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ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to contribute to the reexamination of the proper role of sport and its actual relationship to the educational enterprise of which it is a part. Two polar views of the proper purpose of schooling are discussed first: education for maturity and education for enculturation. The opinion is then set forth that American public schools approach more closely the enculturative rather than the maturity ideal. Interscholastic sports are held to be an important mechanism for fostering enculturation; they contribute only in a limited way to the maturity of the participant or spectator. Several implications of this analysis for educational policy toward sport are drawn. It is felt that sociologists of sport can and should actively contribute to a more humane system of school athletics by addressing themselves to policy-related questions and by helping to plan, implement, and evaluate new models of sport and physical education. (Author/DIO)

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SPORT, SOCIALIZATION AND THE SCHOOL: TOWARD MATURITY OR ENCULTURATION?

by
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FOREWORD

Dr. Walter E. Schafer, formerly with the Sociology Department at the University of Oregon, is now a visiting associate professor at the University of California at Davis. He is also a coordinator of Wanderjahr School, a residential one-year alternative school for adolescent boys and girls located on a 1,000-acre ranch in Marysville, California.

As a social psychologist, Dr. Schafer has written numerous books and articles on education and youth. He has also worked with adolescents as a researcher and camp worker for several years. His keen interest in the sociology of sport is evident in this Bulletin, especially as he explores the two polar views of the purpose of schooling, education for maturity vs. education for enculturation. Other topics he analyzes include American Schooling as Enculturation . . . Sport in the American School: In the Service of Enculturation

. . . Implications for Educational Policy Toward School Athletics . . . and A Plea for an Applied Sociology of Sport.

The views expressed by Dr. Schafer should serve as food for thought for all those who support or are involved in public school athletics. It is our hope that sports serve as an effective vehicle both for enculturation and maturity.

Kenneth A. Erickson
Executive Secretary

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Introduction

Throughout the United States, interscholastic and intercollegiate sports are experiencing unprecedented crises. The authority of the coach to regulate the personal and political lives of his athletes is being challenged. Public schools are finding it ever more difficult to finance competitive inter-school teams and some of the larger districts in financial straits are even dropping them altogether. In many areas, public interest and spectatorship are waning. At the college and university level, student governments are increasingly reluctant to continue to provide funds for athletic departments at the same time that public unhappiness about the political activism and unrest on many campuses is resulting in reduced gate attendance and financial gifts. The consequent money crisis is further exacerbated by rapidly rising costs of interscholastic and intercollegiate sports. Claims of institutional

and individual racism are being voiced.

Both in public schools and in colleges and universities, the proper role of sport and its actual relationship to the educational enterprise of which it is a part inevitably are undergoing renewed scrutiny. This paper is intended to contribute in the following ways to this re-examination. First, we will discuss two polar views of the proper purpose of schooling: education for maturity and education for enculturation. Second, we will argue that American public schools in fact more closely approach the enculturation than the maturity ideal. Third, we will contend that interscholastic sports are an important mechanism for fostering enculturation and contribute only in a limited way to the maturity of the participant or spectator. Fourth, we will identify several implications of our analysis for educational policy toward sport.

Finally, we will argue that sociologists of sport can and should actively contribute to a more humane system of school athletics by addressing themselves to policy-related questions and by helping to plan, implement and evaluate new models

of sport and physical education. Throughout the paper, reference usually will be to inter-school sport at the high school level, although occasionally we will refer to intercollegiate athletics as well.

Two Polar Views of the Purpose of Schooling: Education for Maturity and Education for Enculturation

Throughout the literature on the philosophy, sociology, and history of education, one finds many references to the historic debate whether schooling ought to place greater emphasis on the maturity and individual development of each student or on fitting individuals into the existing cultural patterns and social systems, thereby ensuring the smooth functioning of those patterns and systems. In short, should schooling primarily benefit the student or the society? While necessarily oversimplified, a brief examination of these contrasting views is useful for understanding the educational role of school sports.

Many educational theorists contend that the primary goal of the school ought to be the enhancement of maturity within the individual student. Advocates of this position hold that, while the accumulated knowledge and skills of the culture need to be transmitted and learned, it is even more vital that each student engage in a deep-going intellectual and emotional confrontation with himself and his culture. Such questions as these must be asked and faced: Who am I? Why am I here? How am I being shaped? What do I believe? What do I want to become? What is to become of my country and the world? Are the values shaping how social

problems are approached necessarily, the best values? Is technological growth necessarily good, at least beyond a certain point? What is to be my role in the development of a more humane world? Those who stress the primacy of maturity contend that knowledge and facts are not enough but that awareness and wisdom also are essential--awareness and wisdom about the "hidden premises of his culture."¹ Such wisdom depends on the encouragement of individuals to evaluate and make choices themselves--processes, of course, which require substantial intellectual skills and discipline.²

Confrontation with self and culture must be accompanied, it is argued, by stress upon development of the genuinely autonomous person, who need not rely only upon authority, tradition, or peers for his decisions and choices but who can arrive at his own point of view without undue anxiety or close-mindedness. Autonomy as meant here does not mean selfishness, disrespect or unconcern for others but rather strength and wisdom to determine

for oneself answers to questions like those above.³ Advocates of this position hold that human survival depends not only upon continual questioning of the directions we are collectively taking but on the existence of peoples who can think clearly, evaluate evidence and make up their own minds, who won't be misled by mass media or unwise leaders, and who can split with their own background or immediate social environment and challenge authority figures in order to believe or do what is thought to be right.

Toward this end and in the interest of good mental health of the population, theorists who stress maturity further contend that schools ought to play a major role in the development of a sense of unconditional self-worth in each student. Basic self-worth ought not depend on performance, achievement, conformity, approval or anything else, but rather ought to be inherent and unconditional within oneself, as a result of inputs of love and acceptance. This does not mean, of course, that the

person need accept everything about his personality or behavior, but that fundamental and deep-going self-worth ought to be there, irrespective of other things. Supporters of this view support their position by pointing to evidence that self-esteem is essential not only for mental health but for success along many dimensions of activity. Unconditional self-worth ought to be furthered through each interaction and activity within the schooling process.

While articulation and support of the education-for-maturity view is fairly recent in American education, there is a long tradition of support for education-for-enculturation, dating back to the earliest private schools created to fit youngsters into the religious, cultural and economic ways of their parents. The early public schools also were founded on the belief that the primary responsibility of the educational system was to bring into full adulthood persons with skills, commitments and knowledge that would guarantee the furtherance of the political economy and

the religious-ethical heritage of the people. Contemporary spokesmen of this view lay stress upon such objectives as developing marketable vocational skills for fitting into the economy, loyalty above all else to the nation-state, fundamental acceptance of the prevailing social values and especially the overt and covert premises undergirding the American political and economic patterns. Learning to accommodate to authority and to adjust to a variety of roles and role structures are vitally important, no matter how unpleasant. Greater emphasis is placed by advocates of this position on following orders and believing what one is told than on independent judgment and an inquisitive stance toward one's culture. Education for enculturation also includes an important role of the school in the selection of persons for different positions and levels on the occupational and status systems, as well as the acceptance by the individual of the processes and outcomes of such selection. Not only is independent-minded questioning of the hidden premises of

the culture not to be encouraged within this view, but it is seen as a threat to an effective schooling process and to the stability and well-being of the larger society.⁴

In the view of Bowers and others, local control of finances and educational policy is the main means by which enculturation

is ensured in the United States.

Education theorists and schoolmen do not, of course, advocate education for maturity or for enculturation at the total exclusion of the other, but throughout the literature one does find a preponderance of emphasis on one or the other.⁵

American Schooling as Enculturation

In my judgment, the public schools in the United States more closely approach the enculturation model than the maturity model. This occasion will not permit an extended defense of this conclusion, which is shared by a growing number of educational analysts and critics. But there is little question that in both their overt curricular content and in the covert curricula inherent in the very teaching-learning process, most schools demonstrate a much greater concern for inculcating so-called "correct" attitudes than for fostering inquisitiveness; for teaching the blind following of authority than a desire for

actively searching for the truth; for fostering uncritical loyalty to the nation-state and its current leadership than for developing a critical and questioning citizenry; for turning out followers than for developing innovators; for teaching supposedly marketable skills than for stimulating a life-long enjoyment of learning; and for turning out people who base their acceptance of self and others on performance and "right" attitudes than on intrinsic worth and dignity. In short, greatest stress is given to learning how to "fit in."

While enculturation is not always a conscious and deliberate goal, it is fostered both by the

fact that schooling is conducted within large, bureaucratic organizations (which run more efficiently when the "raw material" being processed is standardized, carefully controlled, treated in an undifferentiated fashion, and taught not to ask difficult questions), and within the context of local control by powerful and generally conservative interests and persons who seek to ensure that young people do not deviate very far from their own definitions of the good person and that existing institutions are protected and manned by individuals who above all else are loyal and do not ask too many questions. It is hard to see, in fact, how education for maturity can ever be carried very far or carried out very effectively as long as it is attempted within schools

that are bureaucratically organized and locally controlled.⁶ While increased centralization may well not be the answer, greater autonomy of the education system and the educator within it may well be.

The important point here is that public schooling in the United States--as in most countries--is more oriented to fitting people into the existing culture and social systems than to generating confrontations with self and culture, independence and autonomy, or unconditional self-worth--at a time, unfortunately, when the development of a more humane and livable world requires a far greater proportion of independent-minded, strong, culturally aware, and innovative individuals.

Sport in the American School: In the Service of Enculturation

It is my contention that, whatever else their outcomes, interscholastic athletics serve first and foremost as a social device for steering young people--

participants and spectators alike--into the mainstream of American life through the overt and covert teaching of "appropriate" attitudes, values, norms and behavior

patterns. As a result, school sports tend to exert more of a conservatizing and integrating influence in the society than an innovative or progressive influence. In short, interscholastic athletics above all else contribute to enculturation and contribute relatively little to maturity as we have defined it. I should like to elaborate, first by giving a very brief description of the basic structure of interscholastic athletics in the United States and then with several examples of how school sports contribute to enculturation.

Each high school is represented by athletic teams, sometimes in a dozen or more sports, in highly organized competition against other schools of about the same size in the nearby geographic area. Usually there are league championships, inter-league play-offs, and state championships for schools of three or four different sizes. The athletic program most often is partly financed through the regular school budget, with supplemental support from gate receipts. Coaches

usually are teachers who receive additional pay for their after-school and weekend work. In most communities, basketball and football receive the greatest attention and support from adults and students, although top athletes in all sports are the prestige leaders of the school. Practice and competition are carried on after regular school hours.

With their stress above all on winning as a team and becoming a champion as an individual athlete (thereby becoming a hero in the eyes of one's peers and community), school sports, first of all, are a significant means by which an instrumental or goal-orientation is developed in youth--not only in participants but in student fans who idolize them as well. In one sense, this is useful socialization--the economy depends on continuous input of new members who are instrumental and goal-oriented. On the other hand, relatively little stress gets placed on doing something, games or anything else, for the inherent enjoyment or delight. Since the vast majority of schools have little or no

opportunity for participation in informal or low-key athletic programs, athletic participation comes to be associated with playing only to win, to be a hero, to work for later rewards at the expense of present enjoyment or pleasure. Many critics of school athletics argue that this strong instrumental emphasis is unfortunate, both because it develops habits of minimizing the importance of engaging in athletics for the sheer enjoyment, and because it discourages many from participating in physical activity later on.

Second, and closely related, is reinforcement of the idea in students that achievement is among the most desirable of all virtues. Like goal-orientation, the reinforcement of achievement in athletics is congruent with the thrust of the school as a whole. Just as genuine learning of ideas takes a back seat to achieving grades, so achieving first-string status, winning the league championship, or winning the approval of the coach takes priority over playing for enjoyment. Since the adult culture places

great stress on achievement, especially through upward mobility in the occupational sector, athletics represent an important means by which youth are prepared for later life, both by direct participation and by emulating the virtues displayed by the athletic heroes of the school.

Third, every interscholastic coach works hard to build into his athletes a deep commitment to hard work--a virtue also stressed and valued in the adult world. Even if hard work does not result in winning, it is still desirable in its own right. Building "good character" for nearly every coach means developing a self-generated enthusiasm for expending substantial effort toward a goal. As in all modern countries, hard work stands next to Godliness and respect for Motherhood as a quality of the Good Person. The adult male who does not hold down a productive job and work hard at it when he physically and mentally could do so finds himself just a step above the bottom of the social ladder. The coach, then, serves the culture well in seeking to build into the motivational

structure of his athletes a strong commitment to hard work--not only in sport itself but in other areas of activity as well.

Fourth, school sports serve to enculturate by providing experience in working in a formal organization and, within that context, adjusting one's own desires and behavior to that of others. In view of the passive character of the student role in schools, the relative scarcity of employment opportunities for youth, and the disappearance of responsible or productive role in the family, athletics (like other extracurricular activities) represent one of the few chances for practicing organizational participation in a serious and sustained way. In many respects, a football, basketball, or baseball team simulates a bureaucracy. In order to succeed, one must learn to accept authority, follow institutionalized procedures and rules, and adapt to the ways of complementary role partners. In team sports, one must subordinate self-interest to group-interest whenever there is potential conflict--a prelude to the kinds of

behavior later required in most work settings.

Fifth, interscholastic athletics in the United States differ markedly from club sports here and abroad in that continued participation depends upon accepting or at least conforming to the moral standards set down by the coach or the athletic department as well as being able to perform well. For instance, the high school athlete most often must avoid getting into trouble with school authorities and the police, smoking, drinking, using drugs, using bad language, dressing sloppily or unconventionally, wearing too long hair, staying out too late at night, associating with the wrong kinds of people, and sometimes even dating a girl of another race. Some of these rules exist to enhance training and performance, but others clearly do not. Rather, their existence is justified partly by the coach's concern with the public image of his team and partly by his concern with turning out so-called upright, desirable citizens, at least as defined by him and other main-

line, middle class people of the community.

Part of the mission of many coaches extends well beyond the border of athletics to include internalization of the values, norms, beliefs, and attitudes thought to be desirable for successful and acceptable later life in the adult community. Since coaches often tend to be rather conventional in social values and life style, their norms regarding personal behavior and values represent middle America very well, and athletics thereby serve to enculturate youth into the mainstream of American life. Very little tolerance is displayed by most coaches toward questioning of these standards by their athletes. At the same time, little emphasis is placed on teaching individual athletes how to make their own choices among alternative life styles or on protecting the individual athlete's right to look like, do, or say as he pleases, so long as he does not interfere with others or with the training and performance of himself and his team. In short, in American high school sports, it

is good to accept dominant community values and life styles rather than to deviate from or question them or to test out alternatives. In this way, athletics serve as a conventionalizing or conforma-tizing influence in American education, guiding youth well into the center of American life.

Sixth, interscholastic athletics exert a closely related influence in relation to political socialization. Although no research has yet been completed on the political attitudes and behavior of high school coaches, I suspect they are relatively conservative and inactive politically. Thus many coaches display little tolerance for leftist political attitudes or for political activism of any kind among their athletes. This position is often justified by a concern about maintaining a good (neutral) image for the team, especially in relation to the public who pay taxes and provide gate receipts. That high school athletics in fact exert this influence is suggested by recent research showing that college athletes, compared with non-athletes,

are somewhat more conservative, less interested and active in politics, more tolerant of violations of civil liberties, and more tolerant of repressive reactions to campus unrest.⁷ Research is now being conducted in Oregon to determine political attitudes and behavior of coaches.

Seventh, high school athletics also reinforce dominant American attitudes toward sport--that one either participates if he is good enough to make an elite team or one becomes a spectator and supports those who are fortunate enough to have the talent and motivation to make the team--the school team or in later life the professional team. Little opportunity is provided by the school for those of lesser ability to participate for fun or fitness. For instance, most schools restrict use of athletic facilities to interscholastic teams of physical education classes and do not make them available after school hours for intra-school sports or informal, unorganized play. Nor does the tax-paying public seem very interested in the idea. One result is that youth learn to

watch from the sidelines, cheer, and only participate vicariously through their hero, rather than developing habits of regular engagement in sport for simple enjoyment. Thus, we move closer to becoming a nation of sheep.

Eighth, and finally, school athletics like academic studies are likely to generate conditional, rather than unconditional, self-worth. One can accept himself only if he performs well. It is true that a good deal of research shows athletes to have higher self-esteem than non-athletes. However, I suspect this is a somewhat misleading picture, since the self-esteem reported by athletes is likely to be contingent on continued achievement in socially valued activities like athletics and is likely not to be independent, self-sustaining, and unconditional. As noted before, good mental health as well as effective behavior in many arenas of adult life depend upon unconditional self-worth--fundamental self-acceptance irrespective of performance or others' reactions to it.⁸

The very nature of school sports, with their great emphasis on winning, and developing heroes, is certain to contribute to conditional self-worth. And as Charles Reich has stated in The Greening of America, a great deal of stress is placed in adult America on linking self-worth to performance. As he puts it, the individual " . . . relies on institutions to certify the meaning and value of his life, by rewarding accomplishment and conferring titles, office, respect, and honor."⁹ And such conditional self-worth in turn generates an instrumental, future-oriented and extrinsic approach to life. As Reich states, the typical adult male . . .

" . . . adopts as his personal values, the structure of standards and rewards set by his occupation or organization . . . Thus, the individual directs his activities toward such goals as a promotion, a raise in salary, a better office, respect and commendation by his colleagues, a title, "recognition" by his profession. Beginning in school, he measures himself and his achievements by

the tests, examinations, grades, and other formal hurdles of life. He becomes a projectile ready to be set in motion by outside energies. His motivations are constantly directed toward the future, because it is not inner satisfaction that moves him but something extrinsic to himself. . . . the individual has no existence apart from his work and his relationship to society. Without his cover, without his function, he would be a non-person; hence the terrible fear of failure in the competitive struggle; below the meritocracy is an abyss where people have ceased to exist altogether. Thus, there is a loss of a sense of reality of self, apart from the way in which society judges self."¹⁰

High school sports, then, do very well indeed in preparing youth for a life of depending on externals, of reliance on extrinsic performance for his meaning and self-worth. And partly because of earlier participation, many athletes approach high school sports not so much as an expression of self-worth as an effort to reduce deficient self-esteem.

Implications for Educational Policy Toward School Athletics

In short, I am suggesting that interscholastic athletics, largely covertly, contribute more to fitting young people without raising questions into the mainstream of American life than to fostering careful examination of self and culture, personal autonomy, or unconditional self-worth. This is not to say that education for enculturation is all "bad" and education for maturity is all "good," that they are entirely mutually exclusive of one another, or that school athletics contribute in no way to maturity. But I am contending that the latent and covert enculturation function outweighs in social significance the contribution of school sports to the maturity of the individual student athlete or spectator.

What are the implications of this analysis, then, for educational policy toward interscholastic athletics? Some might argue that it follows that highly competitive sports ought to be banned altogether. I do not come to that conclusion from what I have said. Clearly, some degree of enculturation is needed for

social integration, and school sports do have a place in the educational enterprise. Many youth like to compete at a high level of quality and intensity, have the talent, and should be given the chance to do so--but not to the exclusion of broad-based opportunities for informed, low-keyed participation for fun, enjoyment, and good health, especially in life-time sports.

Schools in the United States are doing far too little in my judgment in encouraging intra-school competition for fun in a variety of carry-over sports. Facilities should be made available for this purpose, clubs should be formed where useful, and as much value ought to be given by teachers, administrators and coaches to this type of engagement in sport as to participation in high levels of competition. Such opportunities should be equally available to boys and girls.

Another important implication is that just as schools as a whole ought not indoctrinate and conventionalize, so ought not interscholastic sports as part of

the school. Coaches have no business, in my judgment, requiring conformity to a particular set of moral standards--their own or those of the dominant adult community--that are unrelated to athletic training or performance.

To some extent, sport will by its very nature enculturate youth, since participation in many ways is like participation in the adult community-at-large. But much greater stress ought to be placed on questioning, inquiring, making individual choices as to values and life style, and protecting the rights of persons to be different. The mission of the school--and of athletics carried on within it--ought to be not to indoctrinate but to develop independent-minded, autonomous, self-aware persons with a basic unconditional sense of self-worth--qualities depending in part on the extent to which coaches convey a deep sense of acceptance and dignity to each athlete.

The reaction by many to what I am saying will surely be--but the coach needs ultimate and unquestioning authority in order to

maximize performance and success by the athlete and his team. My response is that while the coach indeed needs authority, it must be exercised in a humane, dignified, and supportive fashion if the desired personal outcomes we have discussed are to be achieved. Moreover, it is vital to distinguish between scope and strength of authority. While a coach no doubt needs strong authority over his athletes, that authority ought to be narrow rather than broad in scope in that it is exercised over behavior, clearly and directly related to training or performance. Determination of the precise limits of authority in the end must depend upon the good judgment of the sensitive coach, of course, although athletes can hardly be faulted for increasingly resisting the authority of the unnecessarily intruding and controlling coach and for demanding that he stay within his justifiable limits in controlling their lives.

If, because of their high degree of superimposed organization and their reliance on public support, interscholastic and intercollegiate

athletics cannot avoid cultural indoctrination and suppression of individual rights, then we ought to face up to the fact that they have no place in the American schooling process. Let them survive, but apart from the schools

which already have a tremendous struggle in living up to the ideal of fostering the pursuit of the truth, independent inquiry and discovery, and the nurturance of individual differences.

A Plea for an Applied Sociology of Sport

Where does the sociology of sport fit into this picture? To be sure, we need to describe and analyze the way things are at present.¹¹ But the questions we ask in research should not be just any questions that strike our fancy, fit our computer programs, or make for easy papers to present. Rather they should be questions with policy-relevance, the answers to which will in one way or another contribute to the development of better systems of sport and physical education in our schools. For instance, we need to know more about what coaches are really like and in what directions and ways they influence athletes. We also need to know more about the consequences of different degrees and

kinds of involvement in athletics, as well as the outcomes of different existing models of sport and physical education, both here and abroad.

We also need to play an even more direct, active, and useful part in helping create a more inclusive and humane program of sport in the school. In brief, we ought to help design, implement, and evaluate different models of sport and physical education as well as models of training physical education teachers and coaches.¹² For instance, what would be the actual effects on later voluntary exercise habits of giving physical education credit for physical activity carried on outside school hours? What models of training would

create the most tolerant and supportive coaches and physical education teachers? What would be the effects of different types of athletic clubs sponsored by the school?

These are samples of the kinds of questions to which applied sociologists of sport could address themselves if they were to leap forth from the academic tower of irrelevance with its entangling and blinding vines of useless theorizing, and pedestrian descriptive studies into the open and fertile fields of practical, applicable research of a policy-related, experimental, or evaluative kind--still employing, to be sure, the best methods and logic available and still drawing upon the best

theories of sociology and social psychology as a source of hypotheses and interpretations.

We sociologists ought not to be talking just with ourselves as we have been for the most part. We ought to be talking with educational and athletic policy-makers and practitioners who badly need the assistance we can provide as social scientists as they redesign old programs and design totally new ones and as they try to assess the impact of these programs on students. In this way, we may well be able to hasten the day when school sports not only contribute to "fitting in" and conformity but to developing aware, independent, self-worthy--in short, mature--young people.

FOOTNOTES

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