

## How Can an Anti-Chief Fan Exist in a Pro-Chief World? Eric Dangoy

### EVOKE

#### About the Ethnographer

I am a senior graduating in LAS with a BA in anthropology from the University of Illinois in Urbana Champaign. My interests lie Latin American culture, ecological anthropology, and environmental stability. For these reasons, I am proud to be entering a masters program for cultural anthropology at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale with full tuition and stipend next fall. I hope to one day achieve a doctorate in the same discipline.

university document

I really did not know where to start in inspecting our university's mythical ideologies as Peter Ewell can or how to analyze texts as does Norman Fairclough. But in cruising through the multitude of university documents for what seemed like an endless amount of time, my interest was finally grabbed when I came upon a link to the university's association of fraternities and sororities, aka Greek Affairs (<http://www.odos.uiuc.edu/greek/>). Every day, it feels as if I am surrounded by college Greeks. This feeling materializes in bits of side conversation heard in the wagon circle of young initiates at the next lunch table, or seeing letters displayed on a hat, t-shirts, and even rumps walking to or from class. I even find myself accidentally wandering into the "Illini Greek" section of a campus bookstore now and then. Despite this close contact, I still consider myself as an individual incredibly ignorant of Greek life on the University of Illinois campus. I mainly pieced together my view of Greek affairs through an amalgam of media portrayal in movies, the advertising of Greek events (such as fall recruitment and after hour parties), and varied degrees of social interaction with individual and groups of Greeks to name a few. And quite honestly, my generated feelings towards interactions such as these have given me a negative impression of Greek Affairs. Through this week's assignment, I thought that I could learn something more that would end some discriminations I have towards college Greeks. But in perusal of the information presented through the link above, I must say I was severely disappointed. As part of our inquiry project, I ask the question: How do Greek affairs present campus fraternity and sorority life? On the welcome page, I notice right away that there is a dearth of information. The introduction takes up a bare third of the page. It is weak and contains very little substance: "Greek Affairs staff serve as advisors for the Black Greek, Interfraternity, Panhellenic and United Greek Councils, as well as for individual chapters. Programs encourage academic achievement, diverse membership recruitment, leadership development, community service, risk management, and sound maintenance of physical facilities." Immediately I found error in this introduction. What do these two statements have to do with each other? What programs encourage these values? Through further inspection of the page, I discovered that these questions remain unanswered. In a way, the page answers my inquiry question through the Fraternity and Sorority Community Mission and Values (<http://www.odos.uiuc.edu/greek/communitystatement.asp>) statement: "As members of fraternities and sororities at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, we are committed to ensuring our success as students and invested partners in our organizations through celebrating friendship, leadership, scholarship, service, and social advancement while appreciating the diversity of our member organizations." Yet, once again I ask myself how so? How does membership in a fraternal order lead to any of these ideals? But all that follows in their more detailed explanations of each ideal remains insufficient as one can see for themselves through the above link. Although there is a lack of communication on the part of the online aggregate student organization, U of I

harbors, to my understanding, one of the largest Greek communities in the nation. Somehow, interested students are still finding their own ways to these exclusive social groups. Is knowledge about Greeks implicit or am I looking in the wrong areas for information? Is knowledge and recruitment more accessible to certain types of people in say particular social/class/race groups than others? Because I have these questions in mind, I may be on the verge of starting my semester research on this note. How do incoming undergraduates find their way (or not find their way) seeking acceptance on the doorsteps of fraternities and sororities? How and where do they develop their images of Greek life? Finally, does the ideology (friendship, service, academic achievement) presented by the university differ from that of the actual member? Perhaps I will be closer to answering these questions by the end of the semester.

## **EXPLORE**

### **Question**

#### **What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?**

Let me first start with a recollection. It's longer than what a recollection should be but please bear with me; there is a point. As I sat waiting in the rarely used dining section of the movie theater for one of the hiring managers to finish his tasks in the projectionist's booth, I tangled with mental strategies on how to handle the question, if it came up, "Are you currently enrolled in school?" I was running responses through my head and trying to formulate the most agreeable way of saying, "Yes, I am going back to Champaign in three weeks, but I would be more than happy to consider coming back for this summer, or if you want during my spring break." The previous day, I managed to get through a preliminary interview with the first manager, Kevin, without somehow having to address this significant matter- a matter that in my own mind had the potential to tip the scales for the worst for a job I needed in the worst way near my mother's home in the Chicagoland south suburbs on such short notice and length of time over this last winter break. To my relief, I had reached the end of the preliminary interview without being asked whether or not I was in school. But to my dismay I learned at the end of that successful interview that I was to be interviewed by another manager the following day because of the company's policy on "team work." I hoped but doubted that the subject was going to pass untouched again.

So as I sat waiting, staring at the movie posters and taking interest especially in the creatively designed stand up movie displays, Kelly walked up to the black wrought iron table I eagerly sat at. He was an older Caucasian male with short, combed, salt and pepper hair, fashionably thin eyeglasses, and the sign of wrinkles at the ends of his eyes. He wore casual dress attire; black dress shoes, dark dress pants, black belt with walkie-talkie hanging from it, and long-sleeved button down shirt with tie. He was of my height, at least, and was of small build. For some reason, his narrow-shouldered gait reminded me of that of a calmly quiet and polite Catholic school student, of which I've had many encounters with in my ten years of education in the private Catholic academic institutions.

After a pleasant greeting and apologies for the wait, we sat and began our discussion. Right away I noticed that the interview format was different. I do not remember exactly what, but to me it felt as if the questions he asked were more personal than those that Kevin asked the previous day. I don't know it, could have just been a different style. But my heart sank as the feared question came up, "It says that you go to the University of Illinois, are you still attending?" I gave an upbeat "Yes, but..." type of answer and it seemed to be acceptable; but then again, it's hard to crack the façade of a human resources agent. You never really know what they are considering until they give you that all-important call the following week. Unexpectedly and off the subject of my possible

hire, Kelly responds to my answer by asking something along the line of, “So how about that Illini basket ball team?” with an interested smile...

Somehow I received the job and started work within the following week with an expected stay of only ~3 and a half weeks. Although, I was incredibly grateful for the short notice hire, I was mildly insulted by the question. I know that Kelly, a huge sports fan, was just attempting to make a social connection through a subject he found incredibly fascinating, but I could not help but feel that my level of knowledge of Illinois basketball and therefore my worthiness for the position was being put to the test. I think this was most evident in my fumbling attempt to say something-- anything about the “awesomeness of our team,” without having to go into detail like regurgitating player names, records, and last Wednesday’s match results.

In another instance, I returned to my mother’s neighborhood one weekend in order to attend a surprise birthday party for my brother-in-law. At the community center the event was hosted at, I got to see many faces old and new. One was an old grade school teacher of mine who had more recently taught my eight-year-old niece. In striking up discussion with her and her husband who I had just met, the subject of what school I was currently attending came up. Her husband, as soon as learning that I am attending the U of I, states something along the lines of, “It must have been hard to come back this weekend, seeing as it is the U of I’s centennial for basketball.” What? “Umm...yeah...I uhh” I started in an attempt to show that I had “school spirit” when in reality I was not too sure what he was talking about until he discussed it more.

Not only are these two instances examples of the influence that Illini Basketball, especially this season, has on Illinois sports lovers, but it also shows the assumed identity of proud Illini basketball fans imposed on those affiliated with the U of I. As one not terribly interested in jumping on the basketball bandwagon, I couldn’t help but feel the societal pressure placed on me that makes me try to feel that I should be in the knowing about such things popularly associated with the University of Illinois. Not everybody that attends the U of I is a die-hard fan of Illini sports, but in these two instances I felt that I should be. Irritated, I asked myself, Why don’t they ask something of the U of I that I am interested in or have a response to? Like culture, or registered organizations? It’s a big University with Nobel Prize winners in the news and professors in National Geographic, but everyone can only focus on basketball!”

It is for this reason, I have come up with an interesting research question: “What does it mean to be part of such a “great basketball” university? I would like to know how people affiliated with the university identify or don’t identify with it through its famous basketball program. I am interested in how basketball has changed impressions of being part of the U of I and how it placed a social importance on bearing witness to such an extremely successful and memorable basketball season. One important interview question I can ask of basketball fans is “how has U of I basketball changed for you over the course of the last few seasons? Are there some visible consequences of Illini basketball’s runaway success this year? How has basketball added to the social environment of the U of I? TI think it would be best and most important to focus on the student body rather than faculty and staff because that is one of the first thing that comes to when thinking of “being part of the University.” It would be best to take impressions from a variety of students who have different degrees of affiliation with the basketball mood, for instance, students of the Orange Krush cheering section, students who follows basketball news but do not attend games, as well as students like me, who normally take no interest in the basketball social sphere. To supplement this material, I am thinking of researching journalistic text from online databases, primarily Nexus Lexus. I am not sure what I would find just as of yet, but I am sure to find some information on the basketball frenzies created on campus. In doing this research, I hope to learn more about the influence of basketball on social politics and how this buzz creates such an overbearing identity on the University of Illinois.

## **Plan**

### **How will you go about answering your inquiry?**

#### Research Proposal

How Can an Anti-Chief Fan Exist in a Pro-Chief World?

#### Abstract

My research will seek to document how identity is manifested by anti-Chief student fans in a sport environment predominated by pro-Chief sentiment such as a campus bar, party, or sporting event. Studying how an anti-Chief sports fan constructs an alternative identity in a setting that compels one to essentialize the relationship between Illini sports and the Chief will contribute to the study of the diversity of U of I student culture. Through a variety of ethnographic field methods, I intend to delineate how Illini sports fans who are anti-Chief legitimize their stance in an atmosphere where the Chief and Illini sports are purported as inseparable.

#### Statement of Research Problem

Wherever one goes on campus, one can perceive the strong political backlash and countermovement of Chief supporters in response to the growing dissent of anti-Chief advocates. There has been a material propaganda arms race with on one side t-shirts and buttons saying loudly “Racial Stereotypes Dehumanize” and bumper stickers stating “anti-racism/anti-‘chief.’” I even have seen homemade t-shirts with a mixed political message featuring G.W. Bush’s face with a dopey expression framed by the recognizable mantle of the popular Chief icon and subtitled “Get Rid of the Chief.” On the opposing side there is an overpowering amount of pro-Chief material ranging from your common popular Chief t-shirt and its multiple variations, bumper stickers, writing utensils, flatware, flags, postcards, hats, blankets, bookends, etc. you name it, anything of merchandisable value. Some even argue that the “Loyalty” wristbands supporting the Library Campaign are an inferential reference to the loyalty associated with the Chief. It is my firm belief that due to rising strength of opposition to the Chief, the threat of doing away with the symbol, and efforts of capitalizing merchandisers, many have ingrained being a Chief supporter into their identities. Pro-chief identity has become so profuse that there is an overpowering amount of Chief sentiment, attire, and reference at home games, parties, and campus bars (especially during and after games). Illini sports are so saturated with connotations of the Chief in halftime performance, intermittent musical performance, and in such large part by the assemblage itself. This makes it difficult for those in attendance of social sports viewing events to determine whether or not the character of Illini sports and the Chief can exist without each other.

#### Statement of Proposed Research

Through my research I shall attempt to examine how identities as Illini sports fans and at the same time anti-Chief supporters are manifested in campus social environments that spew Chief sentiment and demand conformity. I argue that because the bond between the Chief and Illinois sports is essentialized and defended due to resistance against the anti-Chief movement, anti-Chief sports fans are symbolically excluded from the fullest participation in the rituals of Illinois sports.

This then poses some questions: How do anti-Chief fans construct pride identities parallel yet contrary to that of Chief sports fans? How do they participate and cope with tacit exclusionary customs of “Illini Pride” as demanded by the Chief and its supporters? How do they legitimize their stances as members of the “Illini Pride” community, which has powerful Chief undertones, while being anti-Chief? How do they carve autonomous enclaves in the greater pro-Chief atmosphere? Or are they swept up in the collective spirit? These are some of the questions that I wish to find answers to in the undergraduate student body of the University of Illinois of Urbana-Champaign.

It is my wish to focus specifically on the undergraduate student body for many reasons. It

is in my experience to know that they spend most of their time on campus where their social life is centered in comparison to other cohorts such as graduate students and instructors. Here on campus undergraduate anti-Chief sports fans partake in more social situations (games, parties, bar hopping) that have strong Chief influences than do other cohorts. I feel they will have the most defining experiences pertinent to my study.

#### Methodologies

I feel the most effective method to perform research is through participant observation. There would be many opportunities to do so during the regular school year due to the popularity of Illini sports such as football and basketball games during the late summer to early spring and the popular expression, "The weekend begins on a Thursday." I plan on presenting my research interests to students of a sports fan/anti-Chief disposition that I already have social connection. I will travel where they travel and record their actions and thoughts in pro-Chief sports events and situations such as football and basketball games, parties and gatherings, and bars; anywhere in fact where the Chief permeates the Illini Pride sports-social environment. From them, I will attempt the snowball method and participate in the same capacity with new informants.

Other research methods that will be invaluable to this study are interviews and focus groups. I will administer interviews with anti-Chief sports fan informants to try to bring to the surface deep-seated sentiments about the Chief and sports. It is pertinent to this study to learn in detail of any personal experience with the Chief and its associated environments in social sports events had by these informants. I would use intensive focus groups in conjunction with interviews in order to witness how informants with detailed understandings and observations of the same situations relate them to each other and their experiences.

Survey and archival research would supplement my study as well. I would use survey in social situations for statistical research. It would be fruitful to learn for sure at games, parties, and bars what stance on Chief issues those in attendance take because outward appearance could be deceiving. For instance, although one acquaintance occasionally wears Chief T's to sporting events, she is expressly anti-Chief. Archival research can add detail to my analysis by studying the growth of the anti-Chief movement and looking for evidence of past anti-Chief sports fans in the Chief Files of the University Archives.

#### Significance of Research

My research will have especial significance for the Ethnography of the University project. It will have great potential to add to the study of diversity and uncharted parameters of university culture. Because a study like this has not been performed in this manner yet, I hope to lay tracks on untrodden territory and lay the groundwork for future study of this subject as trends and sentiments about the Chief issue will undoubtedly and inevitably change.

## **OBSERVE**

### **What observations, or findings are you encountering in your research?**

"How did you get to (end up at) the U of I?"

I was glad that Mike Brossman, a friend and former roommate, enthusiastically agreed to a tape-recorded interview on such short notice. Because he is a second year transfer student, I was hoping that he could offer a vibrant, dynamic impression of the University and of what it was like to be part of it. Therefore, we met on a late Tuesday night in his camptown apartment.

He wears dark blue jeans and a gray Illinois T-shirt, the style that would normally advertise, "Athletic Department" but interestingly had "Psychology" written across it instead. Leaning back in his seat with arms crossed, one can nearly forget his 6'4" frame. In his smallish bedroom we sat, Mike waiting calmly yet somewhat anxiously for the

interview to start as he swiveled to and fro in his black leather desk chair. An understandable behavior, seeing as I had kept the purpose of the interview to myself. Occasionally, he turned to his computer situated on a desk flush between his bed and the opposite wall in order to send instant messages to a friend of ours interested in what we were preparing to do. Sneaking a peek or two, I saw messages from our friend jokingly telling Mike that she is more cultural than he is and that I should be interviewing her instead.

Sitting cross-legged across from Mike on his bed, I was finally ready to begin the interview after some mental preparation and a superfluous shuffling of papers.

“How did you end up at the University of Illinois?”- Immediately, Mike gave me a brief, clear timeline of some events leading to his attendance at the U of I. As he was nearing the end of his time at a local community college, Mike began to seek admissions to a university. It seemed he was attaching logic to his reason for applying here, “...both my parents went to U of I, so I decided it would be a good idea to try to apply here, and I applied and I got in.”

Due to his concise response to the basic question, our dialogue evolved into a discussion of peripheral subjects, such as location of his community college, the quality of the institution’s education vis-à-vis the university’s and a minor touching on what I define as the popular view of the college student social sphere. Surprising to me, he even abruptly touches on socioeconomic class.

“So have your impressions been changed or amplified?” I ask.

“Changed? Yeah, it has, this place has changed,” Mike says. He continues more quietly and a little off to the side, “lot of homeless people here...”

Although a change of subject back to University administration occurs almost immediately afterwards, I feel Mike clued me into either one of two things that I did not further pursue – (a) that the area he normally lived in was devoid of homeless or they were not overly represented or (b) his perspective of campus life has grown to include interaction with the homeless over the near two-year course of attendance.

Reflection- Being the first interview for me, I guess I proctored as well as could be expected although I ran into some doubts about methods used and overall quality of our discussion. First of all, I was of course nervous, as evident in the above-stated shuffling of papers before the interview, which was in no small part a stall to mentally strategize the interview and to calm myself. One of my first thoughts while rereading the basic question two and three times while Mike waited was how is this stalling going to bear on our impending interview? Is Mike getting antsy too? How will that affect his responses? Therefore, I decided to abruptly jump right into it without further deliberations. But after the initial question, it seemed to me as if he answered so precisely and completely, our interview became unbounded within the subject of school life which is evident in my compelled inquiry into his community college roots and campus social life. To this end, I am not confident that the context of the question and response had been developed to its fullest.

Another problem, I had was with the scope of the interview. I wanted badly for Mike, who I know to be an avid U of I football/basketball fan, to include the bearing of sports and the meaning of being a member of the I-Block. But I tried to hold back and allow him to talk as freely as possible as an attempt to not guide the conversation to my ends although it would have been beneficial to me as a possible avenue of research for the class. Another subject I was fighting the urge to coax from him was his evolving impressions of Greek life since his relatively recent arrival to U of I. But once again, I did not attempt to guide the discussion but to allow him to choose what is worth mentioning. Another problem I felt I had was with the tape recorder. Although I am confident that the discussion we had would have been the same regardless of the presence of the voice recording device (if the Becker Principle holds water), I definitely depended too much on

it. After a feeble attempt to jot notes down while Mike initially began talking, I quickly gave it up in order to simply listen and at some points to relate or to comment. Afterwards, I set upon the arduous task of creating the transcript, from which I reflected upon and recreated in summary the scene for the reader. As of now, I am in a state of wonderment as to how ethnographers remain perceptive to the surroundings and to changes in tonality while at the same time managing to jot pertinent information on paper.

-I just want you to talk freely, you know, I'm gonna be a little more professional now. You're gonna see the professional side of Eric Dangoy, which uh...I discovered that I have...right now. My...uh for this class, I am part a...my class is a...umm...partner project for the Ethnography of the University. Have you ever heard of that?

Mike- No, what's it called again?

-Ethnography of the University.

Mike-Never heard of that.

-Its pretty much just like a web-based-

Mike-...excuse me [Shifts in seat]

-...web-based...uh... inquiry set up by students and run by...I believe three professors, one of the professors is mine...and as uh, anthropologists do, when they just go out... they go out and they um investigate, ask questions, inquire about culture and other cultures usually. Well, as a...one professor that is doing this is very interested in the culture of the actual university.

Mike-Aaaaaah! [moment of understanding]

-So the Ethnography of the University is just, you know, go out and uh see what people around campus are like.

Mike-[something inaudible]

-So what purpose of this interview is I just want to like to know how did you got to end up at the U of I, just uh...

Mike- At THE U of I, you mean...

-At THE U of I. [chuckle]

Mike- Ohh, lets see here, went to high school for four years, pleasant experience [sarcastic], grades ... probably good enough to get into the U of I, plus I wanted to stay at home, so I went to a local community college for two years, you may have not known that [joke, bc I did]. Umm, after I went there my freshman and halfway through my sophomore year, I started looking for places to go. Umm, both my parents went to U of I, so I decided it would be a good idea

to try to apply here, and I applied and I got in, and here we are now.

- 'Kay, what community college?

Mike- Waubonsie Community College.

-Okay, that's in the area of...

Mike-Sugar Grove area, Geneva ...

-Sugar Grove?

Mike-Sugar Grove

-Nice.

Mike- You know Sugar Grove?

- Heh Heh, I uh just like the name.

[We talk over each other causing both to be inaudible for a couple seconds]

Mike-...its by Geneva, St. Charles, that area.

-Uhh, West side of Chicago? Northwest side?

Mike- Umm, its like West suburbs, like Southwest suburbs.

-okay

Mike- [inaudible] ...off Interstate 88.

-Did you feel that uh community college had prepared you properly for entrance to U of I?

Mike- [...] No not really, no, the huge jump from between like the paper, like expectancy from there...to here, was completely different, readings, like the amount of readings that was expected, I mean, but, I don't think it prepared me that much at all.

-Paper expectancy, amounts of reading-

Mike-yeah

-contents, quality of reading, of class, of...

Mike- That, that was pretty comparable to what I had to do before in my freshman/sophomore year, after that it was pretty powerful-

-what high school or...

Mike- no uh community college compared to U of I, like content I had to know and the amount of it. The biggest difference was paper quality, the expectancy, ...but paper quality. Like I remember, like, don't think I ever got below a B on a paper and I came here last year-

-at Waubonsie-

Mike-at Waubonsie or high school, I never got below a B on a paper, and I came here and I got a C on a paper. So I was like...psh...on a paper I thought was just fine but there was like ten thousand things wrong with it, so...I got a C on it...[mumbles something].

-So what was the um your first impressions on perhaps the first week of class?

Mike- First impression? Of, of school or the university in general?

-You, you can take uh one or both, its...its-

Mike-we have time, we have time [jokingly]. Of schoolwork...uh[...]there are a lot more kids at this school then what I was used to, compared to like community college, a lot more kids. The class sizes are a lot bigger, um everything, teachers talk a lot faster, they didn't stop for anything...kids raise their hand. Sometimes they answer them, sometime they ignore 'em, um...in general? Basically the school,... I knew a lot of kids like drank down here and I heard that they had a party reputation, but I had no idea 'til I got down here and like how big, how big it was.

-So was that an exciting thought about coming here that perhaps you, or what,...did it help you [inaudible]...or what did you think about getting in uh, the admission process?

Mike- Well, I was only 20 when my roommate when my roommate was 21 so he would always buy us alcohol from...

[we share a chuckle]

- We know, we're all going to know that we were roommates [Mike laughs]...that's cool [cough].

Mike- umm... that was like the biggest thing, like being away from the parents, and we don't have to necessarily be good, just make good choices...got a little money in your pocket... that was a good time I guess. [...] The first week down here, was an eye-opener, how things were, how fast things were, ... and ...how far away it was from home...[something inaudible].

- What do you think of the...so you said that uh you really did not know how it was going to be 'til you first got here...

Mike- No, I did not know what to expect, I was going into it almost blind.

- So have your impressions been changed or .....amplified?

Mike- ....was my impression amplified?

- yeah, or changed or...

Mike- Changed? yeah, it has, this place has changed...I like...  
lot of homeless people here...

[uncomfortable silence and laugh]

- Umm. Compared to your older college or house?

Mike- No, uh, my impression is, ok, this year compared to last year is things are not as complicated as I originally thought they were. Things are just....I just couldn't get everything like straightened out, I remember everything, was just all a jumble, this year I have a better perspective on things, things are not as complicated as I thought they were. Things are you know, not quite as bad as they were.

Mike- Umm, this university is big, a lot of time the right hand doesn't know what the left hands doing, so...I mean like [...]

- As far as administration...

Mike-The administration, the counseling, your office especially when you try to transfer here, try to get your credits transferred, and...with the transcripts and everything, one section...one administration building would tell you you're fine, everything is transferred over while you are still getting letters from the admissions office saying , "we still need your transcripts, we still need your transcripts." And...what you have to understand is that like 40,000 kids go down here so if stuff happens...

- Sounds like a bit of a headache

Mike-[something inaudible]...you know it's a big university.

interview #2

I met Brad Kennedy at the Gregory Hall basement at 4:30 at the Communications computer lab for my second ever interview on student culture. Brad Kennedy is a 21 year old junior in journalism who I met in a course that I am taking this semester. I singled him out for this interview when I learned of his intense passion for Illini sports. This I discovered in small amounts through conversation and through noting his actions. When I first found out that he was a member of the Orange Krush cheering section at home basketball games, I made a mental note to consider him for my research. Consider him I did when he later walked out during class order to catch the start of the Big Ten basketball tournament one Friday noon and when he forgot to attend a group meeting the following Sunday night because he got "caught up in the March Madness selection stuff." I agreed to meet Brad at a location he chose as an attempt to alleviate the effects of privilege and symbolic violence that Bourdieau had spoke off. But my plan fell through as we were deciding where to sit when I realized that for some reason or another my tape recorder had lost the ability to function. Guessing it was the batteries, I asked

apologetically if we could perhaps move our interview to the Illini Union building were I could purchase new batteries at their Quad Shop. They have ample seating anyway, I mentioned. Of course he had no problem with going to the Union so we headed that way. Along the way, he mentioned that he had time to delay our interview until we arrived at the Union because practice did not start for a while yet; he is an assistant coach for children's hockey at the campus ice arena. In learning this I noted his outfit: a baseball cap with the orange "I" symbol, a black zip up fleece stating "Illini Roller Hockey" on one breast, black warm up pants with four red stripes down each leg, clean sneakers, and shouldering a dark book bag. I also talked a little about the Ethnography of the University and my particular interests in U of I student sports mentality hoping to provide some foundation for our ensuing interview.

After an uncomfortable wait in line to purchase batteries we sought a place to sit. "Do you come to the Union often?" I asked him. "Not really," he responded while we walked. Oh great, I thought thinking back to privileged positions and my getting the final say in where to meet. Plus, after inserting fresh batteries, I noticed that the tape recorder still refused to play! Getting nervous now, I told Brad how I could not believe that the device, which my near forty year old sister used in her college days, would decide to "crap out" now. To my relief, I realized through some fiddling that the recorder did not need new batteries, the inconspicuous pause button on its side was activated that was all. Finally we settled down in the crowded Union at a secluded table next to the basement's Blimpie's which looked closed for the day.

Brad comes from the Northwest Suburbs of Chicago. He adapted easily to college life since the high school he attended had been very large for a high school. Plus, many old classmates and acquaintances attended U of I after graduation as well. Besides knowing of approximately thirty former classmates that now attend U of I, he even currently rooms with a friend from high school. Like the U of I, Brad's high school has a respectable sports tradition, owing at the very least to the success of the football and basketball teams. Brad's status as an elite member of the Orange Krush stems from his earlier participation in sports viewing during high school where he "led the student fan group" at high school basketball games. Brad not only views sports, but he participates in them as well. For three years he played not only club hockey in high school, but baseball as well.

"I grew up playing sports," he says. Brad admits that one is socialized into sports, and that "parents choose for you," as far as what types of sports he was introduced to at an early age. It became his "passion following stats" of popular players that grew "more passionate, more intense as years go by." I suddenly noticed how his body language asserted this statement. He began gesticulating with his hands and focusing more on our discussion rather than my fieldnote jottings as if he were really trying to drive home the feeling he gets when he watches sports.

Sports are such a part of his life that they were a key consideration in deciding what college to apply to. According to Brad, besides Illinois, he applied to such universities as Purdue, Michigan State, Indiana in Bloomington, and Wisconsin in Madison all noteworthy sport tradition universities. He did not mention the sport atmosphere when I first asked him how he "ended up at the U of I." Rather, he stated that he wanted to go to a big university but stay more local and since Illinois was closest and in state, it was his first choice. But as we started discussing his sports background and interests, we revisited the issue where Brad added that he did place a school's sports reputation in high regard during the application process.

Knowing what we know about him thus far, it would have been ignorant to ask whether or not he is excited and proud to be an Illini especially during this season of unprecedented basketball success. I learned that not only is he an Orange Krush member he is an All-American member as opposed to the basic Varsity member. This means he must find more contributors and sponsors than the average Orange Krush member must. But to him it is worth it because he does not have to wait hours and hours to get a

reasonable seat during home games; he is guaranteed a floor seat for his efforts as an All-American. Brad describes the average game here at the Assembly Hall as intense and games like the one against Wake Forest as “super intense.” “Orange Krush members go nuts” all throughout the game. On further inquiry Brad states that it is the job of Krush members to make noise and cheer throughout the games. “That is part of the reason for our great record, its so intimidating to play here because we make a lot of noise.” Indeed it must take a lot of dedication to stomp your feet and shout at the top of your lungs for almost three hours.

He states, “It is very honorable” to be part of the U of I. It is as if we were “living up to something,” a reputation that had been lived out in the past and a tradition that our class was maintaining and bearing witness to. This impression of what it is to be part of U of I was painted more vividly when Brad described the loss to Ohio State.

“How was the environment wherever you were during the Ohio game?” I asked referring to the loss noting that this may be a touchy inquiry.

“Where I was? It was happy!” Brad said looking upset.

Happy? I confusedly thought.

“I was actually at Ohio State for that game. Yeah, me and my friends drove there...a mob of red swarmed the court when they won. I have never seen anything like it,” he continued. “We just got up and left in silence. There were people shouting and saying stuff to us but you can’t say anything. They won.”

Finally we discussed how “Illini Fever” as Brad calls it, has traveled all the way to northern Illinois. It is in the news all the time, “to the point where people are complaining about it.” By this comment he refers to alumni from opposing sports universities. He continues by elaborating on the sense of community one develops with others through the Illini, “its something that is not so visible here because we are constantly surrounded by sports, but when you go up to Chicago or away games, its like you see someone with the orange t-shirt and you just start talking. Its like, ‘hey!’ and you give a total stranger a high five, ...it’s like that sense of community.” At this point I notice once again the gesticulations showing to me that he really feels passionate about what he is describing. Throughout this conversation, I was enthralled by his thoughts on the relationship of sports to the U of I. He was able to describe in so many words what it meant to be part of the U of I. From what I perceive, sports perhaps more than academics are more easily identified with the U of I especially during this successful sports season. From Brad, I learned something interesting and new about how students may identify with the U of I on an individual level (student) as well as the collective (Orange Krush). I find this topic very interesting and would possibly like to develop this even more into a research proposal.

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#### Inquiry Page Entry #5

In forming a focus group, I needed to consider a number of things. How do I locate informants who have views pertinent to my research goals? And when/if I do, how do I arrange a group meeting that does not conflict with all of our personal schedules? In solving these problems, I enlisted the advice of Stan Thangaraj who TA’s for a 100 level anthropology course I am taking. Informing him of my research goals and of the difficulty of trying to solicit the idea of forming a focus group to some of the members of Anth 411, he suggested I try to do so for the members of the 100 level course. In reflecting upon his advice, I decided that would be an excellent choice to make. Participation in a Chief debate whereas anti-Chief supporters took the stance of the pro-Chief supporters and vice versa helped me to choose informants for my focus group from the class. I was able to identify and later solicit the focus group idea to the anti-Chief students after working with them and establishing some rapport. Since every Thursday class was delayed fifteen-thirty minutes in order to accommodate students in attendance of Brown Bag lectures, I was able to administer the focus group in the minutes before class thus solving the problem of conflicting schedules.

I had set up a small assortment of chairs and desks in an adjoining hallway a little bit past the path most travel to get to our classroom. I figured the curve in which we would sit would offer some sense of privacy and increase attention to the subject of interest. There I was joined by the four other members of the previous week's Chief debate group, Joanne, Dominika, Eric, and Alexshea.

They had various reasons for wanting to be rid of the Chief which they voiced independently in length. They all believe in one way or the other of the racist and discriminatory themes present in the presence of the Chief. For instance, Eric, who has a Latina/o perspective, feels he is very aware of racism in predominantly White-controlled institutions and classifies the Chief as racist institutional construct. Joanne also of at least part Latina/o heritage, was taught "at a young age that racism is bad" and readily perceives the Chief as a racially perpetuating false image. Dominika and Alexshea, although not outright stating racism is the issue at hand, they allude to the problems with the construction of racial tension. Dominika would be offended if, for example, a hegemonic force appropriated a skewed image of certain ethnic groups of her country and presented it as the essentialized norm. Alexshea herself "didn't love it but didn't despise it." She just "didn't really want to support or promote something that truly hurts or offends or discriminates against others."

Informed of this critical question, I moved on to the subject of sports viewing and to my dismay, I learned that Dominika and Joanne had little interaction with U of I sports. In fact, Joanne stated that she actually hates sports. In a type of recollection all too familiar to me, she relates a story of how a friend expressed shock that she did not know what the Final Four was nor the progress of the Illinois basketball team. Dominika on the other hand, stated that where she comes from, soccer is the popular attraction but she still does not really keep up with U of I soccer news nor actively participates in the U of I popular sports sociality.

Eric and Alexshea have both been to U of I football games. Alexshea comes from a high school with a tradition of winning sports championships. In their firsthand viewings of the Chief, they both expressed ambivalence towards the authenticity of the image. "The first time I saw the Chief, he looks like he's some coked out...you know, I was like...I don't think that's like an Indian dance," recalls Eric, "it looks a little bit deranged. "Yeah, I felt the same way," Alexshea says in support. She expressed what seems to me like to wonderment of the Chief's power over those in attendance. "It seemed like a joke, like I felt like I was standing outside watching this...it just seemed surreal. It was definitely an interesting experience, but it was just like everyone was in a trance. And everyone loved it."

After this integral snippet of feelings toward the Chief and its relation to sports, the conversation temporarily returned itself to the unjust racial aspects of the Chief and denouncements of his qualities. At this point, I had to as the moderator attempt to guide the melee back to my research interests.

Alexshea and Eric both deny the validity of the Chief in the common way of not buying into the Chief. Alexshea states, "I don't wear the Chief, I don't buy the Chief. I can't say I'm an avid..., I don't go protest the Chief, I'm not that hardcore, I just again don't have any personal connections to the Chief, I just don't support it."

Eric and Joanne make interesting point in perceiving their relationship with the U of I and its moot figurehead. "I never say anything about the Chief, I don't cheer the Chief. I may be one of those people that say that say I-L-L, I-N-I. Illini, I may say that name. I don't ever recognize the Chief as standing as the sole symbol of the U of I." Joanne adds, "I think there is a difference between having U of I pride and having Chief pride. You can scream I-L-L, I-N-I and wear orange and blue, but, I mean you don't have to buy into the whole Chief thing."

I believe this focus group was a helpful first couple step in seeking how anti-Chief sports fans could manifest alternate identities in a pro-Chief sports community and show Illini pride in their own ways. They attend sporting events and have pride in their sporting

teams but do not buy into the Chief hype. They go there solely for enjoyment of sports and the game. Alexshea had even jokingly stated near the end that she would use the halftime dance as an opportunity to “use the bathroom and go get food.”

This group tended to reinforce each others statements and feelings about the Chief. To me it seemed they were building off of each others ideas. Although they had their own reasons for being against the Chief, their arguments shared a common framework of anti-discrimination. But as far as fortifying each others arguments regarding “not wearing the Chief, not buying into the Chief,” and participating in non-Chief related ways such as “screaming I-L-L, I-N-I,” I can see were there could be the tendency to support each others sentiments or polarize as described by the text on focus groups. I only wonder how in single interviews these informants would have expressed there feelings about the Chief and sporting events.

Therein I realize the problem with focus groups. Because, I used a focus group method, I did not get detail on any one person’s sentiments about the Chief and sports as I would have in a one on one interview. Nor would I have gotten a first hand natural experience of enclave formation within the Chief sports environment as I would have through some form of participant observation. Furthermore, in this particular focus group experience, I was forced to rush responses due to the relatively short time I had to administer this meeting and definitely added some “unnaturalizing” influences on the discussion. For instances, they may have been expressing unification and a support of each others anti-Chief/pro-sport identities by returning to talking about the problems of the Chief, an effort which I derailed and set back to where I wanted the discussion to head. That half of them did not associate with sports on campus had also dampened the efficiency of my focus group in that I felt inclined to focus more on those that attended sporting events and had experienced firsthand the presence of the Chief.

But on the other hand, I was able to get these people together when individual interviews would have been more difficult to arrange and would have taken much longer to perform and analyze. Plus, I believe it is pertinent to my study to witness how, although in part artificially, anti-Chief sports fans interact and react to each others feelings toward the Chief. Because focus groups have their advantages and disadvantages, for now I would say that I wouldn’t depend on them to be the core of my future study. Rather they are a useful in their own way and therefore I would use them in a tripartite study also utilizing participant observation as well as the long interview.

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#### Inquiry Page Entry #6

I found this section on creating surveys to be especially difficult to apply to my interest, especially since my goal remains volatile. I am having a terrible time deciding what in particular to focus on in the athletics-inclined mentality of the larger student body. I am abandoning all together my search for the psychic unity of sports shared by the greater body. I believe an endeavor this large would necessitate a longer time span than a 2-3 month period to complete the project. And because this inclination is spread cross-culturally and permeates the lives of thousands of diverse individuals rather than a single distinguishable cohort, it would also require a knowledge of, I suppose, the mechanisms of greater general American culture and how it prepares individuals in youth for interest in American sports and presents interest in said sports as socially desirable (as seen in sports bars, on newsstands, in beer commercials and other forms of product advertisement, and as reproduced by society, etc). So I went back to the drawing board in order to narrow my goals. With some idea-swapping, I came up with another interesting topic related to U of I sports. What would remain informative on U of I sports culture and at the same time be less daunting would be discovering how anti-Chief sports fans celebrate the U of I’s sports tradition and participate in an environment encumbered with the ever present image of the Chief.

I speculate that I could create surveys in order to choose possible informants fitting the category I have defined above. A survey would be helpful in choosing these informants

on the basis of whether or not they would be insightful and appropriate to some focus-group portion of my research proposal. Some questions I would have in mind are: What is the concentration of anti-Chief sports fans on campus? In a classroom? To what degree does one participate in the normalized/Chief sports atmosphere. In order to answer these questions, the survey would need to get data on the following topics from respondents: stance on the Chief issue, degree of stance, and degree of interest in U of I sports. The first topic would be simple to define through a close-ended, forced-choice question (yes/no/undecided). The others would be a little more complicated to define. I could gain information for both of these through utilizing identical graphic rating scales whereas numbers one through five would represent degrees of dedication to anti-Chief/pro-Chief and sports-viewing/sports-apathetic inclinations. Through the survey I would try to record, for instance, to what degree an anti-Chief fan is tolerant of pro-Chief propaganda and to what degree is a pro-Chief fan tolerant of anti-Chief promotion. Herein lies a problem: how can I make these survey goals explicit and not confusing to a respondent? That is at least one kink I would need to work out before creating an understandable, reliable survey.

## **DISCUSS**

### **Discuss your inquiry, taking care to separate speculation from fact or data**

It is my firm belief that due to the threat of doing away with the Chief, the vast majority of pro-Chief supporters have affirmed the symbol as part of the school's identity as well as their own and have strengthened their support to the point where Illini sports and the symbol of the Chief seem to necessitate their legitimacy upon each other. In other words, it seems as if the ideology of the Chief has been perpetuated, preserved, and essentialized in large part by the pro-Chief community. How then does one who is expressly an anti-Chief sports fan cope with an environment and social ritual such as an Illinois home sporting event which necessitates the presence of the Chief? How does this anti-Chief sports fan react when the vast majority of what one sees at a sporting event implicitly tells her that Illini Pride and the Chief are analogous? How is the identity of Illini sports fan constructed differently when his stance remains or becomes anti-Chief?

In order to answer these questions to form my research proposal I needed to utilize some ethnographic fieldwork methods. One such successful method was the holding of a focus group. The focus group consisted of four students in the same course whom had an anti-Chief stance. Although, half were not specifically Illini sports fans, the group gave great insight as a whole. At one point one informant expressed that "there is a difference between having U of I pride and having Chief pride. You can scream I-L-L, I-N-I and wear orange and blue, but, I mean you don't have to buy into the whole Chief thing." Another stated, "I don't cheer the Chief. I may be one of those people that say that say I-L-L, I-N-I. Illini, I may say that name. I don't ever recognize the Chief as standing as the sole symbol of the U of I." I believe statements such as these are important first steps into discovering how some legitimate their stances against a majority telling them they are wrong.

Another effective measure I had used but failed to report on was participant observation. I grudgingly took the opportunity to attend the Illini/UNC championship game viewing at Assembly Hall. Not a fan of crowds on a busy Monday night, I legitimated my own presence by telling myself this would be an excellent chance to do some jottings in my research interests. Besides paying close attention to the mood of the audience and especially to discussion and remarks of those around me, I was able to meet a friend of a friend whom I would never known was an anti-Chief sports fan. This is due to the fact that she occasionally models the popular t-shirt with Chief written on the front and the logo stamp on the back. At the gathering I expressed interest in her current choice of attire, a different Chief style t-shirt, and she responded that she is anti-Chief but she likes

the shirt. I found her answer fascinating. It could add new dimensions to my future research, how do tolerance levels of individual expressly anti-Chief sports fans differ? How are identity constructions nuanced at these different levels of tolerance? Being more aware of details such as this can help me choose proper candidates for future focus groups and one on one interviews through the popular research method of taking surveys. I think that a simple closed-response survey can greatly supplement my research through helping to discover number of sporting events attended, the level of sports zeal, level of Chief/anti-Chief support, etc. in each candidate.

One invaluable ethnographic method is the one on one interview. Although I had not performed any interviews with respects to the issue at hand, I had some interview practice as I was previously working on a broader research interest. But through these interviews I learned that I could get a more detailed account of one's ideology than I could have from that same person in a focus group. It was easier to delve deeper into ideas I deemed pertinent than in the focus group where sometimes issues can gain steam and head into a less favorable direction which would necessitate, in my opinion, a harsher intrusion to set the topic back on course. I find it just as valuable to get an individual's perception of the Chief in Illini sports issue as it is to study a group's interaction to the subject to the issue. Coupled with participant observation and focus groups, one on one interviews would allow me to view this project from all angles.

## **REFLECT**

### **Link**

#### **Connect with other resources and materials.**

Spindel, Carol (2000). *Dancing at Halftime: Sports and the Controversy over American Indian Mascots*. New York: New York University Press.

anti-Chief resources:

<http://www.prairienet.org/prc/prcanti.html>

<http://www.retirethechief.org/>

<http://www.iresist.org/>

Those whose constructive criticism added structure and support to my plan:

ANTH 411\_05-02

[http://www.inquiry.uiuc.edu/bin/unit\\_update.cgi?command=elect&xmlfile=u14010.xml](http://www.inquiry.uiuc.edu/bin/unit_update.cgi?command=elect&xmlfile=u14010.xml)

Stan Thangaraj

[http://www.inquiry.uiuc.edu/bin/update\\_unit.cgi?command=select&xmlfile=u14027.xml](http://www.inquiry.uiuc.edu/bin/update_unit.cgi?command=select&xmlfile=u14027.xml)

Uploaded Files:

[Inquiry#6.doc](#)

### **Implications**

#### **Could your findings have broader implications beyond this inquiry?**

I would say get rid of the Chief, but that would be the end for the basis of my study! But in a scenario where the Chief has been removed, I would perhaps change my research plans to focus on the sports fan who supports the Chief in an anti-Chief world.

## **OTHER**

### **A space for other notes, findings, comments, etc.**

I walked into the class truly not knowing what to expect. Being an aspiring anthropologist, I had mind set that this class, Methods of Cultural Anthropology would either make or break my decision to continue in this field. While I cannot say that now at the end of the semester whether or not this class has given me a hard enough push in either direction, I will say that it had been a worthwhile thought provoking course. In the beginning I was very much intimidated being one of the five or so undergraduates who did not end up dropping the course midway through. I feared that due to the higher enrollment of masters and doctorate seekers the quality of what was expected for the course would be much higher than that of what I could offer in my current stage of intellectual development.

But as the semester progressed I realized that I had been fooling myself. Either the expectations were not as unattainable for myself as I first perceived, or I was in fact quite capable of this type of intellectual labor. I am sure my peers of whose comments, criticism, and support I am grateful, would assert the latter.

I feel I have gained in leaps and bounds experience and confidence through the methodological exercises we had to try and report upon. One important skill I think I have started to develop is the ability to think and listen at the same time whereas I normally engross myself in the listening while interpretation follows seconds to minutes to, I suppose, sometimes days after! In conducting interviews and focus groups, I have taken note of this ability and am considering it as a significant factor of good ethnography. Therefore, I will try to develop this skill in future endeavors.

Although the readings were quite meaty, I feel that they were integral to the mission of the course in which they provided various methods utilized in ethnography and reflections by ethnographers. I would not enjoy utilizing some of these methods, nevertheless, these readings are teaching me about various ethnographic opportunities and is helping me to develop my own ethnographic plans.

Finally, I think that the inquiry page is an invaluable tool in doing this type of research. Although I couldn't quite figure out the majority of its utility until at least mid semester, the advantage of using the inquiry page is that one is quickly connected to the outside world compared to the smaller interactional sphere and slower process of submitting in ink writing. I like the access that it offers and that it is always available (although I still cannot figure out why I cannot access certain affiliated inquiry pages).

Overall I am thankful for the learning opportunities that a class taught in this manner offered.