burgers and brats were always popular, one couple opted for breakfast sandwiches on the grill for noon games, while another informant admitted that they enjoyed themed meals throughout the season. One tailgater prepared Polish foods one week, which included pierogies (a Pennsylvania staple) that are “right out of this world.” However the following weeks brought subs, ribs, soups, and chili. Still another stressed the spontaneity of her tailgate in which they “also have a little grill on the side of [their] stove, so [they] can make grilled cheese, etc.” depending on the tastes of the tailgaters and the time of the game (Jost).

However, the emergence of a community is not just specific to individual tailgates, but branches outward to all tailgaters. In many cases, tailgate groups share their edible bounty with other tailgate groups and passersby. Whether as a barter system of goods or one-sided exchange, this penchant for sharing tailgating food is an extremely stimulating aspect for the horizontal comradeship described by Anderson to emerge. Besides the bonds created through this communal activity, these exchanges often progress into conversations that can lead to a stronger sense of community. A female tailgater revealed that it is a very “relaxed and friendly” atmosphere. “If somebody doesn’t have a knife or a spatula for tailgating, then you just get it from someone else whom you’ve never met before.” This outreach is not limited to other Penn State fans, but often extends to visiting fans of Penn State’s opponents. The same informant, without prompting, continued: “Even opposing fans… there’s almost a kinship, before the
game.” As stated earlier, while a love of Penn State and its football team is present among tailgaters around Beaver Stadium, a willingness to converse and enjoy the overall atmosphere of football Saturdays unites the community.

Much like the preparing, sharing, and eating of food, conversation is an important aspect that helps to create the community. According to my own observations and interviews, conversations spring up between strangers over games of cornhole (a bean-bag toss game), ladder golf (a homemade game of PVC piping and golf balls on strings), redneck horseshoes (a game which involves throwing washers into coffee cans or holes in boards), or flip cup (a typical drinking game). As Penn State and its football team are central to the community, it should come as no surprise that many of the conversations heard throughout the tailgates focus on games, players, and tailgates past. Nauright describes sport as a “highly nostalgic practice as the remembering and reconstruction of past achievements and glories of an individual or team are powerful cultural activities” (36). Truly, there is a large aspect of nostalgia involved in Penn State tailgating. Cardboard cutouts of a young(er) Joe Paterno stand guard at many tailgates, while pictures, posters, and autographed jerseys drape many setups. Tailgaters reminisce about bowl trips, national championship teams, and victories that slipped away. Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes describe the importance of this nostalgia:

This process helps sustain the collective group identity among supporters and their allegiance to a particular club. The linkage between tradition and the selective interpretation of history is important, as it sustains particular discourses and allows them an ahistorical position: they become ‘given’ and ‘natural’ (Boyle and Haynes 201).

Seasoned tailgaters know that their fellow tailgaters share these same “essential” memories: important games, both famous and notorious seasons, and unbelievable plays. Moreover, they
also remember past tailgates. As George Lipsitz discusses in his book *Time Passages*, not everyone shares the same exact experience, but they have shared memories of similar experiences. Just like most people have memories of similar birthday parties, although not of the same exact party, separate tailgate groups hold similar shared memories of past tailgates with other groups. Individual tailgaters may not have seen each other at the 1983 Sugar Bowl or the 2006 Orange Bowl, but they unite in their shared memory of what those tailgate experiences were like. Various male and female informants reminisced about bowl trips and past tailgates throughout my interviews. While these informants (presumably) do not know each other, their stories were remarkably similar in what they chose to remember and reveal. Both extreme weather conditions and energetic atmospheres could easily elicit the same lived experiences which would lead to a shared memory among those tailgaters. Ferdinand Tönnies, the famed German sociologist, emphasized the role of the will and spirit of kinship in *Gemeinschaft* by writing: “where it is strong and alive in the closest and most intimate relationship, it can live on itself, thrive on memory alone, and overcome any distance by its feeling and its imagination of nearness and common activity” (43). The “spirit of community” of these past games is sustained in the memories of community members who experienced the events. The will and spirit of *Gemeinschaft* kinship is reinforced by these shared memories, adding to and strengthening the present feeling of community kinship.

The individual memories of tailgaters are incorporated into the shared memory of the entire community, creating an accepted version of what occurred. Nauright argues that “individual memory is always formed in relation to social or collective memory, meaning that

1 A tight community made up of kinship, friendship, or familial ties, as opposed to a society made up of co-workers and acquaintances
the production and selection of memories are developed through processes of interaction between the individual and society” (35). For the tailgaters who continually return, their memories of tailgating will remain mostly positive as the negative memories of losses, bad weather, or disappointing food fade away, since “history is a process of forgetting, as well as remembering, of legitimizing the present through one particular version of the past” (Boyle and Haynes 201). This communally decided upon past is a reflection of how fans choose to view their team and their university. One recently graduated male informant remarked that he most enjoyed the camaraderie and “just being there with a bunch of people that have the same goal as you… there are really no worries or cares in the world.” As a former student, I admit that my image of tailgating is highly influenced by the good memories while the unpleasant ones are pushed aside. A current female student had both fond and bad memories of her trips to Beaver Stadium. An admitted fan of Penn State academically (though not of football), she related a few stories of “drunken old, old men” acting inappropriately. She puts forth a counter memory to the agreed upon rosy one presented by much of the community. While in no way “truer” than any other view of tailgating, her feelings remind us that the community is very much a created one which has been forged through the remembering and celebrating of positive experiences while downplaying the negative ones.

In their book *Against All Odds*, John Allen and Don Dillman discuss and analyze the happenings and traditions of the small rural town of Bremer. Through discussions of town life, the merger of two high schools, athletics, and fairs, they describe how the Bremer community is formed through traditions. In particular, they explore the phenomenon of the Bremer Fair and Stock Show, which includes an outdoor breakfast, five-mile run, golf tournament, parades, potluck dinners, and a community dance. The entire festival is described as a “renewal of
community and a reminder of what it means to be a Bremerite” (189). Much like football Saturday at Penn State, the identity of the community is formed through the traditions surrounding it. Just as the athletes of Bremer are thought to extol and hold up the values and representations of what it means to be a part of Bremer, the Nittany Lions football players hold a similar position for the tailgating community (156). Toma describes the symbolism inherent in Penn State’s traditions:

> Penn State has a similar aura [compared to Yale] in the marketplace due to football, symbolized by its “solid” and “honest” plain blue and white football uniforms, the logo featuring a proud lion atop a rock, and their coach known for winning with integrity. In short, “good football done the right way” is part of the Penn State brand – both Penn State as a football team and as an institution (Toma 198-199).

For tailgaters discussing the team and the university, these symbols are important to their identity. I stated earlier that part of the draw of Penn State football for many fans is its timelessness, exemplified through unchanging and unadorned uniforms of blue and white devoid of names. While other schools update their uniforms, Penn State’s remain remarkable in their ordinariness. Their road jerseys are an incredibly spartan white pants/white jersey combination. While other teams put names on their jerseys and reward individuals with stickers for their accomplishments, the Nittany Lions emphasize the team over the player. A popular tailgating legend regales that when a player once asked Joe Paterno why they could not have their names on their own jerseys, Paterno replied: “if it were up to me, you wouldn’t have numbers.” This stressing of the group over the individual translates well into the community concept of “horizontal comradeship.” It is not surprising that a community that develops in the tailgates surrounding such a team-centric institution would exemplify many of the same qualities. For a school situated in rural, central Pennsylvania that started off as the Farmer’s High School, this
idea of a pastoral or small town atmosphere makes sense. The community celebrates that history by still holding tailgates in cow pastures, appropriate for an agricultural heritage.

While “traditional” tailgating occurs in the parking lots and pastures surrounding Beaver Stadium, a more recent tradition has sprung up directly beside the stadium. With a student population of over 86,000 and only about 21,000 student tickets for sale, getting tickets can be difficult (“University”). Purchasing a ticket only guarantees you a seat in Beaver Stadium. Where you sit in the student section is determined by a “first come, first serve” process; those who show up at Gate A early get seats closer to the front. For this reason, since the early 1990’s, a small number of students have camped outside of the stadium overnight before each home game (“About Paternoville”). During the 2005 season, more and more students began to camp out. As undefeated Penn State prepared for their showdown with 6th ranked Ohio State, numerous tents sprung up outside of Gate A at Beaver Stadium six days before the game. By Tuesday, “Paternoville” officially had a name after Dan Clark and his tent-mates scribbled the moniker on a bed sheet and hung it on Gate A. By Wednesday, students had erected around eighty tents on the asphalt outside of Beaver Stadium (Victor). The rules were simple: in order to keep students from missing classes, only one member of a tent had to be present at any time during the day.

As Jenkins described, fans are “active producers and manipulators of meaning” (“Television Fans” 506). By taking a sixty-minute football game and turning it into a weeklong spectacle of pride and community, Paternoville residents added a dimension of meaning to the game beyond what was intended by the University. Rather than merely being about a football game, Paternoville became a community of pride for one’s university and traditions. Students cheered and sang Penn State fight songs, parodies of the fight songs of other schools, and
popular songs by various artists nearly every hour. Paternoville co-opted a space and event reserved mostly for the athletes on the field and the TV broadcasters and reasserted the importance of the fan. While football could actually be played on any flat surface, the fans create the atmosphere. Music and videos can be pumped into a stadium, but the fans create the response. Games are broadcast by TV stations, but the fans create the passion. Local and national media outlets soon gravitated to Paternoville, with Cold Pizza holding a live broadcast from Gate A. Rather than just the football game, the fans shared the spotlight.

However, Paternoville is not necessarily separate from the “traditional” tailgating community discussed earlier. Both create experiences inspired by the football game that turn a sixty minute game into a new event complete with traditions that are not dependent on football. Moreover, both are dependent upon food, conversation, and conviviality. Many tailgaters mingle with the Paternoville residents, offering them their own food or ordering pizza, Clem’s barbeque, or Damon’s ribs for the tenters. Former students and fans converse with current students, while new traditions are made. Rebecca Kraus calls attention to the common interests and shared beliefs inherent in communities, and it is my assertion that both the “traditional” tailgaters and Paternoville residents exemplify these qualities (85). They are two sides of the same community. Many informants have remarked that had Paternoville existed when they were students, they probably would have been a part of it. Paternoville is not an alternative to tailgating, but another form of it. Since “traditional” tailgating would preclude the possibility of getting “better” seats, students who valued closer seats created a community limited to a specific area in an effort to continue to enjoy the same interests of “traditional” tailgating.

For a significant proportion of the community, a shared interest is found in the tribulations of rivals and conference foes. Their passion for Penn State and its team leads some
to become “anti-fans” of other schools (Gray 64-81). Of course, rivalries and anti-fans are not only specific to Penn State tailgates, but are nearly universal throughout sports. However, evidence of this anti-fan aspect can be viewed throughout the community. Many tailgaters proudly display their “Shitt on Pitt” and “Buck the Fuckeyes” t-shirts around their tailgates while chanting “Michigan still sucks,” even when the Nittany Lions are not playing the Pittsburgh Panthers, Ohio State Buckeyes, or Michigan Wolverines. Regarding Pitt, as the teams have not played in nearly a decade, this anti-fan attitude toward an old rival perpetuates traditions of prior tailgates. This anti-fan attitude is not an example of fear of the unknown; “on the contrary, they [fans] are often familiar with their objects of dispassion and aware of the reasons for their dislike” (Theodoropoulou 317). Vivi Theodoropoulo argues that “the hatred for something is dictated by the love for something else and the need to protect the ‘loved one’” (318). As fans of Penn State, these tailgaters define themselves in part by what they are not. Despite recent incidents of Penn State players running afoul of the law, Penn State has built a reputation of “success with honor,” a sentiment emblazoned on banners hanging around Beaver Stadium. In the 1980’s, when Penn State won two national championships, this was very apparent. In an example of binary opposition, Penn State was portrayed as the scrappy good guys versus the cocky bad guys of the University of Miami during the 1987 Fiesta Bowl. The Nittany Lions were depicted by the media as the tradition-based, no-flash underdogs, while the favored Hurricanes had a trash talking, star-powered team. This image of a smaller team showing up in business attire was juxtaposed with the image of a Hurricane team who showed up for the game dressed in military fatigues. A male informant described this “us versus them” mentality by stating that “you’re [the tailgaters] all a family.” While I cannot speak on behalf of the hundreds of football teams throughout the country, I am fairly certain that many fans of these schools
promote and experience a similar feeling of acceptance and familiarity. Most informants admitted that other schools most likely do invoke the same feelings of belonging and acceptance. However, many also added that such feelings seemed to pale in comparison to those elicited by Penn State. Although Penn State fans recognize that other universities also enjoy impassioned fan support, they still believe their attachment to and support of their team to be unique and superior. Since the argument is based mostly on opinion and observations of opposing fans gathered on scattered Saturday afternoons, the shared perception remains very real to the fans, regardless of its objective validity. Various words and phrases like “special,” “friendly,” “unique,” “one of a kind,” and “nothing else like it” were used by informants to describe the atmosphere at Penn State tailgates.

With part of their identity being based in what they are not, many tailgaters revel in a level of *Schadenfreude* when certain teams lose. In the 2007 season, when the University of Michigan lost to (formerly) Division 1AA foe Appalachian State, tailgaters watching the game on televisions in their tailgates erupted in jubilant celebration. Judging from the noise and elation, many tailgaters found just as much pleasure (if not more) in Michigan’s humiliating loss than in Penn State’s victory over Florida International University just minutes earlier. While tailgating occurs for all Penn State games, including the spring game that pits Penn State players against themselves in the annual Blue & White Game, certain games do seem to hold special importance and a more palpable excitement. Homecoming games and games versus former rivals like Notre Dame and Nebraska seem to awaken nostalgia for the glories of the past more than games versus less historically successful teams. A similar atmosphere develops when Penn State plays conference powerhouses and growing rivals Michigan and Ohio State. Such games bring about spontaneous singing of Penn State fight songs and recollections of the past, as well
as anti-opponent posters, cheers, and t-shirts. Often, these “big games” coincide with a later start time, providing a longer period for pre-kickoff tailgating.

Certainly, the imbibing of alcohol is associated with the tailgate. Lawrence Wenner described the recipe for gameday: “start with a large and well located place, seed it with beer, sports, and television, stir with nostalgia, then add activities for a young sporting crowd” (Wenner 317). For many tailgaters, alcohol is essential to the tailgating experience. While not every tailgater consumes alcohol while tailgating, it would be naïve and irresponsible not to discuss the role alcohol plays in the community. Many tailgating groups start their ritual with a drink: mimosas, champagne, wine, or Yuengling (a popular lager in Pennsylvania). For some groups, this has become a tradition. For instance, one male informant described how his group starts each tailgate off by creating a human goalpost of at least two people, while another fires the cork out of a champagne bottle through the “uprights.” Yet another group does “chair shots” – “a tailgate tradition in which a fan sits in a chair and tips his head back while three friends pour triple sec, vodka and lime syrup into his mouth at one time” (Franklin). In these examples, we can see tailgaters creating their own traditions by combining store-bought goods into a new practice. And while these traditions occur around the event of football, they are directly tied to the event of tailgating. In his article on the sports bar, Wenner describes the importance of its atmosphere being conducive to the formation of feelings of home and belonging. He describes the posters and pictures hanging on the walls and the mismatched collection of chairs and decorations as an overall décor that provides a sensation of “home territory” (320). This same mismatched folk assemblage exists in the Penn State tailgates described previously. The tailgates serve as comfortable “home territory,” reminiscent of a local bar or a living room, in which the community can feel a sense of belonging.
Another insight can be drawn from the act of public drinking by returning to the community of Bremer. The Bremer Fair and Stock Show has its share of individuals who, after they “overindulged on alcohol, have taken catnaps lying on their pickup seats; …[they] are not sanctioned as they would be if this were any other day of the year” (Allen and Dillman 201). The use of alcohol near Beaver Stadium and its surrounding area is normally prohibited. Yet, on game days, alcohol freely flows in the pastures and parking lots before and after the game, although not in the stadium. While not encouraging its use, the university accepts the fact that alcohol is an important part of tailgating for many people. Recently, in an effort to curtail underage drinking, the university banned the use of alcohol at tailgate parties during the game. In the university’s view, the overuse of alcohol is not a traditional aspect of tailgating. Athletic Director Tim Curley emphasizes the importance of tailgating responsibly and respectfully, but also the importance of attending the game (“Game day changes”).

Yet for many tailgaters, while the game is the catalyst, attending the game is not necessary. Some of the tailgaters give their tickets to others or do not even have tickets. Instead, they enjoy the social aspect of tailgating and watch or listen to the game from their TV’s and radios hooked into their RV’s or car batteries. For this reason, I believe the University underestimates the importance of social camaraderie outside of the stadium during the game. Tönnies argues that “the will and spirit of kinship is not confined within the walls of the house nor bound up with physical proximity” (Tönnies 43). This communal spirit is not exclusive to the game going on within Beaver Stadium, but exists through the camaraderie of those surrounding the stadium. One informant’s role in the weekly pot-luck involved purchasing and transporting the beer in his van. He described his position that alcohol is a large part of tailgating:
There’s lots of drinking. There’s no question that alcohol helps fuel the enthusiasm of a tailgate. If alcohol were not permitted, tailgating would not be the same experience. That might be good, bad, or indifferent, but that’s the reality of it. If they banned alcohol, people wouldn’t go as early, and they wouldn’t stay as late… I’m not saying that you have to have booze to have fun, but it seems like the majority of tailgates have drinking.

Another male informant agreed, stating that “you’ve gotta have some ice cold beer, because that’s what America is all about: hotdogs, beer, and football.”

Wenner describes the sports bar as: “the nexus of a high holy trinity of alcohol, sports, and hegemonic masculinity” (Wenner 302). While sports, and especially football, certainly emanate a sense of hegemonic masculinity in their past and present history, I would be reluctant to label women as “irregular regulars” within the tailgate. Although the sport of football historically excludes women from the playing field (except for a few examples of female kickers), the tailgate environment and community is fairly welcoming to both sexes, provided they demonstrate an interest in tailgating and Penn State. While football is typically considered a male sport, female tailgaters are often just as supportive and fervent as their male counterparts. One female tailgater described tailgating as “one long continuous social hour. We’re a bunch of people who enjoy Penn State football and each other’s company” (Jost). She did not describe the typical tailgater as either male or female, but as “people.” The unifying factors are Penn State and camaraderie. Another female tailgater revealed that she continued to tailgate after her traveling companion, her husband, passed away. In fact, she even purchased a large conversion van for the purpose of tailgating, allowing her to expand her tailgate. After having major heart surgery in 2006, she told the doctors: “you gotta get me out, because it’s almost football season”

2 See Lawrence Wenner, In Search of the Sports Bar
Yet another female tailgater related that she and her husband postponed purchasing a new house in order to pay for a trip to the Orange Bowl in 2006 and even gave her son the middle name “Joseph” in honor of football coach Joe Paterno (Pecht). To describe these female tailgaters as “irregular regulars” would be insulting. Their enthusiasm and ties to tailgating are quite real and in line with many diehard tailgaters who happen to be male. While the sport of football may still be considered a male domain, the increasing paraphernalia geared toward women, the number of painted female fans, and countless stories like those related above give credence to the argument that football fandom and tailgating may be less gendered than previously supposed. All of my female informants who had tailgated vehemently denied feeling out of place or unwelcome in the tailgates. However, this does not preclude stereotypical gender roles from emerging. While both males and females participated in the preparation of the food and the tailgate setup, the grill seemed to remain the domain of males, while females were often in charge of previously prepared dishes and salads. Despite this division of labor, none of the female respondents felt that she was outside of the community or that the community itself was a masculine domain. Even though a hegemonic masculinity within sports in American society remains at various levels, the community still imagines itself as what Anderson describes as a “deep, horizontal comradeship” regardless of any inequalities that may exist (7). For this reason, the “spirit of the community” envisions the community as a welcoming one devoid of hierarchy and makes any discernment of the “actual” level of inclusiveness difficult to measure.

The community that I have described is extremely important to those who are a part of it. Nauright writes that “sport is inscribed with the power to liberate and elevate the human spirit –

3 It would be fair to assume that there are women [and men] who do not feel at home within the tailgate. Since my informants were self-identified “tailgaters,” such negative opinions were unlikely to occur. However, these negative opinions do not contradict the feelings of acceptance felt within the community.
to create moments of escape from the mundane” (35). Sports and religion have long been associated with each other: the ancient Olympics in Greece, Mayan ball games, Native American lacrosse, Shinto rituals in sumo wrestling, etc. (Price 196-197). Often, a metaphorical link between sports and religions is made through the description of “miracle” plays, “faithful” fans, and various other religious terms. The pageantry involved in supporting the Nittany Lions, the setting aside of a special day of the week, a kind of pilgrimage to Happy Valley, the heroes involved, songs, cheers, and the life-long devotion to something all resemble aspects associated with religion. Surely, for many, Penn State football and all that it involves provides a constant and safe harbor in an un-constant world. It is an institution that can bring both pain and pleasure and can send fans from the highest highs in victory to the lowest lows in defeat. Religion creates community through a shared link to something greater than the individual, and sports can do the same, for some even to a greater degree. Reporter Berry Tempkin writes about basketball in Indiana: “indeed it is the church and the team that stand as the two most important institutions in many a town – and not necessarily in that order” (Temkin). A male informant and professor at Penn State noted that “it’s almost a little bit like a Mecca on a Saturday afternoon for people to come to worship.” This feeling of being a part of something bigger than the individual is inherent to the idea of community, and football certainly creates such a feeling: “football games take on an importance and transcend the participants on the field” (Toma 22).

However, while a useful metaphor, I do not believe that the community that emerges from tailgating and Penn State football is truly religious in nature, though it could certainly be described as emotionally invested and deeply important. I find myself agreeing with Edwin Cady’s assertion that the “‘Big Game’ is not fundamentally religious since it isn’t sacramental, but it may feel sacramental much like art does” (Cady 78). The game’s ability to transcend those
sixty minutes on a Saturday, envelop the lives of millions of followers, and effect their daily lives is quite impressive. One tailgater confessed: “I didn’t go to Penn State … I love football. I simply love Penn State” (Sunderland). Cady describes this atmosphere as “the most vitally folklorist [sic] event in our culture,” and I would agree that it does demonstrate the concepts of community, identity, and tradition very vividly (78). This identity born from a fondness for Penn State football easily unites millions of people into a larger community: “When the game is over, the feeling of community spirit lingers. Strangers can form a bond over discussing the trials and tribulations of their local team” (Kraus 85). One tailgater emphasized the importance of the tailgate through a description of two tailgaters who chose to hold their wedding ceremony at his tailgate: “It was terrific, about 200 or 300 people… It’s more than just a game. Everyone has this bond” (Franklin). In my interviews with him, he discussed how tailgating was such an important aspect of their lives, it made perfect sense for the bride and groom to hold their wedding in the parking lot. Passersby were invited to stop, watch, and partake as the crowd broke into a cheer of “WE ARE! JUST MARRIED!” David McMillan and David Chavis George describe this aspect of the community as a “spiritual bond” (McMillan and Chavis George 7), while Tönnies called it “the truly human and supreme form of community” (Tönnies 42). Both descriptions stress the intense role this community created through tailgating can play in the actual lives of its members.

Tailgating provides an area for the community to meet. More than in the music of the community or the community within the stadium, tailgating allows for individual traditions and rituals to flourish. Yet, while individual tailgating traditions differ from neighboring ones, they still celebrate the sentiments and beliefs of the community. Because tailgating is not as standardized as the atmosphere within the stadium, it provides an excellent medium to view how
individuals create their own traditions through store-bought products, home-made goods, and personal interactions. Away from the cameras of the stadium, the tailgaters perform for themselves, personalizing their tailgates and offering their wares to passersby. The tailgate provides the opportunity for tales of the past to create shared memories and conjure up nostalgia for previous seasons and tailgates. While the individual tailgates may differ and the stories might vary, they all play a role in the creation of tradition and community.
In the fall of 2008, I returned to Happy Valley for the game against Illinois. Two of my friends that I had made at Bowling Green traveled with me to State College. Neither had ever attended a Penn State game, but both were sports fans and both (coincidentally) cheered for the Red Sox, so they were used to the idea of extreme passion for one’s team. We stayed with my sister and brother-in-law in a local house that the owner rented out for football weekends. In all, there were a dozen of us of different ages, genders, ethnicities, and socio-economic class levels sharing the same house. Though we did not all know each other, we were united in our excitement for a football game. We went out to the bars along Beaver Avenue and College Avenue and watched the current undergrads celebrate in their own ways. We drove past the RV’s of out-of-state families and elderly couples. We had drinks and shared tales with alumni returning for the weekend. The next day, we met up with some of my old high school friends and current Penn State students. My Bowling Green friends and I brought meat and beer purchased in Ohio, while our housemates brought food from the Washington, DC area. My sister stopped at a local Weis Market to stock up on food for the tailgate, as they had just flown in from Hawaii for the game. We set up grills and chairs, while my brother-in-law’s friend blasted fight songs out of his car stereo. Throughout the day, he offered drinks and food to nearly everyone who passed by our tailgate. We played cornhole with Illini fans and made our prognostications about the game.

About an hour before the game, we donned our white apparel and headed for the giant coliseum on the horizon. The Blue Band played, the Drum Major made his flips, the Lion crowd
surfing, and the crowd sang and clapped along to the music. We bounced to “Kernkraft 400” and chanted to “Seven Nation Army.” We screamed out “Penn State!” in response to the students’ “We Are!” and joined “the wave.” We high-fived strangers and mockingly sang “Have You Ever Seen the Rain” as the rain soaked our clothing. We reveled in Penn State’s victory and discussed the future of the team through hoarse voices as we made our way back to the tailgate. We cooked up some more food and wished the Illini fans a safe trip home. Penn State gained at least two more fans, and we drove back to Bowling Green in the morning.

In less than forty-eight hours, we experienced the Penn State football community. Remarkably, when I asked my friends to describe their experience, they echoed my informants, calling it “indescribable” and “powerful.” While I grew up in Central Pennsylvania in a family of Penn State fans, I still have a choice in whether I want to be a Penn State fan (I do). Moreover, I could still be a fan in the general sense and not have it define me to such a large degree. My informants had varying reasons for becoming a fan, ranging from attending Penn State, to liking football, to liking the atmosphere, or liking what the team represents. Whatever the reason, my informants felt a deep tie to Penn State football and to their fellow community members. They thought about football outside of the game, outside of the weekend, and outside of the football season. When I go on trips and see people wearing Penn State apparel, I yell out “We Are!” and anticipate the forthcoming response. My affinity for the University and the football team gives me a connection to others who feel the same way. Stephen Figler argues: “People who associate themselves with sports teams, whether as athletes or fans, gain an identity with those teams. A feeling of ‘us’ as the in-group is solidified by intense rivalry with ‘them’ as the enemy or out-group” (23). In a similar vein, when I wear my Penn State hat to bars here in Northwest Ohio, Ohio State and Michigan fans make assumptions about me based on my chosen
identity, as I do with them. While these assumptions are often accepted as “sporting,” they can take on less positive connotations as well. That being said, they are no less important and no less real.

For many community members, sports are not just a release and a break from “everyday life.” Instead, they can make up a portion of their identity, in the same role (though in differing degrees depending on the individual) as nationality, religion, etc. According to Anthony Cohen, “people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity” (Cohen 118). Through the case study of Penn State football, I have shown how a deep and meaningful community is created. The performance and creation of shared memories, music, traditions, and rituals all play important roles in the development of community and the development of individual identity. As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, even though sports have become ubiquitous within our society, their social significance and the role they play in everyday life is often downplayed or doubted. Benedict Anderson’s theories thoroughly describe the importance of national communities (predetermined by birth and place) to identity. However, I would go a step further. If predetermined communities can cement a portion of how individuals view themselves and how others view them, it is my contention that chosen communities which then form chosen identities are equally useful and important in examining the complicated subject of identity. If the imagined community can exist outside of the predetermined nation, as I believe it can, then Anderson’s idea of the imagined community provides a useful tool in analyzing an increasingly interconnected world. If sports can play such a central and defining role in individuals’ lives, I believe that analyzing their social implications and impact is just as important to the study of social relations as any other topic.
Considering that sports can unite individuals of differing nationalities, genders, religions, races, and socio-economic levels, further investigation into the creation of sports communities would benefit our understanding of society. Of course, sports can also have the opposite effect, ostracizing individuals for their refusal to agree with the beliefs of the community. With the increasing interconnectivity made possible with the utilization of the internet and newer technologies, chosen communities and identities can continue to expand beyond regional and national borders. Fans of sports teams can communicate with other fans through message boards, YouTube videos, etc., with disregard for national or geographic barriers, sharing memories, traditions, and rituals emblematic of their communities. One tailgater revealed: "I have some people coming from Germany to the next game -- I'm not kidding" (Heath). While I am in no position to offer a prediction on the future position and importance of the nation as an identifier, I believe it is safe to say that the possibility of increasing cross-cultural and transnational interconnectivity on individual levels is high. If this is the case, examinations of chosen communities and identities are essential to understanding society.
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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRES

Tailgating:

1. Do you consider yourself a Penn State fan?
   a. What makes you a fan?
2. How long have you been a fan?
3. Did you attend Penn State?
4. Do you attend games regularly?
   a. How often do you attend games?
5. How many games have you attended?
6. Do you have season tickets?
7. Why do you tailgate and when did you start?
8. Have you ever tailgated but not gone into the stadium to watch the game?
9. How long does a typical tailgate last?
10. Does the outcome of the game influence the experience of tailgating?
11. Do you tailgate with a group?
    a. How did this group develop?
12. What does your typical tailgate involve?
    a. Food, traditions, games, beverages, guests, friends, family, students, other fans, visiting fans?
13. Do you feel a kind of connection or kinship with other tailgaters?
    a. Other fans?
    b. Opposing fans?
14. Do you attend road games or bowl games?
15. Have you ever tailgated at other stadiums?
    a. Is it similar to tailgating at Beaver Stadium?
    b. Pros, Cons…
    c. Judging from experience, do you think the same kind of community exists at other stadiums?
16. What is your favorite aspect of tailgating?
17. What is your least favorite aspect of tailgating?
18. What kinds of things keep you from tailgating? Weather, etc.
19. Would you ever stop tailgating?
    a. Why?

Game Attendee:

1. Do you consider yourself a Penn State fan?
a. What makes you a fan?
2. How long have you been a fan?
3. Did you attend Penn State?
4. Do you attend games regularly?
   a. How often do you attend games?
5. How many games have you attended?
6. Do you have season tickets?
7. Do you feel a kind of connection or kinship with other tailgaters?
   a. Other fans?
   b. Opposing fans?
8. Do you attend road games or bowl games?
9. What is your favorite aspect of attending?
10. What is your least favorite aspect of attending?
11. What kinds of things keep you from attending? Weather, etc.
12. Would you ever stop attending?
   a. Why?
13. What does your typical game day experience entail?
14. How does the music affect your experience?
15. What kind of rituals and traditions do you associate with Beaver Stadium?
16. Are these rituals and traditions effective at drawing you into the atmosphere?

Musical Informants:

1. What music would you associate with Penn State football?
2. Do you feel that the music effectively represents Penn State?
3. How does the playing of fight songs differ from the playing of stadium music or doesn’t it matter?
4. How important is the Blue Band to the atmosphere at Beaver Stadium?
5. Do you listen to “Penn State” music outside of the game setting?
6. How effectively do the lyrics of songs written almost a century ago represent Penn State in the 21st century?
7. How effectively do songs which are not exclusive to Penn State represent Penn State in the 21st century?
My name is Benjamin Phillips, and I am a graduate student in the Master’s Degree program for Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, OH. I am conducting research on the culture of Penn State football beyond the actual game itself, and the level of community this culture and the traditions associated with it create. Your participation in this process would involve answering some interview questions. I plan on using the information that I collect during these interviews (along with newspaper articles, academic publications, and personal experience) for my thesis on the traditions associated with Penn State football. It is my goal to further the exploration of created group identities and communities. I believe that the creation of identities, rather than natural identities, is an extremely interesting and important subject for research. Your help is completely voluntary and will allow me to better understand these created communities and identities, and it will add to the academic investigation of these subjects. Furthermore, your participation will help to preserve a part of the culture of Central Pennsylvania. If you decide not to participate in this study, it will not affect me academically. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

During my session with you, I will be asking you questions about your experiences with tailgating, stadium experiences, and questions about State College and Penn State University. During the interview, I will be taking notes and recording our conversation electronically. There is no personal benefit to you in this study, other than the knowledge that you are helping to further my personal research and the information of the academic world. I have asked you to be in this study because you are a Penn State fan or are familiar with State College and Penn State University. If you are under 21 and choose to discuss underage drinking, I would have to break confidentiality if asked to so by legal authorities. For this reason, you may not want to discuss
this topic if you are not of legal age to drink. Though I don’t intend for any of the questions to be inappropriate, if you feel uncomfortable, you may skip the question or end the interview. You may also withdraw your consent for me to use your interview in my research at any time. You are not required to answer all or any of these questions. At any point, you may ask me questions about the research I am conducting and what I plan to do with it. You may also request a copy of my research if you wish to have one. At the end of this interview, you may keep a copy of this consent form for your own use. The interview process will include only 1-2 interview session(s). The purpose of a second interview would be for clarification of answers or to ask more questions that weren’t covered in the first interview. I expect that each interview will last roughly one hour.

The risks in this interview will be very minimal: no greater than the risks found in normal, daily life. Your name will not appear in my finished paper. Instead, when using information provided by you, I will use vague language, such as: “according to one thirty year-old male,” to protect your identity. Only I and my advisor will be viewing my original records of our interview. I will keep the audio recordings and notes of this interview for approximately one year, at which point I will destroy them.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact me at (717-348-3093, benphil@bgsu.edu), or you can contact Marilyn Motz, my project advisor, at (419-372-7863, mmotz@bgsu.edu) You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, (419-372-7716, hsrb@bgsu.edu), if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study.
By signing this form, you acknowledge that you have read the document, had any questions about the interview explained to you, and agree to participate in this interview. Thank you for your time and your assistance!

Signature _________________________  Date_________________
APPENDIX C: INTERNET CONSENT FORM

My name is Benjamin Phillips, and I am a graduate student in the Master’s Degree program for Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, OH. I am conducting research on Penn State tailgating and the level of community this act and the traditions associated with it create. If you have read and understand the conditions described in this posting, I will send you a questionnaire for you to fill out at your convenience. I plan on using the information that I collect from these questionnaires (along with newspaper articles, interviews, academic publications, and personal experience) to create a chapter for my thesis on the traditions associated with Penn State football. It is my goal to further the exploration of created group identities and communities. I believe that the creation of identities, more so than natural identities, is an extremely interesting and important subject for research. Your help will allow me to better understand these created communities and identities, and it will add to the academic investigation of these subjects. Furthermore, your participation will help to preserve a part of the culture of central Pennsylvania.

There is no personal benefit to you in this study, other than the knowledge that you are helping to further my personal research and the information of the academic world. I have asked you to be in this study because you are a Penn State tailgater. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Though I don’t intend for any of the questions to be inappropriate, if you feel uncomfortable, you may skip the question or end the interview. You may also withdraw your consent for me to use your interview in my research at any time, by emailing me. You are not required to answer all or any of these questions. At any point, you may ask me questions about the research I am conducting and what I plan to do with it. You may also request a copy of my
research if you wish to have one. To maintain confidentiality, your name will not appear in my finished paper. Instead, when using information provided by you, I will use vague language, such as: “according to one person who answered the questionnaire,” to protect your identity. All of the responses to the questionnaire will be compiled into a document on my computer and no email address will be attached to your answers. Please note that e-mail is not 100% secure, so it is possible that someone intercepting your e-mail will have access to your questionnaire responses. If you agree to take part in my research, please send an email to me at benphil@bgsu.edu, and I will send you the questionnaire. Thank you for your time!