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Bryan Snyder

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, bsnyder@huskers.com

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HARD WORK, OVERCOMING, AND MASCULINITY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT
OF HIGH SCHOOL WRESTLERS' BODIES AND CULTURAL WORLDS

by

Bryan M. Snyder

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Sociology

Under the Supervision of Professor Julia McQuillan

Lincoln, Nebraska

April, 2012

HARD WORK, OVERCOMING, AND MASCULINITY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT
OF HIGH SCHOOL WRESTLERS' BODIES AND CULTURAL WORLDS

Bryan M. Snyder, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2012

Adviser: Julia McQuillan

The dissertation explores the cultural worlds of high school wrestlers at an inner-city school in the Mountain West region of the United States. The data upon which this dissertation is based come from a ten-month ethnography, where I conducted “observant participation” (Wacquant 2011) and semi-structured, open-ended interviews with members of this school’s wrestling team. I approached both my data collection and analysis through cultural-sociological frames. Although I intend to contribute to a number of areas of specialization, in this dissertation I use high school wrestling as a site to ask basic questions about key sociological themes such as meaning, identity, and masculinity. This dissertation, at its core, asks how high school wrestlers organize and make sense of their selves and their social worlds through shared cultural schemas, which to varying degrees are informed by larger discourses of masculinity. My findings suggest that wrestlers at Central share a common set of cultural schemas that they use to navigate their social worlds, construct masculine identities, and solve a number of problems, which range from their social marginality on campus to the common outsider accusation that “wrestling is gay.” To this end, I explore the ways that individuals and groups use cultural symbols to establish membership and identities, as well as to make sense of

and, at times, defend their social space. I situate my findings in relation to existing literature on symbolic boundaries, sociology of bodies, and current debates on the relationship between masculinity, sexuality, and sport.

To the wrestlers and coaches at Central High who allowed me to share a part of their
social and cultural worlds

Acknowledgements

I am so grateful for everyone that helped make it possible for me to write this dissertation. It is fitting that I begin by thanking my parents, Barry and Charlotte Snyder, who throughout every journey in my life have always been my greatest supporters. Thank you both for the unconditional love and support you have shown me throughout the years. No matter where I have gone or whom I have met, you two have always been the people I looked up to most. I love you both very much.

My time at the University of Colorado-Boulder was one of tremendous intellectual growth and I have many people to thank for this. Martha Gimenez, Anjie Rosga, and Isaac Reed all helped me to see the social world in a very different light than I had before I met them. Thank you all for your time both in and out of the classroom. I will be forever grateful to have met and learned from you; this dissertation reflects your influence on me. A special thanks to John Reid-Hresko, Marshall Smith, Kristina Kahl, and Leith Lombas, who as colleagues and friends helped me navigate the world of graduate school. You were at all times great friends and tremendously supportive of my ideas and projects. Perhaps more than anyone else, Kristina, you challenged me to write this dissertation and think about my project in terms of gender and sexuality. Much love to you all.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my partner during the research aspect of this dissertation, Wendy Smith. This project became much more than dissertation research for both of us. She was always supportive of my endeavors, and whenever times got tough—and they surely did—she had my back. I am very thankful for your support.

At the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Julia McQuillan, Helen Moore, and Emily Kazyak helped guide me through conceptualizing and writing this dissertation. Thank you all for your insightful, thoughtful, and challenging comments. Also, thank you to Sarah Gervais, who served as my outside committee member. This dissertation is better because of you all. Without the support and challenge of my advisor, Julia McQuillan, this dissertation would have remained a collection of notebooks, scattered thoughts, and, most importantly, an unfulfilled journey. You reentered my life when I was at odds with academia. In your own way, you kept me focused, motivated me to think that I had a story to tell in this dissertation, and gave me a sense of hope and faith in the mentorship relationship when I was ready to turn my back on it for good. I am so grateful for your time and support. As all of the students at Nebraska that have come to know you would agree, you are a breath of fresh air in the world of academia.

I am also very thankful for my friends and colleagues in Nebraska, who to varying degrees were by my side as I wrote this dissertation. Mark Manning, Tony Erslund, Craig Brester, Brandon Browne, and Jason Powell, along with Jordan Burroughs and Raymond Jordan, have been great friends throughout the process of writing this dissertation, even if it was sitting around and sharing a laugh with me. The same goes to Eryn Murphy and Jennifer Marcum, both of whom did their best to keep some semblance of balance in my social life when I was writing for hours on end, day in and day out.

A big shot out to my best friend, Willie Smalls, who seems to have been by my side for everything that has transpired in my life in the past 17 years, even if we

lived in different states for most of that time. You have brought such joy, laughter, and friendship to my life throughout the years. I look forward to more of the same in the years to come.

I would also like to extend a special thank you to Jessica Larsen, who I reconnected with when my life was full of uncertainty and when I was seriously considering leaving academia for good. Thank you Jess for challenging me to finish my dissertation, and for sharing the last two and a half years with me.

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone that I came to know during my time at Central High. The individuals' names that appear in this dissertation influenced my life more than they will ever know. I am forever grateful that you all let me share a piece of your social and cultural worlds.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On the second floor of historic Central High, at the South end of the building, sits an auxiliary gym that serves as the school's "wrestling room." This space is rarely ever exclusively a wrestling room though. In the fall, wrestlers share the room with the girls' gymnastics team; in the spring, they share it with the baseball team, of which the countless baseball-sized indentations along the ceiling and walls are a constant reminder. The space also serves as the site of physical education classes during most school days. Despite the fact that the wrestling room is a makeshift one, for many this room is a sacred place. This is especially the case for Coach Jose, who for the past ten years has been trying to recruit kids from the halls of Central to join the wrestling team. As I would come to learn, this is no easy task, especially at an inner-city school where the basketball team is king and basketball players wield much social status and prestige. Wrestling, on the other hand, has always been a marginal sport at Central, both in terms of social status and in terms of sheer numbers of participants. As I mentioned, it is difficult to get kids to try their hand at wrestling in a school that has almost no history or tradition in the sport. It is even more difficult to get those kids who do tryout for the team to make it through an entire season, especially given the physical demands of the sport and the relatively little return in terms of status or prestige.

In the face of relatively no tradition and the above average attrition rates that plague his teams, Coach Jose has been an institutional figure at Central High, unwavering in his commitment to show kids how to wrestle, work hard, and become

“men.” In the wrestling room he teaches young men (and occasionally women) the technical aspect of the sport, but also what it takes mentally and emotionally to become a wrestler. Coach Jose runs daily grueling workouts designed to test his wrestlers’ minds as much as their bodies. He pushes them to the brink of what they think their bodies can handle, and many times shows them that their bodies can do almost anything just as long as their minds do not “break” in the process. He practices tough love whenever anyone shows weakness; he labels anyone a “pie” that fails to live up to his masculine expectations of the sport.

In the wrestling room, wrestlers learn the meaning of hard work and “success.” They also learn how to relate to their bodies in culturally specific ways. More importantly, they learn to think of themselves distinctively as wrestlers, that is, as those who are willing to embrace and endure what most others run from. Collectively, wrestlers think of themselves as tough and “hard,” in large part because they exemplify a work ethic and sense of discipline unparalleled by others on campus. Wrestlers construct a shared sense of masculinity on the basis of hard work and discipline, as much as they do the physicality of their sport. And on any given day, you could walk through the doors of the wrestling room and find wrestlers engaged with each other, pushing and pulling each others’ bodies to the mat, into walls, and sometimes through the very doors of the wrestling room. To outsiders, the sweat-drenched individuals in this room oftentimes appear to be fighting each other, and this is also how wrestlers see it. And, at times, the interaction order of wrestling as a “fight with rules” breaks down and fists do indeed fly.

Orienting Questions and Conceptual Focus

Through their immersion in high school wrestling, wrestlers at Central learn to share a common set of cultural schemas they use to navigate their social worlds, construct their identities, and solve a number of problems, which range from their social marginality to others' accusations of wrestling as "gay."

In this dissertation, I provide an account of these cultural worlds. Drawing from "observant participation" (Wacquant 2011) and qualitative interviews, I explore the discipline and culture of high school wrestling at Central High. That is, I analyze both the corporeal demands placed upon wrestlers, as well as the cultural schemas that wrestlers share in common and which, to varying degrees, structure their social worlds. Although I at times distinguish between the corporeal and symbolic dimensions of scholastic wrestling, my research illuminates that the two are more intimately connected than they are separate. As I will illustrate throughout, wrestlers often draw on the physical and bodily demands of their sport as symbolic resources to construct their masculine identities, as well as make distinctions with others. To this end, the bodily demands of high school wrestling are as much about "boundary work" (Lamont 1992) as they are "body work" (Wacquant 1995).

This dissertation, at its core, asks how high school wrestlers organize and make sense of themselves and their social worlds through shared cultural schemas, which to varying degrees are informed by larger discourses of masculinity. To this end, I look to high school wrestling as a site to explore basic sociological questions centered on meaning, identity, and of course masculinity. I follow cultural

sociologists in analyzing how individuals use cultural symbols to establish group membership and construct individual and collective identities. I ask, for instance, how high school wrestlers mobilize hard work and sacrifice as central components to their individual and collective identities. I also explore the ways that high school wrestlers socially construct their bodies in the discipline of wrestling. Here I look to both the physical demands placed upon wrestling bodies and how members of the wrestling team frame those bodies as proving grounds for toughness, character, and masculinity. Further, I analyze how high school wrestlers think and talk about homosexuality. I examine how they treat a team member that most presumed to be gay. I also explore how wrestlers reacted to my question of whether they would accept an openly gay wrestler to their team.

These questions take us into the cultural worlds of wrestlers at Central and challenge us to examine the shared cultural schemas that constitute wrestlers' shared sense of reality. Yet, these shared cultural schemas do not simply order high school wrestlers' cultural worlds; they also are cultural resources used to solve social problems (Wilkins 2008). To this end, I explore how wrestlers use culture as a way to navigate their social worlds, especially in terms of masculinity. Wrestlers at Central are a marginal social group, not only because most of them come from the lower rungs of society, but also because they participate in a sport that is marginal in terms of status and popularity. The status that is usually associated with core sports such as football (Foley 1990) and basketball is thus lost on wrestlers at Central. How, then, do they negotiate their sense of place? To this end, I specifically

ask how wrestlers mobilize hard work, as a cultural schema tied to masculinity, to make sense of their marginality in ways that promote a sense of self-worth.

High school wrestlers are also marginal in relation to prevailing constructions of heterosexual masculinity. Although scholars have pointed to sport as the site that reproduces hegemonic masculinity in an educational setting (Connell 1996; Foley 1990; Osborne and Wagner 2007), high school wrestling provides an important counter-narrative. Although high school wrestlers think of themselves in hypermasculine ways, they are embattled in terms of their sexual identities, as my past research (Snyder 2012) and personal experience suggest. Wrestlers are many times teased about their involvement in what others deem a homoerotic sport. The structure of the sport—physical contact and combat with other high school boys—is both a point of pride in terms of physicality and a point of contention in terms of same-sex touching. The physicality of the sport offers potential in terms of masculine capital, yet the same-sex touching puts wrestlers at risk of being perceived as gay. This set of dynamics presents insightful questions in the areas of gender, sexuality, and sport. For one, wrestlers prove interesting in that they, as a group, have to contest what others take for granted—namely the presumption of heterosexuality in men’s sports. This allows us to explore wrestling as a sport that challenges, rather than bolsters hetero-masculine capital. Moreover, my research setting provides the context to ask how wrestlers mobilize masculinity in the face of accusations, such as “wrestling is gay,” that challenge their presumed heterosexuality.

Theoretical Perspectives

Researching high school wrestling from the vantage point of ethnography allows me to ask central sociological questions about culture, meaning, identity, and group membership. I follow the direction of cultural sociologists—Alexander and Smith (2003), Blair-Loy (2003), and Reed (2008) in particular—to explore what types of cultural schemas wrestlers employ to make sense of their participation in wrestling at Central High, as well as their social worlds more generally. Cultural worlds, though, are not simply ordered in terms of cognition, but also in terms of morality and emotions (Blair-Loy 2003). To this end, I focus on the moral dimension of culture and look to the ways that wrestlers think about their social worlds and identities in terms of morality, in addition to masculinity and sexuality. Although I intend variation and diversity in the cultural worldviews of members at Central, I also presume a shared set of cultural codes among group members. Indeed, this is what constitutes a culture—shared codes for experiencing and making sense of the social world. In a sense then, I at times bracket the diversity of experience in order to highlight the shared cultural ground or “group style” (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003) of those persons associated with the wrestling program at Central.

I also approach gender and sexuality from a cultural-sociological perspective. Like Bem (1993) and Ridgeway (2009), I conceptualize gender as a lens or frame that helps us organize the social world. On the one hand, masculinity is a set of shared cultural schemas that structure individuals’ social worlds. On the other hand, masculinity is a set of discourses and practices that individuals mobilize, for instance, to construct masculine identities, draw distinctions with others, and solve

problems (Wilkins 2008). In this way I conceptualize masculinity as both a meaning system and a gender strategy (Hochschild 1989). Rather than being synonymous with male bodies (as Halberstam 1998 and Pascoe 2007, for instance, both criticized), masculinity is something mobilized in context, something done—a process. Of course, wrestlers associate masculinity with male bodies, but the scope of masculinity does not end here.

Situating My Questions in Relation to Existing Literature

Although research on the sociology of sport has blossomed in the past decades, there is very little scholarship that addresses the topic of scholastic wrestling. Social scientists (Henricks 1974; Jenkins 1997; Mazer 1998; Smith 2008a, 2008b) have focused, rather, on professional wrestling as a research topic. From Barthes' (1972) classic statements on the topic as a “spectacle of excess” to more recent research (e.g. Smith 2008a and 2008b), professional wrestling has been a common topic in sociological discourse. The literature that is available on scholastic wrestling discusses it in the context of its extreme weight management strategies (Johns 1998, 2004; Kinningham and Gorenflo 2001; Lakin, Steen, and Oppliger 1990), an ethnographic account of wrestling in India (Atler 1992), and the possibility of wrestling as a homoerotic pleasure (Pronger 1990). Since my initial drafts of this dissertation, two important articles have been published on scholastic wrestling, both of which discuss the sport in terms of its implications for gender and sexuality literature. Fair (2011), for his part, looks at the ways that high school wrestlers reframe sexually suggestive positions in hetero-masculine ways. Baker and Hotek

(2011) use ethnographic research on scholastic wrestling to argue that, as scholars, we need to understand men's sporting behavior as falling along a continuum from orthodox masculinity to femininity. They argue that athletes enact highly masculine behaviors, at the same time that they exhibit feminine behavior in key ways.

In their own way, these studies get at important aspects of wrestling. Yet we can learn much more about the sport and the individuals immersed in it by exploring the questions I raise throughout this dissertation. The goal of this dissertation is to expand knowledge of scholastic wrestling by providing a rich analysis of the cultural worlds of high school wrestlers along a number of dimensions, such as masculinity, sexuality, and morality. Although scholastic wrestling is in many ways a body-centered culture, none have looked to how wrestlers socially construct their bodies, let alone how they frame their bodies in relation to prevailing constructions of masculinity. Moreover, my research site provides an important context for exploring what Anderson (2009) and his colleagues describe as an increasingly progressive relationship between masculinity and homophobia in sport. I explore this relationship along two dimensions: one of which looks to how wrestlers think and talk about openly gay wrestlers; the other analyzes how they manage the accusation that "wrestling is gay." Although others (e.g. Fair 2011) have noted that most high school wrestlers face ridicule because they participate in a homoerotic sport, none have explored how wrestlers manage what most perceive as a threat to their hetero-masculine identities.

The methods I used in this research also set this dissertation apart from the other analyses on scholastic wrestling. My history as a wrestler provides me with a

rich “insider” knowledge and perspective. Moreover, my level of immersion and measure of acceptance into the wrestling team at Central High provides an unprecedented look at the sport and its participants. Further, my long and complicated history with scholastic wrestling—first, as naive participant, then as disgruntled expatriate, and then as interested academic—provides for an interesting vantage point. In some ways, I can be considered an “indigenous ethnographer,” which Clifford (1986) argues can be epistemologically productive in terms of different perspectives and depths of understanding. Yet, these accounts, although fruitful in some ways, are restricted in others. As Bourdieu suggests, “being born in a social world, we accept a whole range of postulates, axioms, which go without saying...” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:168). One limitation for insiders, then, is to take for granted certain norms, habits, and interactions that are interesting to those situated outside of their cultural worldview. Along with some direction and challenge from my advisors and graduate school cohort members, I learned to balance my insider knowledge by framing what was once familiar in strange ways, and by turning the tools of ethnography on the domestic, rather than the exotic.

Organization of this Dissertation

In the following chapter, I discuss the theoretical perspectives and substantive literatures that informed my approach to this project. In Chapter 3, I describe the methods I used to collect the data for this dissertation, as well as my epistemological approach to analyzing those data. Chapter 4 looks at hard work as

both a physical demand and a symbolic boundary, and explores the ways that wrestlers mobilize hard work to construct masculine identities and draw distinctions with others. This chapter shows how hard work solves problems for wrestlers at Central, as they draw on it to make sense of and combat their social marginality. In Chapter 5, I examine the corporeal demands of wrestling—namely extreme levels of conditioning and “cutting weight”—but do so with an eye to how they inform how wrestlers socially construct their bodies as *obstacles to be overcome*. In this chapter, I argue that all the fuss over bodies is about much more than simply bodies. By framing wrestlers’ bodies as objects to be overcome, the discipline of wrestling socially constructs bodies—particularly their limits in terms of pain and fatigue—as proving grounds. To this end, they are sites where wrestlers can prove their masculine worth and, moreover, fashion an improved sense of self. Chapter 6 focuses on how wrestlers’ understandings of masculinities intersect with sexuality along two dimensions. First, I look to how wrestlers combat the accusation that “wrestling is gay” by emphasizing the masculine demands of their sport. Next, I analyze the relationship between homophobia and masculinity at Central by examining how wrestlers treated one of their presumably gay teammates, as well as by how they responded to the question of accepting openly gay wrestlers. Finally, in Chapter 7 I discuss implications of my research and the ways in which my findings both contribute to and complicate existing literatures on culture, masculinity, and the sociology of bodies.

Although I intend to contribute to the substantive areas that I addressed above, a larger aim of my research is to shed sociological light on a cultural world

about which academics and the general public know very little. I see intrinsic value in providing an empathetic account of the cultural worlds of high school wrestlers. Moreover, providing space for others to represent and speak their own culture is an empowering act for members of a given culture or subculture. The resultant knowledge, if approached in an ethical and thoughtful manner, can serve to expand our realm of understanding and perhaps acceptance of other cultures. We can, thus, expand the boundaries with whom we can meaningfully converse and interact.

CHAPTER 2

THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical perspectives that have informed the way I thought about and wrote this dissertation. I, first, analyze the central tenets of cultural sociological theory. From the late-Durkheim to more recent developments, I explore the symbolic dimensions of social life. I then review what cultural sociological theory has in common with current perspectives on gender. I argue that a cultural approach to gender is important for understanding gender as a meaningful symbolic system that constructs masculine and feminine identities, and which makes sense of the social world more generally. Moreover, I will show that a cultural account of gender is particularly apt for my research questions, which explore the cultural worlds of high school wrestlers, especially how local conceptualizations of masculinity inform their identities and their sense of place. I then discuss the literature on the sociology of bodies in order to situate my approach and findings on wrestling bodies. Here I look to the various ways scholars have framed bodies in a sporting context and in social life more generally. Lastly, I discuss the current state of the literature on gender, sexuality, and sport. I highlight, among other things, the presumption of heterosexuality in men's sport and the current debate on the relationship between inclusive and orthodox masculinity. As I argue throughout, although these approaches have informed my thinking about this project, my research extends each of these literatures in important ways.

CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY

In this dissertation, I am interested in the cultural worlds of wrestlers at Central High, that is, the various meaning systems within which members are enmeshed and which they use to make sense of their social worlds. I draw primarily from recent trends in cultural sociology in my approach to culture (e.g. Alexander and Smith 2003; Blair-Loy 2003; Reed 2008;). Cultural sociology understands “culture” as “an organized set of meaningfully understood symbolic patterns” (Alexander 1992:295). “Culture” in this sense does not narrowly refer to works of art or music, but rather to the symbolic categories and classification systems individuals employ to understand the social and natural worlds. Against realist and positivist accounts of the social world, cultural sociology asserts that our experience of the social world is mediated by discourse, language, and, of course, culture. To this end, cultural sociology seeks to map the symbolic dimension of social life and treats culture as an independent variable that has a relative autonomy in shaping actions (see Alexander and Smith 2003). Culture, in its many forms, then, is a *structuring* element, in that it shapes our experience of the social world, framing performances and situations, as well as playing an indispensable role in constructing identities.

Blair-Loy (2003) understands these structures as “cultural schemas”— “ordered socially constructed and taken-for-granted framework[s] for understanding the world” (p. 220, n. 8). The power of cultural schemas lies in the fact that many people do not recognize them as constructing reality; rather, they are non-consciously employed as reality. In addition to constructing the world

cognitively, cultural schemas make sense of the social world in terms of emotion and morality. This multidimensional account of culture shows how moral boundaries are part of the symbolic order of society (see Beisel 1992; Douglas 2002; Lamont 1992, 2000), and how cultural schemas organize our emotions (Blair-Loy 2003). For example, schemas of devotion orient people toward what they should care about and how to feel. In this way, Blair-Loy's (2003) conceptualization of cultural schemas is distinct from other uses of the term "schema," which narrowly denote a person's socially constructed cognitive map (DiMaggio 1997; Risman 1998). Blair-Loy's attention to the moral and emotional aspects of culture highlights an often-overlooked aspect of culture and experience. It should prove to be epistemologically productive for my research on wrestling, a cultural space wherein individuals many times emphasize the moral aspect of their identities. In this way, I extend Blair-Loy's insistence on the centrality of morality as a symbolic boundary to establish identity claims.

Cultural schemas are both objective and subjective. That is, they are shared, publicly available understandings, yet partially internalized, shaping personal aspirations, identities and desires (Blair-Loy 2003). Cultural schemas, thus, delineate what is possible by shaping expectations and demands. To this end, they both enable and constrain social action (Sewell 1992). And because schemas are internalized they provide the foundation for a strong moral imperative.

Symbolic Boundaries

Central to cultural sociology, from the late Durkheim to Bourdieu (1984) and Lamont (1992, 2000) is the topic of symbolic boundaries. Symbolic boundaries are “conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space” (Lamont and Molnar 2002:168). For Durkheim, it was the paramount distinction between the sacred and the profane that guided his research. More recent scholars (Bourdieu 1984; and Lamont 1992, 2000; Wilkins 2008) have emphasized the importance of symbolic boundaries for group membership, identity, and access to resources. Building from Saussure, for whom the meaning of a given word is dependent on its difference from other words within a system of language, scholars have emphasized the centrality of (establishing) difference in the constitution of meaningful identities (Bourdieu 1984; Lamont 1992, 2000). And in many ways, symbolic boundaries are the matter through which difference is written. To this end, identities are created and maintained by establishing and clarifying boundaries with others (Gamson 1997). Boundaries demarcate, distinguish, and exclude “others”; and in so doing they function to create a semblance of identity among those that fall within the established boundaries of a given formation. Certain identities, then, are co-constructed with the very “others” against which they define themselves.

Attention to symbolic boundaries highlights the processes—“boundary work,” for example—that establish identity claims. Boundary work refers to “the process by which individuals define their identity in opposition to that of others by drawing symbolic boundaries” (Lamont 1992:233). Processes of boundary work create bonds of shared emotions, beliefs, and conceptual distinctions among group

members, at the same time that they draw distinctions with others. Emphasizing differences with others often creates hierarchies between groups (Wilkins 2008). As I will show in the dissertation, when wrestlers employ boundary work, they usually do so to position themselves above those with whom they draw distinctions. Boundaries are thus important stakes for status and prestige.

Morality is a salient dimension of symbolic boundaries. In fact, in some instances morality is perhaps *the* important dimension along which to draw symbolic boundaries with others, especially for groups situated on the margins of status or socioeconomic standing. Indeed, marginal or peripheral groups often draw symbolic boundaries on moral grounds (Espiritu 2001; Lamont 1992, 2000; Wilkins 2008). This is many times one of the only dimensions they can position themselves above those groups who hold more symbolic capital. Moral discourse, both here and elsewhere (Espiritu 2001; Lamont 1992, 2000; Weis, Proweller, and Centrie 1997; Wilkins 2008), provides otherwise marginal or groups with a sense of righteousness, which helps to shore up their sense of self worth in the face of perceived marginality.

The preceding literature has informed my approach to Central High wrestlers' identity formation. Accordingly, I analyze the symbolic boundaries that wrestlers employ to make sense of their selves and others. Consistent with Lamont, my dissertation extends this area of inquiry and looks to ways that wrestlers structure their social worlds in terms of morality, and how they mobilize moral characteristics to draw distinctions with others. Moral boundaries, as Lamont (1992) notes, are drawn along characteristics such as honesty, work ethic, and

personal integrity. I focus here on the boundary work that wrestlers perform along lines of work ethic. Like others who are denied social status, wrestlers draw on their work ethic to combat their marginality, but also to think of themselves as different kinds of people—those who are willing to endure what most others will not. In this way, they construct their collective work ethic as a “badge of distinction” (see Wilkins 2008:11), which they use to construct a distinctive identity and emphasize differences with others.

Masculinity as Meaning System

The concepts of relationality and difference are also central to gender theory. As Connell (1995), for instance, insisted, masculinity is always *masculinity-in-relation*. As a cultural system, masculinity is opposed to femininity. As Kimmel (2001) notes, the “notion of anti-femininity lies at the heart of contemporary and historical conceptions of manhood, so that masculinity is defined more by what one is not rather than who one is” (p. 272-3). Schippers (2007), for her part, states that “any empirical exploration of masculinity and femininity and their role in gender hegemony must focus on relationality” (p. 100). Masculinity, for instance, is produced “in relation to a multiplicity of bodies, spaces, and objects” (Pascoe 2007:9). Doing so allows us to ask questions such as: what practices or characteristics are defined as either womanly or manly in a given setting? And also “what characteristic or practices of men are defined as feminine, contaminating, or disruptive” (Schippers 2007:100). The last question should alert us toward *male femininities*, which Schippers defines as “the characteristics and practices that are

culturally ascribed to women, [which] do the cultural work of situating the feminine in a complementary, hierarchical relationship with the masculine, and [which] are embodied by men" (p. 96). This type of analytical focus treats gender not simply as what men (masculinity) and women do (femininity). As Risman (2009) suggests, "to label whatever a group of boys or men do as a kind of masculinity, or whatever new norms develop among girls or women as new kinds of femininities, leads us to a blind intellectual alley" (p. 83). My focus dislodges masculinity from male bodies exclusively (Halberstam 1998; Pascoe 2007), and looks to the ways that masculinity is a frame or meaning system. In this way, my approach is informed by Ridgeway (2009), who argues that gender needs to be understood a "primary frame for making sense of *self* and *other*" (Ridgeway 2009:150). Gender then is not primarily an identity or role, but rather a system or frame for organizing social relations (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). As a system, it is upheld by widely held cultural beliefs about the differences between men and women, which "provide a blueprint for doing gender" (Ridgeway and Correll 2004:514) in social settings. Ridgeway's understanding of gender in many ways parallels de Lauretis' (1987) account, which defines gender as "both a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning to individuals within the society" (p. 5). In both accounts, gender is a cultural system rather than something exclusive to male and female bodies.

To understand masculinity as a meaning system, a culture in the strict sense, researchers need to look to the various ways it shapes peoples' cultural worlds; for example, how masculinity organizes social relations and constructs identities, as

well as how it structures peoples' worlds in terms of morals and emotions. Moreover, to get at fuller picture of masculinity, researchers also need to analyze how individuals and groups mobilize masculinity to make sense of one's self and others, and the social world more generally. Discourses of masculinity are indeed associated with male bodies and what they do, but they should not be reduced to them. My dissertation follows this theoretical insight and looks to how scholastic wrestlers conceptualize themselves (bodies included) and others in terms of masculinity and, moreover, how they mobilize masculinity as a strategy to make sense of their place in the social world. In key ways, then, I look to how masculinity acts as a cultural frame, as well as a symbolic boundary upon which distinctions with others are constructed.

SOCIOLOGY OF BODIES

Ever since social scientists began paying attention to the body as an important area of scholarship¹, they have conceptualized the body in a diverse number of ways. Foucault has been influential for his now famous statement, "the body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas)" (Foucault 1984:83). Foucault posits the body as an effect, something inscribed by discourses and disciplines. This Foucauldian tradition has spanned many literatures

¹ Until relatively recently, sociologists have ignored bodies. Some have argued that this disciplinary blind spot was due to Durkheim's insistence that the proper subject matter of sociology was indeed social facts and not biology (or psychology). According to Shilling (2007), the discipline's "determination to carve out its foundations from the bedrock of society, rather than from the materials that furnished other sciences, steered the subject away from attributing too much explicit attention to embodiment" (p. 3).

and topics on bodies. Bettie (2000), for instance, details how high school girls' inscribed difference on their bodies through markers such as hairstyle, clothes, and different shades of lip liner. These girls both constructed and wore their group membership on their bodies. Building on Foucault, Grosz (1994) figures the body as "page or strip on which a social text (or several texts) is written" (p. 117). She counts the following as writing instruments for inscribing the body: pen, stylus, spur, laser beam, clothing, diet, exercise. Tattoos, of course, are texts written on bodies, but so too are diets and eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia. For Bordo (2003), eating disorders are not the result of individual or family pathologies; nor are they aberrations of our culture. They are rather "characteristic expressions of that culture" (Bordo 2003:141). In a very strict sense, Bordo's examples illustrate how culture is written on the surface of bodies.

Inscriptions can occur both violently in the form of scarification and pain and subtlety in the form of inscription of cultural values and norms (Grosz 1994). Chastity, for example, is written onto the bodies of evangelical Christians in the form of absence (see Wilkins 2008), just as discipline is written on the bodies of athletes characterized as having a "monastic devotion" to their chosen craft (Atler 1992; Wacquant 2004).

Bodies are not only inscribed by culture; they signify cultural messages as well. Because culture is inscribed on (and in) the body, the body itself, as Bourdieu (1984) notes, is symbolic property. Dispositions, manners of being, and taste, for instance, act as cultural capital that signifies status, prestige, and class, among other things (Bourdieu 1984). This is one sense of what Butler (1993) intends when she

suggests that bodies matter—they mean. When we view bodies we not only see flesh and bones, but values and ideals, as well as differences that our culture has “written” on those bodies (Bordo 1999:26).

Producing Disciplined Bodies

Bodies are not simply texts, inscribed on the surface by the mark of culture. They are also the locus of social control and the site of discipline (in Foucault’s sense). Foucault (1977), for instance, talks of the production of docile bodies made possible by a microphysics of power which organizes practices spatially. The body’s movements are rationalized, broken down, regimented, and arranged in time. The result of such “a machinery of power” is a positive economy—one that crafts docile bodies, whereby “discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in terms of political terms of obedience)” (Foucault 1977:138). Rather than through ideology, our bodies are trained, shaped, and disciplined through spatial and temporal regulation. This discipline is accompanied by surveillance that is at once general and individualized. The distribution of individuals in space allows for a certain classification system, wherein individuals can be compared and classified in relation to each other. A deepened version of this discipline registers within individuals as they compare and classify themselves in relation to others, noting their abnormalities and attempting to bring themselves into conformity. Discipline, then, does not have to be external and experienced as imposed; it can give individuals a sense of mastery as well as an identity (Bartky 1990), as I show throughout this dissertation. A disciplined self can

also be a source of pleasure, as well as a vehicle to transcend bodily existence (as in the case of some monks). To deny one's body indulgences and to fashion it in a very explicit and calculated manner is, in a strict sense, an exercise or technique of power.

Foucault's comments on disciplining bodies are insightful to understanding how wrestling as a disciplinary regime crafts bodies in particular ways. In Chapter 5, I examine how sport fashions and deploys bodies in particular ways. Yet this dissertation asks more of bodies. My concern does not fall exclusively on the physical demands placed upon wrestling bodies or the ways in which they are disciplined; I am primarily interested in how immersion in the discipline of wrestling effects how individuals experience and interact with their bodies. In this way, I offer a phenomenological account of wrestlers' bodies, an approach few others have attempted. I construct such an account both by detailing the bodily demands placed upon wrestlers (as well as how wrestlers experienced such demands) and by exploring how wrestlers and coaches socially construct their bodies in particular ways. To this end, I analyze the discipline of wrestling, but also the dominant cultural frames wrestlers and coaches use to socially construct their bodies in particular ways. As Bordo (1999) notes, we experience our bodies through the cultural metaphors that are available to us. The question then becomes, what are the dominant schemes for interpreting bodies at Central High, and moreover, what implications stem from these schemes?

As I will argue in Chapter 5, the disciplinary demands of wrestling coupled with the local discourse of overcoming one's body work together to have wrestlers

think of their bodies as *obstacles to be overcome (by one's mind)*. In this way, wrestling provides an interjection on theoretical debates on the relationship between mind and body. There has been a lot of ink spilled debating the relationship between mind and body. Much of it has taken aim against the long-standing tradition of Cartesian dualism (Blackman 2008; Bourdieu 2000; Turner 1984), which figures the mind as both separate from and superior to a mechanical body. In one variant or another, these critics argue that such a Cartesian split is a historical construction, rather than a physiological reality. Others, such as Spinoza and some Buddhist and Hindu philosophers, insist on a monist understanding of the mind/body, arguing that the body and mind are best conceptualized as one rather than separate. The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (1962) has an important interjection on this debate, as it places primacy in the body as the medium through which we are conscious of the world. Although not necessarily monistic, this conceptualization takes issue with framing the body as an object—that is, as something other.

Bourdieu (2000), for his part, argues that the: “body-as-thing, known from the outside as a mechanism... and which is opposed to the inhabited and *forgotten* body... is the product of the extension to the body of a spectator's relation to the world” (p. 133). Bourdieu's point makes good theoretical sense in many circumstances, especially in regards to research that writes about others' bodies from what Bourdieu defines as a “spectator's point of view,” that is, *not* from the perspective of those who are caught up on the game so to speak. The *forgotten* body of which Bourdieu speaks, though, is only one modality of being. As I will illustrate

in Chapter 5, there are definite circumstances when, from an insider's point of view, bodies are anything but forgotten. In high school wrestling, pain, fatigue, and hunger are constant reminders of the body's presence.

Both the dualist and monist conceptualizations of mind and body make little sense when they are discussed simply in terms of theory, divorced from practical consideration. Rather than debate dualism and monism in philosophical terms, the more important question for a sociology of bodies (and minds) is to see how the relationship between mind and body plays out in different contexts. In terms of dualism, the question then becomes, under what circumstances do our bodies become objects at the level of phenomenological experience? Or in Merleau-Ponty's terms, how do we move from the preobjective experience of our bodies in the world to an experience of them as objects in themselves? These questions inform my approach to Chapter 5, where I explore how wrestlers socially construct their bodies.

Socially Constructing Sporting Bodies

By exploring how high school wrestlers socially construct their bodies (as objects to be overcome), I contribute to the literature on the sociology of bodies and sport. To this end, I intend to situate my account of wrestling bodies in relation to others that ask similar questions of sporting bodies. Other research, for instance, found that when boys discussed their bodies and others' bodies in the context of sport, they did so in terms of the body's utility and functionality in relation to sport (Ricciardelli, McCabe, and Ridge 2006). Such research suggests that male athletes

have much more of an *instrumental* relation to their bodies than do women athletes. Rather than contemplate or discuss the body as an object of aesthetic interest, as is many times the case for girls and women, boys often gauge their body image in terms of how it either benefits or hinders their performance in sport (Ricciardelli, McCabe, and Ridge 2006). The *body as utility* metaphor is implicit in the various warrior themes prevalent across numerous sporting contexts. For instance, there is an internal battle within the body to conquer physical limits and persevere through pain, just as there is an external battle to use one's body to "kill" opponents (Lorber and Moore 2011). The external battle demands that athletes fashion their body as a weapon (Messner 1990). In Wacquant's (1995) account of boxing, the body is constituted as both weapon and target, as both the subject and object of violence. To this end, the arena of sport is literally a battleground.

At the experiential level, the sporting body is sometimes experienced as a machine, devoid of human emotions (Drummond 2010). The body-as-machine represents the ideal of the figure of the *body as object*, and as something other than one's mind. In this figuration the body is there to perform assigned tasks, to be pushed and moved about by the mind's will. In this way, the body is always the subject of control and never an autonomous agent (Atler 1992). Sporting bodies have also been described as the locus of pleasure (Woodward 2009), as the controlled and disciplined body is many times a source of pleasure for the individual(s) involved.

The general literature on the sociology of bodies and sport provides a useful framework for thinking about wrestling bodies. Yet this dissertation, although

informed by the perspectives I just discussed, extends the literature in important ways. In addition to showing how wrestling bodies are sites of discipline, I also look to the ways that they are avenues for transforming the self. Socially constructed as proving grounds, wrestling bodies—particularly their limits in terms of pain, fatigue, and hunger—are tests of character, toughness, and, of course, masculinity. The ability to persevere through the various dimensions of pain becomes a sign of one's self. Moreover, I look to the various ways that masculinity is tied to overcoming one's body.

Critical scholars of sport have detailed the ways in which sport is a debilitating force for peoples' bodies, as they are often the sites of chronic, debilitating pain and injury (Curry 1993; Wainwright, Williams, and Turner 2005). In contrast, my research looks to the transformative aspects of pain—how wrestlers socially construct pain in ways that alter their bodies and minds. As sociologists of the body have insisted, pain is more than sensation (Bendelow and Williams 1995; Richardson 2011). What counts as pain, and moreover whether certain types of pain are constructed as negative or positive, is a relative question that demands a socio-cultural analysis. As I argue in Chapter 5, in matters of pain, context matters a great deal. Thus, when discussing wrestling bodies—namely their limits in terms of fatigue, pain, and hunger—I look to how high school wrestlers and coaches socially construct pain in *positive* ways, such as an avenue for improved selves.

GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND SPORT

Scholars writing in the 1980s and 1990s agreed that men's sport was an arena of hegemonic masculinity, a site where dominant constructions of masculinity were both performed and shored up (Dunning 1986; Kid 1987; Messner 1990; Whitson 1990). Hegemonic masculinity, as Connell has taught us, refers to the most esteemed version of manhood; a cultural ideal that sets the standard against which other marginalized masculinities and femininities are evaluated (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). In addition to exalting hegemonic forms of masculinity, which emphasized physicality, aggression and heterosexuality, conventional constructions of sports have devalued emotionality, empathy, and homosexuality. To this end, scholars have argued that organized sports were a site where dominant conceptions of masculine superiority were both constructed and shored up (Messner 1990, 2002), as well as an arena where femininity and gay men were marginalized.

Moreover, whereas women athletes often face questions about their sexuality (Ezzell 2009), most male athletes are presumed heterosexual until proven otherwise (Griffen 1998). Messner (2007) argues that male participation in sport fits the following normalizing equation: "athleticism = masculinity = heterosexuality" (p. 76-77). In contrast, because "sport" is constructed as masculine, women athletes often raise questions: "Athleticism? Femininity? Heterosexuality?" (Messner 2007:77). Moreover, men's participation in sport, in addition to not raising questions, usually bolsters one's heterosexual credentials (Connell 1987). In some cases, sport acts as a closet for gay men, into which they throw themselves to construct a masculine, heterosexual identity (Messner 2002),

as masculine bodily performance can serve as a front or cover for being gay (Probyn 2000).

My research on high school wrestling complicates some of these widely held assumptions about gender, sexuality, and sport. Although most high school wrestlers imagine themselves in ways that are in line with hegemonic versions of masculinity—aggressive, competitive, physical, and perhaps most importantly, heterosexual—they oftentimes run up against outsider perceptions that challenge their presumed heterosexuality. High school wrestlers, thus, have an image problem. What they define as a hypermasculine craft—which among other things is *not gay*—is the object of others’ ridicule as homoerotic. The jeers high school wrestlers face usually centers on the skin-tight outfits they wear in competition (derisively referred to by others as “leotards”²) and the fact that they are in close physical contact with other men in positions that can be interpreted as sexual (Fair 2011; Pronger 1990). Accordingly, not only do wrestlers lack the symbolic capital of dominant sports like football and basketball; they do not enjoy the masculine and heterosexist privilege associated with participation in such high-profile sports. In fact, wrestlers’ participation in sport, rather than bolstering their heterosexuality, at times is cause for others to question it. To this end, high school wrestling contributes to existing literature in that it allows us to analyze sport as a contested terrain in terms of heterosexual masculinity.

² Women traditionally wear leotards in sports such as dance and gymnastics. In referring to wrestlers’ outfits as leotards, others attempt to demean high school wrestlers by associating them with the feminine.

The fact that wrestlers have to defend what others take for granted (i.e. heterosexuality) adds to literature on gender, sexuality, and sport. Although most research has focused on how women in sport manage accusations of homosexuality and challenges to traditional gender performances (Ezzell 2009; Griffin 1998), there is little work on male athletes facing similar questions. The literature that does exist focuses on men in cheerleading (Anderson 2002; Davis 1990; Grindstaff and West 2006). Research on men who cheer provides a good way to situate my analysis of scholastic wrestling. Male cheerleaders often face ridicule from others who suggest that they are either gay and/or feminine for participating in a female-dominated sport. Scholastic wrestlers are not unlike male cheerleaders, whose heterosexuality and masculinity are challenged because of their participation in a traditionally woman-dominated sport. Most scholastic wrestlers and male cheerleaders identify with the tenets of hegemonic masculinity, yet they feel threatened by outsiders' contrary and damaging perceptions of them. To this end, both have contested identities. But whereas male cheerleaders have to manage the stigma of participating in a sport that is considered *feminized* terrain (Anderson 2005), wrestlers have to manage damaging perceptions of them as participating on a *homoeroticized* terrain.

Sport and the Heterosexual Ideal

Much of the research on sport and sexuality has focused on sport's long-standing relationship with homophobia (Anderson 2002, 2005; Muir and Seitz 2004; Pronger 1990, 2000). Pronger (2000) argues that sport, although in some

ways more accepting now than in the past of gay and lesbian individuals, is still a deeply homophobic arena. Homophobia takes multiple forms in sport, ranging from physical violence (Anderson 2000), to overtly homophobic discourse, to something of a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy where the saliency of gay identities is subordinated to virtual silence (Anderson 2002). The joking and ridicule surrounding labeling others “fags” and/or “gay,” is symptomatic of a belief that homosexuality is something to be derided and that the arena of men’s sports is a heterosexual one. Moreover, the range of homophobia within sport, according to many, signals the institution of sport as a deeply troubled arena in terms of gender and sexual equality.

Although scholars have framed men’s sport as a bastion of hegemonic masculinity, which among other things was deeply homophobic, recent scholarship has documented a notable shift toward acceptance and inclusivity. Although hegemonic masculinity has been the dominant theoretical framework within the context of sport, Anderson (2005, 2009) has recently challenged both its ascendancy and contemporary relevance. He argues that hegemonic masculinity, as a theory that suggests a single, hegemonic version of masculinity, no longer makes sense in the context of sport. Anderson attributes the decline of hegemonic masculinity within sport to diminishing levels of cultural homophobia throughout society. He argues that if masculinity is predicated on homophobia, and if cultural homophobia is diminishing, this may change the way masculinity is both constructed and performed (Anderson 2005). Anderson argues that hegemonic masculinity, as a theory, only makes sense in contexts that exhibit high levels of

homophobia, which he describes as a fear of being socially perceived as gay (Anderson 2009, 2011b). For him, sport is still the site of orthodox versions of masculinity, which resemble many of the tenets of hegemonic masculinity, especially when it comes to being hypermasculine, homophobic, and devaluing femininity. But orthodox masculinity is no longer hegemonic; it stands alongside other esteemed versions of masculinity as possible configurations of being a man.

Diminished levels of cultural homophobia, according to Anderson (2009), have opened the door for others to value more inclusive versions of masculinities. Inclusive masculinity as a category type exists as an alternative to orthodox masculinity, and is more accepting of homosexuality and behaviors previously coded as gay and/or feminine. Where hegemonic masculinity and orthodox masculinity construct rigid versions of masculinity, inclusive masculinity constructs broader, more inclusive versions of being a “man” (Anderson 2009). Evidence for inclusive masculinities range from reports of straight athletes contesting homophobia and misogyny (Anderson and McGuire 2010), to spectators having positive impressions of gay male athletes (Campbell et al. 2011), to members of a male soccer team celebrating their teammate’s choice to wear pink cleats in competition (Adams 2011). Moreover, Anderson argues that inclusive masculinity is becoming increasingly dominant among heterosexual men in both North America (2005, 2009) and the United Kingdom (Anderson and McGuire 2010; Price and Parker 2003). And as his recent interviews (Anderson 2011a) suggest, this level of inclusivity has had a positive effect on gay athletes, as they do not fear coming out to the extent that they indicated in his earlier research (Anderson 2002). Taken

together, these studies suggest a movement towards more inclusive versions of masculinity, which among other things are more accepting of a wider range of masculinities and sexualities in sports.

High school wrestling contributes to the scholarship on Anderson's recent claims about the cultural shift towards inclusive masculinity in sport. It does so, for instance, by mapping the culture of homophobia and acceptance at Central High and situating it in relation to existing research. As I will show, in key ways the wrestlers in my study signal inclusive masculinity, especially in their acceptance of others' presumed homosexuality. In this way, they run parallel to Anderson's claims of sport as becoming increasingly progressive in terms of sexuality. Yet high school wrestlers at Central are orthodox in other ways, for example, in devaluing femininity and taking offense to the accusation that "wrestling is gay."

My findings from Chapter 6 also extend the inclusive masculinity debate by mapping a different dimension of it. Although Anderson and his colleagues have talked about how men are increasingly accepting of homosexuality and how they are granted more freedom to act in ways previously stigmatized as feminine (and by association gay), few have addressed how high school athletes react to accusations that challenge their heterosexuality. This dissertation is important, in part, because it does just that—it explores how high school wrestlers negotiate accusations that their sport is gay. Without exception, Central High wrestlers took offense to the accusation that wrestling is gay. It seems, then, that the wrestlers are progressive in their acceptance of others' same-sex desire, yet rather conservative when others question their heterosexuality. This tension is fruitful to push the debate on

inclusive masculinity, namely because it gets at different dimensions of inclusive masculinity by asking different questions of sexuality. To this end, I show how accepting others' homosexuality is a quite different issue than an accusation of homosexuality leveled against wrestlers personally.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The findings presented in the following chapters came from ten months of ethnographic research with a wrestling team at an inner-city high school in the Mountain West region of the United States. I use the pseudonym “Central High” throughout my dissertation to refer to my research site. During my time at Central High I served as an assistant wrestling coach and was involved in all aspects of the team, from daily practices and competitions during the week, to road trips on weekends, to meeting with the other coaches to discuss topics such as wrestlers’ academic eligibility, legal issues, and troubled family lives. Outside of normal practice and competition times, I often met with a number of wrestlers about various topics that ranged from frustration and disappointment with their wrestling to more personal issues such as family and legal troubles. For a period of four months, one wrestler actually lived with me, in large part, because his family life and living circumstances were dire to say the least. During that four-month period, his brother, who also wrestled at Central, also stayed with us from time to time. My “field” was thus not as clear-cut as it is in other studies. Near the end of my fieldwork at Central, I conducted 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with members of the wrestling team.

I approached this study through the lens of interpretive ethnography (Denzin 1997), as my aim was to provide an account of the local culture of wrestling at Central High, especially wrestlers’ understandings of gender and sexuality, from the perspective of members’ lifeworlds. My main avenue for accessing members’

lifeworlds was through the role of “observant participant” (Wacquant 2011), which I will explain in more detail below. Observant participation, coupled with in-depth qualitative interviews, proved to be the most appropriate methods for my research questions that centered on topics such as meaning, identity, experience, and group membership.

Ethnographic methods are useful for studying topics such as experience, meaning, and identity (Charmaz 2004). According to Lofland et al. (2006), qualitative research allows for a “richer” in-depth understanding of how people make sense of their lived experience. Moreover, qualitative research methods are particularly apt for analyzing local meaning and shared cultural schemas (Blair-Loy 2003).

Gaining Entrée and Establishing Trust

I contacted the Head Coach of Central High in early October of 2008 about the possibility of serving as a volunteer assistant coach for the wrestling team. He was familiar with me from my past wrestling accomplishments at the collegiate level and invited me to visit with him about my project. The following day I ran the approximately two miles from my apartment to Central High to meet with Coach Jose while he was overseeing a preseason workout. I was clear from the beginning that I was in the wrestling room to conduct dissertation research, but that as a coach I would serve in any capacity that he needed. He was immediately receptive to the idea and from that point on I was in the room everyday. I even opted out of a much-needed graduate seminar on qualitative writing to be present at all the practices and

competitions, in large part to showcase my commitment to the team. Although I was in the room as a coach the very next day, I waited until I received approval from the IRB at University of Colorado-Boulder, as well as from the high school administration prior to doing any formal research, including interviews and talking with members of the team about their experiences. Shortly after meeting Coach Jose, I met with the principal and athletic director at Central High to discuss my project, and then had to submit a “Request to Conduct Research Application” prior to conducting research. I also had to undergo a background check for the state of Colorado before I was allowed to conduct research in this setting. In accordance with the ASA Code of Ethics and Colorado state law, I created consent forms indicating the purpose of my research project and stressing that any and all participation was completely voluntary. Per the ASA Code of Ethics (1999), in researching vulnerable populations such as adolescents, “sociologists take special care to ensure that the voluntary nature of the research is understood and that consent is not coerced” (p. 14). The ASA Code of Ethics also mandates that prior to researching adolescents, researchers must obtain consent to do so from their parent and or legal guardian. Consistent with these principles, prior to me conducting any interviews, each of the members of Central’s wrestling team that was under the age of 18 signed a “Child Participant Assent Form,” while their parent and/or guardian signed a “Parental Permission Form” (see Appendix D for copies of each form). That is, before interviewing minors and/or discussing my project with them, I received informed consent from both the wrestlers and their parents or guardians. The

coaches and past wrestlers, all of whom were over 18, signed a “Participant Informed Consent Form” prior to participation in this project (see Appendix D).

Referred to by Lofland et al. (2006) as the first truly social moment of naturalistic investigation, getting in and gaining access was *the* fundamental component to the rest of my research. Most of the *entrée* issues—such as being able to locate the group on a regular basis, learning how to present and manage myself, or worrying whether the group members will accept you—were not of much concern for me as they were for other researchers who have tried to gain access to an unfamiliar context or setting. To be sure, my past accomplishments as a wrestler facilitated the general ease with which I gained *entrée* through the doors of Central’s wrestling room. In this way, my research can be considered “opportunistic” (Reimer 1977), in that I exploited unique biography and life experiences to gain access to my setting. Moreover, because of my familiarity with similar settings, my presentation of self—how I dress, talk, and interact; what sort of demeanor I “give off”—seemed more authentic and less problematic, both to those at Central High and to myself. As Bourdieu (1984) details, the ease with which one navigates cultural codes and settings is a key component of acceptance and group membership.

Coffey (1999) argues that our ability to look the part is a crucial aspect in our ability to conduct research, especially in promoting trust and reciprocity, and establishing relations with others. This concern is heightened in contexts where insider/outsider distinction is prevalent, as is usually the case with athletic teams. As Goffman (1963) has shown us, our ability to look the part is critical to social acceptance. My history as a wrestler has left me with certain physical attributes that

mark me as a distinct insider (namely cauliflower ear, but other bodily scars as well). Because I share some of the physical attributes associated with this distinct culture, my ability to establish trust and rapport, namely through perceived credibility, was increased.

Yet, impression management goes beyond dress and appearance. The manner in which researchers manage their bodies is crucial to gaining acceptance and establishing rapport. "Body work," for Coffey (1999), includes the conscious self-presentation of the body in terms of appearance, and the spatial positioning and negotiation of the body in the field (p. 62). All settings, to various degrees, have rules governing bodies. Violating such body rules could seriously jeopardize both the role of the researcher and the quality of field relations (Coffey 1999:73). This insight is extremely important in the context of sport, especially wrestling, where bodies are in constant contact with each other. Again, my history with wrestling facilitated my familiarity with the appropriate body work in this setting. I knew for instance that it was appropriate to touch others when consoling them or when teaching them new moves, but not in other ways. I also was familiar with the different interaction orders in wrestling. For instance, while practicing wrestling techniques ("drilling") with a partner I knew to treat the interaction as a "working consensus" (*a la* Goffman) and *not* to resist him too much. I also knew that when it was time to "wrestle live" such restrictions were eased, and that the interaction order much more resembled combat. Taken together, my level of competence and familiarity in negotiating my body in relation to local body rules helped stamp me as a competent insider and further bolstered my acceptance in the field.

As a “known investigator” (Lofland et al. 2006)—that is, a researcher who is open about his or her role as an investigator in a given setting—the challenge of gaining psychological and emotional entrée was at first a difficult one. The fact that I was a former member of the group that I was now studying helped me gain acceptance and trust from members on the team and coaching staff, as was the fact that the Head Coach introduced me to the team as a “blessing.” Coach’s blessing helped me get my foot in the door, so to speak, but building greater acceptance and trust was contingent upon the relations I established and maintained while in the field. I still had to overcome the fact that I was a PhD student in the room to do research on a group of kids I never met before. And while Coach Jose was excited to have me in the room, often commenting to others about my past wrestling accomplishments, others were at first reluctant to trust and accept a newcomer as accomplished as I was in my wrestling career, especially given the relative lack of success they had in the sport of wrestling. To this end, in some ways I was an insider, yet in others I was a distinct outsider.

I was an outsider in other key ways, namely along racial and class dimensions. Although I was not the only white person in the room, I was one of a relative few. Wrestlers at Central knew I was a PhD student at University of Colorado-Boulder, a place many inner-city kids associated with upper-class, white people. And initially, that is how many on the team saw me. As time passed though and I was in the room with them everyday, coaching them on weekends, consoling them after losses, and dealing with them in various ways outside the wrestling room their perception of me changed, as did my outsider status. To be sure, my role as a

coach—a position of trust and authority—allowed me to overcome certain barriers, such as race and class, that other researchers work hard to overcome. As I explain below though, it was my continued commitment to them both on and off the mat that allowed them to accept and trust me as an integral part of the team.

Ascriptive identity categories, such as race, are indeed socially constructed realities, but as Lofland et al. (2006) argue, they should not be overstated. “Just because you do not share certain characteristics with the persons you wish to study, you should not automatically conclude that such research is impossible or even unusually difficult” (Lofland et al. 2006:24). Racial and class differences did not prevent Wacquant (2004) from gaining access to a mostly Black boxing gym on Chicago’s South Side; nor did they bar Duneier’s (1999) access to poor Black men on the streets of New York’s Greenwich Village. Moreover, high school wrestling at Central was a space that emphasized solidarity among team members and deemphasized differences. Surely, the high school wrestlers in my research joked about race and class, but it was never a point of division or contempt. This context, then, set the ground, in part, for my acceptance both to the field and to members’ lifeworlds. While this was true, gaining access to high school wrestlers’ experiences was much more a product of me establishing and maintaining relationships of trust in the field.

From my initial days in the wrestling room, I recognized the dynamics of race, class, and power and managed my presence in ways that stressed equality and fostered trust and reciprocity. I for instance emphasized commonalities between the wrestlers and myself and downplayed my past accomplishments. I held myself to

the same standards that I expected of them. For example, one day when I swore in practice (from getting my eye blackened by an inadvertent head-butt), I did the required 25 push-ups for breaking the no-swear code. I also was very supportive of their performance on the wrestling mat, whether they won or lost, and I invested and committed *with* them on a daily basis. In other words, I let them know that my presence in the room was about helping them, and I had their back no matter the challenge or circumstances. Lastly, my level of commitment to kids outside of the wrestling room helped establish my insider, equal status. In many ways, I was always more than simply a researcher. From day one, I became invested in these individuals' social lives much more than I was their wrestling. As time passed, many of the wrestlers at Central thought of me as "Coach B," someone they could look to for advice and support both on and off the mat, rather than an outsider who was in the room to study them. And as they began to see me as "Coach B," and realized that I was there for them in various ways, they opened up to me in ways that I would have been denied had they seen me simply as a researcher.

"Observant Participation"

As a sociologist-turned-assistant wrestling coach, deeply involved with high school wrestlers on a daily basis, my ethnographic role was one of "observant participant" (Wacquant 2011). Following Wacquant (2011), this term best describes ethnographic roles that are characterized by radical, bodily immersion in a particular field by a social scientist that is equipped with the necessary disciplinary

tools to be critical and reflexive. According to Wacquant (2011:87-88), observant participation, as a methodological blueprint, suggests the following:

“Go native” but “*go native armed*,” that is, equipped with your theoretical and methodological tools, with the full store of problematics inherited from your discipline, with your capacity for reflexivity and analysis, and guided by a constant effort, once you have passed the ordeal of initiation, *to objectivize this experience and construct the object*, instead of allowing yourself to be naively embraced and constructed by it. Go ahead, go native, but come back a sociologist!

This researcher role is similar to depth participation or “active membership” (Adler and Adler 1987), where “the researcher moves clearly away from the marginally involved role of the traditional participant observer and assumes a more central position in the setting” (p. 50). In contrast to a simple observation—namely because of my position as an assistant coach—I took part in the core activities of the group. And this avenue provided me the opportunity to establish intimate relationships with group members.

Following Haraway (2003), I understand engagement and immersion to be epistemologically productive, rather than an obstacle or detriment to knowledge. First, ethnographic immersion allowed me to analyze categories, terms, and meanings—for instance discourses of masculinity, such as the “pie” discourse—as they emerged in the course of routine activity. In this way, I was able to use organic coding to provide accounts of local, “in vivo” codes and categories (Strauss 1990) as members mobilized them in context. And according to Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995), actual situated use, rather than interview questions that address use, is the primary tool for getting at members’ meanings. Second, as time passed and I gained others’ trust, wrestlers and coaches opened up to me about a number of topics in

casual conversation as well as in the interview process. Moreover, being in close physical proximity with members on a daily basis and on road trips provided invaluable access to their lifeworlds. Thus, my level of immersion provided for rich qualitative analysis that is otherwise lost in lesser membership roles.

At times, my role allowed me to experience what other members were feeling in terms of their bodies and the pain and fatigue that accompany membership in wrestling. There are certain things that are best learned through bodily immersion, as Bourdieu (2000) and Wacquant (2004) would attest. To attempt an analysis of pain, fatigue, and bodily technique, for instance, from the standpoint of an outsider (someone not engaged in practice) is to lose a qualitatively rich experience that is telling in terms of how one relates to one's body.

My shared experience with group members (of being a high school wrestler) provides me with a particular vantage point that for the most part is denied to outsiders. In crucial (but not all) ways we share a common sense of intersubjectivity—namely shared experiences in terms of cultural and bodily schemas (*habitus*). Having managed my body, mind, and emotions in the past in much of the same manner as they do now, allows not only for a shared experience between myself and other members on the team; it also allows me to draw from my own biography and provide “first order constructs.” According to Adler and Adler (1987) active membership brings researchers into the members' first order perspective, which goes beyond rational understanding to more of an irrational, emotional, and “deep understanding of the people and setting they are studying” (p. 60).

As a final note on my ethnographic immersion it is fitting to mention how I potentially affected the wrestling room at Central in important ways. The well-known Heisenberg principle occurs in the field as well as in the laboratory—adding a researcher and assistant coach to a setting will influence what happens in the field in ways that I could not know in advance. My immersion into this space could have had a significant effect on “normal” operations. For instance, my open stance as an advocate for gay rights, coupled with my sanctioning of the terms “gay” and “fag” may have affected how wrestlers thought of and talked about homosexuality. Accordingly, they very well could have told me what I wanted to hear in my interviews. Just as well, though, their thoughts on homosexuality could have been the same in my absence.

Field Notes

“Anthropologists are those who write things down at the end of the day” (Jackson 1990:15)

My role as observant participant and coach who managed and participated in practice did not allow me to write “field notes” per se—that is, notes written in the field. After practice, though, while riding the bus back to my apartment I jotted notes on themes, topics, and other interesting happenings that day, which served to jog my memory when I sat down to write up that day’s notes. Every night when I got home I wrote up my notes for that day’s research. While traveling to competitions, sitting in hotel rooms, and coaching at events I was better suited to write “field

notes” proper, as well as to create more detailed jottings and cryptic notes which also served to jog my memory for later writing.

Writing field notes is a selective process, in part, because as Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) suggest, “there is always more going on than the ethnographer can notice” (p. 63). Field notes reflect the ethnographer’s choices, theoretical commitments, and intellectual curiosity. To this end, field notes are better understood as a construction, rather than a record of reality (Emerson, Fretz, And Shaw 1995). Although I focused my notes to topics that addressed my predetermined research themes, I also paid attention to things that provoked and interested members. Following what Tsing (2009) refers to as “disciplined curiosity,” my aim while thinking about and writing field notes was to be curious about whatever members deem important or salient. The *discipline* component of Tsing’s (2009) term proved to be especially pertinent for my role as a researcher, particularly given my history and experience with scholastic wrestling at a number of levels. The imminent challenge for me throughout my time in the field was *not* to impose my understanding and categories on what quite possibly was a qualitatively different experience of membership in high school wrestling. Although this may have its benefits elsewhere—for instance, coaching attempts to impose categories on wrestlers and frame common circumstances in similar ways—as an ethnographic method, imposing categories fails to appreciate local meaning and categories (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Moreover, in giving credence to members’ concerns and issues, I was able to keep to my aim of providing an empathetic account of their cultural worlds.

Semi-structured Interviews

In addition to my fieldwork, I conducted (and digitally recorded) 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with wrestlers and coaches of the wrestling team at Central. Interviews were difficult to come by for a number of reasons. For one, many individuals quit the team at various points in the season. We had as many as 25 wrestlers at a given practice in the beginning of the year. Many of these individuals, though, were very marginal in terms of participation rates. Some days they attended practice, but much more often were absent. Such numbers were as inconsistent as they were short-lived though. After winter break, a ten-day period in December where organized practice was forbidden by the state wrestling association, the number of individuals in the wrestling room were cut in half. From that time on, we regularly had 10-14 wrestlers in the room. Those who quit were both difficult to locate and reluctant to be interviewed. Very few of them had cell phones, let alone personal computers. And almost none of them had their own vehicle. In many ways, it simply was difficult to locate them, since they were not in the practice room everyday. It is hard to say for sure why those individuals that I was able to locate were reluctant to be interviewed, but it is likely that I did not establish the trust necessary for them to confide in a stranger. Moreover, I was asking them to talk about their experiences in wrestling, something they cared little about and perhaps were embarrassed to discuss since they had quit the team. Of the wrestlers who remained on the team for the entire year, only two refused interviews with me. It was not as much that they outright refused to be interviewed, as it was a failed

attempt to get them to follow up on my request. Although these two individuals were reluctant to talk about their experiences in a formal interview setting, they did so informally throughout the year. To this end, they contributed to the themes and findings of this dissertation, but did so in a truncated manner.

Yet I was able to interview 15 individuals for this research. I conducted all of the interviews in person. Many settings served as my interview site, as I conducted interviews on the school bus while traveling to and from off-campus competition, across the street from Central High at a local coffee shop, at a diner near campus, and in my apartment (mainly with Jordan, who stayed with me for a period of time). Semi-structured interviews provide general guidelines for the interview process but allow for flexibility in terms of topic and narrative. My interview schedule served, thus, as a guide for the interview process rather than a strict script (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Moreover, my interview schedule was flexible, as I deleted questions that proved in past interviews to be unfruitful and added questions that addressed issues that emerged in previous interviews.

I approached respondents as constructors rather than repositories of knowledge (Holstein and Gubrium 1995), and I came to understand the interview process as the site where knowledge is constructed. For, as Charmaz (2004) suggests, it is in the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee that data is generated. Keeping with my aim to understand members' lifeworlds and my commitment to do so empathetically, I used the interviews to build accounts of members' accounts. Moreover, as I mentioned above, I used the interview process to further explore the meanings and usage of terms, codes and categories that emerged

during my fieldwork. Thus, I treated the interview process as an interaction to clarify meaning and categories that emerged in the field, as well as to complicate them.

Throughout the research process, I continually checked analytic categories and levels of abstraction by further research and data collection until the point of either data saturation or the time I end my research in the field (Charmaz 2004). One way I did this was by cross-checking the categories and codes I constructed in my field notes against members' understandings and meanings, what Ellis and Bochner (2000) refer to as "reliability checks." For instance, during the interview process I asked about the meaning and usage of certain phrases that emerged during my fieldwork. Also, informally during my fieldwork, I would ask similar questions about the meaning of local categories. For instance, calling someone a "pie" was completely foreign to me, yet from the way individuals used it in context I guessed it had gendered undertones. I cross-checked my initial assumptions by asking, both informally and during the interview process, "what does it mean to be a 'pie?'" In this way, I allowed for members to either confirm or contest my assumptions, which is an invaluable reference point for ethnographic analysis, especially that which is committed to an emic point of view.

In addition to addressing the codes and categories used by members on a daily basis, my interviews provided the context to ask questions about identity (e.g. How do you see yourself in relation to others on the team, in the school, etc.?) and meaning (e.g. What does it mean to be a "pie?"). To this end, the interview process allowed participants to provide accounts of their social worlds in their own words,

codes, and categories; it also provided the opportunity for narrative activity, all of which served as important opportunities for members to speak their worlds.

Coding

I open coded the hundreds of pages of content—both my field notes and interview transcripts—to gain a sense of what issues and topics were most central to wrestlers' lifeworlds. Although my approach to coding was characterized by a certain degree of openness, I analyzed my field notes and interviews with predetermined themes in mind. I, for instance, looked to how they talked about themselves as tough and masculine, and how they made distinctions with others on these very characteristics. While analyzing the data I made notes and used the practices of "memoing" and "coding" conjointly (Lofland et al. 2006:200). I proceeded with the process of open coding until I reached "data saturation" (Charmaz 2000:520). Once I narrowed my initial coding schema, I employed focus coding to bring together larger sections of data under a similar theme. For instance, I began to notice that wrestlers mentioned hard work and discipline when they talked about their identities, as well as to make distinctions with others.

Keeping to my commitment to present an account of their social worlds from members' perspectives, the local categories, terms, and concepts that members used to describe, define, and make sense of these transgressions— i.e. the *in vivo* codes (Strauss 1990)—informed the analytical constructs and themes upon which this dissertation was based.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH

“Objectivity’ is about living with contradictions and limits—of views from somewhere”
(Haraway 2003:399)

As I see it, an ethnographer’s central purpose is to construct an empathic account of the social world from the perspective of members’ lifeworlds. As a researcher, then, I am interested in individuals’ experience of their social worlds, and the meaning those worlds have for them. Therefore, my approach to ethnography is interpretive (Denzin 1997).

Ethnographic texts are not intended to “reflect reality.” Rather, they are intended to gain access to a version of social reality, as experienced by others. The task of an ethnographer, then, is to reveal to multiple “truths” from the perspective of indigenous members, and not “Truth” per se (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Ethnographic truths are thus inherently *partial*—committed and incomplete (Clifford 1986), and the knowledge I aim for is a “situated knowledge,” admittedly partial and locatable (Haraway 2003). With this in mind, I am committed to providing an account of indigenous meanings (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995) through an empathetic understanding of others’ lifeworlds.

Although I was interested in how members think about, construct, and navigate their social worlds, especially in terms of gender and sexuality, I also kept a critical eye throughout as to how larger discourses of gender and sexuality informed these individuals’ cultural worlds. In this way, I follow Scott (1992) and treat experience as an *effect*, something shaped by discursive systems. This approach does not take away from the saliency of the lifeworlds I detail throughout this

dissertation; it simply addresses the epistemological position that our experience of social worlds and our places within them are mediated by culture and discourse.

Insider/Outsider Questions and Concerns

What may seem to be an unfruitful tension between my role as committed coach, caught up in the game, and as researcher, asking questions of the game, I see as fruitful. In a sense, my immersion in the field as a coach may have limited my ability to ask certain questions as an outsider. As a member of the group, I will never be able to completely push back the barriers of what I take for granted. The only ethical way to address this issue is to remain reflexive in the research process. Reflexivity, as I mention elsewhere, centers on how the researcher—his or her taken for granted presuppositions, disciplinary commitments, etc.—affects the research process and what counts as knowledge. It thus entails transparency and accountability on the researcher's behalf, but also a certain degree of humility in the role of the researcher as capable of only limited and partial knowledge. My role as coach and group member, then, expanded the bounds of what I take for granted and thus limit certain areas of inquiry that an outsider would find interesting. Although this may be true, in important ways my role as coach and group member is also intellectually fruitful. It allows me to detail the cultural world of high school wrestling in such a depth that may be lost on outsiders.

Establishing a sense of trust and rapport lead wrestlers to share their social worlds with me. Part of this trust and rapport, though, is contingent upon my commitment to be accountable and responsible for what I choose to write and

represent. As a researcher, I am accountable and responsible to provide accurate accounts of members' lifeworlds from their perspectives, but also to do so in such a way that does not cause undue harm to participants. Christians (2005) argues that professional etiquette demands that no one deserves either harm or embarrassment, which result from insensitive research practices. And as ethnographers we should not gage the credibility of harm or the severity of the offense simply in reference to the legal system, for there are other consequences (social, emotional, psychological, or otherwise) that are equally harmful to individuals and groups. Ethical issues such as this are a serious concern, according to Lofland et al. (2006), when a researcher moves from the public realm to the private, where access is not granted to just anyone. As an empathetic researcher, this was a constant concern as I wrote this dissertation. If I was not cognizant of this pitfall, I could have inadvertently constructed an account of wrestling that painted the sport in an unfavorable light, which runs contrary to my larger ethical aim of providing a context in which to learn to converse with others in an empathetic way. Accordingly, I wrote this dissertation with that very caution in mind, namely that I needed be cognizant of how others will interpret my work and how it will affect the people that have granted me access to their social world.

Being thoughtful of the ways in which I represent other cultures is one aspect of researcher reflexivity; another is acknowledging personal biases and theoretical and disciplinary commitments. "Reflexivity," according to Davies (1999), "means a turning back on oneself, as process of self-reference [and an awareness] to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing

research" (p. 5). Although grounded theory suggests that theory and analytical codes and categories emerge during the research process, this is not to suggest that the researcher does not bring with him or her a set of assumptions or theoretical orientations when approaching a topic of interest. Theoretical commitments and disciplinary assumptions shape what kinds of questions are interesting and worthy of attention. This is inevitable. Although this is true, I understood some of the concepts that guided my research—e.g. masculinity and identity—as "points of departure to look at data, to listen to interviewees, and to think analytically about the data" (Charmaz 2004:501). These concepts were intended to guide rather than limit my data collection and analysis. When members deemed other concepts or themes crucial, I become interested in them. In this way, the respondents' point of view is where I begin my interpretation (Charmaz 2004).

Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research

The crisis in representation problematized concepts such as reliability, validity, and objectivity, which were previously thought to be settled (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Questions of reliability and validity, premised on positivist and realist assumptions, do not have the same significance in qualitative research that they do in quantitative studies. In quantitative research, validity assesses the degree to which categories or constructs correspond to the real world. Such an assessment is premised on the belief that categories reflect reality, rather than construct versions of reality. Questions of validity hinge on this belief. "If there is no means of correctly matching word to world, then the warrant of scientific validity is lost"

(Gergen and Gergen 2000:1026). Qualitative analysis, then, must ask different questions of validity—ones that ask what categories or constructs members use to make sense of and interpret their social worlds? The important question for categories is not whether they reflect reality or whether they are valid. The important questions, rather, are how and when they are mobilized, in what contexts they are mobilized, and against whom? Answering such questions is no less rigorous than quantitative inquiry into validity; it just requires different methods and scopes, such as providing a faithful account of the members' lifeworlds from their own perspective, complete with local categories and constructs used to make sense of reality.

The important question of validity in qualitative research is: do the constructs and categories that the researcher presents provide an accurate account of how members experience their social worlds? At bottom, this is what interpretive ethnography sets out to do—provide an account of the social world from local, context-specific perspectives. Ultimately, members are the best indicator of validity (What did you mean by this? What are you referring to?, etc.) Thus, my findings are valid to the extent my analytical constructs include the perspectives of the members I am studying.

Like validity, conventional notions of reliability, as they are commonly defined and employed in quantitative research, are not appropriate for participant observation (Jorgensen 1989). Because few ethnographies involve measurement in the quantitative sense, the question of reliability is a misnomer in qualitative research. The ethnographer is the research instrument him- or herself, so the

question of reliability centers on his or her activities or path in the field. The reliability of the researcher necessitates multiple angles and perspectives (Jorgensen 1989). Thus, to enhance the reliability of my research, I attempted to gain access to social phenomena from multiple members' perspectives, as well as from a single member in various ways: observant participation, interviews, self-reports. Moreover, I worked towards reliability through so-called "reliability checks"—presenting work back to the people involved (Ellis and Bochner 2000:751). By talking about my themes both informally and in the interview process, I gave members an opportunity to provide feedback and at times contest what I was writing, all of which works toward my stated goal to provide an account of the social world from the perspective of others.

A Note on Confidentiality

Because of the nature of ethnography, true anonymity is impossible. Yet the guarantee of anonymity via the "assurance of confidentiality" is one of the central obligations of field researchers (Lofland et al. 2006:51). According to Christians (2005), all personal data ought to be secured or concealed and should be made public only under the veil of anonymity. With this in mind, all names and places I refer to here are listed as pseudonyms, which themselves are not full-proof. Some of the idiosyncrasies and nuances associated with certain people or places are detectable to the interested eye, regardless of the use of pseudonyms. This is an inevitable concern when doing qualitative research and using members' own words to voice and represent themselves and others. To this end, they have less of a chance

of confidentiality due to offering biographical and personal accounts. This is especially the case for insiders to whom recognition sometimes comes easy.

Wrestlers at Central High, at times, divulged information about people or places that only they were privy to. Whenever I recognized this in my research, I marked it to not be included in my writing.

CHAPTER 4

HARD WORK, DISTINCTION, AND MASCULINITY

“Pardon my French: I’m not a pussy. I’m 40 years old; I was on the [elliptical] machine the other day working out. I could have quit... nobody was watchin’... no, I was watchin’. I finished and could be content knowing that I worked hard, kept goin’ when I could’ve quit. That’s the mentality that you all have to have in this room” (Coach Jose, Field notes 11.20.08).

The mentality of which Coach Jose speaks is one built from a hegemonic commitment to the ideal of hard work. Hard work, as I will detail in this chapter, is perhaps the most salient aspect of wrestlers’ identities at Central High. It permeates their cultural worlds, making sense of everything from their attrition rates and marginality as a sport to their local understandings of masculinity. A commitment to hard work shapes their masculine and moral sense of self, and in this way provides the grounds on which to draw distinctions with a host of others. Wrestlers come to think of themselves as different types of people, ones that are willing and able to endure what most are not. In this way, the commitment to hard work operates as a cultural schema (Blair-Loy 2003), shaping members’ social worlds cognitively, as well as morally and emotionally.

Most of the literature on hard work and masculinity has addressed the fusing of the two in the workplace. Scholars have noted the centrality of hard work to the masculine identities of farmers (Bartlett and Conger 2004), forest workers (Brandt and Haugen 2005), Mexican immigrant workers (Alcade 2011; Ramirez 2011), and working-class men in London (Archer, Pratt, and Phillips 2001). In each of these

contexts, men constructed and validated their masculine sense of self in their respective workplace, in part, through the ideal of hard work. For these groups, as it was for Lamont's (2000) working-class men, hard work had strong moral undertones. Denied status in other areas, working-class men often mobilized moral standards to draw distinctions with others and elevate their social worth.

Wrestling is no different. As a craft, wrestling is more like a job than a space of leisure and enjoyment. Almost all the kids who came through the doors of Central High's wrestling room talked about the hard work (in terms of physical demands, discipline, and sacrifice) that the sport demanded to not only be successful, but just to be a part of the team. When I asked Brandon, an African-American underclassmen who was in his first year of wrestling, to describe his initial impressions of wrestling he said he did not know,

... that you had to work hard. I didn't know that practice wasn't going to be easy, like football practice... In football you get breaks a lot, and in wrestling you don't... You work hard for a certain amount of time without gettin' a lot of breaks... I wasn't used to practicing that hard.

The demanding practice structure, coupled with the relatively little return in terms of status and prestige, in large part explains the attrition levels Coach experienced throughout the year, as well as in years past. The demand for hard work on various fronts (e.g. during practice and while "cutting weight" outside of practice) figures wrestling as more than simply a sport. In fact, as I show throughout this chapter, there is a lot of physical, mental, and emotional anguish associated with the craft. It is of little surprise then that almost everyone mentioned quitting at some point during the year. At times, some were explicit about the issue: "Wrestling is not fun

anymore.” (Reggie) Those who stick it out, though, drew upon the very circumstances that “others run from” to construct their masculine identity and sense of moral worth.

The Structure of Wrestling and the Demand for Hard Work

Hard work is built into the daily regimen of drills, conditioning, and “live” wrestling that constitute a routine day at wrestling practice. In a very real sense, the structure of the sport demands an adherence to hard work. Wrestling matches are known to be tough, physical exhibitions that require hard work on the front end (i.e. in practice, conditioning) so they can “hold up” in competition. As a coaching staff, then, the goal is to establish situations and circumstances that challenge wrestlers at Central, and, of course, have them build up their bodies and minds to endure and persevere. The following segment of my field notes documents a set of conditioning exercises that are common near the end of practice.

After we’ve already warmed-up, drilled, and wrestled live: everyone is put on the short wall for “suicides” [suicides are a set of sprints where team members run to the first tape line then back to the wall, then to the next tape line then back to the wall, all the way until they finish with one last sprint the entire length of the room, down and back], groups of three... The intensity is high during conditioning: people are grunting between the sounds of footsteps pounding the mat. They gasp for air when they are finished [with their sets]. I make them stay up and walk; no resting on the mat or against the wall is allowed. After “suicides” we run sets of sprints the entire length of the room. In between the sprints the wrestlers climb a rope to the top of the expansive ceiling in the wrestling room. The wrestlers bodies read fatigue; they are bent over, breathing heavily, falling to the floor at times. I stay on each of them, encouraging them to accept their body’s fatigue as a challenge. “This is where you get in shape.” I tell Brian: “that little bit of fatigue you feel in workouts like these... you have to redefine it as a challenge to get in better shape.” For the most part they do very well, pushing their bodies when they are tired. They finish with a set of “sevens” [“sevens” are a drill where team members count off push-ups against each other: the first group does one push-up, followed by the second group doing one push-up. They make their way all the way up to seven push-ups, and then

back down to one, for a total of fifty-six push-ups without touching their knees]. (Field notes, 2.2.09).

As can be seen here, learning how to work hard is a requisite to becoming a wrestler. In fact, the challenge of hard work is written into practice on an almost daily basis. Much of the conditioning drills are not wrestling-specific, as they are comprised of “suicides,” sprints, rope climbs, and push-ups. When we do conduct wrestling-specific drills, Coach expects them to be done in the same manner he expects of conditioning: efficient and “hard.” It is common for wrestlers to “drill” taking their partners to the mat over and over again for periods of thirty minutes or more. And perhaps the “hardest”—that is, most demanding—aspect of wrestling practice is “live” wrestling. Wrestling “live” simulates the interaction order of actual competition. Whereas “drilling” is best conceived as a “working consensus” (à la Goffman), wrestling “live” is a battle, wherein you attempt to “give them nothing, but take from them everything” (as one wrestling t-shirt read).

Hard work, as a demand, is not limited to the wrestling room. Wrestlers talk about “cutting weight” and limiting their social life outside of the wrestling room as hard work. For most, it is a different kind of work, one more closely aligned with the restraint of sacrifice and discipline, rather than the excess called upon in practice. But hard work nonetheless. Almost all wrestlers “cut” some amount of weight. Most cut a lot. It is not uncommon for a wrestler to weigh 15-20 pounds above their desired weight class when the season begins. In fact, this was the amount of weight that both Calvin and Brian lost during the year I was there to meet their designated weight classes. For those individuals who cut a lot of weight, “cutting weight” is both

the hardest and their least favorite part of the sport. Coach, who in high school cut 14 pounds to make his 95-pound weight class, talks about his weight cut:

... It was very, very hard, very tough. But the will to win was greater than that. The will to be successful, it was all work... that was my driving force. Either I do it or I don't do it and walk out like everybody else in the school and I'm just nobody. Or I do it and I become a champion. I wanted to be a champion. I didn't want to be like everybody else.

He went on to tell me that he cut so much weight, his body would stop sweating. To make weight at 6:30am for a competition he would drive to the parking lot at 4:00am and suck on Jolly Ranchers and "spit off" the rest of his weight. "Two pounds [in] about three hours" is what he could expect to lose by spitting in a bottle. It is no wonder that cutting weight was the toughest aspect of wrestling for Coach, as it is for others. For those who cut a lot of weight there is no "out," so to speak. For these individuals, wrestling resembles a total institution. It comes to control most aspects of their life, especially during season.

HARD WORK AS CULTURAL SCHEMA

Hard work not only manifests itself in the structure of workouts in the room and the demand for discipline outside of the room; it is also the dominant cultural schema at Central. In this way, it has both physical and symbolic dimensions.

Schemas, as Blair-Loy (2003) contends, are "shared cultural models we employ to make sense of the world" (p. 5). They are, in other words, blueprints for experience.

Blair-Loy (2003) argues that culture, in addition to ordering cognition, has salient moral and emotional dimensions. For instance, *schemas of devotion* direct people toward what they ought to care about and how to feel in certain contexts. Culture in

this sense is multidimensional, not narrowly conceived as simply cognitive as some scholars imply (Dimaggio 1997; Risman 1998).

For many at Central, hard work is perhaps best understood as a schema of devotion, as it orients individuals toward where they ought to devote their “time, energy, and passion” (Blair-Loy 2003:176). It structures the world cognitively (we know for instance when someone is working hard), morally (we know that to work hard is a good thing), and emotionally (we know that sorrow, guilt, and shame are associated with not working hard, and that happiness and pride are associated with working hard). The hard work schema delineates clear expectations for those associated with the program, as well as provides a blueprint of how to spend one’s time both in the room and out. Moreover, it is both a model for how to come about “success” in wrestling and how to “make it” (as a man) in the world more generally.

Hard work, as a cultural schema, moves across the wrestling room at Central as a penetrating gaze, a discipline in the Foucauldian sense. “Disciplines,” as Foucault (1977) describes, “characterize, classify, specialize; they distribute along a scale around a norm, hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate” (p. 223). In this sense, the ideal of hard work establishes a generalized set of expectations that the coaching staff attempts to embody and reinforce, and which the kids internalize to one degree or another. To be sure, the schema of hard work emanates from the top—that is, from the coaching staff. Jose is uncompromising in his commitment to hard work, as are the rest of the coaches to varying degrees. As a coach/researcher, I am no exception. You can see, for instance, how the schema of hard work has structured my lifeworld. Not only

does it structure my experience of their bodies in space (e.g. when I look across the room and witness what others may see as “fun,” is to me a lack of hard work); I am an enforcer of hard work in the field. I “push” kids to work harder and help them to become hard workers, in part, through having them redefine their fatigue and discomfort through a different cultural schema (as is evidenced in the description of conditioning drills I mentioned above).

Although hard work as an ideal comes from the top, so to speak, the rank and file also sounds it. In this way, hard work as a local ideal gains its power from multiple centers of observation. Individuals on the team, especially those most “bought in” to the schema, police each other. They push each other to work hard and call each other out when they are slacking. These individuals who police others also police themselves; they represent the model of hard work, as well as the ideal form of power.

Hard Work as a Schema to Evaluate Self and Others

Evaluating self. As wrestlers internalize the cultural schema of hard work, it begins to structure their lifeworlds. They compare themselves to the ideal work ethic, and think of themselves as more or less hard workers. The ideal of hard work serves as a constant reminder to individuals in the field of how they should spend their time there. It, for instance, came to structure Jordan’s experience of wrestling to the extent that he felt guilty when he missed practice. Although he missed practice for reasons out of his control (he had a meeting with his social worker at his Aunt Kema’s house to discuss his current and future living arrangements),

Jordan felt he needed to work extra hard the next day at practice to make up for yesterday's absence. This was the first thing he said to me when he came into the room the following day. Brian, although he rarely lives up to expectations, culturally buys into the schema. It structures his lifeworld in the same way as it does Jordan's. After a practice where Brian was "doggin' it" and I was calling him out for not working hard he approached me and said: "thanks for staying on me for not working hard." Similarly, Calvin thanked me via text message one evening for "pushing him" when he didn't want to work hard in practice that day: "Hey coachs [sic] i wanna say sorry again other than that thanks for pushing me n be ready to bring it tommorrow [sic].... These individuals, although they fall short of expectations of the hard work schema, still evaluate themselves in terms of it. The hard work schema still orders their experience and shapes their emotional responses of guilt and sorrow, for example. In this way, it provides a set of "feeling rules" in context. Defined as "rules about what feeling is or is not appropriate to a given social setting" (Hochschild 1983), feeling rules structure wrestlers emotions in relation to hard work. Thus, the guilt and sorrow that Jordan and Calvin respectively felt were experienced as appropriate within the context of a failed attempt at the seamlessness of hard work.

Evaluator of other team members. As wrestlers internalize the demands of hard work and come to see themselves as hard workers, they also mobilize it to as a point of distinction with others on the team. As we are running sprints and doing bear crawls the length of Central's room, Reggie kept yelling at Dante and Sway to "get up" as they continuously fell to the mat grimacing in pain, their bodies exhausted. Reggie explained that he was "hurtin" as they were, but he was still doing

the sprints, as should they. After the final sprint, Reggie ran from the room to throw-up in the garbage can in the hall. He later drew upon this situation to figure himself as a hard worker, as well as to position Dante and Sway as *not* hard workers. This story, in addition to showing how hard work is the source of distinction, also reveals how deeply accepted hard work is as a cultural schema, as the coaches looked upon Reggie's willingness to work hard to the point of vomiting as a commitment to work—and one that would suit Dante and Sway well.

During day two of "Hell Week", tensions were high when members of the team were hand-fighting each other. (Hand-fighting is a live battle between two wrestlers, where they cannot touch their knees to the floor. They are supposed to stay engaged with their partner, working for head and hand position while on their feet. To the layperson, it may actually resemble a fight more so than wrestling.) There is a break in the action and Calvin pushes Edan towards his opponent and tells him to "get in there" (by which he meant close the distance between he and his opponent and continue battling). Edan, with his chest bowed out, yells to Calvin, "Are you talking to me? I outwork you every practice?" Edan interpreted Calvin's instruction to "get in there" as a sign that he was not "working hard," namely because there was space between he and his opponent. Edan, who had been thrown from his space while hand-fighting, took offense to the claim that he was not working hard; thus, his frustration with Calvin's comments. This was not the only time Edan employed hard work to make distinction between himself and others on the team. In fact, Edan paints himself as one of, if not *the* hardest worker on the team. David, for his part, is quite explicit about how hard work structures his sense

of others. When I asked him about work ethic, he stated, “I definitely judge people on how hard they’re willing to work and how easily they quit and give up.” He continued on, saying “you can tell a lot about someone by how hard they work and how easy it is for them to quit and complain.” David then switched to discussing Brian, who many thought of as “soft,” saying he would not want him on his team if he had the choice. In fact, when I asked group members the question—“If you could draw a line of distinction on one principle as far as, 'I want him on my team' or 'I don’t want him on my team,' what would it be?”—members overwhelmingly drew their line along lines of work ethic.

These stories show how wrestlers at Central use hard work as a cultural resource to make sense of themselves and others on the team. As an evaluative tool, it stratifies wrestlers along of continuum of hard work. Those who work the hardest in the room—Edan, Jordan, Reggie, and Calvin—are looked upon favorably, while those who “dog it” or who are lazy are subject to punishment and ridicule. Ezekial, for instance, is notorious for missing practice and routinely not working hard when he actually makes it to practice. This recognition of Ezekial’s lack of adherence to hard work structures others’, especially Coach’s, understanding of Ezekial’s performance in competition. According to Coach, it is Ezekial’s work ethic that is responsible for him becoming “gassed” (tired) during his matches. He’s unwilling to put in the necessary work to “hold up.”

Distinction with others. Hard work is also used to collectively distinguish wrestlers from other sports teams, as well as from the general population. Jordan, while waiting for practice to begin, says to a student standing in the wrestling room

doorway: "You ain't wrestling? Why, its too hard?" The student shrugged off the comment, but he did not contest it. Wrestlers think of themselves as a group that works hard. They internalize the demands of the sport and mobilize "hard work" as a source of their identity, as well as a point of distinction with "softer" sports. Wrestlers, for instance, define themselves against basketball players on the basis of hard work. In the process, they figure themselves as tougher and more "manly" than basketball players who are thought of as "soft." According to Lonzo, "they're just sissies... basketball, I'm not hatin' on it, if you like basketball, go ahead and do it, but I just don't think they work as hard as wrestlers. All they do is shoot a basketball around." Calvin, on a few occasions, argued with basketball players in the hall as to which sport was tougher, insisting, for a number of reasons, that wrestling was far tougher. Privately, while I was talking to Calvin about "cutting weight" he explained that it's the intensity of workouts and the hard work of "cutting weight" that distinguishes wrestlers from basketball players. Chris draws on the theme of discipline, which he sees as a type of hard work, when distinguishing wrestlers from basketball players: "I think we just have to have more discipline, 'cause all the basketball players, they're a state championship team, but they still go out and party. I know a lot of 'em smoke, a lot of 'em drink. If you did that during the wrestling season, you're screwed." Wrestlers are screwed, of course, because if they partied they would not be able meet the demands of wrestling, which according to many are far more stringent than basketball.

Some basketball players refuted these contentions, but others confirmed wrestling as a different place, as did members of the general student body. One of

the school's best two-sport athletes, who at one time tried his hand at wrestling, was in the room one day chatting with Coach and some other wrestlers about the demands of the sport.

Wrestling, as he admitted, is too crazy and tough for his likes: too much running, especially. "I once had to run with this kid, who was lighter than me, on my back and I almost died." He kept referring to the notion that he didn't want to die, that's why he did not come out for wrestling. I learned that this kid had come to one wrestling practice in the past, only to quit immediately afterward due to the demanding work... "What you got here is animals," said the kid. This individual said that he might start varsity this year for the high school basketball team, and this was another reason he wasn't willing to wrestle, as these sports are both winter sports and athletes cannot compete in both. Coach countered that claim, with the notion that he could make this individual *tough*; in his words—"I'll teach you how to work."

Outsiders, then, sometimes confirm wrestlers sense of hard work, as they see the wrestling room as the site of hard work and, at times, animality. The demands of the sport are, according to Coach, second to none. And this is a major reason why there are relatively few wrestlers who remain on the team for the entire year. Calvin had recently asked his cousin, who wrestled for a short while, why he quit. According to Calvin: "[his cousin] physically couldn't do it, he said you know he wasn't built to you know embrace... a sport like this. He said that it's a lot more challenging than a lot of other sports are because... [of] the requirements that come along with wrestling."

These stories about wrestling *as tough*, of course, tell a tale about wrestlers' sense of work ethic and how they mobilize it to make sense of themselves as well as draw distinctions with others. They think of themselves not only as men, but specifically as men of virtue (Wacquant 1995). The sense of distinction that comes from their collective work ethic, for many, acts as a badge of honor. It also helps them to, for instance, make sense of their marginality, which I turn to next. Wrestlers have

power in numbers, but they gain their sense of distinction and honor on the fact that they are a relative few.

HARD WORK, MARGINALITY, AND “SUCCESS”

On a number of occasions across various contexts, both wrestlers and coaches drew upon hard work to make sense of their marginality. One day in practice, for instance, Coach said to his wrestlers, “Wrestling is tough. That’s why everyone is not in here.” Coach then goes on to talk about how easy it is to shoot a basketball, but how demanding it is to wrestle. Coach revisited this theme many times throughout the year. In all of his messages to the team he championed hard work as the reason, as he put it on one occasion, that “the whole school runs away from this room.” Our guys heard a similar tale when we went to the Denver Public Schools free wrestling clinic, headlined by Olympic and World Champion, Kevin Jackson. Jackson, as he stood among the hundred or so kids seated on wrestling mats, argued that wrestling is “special,” because “it is the toughest, hardest sport.” He drew on this theme to make sense of the fact that there were only 150 people in attendance at the clinic, and not the thousands that usually flock to see a World and Olympic Champion.

In each of these contexts, wrestlers draw on their marginality as a source of pride, rather than shame. They position themselves as tougher than others on the basis of their participation in a sport with such demands (and little return in the way of status). Wrestlers who stuck it out the entire season also position themselves over and above those individuals who quit the team. Although many were

disappointed that they lost so many teammates this year, they used the high levels of attrition to think of themselves as different types of people. In this way they wear their commitment and hard work as a badge of distinction, which Wilkins (2008:115) describes as “alternative criteri[on] for worthiness at which [marginal groups] can be successful.” As it does elsewhere (Lamont 2000), hard work (and the ability to persevere) at Central High signals a form of moral purity.

Coach also makes sense of the attrition rates he has seen almost every year he has coached at Central in terms of hard work. For him, he is fighting the good fight, though, by coaching the “toughest” sport. He frames his role in terms of morality, yet he faces challenges beyond his control. When I asked him why he thought so many kids quit the team this year, he replied that it was because of, “the work. We live in a microwave society, and they want quick results. They only want to put in minimal efforts, and in wrestling as a sport, you can’t do that.” According to him, our society is becoming “soft” and lacks a strong work ethic. His role, as he understands it, is to show people how to work hard, even if others “burn” him in the process, and even if there is only one kid in the room. Coach once told me: “Its human nature to find the easy way out.” His job then is to change nature, provide a structure for these inner-city kids to learn how to work and how to overcome (their bodies, their situations, and their expectations). And for Coach, this structure is wrestling.

Hard work and “Success”

Life is tough; wrestling is only one aspect of it, but it would help you be successful.
(Coach Jose, field notes, 12.12.08).

For Coach, wrestling is about much more than actually wrestling. It is a training ground for life, as it is for masculinity.³ Wrestling is violent, hard, and a “battle⁴,” but so is life. The principles taught in wrestling, then, carry over seamlessly to the real world. In this way, Coach sees wrestling as a way to navigate life, which according to him will “punch you in the mouth.” To be sure, Coach’s understanding of life as tough stems, in part, from his own upbringing in a family headed by a stern, authoritarian father in a poor, working class neighborhood. He routinely describes the world as a violent and unforgiving one. “Life’s gonna smash you in the mouth.” This much you can count on. The important question, for Coach is, “What are you gonna do? You either man up, or hit the door.” “Manning up”—in the wrestling room and in life more generally—is about perseverance, hard work, and overcoming adversity—all variables Coach stressed when talking about how wrestling will carryover into life.

Once a fan asked Coach how his team was doing, to which he replied: “Ask me in twenty years.” His grand theory of “success” spills over from the wrestling room into the real world, so to speak. He sees the wrestling room as a place to learn how to work hard and persevere, and if his past wrestlers can employ these

³ Dunning (1986) argues that historically combat sports were justified as “training grounds for war... [and] vehicles for the inculcation and expression of ‘manliness’” (P. 271).

⁴ A note on language—as I will show throughout this dissertation, especially in Chapter 6, wrestlers often refer to their sport as a battle. Thus, this is the language I use to describe the physical, competitive nature of the sport.

principles in their daily lives then both he and they were successful. Jose, then, strives for seamlessness in the principles he teaches in the room and their enactment in real life. The self he aims to construct in wrestling is the same one he intends his wrestlers to employ when facing whatever it is the real world throws at them.

Coach draws on stories from his past to showcase his model of “success.” Darrion, a lean, yet muscular African-American with tattoos and cornrows, who at one time Jose took into his home is one such example. Darrion, according to Jose, did not “make it” in wrestling, but he did so in life. “He’s got a wife, kid and gets up and works nine and ten hour days.” According to Jose, “He [Darrion] learned how to work here.” He continues within this same theme when I interviewed him:

And with Darrion, as far as wrestling and the work ethic, he has... his wife and his daughter, and Darrion gets up every morning, six days a week and swings a sledgehammer, 12 hours a day, because he has something at home that he has to take care of. I think the work ethic that he went into wrestling with, and the year-round, and not giving up and the perseverance, carried over into that part of his life.

Jose believes tremendously in the carryover effect in wrestling—that what one learns within the walls of the wrestling room (namely hard work and perseverance) will carryover to other aspects of one’s life. If Jose can succeed in teaching people how to work, then he has done his part. This, in fact, is how Jose figures his role as a wrestling coach. This is also how others around the state see him. When I asked Jose why he coached wrestling, he evoked the principle of hard work and the notion that it can and does carryover to other realms of life:

I just try to get a normal kid, an average kid, a kid in general, the socioeconomic status doesn’t mean anything, and take him to another level and teach him to work and be a productive member of society, take him under my wing and hopefully he’ll become a better human being so they can contribute to our society. A lot of kids we

work with come from dysfunctional families, they come from poverty-stricken homes. What I try to teach them is that you can achieve it through hard work.

Through hard work Coach aims for a form of “ontological transcendence” in his kids, whereby a given wrestler can fashion oneself “into a new being so as to escape the common determinations that bear upon them and the social insignificance to which these determinations condemn them” (Wacquant 1995:501). Coach knows the deck is stacked against many of the wrestlers that enter Central’s room. Hard work, though, in his mind is the trump card. It can transform them into different persons. Moreover, hard work and perseverance hold the promise of transcending their circumstances, as well as their old selves. As it is in the Protestant ethic and the American Dream, hard work can lead to salvation.

Competing Definitions of “Success”

As is evident from the last section, local definitions of “success” differ from those accounts that define success in terms of wins and losses. Wrestling (at Central High) is built upon the central tenets of the American dream—hard work, meritocratic understandings of social standing, individualism—but focuses more on the process (namely hard work) rather than the results. In fact, as I illustrate below, hard work in many cases *is* “success.” Members are at pains to make sure they define their local account of “success” in opposition to traditional notions of “winning and losing.” Success, according to Coach, is “not about winning or losing, it’s about giving your absolute best.” Jordan expands on this topic by saying that success “is working as hard as you can... success is not winning.” Brandon, a

newcomer to the sport, describes “success” as “to not give up... No matter if you win or lose, you start and you finish [the wrestling match].”

Many at Central realize their definitions of “success” conflict with more conventional definitions. Reggie, for instance, argued one day near the end of season that if he did not qualify for the state championships, “its all worthless.” Reggie thinks that since he has been wrestling for 4 years and hasn’t really beat anyone “worth talkin’ about” that he is a failure in many respects. He says: “I don’t wanna wrestle anymore, I’ve already accomplished my goal when I first started wrestling (to lose 50 pounds).” He continually says, “Its not fun anymore, Coach.” He contemplates what it would be like if he just forgot about it, by which he means quit wrestling. Edan, probably the one who has struggled the most with “success” this year, talks about the tension between the two understandings of success:

I kind of have two different visions of success in my mind. I’m trying to develop my own definition of success, which would be to try as hard as I possibly can and never give up, and that would be my success. It wouldn’t necessarily be the result of what happens in a match. But I’ve kind of been unsuccessful in getting that through my own head, because at this point, no matter how hard I wrestle, when I lose matches, I still feel like I’ve failed, which is really why I get so emotional after matches. Like I said, last year I never cried after a match once, but this year that kind of—success is something I’m trying to find so much more now. I don’t know. Maybe I don’t have the right vision of success, and that’s what can really make or break you as a wrestler.

As illustrated in this section, Edan attempted to construct an alternative definition of success as a defense to the uncertainty of success in terms of winning and losing. Edan’s comments get at the struggles he endured this year, particularly his attempt to make sense of the cultural idiom that hard work yields success. Edan painted himself as the “hardest worker on the team,” yet his level of success did not match his work ethic. It makes cognitive and emotional sense, then, to attempt to

define “success” as working hard or as not giving up. This holds true for both Edan and the other wrestlers on Central High’s team. Although wrestling is a one-on-one battle, wrestlers at Central are at a considerable disadvantage. The first time most stepped on a wrestling mat was when they came into the room at Central during their freshman or sophomore year in High School. Most were not part of any sort of little league program growing up. They were learning the fundamentals of wrestling in high school, while the more established programs were building from years of training. This structural reality, then, in many ways structures their cultural expectations. It, as Bourdieu (1977) would say, creates a sense of limits within which people establish goals and aspirations.

Yet, as Reggie and Edan illustrate, it is very difficult to put in a considerable amount of hard work and not have at least some success (defined in terms of wins and losses). The two definitions of “success” are often at war with each other. As coaches, we realize this tension and that is why we try to place emphasis on the *process of hard work*. And to combat those versions of “success” that trouble individuals like Reggie and Edan, we stress the very distinctive and demanding aspects of our sport that members draw on to fashion their identities as wrestlers. When Reggie was confessing to me his frustrations and worries about not making it to the state championships, I told him that I would evaluate him only on his commitment and work ethic. I continued on to say that, “wrestling is not an easy sport, that’s why there are only a few of us. Its hard to put it on the line when there is no one else to blame.” I set this against football and basketball, where competition takes the form of 5 on 5, or 11 on 11. “It takes a lot of guts to be able to put it on the

line.” “The only thing you can ask yourself, is that you are prepared to compete, to put it on the line.” Putting it on the line, and not being able to blame others, is an honorable endeavor and one that we paint as distinct to wrestling. As a local culture, wrestlers and coaches at Central attempt to mobilize this understanding, in part, to combat their relative lack of success in competition. And in this way, they employ moral standards as an alternative to popular definitions of success in terms of wins and losses (Lamont 2000).

HARD WORK, PHYSICALITY, AND MASCULINITY

Coach’s endeavor to show kids how to work is deeply intertwined with his conception of masculinity. Whenever he talks about perseverance and working hard, he does so in terms of “manning up.” In fact, hard work, as it is understood in this context, is itself masculine.

Coach doesn’t like the work ethic during the drill today. ‘Let’s go, against the wall,’ he yells. ‘If you don’t wanna work hard, we’ll run sprints.’ I line up against the wall with the guys. We count off: ‘one, two, one, two,’ ... so as to make two groups of the entire team. We run ten sprints, alternating each group with every sprint. In between sprints, Coach yells, ‘there is a cheerleading team down the hall with empty spots, if anyone wants to join.’ He questions if the wrestlers are ‘man enough’ to be successful in this room. ‘Gentlemen, wrestling is hard. That’s why the whole school isn’t here. That’s why the school runs away from this room.’” (Field notes, 11.25.08).

As this segment of my field notes indicate, wrestling and working “hard” are deeply intertwined with masculinity. Hard work in this context is associated with physicality, toughness, and perhaps most importantly, perseverance—all of which are fused together in conventional understandings of masculinity. Much of this is premised on the assumption of the male body’s superiority and capability to endure.

Of course, women are capable of embodying these traits, but in the sport of wrestling they are constructed as masculine, that is, what men do.

Wrestling itself is framed as masculine, in part, through the construction of it as “hard”—that is, as physical, demanding, and tough. The structure of daily workout regimens, as I noted above, are designed upon the presumption of “hard work.” In fact, there are entire weeks (e.g. “Hell Week”) dedicated to working hard and pushing the body’s limits in terms of conditioning. In this way, the practices at Central are as much about challenging individuals’ work ethic as they are about learning the technical aspects of the sport. And for Coach, there are two options in his gender regime: either “man up” and persevere through whatever it is that he throws at you or fall by the waistline and be seen as “soft.” “Manning up” in this context is as much about being tough as it is about being in *control*. Wrestling masculine identities, much like rural identities, are constructed through battle and control (cf. Brandth and Haugen 2005). In either case, masculine identity is constructed in relation to controlling one’s environment. The environment, for wrestlers though, is one of artificially constructed designed specifically to test them. The “hard” persevere, the “soft” do not.

The Hard and the Soft

“[Wrestling’s] a tough sport. Not everybody can do it. If everybody could do it, they’d call it basketball, right?” - Brian

Coach constructs wrestling as masculine by setting it against “softer” sports. He does this above, for instance, when he says that if the guys cannot handle the

work, they can go join the cheerleading team. This positions wrestling and its physical demands against the often-feminized sport of cheerleading (Davis 1990; Grindstaff and West 2006). In the process he figures wrestling as tough, masculine, and for the likes of a few, and cheerleading as the feminine other for those who cannot meet the demands of the sport. The same figuration is true of wrestling and basketball. As I showed above, wrestlers often draw distinctions with basketball players on the basis of hard work (which acts as a proxy for masculinity), but also through explicit remarks about basketball's lack of masculinity. Both Coach and Reggie referred to basketball as a "girl's sport" when addressing members of Central's basketball team: Coach to Jay, a tall, chiseled 250-pound African-American, whom he was trying to recruit to wrestle; Reggie to a group of basketball players while leaving practice one day. In his interview, Edan brought up the often-cited joke that wrestlers at Central use to distinguish themselves from basketball players: "Well, Jose has a good saying. He says basketball players play with balls, wrestlers have them" (Edan, interview). This statement positions wrestlers as "having balls"—that is, being tough and manly—at the same time that it homosexualizes/feminizes basketball players. By saying that basketball players play with balls, they attempt to ridicule their sport symbolically as soft, feminine, and/or homosexual.

Wrestlers also draw sharp distinctions with basketball players on the basis of other variables that are central to their masculine identities—contact and physicality. According to Brian,

Real men wrestle, and little boys play basketball. I'm not saying that basketball players aren't real men, but they're not as fight-ready. They're not as prepared to be

thrown into a situation. They take everything as a strategy, and wrestlers take everything as half strategy and half brute force.

When I was talking with Coach about the distinction between wrestling and basketball, the issue of force surfaced, as it did for Brian. According to Coach, there is not much finesse in wrestling, as there is in basketball. Wrestling, rather, is “force against force.” In this conversation he draws on conventional markers of masculinity—namely, violence, physicality, and combat—to construct wrestling as “manly.” We know this through positive constructions of the sport—“Wrestling is a man’s sport, you can’t be afraid to get your face cut”—but also through distinctions with others sports, namely basketball. When I asked Sway to explain the difference between wrestlers and basketball players, he responded, as did others, by saying: “Wrestlers are men and basketball is for women... Basketball players are soft. They’re like girly-men...” When I pushed Sway to explain to me in what ways basketball players were “soft” he drew on masculine themes of physicality and contact: They’re just... it’s no contact in basketball, and if there is, you get free shots. [laughter] That’s the worst part about basketball, no contact.”

Sway constructs basketball as “soft” and feminine because there is limited contact built into the sport; in other words, it lacks physicality. Actually—and this was a big point of distinction for Sway—if there is too much contact or physicality in basketball the referee calls foul and awards free shots to the opposing team. On the other hand, “wrestling is just all-out competitiveness, one-on-one, me versus you, mano y mano. That’s it, just me and him in there, fight till the death, so to speak”

(Sway). Jordan has a similar understanding of basketball and its distinction with wrestling:

[In] basketball there's no contact... Like, for basketball, you're tryin' to run around each other... run away from the person. Wrestling, you're not trying to get past them or run away from them, you want to go one-on-one with them... Wrestling, you're in one spot battling it out. You're not tryin' to get past each other, you're tryin' to slam each other on the mat, makin' him eat mat.

Sway's and Jordan's comments draw upon common themes of masculinity being associated with physicality, contact, and combat. "Heavy-contact sports", as Kreager (2007) notes, "are typically portrayed as important avenues for males to construct hegemonic masculine identities" (p. 709). By constructing their sport as a "battle" and by making distinctions with other "softer", girly sports, wrestlers frame their sport as "hard" and make clear indications about the its masculine character. In this way, they are not unlike members of the National Hockey League (NHL), who draw on a warrior narrative and emphasize stereotypically masculine traits of physicality, violence, and aggression when representing their sport (Gee 2009). A similar logic informs peer understandings of men's rhythmic gymnastics, which is constructed as "soft" precisely because it is *not* combative (Chimot and Louveau 2010). French women boxers, for their part, drew on related themes as they constructed the "soft" style of boxing that emphasized aesthetics and penalized excessive force as feminine, and the "hard", combative style as masculine (Mennesson 2000). Those women who participated in the "softer" style of boxing felt they could retain their sense of femininity through the sport. Yet, the other women who partook in the "harder", more aggressive form of boxing struggled with their sense of femininity: "I have to say that in the ring you must not be too

feminine. The ring is war, to be efficient I'd say that you have to be a man, have a man's psychology" (Mennesson 2000:28).

Violence, as Kimmel (2001) noted, is perhaps the single, most evident marker of manhood. Thus, contact sports that emphasize physicality are seen as masculine spaces, where bodies are sometimes fashioned and used as weapons (Messner 1990). Moreover, the level of physicality informs distinction within a single sport. Thus, "striking", as opposed to submitting opponents, is seen as the more violent and "manly" way of fighting in Mixed Martial Arts (Hirose and Pih 2010). This understanding also structures the idea that Canadian hockey is hard-hitting, physical, and thus more manly than non-North American styles that are thought of more in terms of finesse, and thus as a women's game (Allain 2008).

The "Pie" Discourse

"To be exposed as 'soft' at the core," as Bordo (1999) writes, "is one of the worst things a man can suffer in this culture" (p. 55). Our culture equates physicality, toughness, and emotional stoicism with masculinity and their opposites with being "soft"—that is, feminine. This is true for our culture writ large as well as in the wrestling room at Central.

Being "soft" surfaced when wrestlers made distinctions with other sports—most notably basketball—but also when describing those individuals that failed to live up to the masculine ideal of hard work, physicality, and battle. In this way, they made in-group distinctions on the basis of "hard" and "soft", just as they did with others. The local term employed to describe the various failed attempts at

masculinity was used in the context of “being a pie.” Being a “pie” is the opposite of being “hard,” and thus serves as the constitutive other of wrestling’s masculine identity. Specifically, being a “pie” falls into three categories: (1) not being tough (i.e. invulnerable), (2) not working hard, and (3) not accepting the challenge of combat/battle. I present these categories negatively—i.e. as *not* working hard—precisely because this is how members employ them in context, and also because they represent the failed attempts of attaining the masculine ideal in the wrestling room at Central.

Pie = Being Vulnerable. The first category of being a “pie” that I will discuss—that is, not being tough—is exemplified well in the following section of my field notes:

Numbers are down again in the practice room. Coach asks members of the team where JaMarr is today. Jordan says that today at JaMarr’s physical he was diagnosed with a shoulder problem that will have him out of practice for up to four weeks. While Jordan is pondering the proper name of JaMarr’s shoulder problem, others on the team diagnosis him with “being a pie” (Field notes, 11.25.08).

Being a “pie” in this context is associated with being vulnerable—that is, not being tough, durable, or resilient. JaMarr’s visit to the trainer and his subsequent missed practice is a testament to that. On several other occasions throughout the year, Coach labeled Ezekial a “pie” and instructed him to “man up” when he was either “acting” hurt, acting sick, and/or asking for an inhaler during competition matches. Chris was also seen as a “pie” when he left the room during live wrestling complaining of a headache.⁵

⁵ Shaun, as I detail below, also contested the theme of combat when he left the room when others were live wrestling.

The admission of pain (or being sick), as Bordo (1999) suggests, can lead others to question one's manhood. This is especially the case in highly masculinized contexts, such as wrestling, where "taking pain" is esteemed (Baker and Hotek 2011). Several times throughout the year, members would label others "pies" for seeing the trainer. It is common to think that trainers have a different understanding of injury than do wrestlers, in part because they have different mentalities. Lonzo exemplifies this discrepancy after he jammed his finger during practice one day. Lonzo, while grimacing in pain, runs over to the coaches yelling, "aahh, aahh, pull my finger." I walk over to Lonzo, his finger is swelling as we speak, and I tell him to go see the trainer, who just happens to be in the room today making sure everyone has completed their physicals and paid their "pay to play" fee (she hardly is ever there). "No," responds Lonzo, "she makes everything out to be worse than it is. I'll go in there [to her room] and she'll send me to the emergency room."⁶ Within the dominant cultural schemas, wrestlers are supposed to wrestle hurt, and be resilient throughout a number of adverse circumstances. They are, as Coach constantly reminds them, supposed to "man up" in these circumstances. Seeing the trainer is at odds with this understanding, hence its polluting nature.

Pie = Not Working Hard. While I was interviewing Elijah about his understanding of "pies," he said that being a "pie" meant: "Giving up; making an excuse to get a break; not actually going hard at any point in time." He continues,

⁶ This thinking is commonplace in a number of wrestling contexts. For instance, while coaching at Arizona State I distinctly remember a conversation with a one of the wrestlers who, upon my questioning him as to why he would not see the trainer, said: "Because I'm not a bitch." For this individual, seeing the trainer was a crutch others used to *not wrestle*.

“pies don't really do anything, you see a pie, it just kind of sits there...” “Pies,” then, are the opposite of the exemplars of hard work. Perhaps the most common usage of the term “pie” came when people were not “working hard” in a variety of contexts: not running sprints “hard”; not wrestling “hard”; and not drilling “hard.” When I asked Chris, “What can get you called a pie in practice?” he immediately responded by saying, “Not drilling hard, not drilling at all, asking for your inhaler.” Jose, for instance, was on Calvin one day about “working hard.” Calvin, who was lethargic from his never-ending weight cut, was not performing to Coach’s standards of work. He did not drill hard; nor did he have any enthusiasm in executing any of his exercises. He refused to “wrestle hard” as well. Coach, as can now be expected, peppered Calvin with the “pie” label. Calvin, for his part, did not contest Coach’s comments. As with all things hegemonic, even though he fell short of the ideal, he still recognized it as taken for granted and esteemed.

Edan talks explicitly about a “pie” as a failed attempt of being a “man.”

According to Edan:

In the context of wrestling I would say [a pie is] someone who can't really... handle all the physical and mental struggles of wrestling... someone soft, I guess...they're pretty much interchangeable. Someone soft, somebody who's a pie is just someone who's more likely to break down... when the going gets tough.

In this passage, Edan constructs wrestling as a demanding sport that requires a certain hardness and worth ethic to persevere. To fail in this context is, as he said, to be “pie,” which he equates with being “soft.” A “pie” then in this context is “not giving it your all,” “not working hard,” and/or “taking it easy”—all of which contradict the signifiers of masculinity within Central’s schema of hard work.

Pie = Not Accepting a Challenge. The wrestling room at Central is constructed as an arena for establishing, testing, and proving masculinity. As Kimmel (2001, 2008) notes, masculinities are largely constructed in relation to other men (in addition to women). Thus, homosocial contexts many times serve as proving grounds where individuals seek validation as men (Kimmel 2008). Being a “pie” in this context is, as Reggie says, “backin’ down from a challenge... our Coach always taught us that you don’t back down from a challenge, regardless who it is, where it is, or what it involves...Being a “pie” is about not accepting a challenge.” Reggie, then gave an example of what a pie is in this context: “Well, this 171-pounder I know [Dante] refused to come this weekend [to our competition a few hours from home] because he thought it was too tough for him and he didn’t want to be out of state, out here that long. He’s always complaining about wanting to get better and better, but then he refuses to come to a tournament with his team.” Dante, according to Reggie, is a “pie” precisely because he has been struggling lately and is afraid to accept another challenge. Reggie then goes on to explain that even if “that guy’s number one in the state” you never say “I don’t want to wrestle him, ‘cause I know I’m gonna lose.” As Reggie explains, “even though he might lose, [the important aspect is] givin’ it your all... and workin’ him till that final whistle blows.”

Being a “pie” in this context is about *not* accepting a challenge, no matter what it may be. Accepting challenges that others deny, on the other hand, leads to a specific honor bestowed upon wrestlers—that of, having “heart.” What Wacquant (1995) says of boxing holds equally true for wrestling: having “heart” means not conceding in battle, not buckling under pressure. This understanding makes sense

within the construction of wrestling as a battle and proving ground for masculinity. To live up to the local ideals is to be valorized; to fail to live up to local ideals is to be a “pie.”

Making Sense of the “Pie” Discourse

Individuals at Central used “pie” interchangeably with a number of terms—for example, “pussy,” “sissy,” “drama queen,” “bitch,” and “fag”—that are explicitly gendered. Wrestlers and coaches at Central experience “pie” as a feminine status, one that carries with it a hint of ridicule and shame. When I asked Jordan why he thought others used the label “pie” to describe any of the examples I mentioned above, he said: “cuz a pie is sweet, and no boy don’t wanna be sweet!” As my research experience suggests, boys do not want to be seen as “soft” either—the other adjective most closely associated with pies. The wrestlers at Central think of their sport as “hard” and are at pains to construct it within highly rigid masculine boundaries. They do this through affirmative statements about the demands of the sport, as I detailed above, but also by labeling failed attempts of the masculine ideal as feminine.

As Connell (1995) highlights, masculinity is always *masculinity-in-relation*. And although versions of masculinity are often times defined against women, they too are constructed against other men (Kimmel 2001). This chapter shows how wrestlers construct their masculinity, not only against other male sports such as basketball that they define as “soft” and “girly,” but also against other wrestlers through the “pie” discourse. In this all-male context, less masculine individuals

assume the symbolic role of the feminine other. The “pie” discourse, being “soft,” and/or being a “pussy” all are employed in context to signal when someone is not adhering to the masculine ideals of the space. This chapter also shows how wrestling, like other sports, devalues femininity to the extent that members attempt to bring shame upon those who do not conform to the rigid, highly masculinized demands. In this way, it also reinforces sport as the site of narrow constructions of masculinity.

Although I depict the gender regime of wrestling as particularly rigid, the nature of the “pie” category (as fluid) confirms the fluidity of gender performance (Butler 1988, 1990), at the same time that it lends theoretical support to claims that masculinity is best conceptualized as a social process rather than some *thing* exclusive to male bodies (Halberstam 1998; Pascoe 2007; Schippers 2007). Wrestlers at Central flew in and out of the category, just as adolescent boys moved in and out of the “fag” identity in Pascoe’s (2007) research. “Being a pie” operated in context as a symbolic stone thrown at failed attempts at the local, masculinized ideal of hard work, rather than something essential to their bodies. Members of the team, for instance, could *not* work “hard” one day and be labeled a “pie,” yet work hard the next and have the pie label stripped from their social identity. To this end, doing gender within the walls of Central High’s wrestling room is best conceived as an ongoing interaction within a highly rigid regulatory frame (Butler 1990). This regulatory frame that acts as a cultural system used to make sense of self, others, and the social world more generally. Its saliency as a category stems, in large part, from the role it plays in the maintenance of the highly masculinized schema of hard

work. It makes sense, then, that the abject other of being “hard” is a “pie.” What else is softer (and according to Jordan, “sweeter”) than a pie?

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

For wrestlers at Central High, hard work is both a physical demand and a symbolic boundary. As a physical demand, it is built into the daily regimen of drills, exercises, and “live” wrestling that constitute a normal day of wrestling practice. Hard work also serves to structure wrestlers’ lives outside of the practice room, most notably through the sacrificial practices of dieting and “cutting weight.” Such *rituals of restraint* (Wacquant 1995) extend the disciplinary demands of the sport, and in many ways make the commitment to wrestling more of a lifestyle and less of a mere extracurricular activity. In this regard, wrestling at times resembles a total institution, especially to those most bought in to the cultural schema of hard work and its ancillary characteristics of sacrifice and discipline that extend beyond the walls of the Central High wrestling room.

As wrestlers at Central internalize the demands of their sport, they draw on them to shape their individual and collective identities. Wrestlers specifically construct their sport as “hard” and themselves as “hard workers” to create a shared sense of reality. In this way, hard work operates as a meaning system. It serves to structure their lifeworlds and helps them to make sense of their place in the social world. Wrestlers, for instance, draw on principles of hard work to think of themselves as different kinds of people—ones that are willing to endure what most are not. To this end, they create moral identities on the basis of discipline and hard

work. Wrestlers, in a sense, are modern day ascetics who, to various degrees, shun the pleasures that others enjoy. Moreover, being a wrestler means being a particular kind of “man”: tough, resolute, and not “soft.” A wrestler’s identity, then, is both distinctive and demanding; being a wrestler means adhering to a strict workout regimen and denying the social and dietary normalcies of the general student population.

As a symbolic boundary, hard work solves problems for wrestlers at Central. They mobilize it, for one, as a resource to bolster their masculine worth. As I have shown throughout this chapter, wrestlers think of their sport as a highly-masculinized undertaking and commitment. To this end, they construct their sport as masculine at the same time that they construct it as “hard”—that is, physically, mentally, and emotionally demanding. As I argued above, wrestlers draw upon the (masculine) demands of their sport to do boundary work with a host of others, most notably basketball players. Wrestlers explicitly construct their sport as “hard” as they attempt to devalue basketball as “soft.” The meaning of their identity, then, is constructed, in part, on their difference with basketball players. According to many wrestlers at Central, basketball does not match up to the demands of hard work and physicality they have become accustomed to in wrestling. Because of basketball’s perceived lack of hard work and limited physicality, wrestlers think of themselves as different. More specifically, they are “harder” and manlier than their basketball counterparts. Their participation in wrestling, then, at least locally, serves as an arena to accumulate masculine capital.

Wrestlers mobilize this constructed difference with basketball players, not only to champion themselves as winners of a contest of hard work, but also to combat what is otherwise a marginal social identity. In fact, wrestlers at Central draw on the demanding and distinctive nature of their sport to negotiate status claims in a high school that often looks upon the state championship basketball team with prestige, while overlooking wrestling. Since they are denied status on most accounts, their most common front to stand against basketball calls upon the tenets of hard work, physicality, and contact, and their presumed fusion with masculinity. Taken together, these principles of hard work allow wrestlers to position themselves above other sports, mostly basketball, that has more symbolic capital.

Wrestlers at Central draw on the principles of hard work, not only to understand their cultural marginality, but also to make sense of the marginal participation rates in their sport. They reframed their statistical marginality in ways that construct their *continued* participation as morally superior. It takes a certain kind of “man” to endure the physicality, mental anguish, and emotionality of the sport of wrestling—this, of course, is why “the whole school isn’t here,” as Coach puts it. And the fewer of them, the greater their sense of distinction becomes. Wrestlers, especially those who remained on the team the entire season, use their marginality as a badge of honor. Moreover, they constructed their identities in ways that promoted a sense of self-worth (Ezzell 2009). They make sense of their social position in relation to others who are not capable or willing to endure what they do on a daily basis. Hard work as a collective sense of self, then, insulated them from

others' beliefs about wrestling, as it did from the general lack of attention paid to them. Yet, as Wilkins (2009:364) comments elsewhere, such "solutions are enabled by the insularity of their communities." Hard work makes sense locally, as its coherence is accomplished through common definitions of reality, yet wrestlers often face challenges from outsiders who lend their sport a contrary definition, as I detail in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5

OBSTACLES TO BE OVERCOME: WRESTLING BODIES AS PROVING GROUNDS AND AVENUES FOR IMPROVED SELVES

“Agents create and mold their bodies in accordance with the fields in which they are involved and the demands of those specific fields” (Crossley 2001:107).

In this chapter I draw on my ethnographic role as coach/sociological researcher at Central High to detail the corporeal demands placed upon wrestlers and explore how coaches and wrestlers think and feel about their bodies. I draw specifically on my “observant participation” (Wacquant 2011) to detail the disciplinary demands of the sport of wrestling, and from my qualitative interviews to explore how wrestlers articulate their understanding of and relationship with their bodies. This chapter, then, is simultaneously about the corporeal dimension of *becoming* a scholastic wrestler and about how this process effects how the wrestlers at Central High experience and interact with their bodies. In this way, I contribute to the discussion on the sociology of bodies, but do so through a phenomenological account of wrestling bodies from those individuals immersed in the local discipline and culture of high school wrestling at Central High.

I begin by detailing the bodily demands—namely the extreme levels of conditioning and draconian weight loss practices—placed upon wrestlers in the course of a normal wrestling season. I frame wrestling bodies as products of their social environments, and following Wacquant (1995), look “to the diverse ways in which specific social worlds invest, shape, and deploy human bodies” (p. 65).

Wrestling bodies are more than products though; they are *projects*, transformed and

fashioned by their immersion in particular contexts (Shilling 1993). And as I will illustrate, wrestlers think of their bodies in similar ways—that is, as things to be worked upon and as I will argue throughout ultimately *overcome*.

After detailing the corporeal demands of wrestling, I turn to how wrestlers and coaches socially construct their bodies within such disciplinary practices. How we come to experience our bodies is dependent, in part, upon the cultural metaphors available to us (Bordo 1999). There is thus no inherent way to experience or conceptualize bodies. In fact, as Foucault (1986) has shown us, one has to come to relate to one's body as something worthy of attention. With this in mind, I introduce what I refer to as the *discourse of overcoming* to explain how wrestlers frame and interact with their bodies. I argue that this local discourse helps to create a shared reality among wrestlers and coaches at Central High. It does so by making sense of disciplinary demands placed upon bodies, as well as providing a blueprint of how to act and operate under such conditions. More importantly, it influences wrestlers to socially construct their bodies as objects *to be overcome*. In this way, wrestlers experience their bodies through the metaphor of an obstacle and/or proving ground, the site of what locally is described as a masculine challenge. Although the wrestling mat is indeed a proving ground on which wrestlers prove their masculinity against their opponents, the wrestling body itself—namely its physical limits and comfort zones—is also constructed as a test of masculine worth.

A wrestler's sense of self is deeply intertwined with his body, particularly what degree of control he can exert over it. To this end, I am interested in how

wrestlers *interact* with their bodies, and how this interaction holds out the promise of an improved sense of self. In key ways, wrestling acts as a “technology of the self” (Foucault 1988), constructing obstacles and fashioning a mentality to overcome them. As Foucault (1988:18) asserts, such technologies:

permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

As I will show, all the talk of and attention to the body is about much more than bodies. What wrestlers do with their bodies is important for their sense of self, both in and out of the wrestling room.

DISCIPLINING THE WRESTLING BODY

“You make of your own body your own kingdom where you are the tyrant, the absolute dictator.” Bordo (2003:150).

Wrestling in many ways is a body-centered discipline and culture. The bodily demands placed upon wrestlers—which range from “drilling,⁷” to conditioning, to denying their bodies food and water for extended periods of time—are grueling to say the least. In addition to being extremely demanding, what each of these disciplinary practices has in common is that they take the body *as an object*. In this way, they can be considered *reflexive body techniques (RBTs)*, which Crossley (2005) defines as “those body techniques whose primary purpose is to work back upon the

⁷ “Drilling” is perhaps the most common form of interaction between wrestlers. When drilling, wrestlers practice any number of moves on their partner in a repetitive fashion, and wherein they receive little resistance. The intent is to master a hold at the level of the body through repetition.

body, so as to modify, maintain or thematize it in some way” (p. 9). According to Crossley (2005), whenever we employ RBTs we effect a split between what Mead understood as the “I” and “Me”, and in this way we take our bodies as objects. Wrestling bodies, then, are things to be worked on, pushed, denied, and, as I will detail below, ultimately *overcome* (by one’s mind). Through these various disciplinary practices, wrestlers craft their bodies as distinctively wrestling bodies, which bear the mark of their cultural context.

The Discipline of Wrestling Practice

Wrestlers are trained to endure workouts and circumstances that most members of the general population would deem unbearable. Consider the normal practice regimen at Central High, which lasts at least 90 minutes. We begin every practice with a semi-structured warm-up consisting of jogging, skipping, and a number of other exercises intended to get team members’ bodies warmed-up for practice (e.g. forward rolls, cart-wheels, and maintaining a wrestling stance while periodically taking one’s hips to the mat, to name a few). After a brief time spent stretching, we then move on to “drilling,” where wrestlers pair up with each other to work on a variety of techniques. Although drilling resembles a “working consensus” (*a la* Goffman) where participants work with rather than against each other, a majority of these drills require strength and stamina. Many of the drills start with two wrestlers squared off with each on their feet, banging and pulling each other’s necks, shoulders, and arms with attempts to get the other out of wrestling position. Once out of position, the opposing wrestler takes the other to the wrestling mat, and

this is repeated over and over again. The constant sound of bodies hitting the wrestling mat is common during our drill sessions.

Although this aspect of practice is intended for gaining a technical grasp of the sport at the corporeal level of the habitus (see e.g. Bourdieu 1977; Wacquant 2004), an important tenet of the drill session is that individuals “execute” the moves with speed and force, and do so in a routinized fashion. To this end, drilling pushes one’s limits in terms of conditioning one’s body. After drilling, members of the team square off with each other to “live wrestle” for bouts of varying lengths. Early in the week we do longer “goes,” although later in the week (closer to competition) we either do shorter “goes” or do not wrestle live at all (so as to taper down our training and conserve the body’s strength). During live wrestling—the periods of which sometimes go longer than 15 minutes—teammates battle each other, going at one another with the same ferocity and intensity that they would others from another team. At the end of each practice, we then “condition” the wrestlers with a combination of sprints, rope climbs, and push-ups designed to test the limits of their “shape” and endurance. On occasion, we have the wrestlers do a series of “executions” (very intense drilling) at the end of practice to train their bodies to perform techniques while tired. This is to simulate competition, where one’s body is fatigued, yet needs to effectively penetrate the other’s defense to become victorious. By the end of practice the wrestlers’ clothes and hair are drenched with sweat, they are breathing heavily, as they try to recuperate themselves from their workout.

The structure of practice, as can be imagined, puts significant demands on wrestlers’ bodies, at the same time that it expects a lot from them in return. While in

practice, wrestlers are expected *not* to go to the water fountain, or to the bathroom, or do anything that would limit their participation. They are pushed to the point of fatigue and exhaustion on a routine basis and they are expected to stay focused, engaged, and “hold up” throughout the entirety of practice. During the grind of the season, wrestlers often comment on how their bodies are sore, tired, and fatigued. And all of this is very normal within the context of wrestling, both here at Central High and in a number of other wrestling rooms in which I have been immersed.

The Discourse of Overcoming One's Body

As I stated at the outset of this chapter, my intent is to show how the demands of wrestling, coupled with the discourse of overcoming, condition wrestlers to experience their bodies in certain ways. The disciplinary demands of wrestling force wrestlers to experience their bodies as objects, something separate from the mind. Namely because the discipline of wrestling pushes wrestlers to the point of fatigue, exhaustion, and pain, they cannot help but experience their bodies as objects. In fact, as Leder (1990) and others have noted, it is through the experience of pain that the usually “absent” body appears as such. To this end, fatigue and muscle soreness are constant reminders of their bodies’ presence as objects.

In addition to the corporeal demands, the discourse of *overcoming* serves as the cultural backdrop that further influences wrestlers to think of their bodies as objects. This local discourse helps to create a shared reality among wrestlers at Central High. It, for instance, helps to make sense of the disciplinary demands placed upon wrestling bodies, as well as how to operate under such contexts. More

importantly, it socially constructs wrestling bodies specifically as *objects to be overcome*. Becoming an scholastic wrestler, then, means learning to overcome one's body and the various challenges it presents in the form fatigue, pain, and exhaustion. In terms of overcoming one's body in practice, it is quite common to hear coaches as well as wrestlers yell for others to "push" themselves in a variety of circumstances. In fact, according to a long-time assistant coach Chip, "pushing" oneself is a key tenet of wrestling at Central High: "We talk a lot in wrestling about pushing yourself. That's what it is, trying to adapt your mind, trying to strengthen your mind to a point where you can tell your body what to do." Chip hints at what I will discuss below as wrestlers' Cartesian understanding of mind/body when he talks about building a strong enough mentality to command one's body. And he and Coach Jose are insistent that this is the mentality needed to endure the structure of wrestling practice. Coach Jose designed certain activities in practice, the stated goal of which was to challenge one's comfort zone. This happened at certain times during a given practice, especially near its end when the wrestlers were lined up at one end of the room and ran sprints (back and forth) until Coach saw the effort he imagined. Peppered during and in between sprints, Coach and I (and others) would reinforce the central message to our wrestlers that they were to use this conditioning exercise to push themselves *through their bodies' comfort zones*. Comfort zones are understood in this context as the point at which your body feels discomfort. Locally, it is assumed that the "natural" reaction to such discomfort is to stop doing whatever it is that is causing discomfort. Coach's job then was twofold: (1) to have wrestlers frame the feeling of bodily discomfort differently than nature intended,

that is, as a challenge to be overcome, and (2) help them build a mentality to push through it. In this way, wrestlers constitute their group membership and identity by socially constructing their bodies' discomfort as a challenge and overcoming it.

There were also certain weeks—"Hell Week," in particular—that Coach designed explicitly to challenge wrestlers to overcome their bodies' limits. Every year, Coach would design a series of grueling workouts to put the team through the week leading up to the regional tournament. In addition to the normal grind of a wrestling workout within the wrestling room, during "Hell Week" the team would venture up to the 3rd floor of Central High School after practice and run a number of sprints and hand-fight with each other for prolonged periods of time. Such physical labor was taxing on wrestlers' bodies to say the least. Members of the team, without exception, complained about how much their ankles, knees, and feet hurt from running countless sprints with wrestling shoes on the unforgiving hallway floor. Much to my chagrin, this did not concern Coach much. In fact, his plan for "Hell Week" was to intentionally hurt their bodies. I talked with Coach about his reasoning behind "Hell Week," and for him it was about "mental toughness" and getting the team ready for the challenge of the regional tournament, not necessarily to do anything to prepare their bodies to perform well. In this case, bodies were avenues to test wrestlers' mindsets.

Although such grueling workouts leading up to the most important competition of the year makes little sense in terms of performance, it makes perfect sense within Coach Jose's philosophy. If you can train the mind to hold up and persevere through no matter the circumstances then you will be ready for battle, no

matter what your body feels like. And this speaks to a central component of the local configuration of the relationship between mind/body and the discourse of overcoming—the mind, if fashioned in the proper manner, should have precedence over an, at times, stubborn and unruly body. Moreover, if one can discipline the mind, physical circumstances—bodies or other physical objects—can be overcome. Yet to get to that point is a difficult journey. Becoming a scholastic wrestler is both a process of hard work and resiliency, as well as a cultural lesson in learning how to socially construct one's body, especially pain and fatigue, as something to be overcome.

As Coach alludes to above, the physical demands placed upon wrestling bodies are about much more than bodies. They are rather “technologies of the self” (Foucault 1988). That is, bodies are simply proving grounds to showcase the mind's will and toughness. This is what the discourse of overcoming is principally about, as it sets the cultural context to frame wrestling bodies—particularly their comfort zones—as challenges for the mind. This understanding reaches its pinnacle during “Hell Week.” The demanding workouts acted as rituals for strengthening one's mind and overcoming one's body. In this way, these rituals promised a new and improved self, one that was mentally tough, “hardened,” and capable of enduring anything, including the various dimensions of pain so common to high school wrestling.

The Pain of Discipline

“Early on a wrestler has to establish that you've got to fight through pain. You can't dwell on it. You'll never succeed.” - Coach Jose

As scholars have detailed, sport is oftentimes an arena that normalizes pain (Baker and Hotek 2011; Curry 1993; Curry and Strauss 1994; Sabo 1986; Young and White 2000; Young, White, and McTeer 1994), at times valorizing the characteristics it takes to work through painful circumstances as quintessentially masculine. Wrestling at Central High is no different. Members of the team are expected to wrestle through different types of “pain” without complaint. Those individuals who persevere through pain and adhere to what Sabo (1986) refers to as “the pain principle” are esteemed within the walls of the wrestling room. Those who shy away from pain, on the contrary, are often ridiculed and many times have their manhood questioned. In fact, a common response to individuals complaining about either being sore or hurt is to “man up.” In this way, not only is accepting pain constructed as a normal dimension to the sport of wrestling, both wrestlers and coaches frame the act of persevering through pain as a masculine endeavor.

Whereas many social scientists detail how pain is both normalized and routinized in sport and focus on its debilitating effects (Curry 1993; Messner 1990; Sabo 1986; Young, White, and McTeer 1994; and Young and White 2000), my approach here is different. My aim in this section is to present pain from the perspective of those members who are immersed in the culture and practice of high school wrestling. And moreover, to see what role pain plays in how wrestlers experience their bodies. I am interested, then, in the phenomenological approach to pain “as a lived, embodied experience” (Bendelow and Williams 1995:141). I will focus here primarily on the category of pain most common to wrestlers at Central—*the pain of discipline*. Wrestlers at Central differentiate between different categories

of pain. There is, of course, the common understanding of pain associated with being injured: jammed fingers, sprained knees, and lacerations on the face, to name a few. There is also the pain of regret—e.g. losing because you did not prepare or perform up to standards—which many wrestlers argue is more painful than “breaking something.” According to Brian, this sort of pain stays with you the rest of your life, unlike an injury, which in time will heal. These categories of pain are distinct from the type of pain most central to wrestlers’ lifeworlds—the *pain of discipline*.

Calvin describes the pain of discipline as, the pain that stems from “pushing the body to its limits... you know working through whatever you have to work through in order to become better.” What Calvin articulates here is what others have referred to as *positive pain* (Bendelow and Williams 1995; Howe 2004; Leder 1990). Howe (2004) describes this type of pain as “the fatigue that an elite sporting participant goes through in the course of trying to enhance performance” (p. 85). To become better, one has to not only learn how to deal with pain, but actually push one’s body to the point of painful fatigue and exhaustion regularly. As Coach Chip, says: “If you don’t get there everyday, you’re wasting your time.” Seeking out the pain of discipline, then, becomes a common goal (“you have to *learn* how to suffer,” as Chip once commented), as well as a shared sense of reality for wrestlers at Central High. According to Reggie, “if you’re goin’ hard [in practice], its always gonna be painful. That’s practice. If practice is painful, that means you’re doing somethin’ right.” Brandon’s understanding of pain is framed on a similar logic: “if they [muscles] don’t ache after practice, you didn’t do nothin’.” As these comments illustrate, wrestlers and coaches at Central, not only see pain as a normal part of

everyday life, but also as something positive, that is, something they seek out on a regular basis. Moreover, according to Chip, once you come to relate to pain in such a way it becomes a barometer of sorts, used to police and discipline oneself:

The thing about pain that's valuable is that once you learn to accept it as a wrestler, then you can use it as a gauge. When you're training, you know that if you're suffering, you're doing it right. And that's what pain is good for.

Seeking out this type of pain means learning to relate to one's body in a particular way. It means (1) coming to think of the body as an object, and (2) framing the pain of discipline as something to be overcome. As Howe (2004) notes, it is through the onset of pain that the body "appears" as an object, as something worthy of attention. In terms of phenomenology, pain is what rips us from the pre-objective experience of being in the world. My research and experience confirms this as true within the context of wrestling. The fatigue, muscle soreness, and exhaustion, all of which stem from the pain of discipline, are constant reminders of the body's presence. In this sense their bodies talk back to them—they send painful reminders that they do matter. But becoming a high school wrestler means not only getting to the point of fatigue and soreness, but more importantly learning how to frame such pain and the body as a challenge *to be overcome*. Locally, this also means embracing what others run from (hence its distinctive qualities).

As Calvin noted above, wrestlers push themselves through the pain of discipline, namely because they believe it will make them better wrestlers in the room and, perhaps more importantly, stronger individuals outside the wrestling room. In this way, overcoming the pain of discipline is about making an investment in one's body (and ultimately one's mind). According to David:

You've got to *push yourself through* pain in order to see results in your body... At the end of the day you have to feel like you went through a war and you're gonna fall over and puke, but then you realize, "I did something."

As David illustrates, wrestlers frame the pain of discipline as cathartic, even transformative. They know that if they get through it, they'll be in better "shape," a term that signifies multiple meanings. Their bodies, for one, change size. Reggie and David both talked about how they saw their bodies transform from soft and undefined to hardened as they went through the grind of their first wrestling season. Reggie, for his part, lost 50 pounds because of his participation in wrestling. "Shape," though, means more than body size. Wrestlers mainly refer to being well-conditioned when they talk of "shape," and they invoke the pain of discipline as the avenue to attain it. As I mentioned elsewhere, most wrestlers at Central enter the wrestling season out of shape, namely because they do not wrestle year round. The first couple weeks of practice then are difficult to endure, yet pushing through the fatigue and exhaustion characteristic of a normal wrestling practice transforms their bodies, not only in terms of size, but in terms of conditioning as well. Elijah is illustrative of this point, as he often talked about how the first month of practice was the hardest (because he was "so out of shape" from exercising very little during the summer) but how he always felt better because he pushed through the pain of discipline.

Disciplining the wrestling body, especially learning how to overcome pain and one's previous sense of limits, can be an empowering act. Although many critical scholars of sport point to the debilitating aspects of pain, my research suggests that overcoming one's body and its pain is a positive experience for

wrestlers at Central High. In matters of pain, context matters. As Richardson (2011) argues, “the context or culture within which pain is experienced shapes how it is understood and the meanings that are given to it.” Charmaz (1983), for instance, details the role that pain plays in the emotional suffering of people who are chronically ill. Pain in this context is a sign of a deteriorating self, and the existential nature of suffering is intimately tied to an experience of a *loss of self*. Pain in the context of wrestling is cathartic largely because many frame it as a sign of transcendence. The local meaning transforms the pain of discipline into something positive. Specifically, it is a sign of a better self to come both in and out of the wrestling room. This is especially the case, when we consider the strong belief that both wrestlers and coaches at Central High have in wrestling’s carryover effect. In Jordan’s words, “pain’s the thing that’s helping me, making me better. Pain’s the thing that’s gonna help me push through life.” David operates from the same cultural schema:

It's [wrestling] taught me a lot about life and how to push through hard things. Life is gonna go on, I guess. I guess, like, in practice, you've gotta push through the pain 'cause you're gonna grow as a person, and you may see materialistic results, and then in the real world, you may have a problem you have to go through, and you're either gonna suck it up and push through it or you're gonna crumble and quit.

As David illustrates, pushing through pain in wrestling sets one up to become a better person in the real world. As I mention elsewhere, pushing through pain is about more than disciplining the body. It is about constructing a new self better equipped to manage life both inside and outside the wrestling room.

THE DISCIPLINE OF DIET AND “CUTTING WEIGHT”

"I'm runnin' this shit. I'll tell you what to do." (Jordan, talking to his body when he was in the depths of a weight cut that required him to restrict his food and water until he made weight, interview.)

"Soon you wont control me anymore" (Jordan to the scale, field notes 2.7.09)

"Cutting weight" is comprised of two distinct yet intertwined disciplines: diet and exercise. I have focused above on the physical demands of exercising and conditioning one's body, and the effect this has on wrestlers at Central High regardless of whether they "cut" weight or not. In this section I will detail the dietary demands of becoming a high school wrestler who has to manage his weight, as well as the *extra workouts* those individuals have to endure on a routine basis. For the guys on the team that "cut weight" the physical demands of the sport are compounded, as having to cut weight almost always means having to workout extra.

As I will detail shortly, cutting weight puts significant demands on wrestlers' bodies in terms of dietary restrictions. Yet, the demands unique to wrestling are not dictated by a certain body type or shape, but rather by the ideal of "making weight"—that is, by wrestlers meeting their designated weight class week in and week out. Most wrestlers "cut" weight because they believe it will give them a better chance to be successful on the mat. This ideology is written into the sport of wrestling across any number of contexts. Because other wrestlers "cut" weight, most feel that they will be at a competitive disadvantage if they do not. And to an extent this is true, as the following example illustrates. If I weigh 155 pounds "naturally," that is, without restricting what I eat and drink and I choose to wrestle in the 157-pound weight class, I will undoubtedly be competing against others whose "natural"

weight is closer to the 170-pound mark. If my opponent “cuts” his weight correctly and has time to rehydrate his body, I will be at a disadvantage in terms of strength and weight.⁸ But, regardless of the veracity of such a belief system, the important point is that wrestlers, both at Central High and elsewhere, act as if it were true.

In many ways the fear of wrestling at a heavier weight class trumps the pain of cutting weight on a weekly basis. To this end, the body projects of wrestlers are dictated by the tyranny of the rigid and unforgiving scale. There is no gray area in terms of the scale: you either make weight or you do not. It is simple as that. Having to interact with the scale preoccupies those wrestlers who have to cut a lot of weight. Many wrestlers would check their weight multiple times a day to see what, if anything, they could eat. They come to learn (sometimes through failure) that they cannot eat whenever they are hungry; they must first consult the scale (see Drummond 2010 for a similar account in his experience as an extreme triathlete). In this way, becoming a high school wrestler means learning to *not* listen to one’s body as it communicates its presence through hunger and thirst, but actually overcome it. Moreover, within the context of cutting weight, it means learning to interact with one’s body through the medium of the scale.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, it is quite common for wrestlers to be ten to fifteen pounds over their designated weight class at the beginning of wrestling season. At a school like Central High, where most members of the team wrestle during season only, there is a marked difference between in-season bodies and out-

⁸ The same belief system permeates other sports that have weight classes, such as boxing and Mixed Martial Arts, as well as other sports where optimal body weight is seen as a crucial variable to performance (Drummond 2010).

of-season bodies. And wrestlers are aware of this contrast, as they often distinguish between their in-season bodies (as lean and hardened) in relation to their out-of-season bodies (heavier and softer). Because they do not workout as much or with the same intensity out of season that they do during season, and perhaps more importantly because they do not have to make weight, wrestlers' bodies are considerably heavier (not to mention softer) out of season. Although some enjoy seeing their bodies tone up and slim down, everyone longs for the last weigh-in of the season, for they can then eat whatever they like without having to worry about the scale.

It is less common, but still sometimes the case, that particular wrestlers are also ten to fifteen pounds overweight at the beginning of the practice week. Calvin, Jordan, and Brian, for example, at certain points of the year were all at least ten pounds over the Monday before a weekend competition. To make their respective weights, these individuals like other wrestlers use a variety of techniques that range from the disciplined and rational to the haphazard and extreme. Ideally, wrestlers limit their caloric intake over the course of the preseason training period by rationing their food and drink, at the same time that they are burning calories in the various workouts they endure on a daily basis. Elijah, for example, described how he stopped snacking, drinking pop, and eating at Taco Bell when he had to cut weight his sophomore year. Brian, for his part, cut out junk food from his diet, while eating mainly chicken and rice to make his descent to the 135-pound weight class. Although this is the ideal, it is rarely the case. Although wrestlers do indeed lose some fat and muscle weight throughout the course of the year, most use extreme

measures leading up to competition to make their designated weight. As others have documented (Johns 1998, 2004; Kiningham and Gorenflo 2001; Lakin, Steen, and Oppliger 1990), to make weight wrestlers undergo a combination of excessive exercising and severely restricting what they consume in the days leading up to weigh-ins. Consider Calvin, whose designated weight class was so low, he had no choice but to turn to extreme exercising, in addition to rationing his food and being extremely disciplined with his diet.

Calvin takes off his sweat suit directly after practice and checks his weight; he is still four pounds overweight. He has to make his designated weight (130 pounds) tomorrow evening. Calvin's face drops to the mat, his body movements become sluggish; he begins to sulk. He says he only ate some Jello, 4oz of baby food, and a half of a pastry with vegetables in it today. He feels drained, and rightfully so considering that he just got done working out for approximately two hours. He said he plans to workout again in the morning, probably not eat all day, and weigh-in in the afternoon. He says he will try to get out of school early tomorrow and come to the wrestling room to workout. (Field notes, 1.7.09).

Despite having only a bit of Jello, four ounces of baby food, and half a pastry in more than 36 hours, Calvin did not end up making weight the following day. Although he failed in this regard, he is a good example of the demands placed upon wrestlers who "cut weight" and the discipline needed to make weight on a weekly basis.

Calvin, who cut roughly 20 pounds this year, struggled with his weight on a daily basis. And except for the occasion I just mentioned, he always made weight. To do so, though, he had to ration his food with almost no room for error in his diet. When others were eating pizza at lunch, Calvin pulled out a piece of fruit. When his grandmother flew to Denver and made a spaghetti dinner for everyone, Calvin opted for a piece of bread with peanut butter on it (much to the chagrin of his grandmother and other family members). For Calvin, wrestling became a total

institution, as it came to dominate most aspects of his life both inside and outside the wrestling room. The same was true for Brian, who cut approximately 20 pounds this year as well. This is how Brian described a typical day during wrestling season:

I'd wake up, I wouldn't eat, I'd go to school, I wouldn't eat, or I'd take a can of tuna with me. And then I'd get home and have, like, a chicken breast, stuff like that. I'd have practice after school, and if I was close to weight I'd run when I got home on the elliptical, and then I'd go to bed, after homework, about 9:00 or 10:00pm.

As Brian illustrates, to cut a lot of weight almost always means that one has to endure extra workouts above and beyond what is expected of the rest of the team. In this way, the physical demands of wrestling are compounded for these individuals. Not only do they have to endure what everyone else does, while also restricting their diets, they have to undergo extra workouts either in the morning, during lunchtime, or after practice in the evening. A normal workout, in itself, is challenging. Going through it while severely restricting calories is a fierce challenge. Having to then workout later that evening, while not eating or drinking anything until the following afternoon is brutal. Many wrestlers who cut weight say their body is weak and sometimes nonresponsive. Calvin, for instance, once commented that his body feels numb when he is cutting weight. And these numb, at times non-responsive bodies are called upon over and over again in the any number of extra workouts necessary to make weight—workouts that cannot be described as anything but extreme:

Calvin is still two-pounds over [his weight class] after having jumped rope for an hour, wherein he lost a pound. Calvin is spent; his face is sucked in, skin pale and he is not looking forward to having to lose two pounds before tomorrow's early morning weigh-in... He gets the bathroom heated up by running the shower and faucet on high heat. He also puts a towel in front of the door so that no hot air will be released from the bathroom. I make a deal with Calvin, that I will not eat until we do what needs to be done for him to make weight. Calvin puts on his sweat suit along

with a few layers of sweatshirts, the outer one with the hood up. I do the opposite and take off some of my clothes, preparing to do the 30-minute workout with Calvin in the bathroom. I promise Calvin that he will make it if he listens to me and goes hard. Regimen: bouncing in place is the rest/base position; we do intervals of foot fires, pummeling⁹, and push-ups. We alternate these exercises with a precise rotation. When Calvin was in his base position, I smacked his back, chest, and legs so as to open his pores. This will get him to sweat quicker, and to keep his sweat “rolling.” Calvin does the workout with little complaint. The last five minutes, though, he began to whine and groan a bit. The last position puts him on the floor where I message his body, so as to get more weight off by him while he is relaxing. We then quickly check his weight. As he takes off his clothes sweat falls to the floor. When I left the bathroom, I was in my jeans, which were rolled up; no shirt and sweating profusely. He puts his sweats back on and lies on the floor between the two beds. Because of this workout, Calvin doesn’t have to workout again in the morning. He is under by .7 pounds at weigh in. (Field notes, 12.19.08).

As can be expected from such extreme workouts and dietary restrictions, Calvin loathed cutting weight. Yet he did it week in and week out to meet his desired weight class. When I asked him to describe to me what it felt like to be in the depths of a weight cut like the one I detailed above, he responded by saying:

Words can’t explain it, like your body feels like you weigh a ton. You could be in the best shape and get in the workout of your life, but your body will just feel like a ton, numbs sometimes,... and like your mind is like “man you pushed yourself too much, you’ve gone too far this time.”

Under such conditions, though, one cannot help but be painfully reminded of their body, particularly in terms of hunger and exhaustion, as well the sensation of numbness that Calvin described above. The demands of cutting weight, like those of conditioning, work to have wrestlers think of their bodies as separate and other. This is especially the case for those who ate very little (or nothing) in the final days leading up to weigh-ins. In the case of cutting weight especially, one’s body becomes a hostile other, constantly communicating its presence through hunger. As Bartky

⁹ “Pummeling” is a drill where wrestlers interlock their arms with each other while chest-to-chest, and then “pummel” or “swim” their arms back and forth while leaning their body weight against each other.

(1990) writes, "since the innocent need of the organism nor food will not be denied, the body becomes one's enemy, an alien being bent on thwarting the disciplinary project." (p. 66). In this way, the body again becomes framed as a challenge, something to be disciplined and controlled by the mind.

According to those wrestlers who cut a lot of weight, denying their bodies the simple pleasure of food and drink made them crave such normalcies even more. In this way, it was the discipline of cutting weight that framed their relationships to both their bodies and to food. "The attempt to subdue the spontaneities of the body in the interests of control," according to Bordo (2003:146), "only succeeds in constituting them as more alien and more powerful, and thus more needful of control." To those who cut a lot of weight, food became an almost daily obsession that reached its pinnacle the night before weigh-ins when they could eat very little and many times nothing. Jordan is illustrative of this obsession. When I woke up the day of a tournament, Jordan, who at this point was staying with me on a routine basis, was already awake. He said that he had not slept from 3:00am on, in part because he was too hungry and thirsty. Instead, he drew a picture of everything that he was restricted from eating or drinking: "pizza, popcorn, Gator Rade, Hot Cheetos, 5 bowl of cereal, hot sauce, water, subway sandwich." On the paper he added up all the items that he desired but could not have, and equated him consuming these foods and drinks with being "no wrestler." Jordan illustrates well how both food and drink come to occupy wrestlers' mind when they must restrict them, as well as the necessary *rituals of restraint* that come along with becoming a wrestler who has to manage his weight. Jordan more or less surrendered himself to me when it came to

dieting. Prior to him living with me, he would call and ask what, if anything, he could eat and if and when he should workout. When he lived with me he ate what I told him to eat. In time he learned the discipline of cutting weight to the extent that he could then police himself. In this way, Jordan represents a successful transformation from an outsider who knew very little about the culture and discipline of cutting weight, to a disciplined wrestler. And as he showed in the picture he drew the night before weigh-ins, Jordan in time began to associate his dietary restrictions specifically with *being a high school wrestler* who had to deny what others could enjoy on a regular basis. Not only then was the discipline of wrestling written on his body in the form of sunken cheeks and ultra-lean physique, but also on his identity and sense of self.

Others did not learn the discipline of cutting weight in the manner that Jordan did (in part because they did not they have someone there to help them through the process). Jake, for instance, struggled with his weight all year—not just with missing weight, but also with the *culture* and *discipline* of diet and cutting weight. Dieting is a culture in the strict sense; it's a practical form of knowing. Moreover, it is a way to relate to one's body. Not only does one have to know what they can and cannot eat at certain times, they also have to exert the discipline to deny their body's quest for satiation. Jake would oftentimes come into practice either the day before or the day of competition several pounds overweight. On one occasion he said he only had "two eggs" last night, yet he was four pounds heavier than when he left yesterday's practice. I told him there is "no way two eggs made you gain four pounds. What else did you eat?" He replied "a couple glasses of water."

I asked him the size of the glasses, to which he replied by holding his hands a part to signal the (rather large) size of the glasses. Jake did not realize that drinking water would put that much weight on him, and to the average person it would not have. But for Jake, as is the case for most wrestlers who cut weight and are considerably dehydrated, his body soaks up water like a sponge. This is especially the case as competition nears and levels of dehydration increase significantly.

Jake represents a failed body project within the discipline of cutting weight. Not only did he *not* come to think of food rationally—that is, in terms of calculable rations such as a half-pound of water or four ounces of chicken breast—he also failed to discipline his body’s hunger and thirst. Like other wrestlers, his body communicated to him its presence through hunger. He dealt with the desire differently though; he approached it as much of the general population would—he gave into it. In giving in to the simple pleasures of food and drink and acting as normal members of the general population would in any given context, Jake becomes deviant within the context of wrestling. To this end, he represents an act of resistance (Jamieson, Stringer, and Davids 2008), in the strict sense, to disciplining the wrestling body.

The Distinction of Cutting Weight

The practice of cutting weight has both disciplinary and distinctive components to it, which are intimately related. For those most dedicated to the sport and to its culture of cutting weight, their engagement with wrestling is one of “monastic devotion” (Wacquant 2004). And the disciplinary nature of their craft

helps them to think of themselves as different types of people (as I detailed in Chapter 4). As Calvin once noted:

I think it's [cutting weight] like above all one of the toughest things and that's why a lot of people aren't able to wrestle or... have the mentality of becoming a wrestler. We have... football kids who try to come in and try out for the wrestling team and they leave like the next week cuz they're not able to handle the pressure of you know the workouts and maintaining their weight.

In this section, Calvin gains a sense of distinction and self-worth on the basis that he and other wrestlers are willing to endure what most others will not. In this way, he draws on his ability to sacrifice as a way to set himself apart from outsiders, which in this specific instance are "football kids." As Durkheim (1965), noted, "by [suffering and sacrifice], he distinguishes himself from all the other creatures who follow blindly wherever pleasure calls them; by this, he makes a place apart from himself in the world." (p. 355). And when such sacrifice and suffering take collective forms, as they do in wrestling, members use it to make in-group/out-group distinctions. To this end, the bodily demands and sacrifices of the sport of wrestling forge a sense of solidarity among team members, at the same time that they draw distinctions with others. But, as Calvin illustrates, such distinctions are not constructed solely on the bodily demands of the sport, but perhaps more importantly on the *mentality* it takes to persevere through such demands.

Wrestlers as Cartesian Subjects

"We are Cartesian and Puritan in our attitudes toward the body" (Bordo 1999:223)

The bodily demands placed upon wrestlers, coupled with the various discourses of overcoming overdetermines an experience of the relationship

between the mind and body that can best be described as *Cartesian*. Without exception, the individuals I talked to figured the mind as having precedence and (at times tyrannical) rule over the body. In their local conceptualization of the body, bodies are thought of as having no agency; they are there to be pushed, pulled, and ultimately overcome. Wrestlers many times construct their bodies as formidable opponents, though, as they socially construct them as capable of holding up to intense conditions. As Elijah argued, “as long as you can stand, the body will keep going.” “The body,” then, “will never quit if your mind don’t quit. The first thing that quits is the mind, and then the body” (Sway). What wrestling bodies offer, then, is a challenge to the mind. And to be successful in this endeavor, one has to learn to *control* one’s body. Sometimes, though, the issue of control borders on the edge of tyranny, as Edan illustrates well: “With my body I’m sort of a dictator. I have to be stern with it, cause there’s a lot of times my body doesn’t want to do what I tell it to... I’m kind of a jerk to my body.”

Wrestlers are Cartesian subjects, not only in that the mind and the body are separate entities, but also in that the mind is the charioteer of the body. Calvin, for instance, stated that “whatever your mind tells your body to do, your body will do it... It’s like a spark in the match, you know it’s what starts the fire.” Here the body is figured most prominently as an object, something to be disciplined, controlled, and overcome. This speaks to one of the common themes in wrestling at Central—the battle and tension within oneself to overcome oneself. Reggie illustrates this tension well: “Your mind’s gonna tell you to stop, but you’ve got to tell your body to keep on goin’. You’ve got to push it, push it, push it.” By placing primacy with the mind over

body, the discourse of overcoming in wrestling places responsibility and accountability with individuals' minds. What wrestlers do with their bodies becomes a sign of the self—particularly its toughness, will power, and perseverance. Moreover, by figuring the body as resilient and the mind as in control places moral accountability and responsibility on the individuals in question, no matter how fierce the circumstances. When Calvin failed to make weight under very extreme circumstances, Coach blamed him. He chastised him for not being disciplined enough. In this context, bodies come to be seen as signifiers of a moral, responsible self, as well as a failed self. For those who make weight, their body reads discipline and restraint, as well as the mental toughness to make weight through extreme measures. Either of these techniques is valued as ends to reach the unforgiving and rigid goal of making weight.

DISCUSSION: DISCIPLINE AND ETHICS OF CONTROL

Both disciplines—cutting weight and conditioning—are about *control*. They have in common an authoritative, dictatorial relationship with one's body. Whereas dieting does so by restraint, exercising does so by excess. Each discipline establishes "comfort zones" that wrestlers are expected to push beyond. Yet, they work in opposite directions. Whether wrestlers are telling their bodies "no" (in the case of diet) or "go" (in the case of conditioning), the "fundamental identification," as Bordo (2003) would say, "is with mind (or will)" (p. 151). As I have shown throughout, wrestlers are taught to read their bodies through the lens of "no limits." Although there are indeed physical limits to bodies, as the deaths of three collegiate wrestlers

due to extreme weight-cutting strategies in the late 1990s remind us (Fleming 1997), wrestlers at Central (and elsewhere) operate as if there were none. At least, this is the dominant framework in place at Central High. Wrestlers' bodies, namely their limits in terms of pain and fatigue, as well as their hunger and thirst, become a challenge for the mind, something to rule over and ultimately discipline. In this way, disciplining the wrestling body is about more than simply bodies. It is principally about testing one's mind and constructing a new self, in part, through what Foucault refers to as an "ethics of control." Consistent with the ideas of Foucault (1986), wrestlers attempt to cultivate their sense of self through "a particular and intense form of attention to the body" (p. 56). They do this through the various *rituals of restraint* required by cutting weight, as well as through the *rituals of excess* that push and pull the body through a number of draconian circumstances. Wrestlers call upon these rituals as they do internal battle with their bodies, the outcome of which is formative of a new self.

Wrestling bodies become the site of various types of investment (mental, emotional, and of course corporeal) that hold out the promise of ontological transcendence (Wacquant 1995). The pain of discipline, in this understanding, offers a challenge—an opportunity to remake oneself by disciplining one's body. It is precisely in this way that wrestling and its corporeal demands act as technologies of the self (Foucault 1988). As I mentioned earlier, the experience of pain in this context signals the coming of a better bodily and mental state in the future. Persevering through pain for many in this context is experienced as a cathartic, even empowering experience. For many of the wrestlers at Central, being able to tell the

body “go” when they are at the point of exhaustion is a pleasurable experience, one that signals a particular mastery over one’s body. Calvin, for instance, commented: “I like to push my body to a point... that I finally crawl to the wall.” As Bartky (1990) notes, “whatever its ultimate effect, discipline can provide the individual upon whom it is imposed with a sense of mastery as well as a secure sense of identity” (p. 77). And for the wrestlers at Central, who have little control over other aspects of the life, controlling, overcoming, and remaking (their selves through) their bodies is an empowering experience. The wrestlers took pride in their ability to persevere through difficult circumstances. They also use their capability to endure as a salient component of their identity, as well as to construct distinctions with others (as I showed in Chapter 4).

As Foucault (1986) states, there is “a pleasure that one takes in oneself,” that stems from overcoming the body’s limits and denying it simple pleasures of rest, food, et cetera. Moreover, these practices are formative of one’s ethical self. “The task of testing oneself, examining oneself, monitoring oneself in a series of clearly defined exercises... [is] central to the formation of the ethical subject” (p. 68). The objective then of such practices is *control*—a disciplinary rule over oneself that is at once tyrannical and pleasurable. The bodily demands of wrestling’s exercise regimen, coupled with the asceticism it asks for outside of the room in terms of dietary restrictions provides wrestlers with a disciplinary ground from which to form moral, masculine selves. The structural demands of wrestling become the site wherein toughness, character, and manhood can either be affirmed or denied. In this way, the daily grind of wrestling is a constant proving ground for one to reveal his

worth. Not only, then, are bodies sites of discipline, and inscribed by culture; they also are the medium through which wrestlers can fashion an ethical and moral self.

CONCLUSION

As I stated at the outset, my intention throughout this chapter has been to document the corporeal demands of becoming a wrestler at Central High, as well as to provide an account of how wrestlers come to experience and interact with their bodies. To this end, I hope to have made contributions in the following areas. At a general level, I aim to expand the sociological discourse on the topic of scholastic wrestling, which academics have largely neglected. Although scholastic wrestling has received some attention in recent years (Baker and Hotek 2011; Fair 2011), the topic is largely overlooked in academia. In providing an ethnographic account of high school wrestling from the perspective of those immersed in the sport, I hoped to have shed light on the local discipline and culture of wrestling at Central, but also to have challenged readers to see what wrestling shares with other passionate pursuits both in and out of the context of sport. Learning to become a high school wrestler is much like learning to become a member of other social groups that have strenuous demands in terms of body and mind—it is a difficult process of embodied immersion in a corporeal culture, as well as an equally arduous lesson in socially constructing bodies in particular ways.

As I illustrated throughout, athletes and coaches at Central High socially construct wrestling bodies as objects or obstacles to be overcome. In this way, this chapter contributes specifically to literature on the social construction of the body,

particularly how different metaphors affect how groups come to experience and relate to their bodies. As we saw here, within the context of wrestling the body becomes a challenge for one's mind, but also a question of manhood. Wrestlers' masculine worth was determined, in part, by their capacity to persevere through difficult circumstances and, in part, by their ability to control their bodies. To this end, this chapter also contributes to the literature on masculinities and bodies. Scholars have shown how men construct their masculinities in relation to others (Connell 1995; Pascoe 2007). But as my research illustrates, bodies are not simply vehicles for constructing masculinity in relation to other bodies. The wrestling body itself is the site of the masculine challenge. And here, the quintessential masculine characteristic is that of *overcoming* a stubborn and at times unruly body.

Lastly, when others have addressed bodies in sport they have done so from a critical standpoint, showcasing the debilitating effects sports has on participants' bodies (Messner 1990; Curry 1993; Wainwright et al. 2005). My research represents a significant departure from these studies, in that I illustrate how wrestling bodies—experienced mainly through the pain of discipline—are avenues for improved sense of selves. In this way, I look to the way that wrestling bodies are cultural, symbolic resources at the same time that they are sites of discipline. Drummond (2010), for his part, undertakes a similar project, but does so by way of an autoethnographical account of his time as a competitive triathlete. Although individual accounts are indeed important, studying wrestlers at Central as a group allows me to see how collective representations manifest across many members of a given context. In this way, it allows me to explore the culture of scholastic wrestling—that is, the shared

symbols and meaning systems group members have in common—which was one of my primary objectives when I entered the wrestling room at Central High.

CHAPTER 6

HETEROSEXUAL RECUPERATION AND INCLUSIVE MASCULINITY: MAPPING THE SEXUAL IMAGINATION OF HIGH SCHOOL WRESTLERS

In this chapter I map wrestlers' views on sexuality and how they intersect with their understandings of masculinity. I gain access to this dimension of their cultural worlds by analyzing their everyday discourse on sexuality, but also by asking specific questions in three areas. I begin by examining the manner in which current team members treated Reggie, a senior wrestler that most presumed to be gay. I then analyze how they responded to the question I posed to them of whether they would accept openly gay wrestlers to their team. Finally, I look to the various ways that wrestlers manage the popular accusation leveled against their sport that "wrestling is gay."

As I will illustrate throughout, although most wrestlers at Central High imagine themselves in ways that are in line with orthodox versions of masculinity—aggressive, competitive, physical, and perhaps most importantly, heterosexual—they oftentimes run up against outsider perceptions that challenge their presumed heterosexuality (Fair 2011). The jeers high school wrestlers face usually center on the skin-tight outfits they wear in competition (derisively referred to by others as "leotards") and the fact that they are in close physical contact with other men in positions that can be interpreted as sexual (Fair 2011; Pronger 1990). In this way, the physical contact that wrestlers mobilized to draw gendered distinctions with basketball players (see Chapter 4) is also cause for homosexual suspicion. And wrestlers are well aware of suspicion from others, as many realize that there are

certain moves and positions that others could interpret as (homo)sexual. As David once commented:

There are some pretty weird positions you don't want to get caught in, because when you do you're like, "This is pretty gross! Ugh!" But wrestlers don't think about that, they're not like, "Man, he's wearing a singlet and his junk is all over the place."

Part of my objective here, then, is to explain how wrestlers think about those very interactions that others deem homoerotic. As David illustrates, wrestlers think about these positions and situations in very different ways than do outsiders.

The context at Central—namely that wrestlers share the mat with an individual they presume to be gay and that they often face accusations that their sport is homoerotic—provides an useful set of circumstances for mapping their views on sexuality (and masculinity). It, for one, allows us to analyze male sport as a site where heterosexuality is questioned rather than taken for granted. Whereas women athletes often face questions about their sexuality (Ezzell 2009), most male athletes are heterosexual until proven otherwise (Griffin 1998). Men's participation in sport, in addition to not raising questions, usually bolsters heterosexual credentials. Wrestlers are interesting then, in that they are sometimes forced to negotiate gender and sexuality dilemmas usually reserved for women in sport. And in this way they are aligned with other marginalized masculinities in sport, such as male cheerleaders who for their part have to manage participation in a feminized terrain (Anderson 2005; Davis 1990; Grindstaff and West 2006).

This chapter explores various dimensions of the question of sexuality among high school wrestlers. On the one hand, in analyzing how members interact with their presumably gay teammate and by asking the question "how would you react to

an openly gay wrestler?" I get at the general level of acceptance of homosexuality at Central. On the other hand, I explore how members reacted to the accusation that "wrestling is gay," which, as I illustrate, is an altogether different question. Whereas the question of accepting gay wrestlers does not seem to threaten wrestlers' hetero-masculine identities, the accusation that "wrestling is gay" does so to most of the individuals on the team. Accordingly, the Central High wrestlers responded in markedly different ways to each question. To this end, these questions help me to construct a nuanced account of how wrestlers think about sexuality, which as I argue throughout, is inclusive in key ways, yet orthodox in others.

PRIOR RESEARCH ON HEGEMONIC, ORTHODOX, AND INCLUSIVE MASCULINITY

Scholars writing in the 1980s and 1990s agreed that sport was an arena of hegemonic masculinity, a site where dominant constructions of masculinity were both performed and shored up (Dunning 1986; Kidd 1987; Messner 1990; Whitson 1990). Such hegemonic constructions of masculinity in sport reinforced a narrow ideal of manhood that was both hypermasculine and sharply at odds with what it means to be feminine and/or gay (Anderson 2002, 2005; Connell 1987, 1995; Kimmel 2001; Messner 2007). As scholars have also argued, heterosexuality is taken for granted in men's sports (Griffin 1998, Messner 2007). If sexualities other than heterosexuality enter into the discourse of men's sport, they usually do so as points of ridicule and contempt. In fact, much of the research on sport and sexuality has focused on sport's long-standing relationship with homophobia (Anderson 2002, 2005; Muir and Seitz 2004; Pronger 1990, 2000).

Although scholars have framed men's sport as a bastion of hegemonic masculinity, which among other things was deeply homophobic, recent scholarship has documented a notable shift toward acceptance and inclusivity. According to Anderson (2009), sport is still the site of orthodox versions of masculinity, which resemble many of the tenets of hegemonic masculinity, especially when it comes to being hypermasculine, homophobic, and devaluing femininity. But orthodox masculinity is no longer hegemonic; it stands alongside other esteemed versions of masculinity as possible configurations of being a man. Moreover, diminished levels of cultural homophobia, according to Anderson (2009), have opened the door for others to value more inclusive versions of masculinities. Whereas hegemonic masculinity and orthodox masculinity construct rigid versions of masculinity, inclusive masculinity constructs broader, more inclusive versions of being a "man" (Anderson 2009), especially with respect to accepting same-sex sexuality.

MAPPING THE CULTURE OF ACCEPTANCE AND HOMOPHOBIA AT CENTRAL HIGH

Coach Jose, although very tolerant and accepting on other issues, clearly opposed homosexuality on religious grounds. Jose was a born-again Evangelical Christian, who had rather orthodox views on same-sex relationships. As he often commented, he hated the sin (of homosexuality), yet loved the sinner. Privately, he was explicit about the immorality of homosexuality. On different occasions, he talked at length with me about my stance on homosexuality, asking me once: "With all due respect, what do you have in common with gay people?... I mean, they don't wrestle." Publicly, he gave a clear impression that he was against the practice of

homosexuality. There were a few times during my fieldwork that I heard Jose use the term “faggot” to communicate hatred, not necessarily for gay persons but for people he wanted to “other” on moral grounds. On one occasion, before the start of the city championships, where we showed up with only half a team, Jose expressed his hatred for our cross-city rival who had a well-positioned team to win the tournament by using the term “faggot.” “I don’t mind losing—we’ve taken a bunch of losses this year—but losing to that faggot, fruitcake (sorry coach, [directed toward me]),” according to Coach Jose was unbearable. He also did not have a problem with others using the word “faggot.”

Jordan yells “shut up faggot,” to someone who is calling him out on his wrestling. Coach: “whew their getting intense over there. They’re learning that they’re men over there.” Reggie tells Jordan, “don’t say that word.” I echo this request to Jordan, as I turn to Coach and tell him, “they need to cut out all those damn derogatory comments” (Field notes, 12.11.08).

Although he punished (with 25 push-ups) anyone who used other forms of profanity in the room, when wrestlers used the term “faggot” they did so with immunity.

Actually, as is evidenced above, Coach Jose welcomes its use and even associates it with becoming a man. Coach’s comments represent orthodox views of masculinity as hypermasculine and homophobic (Anderson 2005). Yet, his understandings are not hegemonic. In fact, as the section of my field notes I included above illustrates, members held very different, often warring perspectives on sexuality and the use of words such as “faggot” (see Anderson and McGuire 2010 for the tension between coaches’ and players’ views on homophobic remarks on a university rugby team in the United Kingdom).

I, for instance, offered a contrary position to Coach Jose’s views on sexuality

and the use of what I deemed disparaging, homophobic language. I was an open advocate of gay rights, talking often of my diverse group of friends and condemning the use of terms “gay” and “faggot.” In time, I attempted to sanction these very terms, treating them as the team treated other types of profanity¹⁰. Coach Chip, Jose’s long-time assistant, held very similar views to mine. He was progressive on most social issues and sexuality was no exception.

Reggie, for his part, was an actual embodied challenge to Jose’s views on homosexuality. Reggie was our senior, varsity heavyweight and Jordan’s older brother. As I will illustrate throughout this chapter, most members of the team presumed that Reggie was gay. Reggie at times flirted with his sexual identity in the wrestling room. On one occasion, as he was walking past Calvin who was rolling on his back during stretches, Reggie said “don’t tempt me.” He also expressed himself in ways that others would consider flamboyant. He identified with the cheer squad as a place of joy and contentment, for instance, although others constructed cheerleading as soft, feminine, and at times gay. He often noted that he “had to be fashionably late” when he was late to practice or other sports related functions. In this way, his gender performance was at odds with most of the members on the team.

Wrestlers at Central often referred to and thought of Reggie when discussing the possibility of welcoming a gay wrestler or homosexuality in general. Reggie’s performance of his sexual identity was complicated though. It was not quite “don’t

¹⁰ My attempt was met with marginal success. Although I tried to enforce the prohibition, and in a few cases was successful, it was a difficult task in large part because the head coach (and his wife) used the word regularly.

ask, don't tell" as much as it was something the other guys on the team presumed to be true. Therefore Reggie never publicly came out to the team, but everyone thought of him as gay and he never denied it. To this end, it matters little if Reggie was actually gay; what is important, as the Thomas Theorem¹¹ alludes to, is that others acted *as if he was gay*.

True to Jose's philosophy, he loved and embraced Reggie, the person, while silently condemning his sexuality. The rest of the team fell somewhere between Jose's orthodox stance on homosexuality and the more inclusive stances on the issue represented by Chip, Reggie, and me. As I will explain shortly, views on homosexuality among team members lay on a continuum from indifference to acceptance. To this end, the variation in perspectives represents movement towards an inclusive environment rather than the staunchly orthodox ones of recent past.

INCLUSIVE MASCULINITY AT CENTRAL HIGH

As I argue in this section, wrestlers at Central High acted in ways that are suggestive of inclusive masculinity (Anderson 2009). Although this is true, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that the high school wrestlers in my research also represented orthodox masculinity in key ways. They, for instance, expressed aggression and physicality and, at times, devalued femininity. And to this end, they reproduced orthodox constructions of masculinity.

Yet, the wrestlers at Central contested one of the key tenets of orthodox

¹¹ W. I. Thomas' (Thomas and Thomas 1928) famous dictum reads: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (p. 572).

masculinity: homophobia. They showcased tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality, in part, by how they treated Reggie. By and large, members of the team not only accepted Reggie, they genuinely liked him and considered him part of their team. On most days, Reggie was charismatic, lively, and full of joy. He was well known in school, as well as within the state-wide wrestling community. During the finals of a tournament held at Central High, he had the entire crowd cheering “Reggie, Reggie, ...” as they encouraged him against his opponent. In fact, a lot of wrestlers and coaches looked up to Reggie as someone who fought hard and had “heart.” In this way, he lived up to some of the key masculine expectations of the sport. Moreover, a lot of people invested in Reggie. This is why so many were heart-broken and crying when he lost his qualifying match at the regional tournament and failed to make it to the state championships. I know I surely did. As did Jose, the coach who cared deeply for Reggie as a person and athlete but opposed Reggie’s presumed sexuality.

Reactions to Reggie represent progress toward inclusive masculinity in wrestling. As assistant coach Chip alludes to below, presumably gay wrestlers at Central stand out at the same time that they fit in. This was certainly true of Reggie. To the best of my knowledge no one ever made hateful or hurtful comments directly to Reggie or behind his back. Wrestlers would oftentimes joke with Reggie about his sexuality, and Reggie would usually laugh along with others. Reggie’s workout partner, Dom, for instance, commented on the length of Reggie’s shorts one day by saying “I feel gay already.” On another occasion, Dom referred to Reggie’s presumed sexuality in an affirmative manner. As Dom and Reggie were drilling, Reggie hit with

great precision and speed a move that took most members of the team a back. Dom shouted across the room, “Reggie’s a gay beast!” and most everyone laughed, along with Reggie, who saw no problem with the characterization.

Although others joked about Reggie’s presumed sexuality, these jokes have to be understood against the backdrop of acceptance within Central High’s wrestling room. “The social environment,” as McCormack (2011) argues, “is pivotal in discerning the intent of language, how it is interpreted and the social effects it has” (p. 672). The cultural views on homosexuality at Central, outside of Jose, were fairly inclusive. When individuals used terms such as “fag” or “gay” in the wrestling room they did not do so to explicitly marginalize gay identities. The language, although homosexually-themed, was not homophobic. It took the form of what McCormack (2011) refers to as *gay discourse*, which although privileging heterosexuality does not have the negative social effects of homophobic language. Granted, Coach Jose’s intent of “fag” and “gay” may have had an altogether different meaning, one that was laden with homophobia. But by no means was this the rule in an otherwise inclusive environment, that is, in terms of sexuality.

Yet my research complicates McCormack’s (2011) model. He argues that homophobia is a key factor in determining the type of social environment. According to McCormack (2011), in a highly homophobic culture, “homosexually-themed language is indeed homophobic, as it is used with pernicious intent and has a very negative social effect” (p. 673). Wrestling at Central High challenges this assumption. As the evidence above demonstrates, wrestlers at Central are largely homophobic, in that they fear that others will classify them as gay because they

participate in a “gay sport.” Yet, they did not mobilize homophobic language with pernicious intent, as they employed the terms “gay” and “fag” in a much more casual manner, which among other things was not directly linked to sexuality (Kimmel 2008; Pascoe 2007). My research suggests that individuals and groups can be fearful of being classified as gay or take issue with having their sport labeled as gay, while at the same time accepting gay wrestlers to the team and not using homophobic language. Brian, a senior year wrestler at Central, sums up this position well: “I’d say there’s nothing wrong in being gay, but wrestling’s not a homosexual sport. I guess you could be homosexual and do it, that’s fine. But we’re not boyfriend and boyfriend out there. We’re just wrestlers, we’re athletes.” As Brian illustrates, most wrestlers at Central High can be inclusive in terms of accepting homosexuality, yet still take offense to the accusation that wrestling is gay. For many, the issues are altogether different.

Accepting Openly Gay Wrestlers

Wrestlers at Central signaled inclusive masculinity in another key way. When I asked each of them, for instance, how they would react to an openly gay wrestler on their team, they responded in ways that expressed tolerance. Most of the wrestlers evoked an egalitarian schema and said they would treat them just as they would treat anyone else who walked through the doors of Central High’s wrestling room. When I asked Sway, for instance, how he would react to an openly gay wrestler, he replied: “ [The] same way I react to Reggie. I mean, gay people are cool. There’s nothin’ wrong with gay people. *Just as long as they’re not attracted to me,*

we're fine. We can be the best of friends." I will talk more about the qualification—*"just as long as they're not attracted to me"*—later, but what is important for now is the level of acceptance that Sway immediately expressed. Most others to whom I asked the same question responded in a similar manner, suggesting that they would be fine welcoming an openly gay wrestler to their team. According to Lonzo, if this individual wanted to be gay, "That's his choice, if he wants to be that, he can. It just really doesn't matter to me." Coach Chip, who has been an assistant coach at Central High for the last nine years, confirms the level of inclusivity that I read in my interviews:

I have had openly gay kids in the wrestling room, and it's—they stand out, but they fit in at the same time. We're lucky in that [our] environment is such a mix of kids and people, girls on the team, whatever else it is that it just is never—it's not a problem. Our kids can—99% of them can deal with whatever comes their way. And they just accept people as people, probably because they're used to not being necessarily accepted that way and they would really prefer to be, so they do it. That's probably one of our strengths [of our team], actually, I would say.

Chip later talked to me in depth about how members of the team treated one of their presumably gay teammates a few years back. The worst thing he could recall anyone saying about him (behind his back) was that he had "a little sugar in his tank." Chip lamented the fact that it was said behind his back, but went on to say that the guys on the team never said anything negative directly to the individual in question. And besides the one comment about having "a little sugar in the his tank" Chip could not recall anyone saying anything else negative about him during his time on the team—either to his face or behind his back. Chip not only confirms the inclusive context of wrestling at Central, he also applauds it. In this way, he signals that he too is willing to accept alternative versions of masculinity, and in doing so represents another

point of inclusivity on the team. Moreover, because of Chip's position as an assistant coach for the past nine years he carries considerable weight on the issue.

Anderson (2009) argues that the cultural shift toward people becoming more accepting of homosexuality is relatively recent. Edan, who has been in the program for four years, and who perhaps is a part of the shift of which Anderson speaks, talks specifically about how he has become more inclusive over time:

Well... that's [his opinion on homosexuality] definitely an attitude of mine that's changed over the course of high school, I'd say, which I think [came about] as I became more mature. I honestly think Reggie is more and more willing to accept that maybe he is. I totally think he is. It's not something where I would ever make fun of him for anymore [for being gay]. I might have freshman year, definitely. 'Cause it's not like a gay wrestler wants to go wrestle because he likes touching other guys. I don't really see it like that. At this point, I don't see [a gay wrestler] any different than any other wrestler.

As Edan and others illustrate, members of the team held views on homosexuality that can be considered progressive in important ways. Many wrestlers at Central expressed favorable attitudes towards homosexuality. To this end, they did not act in explicitly homophobic ways toward Reggie or when I asked whether they would welcome an openly gay wrestler to their team. In fact, most responded in ways that signaled acceptance and inclusive masculinity.

Yet, as Sway hinted to above, there are some clear qualifications for openly gay wrestlers—they are welcome just as long as they do not make wrestling sexual. As I illustrate in the next section, wrestlers are explicit that their sport is not homoerotic, but they are aware of the potential threat that gay wrestlers bring to possibly sexualizing wrestling. In this way they are inclusive yet cautious of how the entrance of openly gay wrestlers could alter the presumed hetero-masculine structure of their sport.

“Just don’t hit on me and I’m fine”—Openly Gay Wrestlers and the Potential Challenge to Wrestling

Although wrestlers at Central responded in ways indicative of inclusive masculinity, they have an unequivocal qualification for openly gay wrestlers to be part of their team—no touching “in a gay way,” as Lonzo said. Brian, one of the more conservative team members, said he “wouldn’t really care” if there were gay wrestlers. He went on to say, “as long as you’re not grabbin’ me where you shouldn’t grab, me and you could be best friends.” Elijah is on the same page as Brian: “As long as they’re not hittin’ on me, I’m fine with that. [If] you’re here wrestling just like I’m here, workin’ as hard as I am, I have no problem. Just don’t hit on me and I’m fine.” Elijah evokes an egalitarian ethics, which others have documented (Wacquant 2004), when considering membership in his demanding craft. For him, if someone is willing to adhere to the demands of the sport, then they are welcome in the room—that is, if they do not also try to make it sexual.

Chris, a self-described “homophobe,” is a bit more cautious about interacting with gay wrestlers, stating that he probably would not wrestle them:

I’ve had a couple experiences with gay guys hitting on me, trying to touch me. If they’re wrestling and they’re openly gay, it’s probably ‘cause they like the fact that they’re with other guys, all close, and that would just creep me out and I wouldn’t want to do it.

Chris acts in homophobic ways as he was both skeptical and fearful of gay men approaching him in a sexual manner. Although, he later said he would not have a problem wrestling a gay guy, *if they were there for the explicit reason to wrestle*. For

Chris, as it is for others, “when they try to make it sexual, that’s a problem.”

Jordan also said that openly gay wrestlers would not bother him, yet he promised violence on any who would challenge the account of wrestling as a “battle.”:

If they touched me in the wrong way, it would bother me and I would be pissed off and try to [fight] him, but if we’re just normally wrestling, he’s wrestling hard and I’m wrestling hard and it’s just normal wrestling, I don’t have no problem with it.

Promising or actually enacting violence on those who threaten one’s heterosexuality is not at all uncommon (Schilt and Westbrook 2009). Promising violence in this context allows wrestlers to mobilize hypermasculine scripts against potential threats to what Jordan refers to as “normal” wrestling, by which he means competition that is not at all sexual.

In saying they would welcome gay wrestlers, members of the Central High wrestling team represent a move toward more inclusive versions of masculinity in sport. Yet, their acceptance is a conditional one, as members of the team overwhelmingly said they would welcome an openly gay wrestler, just as long as he did not make it (homo)sexual. In other words, wrestlers at Central are willing to accept gay wrestlers just as long as the latter do not challenge their taken-for-granted heterosexuality or breach the competitive, masculine structure of their sport. In this way, they establish firm boundaries around the hetero-masculine structure of their sport, while also being inclusive in key ways.

DEFENSIVE HETERO-MASCULINITY: COMBATTING THE ACCUSATION THAT
“WRESTLING IS GAY”

“There’s nothing gay about it. It’s legal pain.” – Coach Jose

As I illustrated in the last section, although wrestlers are accepting of openly gay wrestlers, they clearly see them as a threat to the hetero-masculine structure of their sport. This is not the only threat leveled against wrestlers at Central. Unlike other men’s sport, wrestling is a contested space for the performance of heterosexual masculinity. As I mentioned in the opening section of this chapter, although wrestlers at Central High imagine their sport as a hypermasculine craft—which among other things is *not gay*—they are well aware that others’ ridicule it as homoerotic. Without exception, everyone I encountered at Central mentioned that at some time in their career they experienced some version of the stereotype that “wrestling is just two dudes wrestling around with each other in tights¹².”

Although the wrestlers at Central signaled levels of inclusive masculinity in their attitudes toward gay wrestlers, they by and large responded defensively to accusations that “wrestling is gay.” In fact, wrestlers at Central High were at pains to combat the accusation that wrestling is a homoerotic interaction. As I will illustrate, wrestlers’ believed that their masculinity was threatened through their association with homosexuality (see also Schilt and Westbrook 2009). Borrowing from Grindstaff and West (2006), I argue that to the extent that wrestling is coded as gay, and to the extent that homosexuality is conflated with femininity, wrestlers by and large experienced the attacks on the sexuality as attacks on their masculinity.

¹² Some wrestlers, for instance Jordan and Sway, themselves had initial impressions of the sport as gay. When I asked Jordan of his initial impressions of the sport he responded by saying, “I was thinkin’, “This sport is so gay. Men in singlets wrestling each other.” That sounded gay to me.”

Emphasizing Masculine Demands of Wrestling

In response to the accusation that “wrestling is gay,” wrestlers at Central High mobilized traditional gender scripts of violence and physicality to combat what they experienced as homosexual pollution. Lonzo, for instance, emphasized the masculine aspects of the sport when he said that the accusers “couldn’t survive one minute in there [the wrestling room]... workin’ out.” Elijah, while emphasizing the demanding structure of the sport, frames it as a test for accusers, challenging them to endure what wrestlers do on a daily basis:

If you really want to see what wrestling is, if you think I’m gay for wrestling, come into the practice room and try to handle the practice that we go through. See who’s gay then. See who’s gonna last. You think it’s a gay sport, come in there and actually wrestle. Go through a whole practice. Go through the hardest practice and see how long you last, and then call the sport gay. If you can last and you say it’s a gay sport and it’s easy, come in there and give it a shot. I guarantee you’ll change your mind.

In this passage from my interview with Elijah, he conflates the attack on his sexuality with an attack on his masculinity. Elijah associates being “gay” with not being able to endure the masculine demands of the sport. Accordingly, he mobilizes the masculine demands of the sport to combat the stereotype that it is gay. Edan does the same, as his response to those who thought of wrestling as gay was: “Come wrestle me... Try your luck for an hour in the wrestling room and see how you fare. See if you think we are anything less than masculine.” Edan is quite clear that he experiences accusations of homosexuality as a question of his masculinity. Others experienced the threat in a similar manner, and promised violence on would-be accusers. David, for instance, challenged his hypothetical accusers to, “go to the mat

right now and we'll see who's tougher." He continued on, saying that if they were up for the challenge they would "get dropped on their head."

Discursively Constructing Wrestling as a Battle

In important ways wrestlers are like male cheerleaders in that they both face challenges from outsiders who claim that their sport is gay (Anderson 2005; Grindstaff and West 2006). Some male cheerleaders managed the perceived threat to their sexuality by explicitly asserting their heterosexuality, for example, by talking about the fact that they hang around with and touch beautiful, in-shape women on a daily basis (Grindstaff and West 2006). They also managed the threat by avoiding certain behaviors coded as gay and feminine—e.g. dancing, constant smiling, and bouncing up and down (Grindstaff and West 2006). In both cases, they acted in explicit ways to reaffirm their heterosexual masculinity. Wrestlers, when faced with similar threats, react in different ways. For one, wrestlers are not afforded the option to distance themselves from what others frame as homoerotic touching. The physicality and contact, which is the source of their ridicule, is unavoidable in their sport. Their only avenue for negotiation in this regard was to reframe their contact in hypermasculine ways.

In efforts to combat the accusation that wrestling was gay, most wrestlers attempted to reframe the interaction of wrestling *as a battle*. Indeed, the wrestlers at Central thought of wrestling as a competitive fight, and as I will show in this section they often referred to it as a "battle." Elijah, for instance, recalls how he has had to explain wrestling to outsiders time and again. He does so by saying: "It's

people goin' out there to compete, no matter what your sexual preference is... They're not out there to rub upon each other. It's not an excuse to grope people, it's a reason to compete." Even Chip, perhaps the most progressive individual in the setting, insisted that when two wrestlers are physically engaged with each other, "they're in a battle, they're not thinking about what their ideas are about their sexuality at that moment." Jordan is also illustrative of this point. When I asked him, "What would you say to those people who say that wrestling is gay?" he immediately took to reframing the contact in the sport:

Come in the room, you'll see how gay it is. It's not gay at all. I know it's men touching each other and it might sound wrong,... but it's going one-on-one with some guy and showin' him everything you know... [In] wrestling, you're in one spot *battling* it out..., you're tryin' to slam each other on the mat, makin' him eat mat (emphasis added).

Brian, for his part, aimed to draw parallels between wrestling and Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), perhaps the most combative and violent sport of our current era:

There's no sex to it. We're not out there fondling each other. We're out there tryin' to kick the crap out of each other. Would you call UFC [Ultimate Fighting Championship] a whatever-you-want-to-call-it [gay] sport? No, 'cause you wouldn't say it to their face. So why would you say it about wrestling? It's the same thing except for not hittin' each other.

Both Brian and Jordan express the shared opinion at Central that wrestling is a battle, *not a sexual interaction*. In emphasizing wrestling *as battle*, wrestlers at Central construct their interaction as a violent one, wherein they fashion their bodies as weapons (Messner 1990). Moreover, they associate battle with traditional understandings of masculinity (see also Soulliere 2006 for the relationship between violence and manhood in professional wrestling). As Kimmel (2001) notes, "violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood" (p. 132). In discursively

reframing sexually suggestive positions as forms of battle, wrestlers at Central High draw on hypermasculine themes to combat the ridicule others level against them. In so doing they realign their sport with normative versions of masculinity as they attempt to combat the specter of homosexuality that haunts wrestling. Interestingly enough, they do so without invoking homophobia, a topic I turn to next.

Heterosexual Recuperation by way of Normative Masculinity

Taken together, wrestlers' reactions to accusations that their sport is gay signal a form of *heterosexual recuperation*, a term McCormack and Anderson (2010) use to make sense of "the strategies boys use to establish and maintain heterosexual identities *without invoking homophobia*" (p. 846, emphasis added). McCormack and Anderson discuss two forms of heterosexual recuperation in their research: *ironic and conquestial*, both of which draw on explicit references to heterosexuality in their attempts to police heterosexual boundaries. The ironic form does so through satirically proclaiming same-sex desire or a gay identity (e.g. a straight boy saying to his friend, "see you later boyfriend"), whereas *conquestial* does so through boasting of heterosexual desires and/or conquests (McCormack and Anderson 2010). The important commonality between the two forms is that neither mobilizes homophobic discourse in efforts to recoup their heterosexuality. In this specific regard they are aligned with wrestlers at Central High.

Yet the forms of heterosexual recuperation that McCormack and Anderson (2010) describe differ in important ways from the type of heterosexual boundary maintenance wrestlers perform. Unlike the individuals in McCormack and

Anderson's (2010) research, wrestlers at Central never employed heterosexuality in response to the claim that wrestling is gay. They did not, for instance, boast of their heterosexual conquests or talk about their desire for girls. If they mentioned sexuality at all, they did so by either routinely denying that wrestling was gay or by insisting that wrestling was not at all sexual. As Brian insisted, "there's no sex to it." Rather, wrestlers at Central mobilized traditional masculine scripts of violence and physicality to combat what they experienced as homosexual pollution. They, thus, do a form of heterosexual recuperation *via masculinity*. And in this way, they draw on masculinity to do sexuality work.

My findings adds to McCormack and Anderson's (2010) theory of heterosexual recuperation by showing how this process takes form in the context of sport and maintains heterosexual boundaries without evoking heterosexuality to do so. This is not to suggest that wrestlers at Central High did not have heterosexuality in mind when they were emphasizing the hypermasculine demands of the sport. They certainly did. As scholars have shown, although gender and sexuality are analytically separate (Stein and Plummer 1994; Stein 2008), the two spheres are many times conflated at the level of lived experience (Nielson, Walden and Kunkel 2000; Schilt and Westbrook 2009). Moreover, as Connell (1987, 1995) and others have insisted, heterosexuality is perhaps the most important tenet of normative masculinity. The two are intimately linked, as the wrestlers in my study evidence. In fact, they primarily experienced accusations of homosexuality as a challenge to their manhood. It makes sense, then, that many wrestlers would respond by emphasizing the masculine characteristics of the sport. They cannot really say "its heterosexual,"

can they? This would be an admission that their sport is indeed sexual, which as we saw wrestlers are at pains to combat. As I show in the following section, though, although wrestlers do not explicitly state that their sport is heterosexual, the presumption of heterosexuality is key to the way they think of and define their sport.

The Shield of Heterosexuality: Ethnomethodology and Constructing “Accounts” of Wrestling

Although wrestlers do not explicitly say that wrestling is heterosexual, they proceed as if it was. As I argue in this section, wrestlers at Central operate under a “shield of heterosexuality.” Following Garfinkel (1967), wrestlers at Central High have a common understanding of things that are never mentioned—namely the presumption of heterosexuality—that make their particular account of wrestling a reality. The presumption of heterosexuality, coupled with the on-going practical achievement of wrestling as a battle, works to accomplish this account of wrestling as nonsexual. Although usually taken for granted, this shared, yet unspoken reality is rendered visible to the extent that it is disrupted or breached by the possibility of gay boys (and girls) entering the context. The introduction of heterosexual girls and/or gay boys into wrestling threatens wrestlers’ collective definition of their situation. Hence their shared qualification of “no gay stuff” in the case of openly gay wrestlers. The introduction of girls into the space of wrestling is equally telling. As Chip mentioned, “it’s obvious what’s happened when there’s a girl wrestling.” Aside from the very explicit challenge to one’s masculinity by potentially losing to a girl,

wrestling a girl changes the nature of the interaction. As Brian explains, “I still think it’s a man’s sport, ‘cause, like, if you ever had to wrestle a girl, you can’t grab certain spots, so you can’t hit your laterals, ‘cause you’re grabbin’ her [in sexually explicit places]. It doesn’t make it fair.” For Brian, as it is for others, wresting a girl compromises the taken for granted account of wrestling—specifically that it is a masculine affair and that it is *not* sexual.

Why is this a problem when wrestling girls but not (presumably straight) boys? The answer lies within the parentheses. As it is in other male sports, heterosexuality is the presumed, default sexuality in local accounts of wrestling at Central High—unspoken, yet *doxic*. As Bourdieu (1977) notes, *doxa* represents a mode of thought so widely shared that it is beyond question or dispute. I argue that the presumption of heterosexuality undergirds local accounts of wrestling, particularly those at Central High that construct it as a masculine (nonsexual) battle. Heterosexuality operates as an organizing principle in this regard. Specifically, in this context it frames girls’ bodies in terms of heterosexual potential and presumably gay bodies in terms of heterosexual pollution. Both instances prove threatening to the local account of wrestling *as a (nonsexual) battle*. This is why girls, according to Brian, should not be able to wrestle and why gay boys can do so only if they do not make it sexual.

DISCUSSION

In accepting openly gay wrestlers to the team, wrestlers contest one of the central tenets of orthodox masculinity: homophobia. As I mentioned above, this

claim toward inclusive masculinity is not to deny that the high school wrestlers at Central were not orthodox in key ways. In fact, in terms of aggression, physicality, and devaluing femininity, they surely were. Rather, my findings are meant to suggest that along lines of accepting other sexualities and orientations, they signal movement toward greater inclusivity. This in itself is a step toward progressive politics in sport. Although others have documented the pervasiveness of homophobia in a high school wrestling context (Fair 2011), Central High provides an important counter-narrative. Most wrestlers said they would accept an openly gay wrestler to their team (just as long as they did not disrupt the taken for granted account of wrestling as nonsexual). Moreover, members of the team treated Reggie, whom they presumed to be gay, as they did their other teammates, with acceptance. To be sure, they at times referred to Reggie as “gay,” but they did not intend this term to be either hateful or hurtful. Nor was the term reserved exclusively for Reggie. Wrestlers at Central leveled the term “gay,” as well as “fag,” against a host of others both in and out of the wrestling room. And they used these terms in much of the same manner as other high school kids—as a discourse on masculinity that is not necessarily tied to homophobia (McCormack 2011; Pascoe 2007).

Taken together, my findings are consistent with recent studies that suggest a more inclusive version of masculinity in sporting contexts (Adams 2011; Anderson 2009; Anderson and McGuire 2010; Campbell et al. 2011). This is not to suggest that wrestling at Central High is not also the site of orthodox masculinity in important ways (e.g. being hypermasculine and devaluing femininity), but orthodox

masculinity is no longer as pervasive or hegemonic as it was in sporting contexts in the past, especially with respect to homophobia (Anderson 2009).

If there was hegemony in any regard at Central, it was with local accounts of wrestling as a hypermasculine craft that many times takes the form of a (nonsexual) battle. This was, of course, how wrestlers at Central discursively constructed their sport in response to the accusation that wrestling was gay. How they reacted to this threat is telling on many fronts. For one, the very fact that wrestlers had to defend their heterosexuality is significant in terms of the existing literature on sport and sexuality. As others have detailed (e.g. Griffin 1998 and Messner 2007), in male sports heterosexuality is usually taken for granted, even bolstered by one's participation. This is not the case for scholastic wrestling. To this end, the sport of wrestling is interesting in that it allows us to see how heterosexuality is defended and negotiated in an arena where heterosexuality is usually taken for granted. The nature of the defense is also telling, especially in terms of how intimately connected sexuality and gender are at the level of lived experience. Wrestlers defended against the accusation that wrestling is gay, neither by referencing homophobia nor by explicitly asserting their heterosexuality. Rather, they did so by emphasizing the masculine demands of the sport and reframing their physical contact in terms of combat and battle, both of which are coded as masculine. In this way, wrestlers attempt to reclaim their heterosexuality by emphasizing their masculinity (Schilt and Westbrook 2009).

Wrestlers at Central offer up what may seem like contradictory messages on their views of sexuality. On the one hand, they signal inclusive masculinity by their

acceptance of gay wrestlers to their team, as well as in the way they treated Reggie. On the other hand, though, they were highly defensive to accusations that their sport was gay. To this end, they are by definition a homohysteria culture in that they fear being socially perceived as gay (Anderson 2011b). These positions are not necessarily contradictory, as much as they are complicated. My findings here suggest that inclusive masculinity and homohysteria are not necessarily antithetical. Moreover, they can coexist in the same setting. One can be accepting of gay identities, even welcoming them to their setting, while at the same time taking offense to a personal accusation of homosexuality. This is what I argue is going on at Central High (and perhaps in other wrestling rooms across the country). Their individual identities are tied to the collective identity of wrestling. (This is especially the case in wrestling, where the emotional, mental, and physical demands of the sport act in ways that encompass one's sense of self.) They thus experience the threat of homosexuality leveled against wrestling as a threat against them personally. The wrestlers at Central High have progressed to the point of accepting homosexuality as an identity for others, yet they still experience accusations of homosexuality directed toward them in stigmatized ways.

Moreover, as I illustrated throughout, wrestlers largely felt that they had to defend themselves against accusations of homosexuality because they saw them as a challenge to their normative masculinity, not necessarily a direct threat to their heterosexuality. This also helps to explain their acceptance of openly gay wrestlers, as well as their defensiveness to accusations that wrestling is gay. On the one hand, the introduction of openly gay wrestlers into wrestling does not threaten the

masculine character of the sport, just as long as they subscribe to the local account of wrestling as a competitive battle. I think that this is why wrestlers at Central were both uniform and adamant about welcoming openly gay wrestlers only if they did not make wrestling itself sexual. On the other hand, wrestlers experienced the accusation of homosexuality as an attack on their normative masculinity at the collective level. In this way, the accusation of homosexuality pollutes their heteromascularity in a way that accepting openly gay wrestlers does not.

CONCLUSION

In sum, this research provides an important contribution to the literature on gender and sexuality in sport. For one, it maps the understandings of gender and sexuality in a sporting context that is relatively overlooked. As I have shown throughout, high school wrestlers at Central seem to be aligned with the cultural shift toward inclusive masculinity in key ways, especially in their views on homosexuality. Yet, their understandings on masculinity and sexuality are complicated. Although members of the Central High wrestling team expressed acceptance of gay wrestlers, they acted in heteronormative ways when they defended their sport against accusations that it was homoerotic. In taking offense to the accusation that wrestling is gay, wrestlers both here and elsewhere devalue homosexuality at the same time that they reproduce heterosexuality as natural and taken for granted. To this end, my research suggests that it is important to balance the claims of growing acceptance of non-normative sexualities in sport against the ways that heteronormativity manifests itself in varied ways. In fact, attention to the

ways in which heterosexuality is normalized *without reference to homophobia* may become increasingly important as explicit bouts of homophobia become outmoded and frowned upon by members of different cultural worlds and society writ large.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, I provided an ethnographic account of the culture and discipline of high school wrestling at Central High. In important ways, I used high school wrestling as a site to explore key sociological themes, such as the meaning of hard work, masculinity, and the social construction of bodies. At times, I provided detailed accounts of the corporeal demands and discipline required of wrestling bodies to give the reader a sense of the draconian circumstances high school wrestlers immerse themselves in on a daily basis. Yet, my intention for presenting the bodily demands of wrestling was about much more than discipline or bodies. From the early stages of my thinking about this project, I wanted to explore the cultural worlds of wrestlers, especially in terms of local understandings of masculinity and at times sexuality. How for instance did they organize their worlds in terms of masculinity? In what ways did they think of themselves as masculine, and to what ends did they mobilize a masculine identity to make distinctions with others and solve social problems? Accordingly, I analyzed how the wrestlers at Central constructed the physical demands of their sport as masculine; how they socially constructed their bodies as obstacles to be overcome; and how they thought and talked about homosexuality. By asking these questions I was able to peer into the shared cultural schemas among wrestlers at Central High. Taken together, these shared cultural schemas created a shared reality that helped wrestlers at Central High to organize their social worlds, as well as to have them think of themselves as a distinctive group.

As I showed in the preceding chapters, discourses of masculinity informed wrestlers social worlds. Moreover, they used masculinity as a cultural resource—what Hochschild (1989) describes as a gender strategy—to manage dilemmas both common and unique to the general student population. That is, wrestlers often mobilized what they locally defined as the masculine nature of their sport to negotiate their social marginality on campus and combat outsider accusations that “wrestling is gay.”

The findings in my dissertation illustrate, among other things, that masculinity is best thought of as a meaning system, something that organizes how we experience ourselves and others’ bodies, not necessarily something that emanates exclusively from male bodies (Halberstam 1998; Pascoe 2007). Moreover, as I hope to show in this concluding chapter, masculinity is something wrestlers mobilized in context, for instance, to draw distinctions with others, to defend against accusations of homosexuality, as well as to combat their marginality in a school where they are often denied social status.

Combatting Social Marginality and the Local Meaning of Hard Work

My research extends knowledge of the ways that social groups make sense of and negotiate their perceived marginality. As I showed in Chapter 4, wrestlers at Central were well aware of their marginality in relation to others on campus, especially the state championship basketball team. Rather than deny their marginality, the wrestlers and coaches in my project thought about it differently. They made sense of their marginality by and large through the cultural schema of

hard work. As was evident throughout this dissertation, hard work was central to the cultural worlds and identities of the wrestlers at Central. Hard work, then, was not only a physical demand, but also as a symbolic resource—something wrestlers used to structure their social worlds, especially in terms of membership, identity, and distinction with others. In fact, as a symbolic boundary, hard work solved problems for wrestlers at Central. It, for one, helped them to make sense of their participation in a sport that gives little return in the way of status, prestige, or popularity. The demanding nature of wrestling, for instance, helped Jose to make sense of the attrition rates that the team experienced almost every year at Central High. On several occasions, Jose argued that society was becoming “soft” and kids nowadays could not handle the rigors of wrestling. This of course was the primary reason Jose gave for explaining why most students at the school “ran away from the wrestling room.”

Although denied the higher status afforded most male athletes, wrestlers at Central carve out a sense of honor and distinction on the basis of their marginality. They draw on the distinctive and demanding nature of their craft to think of themselves as different kinds of people—those who are willing to endure what most others will not. To this end, wrestlers at Central High resolved their issues with marginality, in part, by creating alternative identities and communities on the basis of hard work and sacrifice. As I showed in Chapter 4, wrestlers think of hard work as a virtue, a moral principle upon which they construct their identities and draw distinctions with others. Morality, as Espiritu (2001), Lamont (1992; 2000), and Wilkins (2008) illustrate, is one of the sites that marginal groups can construct

themselves as superior to groups that hold more power and prestige. Lamont (1992), for instance, illustrates this point as she describes how working class men mobilize moral standards as alternatives to economic definitions of success to position themselves above those from the higher ranks of society.

I find that this same principle is at work in wrestling. To combat their marginality, wrestlers often drew on their collective sacrifice and work ethic as badges of distinction, which Wilkins (2008) describes as “alternative criteria for worthiness at which they can be successful” (p. 115). Hard work and discipline, then, act as the alternative criteria through which wrestlers can position themselves above the more popular, yet (according to the wrestlers) “softer” basketball team, for instance. It is of little surprise then that the hard/soft comparison is the most common distinction wrestlers make with basketball players. On other fronts, such as popularity, social status and prestige, they almost always lose.

Masculinities, Bodies, and Sport

I also contribute to research and theorizing on masculinities, especially in the context of bodies and sport. In general, my research looks to how masculinity, as a meaning system and organizing structure, intersects with wrestlers’ discourse on hard work, bodies, and sexuality. As I evidenced throughout, wrestlers at Central High thought of hard work as intimately tied to masculinity. For instance they drew on their sport’s physicality and contact to socially construct wrestling as masculine. In this way, they are like other athletes who emphasize the combat and physicality of their sport to construct masculine identities (Gee 2009; Kreager 2007), as well as

to draw distinctions with others. As I showed in Chapter 4, wrestlers draw stark boundaries with basketball players, in part, to construct their sport as “hard” and more masculine, and, in part, to combat their marginality in relation to the largely popular basketball team.

Consistent with the work of Connell (1995) and others (Pascoe 2007; Schippers 2007), then, my dissertation illustrates the relational character of gender. As Connell (1995) argued, masculinity is best conceptualized as *masculinity-in-relation*. My project illuminates this understanding, and moreover shows how this process works both between groups and within a single group. That is, I not only show how wrestlers socially construct themselves *as masculine* by drawing sharp distinctions with so-called “softer” sports (e.g. basketball), but how they mobilized the same hard/soft binary to distinguish between more and less masculine men *within* the wrestling room. As I showed throughout, wrestlers and coaches at Central stratified wrestlers along a continuum of hard work, valorizing those who embodied the ideal of hard work and marginalizing those who did not. The all too common “pie discourse” encapsulates this hard/soft theme.

The ways in which wrestlers at Central socially construct masculinity does not end with emphasizing the hard work demanded by their sport. In addition to constructing masculinity at the collective level by drawing distinctions with other sports, and at the individual level by drawing distinctions among members of the team, wrestlers at Central High also construct their sense of masculine self against the challenge of their own bodies. As I illustrated in Chapter 5, wrestlers socially construct their bodies as objects to be overcome. And this understanding sets the

cultural ground for what locally is known as a masculine challenge—a test for wrestlers to overcome their bodies’ socially constructed comfort zones in terms of fatigue, pain, and discipline. Others of course have described how sporting fields and contexts are figurative “proving grounds” (e.g. Muir and Seitz 2004) of manhood, but as I have shown here so too are sporting bodies. Wrestlers have in front of them everyday, then, a challenge, from which they can earn masculine capital and status in the eyes of others immersed in the culture and practice of scholastic wrestling.

My research on bodies also extends knowledge of the ways that athletes socially construct, experience, and manage pain. As social scientists have argued, pain is more than sensation; it is a cultural and social phenomenon as well (Bendelow and Williams 1995; Howe 2004; Richardson 2011). The meaning of pain, as I illuminated, changes from context to context, as does how groups experience pain. Contrary to other scholars who lament the debilitating role that pain plays in sport (e.g. Messner 1990; Curry 1993; Wainwright et al. 2003), my research highlights the ways that wrestlers experience overcoming pain as cathartic and transformative. Coaches and other wrestlers socially construct pain as *positive*, something wrestlers should seek out and overcome on a daily basis. Moreover, the feeling of pain holds out the promise of a better self. And it is in this very way that high school wrestling—specifically its physical demands coupled with its discourse of *overcoming* one’s body—operates as a technology of the self, that is, a way for wrestlers to work upon themselves to transform themselves. Wrestlers bodies are socially constructed as proving grounds at the same time that they are avenues to transform one’s self.

Masculinity, Sexuality and Sport

My research on high school wrestling challenges common ideas in sociology of sport. Whereas others have noted how heterosexuality is often taken for granted and many times bolstered in men's sports (Griffin 1998; Messner 2007), wrestling provides a key point of contrast. As I illustrated in Chapter 6, outsiders often ridicule high school wrestlers at Central for participating in a sport constructed as "gay." The physicality and contact that is so fundamental to the sport of wrestling, and which is so central to wrestlers' masculine identities, is also the object of heterosexist jeers. A common theme in sociology of sport is that participation in organized male sports should bolster the heterosexual masculinity of the athletes. Yet I find that wrestlers are forced to contend with the notion that their sport is "gay." Therefore, high school wrestlers are forced to defend what most other male athletes take for granted—presumed heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity.

In addition I find that wrestlers many times have to perform and negotiate normative gender identities in contested terrains. Most research in this area centers on how female athletes manage threats to gender identity because of participation in the presumed masculine arena of sport (e.g. Ezzell 2009). The notable exception within the realm of men's sport is male cheerleading (Anderson 2005; Davis 1990; Grindstaff and West 2006). Both Anderson (2005) and Grindstaff and West (2006), for instance, detail how male cheerleaders face threats to their heterosexual masculinity for their participation in a feminized terrain.

Wrestlers, I argue, face similar, albeit different threats to their heterosexual masculinity for their participation in a *homoerotized* terrain. Unlike male cheerleaders though, the wrestlers in my study did not respond by asserting their heterosexuality. As I showed in Chapter 6, they responded to the accusation that “wrestling is gay” by emphasizing masculine aspects of their sport. In this way, they mobilize traditionally masculine themes to combat the accusation of homosexuality.

The nature of their defense, particularly that they responded by asserting their masculinity rather than heterosexuality, illuminates how intimately connected gender and sexuality are for high school wrestlers. Wrestlers also showcased this intimate connection by equating the initial accusation of homosexuality as a threat to their masculinity. Despite the collective sense of masculinity wrestlers had of themselves in terms of toughness and physicality, as well as the validation they often received from others on these very characteristics, the accusation of homosexuality still polluted their heterosexual, masculine identities. In addition to highlighting how many people closely link gender and sexuality, their reaction also shows the salience of sexuality, not only as an organizing principle, but as perhaps *the* organizing principle of contemporary constructions of masculinity.

I also find evidence to support the idea that sporting contexts are increasingly becoming the site of what Anderson (2009) describes as *inclusive masculinity*, especially in terms of accepting same-sex sexuality. Inclusive masculinity theory suggests that as cultural homophobia diminishes, so too does the rigid boundaries that traditionally policed the boundaries of normative masculinity. Accordingly, inclusive masculinity is marked by diminishing levels of homophobia

and greater latitude for men to behave in ways previously stigmatized as feminine. Consistent with the work of Anderson and his colleagues, my findings suggest that wrestlers at Central High represent an important point on the cultural shift toward inclusive masculinity, especially in their views on homosexuality. Granted, they reproduced orthodox versions of masculinity by devaluing femininity and showcasing hypermasculine traits such as physicality and aggression. Yet, in suggesting that they would welcome openly gay wrestlers to their team (just as long as they did not make it sexual), and by accepting a presumably gay wrestler just as they did others, wrestlers at Central contest one of the central elements of orthodox masculinity: homophobia. To this end, they present a counter-narrative to recent studies on scholastic wrestling, which suggest high school wrestling to be a homophobic arena (Baker and Hotek 2011; Fair 2011).

LIMITATIONS

Generalizability and its Qualitative Others

Qualitative research has been criticized by positivist strands of social science for its lack of generalizability—that is, the ability to which findings from a given study are generalizable to a wider population. At no point did I embark on a quest to reach this definition of generalizability in this project. Throughout this dissertation, hopefully I was clear that the themes and topics I wrote about were constructed from my time at Central High and do not represent all high school wrestling contexts. As I stated at the outset, my intent was local knowledge and meaning.

Although my findings cannot be applied to the general population of high school wrestlers, they may be useful in understanding how this specific context differs from other high school wrestling contexts and sporting arenas more generally. In this way, my findings may have transferability (Guba and Lincoln 1985), in that they can be used beyond the bounds of this project to make sense of other contexts. As an ethnographer then my aim was for perspicacity—that is “the capacity to produce applicable insights” (Stewart 1998:47). Moreover, my research may prove to have “analytic generalization,” which suggests that theories and themes have wider applicability than does the actual case studied (Yin 2003).

Concerns of Positionality

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, my positionality influenced the manner in which I approached this project, as well as the questions I asked throughout. No research is impartial, nor is it conducted in a vacuum. Feminist scholars have alerted us to the situatedness of presumably “objective” social science (Collins 2000; Harding 1991; Smith 1990). As academics and persons with unique biographical history, we bring with us a number of perspectives that are insightful in key ways, although limiting in others. From the outset of this dissertation, I had to constantly challenge myself to approach the sport of wrestling as an outsider would, and not impose my past experiences and categories on others’ experiences. To be sure, my familiarity with the sport of wrestling may have caused me to overlook key aspects of this context. I was reflexive of this tendency from the beginning of this project, though, and I attempted to balance my familiarity of the field with others’ insights and questions.

For example, many of the themes I discussed that focused on gender and sexuality were the result of ongoing dialogue with faculty members, graduate students, and relevant literature that challenged me to identify and analyze what previously was invisible and/or taken for granted.

Although I aimed to be reflexive throughout this research project, this dissertation is not without its limitations. Considering the great deal of familiarity and history I had with the sport of wrestling, there are undoubtedly themes that I overlooked—themes that others might have deemed interesting and worthy of analysis. Throughout this dissertation, I was interested in how high school wrestlers made sense of themselves in terms of gender and at times sexuality. In highlighting these aspects of their identity, I may have overlooked other salient components of their cultural worlds. If I would have foregrounded either race or class, for instance, the thematic content of this dissertation would have been quite different. Further, if I would have been able to locate and interview those individuals that quit the team throughout the course of the season, I may have encountered themes that contradicted some of the core tenets of this dissertation. In important ways, this group of individuals could provide an important counter-narrative to the findings I presented here, namely with respect to the shared meanings that wrestlers held about their work ethic, masculinity, and bodies.

Another limitation of this dissertation lies in the manner that I potentially affected how wrestlers thought and talked about sexuality. My position of relative power, coupled with my open promotion of GLBTQ rights, quite possibly influenced how others talked about homosexuality and reacted to my pointed questions on the

subject. To this end, the high school wrestlers in this dissertation may have emphasized their support for accepting openly gay wrestlers in a much more progressive fashion than if I held contrary views on the issue. Moreover, my previous experiences with the use of terms such as “gay” and “fag” may have biased my interpretation of those same words in this distinct context. As McCormack (2011) reminds us, such words take on quite different meanings depending on the context of their usage.

Further, my position of relative authority as PhD student, accomplished wrestler, and assistant coach—to the extent that it reinforced hierarchical relations in the field—initially compromised my ability to gain access to their lifeworlds. Although many came to trust me a great deal, others may have restricted me access to their lifeworlds because of my initial position as an outsider. Moreover, my role as assistant coach aligned me with the coaching staff in important ways and may have erected a barrier between myself and wrestlers on the team. Undoubtedly, there are certain issues that teammates keep from coaches’ purview. To the extent that I was seen as a member of the coaching staff and not an equal, I inevitably lost perhaps important perspectives on the themes I presented in this dissertation.

I shared some cultural and socioeconomic aspects with the wrestlers at Central. I had grown up in a diverse working-class neighborhood, and indeed many of my close friends growing up looked similar to members of Central’s wrestling team. Although I shared these things in common with the wrestlers at Central, I differed in key ways—namely in terms of race and class. While I was at graduate school on a predominantly white campus, wrestlers at Central walked the halls of a

racially and socioeconomically diverse school in the heart of the inner-city. When I went home to my secure, quiet apartment at night, others lived in circumstances not so secure or quiet. Some, for instance Reggie and Sway, lived couch to couch and bed to bed on any given night throughout the week. And although I was a relatively poor graduate student living paycheck to paycheck, many at Central first associated me with the nearby university where I was currently a graduate student—a place many thought of as where the rich (white) kids went to school. Such perceived class differences, although they eroded a bit as members became familiar with me, could have influenced my access to their cultural worlds. As Reay (2004) notes, class is a salient component of difference that affects daily interactions; "influencing to whom we talk and shaping what we say and how we say it" (p. 145). Reay's insight holds true in the context of research, as perceived class differences may have limited my access to certain themes, as well as my interpretation of members discourse and behavior in both the wrestling room and the interview context.

The fact that I emphasized commonalities, rather than differences, between members and myself may have caused me to overlook the saliency of race in this context. I was aware of race and ethnicity as variables in the field, especially as a key point of distinction between Central's wrestling team and other teams throughout the state, but I may have overlooked the way race affected the interview process. As it is for others, my racial privilege may have led me to ignore difference. "Being blinded by privilege," according to Hesse-Biber and Yaiser (2004:103), "is not uncommon and is one of the factors that can lead to research that ignores difference." My whiteness may have precluded participants from responding in

certain ways, as well as from emphasizing certain themes, topics, and issues.

Moreover, my position as a relatively privileged white man allowed me to choose what I shared in common with members and overlook key differences. And my attempt to deemphasize our differences and focus on what we had in common may have caused me to overlook key differences in topics, themes, and interpretation.

Lastly, the well-known "race-of-interviewer" effect (Davis 1997, see also Davis and Silver 2003), which suggests that African-Americans will give significantly different answers to white researchers than they would to African-Americans, may have affected my research process. I cannot be sure of the particular manner in which I affected the interview process, but the fact that many of the members that I interviewed and came to know may have responded differently to other interviewers is indeed a possibility. As Davis and Silver (2003) conclude, to the extent that minority groups regard their responses to questions as tests, they may experience anxiety, which in turn affects the content and manner in which they respond.

Standpoint epistemology insists that all knowledge is socially situated, hence the importance to detail the context of discovery and place researcher assumptions on the table for dissection. As McCorkel and Myers (2003) suggests, "in examining the context of discovery, the researcher identifies how her motivations and assumptions give rise to a problematic to be studied" (p. 228). In this section, I have hoped to bring a bit of clarity to the context of discover and my positionality as a researcher. I was cognizant of the tensions I discussed above throughout my

project, and strived for reflexivity in the research process. I also worked hard to establish myself on equal ground with those persons I shared the wrestling room with everyday. I made a conscious effort to downplay my past accomplishments and position myself as someone that was there to serve them as a coach and much more. For instance, I was involved with many of the kids' lives outside of the wrestling room, showcasing my commitment to them as individuals in their own right, not simply as high school wrestlers or research subjects.

Future Research and Questions

Of course, no study is exhaustive, and there are several issues that I explored that warrant more attention. One important topic for future research is investigating the *shield of heterosexuality* that I argue made possible the meaning of wrestling as a nonsexual battle. How would wrestlers, for instance, react to lesbian wrestlers? If they were concerned with how openly gay boys and presumably straight girls would potentially make wrestling sexual, then what would lesbian girls do to the space of wrestling? Would wrestlers treat them as they would a presumably straight boy, or, would gendered assumptions about male superiority organize their thoughts on this matter?

Moreover, women's wrestling, which in recent years has gained notoriety and popularity, could provide an important point of contrast for exploring the scope of the shield of heterosexuality. Do women and girl wrestlers make the kind of qualifications that the boys in my study did, regarding the presumed heterosexuality of their sport? Moreover, what does participation in female wrestling leagues do for

participants' gender and sexual identity? Are they homoeroticized? Do others question their femininity? These questions of course require an in-depth analysis, as the one I conducted here. Such analyses, because of its level of immersion and depth, can gain access to cultural schemas and meaning systems that outsiders might very well overlook or mischaracterize.

Similar to most studies, I end my research with several new questions. First, in what ways do other social groups mobilize gender to make sense of and/or combat their cultural marginality? As I showcased here, wrestlers drew on their collective sense of masculinity to frame their marginality in positive ways. For instance they reframed their social marginality on masculine grounds and argued that their lack of numbers was because of the demanding nature of their sport. In this way, they drew on the physical demands of wrestling to think of themselves as different types of people. The question, then, is how do others employ similar social processes to reframe their marginality in ways that promote a sense of self-worth and distinction?

The findings I presented in Chapter 5 also raise questions for the sociology of bodies. From the standpoint of social theory, my research shows how bodies are not simply sites of discipline; they are also cultural products fashioned through discourse and language. To this end, bodies are much more than biology. Future research hopefully will continue to look to the numerous ways groups socially construct bodies in diverse ways, and moreover what kind of implications result from different constructions. As I showed here, by socially constructing the body as both separate from the mind and something to be overcome, wrestlers and coaches

set the cultural stage to evaluate individuals on their ability to control their bodies, particularly their socially constructed limits in terms of pain in fatigue.

Lastly, Chapter 6 forces scholars to rethink the presumption of heterosexuality in men's sports. Although for many boys and men, participation in organized competitive sports bolsters heterosexual masculinity, this is not always the case. Organized competitive sport is not a homogeneous space; rather it is stratified and hierarchical. Core sports, such as American football, baseball, and basketball, garner more masculine and heterosexual capital than peripheral ones, such as wrestling and male cheerleading. This theoretical insight, coupled with threat that wrestlers experienced, challenges us to see what, if any, other sports face similar challenges. Moreover, if others ridicule wrestlers because they are close contact with other men, do athletes in other contact sports such as judo or Mixed Martial Arts experience similar challenges?

One Final Note on Carryover

In addition to showing how wrestlers at Central High thought about and performed masculinity in a number of contexts, I hoped to have made clear another point in this dissertation. The dominant narratives in place at Central, whether they were about hard work or overcoming one's body, were about much more than actually wrestling. This was true from the perspective of the coaches at Central, as well as the wrestlers. Both understood their craft and its distinctive demands as a metaphor for life outside the wrestling room. To recall, Coach Jose often talked about how life outside the wrestling room was tough, violence, and certainly

unforgiving. This narrative resonated with the wrestlers at Central, many of whom grew up in rough parts of town, came from broken homes, and had the deck stacked against them in more ways than one. Moreover, this narrative helped Jose to make sense of his place as Head Wrestling Coach at Central High. For all his work both in and out of season, Jose garnered little fame. Yet, he persevered because he believed in the kids at Central. Moreover, he believed in the ideology that hard work, toughness, and perseverance—all things he sought to teach through wrestling—could lead one to overcome not only their bodies in the wrestling room but their social position in life.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Athlete Interview Schedule:

(1) Background info

- (a) Parent's education, occupation
- (b) Do you play any other sports?

(2) The process of becoming a wrestler:

- (a) At what age did you begin wrestling?
- (b) How did you come to be a wrestler? (Friends, family, etc.)
- (c) What were your initial impressions of the sport of wrestling?
 - (i) Have these impressions changed over time?
- (d) What was your biggest surprise upon becoming a wrestler?
- (e) What do you like most about wrestling?
- (f) What do you like least about wrestling?
- (g) What does it take – mentally, physically, emotionally, etc. – to be a successful wrestler?
- (h) What do you have to sacrifice as a wrestler?
- (i) What are the differences between the very best and the more marginal, mediocre wrestlers?
- (j) *When learning different wrestling techniques, what is the best way to learn them?*
- (k) *What moves, holds, or positions are the most fundamental to becoming a successful wrestler*
- (l) *How do you know when you have an opponent beat?*
- (i) *What signs do you look in this process?*

(3) The body and the mind:

- (a) How would you describe your relationship with your body?

- (i) Does this differ at different times throughout the season?
- (b) How do you come to know your body's limits, with regard to fatigue, exhaustion, etc.?
- (i) How do you push yourself beyond those limits?
- (c) What is the relationship between the mind and the body?
- (d) Have you had any injuries due to practicing wrestling throughout your career?
 - (i) Detailed account of when, where, how, and what of injuries, if any.
- (e) What role does pain play in the everyday practice of wrestling?
- (f) How often would you describe your body at full capacity and totally healthy during a wrestling season?
- (g) Talk to me a little about your history with cutting weight?
 - (i) When did you start cutting weight?
 - (ii) How much weight to you cut?

(4) The meaning of wrestling:

- (a) If you can think back this year, what were some of high and low points of the season?
- (b) How often do you think about wrestling: in season, out of season?
- (c) Why do you wrestle?
 - (i) Specifically, why do you stay with wrestling when you have little success?
- (d) What would your life be like without wrestling?
- (e) How would you describe wrestling to someone with little knowledge of the sport?
- (f) Are there certain things you learn in wrestling that help you in other aspects of your life?
- (g) How do you define success in wrestling?
- (h) What does being a champion mean to you?

- (i) Is it just winning and losing?
- (i) Who is deserving of success in wrestling?
- (j) What do you think about people that have quit the team?
- (k) What does wrestling mean to you?
- (l) How do you think others at Central think of wrestling?
- (i) If gay, then ask: Does it bother you that others think of wrestling as gay?

(5) Distinction: the construction of masculinity/femininity in and out of the wrestling room

- (a) What characteristics are most prevalent in the more dominant wrestlers?
- (b) How do you differentiate yourself from others in the wrestling room?
- (c) How do wrestlers in general differentiate themselves from others in the wrestling room?
- (d) What is the ideal wrestler?
 - (i) What does she or he look like?
 - (ii) What type of characteristics does she or he embody?
- (e) What are the differences between wrestlers and other athletes?
 - (i) Specifically, basketball?
- (f) Explain to me what a “pie” is?
 - (i) What are some other words for “pie?”
 - (ii) What sort of things will get you labeled a “pie?”
- (g) Explain to me what “drama” is in the wrestling room?
 - (i) Examples of “drama” from this season?
 - (ii) Who is dramatic?

(6) Female-male interactions within the context of the wrestling room

- (a) What did you think about having a girl on our team for a short while?

- (b) (Men): Would you feel comfortable wrestling a women?
- (i) How would you feel if you lost to a girl?
- (c) (Women): Would you feel comfortable wrestling a man?
- (d) Do you think females should be able to wrestle males in high school tournaments (which historically have been exclusive to males)?
- (e) What do you think about girls wrestling in general?
- (f) Would you let your daughter wrestle?

(7) The role of sexuality in the performance of gender

- (a) How would you react to an openly gay wrestler?
- (b) Do you think there are currently gay wrestlers in the sport?
 - (i) Further thoughts on this?
- (c) What do you say in response to the popular claim that wrestling is a homoerotic sport?

(8) Other:

- (a) What did you think when Calvin and Brian got into a fight?
- (b) Talk a little about Coach Jose.
 - (i) What do you think of him?
 - (ii) What qualities does he have that you look up to?
- (c) What do you think of our team prayers?
 - (i) What do you specifically get out of them?

(9) Team solidarity

- (a) Do you value a team that thinks of itself as together, united, etc.?
- (b) How would you describe the relations among members of the team?
- (c) What makes for a strong bond among members of your team?
- (d) Can you describe what traits a model teammate possesses?

- (e) In what ways do you personally attempt to be a good teammate?
- (f) Being that wrestling is an individual sport, how is it also a team sport?

Coaches Interview Schedule:

(1) Background info

- (a) Parent's education, occupation
- (b) Do you play any other sports?

(2) The process of becoming a wrestler:

- (a) At what age did you begin wrestling?
- (b) How did you come to be a wrestler? (Friends, family, etc.)
- (c) What were your initial impressions of the sport of wrestling?
 - (i) Have these impressions changed over time?
- (d) What was your biggest surprise upon becoming a wrestler?
- (e) What do you like most about wrestling?
- (f) What do you like least about wrestling?
 - (i) What was the toughest part of wrestling for you?
- (g) What does it take – mentally, physically, emotionally, etc. – to be a successful wrestler?
- (h) What do you have to sacrifice as a wrestler?
 - (i) What are the differences between the very best and the more marginal, mediocre wrestlers?
 - (j) Carryover from wrestling?
 - (k) *When learning different wrestling techniques, what is the best way to learn them?*
 - (l) *What moves, holds, or positions are the most fundamental to becoming a successful wrestler*

(m) How do you know when you have an opponent beat?

(i) What signs do you look in this process?

(3) The body and the mind:

(a) What is the relationship between the mind and the body?

(b) Have you had any injuries due to practicing wrestling throughout your career?

(i) Detailed account of when, where, how, and what of injuries, if any.

(c) What role does pain play in the everyday practice of wrestling?

(d) How often do you think your wrestlers' bodies are at full capacity and totally healthy during a wrestling season?

(e) Talk to me a little about your history with cutting weight?

(i) When did you start cutting weight?

(ii) How much weight to you cut?

(4) The meaning of wrestling:

(a) If you can think back this year, what were some of high and low points of the season?

(b) How often do you think about wrestling: in season, out of season?

(c) Take me through a normal day during wrestling season.

(d) To Jose: why no pop?

(e) Why do you wrestle?

(i) Specifically, why do you stay with wrestling when you have little success?

(f) What would your life be like without wrestling?

(g) How would you describe wrestling to someone with little knowledge of the sport?

(i) Scholastic wrestling vs. WWE

(h) Are there certain things you learn in wrestling that help you in other aspects of your life?

- (i) How do you define success in wrestling?
- (j) What does being a champion mean to you?
- (i) Is it just winning and losing?
- (k) Who is deserving of success in wrestling?
- (l) What do you think about people that have quit the team?
- (m) What does wrestling mean to you?
- (n) How do you think others at Central think of wrestling?
- (i) If gay, then ask: Does it bother you that others think of wrestling as gay?

(5) Distinction: the construction of masculinity/femininity in and out of the wrestling room

- (a) What characteristics are most prevalent in the more dominant wrestlers?
- (b) How do wrestlers differentiate themselves from others in the wrestling room?
- (c) What is the ideal wrestler?
 - (i) What does she or he look like?
 - (ii) What type of characteristics does she or he embody?
- (d) What does it mean for someone to “break” in wrestling?
- (e) Draw a line of distinction along one principle.
- (f) What are the differences between wrestlers and other athletes?
 - (i) Specifically, basketball?
- (g) Explain to me what a “pie” is?
 - (i) What are some other words for “pie?”
 - (ii) What sort of things will get you labeled a “pie?”
- (h) Explain to me what “drama” is in the wrestling room?
 - (i) Examples of “drama” from this season?
 - (ii) Who is dramatic?

(6) Female-male interactions within the context of the wrestling room

- (a) What did you think about having a girl on our team for a short while?
- (b) (Men): Would you feel comfortable wrestling a women?
- (c) Do you think females should be able to wrestle males in high school tournaments (which historically have been exclusive to males)?
- (d) What do you think about girls wrestling in general?
- (e) Would you let your daughter wrestle?

(7) The role of sexuality in the performance of gender

- (a) How would you react to an openly gay wrestler?
- (b) Do you think there are currently gay wrestlers in the sport?
 - (i) Further thoughts on this?
- (c) Does it bother you that some see wrestling as a homoerotic sport?

(8) Other:

- (a) What did you think when Calvin and Brian got into a fight?
- (b) Talk a little about Coach Jose.
 - (i) What do you think of him?
 - (ii) What qualities does he have that you look up to?
- (c) What do you think of our team prayers?
 - (i) What do you specifically get out of them?

(9) Team solidarity

- (a) Do you value a team that thinks of itself as together, united, etc.?
- (b) How would you describe the relations among members of the team?
- (c) What makes for a strong bond among members of your team?
- (d) Can you describe what traits a model teammate possesses?

- (e) In what ways do you personally attempt to be a good teammate?
- (f) Being that wrestling is an individual sport, how is it also a team sport?

APPENDIX B: WRESTLING-SPECIFIC EATING DISORDERS

As I have illustrated throughout, wrestlers are preoccupied with their weight. As a group they are under significant pressure to take their bodies as objects of attention. In this way, they actually share a good deal in common with many women of the Western world, who for various reasons adhere to body ideals at a considerably greater rate than men. As scholars have detailed, many women are overwhelmingly slaves to the demands of ideal body types, as well as the victims of eating disorders (Bordo 2003; Hesse-Biber 2007). This is especially the case when considering anorexics, 90% of which are women (Bordo 2003). Wrestlers share with these women an attention to their bodies, but they are different in important ways. Unlike anorectics, wrestlers have not internalized an unattainable ideal of thinness that serves as a benchmark for their body projects. A wrestler's goal is to make weight; most of them could care less about how they look. In this way, they have an instrumental relationship to their bodies (Bourdieu 1984). They make a designated weight because they have to—the way kids have to make their bed before they leave their house. The physical scale, rather than a cultural ideal, is the final arbiter, and it leaves no room for negotiation. You either make weight or you do not. The scale is there to police their bodies, yet when the scale loses its jurisdiction, as it does immediately after weigh-ins and when season is over, the wrestlers revolt and eat whatever they like. This is especially the case for those individuals that cut a lot of weight during the season. Because they come to covet that which they have denied themselves for some time, weight-cutters eat for the sake of eating—because they can. As it has for so many in the Western world, for

wrestlers food becomes much more than simply about nutrition. It is a cultural obsession.

Following Bordo (2003), one could argue that the eating disorders unique to wrestlers at Central are “characteristic expressions” of its local culture. Accomplishing control over one’s body is a desirable feeling, yet one that is always dependent upon continued restraint and pushing. In this way, its performative nature can become obsessive. Wrestling asks for excess in training yet restraint in diet. Many times this culture of excess spills over into diet, hence the elective affinity wrestling has with bulimia and/or excessive bouts of eating, followed by equally excessive bouts of training. According to Bordo (2003:201), bulimia “expresses the extreme development of the hunger for unrestrained consumption existing in unstable tension alongside the requirement that we sober up... get back in firm control.” Wrestlers experience a similar tension between extreme hunger for unchecked consumption and the mandate to make weight at week’s end. What matters most for wrestlers, then, is not necessarily control via continued restraint, but rather that control enter back into the equation and overcome the body (by making weight), no matter the means.

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Name	Year in School	Ethnicity	Class
Big Joe	Senior	Black	Lower
Brandon	Sophomore	Black/Hispanic	Lower
Brian	Junior	White	Working
Calvin	Sophomore	Black	Working
Chip	Coach	White	Working
Chris	Freshman	White	Middle
Dante	Sophomore	Black	Lower
Darrion	Post-grad	Black	Lower
David	Post-grad	White	Lower
Edan	Senior	White	Middle
Elijah	Post-grad	Black	Lower
Ezekial	Freshman	Black	Working
Jake	Sophomore	Black	Lower
Lonzo	Freshman	Black/Hispanic	Working
Jordan	Sophomore	Black	Lower
Jose	Coach	Hispanic	Working
Kelly	Freshman	White	Middle
Lil' Bo	Freshman	Hispanic	Working
Lil' Joe	Freshman	Hispanic	Working
Reggie	Senior	Black	Lower
Sway	Senior	Black	Lower

APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL AND CONSENT FORMS

University of Colorado at Boulder
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research
 Office of Research Integrity
 Human Research Committee
 FWA00003492

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL: INITIAL

INVESTIGATOR: Bryan Snyder	PROTOCOL NUMBER: 1108.14	ADDRESS:
PROTOCOL TITLE: Exploring Amateur Wrestling: Culture, Gender, and Bodies		
APPROVAL DATE: 12/04/08	EXPIRATION DATE: 12/03/09	REVIEW CYCLE (months): 12
RISK LEVEL: Minimal	REVIEW TYPE: Expedited	

The Human Research Committee (HRC) in accordance with Federal Regulations at 45 CFR 46 has approved this protocol. Copies of the HRC approved consent forms have been included with this notification. Copies of the HRC approved consent forms must be used when documenting consent of human subjects for participation in this protocol.

Regulations require that this protocol be renewed prior to the above expiration date. If this fails to occur, the HRC is required to close your protocol. The HRC will provide a reminder prior to the expiration date, but it is your responsibility to ensure that your request for renewal is received in sufficient time to be reviewed prior to the expiration date.

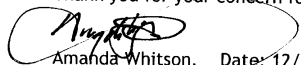
Changes to your protocol must be submitted to the HRC for review and approval prior to their implementation. This includes changes to the consent form, principal investigator, protocol, etc.

You are required to report any unexpected problems or serious adverse events, either physical or mental, to the HRC that occur during the course of your research. UPs must be reported within 5 days and SAEs must be reported within 24 hours. For more information and the necessary forms, see <http://www.colorado.edu/GraduateSchool/HRC/forms.html>.

Our Assurance with the federal government specifies that all signed consent documents be retained for at least 3 years past completion of the research activity.

Please feel free to contact me at or by email at amanda.whitson@colorado.edu if you have any questions about this approval or about HRC procedures.

Thank you for your concern for human subjects.



Amanda Whitson, Date: 12/05/08

Enclosure



University of Colorado at Boulder
Department of Sociology
 Ketchum 219
 327 UCB
 Boulder, Colorado 80309-0327
 (303) 492-6410

Exploring Amateur Wrestling: Culture, Gender, and Bodies

Principal Investigator: Bryan Snyder

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

10 November 2008

Please read the following material that explains the research study in which you are being asked to participate. Signing this form will indicate that you have been informed about the study and that you want to participate. We want you to understand what you are being asked to do and what risks and benefits—if any—are associated with the study. This should help you decide whether you want to participate in the study.

You are being asked to take part in a research project conducted by Bryan Snyder, a graduate student in the University of Colorado at Boulder's Department of Sociology, 327 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0327. This project is being done under the direction of Professor Leslie Irvine, Department of Sociology 327 UCB. Bryan Snyder can be reached at (720) 363-0571. Professor Irvine can be reached at (303) 492-7039.

Project Description:

This research study is about understanding the culture of amateur wrestling, in part, through the individual experiences of amateur wrestlers. My research interests include treating wrestling as a culture, like any other, with hopes to better understand the norms, practices, beliefs, and values unique to this sport. This research will expand on social science knowledge of the role of sport in society, as well as the more general process of meaning-making in culturally-specific sports. You are being asked to participate in this study because you were either approached by the principle investigator, Bryan Snyder, or were recommended by another individual who has already taken part in this research study. It is entirely your choice whether or not to participate in this study.

Procedures:

If you agree to take part in this study, your participation will involve an interview. I will ask you some questions about your experiences in amateur wrestling. All parts of this interview are voluntary and you may quit at any point during the process. Afterwards, I will ask whether I may contact you for a follow up interview. You can also refuse to be contacted for a follow up interview. The interview should take approximately 60 minutes of your time. Interviews will take place either at Denver East High School (1600 City Park Esplanade, Denver, CO 80206) or at the Easton Area High School (2601 William Penn Hwy, Easton, PA 18045). If you prefer, I can meet with you at a public site of your choosing.

You will be asked questions about your experience as an amateur wrestler, as well as the overall culture of amateur wrestling. Questions will range from topics such as your individual experience as a wrestler, which may include the demands of wrestling, as well as the norms, beliefs, values, and practices unique to this sport, to issues of how you think the public perceives the sport of wrestling. I will ask you to provide any explanations you deem relevant and important in explaining what you think are public misperceptions of amateur wrestling.

Participation in this research may include digital audio recording. These recordings will be used for transcription purposes only and will be retained until the interviews are transcribed. Only Bryan Snyder, Principal Investigator, will have access to the recordings.

Risks and Discomforts:

There are no foreseeable risks if you agree to take part in this study. You will not be asked about any illegal activities, and any non-relevant answers that describe illegal activities will be stopped for your protection. If you should discuss such activities, the information could be requested by the authorities.

Benefits:

Although there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, you may enjoy having the chance to discuss your viewpoints on the culture of wrestling. Additionally, because the topic of amateur wrestling has not received serious academic attention, your views will help to shape the knowledge about this topic.

Cost to Participant

There are no direct costs to you for participation in this study.

If You Are Injured or Harmed:

If you feel that you may have been harmed while participating in this interview, you should inform Bryan Snyder, PI, (720) 363-0571, immediately.

Ending Your Participation:

You have the right to withdraw your consent or stop participating at any time. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) or refuse to participate in any procedure for any reason. Refusing to participate in this study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality:

I will make every effort to maintain the privacy of your data. In order to protect your confidentiality all recorded interviews will be erased upon transcription, wherein pseudonyms will take the place of participants' actual names. The audio recordings will be in my sole possession, as I will be responsible for conducting the interviews, as well as transcribing them. Transcribed interviews will be kept in a password-protected file on my personal computer. Any backup files located external to my personal computer will also be password-protected. Field notes taken during my time in the field will be kept in a secure location, accessible only by me.

I will also provide pseudonyms for each of my research sites, keeping in mind to exclude any descriptors that may compromise the confidentiality of the research site, as well as the confidentiality of any and all research participants. Other than the researchers, only regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections and the University of Colorado Human Research Committee may see your individual data as part of routine audits.

If I ever share this data in any form to my colleagues with similar interests, all information will be kept strictly confidential and all participants, research sites, and data will be de-identified. If data sharing is ever an option for me, the only information I intend to share will be general patterns or themes emerging from my research. Any reference to individuals and/or individual comments will be in the form of pseudonyms. Likewise, I will exclude any noticeable descriptors of individuals and/or research sites.

Questions:

If you have any questions regarding your participation in this research, you should ask the investigator before signing this form. If you should have questions or concerns during or after your participation, please contact Bryan Snyder at (720) 363-0571.

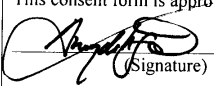
If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, any concerns regarding this project or any dissatisfaction with any aspect of this study, you may report them -- confidentially, if you wish -- to the Executive Secretary, Human Research Committee, 26 UCB, Regent Administrative Center 308, University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, CO 80309-0026, (303) 735-3702.

Authorization:

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I know the possible risks and benefits. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study. I know that I can withdraw at any time. I have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing two pages.

Name of Participant (printed) _____

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____
(Also initial all previous pages of the consent form.)

For HRC Use Only	
This consent form is approved for use from <u>12/04/2008</u> through <u>12/03/2009</u>	
	Panel Coordinator, Human Research Committee
(Signature)	



University of Colorado at Boulder
Department of Sociology
 Ketchum 219
 327 UCB
 Boulder, Colorado 80309-0327
 (303) 492-6410

Exploring the Culture of Amateur Wrestling

Principal Investigator: Bryan Snyder
 PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM
 10 November 2008

Please read the following material that explains the research study in which your child is being asked to participate. Signing this form will indicate that you have been informed about the study and that you give permission for your child to participate. We want you to understand what you are being asked to do and what risks and benefits—if any—are associated with the study. Once you provide your permission, your child will also be asked to provide his or her assent to participate. Your child may not participate in the study unless BOTH you and your child agree.

Your child is being asked to take part in a research project conducted by Bryan Snyder, a graduate student in the University of Colorado at Boulder's Department of Sociology, 327 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0327. This project is being done under the direction of Professor Leslie Irvine, Department of Sociology 327 UCB. Bryan Snyder can be reached at (720) 363-0571. Professor Irvine can be reached at (303) 492-7039.

Project Description:

This research study is about understanding the culture of amateur wrestling, in part, through the individual experiences of amateur wrestlers. My research interests include treating wrestling as a culture, like any other, with hopes to better understand the norms, practices, beliefs, and values unique to this sport. This research will expand on social science knowledge of the role of sport in society, as well as the more general process of meaning-making in culturally-specific sports. You are being asked to participate in this study because they were either approached by the principle investigator, Bryan Snyder, or were recommended by another individual who has already taken part in this research study. Participation in this study is entirely up to you and your child. About 50 participants will be invited to participate in this study.

Procedures:

If you and your child agree to take part in this study, his or her participation will involve an interview. I will ask him or her some questions about their experiences in amateur wrestling. All parts of this interview are voluntary and your child may quit at any point during the process. Afterwards, I will ask whether I may contact your child for a follow up interview. Either you or your child can also refuse to be contacted for a follow up interview. The interview should take approximately 60 minutes of your child's time. Interviews will take place either at Denver East High School (1600 City Park Esplanade, Denver, CO 80206) or at the Easton Area High School (2601 William Penn Hwy, Easton, PA 18045). If you prefer, I can meet with your child at public site of your choosing.

Your child will be asked questions about their experience as an amateur wrestler, as well as the overall culture of amateur wrestling. Questions will range from topics such as their individual experience as a wrestler, which may include the demands of wrestling, as well as the norms, beliefs, values, and practices unique to this sport, to issues of how your child thinks the public perceives the sport of wrestling. I will ask your child to provide any explanations they deem relevant and important in explaining what you think are public misperceptions of amateur wrestling.

Participation in this research may include digital audio recording. These recordings will be used for transcription purposes only and will be retained until the interviews are transcribed. Only Bryan Snyder, Principal Investigator, will have access to the recordings.

Risks and Discomforts:

There are no foreseeable risks if you and your child agree to take part in this study. Your child will not be asked about any illegal activities, and any non-relevant answers that describe illegal activities will be stopped for you and your child's protection. If your child should discuss such activities, the information could be requested by the authorities.

There are some things that your child might tell us that we CANNOT promise to keep confidential, as we are required to report information like:

- Child abuse or neglect
- A crime they or others plan to commit
- Harm that may come to you or others

Benefits:

Although there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, your child may enjoy having the chance to discuss his or her viewpoints on the culture of wrestling. Additionally, because the topic of amateur wrestling has not received serious academic attention, your child's views will help to shape the knowledge about this topic.

Cost to Participant

There are no direct costs to your child's participation in this study.

If Your Child is Injured or Harmed:

If you or your child feel that s/he may have been harmed while participating in this interview, you should inform Bryan Snyder, PI, (720) 363-0571, immediately.

Ending Your Child's Participation:

Your child has the right to withdraw assent or stop participating at any time. S/he also has the right to refuse to answer any question(s) or refuse to participate in any procedure for any reason. Refusing to participate in this study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which your child are otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality:

I will make every effort to maintain the privacy of your child's data. In order to protect your child's confidentiality all recorded interviews will be erased upon transcription, wherein pseudonyms will take the place of participants' actual names. The audio recordings will be in my sole possession, as I will be responsible for conducting the interviews, as well as transcribing them. Transcribed interviews will be kept in a password-protected file on my personal computer. Any backup files located external to my personal computer will also be password-protected. Field notes taken during my time in the field will be kept in a secure location, accessible only by me.

I will also provide pseudonyms for each of my research sites, keeping in mind to exclude any descriptors that may compromise the confidentiality of the research site, as well as the confidentiality of any and all research participants. Other than the researchers, only regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections and the University of Colorado Human Research Committee may see your individual data as part of routine audits.

If I ever share this data in any form to my colleagues with similar interests, all information will be kept strictly confidential and all participants, research sites, and data will be de-identified. If data sharing is ever an option for me, the only information I intend to share will be general patterns or themes emerging from my research. Any reference to individuals and/or individual comments will be in the form of pseudonyms. Likewise, I will exclude any noticeable descriptors of individuals and/or research sites.

Questions:

If you or your child have any questions regarding your participation in this research, you should ask the investigator before signing this form. If you or your child should have questions or concerns during or after your participation, please contact Bryan Snyder at (720) 363-0571.

If you or your child have questions regarding your rights as a participant, any concerns regarding this project or any dissatisfaction with any aspect of this study, you may report them -- confidentially, if you wish -- to the Executive Secretary, Human Research Committee, 26 UCB, Regent Administrative Center 308, University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, CO 80309-0026, (303) 735-3702.

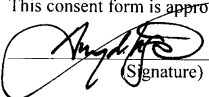
Authorization:

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I know the possible risks and benefits. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study. I know that I can withdraw at any time. I have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing two pages.

Name of Participant (printed) _____

Name of Parent or guardian (printed) _____

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____
(Also initial all previous pages of the consent form.)

For HRC Use Only	
This consent form is approved for use from <u>12/04/2008</u> through <u>12/03/2009</u> .	
 (Signature)	Panel Coordinator, Human Research Committee



University of Colorado at Boulder
Department of Sociology
 Ketchum 219
 327 UCB
 Boulder, Colorado 80309-0327
 (303) 492-6410

Exploring Amateur Wrestling: Culture, Gender, and Bodies

Principal Investigator: Bryan Snyder
 CHILD PARTICIPANT ASSENT FORM
 10 November 2008

Please read the following material that explains the research study in which you are being asked to participate. Signing this form will indicate that you have been informed about the study and that you want to participate. We want you to understand what you are being asked to do and what risks and benefits—if any—are associated with the study. This should help you decide whether you want to participate in the study.

You are being asked to take part in a research project conducted by Bryan Snyder, a graduate student in the University of Colorado at Boulder's Department of Sociology, 327 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0327. This project is being done under the direction of Professor Leslie Irvine, Department of Sociology 327 UCB. Bryan Snyder can be reached at (720) 363-0571. Professor Irvine can be reached at (303) 492-7039.

Project Description:

This research study is about understanding the culture of amateur wrestling, in part, through the individual experiences of amateur wrestlers. My research interests include treating wrestling as a culture, like any other, with hopes to better understand the norms, practices, beliefs, and values unique to this sport. This research will expand on social science knowledge of the role of sport in society, as well as the more general process of meaning-making in culturally-specific sports. You are being asked to participate in this study because you were either approached by the principle investigator, Bryan Snyder, or were recommended by another individual who has already taken part in this research study. It is entirely your choice whether or not to participate in this study.

Procedures:

If you agree to take part in this study, your participation will involve an interview. I will ask you some questions about your experiences in amateur wrestling. All parts of this interview are voluntary and you may quit at any point during the process. Afterwards, I will ask whether I may contact you for a follow up interview. You can also refuse to be contacted for a follow up interview. The interview should take approximately 60 minutes of your time. Interviews will take place either at Denver East High School (1600 City Park Esplanade, Denver, CO 80206) or at the Easton Area High School (2601 William Penn Hwy, Easton, PA 18045). If you prefer, I can meet with you at a public site of your choosing.

You will be asked questions about your experience as an amateur wrestler, as well as the overall culture of amateur wrestling. Questions will range from topics such as your individual experience as a wrestler, which may include the demands of wrestling, as well as the norms, beliefs, values, and practices unique to this sport, to issues of how you think the public perceives the sport of wrestling. I will ask you to provide any explanations you deem relevant and important in explaining what you think are public misperceptions of amateur wrestling.

Participation in this research may include digital audio recording. These recordings will be used for transcription purposes only and will be retained until the interviews are transcribed. Only Bryan Snyder, Principal Investigator, will have access to the recordings.

Risks and Discomforts:

There are no foreseeable risks if you agree to take part in this study. You will not be asked about any illegal activities, and any non-relevant answers that describe illegal activities will be stopped for your protection. If you should discuss such activities, the information could be requested by the authorities.

Benefits:

Although there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, you may enjoy having the chance to discuss your viewpoints on the culture of wrestling. Additionally, because the topic of amateur wrestling has not received serious academic attention, your views will help to shape the knowledge about this topic.

Cost to Participant

There are no direct costs to you for participation in this study.

If You Are Injured or Harmed:

If you feel that you may have been harmed while participating in this interview, you should inform Bryan Snyder, PI, (720) 363-0571, immediately.

Ending Your Participation:

You have the right to withdraw your consent or stop participating at any time. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) or refuse to participate in any procedure for any reason. Refusing to participate in this study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality:

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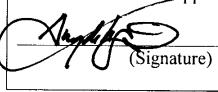
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Authorization:

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I know the possible risks and benefits. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study. I know that I can withdraw at any time. I have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing two pages.

Name of Participant (printed) _____ Age _____

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____
(Also initial all previous pages of the consent form.)

For HRC Use Only	
This consent form is approved for use from	<u>12/04/2008</u> through <u>12/03/2009</u>
 (Signature)	Panel Coordinator, Human Research Committee

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