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Sport myth as lived experience

Estes, Steven Gregory, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1990

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SPORT MYTH AS LIVED EXPERIENCE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

By

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FIELD OF STUDY

Humanistic Study of Sport and Physical Education
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INTRODUCTION

This study examines how sport can be explained by using the myths that are part of the sport experience. It is based on the assumption that we use myths to explain our sport experiences, both to ourselves and to others, and that the study of these explanations reveals many insights into how we experience sport.

A myth is a story believed to be true that explains our experiences to ourselves and to those around us. It tells us the truth of a situation in the sense that truth is contingent upon our experiences. Whether or not the story is "true" in an absolute sense is irrelevant. What is relevant is that the story and the myth it embodies are accepted and believed to be true\(^1\). Through the telling of this story we explain our beliefs, emotions, experiences, and the world around us. We gain a satisfying feeling from the telling of the story that an issue has been resolved or a contradiction has been reconciled.

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This definition of a myth is not obvious, especially to those unfamiliar with mythology. To many a myth is a "lie" or a "falsehood" that contradicts "fact." Correspondingly, an examination of sport through its mythology appears to be an investigation of the "lies" or "falsehoods" in sport, a pointless task. Americans generally believe that if one wants to find the "truth" of a situation then one needs to do so by looking for the "facts." This is because Americans see their culture as pragmatic, and they generally believe that they are objective about their lives. A study using rational methods and objective observations is considered superior to a method using lies and falsehoods.

I argue, however, that the use of myths to understand sport can be justified by the manner in which myths can be used to explain our experiences. For example, the idea that Americans are rational beings is a myth. I do not mean this in the sense that Americans are irrational, rather that the American belief in its cultural rationality can be explained in mythological terms. When Americans tell the story that they are rational beings, they communicate many different ideas that all together comprise a myth: that other cultures are not as rational as Americans; that Americans are influenced only by objective observations and not subjective desires; and that the feelings of satisfaction derived from the story are proof of its validity. These beliefs and
emotions, among others, are communicated in the story and comprise a myth of American rationality. The American story that we live as rational beings is mythic in the sense that when it is told it explains our thoughts and actions. Our belief in our rationality is contingent upon the stories we tell each other rather than our strict adherence to logic. From this perspective a study using myth to understand sport is as justifiable as other traditional methods.

The meaning of sport to Americans, then, can be examined through the myths communicated in stories about sport. Sport myths constitute part of the language of sport in conjunction with the experiences of participation as athlete, spectator, coach, or administrator, and they help create the reality of sport as it is experienced. Americans understand their roles as athlete, spectator, coach, and administrator in part through the myths they exchange, and eventually form a worldview from these myths that explain these roles. This worldview tells us how to behave and what to expect, helping us create new experiences, new myths, and new worldviews. The process is dynamic, changing, and ultimately it is sport as a lived experience.

The meaning of sport gained through myths occurs through the development of both the self and the social context of sport. Pragmatists argue that one cannot understand the self without an understanding of the social context from which it
is derived. Similarly, one cannot understand the social context of sport without an understanding of how the self creates reality. Each is a manifestation of the other, and sport myths provide a framework in which the relationship between the self and the sport context is developed. The evolution of this framework occurs because sport myths do not exist separately from the self or the sport context, but are simultaneously the experienced sport context and the language of the sport context. There can be no separation between an experience and the expression of the experience, through myths or any other means of communication, for to separate experience and expression is to subscribe to the idea that reality is represented by symbols and is separate from those symbols. This is a formalistic definition of reality. Expression, in both the stories one tells and experiences, connects the self to the sport community. Myth, self, reality, language and culture are intimately related, and the discussion of one necessarily means the discussion of the others.

Literature in sport mythology has traditionally followed one of two paths, both of which differ from the above argument. The first approach uses the methods of philosophy to concentrate on the relationship of myth and culture, generally ignoring the aspects of self and how one creates the sport experience. The second approach uses the social
sciences to study sport from the perspective of anthropology, and in so doing objectifies the sport experience. The former argument looks at sport as a microcosm that exists to ameliorate unacceptable portions of mainstream culture\(^2\), as a mystical experience that compares sport myths to religious myths\(^3\), or as a mirror that reflects myths in mainstream American society\(^4\). Using the latter approach anthropologists have begun to study myth to understand sport experiences, but these studies are positivistic\(^5\). Both of these approaches attempt to isolate sport as a certain kind of cultural


\(^4\) Voigt positions baseball as a sport institution that is separate from, but is affected by, mainstream American culture when he notes, "That established sports of a society mirror the culture of that society has long been recognized by students of human nature, but scant effort has been expended to display this reflection." Voigt, David Q., *America Through Baseball*, Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976, 1.

experience and place it in a meaningful context. But little attention is paid to how one develops a sense of self, or to the subjective experience of sport through sport myths.

It is my contention that sport myths are a key to understanding the subjective experiences in sport. I will attempt to show that the study of myths through cultural criticism and symbolic anthropology can reveal this to be the case. Symbolic anthropology differs from a social scientific anthropology in that it attempts to understand a culture through its own eyes, and in so doing describes the processes it studies without distorting or reducing that culture by objectifying it.

This work is divided into six chapters. The first chapter discusses how a study of sport using myth is justified. I argue that sport myths have not been studied extensively largely because of the positivistic influence of science and the difficulty a culture has in examining its own symbol systems. Contemporary research in the anthropology

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In an discussion regarding the role of rites in politics David Kertzer argues for the role of the study of symbols in scholarship: "The lack of systematic studies of the symbolic dimension of politics in contemporary Western societies is no doubt...due to the difficulty all people face in examining their own symbol systems. Since people perceive the world through symbolic lenses, it is difficult for them to be conscious of just what those symbols consist of and what influence they have...The underdevelopment of studies on the symbolic dimension of modern politics is also due to the kinds of empirical methods emphasized in modern social science."
of sport is discussed in this light, and I will compare positivistic approaches to the study of sport to those that use the methods of symbolic anthropology. I will then discuss how the theories of symbolic interactionism and symbolic convergence theory are a type of symbolic anthropology.

The second chapter argues that myths are a means of organizing our experiences in culture and develops a working definition of a myth. This will be done through the writings of Joseph Campbell, Ernst Cassirer, James Robertson, and A.J.M. Sykes, who argue that the communication of myths is an important ingredient in the formation of culture and the self. Myths are a type of symbolic language, and when sport is viewed as a symbolic language one can explain sports' universality through the capacity of individuals to converse with symbols. Sport myths are one form of this conversation made explicit. The chapter concludes with two examples of sport myths that reveal insights to an understanding of ourselves and sport in a social context.

Symbols cannot be satisfactorily studied in quantitative terms...In emphasizing such methods, analysts have a tendency to assume that those aspects of politics that cannot be easily quantified must be unimportant. To complete the vicious circle, the resulting empirical studies then reinforce the view that modern politics is determined by rational action." See Kertzer, David I., Ritual, Politics, and Power, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1988, 7.
Chapter Three discusses how contemporary scholars have discussed myths and how they exist in sport. Barthes and Magnane use sport myths to describe sport as a microcosm of culture that serves as a catharsis for hegemonic, mainstream culture. Lenk begins with this thesis but deviates from it when he describes how the athlete serves as an archetype in culture. These writers see sport as separate from culture and as a reactionary or contrasting experience. Voigt takes a different approach when he states that sport "mirrors" American culture, and that sport myths reflect myths in mainstream culture. While sport is seen as an important aspect of culture, it is still viewed as something separate. Novak states that sport performs the same roles in modern culture that religion once did. While he does not abrogate the authority of religion to administer theological dogma, he explains how sport functions in a social and political sense in the same way religion did in premodern culture, and still does in certain respects in modern culture. John Gibson uses a philosophical framework to show how modern culture values results over performance in sport. In so doing he also

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7 Lenk, "Facination with Top Level Sport."
8 Voigt, America Through Baseball.
establishes a framework for understanding that some sport myths exist as the standards that define sport as a practice.

While these studies discuss sport myth in culture, none of them deal explicitly with how one obtains meaning from sport myths or develops a sense of self. The fourth and fifth chapters attempt to do just this by using Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism and Bormann's theory of symbolic convergence theory to describe how ideas are generated and diffused in culture. Both theories are useful in describing the process of the individual accepting sport myths as one's own from the social context and also in showing how individuals and small groups create the sport context using sport myths11. Interactionism describes our experiences as meaningful through the conversations we hold with ourselves and with the community, and then describes how we create ideals in culture. I use this theory to describe one's sport experience as a conversation between the self and the sum of


one's past experiences. The theory of symbolic convergence can be used to describe how the ideas that are generated by individuals and small groups are exchanged to become sport myths. In so doing it unites the social context of culture and the expression of cultural symbols in experience and the expression of experience.
CHAPTER I

THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY OF SPORT THROUGH MYTH

A Reification of Myths

An examination of the relationships between myth, self, reality, language and culture through stories we experience in sport begins best with a story of a sport experience. This is a story in which I was one of the players, and can be used to describe how myths are reified in the sport experience. Some background is helpful in describing why this race unfolded the way it did.

This race, actually a series of races, occurred while I was training with the United States Rowing Team in one of the two eight-oared classifications, the Lightweight Eight\(^1\). Because of our training schedule, my crew generally practiced without another rowing shell next to us. When an opportunity arose to race another crew we would do so to gain experience for the upcoming World Championships. One such opportunity

\(^1\) In lightweight events the average of the combined weights of the rowers can be no more than 70 kilograms, or about 155 pounds. The other event, heavyweight or open, has no weight restriction.
pitted us against a crew of taller, heavier oarsmen that competed in the heavyweight classification.

This other crew was composed of eight rowers that normally raced in two heavyweight four-oared shells. These were two fine crews making up the eight, a blend of college and international racing experience. In the stern of the eight were the Silver Medalist coxed four from the 1981 World Championships, while in the bow four seats was the heart of the 1982 University of California, Berkeley, Varsity Eight, arguably one of the best college crews in the country that year.

The purpose of the pieces was different for each eight. For my crew the purpose was to work on concentration while another boat was next to us. We had been rowing alone for several weeks, and our coach thought we were merely going through the motions of training and needed to practice next to another crew. The heavyweights were equally in need of a change of pace since they were tired of racing each other in their fours every day. They considered the chance to race a different group of rowers in an eight refreshing. We were scheduled to do a series of two-minute pieces\(^2\), and in this instance the two crews would row at a controlled rating of 32

\(^2\) A "piece" is any intensive row of arbitrary length, intensity, or time.
strokes per minute. Both my crew and theirs looked forward to the practice.

Midway through the first piece we noticed that the heavyweights were not following the workout plan. My crew began at the correct stroke rating of 32 strokes per minute, but the heavyweights sprinted off the line at 37 strokes per minute, a difference that enabled them to move ahead of us. We responded by raising the cadence, and both crews sprinted toward the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge at a pace we normally would not try to maintain. At the conclusion of the piece the heavyweights were ahead of us by 6 seats (maybe 20 feet), and we collapsed over our oars gasping for air. The workout, begun as a change of pace, had developed into a full blown race.

We decided not to lose the next piece. This was not hubris. We were a National Team and could generate the type of speed needed to beat other crews. We had won the United States National Championships in both the Elite Lightweight Eight and the Elite Heavyweight Eight, a fair measure of speed. While we knew the heavyweights were a very good crew, we still felt we could beat any "pick-up" crew if we chose to do so. Our confidence was born of success.

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3 A "pick-up" crew is one that is created for one race and does not practice for that race.
Andy Fisher, our coxswain, outlined our plan for the second piece. We would sprint for the first 20 strokes at a high, yet controlled, rating of 38 strokes per minute and "settle" to 32 strokes per minute for the remaining part of the piece. In this way we would take the lead and hold off the challenge from the heavyweights. We knew that no crew would catch us from behind as one can see the crews behind without effort. Rowing is unique in that the athletes are seated in the boat facing the stern, or the back of the boat. Being ahead is a significant advantage as one can watch the race develop and control it.

Unfortunately, the heavyweights had the same idea. They started at over 40 strokes per minute, and again we sprinted the entire two minutes trying to catch them. We lost, but cut their lead after two minutes by several seats. Our coach, an authoritarian who normally demanded precise ratings and effort, was strangely quiet after this piece. We took this to mean that we could be a little more creative in our supposedly "controlled" workout. Two motorboats and a half dozen local and national team coaches joined us before the third piece for purposes of video taping the workout and to see the racing. As we prepared for the third piece we were followed by a small fleet of coaches, an unusual event since rowing practices rarely generate many spectators.
We decided to row the third piece as though it was a real race. We sprinted off the line using every bit of skill and energy we had, and led by four seats as we settled into our standard race pace of 38 strokes per minute. Unfortunately, so intense was the racing that Andy did not see a buoy, and the collision was disastrous. The oar was knocked from the bowman's hands, and we were fortunate that he was not hurt. Andy's strategy and concentration were indicative of the attitude of the whole crew, though, and were a type of statement to the heavyweights and the coaches: it was race time and we were no longer subject to any restraints.

I believe our coach remained quiet, or at least I do not remember his speaking to us. The atmosphere was so charged by this time that even he had turned into a spectator. The following five pieces were similarly planned and raced. We raised the level of intensity with each piece, only to find the heavyweights had reacted similarly. Both crews used all the skills they had, matching wits and strength to obtain an advantage that might make the difference in the next piece. The crews were never separated by more than a few feet, a small margin considering the distinct differences between them.

To end the story, both crews were physically and emotionally drained after the practice. More interesting was
that both crews, composed of experienced rowers, disregarded strict workout plans and engaged in racing without regard for the consequences and without a word spoken between them. We knew what was happening without discussion. We entered the racing freely, raced without reservation, and accepted and enjoyed the consequences.

It turned out that the differences between the two crews were, at least in part, the cause of the intense racing. No self-respecting heavyweight felt he should lose to a crew that was at a significant disadvantage in size, no matter the quality of that crew. The heavyweights were expressing the idea that big rowers should beat little rowers, and not to do so was a comment on their ability to make boats go fast. Consequently they increased the amount of effort in each piece in order to create this reality. My crew operated on a different set of ideas, though. We were a practiced crew, and operated as a team. We believed that our unity offset their size advantage, and we expressed this idea in leading our share of the races. Two evenly matched crews were the result of these different sets of ideas.

This situation could not have happened unless the two crews held in common certain experiences. Put another way, we could not have experienced this sport context without a common understanding of how to create this type of experience. I believe this common understanding was provided
for us, to a certain extent, by myths inherent in rowing stories. There are many myths that explain what happened in this practice, myths that explain what a race is, how participants in a race relate to one another, and how one behaves in a race. The race was a sport context, or reality, created by the sixteen rowers and two coxswains, and had many characteristics anthropologists ascribe to play. Clearly the two crews understood the concept of competition. This understanding was manifest in the two crews creating a race instead of following the instructions of the coaches. It is clear that we understood the concept of team and how we related to our teammates, and also how the teams related to each other. Each oarsman sublimated his individual desires so that his crew would perform as well as possible during the pieces. And each of us understood our own roles in the race in that each rower was heroic in the quest of finding himself through competition and expressing this understanding in his performance with his teammates. Each piece was an epic unto itself.

The races were meaningful to both crews, and they are meaningful to subsequent crews to the extent that this story reinforces the myths that explain their own experiences.

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4 One's sense of team in rowing is enhanced by the structure of the shell physically connecting each and coxswain, and the sensation of connection is kinesthetically obvious.
Five years later I heard the story of the above race retold at the Selection Camp for the United States Lightweight Team. Rowers often debate the differences in speed between lightweight and heavyweight crews, and this story communicates and reifies myths that explain how crews develop speed through working as a team compared to a "pick-up" crew, how types of boats affect the speed of crews, how the intensity of racing can elevate personal performance, that heavyweights believe they should not be beaten by lightweights, and what the difference in speed between the two categories of rowers is. The myths inherent in the story provide solutions to these questions, solutions that explain race results between lightweight and heavyweight rowers in terms that are emotionally satisfying.

We have ideas of what teams, heroes, competition and play are. But where do these ideas come from? The story above illustrates that these ideas are created by people in various sport contexts. These ideas come from the stories we hear about sport and are retold and acted out, beginning with our first Little League Baseball Game to the locker room banter before practice. Within these stories are myths about competition, heroes, play, team and many others. Throughout our lives we tell stories of what competition looks like, of how heroes act, and of the great teams in a given sport. We experience sport and tell stories of our experiences so often
that to do one necessarily includes the other, that to do one is doing the other. We eventually embody the stories we hear, and act them out in our own experiences. These experiences generate stories, stories that make those experiences meaningful to everyone involved in that sport context. In sum, we live the myths that comprise the context of our sports experience.

Studies of Sport Using Mythology

This chapter discusses how a study of sport using mythology can be justified. This task is necessary for several reasons, the first being the pervasive belief in the nature of myth as falsehood. This belief discourages the use of myth as a mechanism for understanding sport. A discussion of mythology reveals, however, that the belief that myths are falsehoods is not necessarily true, and that mythology can reveal insights into both the self and culture. More will be said about this in the Chapter 2. Another reason is methodological. Most scholars seek to create knowledge using traditional methods of empirical science. However, studies of a culture’s mythology can overcome the limitations of an empirical approach to cultural studies by not reducing

5 In this case I am using the term mythology to mean "the study of myth." A mythology is also the body of myths that are held by a particular culture.
culture to an object. When a culture's mythology is viewed as a symbolic expression it can be studied with the methods of symbolic anthropology, a means of studying individuals and culture through the symbols that are used in expression and experience.

In sum, sport myths have not been studied to a significant degree for many of the same reasons that others myths have not been studied. The traditional methods of studying sport have relied on the methods of empirical science to create a body of knowledge, and these methods direct research away from mythology. The studies that have examined sport myths using the empirical methods of history, sociology, or anthropology have reflected this trend by approaching myth studies in one or both of two ways: by objectifying myths and reducing them to abstractions of belief, value and attitude, or by placing them in a category of ideas that need not be examined because of their perceived basis in falsehood. The former situation views myth positivistically, while the latter places mythology in a residual category.

Regarding the charge of positivism, the traditional methods of the disciplines of history, anthropology, sociology, etc., are not designed to explain symbolic aspects of culture. These traditional approaches provide meaning and understanding of culture within their frameworks using the methods of observation, hypothesis, test, and analysis to explain social phenomena, and should not be expected to produce meaningful answers to questions about the relationship of self and community, the value of experience, or the meaning of sport. Since most research in sport has used the methods of empirical science, very little has been done with sport myths as a symbol system. This approach to cultural studies does not fit the social science model.

The placement of myths by scholars in a residual category can be explained in a critique of the limitations of the social science approach by Kenneth Leiter. He notes that conventional sociology relegates common sense knowledge to a residual category\(^7\). Residual categories are phenomena that fall outside of a theory and consequently are not studied by theorists because they are not considered worthy of study.

By treating commonsense knowledge as the stock of knowledge at hand, and as inferior to scientific knowledge, sociologists have turned .... commonsense knowledge into a residual

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category....What seems to matter most to the sociologist is documenting the sociological version of social reality.®

One form of common sense knowledge are the myths that give meaning to thoughts and behaviors. If Leiter's theory is correct, then myths are shifted to a residual category and are not studied because they are either considered inferior to scientific knowledge, or are not considered at all®. This concept has implications for sport myths as a social reality and a lived experience. Since myths do not fit into the sociological version of social reality, sport myths are not studied.

Two examples of the social science perspective toward myth illustrate how myths are perceived as falsehood and placed in a residual category, and are reduced to objective

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8 Ibid., 15.

9 Renato Rosaldo argues a similar point when he discusses the classic norms of social analysis. He attempts to decenter, but not eliminate, the study of control mechanisms in order to break objectivism's monopoly on truth claims. In so doing he criticizes the methods of empirical science that ignore the aspects of social analysis that do not lend themselves to an ordered understanding. "When the workings of culture are reduced to those of a control mechanism, such phenomena as passions, spontaneous fun, and improvised activities tend to drop out of sight...It reduces to undifferentiated chaos everything that falls outside the normative order. In my view, social analysis should look beyond the dichotomy of order versus chaos toward the less explored realm of "nonorder." Rosaldo, Renato, Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis, Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.
data through positivistic methods. In the first example, Howard Nixon contrasts myth with reality in order to debunk the myths in America that constitute the "American Dream." In this comparison myth is placed in a residual category by comparing it to a reality that is created and examined through the methods of social science. Nixon is not concerned with how sport myths affect one's understanding of sport. Rather he hopes to use an empirical approach to arrive at a relatively consensual interpretation of social reality that will lead to better sport experiences.

The pursuit of the American Dream of achievement, mobility and success continues to be a major driving force in the lives of the majority of Americans ... It is hoped that by looking at the connection between the American Dream and sport, it will be possible to see more clearly the extent to which the American Dream is a reality or a myth for those in sport as well as in American society in general.  

Myth is treated as that which is not "true," and Nixon believes that sport myths should be debunked to the extent that they cause "real problems, shortcomings, and disappointments...." He implies that the American Dream has its virtues, but myth is considered "as it exists as a romanticized fantasyland in the minds of many fans..."

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Nixon develops his study by contrasting the myth of the American Dream (falsehood) with the reality of sport as understood through the methods of empirical science (consensual truth). I do not mean to undermine Nixon's research by articulating the dualistic nature of his argument. Nor do I mean to imply that Nixon believes that his methods are completely free from the myths he seeks to understand. Rather I want to point out that his dichotomy relegates the American Dream that Americans use in their created sport contexts to a residual category that is

11 Nixon addresses this specifically in a discussion of the methods of sociology and its limitations: "...the sociologist's ostensibly systematic and objective search for social facts should not delude us into believing that a sociologically oriented examination of sport and the American Dream will be free of value biases, misinterpretations of fact, and wrong conclusions. At times, sociologists seem to delude themselves by a myth of their own objectivity or value neutrality. Nevertheless, by recognizing they have personal values that influence the choice of research problems and methods of studying them and that could destroy their interpretation of what they see or have found, sociologists may be able to step far enough back from the potentially distorting influence of their personal values to arrive at reasonably accurate or insightful interpretations of reality. We will assume that despite the many possible perceptions of social reality, sociologists as systematic social scientists mindful of their own shortcomings and biases are capable collectively of arriving at relatively consensual interpretations of many aspects of social reality. Thus, if systematically and consensually validated sociological knowledge is assumed to represent a relatively accurate perception of social reality, then it becomes possible to use sociological knowledge to distinguish myths and illusions about sport and the American Dream from reality." p.13.
difficult to study using traditional means. Nixon's residual category is a social reality for all those who experience it and continues to influence the sport context in America today. This can be seen in his admission that the American dream continues to be a driving force in the lives of Americans. To the extent that it is the social reality of the American sport context it can, and should be, studied using methods that are appropriate.\(^\text{12}\)

Blanchard and Cheska take a positivistic approach within the discipline of anthropology that reduces sport to objective measurements of behavior, although they note that this approach is one among many.\(^\text{13}\) They state that the study

\(^{12}\) It should also be noted that this study utilizes the dichotomy of empirical science on the one hand and symbolic anthropology on the other. In so doing I contrast the two methods and emphasize those aspects of self and culture that are better understood using the methods of symbolic anthropology. As with Nixon's work or any other work of scholarship, this study is contingent upon an arbitrary set of assumptions about what is acceptable as scholarship, and in this case I utilize those assumptions established by the tradition of symbolic anthropology. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses, including symbolic anthropology, which, as the empirical scientist will note, does not lend itself to empirical methods of investigation.

\(^{13}\) Blanchard, Kendall, and Alyce Taylor Cheska, *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction*. Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, Inc. 1985. Edward Norbeck writes in the Introduction, "To my knowledge, this book is the first on its subject by cultural or social anthropologists that covers a broad range of sub-topics." While Blanchard and Cheska's approach utilizes traditional social science methods to study sport, it does not examine sport myths to determine how
of sport in preliterate society reveals much about modern sport, and assume that science will ultimately remove the mythic elements of sport by revealing the relationship of the sport context to a "reality" that exists separate from the sport context. They create a reality that can be studied using empirical methods, but recognize some of the limitations of this approach. Blanchard and Cheska define the anthropology of sport as ...

...simply the anthropological analysis of sport behavior. Its distinctiveness is manifested through its characteristic theoretical perspectives and major concerns. These concerns include such things as the meaning of play and sport, the description of sport in small-scale, preliterate, or tribal society, the prehistory of sport, sport and culture change, and the possible applications of sport data. 14

Both Nixon's study and Blanchard and Cheska's associate myth with falsehood. Both studies also subscribe to a scientific, objective approach to the study of culture and sport, and argue that the reality that is created through these studies reveals a better way to experience the sport context. 15

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14 Ibid., xi.

15 It should be noted that Blanchard and Cheska understand that the symbolic aspect of life is an important one, and that it should be studied. However, they have selected positivistic methods instead of symbolic ones,
In taking this positivistic approach, however, I argue that they are not discovering the "truth" of the sport context. Rather they are creating a reality where understanding is created through the comparison of one method with another. Both methods (empirical science and symbolic anthropology) are human creations designed to answer types of questions, and the quality of each study within a method is contingent upon its conforming to the standards of its methodology. Neither method, however, reveals the one true reality of the self and the sport context. Rather, each method creates and expresses a sport context contingent upon a set of created assumptions. This study examines sport through some of the methods of symbolic anthropology.

**Symbolic Anthropology**

In this section I define and justify the use of two types of symbolic anthropology to study sport, discuss some of the merits and assumptions upon which symbolic anthropology is based, and describe the influence of Freud's work on the development of symbolic anthropology. This task is worthwhile since Blanchard and Cheska argue that, among other things, symbolic anthropology can be used to study sport because it raises and answers questions regarding and recognize that their selection leads to conclusions of a certain type.
social organization, social class, political behavior, national character, and religion. All of these aspects of culture are potentially symbolized in sport activities and are influenced by myths that create the sport context.16

Symbolic anthropology falls within the purview of social and cultural anthropology, an approach to the study of culture in which Dolgin, Kemnitzer and Schneider include the study of systems of symbols and meanings. They define the anthropological study of culture as ...

"...the science of the basic terms with which we view ourselves as people and as members of society, and of how these basic terms are used by people to build for themselves a mode of life...anthropology implies the existence of ways of acting and being in the world which are alternatives to those habits and institutions which we have historically taken to be the most "natural": our own.17

Dolgin, Kemnitzer and Schneider argue that people act on the basis of their beliefs about the world, themselves, and action itself, and that these beliefs exist in systems that

16 Blanchard and Cheska, The Anthropology of Sport, 74-75. Blanchard and Cheska go on to say that, "The objective of the researcher is to analyze exactly what the symbolic messages are, how they are communicated, and what they teach us about the system from which they have emerged."

can be studied. Some beliefs are shared by all of the members of a group, while others are specific to one or another subgroup. Still other beliefs are held only by individuals. Each of these sets of beliefs can be studied as systems at different levels. The system of beliefs that are more or less shared by the members of a group is called a "culture" or "ideology," while an individual's system of beliefs is an aspect of personality. These belief systems overlap and are interwoven, which explains one means by which an individual feels connected to a community, and recognizes her community as hers.

One goal of social and cultural anthropologists is to try to understand belief and meaning, and the theory that guides this effort. They try to abstract a general pattern that more or less comprehends the lives of those they study. Symbolic anthropologists, then, study the symbols and cultural systems in the patterns that are created and used by people as their beliefs. Myths are studied to the extent that they are the symbols used by, and the basis for the beliefs of, individuals, subcultures and cultures. They can be studied as the abstraction of a generalized pattern that explains one's life in a culture, both to the individual and to the anthropologist.

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18 Ibid., 3.
The two methods I discuss as types of symbolic anthropology try to understand culture and represent it without creating any distortions through objective methods. Dolgin, Kemnitzer and Schneider argue that culture cannot be understood through methods that reduce it to an object without risking the loss of that which makes culture unique:

Because we know that culture is not available to us in propositional form, any more than personality is, we cannot express our own culture, our own mode of life, our own beliefs, in such a way without stripping them of much of their richness, their ambiguity, their living power to direct our lives and give them meaning; and we cannot understand the fullness of the culture of another people by reducing their beliefs to a syllogism.19

It is assumed, however, that social action tends to be orderly, and is to some degree predictable or understandable by both participants and observers because of this orderly condition. The goal of symbolic anthropology is to study these patterns of beliefs without reducing culture to those sets of beliefs. To this end Dolgin, Kemnitzer and Schneider note that:

Social life -- made up of people, gods and ghosts and ghouls, of beliefs about the possible and about the actual and about that which is right and that which is wrong as well as actions, things, relationships, and institutions -- is constituted logically, attaining a coherence for those who live it out in its particularity.20

19 Ibid., 3-4.

20 Ibid., 4-5.
This orderly pattern of beliefs that is coherent to an individual is fairly consistent within his culture, and it is the task of the symbolic anthropologist to understand, in symbolic terms, the beliefs and patterns that make that culture an identifiable whole. Researchers attempt to study and to categorize behavior in terms that an insider to that culture would understand, all the while recognizing that they are imposing their own viewpoints upon the culture they are studying.\(^{21}\)

The recognition of one's interpretation of a culture as a component of an observation, however, does not constitute, to cultural critics, a research artifact as it would if one accepted the empirical methods of the social sciences. The empirical sciences accept the idea that one can be an objective, unbiased observer of culture, and one using these methods would argue that the imposition of the observer into

\(^{21}\) The question of the emic (insider's) orientation and etic (outsider's) orientation with respect to whose viewpoint the ethnography should reflect has received considerable attention in the anthropological literature. Harris and Park note that "...researchers are constantly cautioned about the need to study and to categorize behavior in terms their informants' conceptualizations of human events, rather than imposing their own structures and categories on the people studied." See Harris, Janet C. and Roberta J. Park, *Play, Games & Sports in Cultural Contexts*. Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetic Publishers, 1983. 11-12. The Introduction provides an overview of how ethnographic cultural research can be used to study sport in a cultural context.
the environment of the observed unduly influences it. Again, one can see the difference between one using empirical methods and a cultural critic, who believes in a subjective, non-neutral, partial approach. Empirical methods suppose that one can discover the objective truth of a situation, while the cultural critic argues that there is no single truth to be discovered\textsuperscript{22}. There is broad agreement among symbolic anthropologists that both the perspective of the culture being studied and that of the researcher enter into

\textsuperscript{22} This point is argued forcefully by Renato Rosaldo, who describes the changing nature of cultural studies. He does not claim that one method is better than another. Rather he argues that each method has its advantages and can reveal insights into the culture being studied from a certain perspective. "This book argues that a sea change in cultural studies has eroded once-dominant conceptions of truth and objectivity. The truth of objectivism—absolute, universal, and timeless—has lost its monopoly status. It now competes, on more nearly equal terms, with the truths of case studies that are embedded in local contexts, shaped by local interests, and colored by local perceptions. The agenda for social analysis has shifted to include not only eternal verities and lawlike generalizations but also political processes, social changes, and human differences. Such terms as objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality refer to subject positions once endowed with great institutional authority, but they are arguably neither more nor less valid than those of more engaged, yet equally perceptive, knowledgeable social actors. Social analysis must now grapple with the realization that its objects of analysis are also analyzing subjects who critically interrogate ethnographers—their writings, their ethics, and their politics." See Rosaldo, \textit{Culture and Truth}, 21.
the ethnographic research process, and that a research report is a synthesis of these two different viewpoints\textsuperscript{23}.

Symbolic anthropology has been influenced by investigations in linguistics and psychology, particularly Freud's work. Dolgin, Kemnitzer and Schneider note, "From Freud's work comes an understanding of the importance of the unconscious aspect of beliefs, particularly in giving to knowledge significance and order for the person (italics theirs)."\textsuperscript{24} Freud's studies described the processes through which symbols take on multiple meanings, the process in which the mind displaces the content of experience onto a chain of reasoning, and the complementary process through which this chain of reasoning and memory is condensed during the process of displacement\textsuperscript{25}. They go on to note that much of Freud's

\textsuperscript{23} Harris and Park, \textit{Play, Games and Sport}.

\textsuperscript{24} Dolgin, Kemnitzer and Schneider, \textit{Symbolic Anthropology}, 5.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, 5. Dolgin, Kemnitzer, and Schneider's interpretation of Freud warrants discussion. "Thus, \textit{displacement} is the process through which one symbol (with negative implications for the person) is replaced with another (less threatening, more acceptable) symbol." According to Freud, the second (or third, fourth, etc.) symbol is less anxiety-provoking, and is used to say that which could not be said before directly. Eventually several sets of meanings are displaced onto one symbol that becomes the condensation of many different meanings or chains of meaning. "Freud thus explained ... how conscious thought becomes a code for the (repressed) unconscious. By unraveling this code, the structure of needs and understanding which motivate a person, the implicit pattern of significance
explication of the details of these processes, like the importance of instinct, sexuality, and the psychology of women, is now either dismissed or the subject of great debate. "But the basic skeleton of the workings of the mind and the dynamics of the relations between conscious and unconscious, of code and meaning--of the working, in fine, of symbols (italics theirs) in human consciousness--is Freud's lasting contribution to the understanding of people."26

From this understanding of Freud's work has come the blueprint for the understanding of the workings of symbols within the individual mind, and from the study of language come strong hints that what Freud said of the individual mind is true as well of the beliefs of groups. Dolgin, Kemnitzer, and Schneider go on to argue that groups, like individuals, have symbolic codes or systems of signs. These symbolic codes give order to the beliefs held by their members, and this order shapes the development of new knowledge in the group while at the same time tending to insure that old observations will be repeated. These codes represent an intricately woven tapestry of motives, experiences,
knowledge, and desires, and they help to shape and express this tapestry at the same time that they keep so much of it unseen and out of sight.

Dolgin, Kemnitzer, and Schneider note that several disciplines can be used by symbolic anthropologists to unravel these codes so that they can be understood.

Linguistics -- like psychoanalysis, literary criticism, philosophy, and many other disciplines -- has given us techniques with which to unravel these codes and thereby enables us to see belief, the elaboration of belief, and the development of belief, in action.27

My goal is to use two methodologies to do just this, to unravel the codes that exist as sport myths in America. The methods of symbolic interactionism and symbolic convergence theory can be used to unravel the codes of American culture to see the elaboration and the development of beliefs about sport in both private and public contexts. These methods are valuable because they transcend the dichotomy of the individual and the group within the sport context by studying the symbols, codes and patterns of beliefs that give meaning and order to both. The symbols, codes and patterns of belief that exist as myths create and define, to a significant extent, the sport context to Americans on both an individual and a cultural level. The study of these myths through the

27 Ibid., 6.
methods of symbolic interactionism and symbolic convergence theory reveal much about how Americans experience sport.

Symbolic Convergence Theory and Symbolic Interactionism as Symbolic Anthropology

Symbolic convergence theory falls within the realm of symbolic anthropology when it is used as a model to describe how myths are developed and communicated between individuals and culture. It was developed by Ernest Bormann, a student of communications and rhetorical criticism, who was influenced by the work of Robert Bales, a psychologist. Bales was interested in the process of group fantacizing, or how groups select an idea generated by an individual and take it to be their own. Bormann expanded on the work of Bales, and argued that an understanding of small group communication provides insights into the nature of public address and mass communication.

A fantasy theme is an idea that develops in a group so that all of the members of the group understand it in a way that identifies them, both to themselves and to outsiders, as

a cohesive group. The idea is generated by an individual within the group, and each member of the group, for any number of reasons, "buys" into the idea as if it were his own. When a fantasy theme is large enough, and can be reified in a large group like a subculture or a culture, it is called a rhetorical vision. The idea can take any shape, such as a saying, a story, or a myth, and is expressed in dramatic and symbolic form. One defining characteristic of the fantasy theme is its communicative nature. As Bormann notes, "The explanatory power of the fantasy chain analysis lies in its ability to account for the development, evolution and decay of dramas that catch up groups of people and change their behavior."

Fantasy theme analysis assumes that dramatizing communication creates social reality, and this reality can be examined for insights into a group's culture, motivation, emotional style and cohesion. When group members respond emotionally to the dramatic situation, they publicly proclaim some commitment to an attitude. Dramas also imply motives, and by chaining into the fantasy the members gain motivations. The dramatizations that catch on and "chain out" in small groups serve to sustain the members' sense of community, impel them to action, and provides them with a

30 Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision...," 399.
social reality filled with heroes, villains, emotions, and attitudes.

Symbolic convergence theory can be situated within the discipline of symbolic anthropology by noting Bormann's argument regarding the relationship of symbols and social reality. He argues that the words used in social expression are the social context, and disagrees with the idea that words arise out of the social context and are separate from it. Put differently, Bormann argues that the social context is not an objective reality that can be studied by individuals. Symbols are an integral component of the individuals who create and use them, and by discussing social context in terms of symbols Bormann avoids the dichotomy between subject and object. As Bormann notes, American sociologists would do well to see this point.

When a critic makes a rhetorical analysis he or she should start from the assumption that when there is a discrepancy between the word and the thing the most important cultural artifact for understanding the events may not be the things or 'reality' but the words or the symbols. Indeed, in many vital instances the words, that is, the rhetoric, are the social reality and to try to distinguish one symbolic reality from another is a fallacy widespread in historical and sociological

31 Symbolic convergence theory uses the expression "chain out" to mean the communication of the idea from an individual to the group, from one group to another, and from the group to the individual. It includes both the private and public acceptance of the fantasy theme or the rhetorical vision in its symbolic form.
Symbolic convergence theory, then, expresses social reality as it is experienced in a rhetorical vision. It examines the social relationships, the motives, and the qualitative impact of the symbolic worlds discovered as though they are the substance of social reality for those people who participate in the vision.

Symbolic interactionism also falls in the general realm of symbolic anthropology when it is used to describe the process of how individuals converse with symbols to understand themselves and their relationship to culture. Influenced by the work of George Herbert Mead, symbolic interactionists emphasize learned aspects of behavior that occur through social interaction. Physiological and genetic processes are considered important, but only to the extent that they affect learned responses derived from societal and group memberships. Symbolic interactionism also discusses meaning in terms of social values and explains how social values become one's own.

Symbolic interactionists assume that behavior is teleologically oriented. This means that motive refers to an actor's stated purposes and the anticipated consequences of her act, and is assumed to be due mostly to social learning.

32 Ibid., 401.
The interactionist wants to know why these specific explanations for her actions are given to herself or others, and how these explanations affect group memberships. Interactionists assume that, although their motives are entirely personal, many motives are furnished by the society in which they live.

Another assumption is that humans live in symbolic environments. Every known society has generated one or more languages that include words, phrases, and gestures that have symbolic, "insider" meaning. Language symbolically expresses particular points of view, deems certain objects important, and expresses ways of living. People live as they do because they interact with symbols, in both their public and private lives, and this interaction enables them to create their realities in a symbolic manner that can be studied. These created realities are composed, to a great extent, of myths, and symbolic interactionism describes how we gain meaning from these myths.

Summary

This chapter has examined how sport myths can be studied in order to understand how they work in the individual mind.

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and culture. Sport can be seen as a symbol system composed of myths. Yet traditional methods of study in sport dismiss or debunk myths because of the pervasive beliefs that myths are falsehoods, and attempt to replace myths with more rational, or "truthful," understandings. In so doing, an understanding based on the empirical methods of science is created, but the symbolic experience, the *motus operandi*, of the everyday sport participant is never really explained.

The traditional methods of study that are used to explain sport in an empirical, scientific sense do not explain how we gain an understanding of sport, nor are they designed to do so. Studies using the empirical methods of the social sciences objectify sport and reduce it to the abstractions belief, value, and attitude, or they relegate its symbolic aspect to a residual category through the method's failure to study it. In so doing these types of studies miss much of the richness, ambiguity, and direction provided by these symbols. As Dolgin, Kemnitzer and Schneider note, "...(w)e cannot understand the fullness of the culture of another people (or ourselves) by reducing their beliefs to a syllogism."34

Several methods in symbolic anthropology are designed to study the individual and culture in its richness and

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34 Dolgin, Kemnitzer and Schneider, *Symbolic Anthropology*, 3.
ambiguity by examining the symbols that transcend our public and private lives. These methods, as a type of symbolic anthropology, attempt to study cultural symbols to tell us something about how a culture views itself. Symbolic anthropology transcends the dichotomy created when one uses empirical, scientific methods by examining the symbolic aspects of our public and private lives and comparing how these two aspects of our lives are similar or different. In so doing it can be used to study sport, or any other cultural or personal aspect of life we experience symbolically, as a lived experience.

Several aspects of symbolic convergence theory and symbolic interactionism show them to be a type of symbolic anthropology. Both of these theories are concerned with symbols, and both avoid the dichotomy of subject and object by studying the individual mind and culture in symbolic terms. This can be seen, for example, in Bormann's argument that rejects the idea that symbols somehow represent some objective reality.

Both theories are also concerned with how symbols become meaningful to the individual and to her culture, and how the individual is related to her culture. Interactionists argue that one's environment is primarily social, and this socializing aspect of our lives has an obvious, significant impact. Both methods study how these symbols are
communicated among and between individuals and groups. For instance, symbolic convergence theory argues that ideas begin with individuals and chain out to members of a group, who, upon acceptance of the idea, take it as their own and define themselves both as individuals and as group members with the idea. Interactionists emphasize learned aspects of behavior that occur through social interaction, and discusses meaning in terms of social values and explain how social values become one's own.
CHAPTER II
MYTH AS A MEANS OF ORGANIZING EXPERIENCE

The theme of this chapter is to discuss myths as a means of organizing experience in culture. I argue that people utilize myths to explain their experiences to themselves, and that these explanations can be identified as myths by examining the characteristics of myths. In so doing myths become recognizable components of culture that are created by individuals to understand their experiences, and also are a means of creating culture by communicating one's experiences to others.

Many in contemporary culture fail to recognize how they use myths in their lives for many of the same reasons that scholars fail to study them, and especially for the pervasive notion that myths are falsehoods. This misunderstanding leads these people to believe that their culture does not have a mythology. I argue, however, that this understanding is itself a myth, and is one of the most pervasive and unexamined myths in contemporary culture. This myth leads us to understand our lives in ways that are fundamentally
different from what would be the case if we had a different understanding of myth.

My understanding sport myths assumes that myths do exist in contemporary culture. James Robertson, A.J.M. Sykes, Joseph Campbell, and Ernst Cassirer present arguments that substantiate the claim that myths are experienced in contemporary culture just as they were in traditional culture. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of culture, according to these writers, is our ability to create ourselves and our culture using myths as the symbols of our private and public experiences and understandings.

Robertson, Sykes, Campbell, and Cassirer discuss and analyze myths in culture in a way that makes them recognizable to contemporary Americans. From their arguments I develop a blueprint for a myth in order to discuss how sport myths can be recognized. I will then tell two stories that characterize particularly common sport myths: a story of the athlete-hero and a story of team players. These stories contain myths that are meaningful to Americans in many sport situations, and have become so common in American culture that they are used in many non-sport situations to explain experiences that have nothing to do with sport.
Some Brief Definitions of Myth

It is helpful to review some definitions of a myth to provide some background for my argument. James Robertson describes a myth as a narrative, a story that is meaningful to both the teller and the listener.

Myths are stories; they are attitudes extracted from stories; they are 'the way things are' as people in a particular society believe them to be; and they are the models people refer to when they try to understand their world and its behavior. Myths are the patterns; of behavior, of belief, and of perception which people have in common. Myths are not deliberately, or necessarily consciously, fictitious. They provide good, 'workable' ways by which the contradictions in a society, the contrasts and conflicts which normally arise among people, among ideals, among the confusing realities, are somehow reconciled, smoothed over, or at least made manageable and tolerable.¹

Robertson goes on to say that the story many times explains a problem, such as one's Achilles' heel, or a Trojan horse.

Very often, the problem being "solved" by a myth is a contradiction or a paradox, something which is beyond the power of reason or rational logic to resolve. But the telling of the story, or the recreation of a vivid and familiar image which is part of a myth, carries with it--for those who are accustomed to the myth, those who believe it--a satisfying sense that the contradiction has been resolved, the elements of the paradox have been reconciled.²

Robertson's definition gives several clues as to how people use myths to explain their experiences. They serve as a type of worldview that provides solutions to problems. They are patterns of behavior and belief that provide solutions of a kind to the contradictions that arise in culture. These solutions many times are beyond the power of reason to resolve, but the telling of the story provides an emotional response that somehow the paradox has been resolved.

Robertson's definition is, to say the least, comprehensive. Some explanation is needed, however, to make it manageable. For instance, when is a myth a story and when is it the attitude extracted from a story? Can it be both at the same time? When are myths "true" and when are they "fictitious?" What is the relationship between the emotions evoked in the telling of a myth and "truth?" These questions and others need clarification to explain how myths are used in the sport context.

A.J.M. Sykes states that to be mythic a story must have several defining qualities\(^3\). First, it embodies certain ideas and at the same time offers a justification of those ideas. In short, the logic of the myth is inherent in itself. Second, a myth must express abstract ideas in a

\(^3\) Sykes, "Myth in Communication."
concrete form, and it must be constructed to appeal to the emotions and enlist sympathy for the ideas expressed. Third, the subject matter of the story must offer an acceptable justification of these ideas. Therefore, the ideas embodied in the myth and the subject matter of the story must be in agreement. This agreement must appeal to the emotions of the participants. However, the actual truth or falsity of the story is irrelevant, as what is important is that the story and the ideas it embodies are accepted and believed to be true.

An example illustrates these mythic qualities in a story. Robertson tells a story of how former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger explains his "incredible movie-star status." Kissinger believes it comes from "the fact" that he had always acted alone. "Americans like that immensely," said Kissinger.

Americans like the cowboy who leads the wagon train by riding ahead alone on his horse, the cowboy who rides all alone into the town...with his horse and nothing else. Maybe even without a pistol....this cowboy doesn't have to be courageous. All he needs is to be alone, to show others that he rides into the town and does everything by himself.4

Robertson argues that the image of the cowboy riding alone is an image in American heroic mythology. It comes to the minds of Americans easily and in many variations, and it is

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4 Robertson, American Myth, American Reality, 6.
associated with many different images and ideals. It has grown from many tellings and retellings in stories, movies, television programs, history books, and children's play. Cowboy stories are a part of growing up in America for many people, and the stories are part of these experiences and are also an interpretation of them. "Almost intuitively, Americans know it explains American loneliness, independence, conviction, and the need for approval, while at the same time it reconciles some of the contradictions among those characteristics."5

A very different story about sport uses many of the same myths. When Rocky Balboa, hero of the movie Rocky, prepares to sleep the night before he fights Apollo Creed for the Heavyweight Boxing Championship of the World, he expresses one hope: that he goes the distance with Creed, a feat no man has done before. When he expresses this, Rocky conveys images of the underdog, the loneliness of the boxer, independence, the need to prove himself, and the fear of competition and debilitation. On the surface this is merely a story of one man's pursuit of victory in a brutal sport, but mythically it is a story about what it means to be an underdog, how one acts to win, what winning means, and many other myths. The movie was successful to a great extent

5 Ibid.
because it was much more than a boxing story. It communicated, on a very personal level, the beliefs and images of what it means and feels like to be in Rocky's position.

Communicating these myths in a literal fashion is difficult, but doing so by telling a story is a far different task. It is in this sense, the sense of organizing our experiences through some narrative form, that myths exist in contemporary culture. It is helpful at this point to tell a story of why many of us believe they do not.

Myth as an Explanation for Experience

As I noted earlier, most Americans do not understand what a myth is, and believe that a myth is a type of false story. Those who understand myth in this way believe that contemporary culture has somehow evolved from a reliance on myths to explain our experiences, and believe that humanity is now "rational." I argue, however, that this story of how contemporary culture should be understood is itself a myth.

Like other myths, this one is contained in a story of how myths fit into our lives in contemporary culture. As this contemporary story goes for those of us who believe that contemporary culture is "rational," a myth is usually believed to be a story of man-like gods from some ancient, dead culture. These gods purportedly performed a variety of
deeds, many of them heroic. The stories may have served some purpose or amusement, like that of a fairy tale or a fable, for these stories certainly had no basis in "reality." This is because we all "know" that no individual could perform the deeds of, say, Heracles of the ancient Greeks or King Arthur of the Middle Ages.

These old stories have no meaning to non-believers in myth, to a great extent because of their origins in a culture that is long since dead. And as the logic of our contemporary story goes, if the old mythology was correct, then that culture, or at least its mythology, would still be here and functioning. But these stories are now "merely" myths, and have no meaning to us other than that developed by historians. We even feel these ancient stories could have had no meaning to their contemporary listeners except as amusements, fables, or perhaps even curiosities. Many have a hard time believing that anyone ever believed these stories were "true" or "real."

This story, I argue, conveys several myths, myths that explain how meaningful these stories were to those who did believe them to be real, and how we should interpret these stories in contemporary culture. These myths affect our beliefs as to what is real and what is not. Ironically, our beliefs limit our ability to believe that myth is a present force in modern culture. In sum, I argue that we do have a
mythology in contemporary culture, and that it is used in contemporary culture in much the same manner it has always been used by people who tell stories to one another.

Several modern scholars argue that myth is experienced in contemporary culture in subtle and powerful ways just as it was in traditional culture. James Oliver Robertson argues that we participate in our myths just as other cultures participated in theirs:

\[...\text{when we study our history, when we try consciously and rationally to understand ourselves and our past, we tend to discount myths. We think of them as fictions, 'only stories,' 'made-up' things which have nothing to do with reason and understanding. We contrast myth and reality; the one is mistaken, unreal, false, a lie; the other is objective, understandable, real, the truth.}\]

Robertson's position is similar to that of Rosaldo and Leiter, who argue that an objectivist, impartial, rational approach to social analysis creates residual categories that ignore certain types of experiences. In this case, however, Robertson is criticizing the pervasive, cultural understanding of myth, not the scholarly approach assumed in empirical science. The results are the same, though, in that the dichotomy of myth and reality creates certain conclusions that dismiss myth as "mistaken, unreal, false, a lie."

\[6\] Ibid., xv.
Myth, however, has not always been thought of in this way, and Robertson tells a story that explains why our beliefs regarding myths developed the way they did.

Because of the pervasiveness of myths in human experience, the advocates of rationality are in a constant battle posture. Over the past two or three hundred years in Europe, and in the offshoots of European culture throughout the world, modern Europeans have attempted to see human life as an entirely rational affair, and have turned to reason and science to understand the organization of human experience. The result has been an insistence that the modern world is essentially different, that change is more rapid and more important, that our understanding of the universe and of human experience is more real and more true than that of all human beings before us.

The advocacy of reason has led to the denial of the existence of myths, in precisely the same way that the advocacy of one particular body of myths has led human beings for millenia to deny the existence...of all other bodies of myths. It is not impossible, of course, that our belief in reason and science is our myth.7

European culture is profoundly affected by the rational thought processes of the ancient Greeks. Greek philosophy sought to organize "reality" in a self-conscious, logical, and rational manner, a method of organizing experience that is conscious, dialectical, experimental, and investigative. These traits eventually manifested themselves in American culture.

Greek definitions for the words "myth," "logos," and "fable" provide some insight into the dichotomy of myth and

7 Ibid., xvi.
reason. "Mythos" in ancient Greek was used by Homer for "word" or "speech," and was differentiated from "logos," which meant a tale or story. "Logos" became a technical term of literary criticism, signifying "plot," which Aristotle held to be the most important feature of tragedy. The Latin equivalent, "fabula," signified the whole dramatic work, and its derivative is "fable." The derivatives of "logos" are attached to the sciences (the "-ologies"), and have retained their sense of importance, while "mythos" and its derivatives are associated with religion.

The influence of Christian thought also invalidated myth as a method of organizing experience. Myths were pagan according to early Christians, and therefore came to be false in the light of "true" Christian belief. Many mythologies were banned, and only because the classics were based upon fictive themes did they survive the mythophobic rigors of early Christianity. According to Harry Levin, this is where the debunking of myth begins: in the denunciation of one myth as falsehood from the vantage point of a rival myth.

In spite of its antagonistic relationship with the methods of reason, however, myth has not been eradicated as a

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9 Ibid.
method of organizing experience for several reasons. Robertson notes that myths are contained in stories, and the attraction one feels toward a good story causes myths to be more prevalent than most of us are aware. If people are telling or listening to stories, then they are in many cases communicating a myth or myths. Furthermore, Robertson notes that complex myths, especially in literate societies like ours, are not easily separable from ideologies. In sum, "If all human beings before the modern and civilized world used myths as an essential part of the structure of their understanding of their individual, social, and physical universes, then it is legitimate to assume that we use myths in the same way for the same purposes."¹⁰

Joseph Campbell takes a similar position regarding the existence of mythology in culture. He states that mythological aims and concerns shaped human experiences before the widespread use of rational thought, and continues to do so today. "Mythology is apparently coeval with mankind....for the fundamental themes of mythological thought have remained constant and universal, not only throughout history, but also over the whole extent of mankind's occupation of the earth."¹¹ Campbell believes that

¹⁰ Robertson, American Myth, American Reality, 2.
humanity's myth making tendency is one of its distinguishing characteristics, and should be used to define humanity along with the label as tool maker, thinker, doer, player, etc. He notes that, when one considers the psychological characteristics of the species, the distinguishing characteristic of humanity is the organization of life according to mythic laws, and only secondarily to economic aims and laws.

According to Campbell, humanity is predisposed to myth making because individuals, conscious of themselves as living beings, realize their mortality. Individuals explain the story of life and death by placing their mortal life in some symbolic context, and this context exists as their mythology. "This recognition of mortality and the requirement to transcend it is," notes Campbell, "the first great impulse to mythology." Along with the individual's desire to transcend her mortality is the realization that the social

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12 Ibid., 20. By stating that people seek some context in which to understand their experiences, Campbell argues for a contextual understanding of the relationship between the individual and culture. However, he leaves open the question of how this context is created, and some critics argue that he is, in fact, a biological determinist when he argues that all cultures have a propensity toward myth-making due to their psychological or genetic makeup. I choose to understand him, at least within this passage, from the perspective of historical social analysis.
group into which she was born existed long before her birth, and will exist long after she dies. She confronts the necessity to adapt herself to the order of life of the community into which she was born. The community is then thought of as a "super-organism," one that can absorb the individual, as well as offer the possibility of knowing the life that transcends death. This is one manner in which the individual is symbolically connected to the community.

Campbell states that the desire to understand one's mortality and the endurance of the social order have been combined symbolically:

In every one of the mythological systems that in the long course of history and prehistory have been propagated in the various zones and quarters of this earth, these two fundamental realizations — of the inevitability of individual death and the endurance of the social order — have been combined symbolically and constitute the nuclear structuring force of the rites, and, thereby, the society."¹³

By studying the relationships of myths as symbols of mortality and eternal community, one unravels the codes that interpret our modern rites, and provide one means of studying society.

While myth is, according to Campbell, an indispensable ingredient of culture, its particular shape is highly variable. Anthropologists have documented the variations of

¹³ Ibid., 21.
myth in different cultures. Myths grow and change according to the needs and views of the cultures that develop them, and are contingent upon the experiences of individuals in a particular culture. They are constantly regenerated, as every historical change creates its mythology.

These changes are, however, only indirectly related to historical knowledge. It seems reasonable to assume that as our historical interpretations of history change, so will our myths, yet this is not always the case. Historians have discredited literal interpretations of ancient myth since the type of proof required by historians cannot be provided by many myths. Yet many people continue to believe in their myths, ironically not realizing that that they believe in a myth in spite of the historical evidence. An example is the biblical story of Genesis. Many Christians do not believe that God literally created the universe in six 24-hour days, and that He rested on the seventh\textsuperscript{14}. They do believe, though, that this account of Creation somehow symbolizes the origins of the universe. From a mythic standpoint, it is not necessary that this story be factually correct to be believed.

\textsuperscript{14} Creationists do accept this story at face value, and argue vociferously that any other explanation for the creation of the world undermines traditional Christian values, and live according to the literal interpretation of the Bible. What is important to my thesis, however, is that they believe their version to be true, not whether or not Creationism is true in historical terms.
since myth does not need to be connected to factual events or persons. Rather this myth appears to be an aspect of Christian existence to the extent that Christians live according to the realities symbolically developed in the Biblical story of Genesis. As Bronislaw Malinowski notes, "Myth is a constant by-product of living faith, which is in need of miracles; of sociological status, which demands precedent; of moral rule, which requires sanction." A culture's mythology, then, can be thought of as a cultural experience that is as real as much as it is believed and acted on.

It can be argued that the influence of myth is more pervasive since the beginning of the twentieth century due to the belief that myth does not exist in an age of rationality. The argument for the hierarchy of reason over myth was clearly articulated by Auguste Comte, who concluded that an age of science should replace myth, and the more completely scientific the culture is, the less the reliance on myth. Comte believed that many political problems were rooted in the tendency of philosophers to disregard the facts of nature.

and society, and to rely instead on metaphysics. Comte reacted against traditional metaphysics because of its limitless assumptions and, to him, futile controversies. He gave the name of positivism to his views, and described the history of humanity in three stages. The first stage was the theological stage, when reality was interpreted through superstition and prejudice. This stage was associated with myth. The second stage was metaphysical. In this stage people attempted to comprehend and reason about reality, but were unable to justify their contentions through the use of facts. The third and final stage of humanity was positive. People would replace dogmatic assumptions with factual knowledge, and the use of scholarly inquiry in the sciences would provide this knowledge. Ultimately humanity would

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Winn, Ralph B., "Auguste Comte," The Standard Dictionary of Philosophy, Dagobert D. Runes, Ed., New York: Philosophical Library, 1983, 77. Comte argued that "Theological and metaphysical methods exploded in other departments, are as yet exclusively applied, both in the way in inquiry and discussion, in all treatment of Social subjects.... This is the great, while it is evidently the only gap which has to be filled, to constitute, solid and entire, the Positive Philosophy. Now that the human mind has grasped celestial and terrestrial physics,—mechanical and chemical; organic physics, both vegetable and animal,—there remains one science, to fill up the series of Sciences of observation,—Social physics. That is what men have now most need of: and this is the principal aim of the present work to establish." Comte, Auguste, The Positive Philosophy, Vol. 1, trans. Harriet Martineau, London: George Bell, 1896, 7-8, quoted in Cassirer, Ernst, "The Technique of Our Modern Political Myths," Symbol, Myth and
not use myths at all, but would live according to the realities of a scientifically experienced world.

Ernst Cassirer argues against Comte's position, noting that perhaps the most important and alarming feature in modern culture is the sudden rise of power of mythic thought, which can be seen in the political rhetoric and behavior of European countries in the twentieth century. He states that the preponderance of myth in modern political rhetoric repudiates the belief that contemporary culture is rational. Furthermore, Cassirer notes that scholars in ethnology, sociology, anthropology and psychology have accumulated data showing that myth continues to appear in modern culture in various and divergent conditions.

Ironically, Cassirer notes that these disciplines are practiced in a manner that assumes that human culture has outgrown its mythic age. While disagreeing with this assumption, he states that myth continues to exist in modern culture "...as a common element in human life that appears, in a similar shape, under the most various and divergent conditions...."

(Myth) is not an outgrowth of primitive mentality; it still has its place in the most advanced stages

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Cassirer, "The Technique of Our Modern Political Myths."
of human culture. To banish myth, to eradicate it root and branch, would mean an impoverishment... Yet there is no danger that mankind ever will forget or renounce the language of myth. For this language is not restricted to a special field; it pervades the whole of man's life and existence.18

Cassirer believes the principle sources of mythic thought are found in the tendency to personify things and events, and that this tendency manifests itself in human speech. Cassirer argues that we use the "language of myth" in all of our experiences, "For this language is not restricted to a special field; it pervades the whole of man's life and existence."19 Myth is an element in human culture because people are not exclusively rational, but use myths to explain their experiences. So our myth making tendency always recurs in new shapes, regardless of our belief (or lack of it) in its existence20.

Cassirer argues that, as long as people are living within a reality they understand through reason, then reason is adequate. But as soon as one's experiences cannot be

18 Ibid., 245.
19 Ibid., 245.
20 Cassirer argues that "Myth is part and parcel of human nature." 246. It is unclear what he means by "human nature," but it could be argued that his definition implies some essence to our being, either biological, psychological, or spiritual, that is mythic. This assumption about the origin of myth is problematic, but I believe his argument for the existence myth as a part of human culture is a correct one.
understood through reason, people use myths, or "magic," to explain their experiences. Cassirer argues that people use myths to explain human actions, especially the rituals of culture, and that myth as an explanation of experience can be documented through anthropological research. The desire to understand one's experiences eventually leads to two types of explanations, one method based on reason, and one based on myth that requires a special emotional stress\textsuperscript{21}.

As long as man is still confined within the narrow limits of his everyday experience; as long as he has to do with a comparatively easy situation which he can handle and master himself, he is not likely to take recourse to magic... But if it comes to more serious and difficult tasks which seem to be far beyond his individual powers, man inevitably gropes after higher and more potent means. He must go to extremes in order to cope with an extreme situation.\textsuperscript{22}

Cassirer states that human culture has not eliminated mythic elements of culture with reason, but has attempted to control mythic elements by using reason. This control is apparent

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid.}, 248-49. Cassirer uses this argument to explain Nazi propaganda before and during World War II. The emotional stress of European political tension, especially in post World War I Germany, combined with the rational desire to manipulate masses of people, led to the purposeful use of myths as weapons of war. "But here were men who acted very deliberately and 'according to plan'... The new political myths were by no means wild fruits of an exuberant imagination. They were artificial things made by very skillful and cunning artisans." 253.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ibid.}, 250.
through the constructive powers of logical and scientific thought, ethical forces, and the creative energies of artistic imagination. These forces affect myth by counter-balancing it to some extent within culture, but do not eliminate it. The increased use of rational thought can be thought of as the beginning of the state of tension between myth and reason. Cassirer describes reason and myth as formerly existing in a type of dynamic equilibrium, but in the twentieth century this balance shifted toward the mythic, which can be seen in the purposeful manipulation of Germany's mythology.

Cassirer argues that this manipulation is possible because of the relationships of people, rituals, and myth. The power of mythic thought is, in primitive cultures, manifested in the wizard, the shaman, or the sorcerer, and in modern times by the politician. This power is not in the person, however, but in the collective of the whole community that this person represents symbolically. This is especially evident in rituals in which all members of the community participate. The constant repetition of certain rituals breaks down the distinction between the individual and his community, eventually creating the group as the real moral subject where, in primitive cultures, "(t)he whole tribe, the clan, and the family are responsible for the actions of all
their members." This breaking down of the distinctions between the group and the individual can be observed during modern mass rituals, where the individual and the community operate as a single unified entity.

This shift toward the mythic in twentieth century political rhetoric relied on the emotional content of myth, and was supported by new mass rituals that effectively combined the myths of the individual with those of the community. Cassirer documents the use of rituals within Nazi Germany to unite the private and public lives of the German people, where the ultimate goal was complete control of the minds of all Germans. This was done through mass participation in new rituals, which were so effective because rituals are not individuals acts, but communal acts. "Rites

23 Ibid., 257-58.

24 Cassirer argues that the individual begins to feel a deep mistrust in his own formative and creative powers while experiencing a communal ritual, and that this experience explains, to a certain extent, how an individual accepts the communal meaning of the ritual. "Nothing is more apt to suppress our critical judgment and to break every resistance on the part of the individual than the steady repetition of the same magic formulas or the incessant performance of the same rites." 257-58. He argues that in primitive societies we find no clear concept of individuality because the whole tribe is responsible for the actions of each member. Similarly, in our modern political life, the whole nation or race is accountable for individual actions. The distinction between the individual and the community is blurred in such situations, and the beliefs of the group become the beliefs of the individual."
are not individual acts; they are always performed by a community and, in most cases, by all the members of the tribe. It is their principle effect that the men and women who are performing these rites lose every sense of their individuality. They are melted together; they act, think, and feel as a whole."25

Cassirer's argument illustrates one manner in which the individual is connected symbolically to the community. Myths accepted by the group are also accepted by the individual through the communal rituals an individual experiences, and these myths, according to Cassirer, "accompany and interpret" the rites of the culture. What is needed at this point in my argument is an explanation of what a myth is and what it is not in order to clarify my argument of how we use myths to interpret our experiences.

The Anatomy of a Myth

As I noted earlier, modern historians, and certainly most contemporary Americans, do not accept literal interpretations of myths as "real" accounts of our historical past. Yet this was not always the case. Campbell notes that before the Enlightenment myths were interpreted literally as an explanation for how one should understand both one's

25 Ibid., 256.
experiences and as accounts of the historical past, and he argues that without a literal interpretation of myth a culture suffers. This occurs because myths and mythic symbols were used to support the moral orders, the cohesion, vitality, and creative powers of culture, and the loss of myths undermines certain aspects of culture. "With the loss of (myths) there follows uncertainty, and with uncertainty, disequilibrium, since life, as both Nietzsche and Ibsen knew, requires life-supporting illusions; and where these have been dispelled, there is nothing secure to hold on to, no moral law, nothing firm."26

I disagree with Campbell's argument on two counts, but I still believe his argument warrants attention because it provides insights into areas of our lives where myths are used as explanations for our experiences. My first disagreement centers around Campbell's assertion that myths can be lost, or are in danger of being dispelled. Cassirer notes, however, how myths recur in new shapes, which would allay Campbell's fears on this count. Secondly, Campbell's argument implies that myths have a function in culture, one of support, cohesion, and the fostering of creativity. I disagree with this argument because it implies that myths

have a life of their own, that they are an essence to our humanity, and without this essence we are somehow the lesser. I do not disagree with the idea that culture facilitates support, cohesion, or creativity. Rather I believe that people create culture and cultural aspects by communicating with each other on various levels, rather than discovering and using mythic essences in order to function in culture. Even though I disagree with Campbell's interpretation of myths as functioning essences, however, his description of how people create and use myths to explain their experiences warrants attention.

Campbell describes myths as having four functions, the first of which is to solve problems that deal with the wonder of the universe. Campbell argues that myth provides the means by which the mystery of the world is made available to us. "Myth opens the world to the dimension of mystery, to the realization of the mystery that underlies all forms. In

27 With regard to his concept of essence, Campbell goes on to argue that, "We have today to learn to get back into accord with the wisdom of nature and realize again our brotherhood with the animals and with the water and the sea. To say that the divinity informs the world and all things is condemned as pantheism. But pantheism is a misleading word. It suggests that a personal god is supposed to inhabit the world, but that is not the idea at all. The idea is trans-theological. It is of an undefinable, inconceivable mystery, thought of as a power, that is the source and end and supporting ground of all life and being." Ibid., 31.
short, if a culture loses its sense of mystery then that culture ceases to wonder." 28

Campbell's second function of myth in culture involves a cosmological dimension, the dimension with which science is concerned. While traditional culture uses magic and ritual to answer questions regarding creation, modern culture uses science to do the same thing. Viewed in this manner, Big Bang theory is similar to the Creation myths of many cultures: it is a story we use to explain how the universe began, and where each person fits within this story. Science, or more particularly theoretical physics, provides a meaningful answer in modern culture to questions of cosmology.

Campbell's third function of myth is a sociological one, that myth supports and validates a certain social order. 29 He notes that myths vary from place to place, but provide for the social order of each culture by performing certain


29 Rubin Gotesky argues along a similar vein, that the role of myth is for purposes of social conservation. "Every culture will create and value its own myths, not because it may not be able to distinguish between truth and falsity, but because their function is to maintain and preserve a culture against disruption, disappointment; and they preserve institutions and institutional process." Gotesky, Rubin, "The Nature of Myth and Society," *American Anthropologist*, 54(1952) 530.
conservative functions of social preservation. He also argues rituals are one means to this end, as socializing myths are accepted during "the impressionable years" through culturally accepted rituals. Through rites a young person is "turned from an amorphous nature product, prematurely born, into a defined and competent member of some specific, efficiently function social order."31

Campbell's fourth function of myth is pedagogical, of how one learns to live as a human. A culture's myths teach one how to live by socializing children, and it provides both the method and the specific information that is taught in a culture. It teaches one, "... how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances."32

In sum, rather than seeing myths as functioning in certain social areas, I argue that people experience realities in four aspects of their lives, and use myths as explanations for these experiences. Campbell's argument is insightful in that it discusses our experiences in terms that relate the individual to the community. This occurs whenever one realizes "what a wonder the universe is, and what a wonder you are," by questioning the shape of the universe and

30 Campbell, "The Importance of Rites."
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
wondering where one fits in it, by living as an individual in a community, and by perpetuating one's community by raising children. The question that arises at this point is How do people experience myths as explanations?

Myths have certain characteristics that allow individuals to communicate with others in certain, specific ways. One characteristic of a myth is that it purveys attitudes, beliefs, values and stereotypes. According to A.J.M. Sykes, the term myth can mean the entire myth complex, including the story in which it is contained, and the attitudes, beliefs and values the story embodies33. Secondly, myth can refer particularly to the narrative or story element in the myth complex. The story element is important because the emotive effect of the myth depends upon it, which causes the artistic element in the story to be stressed.

Embodied in the story element of a myth are certain attitudes towards people and objects, or as Sykes calls them, interests34. The story element stresses the attitudes that the listeners ought to hold towards these interests. It also embodies certain beliefs that justify these attitudes. These beliefs may be rational, arising from a reasoned base, or the

33 Sykes, "Myth and Attitude Change."
34 Ibid.
beliefs may be emotive, based upon emotional responses. Both types of beliefs may be found together in a myth, or a single belief may have both rational and emotive elements. Value judgements are implicit in the attitudes described in the myth and in the justifications offered for these attitudes. A system of values is used in this process that is referred to whenever the myth is subsequently invoked, and Sykes calls these systems stereotypes. Stereotypes tell an individual how certain situations will be patterned, and are acquired by one "ready-made" from one's particular class or group. They express the social appraisals and attitudes that the individual has acquired as a member of a particular class or group. One might think of a stereotype as a "packaged" set of attitudes, beliefs and values.

When the characteristics of a myth are described in terms of attitudes, beliefs, values and stereotypes, the concept of a myth seems easy to analyze. But the explanatory power of a myth is not so easily understood. This aspect of the myth is contingent upon the subjective coherence of its components, yet cannot be reduced to these components. Myths convey the perception of an entire story, while analysis describes the parts that make up the story. However, the sum of the analyzed parts of the story do not necessarily convey a perception of the whole. Myths effectively explain our experiences because individuals have the ability to perceive
the whole of the myth as it affects their perceived world. Sykes notes that, while it takes a fair amount of training to reconstruct a myth from the analytical presentation of its various parts, over the course of a lifetime the average person learns how to easily communicate using a method that deals in whole, complex, living myths. As Sykes notes, "Within certain limits we 'see' what our interests, beliefs and values determine us to see....through its various constituent elements myth plays an important part in determining how an individual will cognitively structure a particular situation."35

Myths are communicated as a complete entity, a characteristic that both accounts for the strength of the myth and makes it difficult to analyze. As Marshal McLuhan notes, a myth is the mode of simultaneous awareness of a complex group of causes and effects. "Can we, perhaps, say that in the case of a single word, myth is present as a single snapshot of a complex process, and that in the case of a narrative myth with its peripety, a complex process is recorded in a single inclusive image?"36 Myths are communicated simultaneously as a whole package, which gives

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35 Ibid., 324.

them an advantage over information that relies on lengthy description.

A myth, then, is easily understood as a whole "truth," and people deal with myths from the time they are born, which accounts for their skill in interpreting them. A.J.M. Sykes states that most individuals are not trained "... to interpret the rational analysis of an involved situation and even fewer are capable of making such an analysis for themselves." Analysis is used primarily by academics to understand larger concepts that defy explanation in their complete state. However, analysis defeats the purpose of examining a myth that works in a holistic sense. Sykes states that most people can, however, understand myths. Even if they cannot readily create myths piecemeal themselves, they can use myths as a means of conveying their perceptions of situations to others.

Another characteristic of myths is that they provide the appearance of "truth" in an experience, and this "truth" is a justification for the attitudes, beliefs, values and stereotypes that are inherent in the myth. As Sykes notes,

...the myth expresses the truth about the situation more clearly and concisely than any factual and objective description of that situation could do. The reason for this is that in the myth the situation will have been shaped and given a

coherent form. The actual situation in itself may be highly complex and almost incoherent; the 'facts' about it may be vague and even contradictory. (One's) perception of such a situation is emotional rather than rational; they have not tried to shape the situation into a form that can be understood rationally, and therefore they cannot describe it to others in rational terms. Any attempt to describe such a situation rationally...may be quite incomprehensible. In the myth, however, this situation has been shaped artistically, and, although the appeal may be largely emotional, it is cast in at least a semblance of a rational form. The various contradictions are eliminated to create coherence.  

Anthropologists have argued that another way of understanding how a myth expresses "truth" is that it is not known to be false. In other words, one does not argue whether or not a myth is "true," because the "truth" of a myth is understood and taken for granted. This explains one reason why myths are so value-charged. A myth is valued because it is "truth."

Whereas a myth "works" in a given culture because it expresses some "truth" to its participants with more coherence than a logical argument, the strength of a myth is

38 Ibid., 334.

Gotesky argues that the interpretation of myth as "truth" is documented by several anthropologists. "Proof that anthropologists generally attribute to myth the characteristics of (a) being believed— not known to be false— and (b) being value-charged, is not needed. The writings of Taylor, Frazer, Boas, Malinowski— all of whom are quoted by Bidney— provide overwhelming evidence that these students included both characteristics." Gotesky, "The Nature of Myth and Society," 523.
derived from its emotive character. Strength is contingent upon the force of the emotions aroused when it is experienced, and Sykes notes that myths are used, consciously and deliberately, to arouse emotional responses. People communicate emotions directly by using myths, and Sykes notes that one who uses a myth is often more concerned with communicating an emotional response than with communicating a logical argument.40

Myths do not "merely" convey information, but a whole complex entity of emotions and perceptions. In order to generate an emotional response, people make use of the emotive language that characterizes myths. In so doing people communicate in a manner unavailable to rational users of language. Myths also convey perceptions, which Sykes argues are inseparable from emotions, but in practice it is the emotional aspect of a myth that is dominant.41 The emotions communicated in a myth are strong, definite, and easily conveyed, so that within a story a myth can convey both the perception of a situation and the complex of attitudes, beliefs, and values that were used to structure the situation. Myths are good in terms of communicating perceptions that cannot be precisely structured, that are

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
flexible and imprecise, but they are limited in some respects. They are not suitable for conveying precise and specific perceptions, which are better communicated using scientific, rational language.

Sykes also states that most people deal with concrete situations, or operate from their own experiences. It is therefore possible for a listener to identify with the teller of a story because they both had similar experiences of a concrete and particular nature. This common experience allows individuals to respond emotionally to the myth. "In fact a myth, if it is to be accepted as such, must be designed to cause identification and to arouse emotional responses. It is obviously difficult to cause identification or to arouse such emotional responses if one is dealing in terms of abstract generalisations."42 When one communicates using myth, then, one implicitly shares experiences, evoking a response from the listener that validates the myth in its entirety.

Myths, in addition to their use by people to explain their everyday experiences, are also used to explain our ritual experiences. Like myths, however, the place of rituals in contemporary culture is not at first apparent since many people associate them with primitive cultures. We

42 Ibid., 19.
do have our rituals, though, which can be seen when one observes wedding ceremonies, graduation ceremonies, and the playing of the National Anthem.

Other examples are easily observed in sport, beginning with the phrase, "Play Ball!" Rites of valorization (the marking of game space in the gymnasium, stadium, etc., and the passage of playing time which runs separate from "real" time); rites of passage (T-Ball to Little League, to Pony League, to High School, to College, to the Pros, to retirement); rites of conspicuous display (trophy cases in gymnasiums); rites of conspicuous consumption (Dodger Dogs, $.10 Beer Nite); rites of exchange (swapping hats and jerseys); rites of competition (the game itself); and rites of devalorization (the final out) are all examples of ritual in sport43.

A ritual, then, can be understood as one way of acting out, or of experiencing, a myth, and this experience has several characteristics of its own. Robertson, for instance, defines a ritual in terms of its dramatic and evocative nature.

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Ritual is an abstract drama, an acting out—through generally accepted motions, positions, words, architecture, clothing, furnishings, and choreography—of social ideals, stories, myths, and mysteries which are significant to a particular society (the significance is a matter of the particular myths and ideals of that society). Because ritual generates strong emotions, it leaves its communicants ("actors," "players," and "spectators") with a very strong sense of the reality of its drama. Once a ritual is created and accepted, it will generate a mythology of its own—logical explanations, accretions of stories, proofs of the efficacy (i.e., the reality) of its drama—which in turn becomes part of the mystery, the significance and the social reality of the ritual.44

Emotions, community, and reality are experienced in dramatic form in a ritual, and the logic or proof of the ritual is the mythology behind it. Robertson also notes that rituals are usually associated with religion, but that ritual does not need to be religious in the customary sense. Rather it must be significant, "a visible acting out of our beliefs and ideals which at the same time are real to us."45 It is in this sense that sport is a ritual. "The games of the ancient Greeks," notes Robertson, "were rituals, but they were also religious. The games of modern Americans are rituals, although they are secular. They are significant dramas which Americans believe are an important part of the realities of

45 Ibid.
their lives and their society."46 In a word, Robertson notes, rituals matter, and this characteristic shows their significance perhaps better than any other.

Myth Summarized

The anatomy of a myth can be summarized from the above argument to examine how we use them to organize our experiences. My argument reveals certain consistent themes that are used by Cassirer, Campbell, Robertson and Sykes to describe myths. Myths are "packaged" in and intimately connected to stories. They are believed to be "true," and are the models or paradigms people refer to when they try to understand their world and its behavior. In its most expansive form, a system of myths or a mythology provides a worldview for a people in a particular society, an illustration of "the way things are." This system provides good, 'workable' ways by which the contradictions among people, ideals and confusing realities in a society are somehow reconciled, or at least made manageable and tolerable. Participating in a myth provides a satisfying sense that the contradiction has been resolved, that the elements of the paradox have been reconciled.

46 Robertson, American Myth, American Reality, 250.
Myths are replete with evocative language that convey attitudes, beliefs, values and stereotypes. The emotive effect of the myth depends on this type of language since it embodies both the beliefs and the justification for these beliefs. In sum, the logic of the myth is inherent in the myth itself. These beliefs are communicated in a whole, complete package that is difficult to analyze, and this package provides the appearance of "truth" about a situation that is the justification for the beliefs in it. Since myths are believed to be true they are value charged, and they are valued because they are "truth." This accounts for the ability of a myth to communicate emotions, which in practice is the most prevalent ingredient communicated. Myths do this well because they are associated with an individual's concrete experiences, and allow the communicants to share the belief that they also share a common experience. This develops a sense of community and a bond between the communicants of the myth. Much of this occurs as people share certain rituals, and myths serve as an explanation of these rituals.

Two Sport Stories Studied Through Myth

The anatomy of a myth discussed above can be applied to stories about sport, and in so doing one can discuss how sport myths are used to explain what these stories mean. Two
sport stories can be told that convey myths about heroism and teams. These myths are communicated in many sport contexts, and an examination of how they are communicated provides insights into how other myths are used as explanations.

Perhaps one of the most popular stories about an athlete-hero is the movie Rocky, which begins with the hero, Rocky Balboa, fighting in a small, delapidated ring. From this setting one might believe that Rocky is a second-rate fighter with no future, but one can see that he is something more when he defeats his opponent after having been butted in the head.

Rocky, we find, is a "nice guy" who lives in a lower class neighborhood in Philadelphia. He has a down-to-earth, self-deprecating style of humor that he mumbles from one encounter to the next. Rocky works as a muscle man collecting for a loanshark, but he is too nice for this job, which can be seen when he avoids breaking the thumb of a man who is late paying his debt and gives him another chance to repay the loan. Rocky is characterized as an empathetic human being, a lower class urban American, yet one senses that he is destined for better times.

After his victory Rocky is confronted by Mickey, the club coach, who describes Rocky as a "tomato," a fighter who has the ability to be good but has some moral weakness that does not allow him to live up to his ability. When Mickey
believes that Rocky should retire before he is seriously hurt, Rocky is portrayed as a losing fighter without a coach. One suspects, however, that Mickey has misjudged Rocky when Rocky's luck turns for the better.

At this point in the story Apollo Creed is introduced. Creed is modeled in the image of Muhammed Ali, only he is more "Aliesque" than Ali was at his very best. He is flamboyant, articulate, poetic, businesslike, and a handsome black athlete, characteristics that highlight the differences between the two fighters. With the loss of a qualified contender, Creed develops the idea of a club fighter to challenge for the Heavyweight Championship of the World on January 1, 1976. His idea is to give a local boxer a chance at the top boxing spot in the world during the Bicentennial, symbolizing America as the land of opportunity. Rocky is therefore portrayed as an All-American boy, one with the Alger-like opportunity to rise to the top through dint of his own hard work and good fortune.

Rocky realizes the opportunity placed before him and accepts Creed's challenge. However, he does not have to do this alone as his future wife, Adrian, Butkus (Rocky's favorite dog) and Adrian's brother Pauli offer their support. Rocky allows Mickey to coach him in an emotional scene that portrays Rocky's strength of character and moral descency, and Rocky is freed physically and mentally to train.
The training scene in *Rocky* is one of the great sequences in athletic cinematography. Rocky prepares to fight Creed by consuming a half dozen raw eggs prior to his 4:30 AM training run (a tremendous feat in itself), sparring, and ultimately sprinting up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art as the sun rises over Philadelphia. Rocky follows the old fashioned formula for success by earning his personal victory through hard work. The fight is exciting as Creed underestimates Rocky's strength and courage, and Rocky achieves his goal as the fight goes the distance.

The story of Rocky Balboa's quest for the Championship comes with many myths about how one gets the chance to succeed, of how hard work pays off in success, of how an opponent behaves when facing a hero, of how people treat a hero, and how a hero deals with others. As the myth goes, if one is honest, works hard, and trusts himself, then one will be successful. The ending of the story, even though it is fictional, provides the proof of the myths. These myths are conveyed through the characterization of Rocky when he is portrayed as having a certain, undefinable quality of greatness that shows through his lower class surroundings, when he is portrayed as having the strength of character to trust his instincts when others doubt him, and by showing that he works for his goals and achieves them.
These myths occur in many other stories of athlete-heroes as well, and Michael Oriard has described a morphology of the athlete-hero that embodies many of these myths. In short, the sport hero lives the following tale:

The athlete-hero is a prowess hero, not relying on trickery or morality to succeed in his struggles. His roots are in the middle class, and there is little or no mention of his parentage. The hero leaves a small, safe environment for a more intimidating one, and usually attaches himself to a coach as a father substitute and/or a girl in a chaste, romantic love. The actions of the hero are important to the community, and the hero's friends are loyal and devoted. The antagonist embodies vices antithetical to those of the hero, and is occasionally a noble adversary, but never as noble as the hero. The hero receives accolades for his prowess, from foes as well as friends. His humor is a necessary part of his character, but it is of a simple type. He is usually an underdog, undergoing any number of personal adversities, yet these problems are usually not his fault as his ability can never be seriously questioned. There is usually a mystery to be solved or a rescue to be made prior to the main event. Finally, the hero competes in the event and achieves his greatest triumph. The hero's triumph brings benefit to others such as money, championships or fame.47

Oriard, *Dreaming of Heroes*, 30-37. The athlete-hero has characteristics that are similar to those of the heroes of Western civilization. Michael Oriard developed a morphology of the American athlete-hero in literature that is similar to Joseph Campell's morphology of the classic hero in myth. Both morphologies are abstracted from narratives of oral and written form. Oriard notes that, "The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation--initiation--return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. 'A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the
One can analyze the myths in both Rocky and the morphology to explain why this story in particular, and athlete-hero stories in general, are meaningful to many that experience them.

The myths contained in the both the story and the morphology are believed to be true. It is believable that, by being an honest and nice person, one will get the chance to "go to the top." This is a story that has been told many times before in many different contexts, and even has a label: the "Horatio Alger" story. By working hard and remaining true to ones self and goals, one's friends will ultimately see one's inner goodness.

These characteristics of an athlete-hero come in a whole, complete package. When Rocky fights Creed, or when any hero meets his enemy in the climax of the contest, the ambiguities of what is good and what is are reconciled in the outcome of the contest. We "know" that good will vanquish evil because that is how the myth goes, and we are emotionally satisfied with this outcome because it both embodies stories we have heard before. This outcome contains elements of "truth" of sport contexts we have previously

experienced—in many cases in other stories about athlete-heroes. These experiences are "concrete" in the sense that they are as real as our own, personal experiences of hearing those stories or playing in similar contests can be. These experiences have been shared in the communal rituals of sport, in the contexts of the stories we have heard in public, and the stories we tell ourselves to explain our experiences.

We use myths to explain our experiences in team sports as well, and one story that deals with the concept of team is the film Hoosiers. He hero of this story is the coach, who is brought to a small town in basketball-tradition-rich Indiana to rebuild a struggling highschool basketball team. The coach is portrayed as a authoritarian, a man who understands the game in one way: each player will sacrifice his individual goals to play for the team.

Complicating the story is the behavior of one of the players and the acting principal. The athlete is a natural basketball talent that will not play because of the manner in which the old coach left the team. The athlete believes the old coach was somehow wronged, and will not allow his talents to be exploited by a new coach. The principal believes that sport serves, or should serve, some educational purpose, and that this young athlete has some academic talent that will not be served by a bitter conflict regarding his basketball
talent. In order to promote his academic career, she encourages the athlete to stay away from basketball. Both of these characters place obstacles in the path of the new coach that must be overcome in order for the team to win.

Fortunately the coach has the ability to convince all those that place obstacles on the path to the team's success to see that his way is best, and in so doing he molds the entire community into a team. The athlete decides he will not play unless the new coach, who is threatened with the loss of his job because he will not yield to the individualistic traditions of basketball within the community, is allowed to continue with his team-oriented style. The principal also relents in her academic mission, and ultimately is won over by the coach's charm. The coach argues that the team and the town must join together to win the state highschool basketball championship, and only together will they able to do so. Ultimately they achieve this goal, after withstanding many challenges both on and off the court.

The story is not only about teams, but also about heroes. The two aspects of sport are not exclusive. Yet one is heroic within the context of being on a team, and the relationship of the individual to the group is of critical importance. Team sports represent certain relationships in American culture: the subservience of the individual to the
team effort for the common good, the emphasis on middle class, and the stifling of individuality by corporate America. Concepts of self sacrifice, dedication to a community, the acceptance of the goals of the group over those of the individual, a certain kind of attitude that is humbling, and other characteristics are also evident.

These ideals are not necessarily the opposite of the hero. Paradoxically one can be a hero because one is a team player. As Robertson notes,

The logic of the team-sport ritual brings the imagery of the machine and of humans organized into machine-like teams together with ideals of heroism, individual work, and skill acquisition. The sports hero teaches himself the skills he needs—in his own back yard, the sandlot, on the street, at the playground. He works hard at that job. And his heroism magnifies his idiosyncrasies, makes him more individualized in dress and behavior both on and off the team, even in his relationships with his teammates. It is in both the specialization and the uniformity of the team that baseball—and football and basketball—idealizes the life of Americans in industrial cities....The games also celebrate the individual, but they make it visible, as well as emotionally and psychologically clear, that the individual cannot even play the game without the team, without the community.  

The characteristics of Robertson's morphology of a team and the team player are evident in Hoosiers. The basketball team becomes a machine capable of doing what the sum of the abilities of the basketball players cannot. The star athlete

is first seen playing on a dirt court, shooting baskets with uncanny accuracy, and is portrayed as having an unusual sense of confidence in his ability. He is held in awe by both his teachers, the principal, and even the entire town— but not by the coach. The coach makes it clear that no player is greater than the game, that the game cannot be played supremely unless it is played as a team. Ultimately it is the entire community, symbolically represented by the team, that wins the championship game, and the winning of the game is symbolic, mythic proof that the myths of team are true.

*Hoosiers* conveys these myths of teamwork particularly well. The coach's role is important because he is able to convey these images of team, not only to the basketball players but to the entire community as well. The coach understands the basketball world in terms of teamwork, and he is able to convey his understanding to both of these groups. The story includes the audience to the extent that those participating in the story "buy into" the reasoning of the coach, and believe that the way to success is to operate as a team. This belief comes to the audience in the "package" of the story as an illustration of "the way things are" in the real world. The contradictions among the people in the town, the principal and the star athlete are reconciled in their common goal of winning the championship, and by winning all of the communicants in the myth are left with the satisfying
feeling that everything has been made right within the entire
town by doing it the coach's way. Those who have experienced
playing on a team recognize many of the relationships of the
characters in the story as "real," and these relationships
are reinforced by others stories that have dealt with teams.
The rituals of teamsport have reinforced many of these
stories, adding to the sense of reality. For those who
participate in the telling of the story, the efficacy of the
myths is in the team's success.

Summary

Myths do exist in contemporary culture, and are used to
organize our experiences just as they were to organize the
experiences of those who lived before our "Enlightened" age.
Indeed, the idea that myths are false is a myth, and it can
be argued that our belief and use of reason is part of our
mythology. My explanation of myths reveals that they are not
falsehoods, but that they facilitate communication between
people and promote our own understanding of our experiences.

Our proclivity towards drama leads us into symbolic
involvement in community, and myths facilitate this symbolic
involvement and make it understandable. Myths provide
"truth," an understanding or explanation of life that we use
day to day, and we believe in these "truths" as if they are
absolute. We are emotionally attached to this truth, which
paradoxically shows that we are not the objective creatures we believe ourselves to be. Myths form the worldview referred to by people when they try to understand the world and its behavior, and provide the commonalities between individuals and their culture. They provide good, workable ways by which the contradictions among people are reconciled, and provide emotional satisfaction when this is done.

Myths are used many times to explain experiences that deal with the relationship of the individual and the community. These explanations, as Campbell argues, deal with mortality, the wonder of the existence of the universe, and the relationship of the individual to the community. Myths change as a culture changes, yet these changes are only indirectly related to the history of a given culture. But these myths are no less believable because of the lack of historical authenticity since many times they symbolize an explanation. In many cases myths are believed because reason is not a viable method of explanation, and these explanations are ritually acted out which communally reinforces them. This communal nature of ritual ties the individual to the community, and reinforces the myth.

The sport context is as affected by this method of organizing experience as any other aspect of our lives. We experience these explanations in the stories we hear and the sport experiences we act out, and use these explanations as a
means of understanding and creating the realities of the sport context. These experiences are conveyed in stories, complete with attitudes, beliefs, values and stereotypes, and are accepted as a whole, complete package. Myths convey the appearance of "truth" about an experience, and as such are value charged which accounts for the strength of the explanation. This strength manifests itself in the emotional content of the language that is used in conveying the myth, which is experienced by all of the communicants in the myth. People identify with the myth because it relates well to their own concrete experiences.
CHAPTER III
SPORT MYTH AND CULTURE

This chapter reviews how contemporary scholars use myths to explain the sport experience. I argue that these studies use myths as an explanation for how sport is related to culture, and that these studies show how individuals use myths to explain their understanding of their personal sport experience and how this experience relates to the sport context. In so doing these scholars engage in a type of cultural criticism similar to that which was discussed in the previous chapter. Like Cassirer, Campbell, Sykes, and Robertson, these students of sport argue that people use myths to explain symbolically the relationship between themselves and their community, and in so doing symbolically explain their experiences.

Barthes and Magnane, Lenk and Voigt have in common the view of "sport as a microcosm" in culture. In this approach the sport context somehow exists separately from "mainstream" culture, and sport myths are used to explain the sport context and its relationship to mainstream culture. The
individual is seen as one who experiences both the "reality" of culture and the "microcosm," and the experience in one interprets, and is a reaction, to the other. Barthes and Magnane argue that sport serves as an "escape" from mainstream culture. Individuals react to the oppressive nature of modern culture by participating in some way in a sport experience. Voigt argues that sport mirrors mainstream culture, and that a study of sport myths, particularly baseball myths, allows one insights into both cultures. I argue that these approaches transcend many traditional dichotomies used in an empirical science approach. More importantly, however, these studies address how one uses myths as symbols to explain their private and public sport experiences.

Novak discusses sport as an institution that fills the same social roles in modern culture that religion once did. Novak, in contrast to Barthes and Magnane, Lenk, and Voigt, does not see sport as a microcosm of culture but more as a spiritual center around which individuals build understanding and community. There is no separation between sport and culture since sport is culture. Sport is seen to emanate from a deep impulse that is highly religious in nature.

John Gibson does not specifically address myth. He deals with how contemporary culture values results over performance in sport, and develops a framework that explains
how sport should be understood in terms that value results and performance more equally. In so doing he discusses cultural standards that define sport as a practice. I argue that this framework can be used to discuss sport myths as conveyors of standards of excellence in sport that are both public and private in much the same way sport myths convey beliefs, attitudes and values.

Sport Myths As Symbols and the Concept of the Microcosm

Hans Lenk has used the methods of philosophy to examine how people use sport myths. Lenk's work was influenced by Roland Barthes and G. Magnane, who accept the "sport as microcosm" theory\(^1\). Implied in this position is the assumption that the sport context is separate in some way from the "real" world, or mainstream culture. Barthes and Magnane state that sport represents symbolic elements of culture for spectators, and argue that the vicarious experience of sports contests compensates for everyday frustration and monotony. They believe the individual feels alienated from modern culture, and since sport is easily understood it allows the individual to come into contact with

essential aspects of unofficial culture. Sport myths are a projection system that explains the world, and spectators vicariously identify themselves with the values of this "unofficial" culture. Myths are used to provide an explanation of the world to the sports fan in a manner that is meaningful.

According to Barthes and Magnane, the average individual is considered to be estranged from "official culture." Official culture can be interpreted as the cultural standards and conventions established in the "real" world. This individual then searches for another culture in which she can live and find meaning through values she is certain she will be able to grasp. Sport is one such "unofficial" culture, and significant sporting movements become a special "set of signs." Sport culture contains a mythology by which the average individual, who is considered relatively uneducated, takes revenge and finds a type of indemnity for the real disadvantages of fate. Barthes and Magnane consider sport culture to be a reversed image of reality, and through unofficial culture one finds "gross compensation and a source of confidence." Magnane emphasizes that the sporting mythology would fulfill the function of offering frustrated people in a precultural state an access to ontology.  

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2 Ibid., 435-36.
The relationship of official culture and unofficial culture is that sport, as unofficial culture, exists as a microcosm of society. Sport as a microcosm is a "mirror" of culture, and compensates for the inadequacies of the hegemonic, yet inadequate, official culture by releasing one from the workaday world into another world created as a reaction to these inadequacies. There are two problems, however, with the microcosm thesis. First, at which point does "mainstream" or "official" culture end and the sport context, or any other context one creates, begin? Second, this thesis implies a conscious use of sport as a means of escape. It is arguable, however, that the sport context is created for, and explained by, other reasons, such as health, community, citizenship, or phenomenological reasons. To reduce sport to an institution of compensation for alienated individuals also dismisses the thesis that play or sport exists for its own sake. While Barthes and Magnane offer

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3 See Gerber, Ellen, "The Ideas and Influence of McCloy, Nash, and Williams," Proceedings of the Big Ten Symposium on The History of Physical Education and Sport, Chicago: The Athletic Institute, 1972, 85-100. McCloy represents the use of sport as a means of developing the health of the individual. Nash represents the use of sport to best use one's leisure time. Williams believed that sport encourages an individual to be a good citizen. All three theories use sport for some other means than simply playing for fun.

4 The two works taking this position are Huizinga, Johan, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture, Boston:
some valuable insights as to how sport myths operate as a symbol system, their analysis of how people experience sport is one dimensional when it explains the sport experience only from the perspective of the alienated in culture.

Lenk disagrees with Barthes and Magnane's assessment of the sport experience as an escape. Lenk notes that the efficacy of myths cannot be reduced to only one unique compensation function, and believes that sport is more than a "catch-all" for the inadequacies of modern culture. Like Barthes and Magnane, Lenk begins from the position that sport myths are a set of signs created by individuals to explain how the world operates. He believes that sport serves a cathartic function, where the sport participant experiences some catharsis in a dramatic fashion replete with emotion, archetypes, and symbolism. In this respect modern day athletic sport is a drama that displays effects analogous to the ancient Greek theater. Lenk believes, however, that sport has its origin in a non-religious situation. It offers the opportunity to be vicariously "carried away" into archetypical struggles between opposing roles within restricted frames of reference, and relieves the sport

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aficionado of other social and personal concerns. "The sport roles symbolically reflect his own problem situation or, at least, some of his problems of tension, stress, anxiety, the dynamics of winning and losing, etc."\(^6\)

Lenk states that archetypes are available to spectators that determine both norms and behaviors. These archetypes are of top level athletics, and are mythic. The relationship of the "real" world, which can quantify elite athletic performance, and the "mythic" world, which explains elite performances in mythic terms, allows for the vicarious association of the spectator with the god-like elite athlete. Sport archetypes are ideal abstractions that cannot be found in the world of labor, and represent the "pure essence" of achievement behavior. They are standardized and evaluated through symbolic incarnation, and this process renders the possibility of strict measurement and visibility, and thus of simple understanding. Lenk notes, however, that this process is an abstraction, and should not be carried to an extreme. Were this to happen the average fan or athlete might lose sight of the correlations, similarities, or analogies that correspond to everyday life.

Lenk provides some insights to the process of using myths to explain one's reality when he discusses sport myths

\(^6\) Ibid., 436.
from the perspective of the athlete. Lenk argues that athletes are affected by the same stories and myths that affect the rest of culture. He notes that athletes strive to materialize abstract cultural goals, live up to fictitious values, and abide by normative conventional rules in order to accomplish self-determination and realization, self-differentiation, and self-confirmation, even to the exclusion of biological needs. This process is guided by the myths that constitute the worldview of the athlete, and this worldview is peculiar to the culture in which she lives. The athlete, then, is not operating in a distinctly different world of sport, or a microcosm, as much as she is creating a set of experiences based on prior experiences within her culture.

It is not surprising that Lenk would disagree with Barthes and Magnane on this point when you consider that Lenk was a world class athlete and coach. He was a gold medalist in rowing in the eight oared event at the Rome Olympics in 1960, and was coach of the famous (in the rowing world, anyway) "wunderachter" (wonder eight) at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. His experiences in sport are from the perspective of athlete and coach, where Barthes' and Magnane's experiences with sport are from spectator, academic, and political perspectives. Lenk therefore explains the reality of sport from the perspective of the athlete participant. None of these perspectives, however, provide the explanation of the sport context. Rather they explain sport from a variety of perspectives that reveal insights into how a particular individual uses myths to explain his experiences. The reality created by that individual is contingent upon his experiences, including the perspectives of athlete, coach, spectator, and academic.
Lenk explains the popularity of sport by noting that it fulfills the symbolic function of representing reality to all who participate in it, both spectator and athlete. "Sport as a symbolic microcosmic representation of archetypical role dynamics functions as a modern 'myth'; only this additional aspect, refining the microcosm thesis on a semantic level, seems able to explain the fascination of competitive athletics." Lenk believes the addition of the concept of myth to the "sport as microcosm thesis" makes for a more comprehensible and accurate representation of sport in culture. In saying this he attempts to overcome the limitations of the thesis that sport is only a microcosm of "reality" and mirrors the social processes. By taking this position he also critiques the exclusively social scientific approach to the study of sport.

The position of sport as a microcosm of society is also used by H.J. VanderZwaag, who states that the significance of sport for the individual is derived from interpretations and projections of the social processes. Lenk states that if one takes this position too literally then too much emphasis is placed on representation, that sport represents some other

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8 Ibid., 438.

9 VanderZwaag's argument is described by Lenk in Ibid., 437-38.
characteristic of "reality." The microcosm thesis neglects the normative character of sport, the mythical, the archetypical, and the abstractive elements. Lenk states that a philosophical interpretation cannot be totally resolved in an empirical, scientific description or explanation because, in this case, empirical science is too general and vague.

Sporting life is not only normal life in a nutshell; it does not represent the focus of everyday existence. Sporting life represents a model, but the model is in part an ideal model of a pointed and contrasting life featuring some essential traits and dreams in 'mythical' symbolization and exaltation. Sport as a 'mythical' model of symbolized, competitive role behavior is governed by archetypical norms. From the spectators' point of view, this 'mythological' interpretation may provide a valuable partial explanation, or at least a plausible illustration of the fascination of top level athletics. Projections, worlds of symbols, relative detachment from daily life, microcosm, identification, and dramatic staging all concur in the above 'mythological' interpretation and may serve to explain the peculiar position of athletics between usual behavior and abstract ideal patterns. Thus, the 'mythological' encompasses the somewhat modified microcosm thesis in a meaningful manner.\textsuperscript{10}

For Lenk, then, sport is not a microcosm of society as much as it is a combination of normal behaviors and idealized archetypes created by spectators and athletes. This argument explains one type of athlete who experiences sport as his only reality, or, put differently, when one's profound experiences occur in one context.

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Ibid.}
In an introspective account of himself as a rower, Stephen Kiesling describes the Copernican revolution in his life between school and rowing: "Sex, I had been told, is a sublimation of rowing, but, for that matter, so was everything else. Once one is beyond a certain level of commitment to the sport, life begins to seem an allegory of rowing rather than rowing an allegory of life." Kiesling is describing how sport becomes the archetype for all other aspects of his life, and that this archetype is used to determine normal behaviors. Lenk's description of how sport myths can be used to explain one's experiences can be used to describe and predict what happens when one becomes immersed primarily in one type of experience: the experience of one context, if it is profound, becomes the measure of the others. One might conclude from this argument that to differentiate between sport as a microcosm and culture is problematic since the two are contingent upon the quality of one's particular experiences.

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Sport, Religion, and Myth

Michael Novak argues that the myths used to explain religious and sport experiences shares several similarities. He notes that religious myths are concerned with the search for a perfect reality and the problems of mortality, and that sport myths can also be used to explain these experiences. For many people sport myths are now used instead of religious myths to fulfill one's symbolic need for spiritual fulfillment. Novak argues that, for a significant part of culture, sport both provides a sense of community and teaches one how to behave, and that the myths that are used to explain our sport experiences are now also used to explain these spiritual and pedagogical experiences.

For Novak, sport is not a religion in the same way that Methodism, Presbyterianism, or Catholicism is a religion. He argues, however, that these are not the only types of religion, that there are secular and civil religions as well. The institutions of the state are what Novak calls civil religion, and Americans have sacred documents (the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, Washington's Farewell Address, and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, etc.) that constitute the "gospel" of secular religion to help

guide and inspire. Novak argues that the influence of religion has waned in contemporary America, and that other institutions are now used by individuals to fulfill public and private needs. Sport now has a significant impact on many public and private lives, and the myths that accompany sport have became more meaningful as they are used to explain an increasingly important cultural institution.

Novak argues that the relationship of sport and religion is older than the ancient Olympic games. Sport festivals were established to honor the gods, and this tradition continues today although the gods we honor are now secular rather than sacred. Sport ceremonies have always included the state and the church, and the myths that explain these ceremonies similarly overlap. Rituals that have traditionally been studied in the religious context are clearly evident when one examines the sport context, and can be seen in rites of valorization, passage, conspicuous display and consumption, exchange, competition and of devalorization. Baseball on the Fourth of July and football on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day are just a few examples. Novak claims the similarities between sport and religious rituals are present because sport is inherently religious. "I am saying that sports flow outward

13 Falassi, *Time out of Time*. 
into action from a deep natural impulse that is radically religious: an impulse of freedom, respect for ritual limits, a zest for symbolic meaning, and a longing for perfection."¹⁴

Novak goes so far as to say that sport offers the most available and meaningful source of rituals in America today. It provides nourishing popular arts accessible to all our citizens, while religions are sectarian in spite of their universal aims. As a result the symbols and liturgies of traditional religions do not unite as many as the symbols and liturgies of sports do. In this respect sport participants utilize a mythology that is more publicly available than that of contemporary religion. Furthermore, Novak claims that the liturgies and rituals of the democratic state, such as civil holidays, elections, parades and public speeches, run very thin. Sport therefore provides a more readily available communal ritual for Americans than either the traditional sacred or contemporary secular religions.¹⁵

Novak documents his argument that sport is a secular religion by noting that it begins with ceremonies that are performed for the many by a few "surrogates." Sacred vestments are employed and rituals are prescribed, customs develop, actions are highly formalized, illicit behaviors are

¹⁵ Ibid., 284.
distinguished from licit ones, professional watchdogs supervise formal correctness, moments of silence are observed, certain days and hours are consecrated (sacred time), and heroic forms are provided as models. By describing the sport context in religious terms Novak highlights how sport is organized and dramatized in a religious manner. His argument follows from his premise that the origins of sport, like the origins of drama, lie in religious celebrations. Novak's reasoning for accepting sport as an important cultural institution is pragmatic, however, when he describes how the rituals of sports really "work." They "... serve a religious function: they feed a deep human hunger, place humans in touch with certain dimly perceived features of human life within this cosmos, and provide an experience of at least a pagan sense of godliness."

Novak, like Lenk and Campbell, argues that religion fulfills the mythic roles of calming the timeless fears of Western civilization. "Religions make explicit the almost nameless dreads of daily human life: aging, dying, failure under pressure, cowardice, betrayal, guilt. Competitive

16 Ibid., 29-31.
17 Ibid., 20.
sports embody these in every combat."18 He also notes that sports, like religion, recreate symbols of cosmic struggle. The athlete symbolizes the struggle of life in which human survival and moral courage are not assured, and the spectator identifies intuitively with this struggle. To this extent sports are not mere games, diversions, or pastimes since, according to Novak, their power to exhilarate or depress is far greater than that.

Novak's argument reveals much about how we experience winning and losing in sport. To say "it was only a game" is the psyche's best defense against the cosmic symbolic meaning of sports events, especially when one loses, which symbolizes death. "To lose symbolizes death, and it certainly feels like dying; but it is not death." 19 Novak's argument adds perspective to an infamous quote about losing made by several college and professional coaches: "Losing is worse than death because you have to live with it." This quote is misleading when it implies that losing as a symbol and losing a basketball game correspond precisely with losing one's life, an obvious absurdity when one can usually find another game in which to play. But it is insightful to the extent that in

18  Ibid., 30.
19  Ibid.
the world of college or professional sports one's livelihood really does depend on winning and losing. This saying is symbolically closer to the "truth" of professional sport experiences than many would at first realize.

At the other extreme of taking winning and losing too seriously is the treatment of sport as "merely" a game. Novak notes that if one treats sport as "merely a game" then one is unable to explain the intensity of those who are involved in it, who explain their experiences in very serious and emotional terms. Novak argues that sports journalists and academics are examples of this misunderstanding. They attempt to debunk sport myths and sport heroes in an effort to promote the "important" characteristics of economics and politics in sports. Novak, however, argues that sport is perhaps more real than the "real" world.

The political myths and stories reported on the news may have less substance than the sports account of the local team's fifty-seventh loss this year. Who tells a more mythic story, the White House correspondent giving us sixty seconds on the president's day, or the local radio announcer calling the play-by-play, his sympathies clearly with the locals? The statistics of the business reporter may be less reliable than the seasonal statistics on the pitchers, hitters, fielders. Which world is more 'real'?

Reality is determined by more than that which is "serious" and that which is "play." It is determined by the attitudes

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20 Ibid., 25.
of those who create the context in which they are participating, using the "truths" that make their particular experiences understandable. From this perspective play is as serious as politics, or vice versa.

This argument reveals that the meaning of sport to spectators depends on how those spectators create and participate in their sport experiences. Novak argues that there may be spectators at a sports event who come to be merely entertained, just as some people come to church to hear the music. But in many cases a participant is not "merely" a spectator, even if one does not walk among the clergy. At a liturgy, a term Novak uses to describe a ritual of public worship, elected representatives perform the formal acts, but all "true" believers put their hearts into the ritual. It is considered inadequate, even blasphemous, to be a mere spectator. In this respect sport and religion have in common the attention of their denominations. Believers in sport do not go to sports to be entertained anymore than the truly religious go to church to be entertained.

Novak argues that this type of commitment separates spectators from those merely seeking entertainment, that sports fans might go to plays and dramas to be entertained but not to sporting events. He believes that sport differs from entertainment in that sport is far more "serious" than the dramatic arts. Sport is much closer to the primal
symbols, metaphors, and acts that identify the essence of that which is human\textsuperscript{21}. As such, sport is much more powerful, and perhaps more frightening. For Novak sport contains the metaphors of the mysteries of youth and aging, perfect action and decay, fortune and misfortune, and strategy and contingency. "Sports are rituals concerning human survival on this planet: liturgical enactments of animal perfection and the struggles of the human spirit to prevail."\textsuperscript{22}

It is my belief that Novak errs in his argument only when he elevates sport to a level higher than that of other human activities. The dramatic arts are as "serious" to its aficionados as sport is to its spectators. However, this does not discount Novak's characterization of sport as an activity that facilitates high levels of commitment. Sport, religion and drama are all mythic to the extent that their participants explain their activities with the intensity Novak has described.

\textsuperscript{21} Novak is a Christian theologian who's understanding of reality is clearly influenced by the concept of a higher spiritual reality. His concept of essence is developed from this position. However, I do not believe his argument regarding the seriousness and importance of one's sport experience is undermined by this position, nor his argument as to how these experiences are created.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 28.
Novak concludes his argument by noting that Americans are naive about the symbolic and mythic necessities of the human experience, and deny these necessities and regard them as unenlightened. In our efforts to live an objective, rational life we repress those portions of our lives that are mythic. As a result symbol and myth flourish in all aspects American culture, and sport is no exception. Novak notes how ironic it is that Americans, who do not believe in myth, are saturated in myth, a condition that has occurred because Americans keep telling themselves that myths do not exist. These stories explain our rationality, and the supposed opposition of rationality to myth excludes the obvious from us. "We the pragmatic, nonmythic, purposive doers of the world, are as myth-devouring as any people on the planet. Outsiders recognize how thick in myth and symbol our lives are. Reality does not force us to be as we are..." Sport is an experience imbued with myth to explain many cultural

23 Novak describes the manner in which mythology exists in America: "Heroines of cinema like Marilyn Monroe, heroines of rock like Janis Joplin, and political heroes of every type of movement live luminously in our minds and lives. We have invented mass media as the most enormous engines of myth the world has ever seen, and we transmute each person, event, and idea that enters their giant maw into 'image.' Our Lions' Clubs, moon shots, participatory democracies, political movements, causes, issues, trends, and celebrities are saturated with mythic materials." Ibid., 284-85.

24 Ibid., 27
experiences, and, according to Novak, by examining its myths it can be seen as both our chief civilizing agent and our national art form. It tutors and imbues Americans with a sense of self and society.

**Baseball: America's Mythic Pastime and the National Character**

David Voigt interprets both American baseball and American culture by studying the myths that explain both experiences. Voigt uses Jacque Barzun's statement, "He who would know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball, the rules and realities of the game...," as both a justification and an apology for interpreting American culture through a sport. Voigt notes that the study of American culture usually takes place in the "serious" fields of esthetics, philosophy, economics, or politics, but that these disciplines many times do not describe critical aspects of American culture. He argues that many in these disciplines dismiss sport as a mechanism that can be used to study culture. "To take the path of sports is to be off the track."

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Voigt compares this methodology to a more traditional one, and notes that a rational analysis of baseball using the methods of history and sociology reveal much about the sport. However, he also notes that he cannot ignore the evocative characteristics of the myths that explain baseball to those who participate in it, and uses the baseball strike of the 1890s as an example of how these myths affected strike. The story he tells describes the positions of those for the strike, those against it, and those caught in the middle, in terms that make the event a powerful emotional experience composed to a great extent of the attitudes and beliefs that are based on myths.

While the strike raged, volleys of rhetoric thundered from the positions of both sides. Thin on fact, much of it was confusing, reflecting general bewilderment over each other's motives. Union-busting, power-seeking, salary gouging, trouble-making, interloping, electioneering ... these expletives described the motivations. Accompanying all this were expressions of horror over the apocalyptic consequences of what was said to be American baseball's first strike. In the player demands some critics saw a reflection of a broadly pervasive dog-in-the-manger attitude that supposedly sapped the moral strength of the nation. Others predicted the death of American baseball, while still others predicted a rebirth.27

Voigt notes that this story is heavy with opinion and emotion, but that this characteristic of both the story and of the baseball strike challenges the student of sport. From

27 Ibid., 131.
the attitudes of the participants in the strike one can find what baseball meant to Americans in the 1890s. Voigt concludes, "Although serious students are appalled at the pile of emotion and myth, such materials are useful for understanding both baseball and America."28

Voigt states that American attitudes are affected by myths, and that these myths constitute a worldview or a "national character." The national character is dynamic and changing, and there are no permanent standards of normality or deviance. It is both individual and social, contradictory and polytypic in its traits, everchanging and never stable. This dynamic portrait of the national character is mirrored in major league baseball. For instance, owners of major league teams have learned to survive and to profit in a rapidly changing America by keeping pace with changes in both the national character and other institutions. By studying changes in American baseball one can also see the broader patterns of changing behavior that is typical of American life in general29. The attitudes of the players and fans toward baseball reflect attitudes Americans hold toward other aspects of their lives.

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
Voigt argues that these attitudes are derived from myths, and that myths are an integral part of the human psyche. "Man is a myth making animal and myths are among his most basic needs. Myths are used to support all of his social institutions, including American baseball. If a primary task of social science is to disenthrall man from myths that no longer 'fit,' the student of sports will not lack employment." By "disenthrall" Voigt seeks to explain the meanings of myths significant to those who participate in baseball. The myths that harm the game should be removed, and those that are beneficial should remain. Players and spectators can use their new understanding to criticize and improve their relationship to the game.

One aspect of the national character Voigt relates to baseball is our nationalistic tendency. He argues that baseball has affected and been affected by myths of American nationalism. Nationalistic myths explain manifest destiny, economic growth, freedom, independence, territorial expansion, the quest for national symbolic unity, resistance to integration, and the promotion of Jim Crow practices, and these myths are also used to explain the development of

30 Ibid., 27.
baseball in its formative years. These myths are still used to explain baseball experiences in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{31}

Baseball has been described as America's national game, a description that identifies both America and baseball in mythic terms. This myth can be attributed to Albert Goodwill Spalding, who created it to promote baseball and his economic interests in the game. Voigt states that the concept of baseball as the national game was "our invention by immaculate conception," and became one of the most hackneyed phrases of that age\textsuperscript{32}. Writers and fans came to believe the myth of the national game both because of Spalding's efforts and the cultural attitudes toward the developing nation. These beliefs can be shown by an alliterative description of the virtues of baseball that tells us much more about Spalding than it does about baseball, a sport that is imbued with the following qualities:

the exponent of American Courage, Confidence, Combatism; American Dash, Discipline, Determinism; American Energy, Eagerness, Enthusiasm; American Pluck, Persistency, Performance; American Spirit, Sagacity, Success; American, Vim, Vigor, Virility.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 77-129.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 83-84.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
Furthermore, baseball was reportedly imbued with the ability to create manly Americans, a necessary characteristic for the acceptance of the game in late nineteenth century America. As Spalding put it, "Baseball gives ... a growing boy self-poise and self reliance. Baseball is a man maker." The virtue of manliness was used to create positive attitudes toward baseball, a sport that was considered a child's game in the early 1800s. Once manliness was associated with the game the way was paved for adults to participate. In sum, myths that were used to explain baseball as a child's game were no longer used in the late 1800s. Instead myths were used to explain baseball as a manmaker.

Performance, Results and Myths

John Gibson has questioned the manner in which modern culture values excellence in contemporary culture only as winning, and in so doing reveals that the performance aspect of sport is largely ignored. I argue that many of contemporary culture's attitudes and beliefs about sport are


contingent upon myths that explain the relationship of performance and results. Performance and results exist in a means-ends relationship where results are the product end of sport, or the win, while performance is the existential awareness of the sport experience and context. Gibson argues that, while the goal of a contest is to win, the exclusion of the performance aspect perverts the value of the performance as a private act. He does not explicitly deal with sport myths, but his model can be used to describe standards of excellence, perceptions, attitudes and emotions that are communicated in sport myths. I argue that sport myths are one means of communicating the standards of excellence from one individual to another within the sport context.

Gibson's model re-evaluates the dichotomy of results and performance. He begins with Alasdair MacIntyre's concept of the virtues in a social context, but he rejects MacIntyre's Aristotilian basis and substitutes Jergen Habermas' "communicative action," Richard Rorty's "conversation of philosophy" or Drew Hyland's "stance of responsive openness" to develop a post-modern basis that describes sport as a conversation between the individual and his culture. This enables Gibson to remove Aristotle's essentialism without

rejecting MacIntyre's social framework, and the resulting relativistic model values sport performance on par with the results of the contest.

Gibson's model is based on three levels of social grounding: the concept of a "practice," the concept of the narrative unity of a single life, and the concept of a tradition. "Practice" is defined by MacIntyre as

...any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to and partly definitive of, that form of activity with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended.37

Gibson notes that a practice is distinct from the skills one uses in a practice. "(K)icking a soccerball is not a practice, but the game of soccer is. Planting seeds is not a practice, but agriculture is. Conducting an experiment is not a practice, but the investigations of all sciences are, along with the practice of medicine, music, and art."38 He differentiates between the simple skill integral to an activity and the way one lives as a practitioner of that skill.

37 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 187.
38 Gibson, Performance vs. Results, 129.
Gibson does not explain, however, how one acquires the standards of excellence that evaluate the skill or the practice. Nor does MacIntyre explain how one acquires these standards, other than to say that it happens.\footnote{Gibson and MacIntyre do not discuss the manner in which one obtains cultural standards because they are more concerned with the development of their model regarding the standards of a practice. At this stage of their argument this concern is immaterial. In both arguments, however, it is implicitly understood that one communicates with one's culture, and that these standards are somehow shared.}

A practice involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods. To enter into a practice is to accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them. It is to subject my own attitudes, choices, preferences and tastes to the standards which currently and partially define the practice. Practices...have a history: games, sciences, and arts all have histories. Thus the standards are not themselves immune from criticism, but nonetheless we cannot be initiated into a practice without accepting the authority of the best standards realized so far...If, on starting to play baseball, I do not accept that others know better than I when to throw a fast ball and when not, I will never learn to appreciate good pitching let alone to pitch.\footnote{MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, 190.}

It is my belief that one method of obtaining the standards that determine excellence occurs through the communication of stories that explain the practice. Gibson's work is valuable in that it develops a framework that describes sport in culture as a practice: a communal
activity are... these stand these stand given in the story of the myths held by individuals which one subsequent explains standards... Gibbon argues external goods as in the practice of goods in a variety of an interesting done a part acquisition through... or fame. The conversa... and this occurred in the practice...
activity that has standards of excellence and is valued for these standards. Both the standards and the belief that these standards are valuable can be communicated together in the stories that explain the sport as a practice. One's attitudes, choices, preferences and tastes can be affected by the myths that are exchanged, and once accepted by the individual the standards of excellence are the "truth" to which one compares one's performance. These standards are subsequently experienced by the new practitioner when he explains and evaluates his performance relative to the standards of excellence that describe the practice.

Gibson states that an individual acquires internal and external goods when one experiences a practice. Internal goods are those that can be had in no other way but through the practice. External goods, on the other hand, can be had in a variety of ways separate from the practice. An example of an internal good would be the feeling one has after having done a particularly difficult job very well, or the acquisition of a type of knowledge that has been earned through hard work. An example of an external good is money or fame. The valuation of internal goods occurs both in the conversation one has with the community and with the self, and this conversation embodies the standards of excellence in the practice. The reward is the good feeling of having
personally experienced the practice to the standards that are also accepted by the community.

MacIntyre defines a virtue as "an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods." Virtues, standards, and internal goods are components of a practice, and all of these components can also be explained in myths that are used to describe sport as a practice. They are communicated among the practitioners in the conversations that create the social context of sport.

Gibson notes that a practice alone proves unable to provide a basis for the virtues, and that an overriding conception of the "telos" of a whole human life is needed for the basis to exist. He builds a case for the conception of a human life as a narrative unity within a tradition, and this narrative overcomes the social obstacle of modern life being divided into separate realms such as work/leisure, public/private, corporate/personal, and youth/middle/old age. "Each segment has its own norms and modes of behavior, thus the distinctiveness of each area is emphasized and not the unity of the life of the individual who passes through those

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41 Ibid., 191.
sections." He also notes the philosophical obstacles that arise both from analytic philosophy, which views human action atomistically, and from existentialism, which sees the self as something totally separate from the roles that the individual plays. Gibson overcomes these limitations by using the narrative of one's life so as to see oneself as more than an accumulation of roles, and notes that this method of understanding self is more familiar than it initially appears in that this method has played a key part in the cultures that are historically predecessors of our own.

The narrative concept of self characterizes behavior with respect to the intentions and settings in which behavior occurs. More importantly, though, is that a narrative unity can explain behavior and provide a way to judge it. Through the narrative behavior becomes meaningful. "The unity of an individual life ... consists in the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life. The quest for the good life becomes the quest for the best way to live out that unity and bring it to completion." The quest represents the concept of the narrative unity of a single life, "the telos of which

42 Gibson, *Performance vs. Results*, 137.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 139.
is to search for the good life for man, which is itself the good life for man."\textsuperscript{45}

The quest in sport can be represented by the myth of the athlete-hero. One lives the life of an athlete, utilizing an understanding of the virtues to behave in a manner that makes possible a decisive victory in one's given sport, and the victory brings benefits to others such as money, championships or fame. Gibson would argue, however, that the decisive victory is not merely winning the game and gaining the associated external goods. Rather the victory would be the self knowledge gained in the process of living the sport as a practice, or the internal good of living the life as an athlete as defined by the practice. More importantly for Gibson, though, is that the narrative unity of an athlete's life is the connecting thread between one's intentions, behaviors and understanding of what constitutes the athlete's sport as a practice. Athletes come to know what the narrative unity of their lives are through the stories they tell each other, through sport films and sport literature, and through their own sport experiences.

Gibson's concept of a tradition links the individual to the larger scheme of the community through the narrative. "Good and virtue are not to be exercised just as and for the

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.}
individual... A living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, partly about the good of that very tradition. Tradition relates the individual to the social context in which the practice takes place by establishing both a starting point and the context for the quest. Many traditions are rooted in the rituals that surround sport, and are explained by the myths that accompany them. The first pitch of a baseball game on opening day, the Rose Bowl, the giving of one's shirt to the winner of a rowing race are all rituals that are meaningful in the context of a tradition. One knows how to behave in such a situation and understands what the ritual means.

Gibson's three stages can be communicated among those who use myths to explain sport as a practice. The stories exchanged between these people in a sports practice are used to create the context of the practice, communicate the standards of excellence that define the practice, allow the athlete to identify himself as a practitioner, and connect the athlete to the community of athletes and the community as a whole. Sport myths can be used by practitioners to provide a type of grounding though which the conversation of sport can be communicated between athletes and to themselves.

46 Ibid., 141.
Summary

The arguments of Barthes and Magnane, Lenk, Voigt, Novak and Gibson have several characteristics in common, most notably the use of symbols that relate the individual to culture. The myths used to explain the sport context provide an explanation available to large parts of culture, and sport is seen as an experience that can have a significant impact on the individual. The approaches to this experience vary among the writers, so the interpretation of individual experiences also differ. But all view the relationship of the individual to the sport context in the symbolic terms of myth, and these myths can be used to explain one's sport experiences. All of these writers use sport myths as a means of cultural criticism to explain the sport context in the same way that Cassirer, Campbell, Robertson and Sykes use myths to explain the self and culture.

Barthes and Magnane consider the average person to be estranged from official culture, and believe that that person uses sport to escape from this culture into an artificial world that is somehow more meaningful. Sport myths are used to explain this world, and through them the individual finds "gross compensation and a source of confidence."

Through

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47 Lenk, "Fascination with Top Level Sport."
this explanation the individual is symbolically related to both official and unofficial culture.

Lenk disagrees with the idea that the sport experience serves as an escape from culture, but does believe that the sport participant experiences some catharsis in a dramatic fashion that is explained by sport myths. Modern sport is seen as a drama that displays archetypical themes that are experienced by the individual, where sport roles symbolically reflect the individual's situation. The spectator and the elite athlete share explanations that explain their different sport experiences, many of which are used to explain both the sport context and other aspects of culture. In this respect they are a community consisting of a common explanation. Lenk argues that one's understanding of self and culture are contingent upon the explanations used, and that self and culture are intimately related. In so doing he explains how one might see reality entirely in the terms of sport.

Novak argues that for many people sport has replaced religion as a means of providing a sense of community and teaching one how to behave. In so doing he explains how the individual uses sport myths to symbolically understand his or her mortality and the search for a perfect reality, an understanding that is still provided by organized religions but also by other secular institutions. Sport is seen as a viable means of accomplishing the search for self, and as an
activity that springs from some inner essence of our being it is particularly well suited to this task. Since sport is publicly celebrated in a manner that is similar to religious rituals it also provides a means for creating community. Novak goes so far as to say that sport offers the most available and meaningful source of rituals in America today, and as such is a liturgy that unites Americans in a way that no other modern institution can.

Voigt uses the myths we use to explain baseball to understand culture. He argues that this is as justifiable a method of understanding culture as other traditional academic methods, and also that traditional methods of understanding sport dismiss much of the evocative and experiential aspects of sport. He shows how American cultural attitudes are manifest in the decisions made by baseball executives and spectators, and how these attitudes are affected by the sport myths that explain the contexts in which sport decisions are made. In so doing he describes American culture and baseball in terms that identify both as creations of people that use sport myths to explain their experiences both within and without sport.

Gibson's model of sport as a practice provides an explanation for how standards of excellence are developed and communicated. These standards are accepted by the individual when she chooses to live her life as a practitioner, and what
this means is discussed within the traditions of her culture and is communicated through the narratives that are part of that culture. I argue that the narratives are in part the sport myths that are used as explanations for our experiences in the sport context.
CHAPTER IV
SPORT MYTH AND SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

All of the writers discussed in the previous two chapters argue that myths are used by the individual to explain his experiences. Campbell, Cassirer, Robertson and Sykes describe how the individual can use myths to symbolically explain his relationship with culture, while Barthes and Magnane, Lenk, Novak, Voigt and Gibson describe how the individual can use sport myths to symbolically explain his sport experiences and the sport context. While these studies discuss myths as cultural symbols, however, none of them deal explicitly with how one obtains meaning from myths as symbols, of how one uses symbols to develop a sense of self, or of how one creates culture and reality using symbols. In this chapter I will discuss how the theory of one scholar, George Herbert Mead, attempts to do just this.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Symbolic interactionism is also known as social interactionism, social behaviorism, and social psychology. In this Chapter I will refer to these theories simply as interactionism. Lindesmith and Strauss note, "...there are three rather separate
Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism is one method of describing the process of how we make our experiences meaningful. He argues that this process of developing meaning and understanding occurs through the conversations we hold with ourselves and with the community. His theory can be thought of as a myth: a story that symbolically explains how we gain an understanding of self and community. As such it does not reveal the one "true" way of understanding the relationships between symbols, the individual, culture, sport and reality. Rather it is a story that is meaningful because of the way it relates these particular symbols and places them in some context. I use this theory to describe how one's sport experiences can be understood as a conversation between the self and the sum of one's past sport experiences. Subsequent experiences are interpreted in light of these explanations, which are also used to create the reality of the sport context.

approaches to social psychology as reflected in the actual work of sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists." Each discipline has to a certain extent developed its own terminology, but for the most part all of the fields follow the same train of thought. See Lindesmith, Alfred R. and Anselm L. Strauss, Social Psychology, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968.
The History of Symbolic Interactionism

Interactionism was developed as an explanation for human behavior in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by pragmatist philosophers Charles Cooley, John Dewey and W.I. Thomas, George Herbert Mead, and others. Pragmatists, like philosophers of other persuasions, were influenced by several ideas in the nineteenth century. Darwin's theory of evolution had a significant impact on the development of interactionism. Anselm Strauss notes that,

Evolutionary theory contributed such social-interactionism ideas as: (a) emergent evolution (with humans acting at a "higher," more complex "level" than other species), (b) communication as a central feature of human relations, and (c) the possibilities of rational control in directing societal evolution.

In an argument that describes the philosophical attack on formalism, Philip Smith argues that Charles Darwin had a profound impact on philosophical inquiry. "(Darwin) discouraged speculation that was not controlled by detailed empirical study. To a large extent because of his work, philosophers of all persuasions have come to the conclusion that the capacity for expansive and comprehensive thinking does not result from any special gift." Mead represents this position through his reaction to formalism and the resulting theory of the development of the self and community through communication. Smith, Philip L., Sources of Progressive Thought In American Education, Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1980, 17.

Pragmatic philosophers like John Dewey and George Mead, who influenced later social interactionists, reacted against idealistic philosophy, but took from it several assumptions:

(a) an essential characteristic of man is his self, and (b) man is related to his environment via the mediation of self and self-reflexive action. From idealistic philosophers like G.W.F. Hegel, the pragmatists also borrowed the idea of societal change as evolutionary, with individuals implicated as social beings in the evolutionary process.4

Strauss also notes that sociology and anthropology reflected evolutionary notions of stages of societal development. Societies were said to progress from the simplest toward the most developed. "The idea of culture was an especially important one in anthropology, and sociological thinking was strongly colored by the same idea."5

Pragmatists assumed these principles, and interactionists in turn accepted pragmatism and developed a theory that explained the concept of the human mind in a way that transcended several philosophical problems6.

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4 Ibid., 279.
5 Ibid., 279.
6 Smith summarizes Mead's renown by noting that, "(Mead) was, and remains today, a seminal figure in the philosophy of the social sciences. His renown can be attributed primarily to his brilliant and effective use of the concept of action in explaining the origin and nature of the human mind. He assumed the existence of what he called "the world that is there" and proceeded to show how our capacities to think and to feel evolve
Interactionists assumed that our experiences are real, and sought to understand human nature and behavior through the methods of experimental science. In this manner the human mind was observable and could be studied, which overcame the formalistic problem of the mind existing in some objective reality. As Smith notes, "Mead was trying to undermine formalism by explaining mentality...as a natural consequence of interacting natural events."7

Furthermore, interactionists were also opposed to deterministic theories of behavior such as biological determinism, cultural determinism, reductionism, and stimulus-response theories. Smith goes on to note, "...it was as much Mead's intention to avoid nominalism, especially positivism, the view (James B.) Watson was so anxious to promote."8 These theories, summarized here as variants of behaviorism, tended to regard introspection as a nonexistent phenomenon since it could not be observed and studied. Mead sought to widen behaviorism to include the introspectively observed phenomena of consciousness9. Interactionism was

7 Ibid., 123.
8 Ibid.
developed, then, as a theory of behavior that has its base in the experienced world, yet regards introspection as real and important. In this regard it attempts to transcend the extremes of a purely mental philosophy and a reductionist, deterministic philosophy.

Interactionism Defined

An important aspect of interactionism is the role of communication in understanding behavior. Mead rejected stimulus-response theory as too simplistic, and sought to expand behaviorism to include introspection and consciousness. For interactionists, stimulus and response are meaningful only when viewed as aspects of communication, and they cannot be studied outside the context of the social process in which actions occur. Mead believed that individuals do not react merely to stimuli, and this was
where he considered behaviorism to be in error. Behaviorists study only the final, overt stage of the act. By limiting their focus to that which is only observable, behaviorists miss the private stage, which is the idea of the act. Interactionists define an idea as the early stage in an ongoing act directed toward an environmental goal, and stimuli are purposefully selected to this end. This means that individuals are agents who control their own destiny and not passive biological receptacles of stimuli who are connected meaningfully to events at some later time. Ultimately the individual and the environment influence and construct each other through a communicative process, and mind develops from this dynamic condition.

Actions occur within this communicative process. Mead claimed that the initial phase of the overt, observable stage of an act is a gesture, and this gesture allows others to


11 Ibid. Smith describes Mead's account of the form and content of mental life as proceeding through a series of stages. In the first stage two or more individuals become involved in a common task, and each makes physical gestures that are eventually seen as signs of what to expect next. In the second stage of mental development human organisms acquire the capacity to recognize their own gestures, and this capacity generates a mechanism of control. The third stage is reached when we learn to generalize from particular responses, and the fourth and last stage occurs when the self becomes a member of a community. Smith, Sources of Progressive Thought.
become aware of the intentions of the initiating communicant. However, this does not necessarily mean that communication is taking place.

The rudimentary situation is a conversation of gestures, in which a gesture on the part of the first individual evokes a preparatory movement on the part of the second, and the gesture of the second organism in turn calls out a response in the first person. On this level no communication occurs. Neither organism is aware of the effect of its own gestures upon the other; the gestures are nonsignificant.\textsuperscript{12}

Communication takes place when the gestures are significant, that is, when both communicants are aware of themselves and how their actions are having an effect upon each other. Each must have knowledge of how the other is going to respond to the act which is in process, and at this point the gestures become significant symbols.

Actions are considered to be organized temporally, and it is because of this that rational conduct is possible. The final phases of the act, which are observable as behavior, are present as imagery or ideas during the initial phases of the act. Since the act is a process, and the individual is conscious of the consequences of the act, then the individual can adjust the act while it is in process to obtain the desired consequences. Usually several alternatives are possible during the course of the act, and the individual can

\textsuperscript{12} "Mead, George Herbert," \textit{Encyclopedia of Philosophy}, 231.
best select the alternative which will obtain the desired consequence. It is this connection of means to ends that makes rational conduct possible. Mead defined the individual as a social, symbolic being when he connected the role of the other individual to this process. The individual who initiates the communication process must be able to place him or herself in the role of the other:

Where organisms use significant symbols, the role of the other individual controls the ongoing act. In advance of our completion of a social action, we anticipate the response of the other individual. Since our behavior is temporally organized, the imported role of the other may cause us to select a course of action that is different from what we originally intended.13

The ability of an individual to take the role of the other toward its own developing behavior is what Mead called "mind." Reflexivity is the ability of an individual to reflect upon herself, and is critical to the development of mind within the social context. "With reflexivity the social act is imported within the individual and serves to alter the person's ongoing acts."14

At this point one can argue that Mead's theory of interactionism is as deterministic as those schools of thought he criticized unless he can show that some freedom of

13 Ibid., 232.
14 Ibid.
thought and creativity exists outside the cultural ideas existent in the role of the other. Mead accomplished this by stating that an individual carries out an internalized conversation between two roles, the "I" and the "me." The internalized role of the other, described above, is the "me." The "I" role is the capacity within an individual for spontaneity, and is expressed when the individual changes her ongoing response to the "me." "Individuality and originality arise from the inner conversation between the 'I' and the imported role of the other. An inner forum comes to exist, consisting of a dialogue between the 'I' and the 'me.' This inner rehearsal of projected actions constitutes introspection, or thinking."15 This conversation is by definition a process, and once again emphasizes the importance of communication. Freedom and creativity are maintained, and the pitfall of determinism is avoided. The individual is not limited to the forms, ideas, attitudes, or myths, existent in culture. One can create through the process of thinking new ideas and correspondingly reshape the cultural environment.

15 Ibid.
Sport Myth and Interactionism

The form and content of mental life is explained by interactionists as the communication of signs. Important to this dissertation is that this communication occurs through the exchange of symbols, and the symbols that I discuss are sport myths. These symbols are created and shared in the process described above, and Mead argued that sharing a common understanding of these symbols with others is a condition not only of communication but of intelligence itself.

(Mead) recognized that neither (communication or intelligence) can attain high levels of refinement without the benefits of a system of artificial signs, or what we more commonly refer to as a "system of symbols." We are constrained in our use of actual signs by physical and practical circumstances. With symbols we can transcend these limitations. We can express facts and relations even in their absence and can achieve levels of clarity, exactitude and abstraction otherwise unreachable. What results is not only an increase in our understanding, but further development of our capacity to understand, that is, mental growth.16

Interactionists believe that we live in a world mediated by symbols, and emphasize that humans are languaged beings. Strauss notes that groups develop special languages, jargons, or lingo to refer to important activities and objects17.

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16 Smith, *Sources of Progressive Thought*, 126-27.
17 Strauss, "Sociological Theories of Personality."
This has important implications for the sport experience in that the symbols that are communicated are in many cases sport myths. Those who participate in sport understand the slang, ideas and attitudes that are part of the context, and these aspects of the sport context are communicated symbolically in a language that must be learned before one can understand the game. As James Robertson notes that much of this communication occurs in the rituals that abound in the sport context:

"It is very difficult for the uninitiated to understand what's going on in modern games. The movements and behavior of players are choreographed and freighted with significance calculated to move the emotions of all the communicants. The activities of managers and coaches, of referees and umpires, and of spectators are all part of a ritual, almost of a liturgy." 18

Robertson's quote describes the knowledgeable behavior of sport participants and how their movements are symbols in a language that is used to both create and communicate the meaning of the game. These movements are meaningful to those who participate in the sport context, and the movements and behavior to a great extent mean the same thing to the participants. Those who are unfamiliar with the actions of the participants in a sport are like those who listen to a conversation in a language they do not know. They may know

18 Robertson, American Myth, American Reality, 253.
there is some sort of a conversation going on, but it has no meaning to them.

The symbols that have meaning need not be words or phrases. Symbolic language may include gestures that have insider meanings, and as such express particular points of view, objects deemed important, ways of life, etc. Herbert Blumer notes that interactionism rests on the premise that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the symbols have for them, and these symbols include everything that humanity notes in its world such as physical objects, other individuals, categories of individuals, institutions, ideals, activities, and any other situation an individual might encounter\(^9\).

Strauss argues that every known society has generated one or more languages, and that groups even develop special languages, jargons, or lingo to refer to important activities and objects. Outsiders often do not understand this special terminology. Besides words and phrases, special language may include gestures that have "insider" meanings. Language thus expresses particular points of view, objects deemed important, and ways of life.

In a more profound sense people are not (or so interactionists conclude) merely symbol creators and symbol users and symbol responders; they exist as humans because their symbolization mediates reality to them. As Cassirer has put it,..."Instead of dealing with things themselves man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms...that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this...medium ..."

This argument can be used as an explanation of how we understand our sport experiences. In short, we construct our sport realities through the mediation of symbols. The symbols that identify a sport--the rules of the game, the gestures and actions of the participants, the overt language that describes the game, the relationship of the spectators to the athletes and the reverse, the traditions and the history of the game--are communicated as mythic symbols among the participants. They are related in an ongoing conversation within the individual's sport experience, and as one experiences a sport this conversation continues and explains the sport.

Mead was intrigued with the activity of play because he believed it served as a good example of how the self is developed. He theorized that children have an imaginary companion in many of their play experiences, and through this imaginary companion they "play out" many of the roles they have observed around them. A child organizes the responses

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20 Ibid., 286.
he seeks in his playmates and in himself, and through these responses he develops both his self and his capacity as a symbolic being. Mead believed that sport differs from play in that the child must learn the roles of the others involved in the game, and these different roles have a definite relationship to one another.

Mead used sport as an example of and explanation for the process of interactionism. Rather than stating a "truth" about how one learns this sport, however, his example should be read as a story that explains how people symbolically communicate their relationships to each other and what their movements mean. He uses baseball, where one member of a team is in fact connected to all the other members:

He must know what everyone else is going to do in order to carry out his own play. He has to take all of these roles. They do not all have to be present in consciousness at the same time, but at some moments he has to have three or four individuals present in his own attitude, such as the one who is going to throw the ball, the one who is going to catch it, and so on. These responses must be, in some degree, present in his own make-up. In the game, then, there is a set of responses of such others so organized that the attitudes of one calls out the appropriate attitudes of the other.21

The player has within him the attitudes of the other members of his team, and he also has the attitudes of his opponents in order to predict their reactions to his movements. This

21 Ibid., 151.
awareness is not limited to the playing field, however. Athletes are aware of spectators and how they behave, as well as the different members of the press, parents, lovers, and anyone else connected to the game. All of these roles are connected to the original player, and the conversation of these roles within the player creates the player's self and behavior as he anticipates the consequences of his actions in the gestures of these others.²²

What the athlete does on the field is, in a sense, controlled by the athlete being, at the same time, everyone else on his team as far as the corresponding roles have an impact on his response in a given situation. The "other," then, becomes the entire organization of attitudes of those involved in the game, and is a community or social group that Mead called "the generalized other." "The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community."²³

The concept of the generalized other includes all of the sport experiences of the participant. Interactionism assumes

²² It is not surprising Mead used a game to illustrate his point. The rules of a game are clearly articulated, and the roles of the participants are equally clear. A game is a construct in which the rules have been arbitrarily agreed upon by all involved, and its integrity is contingent upon the ability of the participants to understand and experience the rules. The roles of the "other" can be easily distinguished, as can be the conversation between all of the participants.

²³ Ibid., 154.
that humans act on the basis of the meanings that symbols have for them, and these symbols include everything that humans note in their world such as physical objects, other individuals, categories of individuals, institutions, ideals, activities, and any other situation an individual might encounter. These exist symbolically and are communicated as sport myths, and have meaning as the generalized other. Mead elaborated on the elements that constitute the generalized other:

(I)t is possible for inanimate objects, no less than for other human organisms, to form parts of the generalized and organized--the completely socialized--other for any given human individual, in so far as he responds to such objects socially or in a social fashion (by means of the mechanism of thought, the internalized conversation of gestures). Any thing--any object or set of objects, whether animate or inanimate, human or animal, or merely physical--toward which he acts, or to which he responds, socially, is an element in what for him is the generalized other; by taking the attitudes of which toward himself he becomes conscious of himself as an object or individual, and thus develops a self or personality. 24

Mead noted that there is one more step to be taken for an individual to develop a self in the fullest sense. In addition to assuming the role of the generalized other, which is taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself and toward one another, one must also ...

24 Ibid.
take their attitudes toward the various phases or aspects of the common social activity or set of social undertakings in which, as members of an organized society or social group, they are all engaged; and he must then, by generalizing these individual attitudes of that organized society or social group itself, as a whole, act toward different social projects which at any given time it is carrying out, or toward the various larger phases of the general social process which constitutes its life and of which these projects are specific manifestations.25

Sport myths constitute that portion of the generalized other that Mead describes as "their attitudes toward the various phases or aspects of the common social activity." They exist in the generalized attitudes that affect the behavior of the individual. Sport myths convey the attitudes and beliefs existent in the generalized other, as well as the rules and roles of whatever game is being played.

It is out of the attitude of the generalized other that one achieves the fullest development of the self. Within this process the community exercises a degree of control over the individual, as it is within this process that the social organization enters into the thinking of the individual. Again, the individual and community are related, and James Robertson uses the emotions an individual experiences when he judges himself by the standards of the generalized other as an example of this relationship26. The control of individual

25 Ibid., 155.

26 Robertson, American Myth, American Reality, 155-56.
ambition that American culture uses to turn rampant egotism to socially useful ends is the desire of the individual to be liked. What is important in the behavior of the individual, though, is not whether he is actually liked, but rather how he perceives he is judged by the generalized other. "Rampant egotism" is the "I" and represents the impulsive side of behavior. In contrast is the "me" which refers to the community internalized in the individual. The "me" represents the community's social control of the individual's behavior in that one communicates with one's "me" in an ongoing conversation. One takes into account the consequences of one's behavior in the context of this conversation, and the desire to be liked by this generalized other ("me") influences one's behavior toward the acceptable limits of the social organization. Without approval the striving individual is not only not successful, such a person is considered a failure. In the relationships with other Americans, friendship and approval can be found which give the individual a place and position in society. Robertson notes that "First in the hearts of his countrymen" is both capstone and control to the ambitions of the American individual. 

27 Ibid.
The relationship between the "I" and the "me" has important implications for sport myths. Myths, as explanations people use to understand their world and its behavior, provide a worldview or an illustration of "the way things are." They are symbolized in the generalized other, the "me," and the stories that explain the attitudes of the generalized other, and it is to the generalized other that the "I" responds.

The sport experiences of the individual are a type of conversation between the "sporting I" and the "sporting me," and out of this conversation one creates the sport context. Sport myths are significant not only because we tell them to each other, they are significant because we tell them to ourselves. Out of this dialogue comes our sport behavior because we choose among the various alternatives of behavior so as to affect the outcome of our actions. These sport myths are "true" to the extent that they represent the sport context to the individual. In other words, they "work" and therefore they are valued.

Also out of the conversation between the "sporting I" and the "sporting me" comes the spontaneity and creativity of the individual in the sporting situation. Individuals do not merely accept the rules and roles of a particular sport. They live the sport as a conversation among all of the participants, whether they are teammates, opponents, fans,
press, or any other relationship one can imagine. In these conversations one has the opportunity to express one's creativity and simultaneously enjoy that which is being created on the playing field. No two games are alike, as no two individuals are alike. The conversations between all of the entities are alive and ongoing. It is no wonder that sports fans feel so alive when they participate in a sports event. Perhaps in no other venue of life is one so aware of the rules of an institution, the roles of the participants, and the possibilities of communication between all of these entities in a social organization and oneself. The possibilities and the actualities of the experience are both exhilarating and intoxicating at the same time.

Mead alludes to the fact that an individual's membership in several abstract social classes or subgroups makes possible social relations with an almost infinite number of other individuals who also belong to the same groups. These subgroups cut across functional lines of demarcation that divide different human social communities from one another, and as such provide a sense of community that is larger than any single subgroup. Sport myths serve to unite contemporary Americans from many distinct subgroups, yet this phenomena goes largely unnoticed among Americans\textsuperscript{28}. Other art forms

\textsuperscript{28} This point was argued by all of the writers in Chapter Three.
such as theater, fine arts, music, contemporary religion, education, politics and perhaps even war are credited with overcoming the pluralities in American life. Many of these institutions set out with the Melting Pot as a desirable goal. Sport can be understood as an institution that cuts across the functional lines of demarcation that divide human communities, and our common language of sport myths facilitates this process. Because sport allows, in fact needs, so many individuals to communicate their sport experiences, sport occupies a unique place in American culture. Other subgroups do not have the capacity for this conversation because, for one reason or another, they are more exclusive in who participates. As large as the social institution of General Motors is, the social institution of the Detroit Tigers fans is far larger, and perhaps more meaningful in terms of the stories that Americans tell each other in explaining their world. While one may share an experience with others in a business, a play, a school, or a religion, the national scope of the sport experience and the ability of the media to express it places sport in a unique position. In any event, sport allows for the conversation both within and between individuals; it promotes the development of creativity within and between the individual,
community and sport; and it connects the individual to a similar minded community. By doing so much, sport creates its own energy—a modern day "perpetual motion machine."

Mead argues that in common efforts, such as teamwork, where a sense of closeness develops among everyone involved, a feeling of exaltation arises, and I argue that this sense of community can be explained through the relationships of sport myths. Mead states that the sense of emotional satisfaction is a result of the "I" and the "me" no longer being merely in conversation, but fused. "We get into an attitude in which everyone is at one with each other in so far as all belong to the same community." The result of this "attitude in which everyone is at one with each other" is the creation of the feeling of belonging to a community of like-minded individuals. As long as one can retain this attitude, one is freed from the sense of control that modifies our behavior. The resulting emotion is exaltation, as "all seem to be lifted into the attitude of accepting everyone as belonging to the same group. One's interest is the interest of all." Mead notes that the emotional

29 “Mead, George Herbert,” Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
30 Mead, Mind, Self, and Society, 274.
31 Ibid.
characteristic of these experiences are "peculiarly precious."

The connection of the sport participant to some type of community is one of the most emotionally satisfying components of sport, and I argue that sport myths are used by participants to create this feeling. This sense of closeness is created when the sport myths used by the "I" to construct the sport context are, to a large extent, the same sport myths that are used to construct the generalized other. Spectators, teammates, and many other sport participants experience this emotion when they create the sense of community associated with the sport context. The context represents both the focus and the sense of community of the participants at the same time.

Summary

Interactionism provides an explanation or an illustration of how individuals obtain meaning from myths in culture. Put differently, interactionism can be described as a myth: a story that explains our experiences. Interactionism is an interpretation of how we create meaning from our experiences, and as such it can be used to examine sport myths and how we use sport myths to create and understand our experiences that deal with sport.
Influenced by the tradition of pragmatism, interactionism assumes that individuals are related to their environment through the mediation of self and self reflexive action. The environment is considered to be primarily cultural, and individuals are considered capable of change because human nature is not confined to its biological structure. The interaction between the environment and the individual occurs through communication, and from this interaction we create our selves, our communities, our realities.

Interactionism can be used to explain that in sport, as in other aspects of culture, the individual and the environment influence and construct each other through the communication of our myths. These myths are used to explain what sport is, to create the sport context, and how to behave in it. Interactionism can be used to describe the relationship of sport myths, the individual, and culture. From the perspective of interactionism, when one talks about myths, one is also talking about the individual and culture. To separate myths from the conversation between the individual and culture is to take them out of context.

Interactionism offers an explanation of how actions occur within the communication process by placing the understanding one creates with sport myths back into one's experiences. Sport myths, like other aspects of the cultural
environment, change and adapt as individuals have new experiences and respond to their environment through self reflexive behavior. Change occurs as a discussion between the creative portion of self and the influence on the self of the community, and through this change the self is created and developed.

Sport myths exist within an individual in the role of the generalized other. Myths that explain sport experiences exist as symbols and mean much the same thing to participants, which allows for a sport community to exist. These symbols are not only stories, but are also explanations about movements, behaviors, traditions, rituals, physical objects, and any other situation an individual might encounter. The combination of these symbols constitutes a language of sport, and sport myths are one expression of this language. We respond, create and use this language, and ultimately exist as humans because this symbolization is used to mediate reality. As such we construct the reality of sport.

We are not born with the ability to understand the symbolic worlds we create. We are born, however, with the ability to obtain this understanding. Perhaps one reason for the popularity and universality of sport is that the symbols created to understand sport are easily constructed and understood. One can quickly grasp the significance of a
given sport situation by comparing this situation to one's own experiences that exist in the form of the generalized other.

From the perspective of interactionism, then, sport can be seen as a language of significant symbols created by individuals that share common experiences. This language is composed of, to a great extent, sport myths. Interactionism is one explanation that describes how these myths are communicated and how we make them meaningful.
CHAPTER V
SPORT MYTH AND SYMBOLIC CONVERGENCE THEORY

Like symbolic interactionism, symbolic convergence theory is concerned with experiences that are communicated between the individual and culture. Specifically, symbolic convergence theory attempts to explain how ideas created by individuals and small groups are accepted by and affect a social organization. Both theories can be interpreted as myths that explain a continuum composed of the individual and culture: interactionism offers an explanation of how the individual is shaped by, and shapes, the cultural environment through the communication of ideas; symbolic convergence theory offers an explanation of how the individual creates and accepts ideas that are communicated to culture. I argue that both theories can be used to explain how we create and experience the sport context through the communication of sport myths.

The two theories have several characteristics in common. Both theories deal with the role communication plays in the
development of the the worldview of the individual, and both discuss meaning and understanding in terms of this communication. Both theories are concerned with the symbols that are communicated and how they are used to construct the social context, and both assume that symbols are interpreted to be the reality of the social context, and not a representation of it.

I argue in this Chapter that symbolic convergence theory offers one explanation of how sport myths are created through the experiences of small groups of individuals. These communication experiences, or fantasy themes, can be expressed symbolically, and in many cases are the sport myths used to explain the sport experience. Subsequently fantasy themes "chain out" to form a rhetorical vision that is recognizable to those who share similar types of experiences. Individuals respond to rhetorical visions by expressing their emotions and creating new experiences that affect those around them. The commonalities expressed symbolically in the rhetorical vision converge, creating a community that constructs the social context of sport.

**Symbolic Convergence Theory Defined**

Symbolic convergence theory is designed to study how dramatizing communication creates social reality for groups of people. It is also used by rhetorical critics to examine
messages for insights into the group's culture, motivation, emotional style, and cohesion. From this perspective symbolic convergence theory can be used to explain how groups of people create the social context of sport and treat it as reality through the stories they communicate.

Ernest Bormann's work was influenced by Robert Bales, who constructed a theory that explains the dynamic process of group fantasizing. Bales was interested in how small, natural groups assume the attitudes of individuals, and his work led to the discovery of "group fantasy events." He found that the communication coded in his study as "dramatizes" would "chain out" from one individual to the whole group. "Chain out" was the expression Bales used to describe the process of communication from an individual to a small group to the social organization. When this process occurred in the groups he studied, several characteristics of chaining out were noted: the tempo of the conversation picked up; people grew excited, interrupted one another, blushed, laughed, and forgot about their self-consciousness. The tone of the meeting became lively and boisterous, and the

chaining process indicated that the individuals in the group were creating a drama of their own.

Bales believes that the content of the drama in a group fantasy chain consists of characters playing out a dramatic situation in a setting removed from the here-and-now transactions of the group, and can be interpreted as both a mirror of the group's here-and-now situation and as a mirror of the group's relationship to the external environment.

"The drama played out somewhere else or in some other time often symbolizes a role collision or ambiguity, a leadership conflict, or a problem related to the task-dimension of the group." The manner in which an individual's repressed problems surface in dream fantasies is similar to the manner in which a group might develop a fantasy chain, and a critic can interpret the content of the fantasy chain in order to discover the motives of the group just as a psychoanalyst investigates the repressed problems of an individual.

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3 Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision."

4 The "here-and-now" is a concept Bormann borrowed from sensitivity and encounter group practice and refers to what is immediately happening in the group. "Thus a recollection of something that happened to the group in the past or a dream of what the group might do in the future could be considered a fantasy theme." 397.

5 Ibid.
This analogy has definite Freudian overtones, yet Bormann claims he avoids Freudian criticism by not doing psychoanalysis on the group. Bormann, as a rhetorical critic, is interested in the methods and motives of persuasive communication, and therefore seeks to understand the conscious use of rhetoric rather than the unconscious workings of the individual. The process of chaining out dramas does not need to be linked to psychoanalysis because the motives of the individuals involved in rhetorical persuasion are often overt. Rather he is doing cultural criticism, which can be seen when argues that "the fundamental subject-matter of the social sciences is the self-conscious actions of individual persons." Bormann constructs a theory that describes the process by which a "zero-history group," one that has never operated

6 Bormann notes that "My bias has always been that a complete communication or rhetorical theory must deal with the conscious plans, goals, intentions and meanings of the people involved. To be sure, nonrational aspects need to be taken into account as well, but to my mind, a rhetorical approach involves the conscious drafting of messages with an eye to audience conditions...Bales' hints and conjectures would be incomplete if not on the wrong track in that they omitted the conscious, intentional, and rational elements that a rhetorical dimension would imply." Bormann, Ernest, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: Ten Years Later," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 68(1982), 291.

as a group before, uses fantasy themes to develop a common culture. In so doing he describes the relationship between the dramas people share and the culture their sharing creates. As members of the groups selected comments that related to their here-and-now situation or to their own psychodynamics, a small culture was formed. Improvisation among the members continued and the commonalities of the group became public. The evocative response of the individual group members to the dramatic situation they created also elicited a public commitment to an attitude. Dramas imply motives, and by chaining into the fantasy the group members gained motivations. The commonalities expressed in terms of attitude and motives created this small, temporary community, and the satisfaction of the individuals in being part of this new community was manifest in their behavior.

Bormann states that the members of this newly created community experience an increased awareness of the reality they have created. This new world is its own drama filled with heroes, villains, saints and enemies. Bales notes that this culture is a fantasy established from the past that is acted upon in the present, and somehow the individuals of the group feel they have been "transported" to a world that seems somehow even more real than the everyday world.
One may feel exalted, fascinated, perhaps horrified or threatened, or powerfully impelled to action, but in any case, involved. One's feelings fuse with the symbols and images which carry the feeling in communication and sustain it over time. One is psychologically taken into a psychodramatic fantasy world, in which others in the group are also involved. Then one is attached to those other members.  

Bormann argues that these moments occur not only to an individual's reaction to a work or art, or in a small group's chaining out a fantasy theme, but also in larger groups hearing a public speech. Bormann's interest lies in the persuasive use of speech, or rhetoric, and it is clear that Bale's theory has much to say about rhetoric. Bormann's and Bale's arguments are also valuable, however, in understanding the creation of the sport context and how it is communicated.

The use of symbolic convergence theory to interpret sport myths is made possible by Bormann's use of symbols to communicate dramatized experiences. I argue that these symbols do not represent the experience, but are the experience. To this end Bormann clarifies the seeming separation between public fantasies and "reality" or action, and does so by noting that words are the social context and

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8 Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision," 398. What Bales is describing is Mead's fusion of the "I" and the "me" in the terms of group dynamics. The terms "exaltation" and "fuse" are the same terms Mead uses when describing the spiritual characteristic of one experiencing the union of one's self and the social group.
are not generated out of the social context. Similar to the sport experience where the game played and the game expressed are the social context of sport, Bormann notes that there is no separation between the dramatic experience and the expression of dramatic experience. The idea that there is a difference between words, or symbols, and concrete material things is a sociological premise to which many scholars erroneously subscribe. "American sociologists simply do not believe that how we communicate determines how we relate as social beings. Most sociologists really think of symbols as photographs of some kind of reality that is 'behind' symbols...Class exists and is then expressed, it does not arise in expression." Sociologists that believe in a reality that is represented by symbols but separate from those symbols unconsciously subscribe to a formalistic definition of reality. Bormann goes on to note that when there is an apparent discrepancy between the word and the thing, it is most important to understand that the experiences are the symbols that create the social reality.

The value of symbolic convergence theory is that one can use the rhetorical vision as though it were the substance of

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social reality for those who participated in the vision. Because the rhetorical vision is constructed from the concrete dramas developed in the sport experience, one can understand the social relationships, the motives, and the qualitative impact of that symbolic world. Bormann notes that:

If the critic can illuminate how people who participated in the rhetorical vision related to one another, how they arranged themselves into social hierarchies, how they acted to achieve the goals embedded in their dreams, and how they were aroused by the dramatic action and the dramatis personae within the manifest content of their rhetoric, his insights will make a useful contribution to understanding the movement and its adherents.10

My argument is that the dramatizations individuals experience in sport are composed of both the sport myths experienced in the sport context and the sporting events themselves. Sport myths convey the attitudes and meanings that are communicated, and they subsequently chain out in many ways: through conversation, while experiencing the sport context, through the mass media, and through all of the other means we use to communicate. In so doing they are used to construct the social reality of the individual experiencing that sport context. These communication experiences serve both to sustain the individual's sense of

10 Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision," 401.
sporting community, explain this community to the individual, and provide the individual with a social reality filled with heroes, villains, emotions and attitudes.

Bormann calls the composite dramas that catch up large groups of people in a symbolic reality a "rhetorical vision." A rhetorical vision is constructed from the fantasy themes and myths that chain out, and sport provides vehicles for this type of symbolic exchange in the sports arena or stadium, the lockerroom, the playground, and the various electronic media, the newspaper, and magazines devoted exclusively to sport. Sport can be explained as a dramatic expression that conveys both plot and characterization, and this expression evokes responses from those experiencing the dramatization that are similar to those in the original setting where the story was created. A community is created composed of all of those who have experienced the dramatization.

Bormann notes that the relationship between a rhetorical vision and a specific fantasy theme within a message explains why so much "persuasive" communication simply repeats what the audience already knows\textsuperscript{11}. The speaker does not "conquer" the audience, but portrays and represents them. Speeches can be seen as day-dreams of the mass soul of the audience,

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
representing chaos and are full of contradictions if the words are taken literally. Yet many speeches are charged with deeper meaning, and it is this meaning that the audience accepts.

Similarly, the sport context is a reification of the sport myths that are expressed dramatically in the context. Sport is composed of athletes and spectators who have many of the same characteristics as speakers and audiences. The dramatic component of the athletic event can be seen as the expression of the sport myth that represents the event symbolically, and the expression of this event in any medium is well received because the audience is already aware of that which is being expressed. To a an extent participants experience the sport context because this is where they can experience what they already feel and accept through the communication of sport myths.

At this point one is experiencing the convergence of the symbols that create and define the sport context. Bormann summarizes the explanatory power of symbolic convergence theory in a communication model that describes the development, evolution, and decay of dramas that are used by groups of people to understand their experiences and change their behavior.12

12 Ibid.
A small group of people with similar individual psychodynamics meet to discuss a common preoccupation or problem. A member dramatizes a theme that catches the group and causes it to chain out because it hits a common psychodynamic chord or hidden agenda item or their common difficulties vis-à-vis the natural environment, the socio-political systems, or the economic structures. The group grows excited, involved, more dramas chain out to create a common symbolic reality filled with heroes and villains. If the group's fantasy themes contain motives to "go public" and gain converts to their position they often begin artistically to create messages for the mass media for public speeches and so forth. When they need to develop a message for a specific context they often find themselves shaping the drama that excited them in their original discussions into suitable form for a different public.13

Sport Myth and Symbolic Convergence Theory

Symbolic convergence theory can also be used to explain how sport is dramatically communicated in a social context. Sport myths can be expressed symbolically as fantasy themes, public fantasy events and rhetorical visions, and individuals use these myths to create the sport context and explain it to themselves. My interpretation of symbolic convergence theory outlines this communication process.

An individual (player, spectator) or a small group of individuals (a single team or two teams, a group of friends at an athletic event as spectators) attend or create a sports event, or come up with an idea that has an impact on their

13 Ibid., 399.
sport context. An experience that describes this idea (a great catch, a homerun, a clutch performance, etc.) occurs, and this experience is expressed in a dramatic fashion. The dramatic creation and telling of the story is replete with evocative language that denotes the use of sport myths, and these myths communicate the attitudes, beliefs, and values that resonate within the group.

The story chains out within the group because it reveals a common admiration, a common athletic experience, or symbolically expresses the particular sporting theme. As the experience chains out from the original group to other groups it is recreated in dramatic form, and it is used to create a common symbolic reality complete with heroes, teams, opponents, or concepts of play and competition. If the story resonates with other groups it will be retold and compared to other, similar experiences. The experience is perhaps compared to images on television or the print media. When a similar experience occurs, or perhaps just for the pleasure of telling the story, the original story is told again, recreating the social context, meanings and drama of the original story. New experiences occur and are compared to the old story, and are then told and retold. The story evolves and changes, and it is retold as long as it is meaningful. The process continues.
Two examples illustrate how symbolic convergence theory can be used to interpret a story that expresses certain sport myths. One story deals with teams and the other story describes what competition means. The idea of people working together as a team began in the nineteenth century when games first spread throughout America. Prior to this time most Americans understood that a team was a group of animals working together to do a particular job. While there was a degree of specialization among animals such as "lead," "near," and "far" animals that performed in slightly different ways within a group, the underlying assumption was that all of the animals worked uniformly and together. This image of a team continues today on athletic teams, where, as the myth goes, everyone works together to perform a common task. To work toward some other goal while in the social context of the team is to violate the team in some way, and the stories we hear that deal with teams contain myths that are used to explain this to us.14

This image is obvious today, but it was not always so. I argue that this story of what a team is may have developed among individuals involved in some original sport context that was composed of people familiar with farm animals, and

14 See my description of the film Hoosiers, which describes attitudes, beliefs and values that are communicated in myths about teams, in Chapter Two.
that this idea was stated dramatically. At some point an individual or group of individuals noticed the similarities between a group of animals performing a common task and a group of people working together to win a game. This similarity was expressed in face-to-face interactions, and perhaps even the newly developing print media, as a fantasy theme, and this story symbolically expressed the attitude that teamwork is better than not working with a team. Certainly this idea already existed in an America that was largely agricultural, so the idea was easily understood and accepted. The idea was valued because it "works," and eventually it became a widespread belief throughout American culture that playing on a "team" required certain attitudes and behaviors from the players. This theme is so accepted now that contemporary images of team are primarily sports oriented, and when one envisions a team in politics, business, and perhaps even with groups of animals, one wants them to act like a well-organized sports team. The metaphors that describe teamwork, such as the Cincinnati Reds as the "Big Red Machine" are many times sports oriented.

The second example describes how competition is valued in contemporary culture. Competition is characteristic of a situation in which two or more people vie for a prize, honor or advantage that can only be had by one. Mythically, however, competition is much more than that. To many
Americans if one is not "competitive" then, as the myth goes, one is lacking in some basic human characteristic that is necessary for survival. As Bil Gilbert notes,

...various authorities are suggesting that competition is importantly connected with what should or should not be done about the balance of trade, oil taxes, dependent mothers, Nicaragua, public schools and the Democratic National Convention. John Thompson, the highly successful Georgetown basketball coach, summed up a lot of fashionable thinking when he remarked, "Life is about competition." 15

As the myth goes, competition is seen and valued as a means, sometimes the only means, of improving either the individual or the group. By struggling for victory one either survives or learns how to survive. We use myths to communicate our belief that competition is good because it will do this, and we value competition because of its perceived ability to teach us the things we need to survive. We have heard these stories so often that our attitudes and values regarding competition are, for many, unquestionable.

Like the myths we use to explain how teams should work, myths of competition became popular in the late nineteenth century. Prior to this time competition was not communicated in the myths American's told each other about any aspect of their lives. Robertson notes that there was competition, as,

15 Gilbert, "Competition: Is It What Life's All About?" Sports Illustrated, Find Date.
for instance, Daniel Boone may have competed with other
backwoodsmen to find the Cumberland Gap, or Lincoln may have
gone into competition with Douglas for a seat in the United
States Senate. In sum, "Some competition was believed to be
socially important and of service to the community...But
significantly, the Lincoln myths almost completely ignore the
competition of Lincoln's successful campaigns for the
Presidency."16 The stories that were told to explain these
experiences to Americans of those eras did not use
competitive myths to describe how or why Boone and Lincoln
lived.

Robertson argues that competition myths were not
manifest in American culture--where the individual was not
thought to be significantly improved through the use of
competition--until the time of the nineteenth century robber
barons17. Ironically, the competition that was visible was
not between individuals, but was the vicious, cutthroat, and
often violent competition between growing corporations. Big
industrial businesses were in open competition with each
other, and sometimes violently attempted to destroy each
other. Robertson argues that corporate leaders told
Americans that such competition was characteristic of the old

16 Robertson, American Myth, American Reality, 181.
17 Ibid, 180-82.
days of individualism, and that corporations offered the solution to this destructive mechanism of "improvement". As the myth went, competition was "old" and not as good as cooperation, yet ironically corporations were involved in cutthroat competition. The new myths reconciled this paradox, as Robertson notes:

The logic of the new myths...implied that competition had proven an inadequate control...In place of the proven inadequacy of competition, the new myths offered corporate organization and cooperation....The robber barons, in this new mythology, represented both the epitome of competitive individualism and the solution to the failure of competition...Americans of all sorts, for example, came to believe that individual competition as the central regulator of and control on ambitious economic activity (by individuals or by corporations) was a desirable state to bring back, to restore to American life.

The story corporate leaders told Americans was imbued with myths of the value of competition. Corporations survived by successfully competing, yet paradoxically corporations were models of cooperation. Corporate myths of competition

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18 Robertson notes that, "It was such competition, corporate leaders told Americans, which was characteristic of the old days of individualism. Corporations were devoted to abolishing such competition, they said, to the greater benefit of Americans. It was such competition which twentieth-century Americans came to believe had been characteristic of traditional American individualism, and still made Americans violent, bent on destroying all who competed with them." Ibid., 181.

19 Ibid., 181-82.
resolved the conflict of when to compete and when to cooperate, and left Americans with the attitude that competition is somehow the mechanism to achieve both cooperation and competition.

From the perspective of symbolic convergence theory, the robber barons constitute a small group that created an idea that "chained out" to American culture. A relatively small group of individuals like Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, Morgan, and others, constitutes the original group that started the fantasy theme. This group came to believe that competition among independent Americans was the only control on rampant greed and ambition. Quotes like Vanderbilt's "the public be damned" became public fantasy events, and the internecine wars of corporate America between corporate giants, against the unions, and against the individual worker reinforced the idea that success was achieved through competition. 20

20 Robertson quotes a famous speech by William K. Vanderbilt, the heir of Commodore Vanderbilt and the head of the New York Central Railroad. Vanderbilt was asked by a reporter for the Chicago Daily News in 1882 if he ran his trains for the public benefit. "The public be damned," he said. "What does the public care for the railroads except to get as much out of them ... as possible? I don't take any stock in this silly nonsense about working for anybody's good but our own, because we are not. When we make a move we do it because it is our interest to do so, not because we expect to do somebody else some good. Of course we like to do everything possible for the benefit of humanity in general, but when we do, we first see that we are benefiting ourselves. Railroads are not run on sentiment, but on business principles." 182-83.
The corporate myth of success through competition was reinforced by Darwin's concept of Natural Selection, another fantasy theme that was used to explain how competition is a viable means of achieving success\textsuperscript{21}. The image of Darwin's method of Natural Selection—the law of the jungle, the survival of the fittest, trial by combat—continues to be appealing, even though it has been repudiated by scientists\textsuperscript{22}.

Vanderbilt represented the individualistic ideal of competition and how one behaves when one subscribes to it. Robertson notes that few Americans have ever applauded Vanderbilt's sentiments of "the public be damned," but most understand the principles of standard American competitive individualism which can be applied to both individuals and corporations.

\textsuperscript{21} Darwin always capitalized the words "Natural Selection." Darwin's theory states that certain characteristics, wherever they come from, are favored or discouraged by environments, and Darwin argued that possessors of favored characteristics produce more children and get more food, and the process continues. He erred, however, when he stated that the struggle for existence, the law of the jungle, and the survival of the fittest are mechanisms for natural selection. These methods have been proven scientifically insignificant. As noted earlier, however, myths need not be "true" to be believed.

\textsuperscript{22} It is interesting to note that academics still subscribe to the myth of Natural Selection in spite of proof of its insubstantiability. Robertson quotes Asa Gray, a leading spokesman for Darwinism in America and Harvard College intellectual, who argued for the competition of ideas among intellectuals so as the weaker ones may be weeded out: "A spirited conflict among opinions of every grade must ensue ... which ... may be likened to the conflict in nature among races in the struggle for life, which Mr. Darwin describes; through which the views most favored by the facts will be developed and
In sum, these two fantasy themes were symbolically expressed cultural myths, one that was used to explain corporate and individual competition, and one that explained Natural Selection. They myths were imbued in stories that converged on the public conscious in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to form an American "reality": competition is the key to improvement. As the stories went, and still go, if one fails to compete or win, then one will be passed by one's peers. Sport by its nature is competitive, and it creates an environment where one can be competitive in a safe context. Competition is used in many other social contexts, and it is not surprising that it is expressed in sport.

*Rocky from the Perspective of Symbolic Convergence Theory*

One example of how a social reality is created in the sport experience can be seen in the film Rocky and its sequels. These four films represent a rhetorical vision of tested by 'Natural Selection,' the weaker ones be destroyed in the process, and the strongest in the long run alone survive." Robertson, *American Myth, American Reality*, 284.

Rocky and its sequels have been the subject of several analyses in rhetorical criticism. See Rushing, Janice Hocker and Frentz, Thomas S., "The Rhetoric of 'Rocky'" A Social Value Model of Criticism," *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 42(Spring 1978), 63-72. See also Frentz, Thomas S. and Rushing, Janice Hocker, "The
what boxing is, how boxers live, and how they are successful. These images graphically express and communicate sport myths, and in so doing help create the sport context of boxing in the United States. The summary of the four films in dramatic form highlights their mythic themes and recreates the social context in which they were originally popular.24

In the first film Rocky's character is developed as that of the "typical" American, and the timing of the film in relation to the social context existent in 1976 America—post-Vietnam, post-60s liberalism—led to its Academy Award as Best Picture. In the first film Rocky is portrayed as the muscular Christian, a God-loving American supporting Christian ethics with his physicality and courage in the evil world of the city jungle. He is the Horatio Alger character when he is miraculously offered a chance at the Heavyweight Boxing Championship and works hard to achieve success, fights an evil antagonist in Apollo Creed (who represents greed associated with success) all while courting the white goddess Adrian. He reifies the myth of the Great White Hope, the

24 The myths discussed here were originally expressed in a paper given by Steve Estes and John Gibson, "Rocky I-IV: An Odyssey of Muscular Thespianism," Conference for the North American Society of Sport History, Capital University, Columbus, Ohio, May 23, 1987.
white boxer who will defeat the incarnation of Jack Johnson, Muhammad Ali or any other contemporary black heavyweight boxing champion. And he represents what Michael Oriard describes the American-athlete hero. All of these stories embody myths that can be called upon to identify Rocky as an American hero.

In the second film, Rocky II, Rocky adds the image of the "rube" in the city, one whose natural athletic talents are derived from both the ideals of the shrewd Yankee peddler who is continually outwitting his New York counterpart, and a version of the natural, or the frontier roarer. The result is a blundering and simple but physically talented hick who succeeds almost miraculously at the expense of his sophisticated city brothers. Rocky's life is charmed, but he is never in control of his situation and ultimately he is at home only in the boxing ring.

Rocky III shows Rocky's development as an heroic figure in contemporary America. He adapts to the sophisticated lifestyle of the successful, wealthy athlete and is no longer the rube in the city but a "yuppie" of the 1980s. His sophistication and ability to operate within the structure of the social elite is evident in his change from loan shark to a member of the upper class. This change is necessary in

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25 Oriard, Dreaming of Heroes.
order to contrast him with his barbaric opponent, Clubber Lang. Lang wears a feather in his severely cut hair, reminiscent of the native American Indians, and savagely growls when he trains. His dress and lifestyle are similarly primitive, and his success as a boxer is based on his intensity and savage manner. Lang is black, and his color becomes significant when he offers Rocky's white wife a chance to spend the night with a "real man." Rocky defends the purity of the white race and comes to represent civilization and the civilized man, while Lang represents the savage in the wilderness. American mythology dictates that these two forces must conflict violently with each other as they did in the formation of America, and from this perspective there can be only one outcome: civilization must tame nature.

In the fourth film Rocky represents America pitted against the "Red Tide of Communism." He avenges the death of Apollo (Son of Zeus, light, reason) Creed (the Word) who dies at the hands of the Ivan Drago (Ivan the Dragon) in a scene that is spectacular in its representation of American sport. Apollo descends from the heavens (the balcony at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas) attired in his famed red, white and blue American Flag boxing trunks, complete with an "Uncle Sam" hat. No less symbolic is the ascent of Ivan Drago from the depths (the boxing ring is raised from the basement) who
arrives in the midst of capitalistic cherubs prancing about
the stage to the tune of "Living in America" sung by James
Brown. Apollo dies in the ring by the hand of the insidious
Soviet, and once again Rocky has an opponent more formidable
than his last. Rocky invokes the myth of American
adaptability to once again become the natural man, and
defeats the steroid-injected, Soviet automaton Drago, who
represents American fear of Soviet technological supremacy.
In sum, Rocky vanquishes ideology and technology in one
violent confrontation.

The four Rocky films comprise a rhetorical vision in
which the fantasy themes are the sport myths expressed in the
films. Each film told a story that expressed certain sport
myths that explain, in particular, Rocky's success in boxing,
and in general, that to succeed one will have to follow in
Rocky's footsteps. In sum, and according to the myths in the
Rocky films, success is achieved through Christian ethics,
good luck, opposition to evil opponents (especially evil,
fast talking, athletic black opponents), association with the
American wilderness, self-effacing humor, civility, hard
work, physicality, violence, competition, honesty,
adaptability, and repudiation of technology. To be sure,
they were only boxing stories. But to the extent the films
created a reality that uses these myths, Rocky is a real
person that uses these myths to explain why he was successful.

These myths were present in American culture before the films were made, and it is arguable that one reason the films were made was to dramatically express these myths. American audiences accepted the films easily because these myths were part of the social context in which they viewed the films, and the reality of the social context for those watching the films was to a great extent more "real" than that which existed outside the theaters while the films were running. The myths were expressed in the conversations of those who saw the film, and generated a kind of understanding of what it means to be Rocky Balboa. People heard these stories and came to see the films. When *Rocky IV* opened in 1986 *Rocky* was the third most lucrative film series ever made. *Rocky* slogans, metaphors, and positions symbolize sport myths that explain an entire whole social context, and these symbols are used to explain many other contexts of American cultural life.

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26 One can still see people sprinting up the steps to the Museum of Art in Philadelphia, turning and facing downtown Philadelphia, and shouting "Yo Adrian! I did it!"

27 "Rocky & Rambo." *Newsweek*, (December 22, 1985), 58-62. As of this writing the Rocky series has grossed close to 1 billion dollars with the addition of the video market.
Summary

I have discussed in the chapter how sport myths are created and chain out to form a rhetorical vision. The theory of symbolic convergence describes how symbols are created and communicated in a way that is both meaningful to the individual and a creator of community. The myths that made *Rocky* popular, for instance, existed in the social context of the "real" world before the film was ever made. Symbolic convergence theory explains the popularity of the film series in terms of the symbols Americans are familiar with, and these symbols are in many cases sport myths. Symbolic convergence theory offers an interpretation of how we create these myths, what they are and how they are communicated.

Similar to interactionism, symbolic convergence theory argues that the meaning of sport is the message that is communicated in the dramatic expression of sport, and as sport myths chain out as fantasy events new meanings are created that may not have existed before. The new meanings exist in the messages created during the shared sport experience, and this experience was shared through public dramatization. Shared sport experiences are by their nature emotional, and this stands to reason in that myths evoke emotional responses from those who share them. Furthermore, motives exist in the dramatizations that are shared, and
these motives help determine one's behavior so as to influence the consequences of one's actions. Those who share sports experiences are impelled to act on them, and this action can range from spectating to athletic performance to day dreaming of personal excellence on the playing field. These actions are shared, and the collaboration of those who share describes the sports community particularly, and the social context of Americans generally.
CHAPTER VI
SPORT MYTHS AS LIVED EXPERIENCE

This study has examined how we explain our sport experiences using myths. It is based on the assumption that these explanations are contingent upon our past experiences, and that one type of experience we have is the symbolic expression of myths. We create both the reality of the sport context and a sense of self by using sport myths as an explanation of our experiences. When viewed this way, this study and other methods used to examine sport myths are myths themselves to the extent that they are stories that can be used to explain our experiences.

This study is justified because symbolic methods that study sport myths reveal certain insights that are not readily apparent when one studies sport through conventional, empirical methods. Myths are a common, everyday explanation of experience. Granted, they are not explanations that are based on a method that is conventionally believed to deliver the "truth," i.e., the scientific method. But we use this method much more than we realize to create the realities of
our experiences and to explain the reality we have created. The myths we use to explain our experiences are as "true" as much as they "work," and I argue that our use of myths to explain our experiences, even though our mythology tells us that myths are "false," merits study.

The methodologies that can be used to study myths are not commonly used to study sport. Most methods of studying sport have relied on empirical methods to create an explanation for experiences, and these methods are not designed to explain meaning or how one understands one's subjective experiences. The methods of empirical science objectify our experiences, and in so doing reduce them to observable behavior. The myths we use to explain our experiences are consequently relegated to residual categories or the periphery of our studies, and are not examined.

Symbolic anthropology can be used to explain how we create meaning from our experiences. As Dolgin, Kemnitzer and Schneider note, one goal of social and cultural anthropology is to try to understand belief and meaning, and the theory that guides this effort. Symbolic anthropology, as a type of social and cultural anthropology, attempts to explain the patterns that are created and used by people as their beliefs in terms of symbols. It is designed to explain

1 Dolgin, Kemnitzer, and Schneider, *Symbolic Anthropology*. 
experiences that can be expressed symbolically, and is particularly valuable as a means of explaining the relationship between the development of the self and the social context in which the self develops. Sport myths can be studied through the methods of symbolic anthropology to the extent that they are used as symbols that create the self and the sport context.

I argue that symbolic interactionism and symbolic convergence theory can be interpreted as methods of symbolic anthropology. These methods are valuable because they transcend the dichotomy of the individual and the community within the sport context by studying the symbols that give meaning and order to both. The symbols, codes and patterns of belief that exist as sport myths are used to create and define the sport context to Americans on both and individual and cultural level.

Symbolic convergence theory assumes that the symbols that represent social reality are social reality. Bormann notes that the symbols used in social expression are the social context, and are not a representation of it. By discussing self and social context in terms of symbols Bormann avoids the dichotomy between the two, and allows the critic to examine their mutual development in terms of the communication of symbols.
Symbolic interactionism can be used to describe the process of how individuals converse with symbols to understand themselves and their relationship to culture. Interactionism assumes that humans live in symbolic environments, and that these environments include words, phrases, and gestures that have symbolic, "insider" meaning. Individuals create and experience reality through the mediation of symbols in both their public and private lives, and this interaction enables critics to explain these realities by examining the symbols they communicate. Again, to the extent that sport myths are symbols that are used to create and communicate experiences in sport, they can be used to explain both the self and the reality of sport.

An examination of myths reveals that they have the characteristics of the symbols of expression that are used by individuals to create the self and culture. Myths are "packaged" in and intimately related to stories. They are believed to be "true," and are therefore the models individuals refer to when they try to understand their world and its behavior. From this perspective symbolic convergence theory and symbolic interactionism are myths to the extent that I have used to them to understand "reality" and how one develops a sense of self. Similarly, the scientific method, the Bible, and other methods of creating "truth" are myths to the extent that they are believed to create or illustrate the
"truth." "Truth," as I use the word, is not absolute, is contingent upon one's experiences, and is expressed by communicating myths.

This method of discovering "truth" enables one to develop a worldview of how one fits into culture and how one should live and think as a member of that culture. Using a myth to create the "truth" many times provides a satisfying emotion, which is a type of proof of the efficacy of the myth. Put differently, the logic of the myth is inherent in the myth itself. Myths are effective vehicles for the communication of emotions since they are replete with evocative language that conveys attitudes, beliefs, values and stereotypes, and these emotional attributes would be difficult to convey using more technical language. Myths convey both these emotions and the substance of the story in which they are contained in a complete package that is difficult to analyze, and this package provides an explanation that we value highly because it is the "truth." Myths appear to be true because they are associated with an individual's concrete experiences, and allow those who participate in the myth to share the belief that they also share a common experience. This facilitates the sense of community created through the telling of the myth.

In sum, myths are concerned with both the self and community. They are meaningful stories that are symbolically
understood and communicated, and in the expression of these stories one creates a sense of self and community. These characteristics of myths can be examined through methods of symbolic anthropology, and by doing so one can study the sport myths that we use to explain our experiences and create our sport context.

Contemporary scholars in the study of sport have done just this. Barthes and Magnane, Lenk, Voigt, and Novak have used sport myths to explain the sport context and how this context has an impact on the individual in a manner similar to that of Cassirer, Campbell, Robertson and Sykes, scholars that seek to understand how myths are used in culture generally. Barthes and Magnane consider the average individual to be estranged from official culture, and that this individual uses sport to escape from this culture into an artificial world that is somehow more meaningful. Sport myths are used to explain this world, which is explained as a microcosm of reality. Lenk believes that sport myths are used as an explanation of excellence, where the elite athlete is an archetype or model of behavior for all to see. By identifying with this archetype the average individual is able to explain his own mortality, and is connected to his community when this archetype is culturally shared.

Novak argues that for many people sport has replaced religion as a means of providing a sense of community and
teaching one how to behave. Sport myths are used to symbolically understand one's mortality and the search for a perfect reality. Since sport is a public ritual it is used as a means of creating community, and Novak argues that sport is perhaps the most available and meaningful mechanism for creating community in America today. Voigt argues that contemporary Americans use sport myths to explain their cultural experiences, and that cultural myths affect one's sport experiences. He argues that sport myths are a justifiable method of explaining culture as are other, traditional methods.

I argue that Gibson's model of sport as a practice provides an explanation for how standards of excellence are developed and communicated. Sport is described as a practice created with standards of excellence, and these standards can be expressed in the sport myths one experiences when participating in sport as a practitioner. Gibson's description of sport as a practice develops the relationship of the individual and the community in terms of the narrative and cultural tradition, which I argue are vehicles for the expression of sport myths.

Symbolic interactionism and symbolic convergence theory both provide explanations of how individuals create meanings by communicating symbols. Interactionism assumes that the interaction between the environment and the individual occurs
through communication, and from this interaction we create our selves, our communities, and our realities. As such it can be used as an explanation for how the sport participant and the environment influence and construct each other through the communication of our sport myths. Sport myths can then be used to explain what sport is, to create the sport context, and explain how to behave in that context. Sport can be seen as a language of significant symbols created by individuals that share common experiences, and this language is composed in part of sport myths.

Symbolic convergence theory can be interpreted to reveal that the meaning of sport is the message that is communicated in the dramatic expression of sport, and as sport myths chain out new meanings are created that may not have existed before. This act of communication provides a method of creating community, and the motives implied in the dramatizations that are communicated influence one's behavior by communicating motives for one's actions. Consequently those that share sports experiences are impelled to act on them.

Mike Schmidt's Retirement

I have argued that sport myths are used to both create and explain one's sense of self and the sport context. This approach assumes that an examination of the symbols that are
used to express our experiences is also an examination of the reality that is being expressed. A story told by Dick Fenlon, a sports columnist for the daily newspaper *Columbus Dispatch*, about the retirement of Mike Schmidt, a professional baseball player, can be examined in this light. This examination reveals that Schmidt and Fenlon are describing Schmidt's retirement from two different perspectives, and that these perspectives can be studied by examining the myths that are expressed by each.

Schmidt's retirement was noteworthy because of his skills and longevity, both of which were well established at the time of his retirement. When he announced his retirement he was clearly emotionally distraught, and I argue that one should not be surprised by his experienced sense of loss. Many times an athlete is good because he has spent a tremendous amount of time developing his skills. Those with whom he trains form his social network, and he creates and understands his reality through the sport myths that are expressed in the participation of his sport. I argue that Schmidt's experienced sense of loss is not unique in this respect. Any person that has created a sense of self and a social context for him or herself would feel a sense of loss upon leaving it.

Specifically, when athletes leave their sport they not only lose the time they spend training and competing, they
leave the community that speaks the same language they do. While many times their sense of loss is associated with the competition, excitement and fun associated with the sport, I argue that their loss is larger than that. They feel they have lost a way of living, a way of looking at the world with their brothers and sisters in sport. They have entered a new reality, and they intuitively understand that the myths they have used to explain and express their reality no longer apply.

Schmidt was one such athlete, and he was both affected by the myths that were part of the social context of professional baseball and, as a measure of his impact on the game, affected this social context. For instance, Schmidt was described by many of his teammates as one of the hardest working athletes in professional baseball, and because of the time he spent training Schmidt helped change how baseball players train for the game. The stories that explain this change were expressed in part by myths, and the most vivid example was when he introduced and popularized weight training for baseball players.

Before Schmidt's time baseball players and coaches believed weight lifting made one "musclebound" and too tight and inflexible to be a good hitter. This belief was communicated among players and coaches as a myth, and the basic message was that if you lift weights you will not hit.
This myth was expressed as a "truth" that was believed by those in the context of baseball as if it were absolute. Baseball players and coaches were emotionally attached to this "truth," and to the extent that players failed to hit when they were tired this "truth" was born out in their concrete, material experiences. The myth was used to explain, in part, the "mortality" of baseball players, for if one does not hit then one dies a metaphorical death when one is cut from the team, and was used to create a community of non-weight lifting individuals.

This myth was expressed in many stories about how one would lift weights and then try to hit, and sure enough it was found to be "true." Schmidt realized, however, that weight training is effective when done properly and not too soon before trying to hit. With rest one can use weight training to improve hitting. He used a different perspective to change his reality of hitting, the perspective of resistance training that have been documented through the "mythology" of empirical science. Through proper training techniques Schmidt had success with his new method, and his success caused many other athletes to change the way they train for hitting. Put differently, Schmidt's dramatization of the art of hitting has "chained out" through professional baseball. In part a result of his innovation, Schmidt was a ten time Gold Glove Winner, three time Most Valuable Player,
and is seventh on the all time homerun list. My argument is that this example of weight training is just one of many examples of how Schmidt, or any other athlete, creates the reality of one's sport experiences through the myths that are used to explain and create this reality.

Dick Fenlon, a writer for the Columbus Dispatch, has a completely different perspective on Schmidt's retirement. He does not understand Schmidt's change of life, and does not sympathize with Schmidt's emotionality. "It bothers me a little that I was not moved when I saw Mike Schmidt weep." He is cynical about the retirement of professional athletes because they seemingly use emotional proclamations like Schmidt's for material gain. Enough athletes have done this so that Fenlon now sees retiring athletes from a completely different perspective than Schmidt sees himself. Fenlon believes that athletes should be happy that they are able to perform so wonderfully for as long as they do. He implies that their performance is all that there is to their participation in sport.

Where's the guy been, I ask? Isn't it time for him to grow up? Did he think he was going to play to 45 or 55 or 60? Did it suddenly just dawn on him? Did he not realize it must end someday? Shouldn't he be exulting and happy and smiling for the great

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2 Dick Fenlon, "Schmidt's crying brings no tears," Columbus Dispatch, Section C-1, June 1, 1989.
trick he has been allowed to play on life and reality rather than making a spectacle of himself.\(^3\)

Fenlon laments his own loss of innocence. Where he once would have been moved by the retirement of a great athlete, he is now unmoved. He attributes this to the many athletes who have lucrative media careers ahead of them, and how television will skew the emotionality of the Schmidt's retirement into something that Schmidt never intended it to be. In so doing the public, in which Fenlon includes himself, is manipulated into its cynicism. "I have been fooled too many times. We have all been fooled too many times." He admits to feeling that his sympathies lie with the farmer who has lost his house, for the steelworker laid off, for the lame, the deaf, the halt. "I'll save my sympathies for those who never were and never had."

Fenlon's sentiments are understandable, even predictable, for someone who has not had Schmidt's sport experience. Fenlon, as a non-athlete and the sports editor for the *Columbus Dispatch*, communicates to the public the social reality of sport. However, from Schmidt's perspective he does not seem to understand what Schmidt is retiring from: not baseball as a game, but baseball as a way of life.

Perhaps if Fenlon had experienced the same symbolic world Schmidt has he would have more understanding of what

\(^3\) *Ibid.*
Schmidt is leaving behind. As Novak notes, professional sports journalists criticize the idyllic lifestyles of professional athletes in an effort to "get the facts" and not deal in the myths surrounding and explaining the game. Perhaps many journalists fear or resent retiring athletes because many begin careers in journalism upon retirement, and have a perspective on the game that non-athletes lack. Journalists may fear the symbolic understanding of sport that athletes have experienced.

At any rate, the above story demonstrates that the stories of the two men represent different realities created by their very different experiences, and that these stories communicate myths that explain both the event and the perspectives of the story tellers. Both stories are "true" from the perspective of the teller, yet both differ in many respects. Both convey a fair amount of emotion, Schmidt's the sense of loss of a way of life and Fenlon's the cynicism of a man who has been fooled by too many retiring athletes. Sport is a way of living for both Schmidt and Fenlon. Both use myths to explain their sport experiences, and both are members of a community that shares similar myths that are used to explain their sport experiences.

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Summary

The sharing of these sport experiences occurs through the act of communication, and both symbolic interactionism and symbolic convergence theory assume that this act of communication can be studied to examine the social realities of the communicants. These social realities are expressed symbolically, and the symbols are used to explain the experiences to others and to one's self. Schmidt's and Fenlon's stories can be explained in this manner, and reveal some of the myths that have been used to create their realities. The experiences and realities of others can be similarly explained. From the perspective of the study of symbols, then, one can examine sport myths as lived experience.

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In October of 1988 the crew described in Chapter One, the 1982 National Team, held its seventh reunion at the Head of the Charles Regatta. We were not the only National Team holding a reunion, as the 1972 Olympic Team, the "Alte Achter Boat Club," has threatened to race until they are 40th, or last. From this perspective their skills have failed them; their ability has limited them to 38th. But they keep trying. They now serve as a model not of futility but of community.
They have ten years on us, but we are following closely. Where once we had seemingly unlimited bursts of energy, we now must conserve ourselves so that we can finish the race: 5,000 meters will take approximately 16 minutes. We are starting 13th in the field of 40, and we are still sore from our 30 minute practice from the day before. Through the Boston University Bridge we row, around the corner to Powerhouse Straights. Our first challenge is Riverside Boat Club. They pass us easily. Our next challenge is Navy. We try to hold them off, and succeed through some crafty steering by Andy. Coming by Harvard, though, they take 20 hard strokes and sprint by us. We save ourselves for the final sprint past Cambridge Boat Club. Dartmouth closes. We see them coming and try to raise the cadence. Nothing happens. We finish slightly ahead of them, but they have made up at least 45 seconds, and will finish ahead of us in elapsed time. We finish 32nd.

We make a new plan, only this time it is for the party after the race. It is good to see everyone again, and the race has been the excuse for the reunion. Wives and children now share and create the reality of our new rowing experiences, and they all have to deal with stories of how fast we really were. We'll get those heavyweights yet.
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