About the Author:

Playing basketball and baseball all four years of high school definitely has exposed me to what you would consider "sport/play." But I have never really realized what ethnography was before I started taking this course. I'm fascinated with the concept of the student athlete, and how they manage everything that they do. I really enjoyed the Geertz article and I would like to try and somehow immerse myself in what I was studying much like he did. I think that is one of the more effective and interesting methods of ethnographic study that we have looked at so far and I look forward to possibly delving into my study in a similar way.

Keywords:

race, athletics, University of Illinois, track and field

Abstract:

What are some myths related to race in college track?

How do caucasian athletes respond to these myths?

I wanted to look at these questions and have them answered by someone close to the source, a track and field athlete here at the U of I. I looked at Kyle Kusz's book, "Revolt of the White Athlete: Race, Media and the Emergence of Extreme Athlete in American," to get a closer background on the concept behind my project. The concept of new racism. I also looked at the library website to find articles involving race and track and field.

Initial Exercises:

I have definitely learned many things from the 3 weeks that I have been in this course. Like I mentioned above, the Geertz study of the Balinese cockfighting was fascinating. He looked at so many different aspects of what was going on and he provided a great look in to what was happening at these cockfights. Geertz placed himself into the role as a spectator in the midst of one of these events and even participated in the mad-dash that occurred when the police arrived. He also studied the men involved and what types of things they did, such as betting, during this fight. I was not aware once I learned what ethnography was at the beginning of the course that it could possibly involve a participatory venture on behalf of the ethnographer. I thought that it was going to be limited to observation. I don't know if what I plan on doing as an ethnographer will involve any participation on my part, but I find that aspect of ethnography very interesting.
I also did not realize the story behind the removal of the chief as the school's mascot. I knew that it was no longer part of the tradition of the university, but I was not aware of the roots behind the protest from the Native Americans. And I had never heard of Charlene Teters either. I thought that was another very compelling ethnographic look, and it is something directly related to the University of Illinois. I thought it was interesting to get completely different viewpoints from people. The officials of the University were very proper in supporting the chief, whereas the clips of the fans that were shown in the film were very angry and appalled at what was going on. And then there of course was Teters who had her motives to get the chief removed.

One of the topics that I am still interested in is the role of the student athlete at a Division 1 University. Like I mentioned before, I know on a smaller scale how stressful everything can be while playing a sport or multiple sports. The practices, off-season training, homework, girlfriend/boyfriend, and several other factors can play in to an extremely hectic lifestyle. I want to know how student-athletes can juggle everything that they must cater to and still compete on a national stage at a high level like this. At this point in their careers at whatever sport they may be doing, it becomes a full-time job. I know that they work year round on perfecting what they do, with maybe a month off somewhere in between if they are lucky.

Although this topic interests me very much, like we talked about in class, it can be very hard to get access to student athletes. I personally know a few girls and boys track and cross country athletes, but I'm not sure if that's what I want to study off of. If I did decide to go with a topic like this though I would start there with one of the people that I know. But even then, do they have time to answer any questions that I may have? It also would be difficult to try and observe them at what they are doing without being a complete pain. What I'm interested in finding out about them could be very personal information that maybe they do not feel like exposing. Maybe they don't feel like revealing how stressful it can be. I'm interested in seeing if I can build off of this idea though, because like I mentioned before, it is something that greatly interests me.

Susan Brownell is a well-known expert on Chinese sports. She has done several different studies on sport in China including the most recent Olympic Games in Beijing. Brownell actually went to Beijing University where she was a member of the track team. She participated in the 1985 Chinese College Games and she won the heptathlon. Her piece, "Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic," takes a look at an interesting aspect of what she calls, "body culture." Even something as simple as how a person walks fascinated Brownell. Through this she could tell a lot about a person and it displayed cultural differences. She noticed that Westerners walked differently than people in China for example. Brownell also was interested in looking at the Olympic movement, and how the techniques of the body have evolved and become uniform for certain types of sports.

Iain Borden is an architectural historian. His studies on skateboarding as an urban activity have been one of his main focuses. Borden's "Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body," takes a closer look at the relationship between skater, skateboard, and terrain. One of Borden's focuses/questions seems to be how the skater views the architecture/terrain around him and recreates it for what he or she wants to use it for. Borden feels that skateparks are a way of recreating urban terrain for the use of skateboarding. Borden also took a look at how he felt that the
skater, skateboard, and terrain all became one "entity" through skating. Something that Borden questioned was how architecture was put forward by skateboarding and vis versa. It was examined through his study how the architecture tends to form the skateboarder.

Question:

I want to analyze the racial myths and ideas regarding collegiate athletics, and track and field specifically. It is thought in a widespread manner that minorities, or African Americans in general, are more successful in athletic competition than caucasians. I want to find the reasoning behind this and the thoughts of a white track and field athlete at the University. I hypothesize that the athlete that will be questioned will have a somewhat different view than what many common people do on the subject.

Plan:

I plan on finding the ideas of racial stereotypes and feelings about athletes and their success rates. Many people believe that African American athletes or just minority athletes in general are typically more competitive and successful when it comes to running, jumping and just any form athletic competition.

Data:

My primary evidence, or research, involved my interview. That was my primary focus from the beginning and that is what I decided to focus on as the project progressed. I felt that interviewing an athlete that is close to the source of a track and field lifestyle would provide some very valuable information. The interview that I had planned out turned out to be somewhat of a failure in regards to my original plans, but the way in which the interview progressed was in no way disappointing. Although my topic remained the same, a lot of the valuable information that I took away from this ethnographic experience was actually on the topic of international recruiting instead of racial myths themselves. While the information may have been a little off topic, I felt that it still was relevant to the research that I had already engaged in. In regards to archival evidence, there was practically nothing that I found that I felt pertained to my topic. My search of articles from the library's EBSCO search did help me to find some background information involving race and track and field though.

Works Cited:


Kusz, Kyle. Revolt of the White Athlete: Race, Media, and the Emergence of Extreme Athlete in
Discuss:

Kyle Kusz' "new racism" idea in a large part influenced the topic and idea that I chose to research this semester. Kusz developed the concept of "new racism" in athletics. This idea focuses on the shift of white athletes from traditional athletic competition in to roles of extreme athletes. These extreme athletes are viewed as radical innovators in the world of sports. Kusz also mentions the revolt efforts that took place in Hollywood at the time. While African-American superstars were coming to the forefront of stardom in the American media, films were being made to try and influence the country in feel good stories such as Rudy and Forrest Gump, in which unsuspecting white adolescents achieve their life-long dreams. And by doing so they gain the happiness that they have always been looking for. In Kusz's opinion these films were also part of this silent white revolt. The revolt also took on a more obvious role with the emergence of extreme sports. Sports such as skateboarding, BMX, motocross and snowboarding exemplified the white culture backlash. Through these extreme sports, Kusz felt like caucasian men were making attempt to gain popularity through sport, a popularity that largely had been taken away in the 1990's by rising African American stars. From just a general knowledge I know men like Michael Jordan, Barry Bonds, Sammy Sosa, Ken Griffey Jr., Jerry Rice, and Barry Sanders were some of the more prominent black athletes of the decade that could be "accused" of taking away this attention. These men were seemingly being portrayed as the privileged and heroic figures of America by the media. Kusz felt like caucasian extreme athletes were attempting to take on the role of underprivileged and radical citizens that previously had been attributed to African Americans by the media.

Kusz's work inspired me to take a look at a topic involving both race and athletics here at the U of I. I from there took a look at athletics here at the university in regards to race and decided to relate race and track and field into my study. I happen to know a track athlete here on campus and decided that I would interview him to get his opinion on this "new racism" concept and if he felt like there were any racial myths or stereotypes in the sport of track and field. A lot of what I looked at involving the topics race brought up the issue of Tommie Smith and John Carlos. These two men were banished from the Olympics when they peacefully protested in favor of black rights and power at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. I had mixed emotions on whether or not to include this information in my study but felt in the end that it was important to highlight for background knowledge on the subject. My interview was largely based around racial issues in track and field. I had a difficult time incorporating the information that I was getting about the racial issues in my interview and I shifted to another topic that was brought up. I learned a lot about international recruiting in the talk that I had with my friend. He told me a lot about what goes on in regards to recruiting athletes here at the university, and more specifically international athletes. I found this information much more intriguing and am happy that he brought up this topic.
as I was seemingly drawing blanks with my original topic of racial myths in track.

EUI Links:

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/review_of_higher_education/v021/21.3hurtado.html

http://www.eui.uiuc.edu/methods_topics_t1.html

http://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/8728

This link almost exactly correlates with the research that I was doing. It delves in to the topic of racial segregation on the Illinois track team and that is very similar to the type of information that I was looking for with racial myths in track and field.

Reflect:

My research process was interesting to say the least. Initially I wanted to look at the life of a student athlete here on campus. I then felt like I could incorporate a topic that fit more issues. The second topic that I chose was about race and track and field here at the U of I. At first I was happy with this decision, but I quickly learned that researching this topic was more difficult than I thought, but I went ahead with my interview anyways to see if I could gather some valuable information. What I got out of the interview as far as what I wanted in relation to my original topic wasn't exactly what I thought it would be. The issues that we did end up talking about in international recruiting ended up being very valuable and informative to me. The research that I conducted was largely based on Kyle Kusz's idea of "new racism." I also found a lot of inspiring information in Tommie Smith and John Carlos' black power display at the Olympics. Working in the on-line environment for me was an interesting experience. I am in no way good with computers but I learned a lot through searching library resources. Overall I wasn't completely satisfied with what I accomplished in my research but I learned alot about the process itself and what type of resources to use for a similar adventure in the future.

Recommendations:

I found the information in my interview regarding international athletes in an American university setting to be very interesting. If I had to choose to explore deeper into an issue or recommend a topic for future researchers I would strongly suggest taking a closer look at international recruiting. Initially, I was very unaware about the topic of foreign recruiting but my interview gave me a little taste as to what it is about. Again, I would encourage anyone that would be interested in this topic to research it further.