The Rodeo as a Deviancy Generating Milieu: Reflections of Participants and of Others

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THE RODEO AS A DEVIANCY GENERATING MILIEU: REFLECTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS AND OF OTHERS

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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May 2014
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Through partial participant observation, interviews, and archival analysis, this thesis examined the effects of the rodeo on the social milieu of the town. For more than fifty years, the Latigo Rodeo has been held annually in a town of 2,500 in upstate New York. The four day event attracts approximately 10,000 fans and 270 competitors. After the evening performances, the rodeo association hosts a party on the rodeo grounds. Many locals and visitors perceive of the rodeo and especially its “after-party” as a time to “let loose” and consume alcohol. The police, however, report few encounters or problems with the rodeo. A number of environmental, social, and organizational features appear to have helped mitigate and minimize deviant and law breaking behavior which did occur. Additionally, the findings revealed that a disjuncture existed between rodeo and non-rodeo perceptions of deviance as well as between these perceptions and reality.
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CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM

The rodeo lifestyle resembles that of a traveling circus (Pearson & Haney, 1999). Professional rodeo cowboys and cowgirls lead a transient lifestyle, competing in an average of 70 to 100 rodeos annually and traveling for approximately six to seven months of the year (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). The arrival of the rodeo to an area causes a shift in the local demographics by attracting large crowds, increasing citizen mobility, and increasing the number of strangers. Contractors bring stock for roping, steer wrestling, and the “rough stock” events (i.e., bull and bronc riding). Timed event participants bring their horses. Such changes in local demographics naturally require preparation on the part of local businesses and police. The impact of the rodeo culture reaches beyond the event itself. Groupies, fans, and participants interact in local bars and other local venues before, during, and after the rodeo.

This thesis explored how these changes predictably influence the mindset of rodeo participants and the local population. The researcher sought to identify whether the rodeo creates an atmosphere conducive to social deviance, rule breaking, and risk taking. Reflections of rodeo participants, fans, groupies, rodeo organizers, local business owners and employees, and of local police were be examined for their diverse insights and perspectives.

Research Questions

This research addresses three categories of research questions.
First, in what ways does the arrival of the rodeo impact the local attitudes of community members and of rodeo participants? That is, do the personal accounts of the rodeo organizers, participants, fans, and local police suggest a change in local mentality? If so, how are the changes in attitudes described?

Second, how might the rodeo atmosphere be conducive to deviance, rule breaking, and/or risk taking? This question builds upon the first research question by asking how any changes in local mentality are reflective of, contribute to, or encourage deviant behavior and risk taking. Do respondent perceptions suggest that rodeo participants engage in these behaviors more frequently during and following the rodeo? Do fans perceive of the rodeo as a time to take risks and engage in deviant behavior?

Third, does the community experience a rise in social deviation and/or law breaking activity while the rodeo is in town? What, if any, changes do local business and law enforcement observe and/or put into place? Do the personal accounts of police, business owners, or local news indicate a rise or change in criminal activity?

Significance

Sporting events have long played a significant role in American culture. Sports reflect and may even challenge cultural beliefs, values, and ideologies (Coakley, 2007). The rodeo is only one example. The sports industry as a whole generates billions of dollars annually and nearly all major forms of media include coverage of sports, including athletes’ engagement in deviant and criminal behavior (Atkinson & Young, 2008; Coakley, 2007; Quinn, 2009). Nonetheless, the literature is sparse in regards to how social deviance and crime may fluctuate within the context of the rodeo event. This
thesis will help to fill the void in the literature by providing narratives of the rodeo participants and others addressing the manner in which the rodeo may alter, even if only for a short time, the nature of perceptions social deviance and crime in the immediate community.

Research Setting

The selected rodeo is hosted annually in Latigo, New York, which is located in the northwestern region of the state and has a population of about 2,500. The event goes on for four nights. Each performance was professionally sanctioned by at least one sanctioning body. Rodeo events include barrel racing, bull riding, bareback and saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling, tie-down roping, and breakaway roping.

Definition of Terms

1. APRA: This acronym stands for “American Professional Rodeo Association.”

   The APRA is a northeastern rodeo sanctioning organization based out of Howard, Pennsylvania. Rodeos sanctioned by the APRA are subject to the association’s rules (American Professional Rodeo Association, 2013)

2. Barrel Racing: In this timed event, the competitor must ride her horse around three barrels in a clover-leaf pattern. For each barrel that is knocked over, a five second penalty is assessed. Going off course results in disqualification. There is a sixty second time limit. In some competitions, if a competitor loses her hat a penalty and/or fee may be assessed. The fastest time wins. Barrel racers are almost exclusively women.
3. Breakaway Roping: Breakaway roping is a timed event for women or youth in which the participant uses a lasso to rope a calf from horseback. The calf receives a head start and if the competitor breaks the barrier before the calf, a ten second penalty is assessed. The competitor with the shortest time wins.

4. Bronc Riding: In the bronc riding events, the competitor attempts to stay aboard a bucking horse for eight seconds. The highest score wins. Below the two variations of bronc riding are described.

   a. Bareback: This is a type of bronc riding event in which no saddle is used and the competitor must stay on the bronc through the use of a rigging. The competitor must “mark out,” or have both spurs make contact with the horse’s shoulders as it exits the chute until its feet first hit the ground, or he will be disqualified. Judges assign scores based on spurring technique (Lawrence, 1982).

   b. Saddle: This is type of bronc riding event in which a saddle is used. In this event, competitors are also required to mark out and must hold onto the reins with one hand in order to receive a score. Competitors are judged based on spurring technique (Lawrence, 1982).

5. Bull Riding: In this event, participants attempt to stay aboard a bucking bull for eight seconds. Disqualification will result from the competitor touching the bull with his free hand. The competitor is judged based on his or her ability to stay aboard the bull. The highest scoring cowboy wins (Lawrence, 1982).

6. Calf Scramble: Calf scrambles allow children from the audience to participate in the excitement of the rodeo. Details may vary from event to event; however, in
the case of the Latigo Rodeo, children are invited to climb into the arena. The calf is released with a ribbon tied to its tail and the children chase it around the arena. The child who snatches the ribbon from the calf’s tail wins.

7. Crime: In the context of this thesis, crime means the violation of a law contained within a criminal code.

8. Culture: Culture refers to a common and unifying set of values, beliefs, and customs shared by a group of people.

9. Deviance: Deviance means an action or idea that violates the socially accepted rules or norms.

10. Groupie: Groupies are fans who follow certain individuals or groups of individuals, such as athletes or musicians, with particular enthusiasm. In the context of this thesis, the term “groupie” is most commonly used to refer to people who follow rodeo competitors or personnel seeking sexual encounters.

11. IPRA: This acronym stands for “International Professional Rodeo Association.” The IPRA is another rodeo sanctioning organization. Rodeos sanctioned by the IPRA are subject to the association’s rules (International Professional Rodeo Association, 2013).

12. PRCA: This acronym stands for “Professional Cowboy Rodeo Association.” It is the oldest rodeo sanctioning association. Rodeos sanctioned by the PRCA are subject to the association’s rules and competitors must hold a PRCA permit card in order to compete. Stock contractors at PRCA sanctioned rodeos must comply with PRCA guidelines to ensure the humane treatment and quality of the stock ("About the Professional Cowboys Rodeo Association", 2013).
13. Rodeo: A competition in which cowboys (and cowgirls) showcase their skills at bronc and bull riding, roping, and steer wrestling in an attempt to win, for the purposes of this study, a cash prize.

14. Steer Wrestling: In this timed event, sometimes also referred to as “bulldogging,” the competitor begins on horseback and then attempts to wrestle a steer to the ground. The steer receives a head start. Breaking the barrier before the steer results in a ten second penalty. The fastest time wins (Lawrence, 1982).

15. Stock: This term describes the animals (horses, bulls, calves, etc.) used in the different rodeo events.

16. Team Roping: In this timed event, competitors participate in teams of two. The steer receives a head start. The team receives a ten second penalty if the header breaks the barrier before the steer. The header first ropes a steer around one or both horns and the head or the neck. The heeler then ropes both hind feet. If only one hind foot is roped, a ten second penalty is assessed. The team with the fastest time wins (Lawrence, 1982).

17. Tie-Down Roping: In this timed event, the participant uses a lasso to rope a calf from horseback and then proceeds to stop the horse, dismount, flank the calf, and tie any three of its legs together. The calf receives a head start and if the competitor breaks the barrier before the calf, a ten second penalty is assessed. The calf must remain tied for six seconds in order for the competitor to receive a time. The competitor with the shortest time wins (Lawrence, 1982).

18. Rough Stock: The term “rough stock” refers to the horses and bulls used in the bronc and bull riding events.
Chapter 2 will provide a review of relevant literature that pertains to the research problem and questions. It will also discuss several theoretical perspectives in criminology that are expected to help guide the study.
CHAPTER TWO

RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORY

Review of the Literature

The History of the Rodeo

While the rodeo would later develop into a competitive sport, it began as a novelty. The exact origin of the rodeo is unclear but rodeo-like events seem to have emerged in the mid to late nineteenth century (Lawrence, 1982). Perhaps the most famous of these events were the exhibitions of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West. Russell (1970) stated that William Fredrick Cody initially considered referring to his exhibit as either a “show” or a “circus” though ultimately named it “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” and would sometimes refer to it as an “exhibit” (as cited in Lawrence, 1982, p. 45). Cody wished to create a show which accurately portrayed the Western frontier, a way of life which was quickly disappearing. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West began in North Platte, Nebraska in 1882. Thousands of cowboy contestants competed in roping, shooting, riding, and bronco-breaking events for prizes offered by local businessmen. The cowboys of Cody’s exhibition were salaried performers and portrayed stagecoach robberies, buffalo hunts, roping and riding of steers, riding of bucking broncos and mules, and more (as cited in Lawrence, 1982, p. 45).

The first organized, sport-like rodeo most likely occurred in Prescott, Arizona in 1888. The rodeo not only awarded cash prizes and a trophy but also charged spectators. This marked the beginning of the institutionalization of the rodeo. In 1936, a group of competitors founded the “Cowboys’ Turtle Association,” which would be renamed the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) in 1975 (Lawrence, 1982). Over the
course of the twentieth century, media coverage allowed the rodeo to grow in recognition and popularity (Pearson & Haney, 1999).

The Rodeo as a Sport

Sports exist as an integral part of modern society. They not only provide entertainment but are tied to cultural ideologies and values and are connected to the “major spheres of social life” (Coakley, 2007, p. 24). Sports are created to reflect and sometimes challenge ideas and beliefs about all aspects of society. Schools feature sports in physical education classes and competitive sports teams. Ticket sales for sporting events annually affect the economies of many nations by billions of dollars. Athletes often receive large salaries and endorsements worth millions of dollars and serve as role models (Coakley, 2007).

Most individuals possess some understanding of what constitutes a “sport;” however, scholars and sports enthusiasts alike do not always agree on which activities should be identified as sports. Coakley (2007) defined sports as “institutionalized competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex skills by participants motivated by external and internal rewards” (p. 6). Based on the criteria set forth in this definition, the rodeo should be characterized as a sport.

Sports are institutionalized and competitive activities. That is, a sport features standardized rules enforced by official regulatory organizations (Coakley, 2007). The rodeo became institutionalized in 1929 with the emergence of the Rodeo Association of America, responsible for the management of a number of notable rodeos. Later, in 1936, the “Cowboys’ Turtle Association," later to become known as the Professional Rodeo
Cowboys Association (PRCA), was formed (Lawrence, 1982). Today, other rodeo organizations such as the American Professional Rodeo Association (APRA) and the International Professional Rodeo Association (IPRA) exist. The rodeo also possesses a competitive atmosphere. Rodeo athletes compete against one another to achieve the fastest time or highest score in order to win. Rodeos are institutionalized and competitive activities.

Sports require physical exertion or the employment of complex skills from competitors. In other words, “[t]he organizational and technical aspects of the activity become important . . . [and] the learning of game skills becomes formalized” (Coakley, 2007, p. 6). In their analysis of the rodeo as a sport, Pearson and Haney (1999) questioned whether the organizational and technical aspects of the rodeo were sufficiently important for the rodeo to be considered a sport as no drug screens or physical examinations are required, arena sizes vary by location, and competition depends on the behavior of unpredictable animals. Despite this, competitive times are calculated to the one hundredth of a second and competitors, especially rough stock riders, are subject to detailed and standardized rules and regulations. In the late 1980s or early 1990s, rodeo “schools” emerged where students could learn the skills required to compete in rodeo events (Pearson & Haney, 1999). Professionals may offer lessons where children and adults are taught horsemanship and even roping skills. The rodeo possesses sufficient organizational and technical aspects to be considered a sport.

Sports are “activities played by people for internal and external rewards” (Coakley, 2007, p. 6-7). Internal rewards might include personal pleasure or satisfaction
derived from involvement in the sport or competition. External awards include not only
prizes but status and public approval (Coakley, 2007). The rodeo truly exemplifies this
requirement. Rodeo athletes compete in a dangerous activity and often suffer financial
stress as the rodeo offers little opportunity for financial gain and little practical value.
Competitors seek distinction and excitement and continue to compete out of a love of the
lifestyle (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007; Gauthier & Forsyth, 2000; Pearson & Haney, 1999).

While most individuals maintain some idea of what constitutes a sport, scholars
and sports enthusiasts alike often disagree on which activities should be considered
sports. The rodeo represents a competitive, institutionalized activity which requires
physical exertion and skills from the competitors and offers both internal and external
rewards (Coakley, 2007; Pearson & Haney, 1999). The rodeo should be considered a
sport and consequently concepts of sport deviance can be applied.

Social Deviance in Sports

Deviant behavior is a reality in sports among both athletes and fans. Deviant
behavior can be defined as any action or idea that falls outside an accepted range of
behavior. These socially construct norms dictate the limits in which individuals are
expected to behave (Coakley, 2007). People may engage in deviant behavior either on an
episodic, intermittent, or ongoing basis. Deviant behavior encompasses more than just
negative and criminal behavior and includes all acts and ideas that may be considered
unconventional or reflective of “different attitudes or values of a person or group”
(Bryant & Forsyth, 2012, p. 527). While deviancy is not always negative and positive
deviance within the rodeo milieu may be addressed by the researcher, this project will pay special attention to deviant behaviors which either contribute to social problems, can be construed as being harmful or dangerous, or are criminal in nature.

Deviant over-conformity, in the world of sports, is embodied by “uncritically accepting the norms and being willing to follow them to extremes” (Coakley, 2007, p. 159). Sport athletes are expected to push these boundaries, play through injuries, accept risks, strive for excellence, and make sacrifices. Athletes who under-conform to the ideals of sport ethic are admonished while coaches and athletes routinely praise and even look up to those who over-conform. Thus athletes strive to exhibit the expected traits and pursue excellence through emulating sport ethic (Atkinson & Young, 2008; Coakley, 2007). Many types of deviant behavior can be found in the world of sports and the line between wanted and unwanted deviance can easily be crossed as athletes are taught to rationalize over-conformity and rule breaking (Atkinson & Young, 2008). Athletes violate rules, engage in binge drinking, get into fights, destroy private property, and play through injuries sometimes with the assistance of painkillers. Judges may take bribes and alter the outcome of events (Coakley, 2007). Deviant over-conformity is a reality in the realm of sport.

The attendance of sporting events serves as a form of escapism for fans (Quinn, 2009). Fans often exhibit different behavior at sporting events than would be considered acceptable in their day-to-day lives. They may get into fights with each other, taunt athletes, illegally gamble, and destroy property (Coakley, 2007). In 532 B.C., over 30,000 people died in a riot following a chariot race in Constantinople (Quinn, 2009).
Fan violence remains common to this day, especially in soccer matches in Europe and college football games in the United States. Crowds may engage in violent behavior against one another, athletes, or event judges or officials. Celebratory crowds may cause riots and other problems throughout a community following a sporting event. Numerous factors may influence fan violence including crowd size and composition, team and spectator history, attributed cultural meanings, crowd-control strategies, the location of the sporting event, drug use, alcohol consumption, and even weather (Coakley, 2007; Quinn, 2009).

**Social Deviance in the Rodeo**

Atkinson and Young (2008) asserted that sport subcultures define wanted and unwanted deviance within the context of each institution. The dangerous sport of rodeo provides no exception. Cowboys (and cowgirls) strive to conform to the rodeo sport ethic, competing in spite of serious injuries. Rodeo athletes remain involved in the sport despite constant financial and familial stress.

**The cowboy.** Traditionally, the cowboy has been portrayed as a stoic, “tough independent man with a rough exterior and few social attachment” (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007, p. 395). Hyper-masculinity and hyper-individualism are commonplace and reflect over-conformity to the cowboy identity. Rodeo competitors exhibit characteristics of sports ethic and can be identified as athletes (Pearson & Haney, 1999). The rodeo “pushes them [cowboys] to take unprecedented risks and to compete even while seriously injured” (Pearson & Haney, 1999, p. 315). Cowboys downplay even severe accidents, referring them as “wrecks,” and often deny the pain in an effort to
conform to the tough cowboy image (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007; Gauthier & Forsyth, 2000; Pearson & Haney, 1999).

The transient lifestyle of the rodeo cowboy creates numerous domestic problems such as job instability, financial trouble, infidelity, and neglected health and child care (Pearson & Haney, 1999). Professional rodeo cowboys travel for six to seven months of the year, competing in 70 to 100 rodeos annually (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). The constant cost of travel, fees, and equipment and relatively small cash prizes result in constant financial stress. A bull rider interviewed by Pearson and Haney (1999) during their ethnographic study of the image of the contemporary cowboy stated that he was happy when he could win back his entry fee and enough extra money to compete in the next rodeo. Forsyth and Thompson (2007) conducted an ethnographic study exploring the supporting roles of rodeo fans, wives, and groupies. Wives of professional rodeo cowboys work to create an environment in which their husbands can compete and uphold the individualistic, hyper-masculine image and will sometimes hold down multiple jobs to support their careers.

**Rodeo fans.** Fans are also an integral part of the rodeo, verbally expressing encouragement for the cowgirls and cowboys and disappointment in poor performance or a perceived low score (Lawrence, 1982). Approximately 4 million fans from diverse backgrounds regularly attend PRCA sanctioned rodeos. Demographic information collected by the PRCA suggested that fans are likely to "enjoy hunting, fishing and camping" ("About the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association," 2013, para. 13). Rodeo fans often identify as part of a rodeo subculture and feel loyalty to the sport and to
the competitors (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). Rodeo fans exhibit high levels of enthusiasm for the sport. Interviews conducted in Gauthier and Forsyth’s (2000) study revealed that serious fans may attend 50 to 100 rodeos annual. Fans may give cowboys rides, provide a place for them to sleep or a meal, and provide other forms of general support (Gauthier & Forsyth, 2000). Interest in the rodeo often results from cultural and familial influences. The sharing of a common jargon allows fans to easily identify “greenhorns” (Pearson & Haney, 1999).

Infidelity is not uncommon on the rodeo circuit. Field research conducted by Gauthier and Forsyth (2000) explored the interactions between cowboys and their groupies, referred to as “buckle bunnies.” Buckle bunnies wait for the competitors after the rodeo at the exits, local night clubs, bars, and hotels, seeking a sexual encounter with one of the cowboys. They sometimes gain access to sold-out rodeos illegally. The study’s respondents told stories of cowboys and buckle bunnies having sex in bars and parked cars. The buckle bunnies seek out winning cowboys and indicated preference for steer wresters and rough stock riders. Though buckle bunnies would sometimes provide cowboys with company and a place to stay, cowboys and buckle bunnies alike generally expect nothing more than sex from their encounters (Gauthier & Forsyth, 2000). These women often are looked down on by other fans, receive the label of “whore” or “slut” and are viewed as cultural outsiders (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007).

**Festivals and Spectators**

While the rodeo may be considered a sport and thus concepts of sport deviance apply, rodeos, especially eastern rodeos, also exist as spectacles. Originally, Buffalo
Bill’s Wild West was referred to as a “show” or “exhibition” and was less sport like and more spectacular in nature (Lawrence, 1982). Some of these qualities can still be seen in rodeos today. Competitors and personnel dress in the traditional western attire and attempt to portray a piece of the western or cowboy culture. Rodeo clowns and performers, such as trick ropers and riders, create an event which may be viewed as a spectacle or exhibition in addition to a sport. Pearson and Haney (1999) compared the rodeo to a traveling circus. As such, some of the literature examining the interaction between spectacle attendees and the host community is relevant.

Kosugi, Kato, and Fujihara (2003) examined “the process of attitude change for an in-group and an out-group from different towns” (p. 181) in the context of a Japanese festival. The researchers administered surveys to seventy-one, male, festival attendees. The survey items measured the participants’ attachment to the area as well to the in-group and the out-group. Respondents’ initial positive evaluations of the area did not change after the festival; however, “attitudes toward out-group members had rapidly become more positive just after the festival” (Kosugi et al, 2003, p. 187) despite attachment remaining higher to the in-group than the out-group throughout the study. Kosugi et al suggested that such “positive attitudes toward out-group members” (Kosugi et al, 2003, p. 188) were likely due to the face-to-face nature of the interactions, giving a personal identity to the group members. The researchers found that interactions between locals and visitors from out of town altered the groups’ perceptions of one another.

Redmond (2003) examined playful deviance playful deviance among tourists during Mari Gras. He explained that “playful deviance occurs most often when small
groups of tourists travel to symbolic spaces of leisure to participate in temporary forms of transgression that they will not normally perform in places where they live” (p. 27). In order to thoroughly explore this topic, the research engaged in participant observation and conducted 150 interviews. He suggested that Mardi Gras, as well as Spring Break, festivals, and carnivals, may serve as backspaces (Goffman, 1959; 1963) and “provide a liminal license for people to transgress norms, participate in playful deviance, and present their secret self” (Redmond, 2003, p. 28). Removed from the constraints of every day, participants engaged deviant behaviors ranging from public nudity to public masturbation. The study’s findings indicated that respondents enjoyed the eroticism, anonymity, and public admiration associated with the tourist attraction of Mardi Gras.

As in other sport subcultures and within the context of other festivals and spectacles, deviant behavior occurs in the rodeo. The cowboy image encourages deviant over-conformity (Coakley, 2007; Pearson & Haney, 1999). Costs associated with the rodeo lifestyle present financial difficulties for competitors and their families. The transient lifestyle of rodeo competitors can create domestic problems (Pearson & Haney, 1999). Rodeo fans and wives often dedicate themselves to enabling cowboys to pursue the ideals of sport ethic (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). Buckle bunnies seek sexual encounters with cowboys and sometimes employ illegal means to gain access to sold-out rodeos (Gauthier & Forsyth, 2000). Deviant behavior is a reality of the rodeo.

**Theoretical Overview**

Glaser and Strauss (1967) introduced the concept of grounded theory methodology, suggesting that it is presumptive of researchers to claim to know prior to at
least the beginning stages of data collection what concepts and hypotheses will be relevant. This approach to theory permits the researcher to move beyond verification and, through a process of constant comparison, generate theory based on developing concepts from empirical indicators gathered from the data and proposing plausible relationships between the concepts. As the research unfolds, new concepts and theoretical patterns will predictably emerge from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Schwandt, 2001).

It was originally anticipated that the project will be guided, at least in part, by Durkheimian theory. Emile Durkheim (1933) was among the first to suggest that increases in deviance and social problems would be predicted as a region changes from a rural to urban character and features. The arrival of the rodeo temporarily brings such changes to a community. Competitors may travel long distances in order to compete in a professional rodeo. Timed event competitors bring their trucks and trailers. Contractors bring stock for roping, steer wrestling, and rough stock events. Fans and groupies come from surrounding areas and perhaps even distant locations in order to attend the rodeo.

The impact of the rodeo culture extends beyond the even itself. Participants, fans, and groupies interact with the local community. They may visit local eating and drinking establishments or stay in local hotels. These demographic changes influence the local character and mentality, requiring preparation on the part of local businesses and police. Thus, Durkheimian perspectives argue that populations will suffer stress as they abruptly move from small, mechanized communities to complex, organic and disintegrated urban
areas (Durkheim, 1933). These predicted processes will be explored in a general way in this study on the impact of the rodeo.

As themes surrounding the differences between rodeo and non-rodeo perceptions began to emerge, the original perceptive was expanded to include the concepts developed by E. Goffman (1959; 1963). According to Goffman, human behavior is acted out as though on a stage. Performers act within the context of their personal front, or their appearance and mannerism, and the setting, or “the scenery and stage props for the spate of action played out before, within, or upon it” (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). These sign vehicles allow the audience and other players to interpret the social situation and understand not only what is expected of them but also what to expect of others.

Chapter 3 discusses the study’s methodology. It also addresses the plan for analysis, validity and reliability issues, as well as the protection of human subjects.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the methodology utilized in this study. In order to respond to the research questions, this thesis employed qualitative strategies of inquiry, especially those common to fieldwork in the natural area of concern – the rodeo. This chapter is subdivided into multiple sections. These include: Research Questions, Sampling, Data Collection Procedures, Analysis Plan, Validity and Reliability Issues, and Protection of Human Subjects.

Research Questions

For the convenience of the reader, the research questions are repeated here.

First, in what ways does the arrival of the rodeo impact the local attitudes of community members and of rodeo participants? That is, do the personal accounts of the rodeo organizers, participants, fans, and local police suggest a change in local mentality? If so, how are the changes in attitudes described?

Second, how might the rodeo atmosphere be conducive to deviance, rule breaking, and/or risk taking? This question builds upon the first research question by asking how any changes in local mentality are reflective of, contribute to, or encourage deviant behavior and risk taking. Do respondent perceptions suggest that rodeo participants engage in these behaviors more frequently during and following the rodeo? Do fans perceive of the rodeo as a time to take risks and engage in deviant behavior?

Third, does the community experience a rise in social deviation and/or law breaking activity while the rodeo is in town? What, if any, changes do local business and
law enforcement observe and/or put into place? Do the personal accounts of police, business owners, or local news indicate a rise or change in criminal activity?

**Sampling**

**Selecting the Rodeo Site**

I selected the Latigo Rodeo based on several criteria. I first identified a number of rodeos based on their convenient location, considering only events featuring professionally sanctioned rodeos. This simultaneously excluded exclusively amateur rodeos and ensured some level of consistency between the events. Eligible rodeos were hosted annually. Only rodeos hosted within a reasonable distance of the university were considered. Finally, this event was chosen, in part, based on the cooperation of the Latigo Rodeo Association.

The selected rodeo is hosted annually in Latigo, New York, which is located in the northwestern region of the state and has a population of about 2,500. The event goes on for four nights. Each performances was sanctioned by at least one sanctioning association. Rodeo events include barrel racing, bull riding, bareback and saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling, tie-down roping, and breakaway roping. The rodeo association hosted an after-party the first three evenings. A live band performed and alcohol was available for purchase onsite. Following the conclusion of the rodeo events, admission to the after-party was free.

**Identifying Interview Subjects**

I used a snowball sampling technique to identify potential subjects. In this sampling method, the researcher, after identifying and interviewing an original
participant or participants, asks the interviewee to suggest others who might be willing to participate in the study who would be knowledgeable of the research topic (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Such a snowball or network procedure continues until the researcher concludes that new information is no longer forthcoming or the information being collected is reaching a point of redundancy (Austin 2005, p. 480).

Prior to arriving in the area, I had already established contact with the rodeo organizers via email and telephone. I planned to meet with the president of the rodeo association at a cattle penning event the Saturday I arrived. That evening, I met with the president, vice president, and secretary and conducted my first interviews. Upon the conclusion of these interviews, I asked the respondents to refer me to others who would be able to contribute to my research. I spent the first few days in the area independently establishing contact with business owners and employees. Though some interviews were scheduled, the majority were conducted on the spot when I came into contact with individuals who could contribute to the research. I conducted 36 interviews.

**Data Collection Procedures**

In order to thoroughly explore all aspects of the research questions, I employed multiple qualitative data collection techniques including “partial” participant observation, in-depth, “face-to-face” interviewing, and archival analysis. My participation in amateur rodeos as a youth and exposure to the rodeo culture served as an advantage in building rapport with rodeo participants, properly understanding the cultural context, and accurately interpreting observations.
Partial Participant Observation

There are different levels or styles of participation (Gold, 1958; Spradley, 1980; Webb, et al. 1966). For purposes of this thesis, I did not actually participate in rodeo events. However, I attended the rodeo activities and experienced first-hand the rodeo atmosphere. Observation served as a key component to this study’s methodology. Following Gold’s analysis, I acted as an “observer as participant.” I arrived in the area on the Saturday before the rodeo began and observed the manner in which the town changed with the arrival of the rodeo. I also attended all four rodeos, allowing for an opportunity to observe the behavior of fans and participants alike during the events. These rodeos were public events and individuals needed only purchase a ticket in order to attend. Following the events, I observed interactions between participants, fans, groupies, and locals at the after-party hosted by the rodeo association. I did not participate in the rodeo or engage in risk-taking or deviant behavior with subjects. Total participant observation was unrealistic. Yet, my mere attendance at the rodeo and presence in the community and local eating and drinking venues and other businesses constituted a degree of participation considered here as partial participant observation.

Some data was obtained through the practice of listening. While engaged in observation at the rodeos and in local eating and drinking settings following the rodeo, relevant and useful information was obtained from conversations which I overheard during observation. This behavior, identified as “lurking” by Strickland and Schlesinger (1969), served as an unobtrusive means to gain useful data by the simple act of being present and attentive and proved useful in supplementing data collected through more obtrusive interview techniques.
Consequently, I gained direct and personal observational accounts of rodeo activity and also of the immediate community reactions to the rodeo. As an extension of this participation, I kept detailed, daily written accounts in a journal. Although I recorded some notes at the rodeo site, more full accounts of each day’s activities, observations, and interpretations were logged, documented, and detailed each evening after the close of the rodeo and activities. This field journal was diligently maintained and reviewed throughout the study.

**Interviews**

In-depth, face-to-face interviews allowed me to explore the research questions and collect personal accounts of the rodeo and community participants. Such interviews provided a great degree of flexibility (Maxfield & Babbie, 2011). That is, this level of inquiry combined a series of open-ended questions about rodeo life and associated activities with a number of more semi-structured questions aimed at obtaining more specific responses to the research questions (Stewart, 1996). While all subjects were asked to respond to a prepared set of interview questions, asking follow-up questions permitted for further elaboration as well as inquiry into unanticipated findings. Individual interviews ranged from short comments involving only a few questions to longer interviews stretching into an hour. In some instances, a particularly informative respondent was seen on multiple occasions to gain further insights. Additionally, on some occasions, a small group of respondents congregated in what may best be viewed as a “focus group” activity. Such was welcomed because it allowed one respondent to be motivated or reminded by another of specific activities that may be germane to the research questions. This proved particularly useful in accommodating the busy scheduled
of rodeo participants. Interviews were not be audio-taped. I took meticulous handwritten notes during the interviews and, when practicable, read them back to the subject in order to ensure accuracy.

I conducted interviews with several different types of subjects. Each group provided different insights to the rodeo’s influence on local mentality and the ways in which it may contribute to deviant or risk-taking behavior based on the interlocutors’ personal experience. Rodeo organizers and officials provided descriptions of the general rodeo experience. Questions centered on rodeo preparation and attendance. I asked participants to reflect on their experience with the rodeo and the ways in which they typically interact with the community. I asked participants about their perceptions of deviance and rule-breaking within the context of the rodeo milieu. Fans and groupies provided insight into the rodeo’s effects on local and crowd mentality, particularly whether the atmosphere encourages deviant or risk-taking behaviors. Local business owners and employees revealed information about changes in local demographics as well as in the local mentality. Local police representatives provided their descriptions of preparations taken in anticipation of the rodeo, attitudes toward the rodeo, and past experiences with the rodeo.

Archival Analysis

In order to allow for triangulation and external confirmation of observations, I also engaged in small scale archival analysis. While bias and the presence of errors pose a problem in any archival analysis (Webb, et al., 1966), the presence of such limitations did not severely limit this study as the data collected from such sources was used
primarily in secondary and supplemental analyses. I collected and analyzed local news pieces concerning the rodeo as well as information about arrests published in the local for a month preceding and following the event. This allowed for comparison with and verification of data gathered from other sources (Glaser & Straus, 1967).

**Strengths and Weaknesses**

Qualitative research inherently permits for a greater level of flexibility as well as a deeper examination of the questions at hand. Though qualitative techniques tend to provide a higher level of validity, problems with reliability and generalizability are not uncommon (Lewis, 2009; Maxfield & Babbie, 2011; Morse, 2002; Stewart, 1996). As Morse *et al.* (2002) observed, “[i]t is essential that the investigator remain open, use sensitivity, creativity, and insight, and be willing to relinquish any ideas that are poorly supported” (p. 11). I took special care to remain responsive to these concerns throughout all data collection.

“The definition of reliability in qualitative research differs between . . . researchers, but there is concurrence in the need for trustworthiness, accuracy, and dependability of research findings” (Lewis, 2009, p. 7). I strived to increase reliability by remaining detail-oriented and continuously seeking clarification of any unclear observations from specialist in interviews. In this way, I attempted to minimize improper interpretation of the data (Morse, 2002; Stewart, 1996). Additionally, I observed the community prior for several days prior to the arrival of the rodeo. This will allowed me to see what a typical summer week is like for locals and better enabled me to make accurate observations of changes. I also asked a number of critical questions to every
participant interviewed (Lewis, 2009). However, qualitative data addressing
respondents’ perception of phenomenon and events is admittedly subjective in nature and
thus reliability must be noted as a limitation.

In order to attain validity, I employed complementary data collection techniques
to ensure “the intended meaning of things observed or that people interviewed had been
accurately captured” (Maxfield & Babbie, 2011, p. 326). The use of multiple sources to
explain an event adds to the findings’ validity. By employing a combination of partial
participant observation, interviewing techniques, and archival analysis, I was able to use
triangulation to enhance the study’s validity (Lewis, 2009; Stewart, 1996). The depth of
the information that can be obtained through the interview and the ability to observe
subtle detail also contributes to the study’s validity (Stewart, 1996).

Reactivity may serve as another limitation. Subjects may exhibit unnatural
behavior or provide the answers that they believe the researcher wants (Schwandt, 2001).
For this reason, I took special care to blend in when observing subjects. Interview
questions were carefully phrased to avoid leading a respondent to a particular answer. It
was, of course, not possible to fully eliminate this problem; however, I took care to
remain aware of potential reactivity and how it may have impacted the study’s results
(Lewis, 2009). Though bias and errors may exist in the news sources analyzed, reactivity
is not an issue (Webb, 1966). This will help reduce the effects of reactivity on the results.

Generalizability is a common limitation to field research. “[F]indings cannot be
used for statistical generalizations” (Stewart, 1996, p. 47). This limitation applies to
study at hand for multiple reasons. While rodeos in the Eastern United States consist of
the same events and operate under the same rules as Western rodeos, key differences exist. A New Jersey rodeo organizer describes the rodeo experience as being “a novelty for the people” (Lawrence, 1982, p. 22). Likewise, a cowboy who traveled from the West to compete in a rodeo in New Hampshire suggested that Eastern fans were not as familiar with the rules and cultural significance of the rodeo as Western fans (Lawrence, 1982, p. 23). Rodeo personnel, participants, and organizers reported similar differences in this study, which will be discussed at greater length in subsequent chapters, and the findings may not be applicable to Western rodeos. Fans’ enthusiasm, attitudes, and understandings likely influences their reaction to and interaction with the rodeo. For these reasons, I do not attempt to generalize the findings. However, Stewart (1996) argued that perspicacity is an attainable goal. I aimed to produce relevant and applicable insights about cultural perceptions of deviance.

**Analysis Plan**

Finally, effort was made to explain how the findings pertain to and clarify the theoretical guidelines as developed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Grounded theory methodology, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), requires the research to generate theory based on concepts developed from empirical indicators in the data and the relationships among them. Through a process of constant comparison throughout data collection and analysis, new concepts and theoretical patterns will predictably emerge from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Schwandt, 2001). In order for a concept to become part of the final product, it must present itself repeatedly in the data “or by being significantly absent . . . Grounding concepts are in the reality of data thus gives this method theory-observation congruence or compatibility” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 7).
Interviews and field notes be coded into two categories: line-by-line coding and focused coding (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). In initial coding, I analyzed each line, making notations of the context of the statement or observation and what was being expressed. Line-by-line coding was part of on-going analysis from the beginning stages of data collection as is expected in grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss 1990). Additionally, I engaged in the process of memoing. During the process, I compared categories and subcategories and records existing relationships (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

“[A] good qualitative researcher moves back and forth between design and implementation” (Morse, 2002, p. 10). Huberman, and Miles (1983) suggested that such a procedure allows themes to emerge at early stages and helps to prevent the collection of unnecessary data and identify gaps and potential sources of bias. Such coding was reviewed and revised after transcripts of interviews and fields had been produced. A subsequent focused coding procedure allowed me to further analyze the initial coding by identifying patterns and themes (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). As specified by grounded theory methodology, archives analyzed were coded in the same manner.

**Human Subject Protection**

Data collection began only after the study received IRB approval. Participation in this study was voluntary. All subjects were eighteen years of age or older and did not belong to any special population. I informed all participants that I was engaged in research concerning “what happens when the rodeo comes to town.” All interviewees signed informed consent forms and were aware that their consent could be withdrawn at
any time. I conducted interviews at times and in places most convenient for the subjects. Interviews lasted from several minutes to one hour. While most interviews were completed individually, when appropriate, a focus group format was used to accommodate competitors’ schedules and/or encourage discussion between subjects. Meticulous handwritten notes were taken during interviews. No interviews were tape recorded.

Due to the nature of the study, confidentiality was seen to be especially important. I assigned pseudonyms to the town, rodeo, and subjects. The names and identifying information of participants are not included in this thesis. Transcripts of field notes and interviews are saved only on a zip drive and kept in a locked file cabinet accessible only by myself with all consent forms or other identifying documents for three years, as dictated by federal guidelines.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

I embarked on this research project with the goal of exploring the impact of the Latigo Rodeo on the local community. Through the use of interviews, observations, and archival analysis, I investigated how the arrival of the rodeo influences the mindset of rodeo participants and the local population. Additionally, I examined whether the weekend of the Latigo Rodeo is perceived as a time to engage in deviant and/or law-breaking behavior. Interviews with local police officers, observations, and an archival analysis of local news sources helped me ascertain some data on the actual occurrence of deviant and criminal behavior during the rodeo weekend.

In order to coherently address my research questions, I found it necessary to present a description of Latigo as well as the rodeo grounds in greater detail than offered in the first few chapters of this thesis. This will help to contextualize my subsequent discussion about changes brought about by the rodeo’s arrival and depiction of the rodeo atmosphere. These changes, among other features, contribute to varying, or even contradictory, perceptions of deviance and the rodeo. Interestingly, a disjuncture exists between the rodeo and non-rodeo perceptions of deviant behavior within the context of the rodeo as well as between perceptions and reality. High levels of informal social control, resulting from elements of the physical environment as well as social factors, help mitigate and contain most deviant behavior and minimize the concern and scrutiny of law enforcement.
Durkheim (1933) posited that an increase in deviance and social problems could be observed as a region abruptly changes from a rural to urban character and features. The arrival of the rodeo temporarily brings such changes to a community. Over the course of the weekend, nearly 10,000 people pass through Latigo. These changes extend beyond the rodeo event as participants, fans, and groupies interact with the local community. They may visit local eating and drinking establishments or stay in local hotels. These demographic changes inevitably affect the local character and mentality and naturally require preparation on the part of local businesses and police.

The subsequent discussion of my findings will demonstrate that, despite the significant increase in strangers and traffic, the Latigo and rodeo communities maintain cohesion. While interviews and observation reveal incidents of deviant and law-breaking behavior, the majority of observed and reported incidents occurred on the rodeo grounds and did not spill over into the community. Furthermore, interviews with law enforcement officials and an archival analysis of local news sources suggest little to no interaction between the local police and the rodeo. This can likely be attributed in part to the maintenance of folk characteristics, such as cultural homogeneity, tradition, and altruism (Durkheim, 1933), as well as situational crime prevention tactics, the use of private security and wristbands to identify those of legal drinking age (Clark, 1983).

Differences in rodeo and non-rodeo perceptions of deviant behavior within the context of the rodeo as well as between perceptions and reality emerged as a theme. Goffman (1959; 1963) postulated that individuals gather information about other “performers” which “helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance
what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him” (Goffman, 1959, p. 1). Additionally, he posited that we interpret strangers’ social cues like appearance and mannerisms “to anticipate his category and attributes, his ‘social identity’” (Goffman, 1963 p. 2). These perceived, or virtual, identities may not always be the same as actual identities. The rodeo exists as a unique social situation and perhaps even culture. Traditional western attire, like cowboy hats and boots, jeans, and spurs, are associated with the rodeo subculture. Behavioral expectations within the context of the Latigo Rodeo were heavily influenced by the rodeo setting as well as the appearance and manner, or personal front, of the actors (Goffman, 1959). On the stage of the Latigo rodeo, locals, fans, and the rodeo community interpret social cues from one another that influence both their perceptions and actions.

**The Setting**

**The Town of Latigo**

Latigo is a small town with a population of approximately 2,500 located about an hour from the nearest city at the intersection of two state highways. One must navigate lightly travelled state highways in order to find his or her way to Latigo. I arrived almost a week before the beginning of the rodeo, allowing myself time to locate and interview respondents and to personally observe the changes accompanying the rodeo.

Prior to meeting with any informants, I explored the streets Latigo. The town possesses a quiet, small town atmosphere. Though not large, the main street is lined with a number of local businesses. While only one hotel operates in Latigo, several convenience stores, local and chain restaurants and bars, and other businesses serve the
community. As suggested by 2010 U.S. Census data, the community is over 90% Caucasian and reports an average annual income of approximately $55,000 per household (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Private residences are located at the center and the outskirts of the town. On the edge of the town, farms, ranches, and private homes with acreage can be found.

Though a state park and several tourist attractions are within an hour’s drive of Latigo, the lack of travel accommodations as well as data collected from with locals suggests that the town itself experiences little tourism outside of that brought in by the Latigo Rodeo. Respondents described the weekend preceding the rodeo as reflective of the town’s typical summer days. The streets remained mostly empty. I regularly observed only a small number of cars parked along the main street and relatively empty parking lots. Nearly all vehicles bore New York license plates.

**The Latigo Rodeo and Rodeo Grounds**

The Latigo Rodeo has become a local tradition. Throughout the summer, the rodeo association hosts cattle penning and barrel racing competitions. The association also makes an effort to remain involved in education and service opportunities in the community. Justin, a local respondent, offered an example when he explained how the rodeo association had raised money to help with his medical bills several years earlier. For over fifty years, the Latigo Rodeo Association has organized and hosted an annual rodeo. What began as a small, backyard event grew into a spectacle that attracts approximately 10,000 people annually. The event goes on for four days and includes five separate performances, three evening and two afternoon shows. Each performance was
sponsored by at least one sanctioning body. Rodeo events include barrel racing, bull riding, bareback and saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling, tie-down roping, and breakaway roping. Following each of the evening events, the rodeo association hosts an “after-party” for rodeo personnel, participants, fans, and locals.

The rodeo grounds are located near the edge of Latigo, within walking distance of the town park. A dirt driveway leads from the main road back to the grounds. Two large, open fields are converted to parking lots for fans and a third for the rodeo association members and rodeo participants. The arena is located directly across from the parking lots. When the rodeo is in session, the Latigo Rodeo Association charges a small fee for parking which is collected at the end of the driveway. Volunteers and association members then direct fans to their parking spaces. A small portion of one of the public lots is reserved for association members to park and use their RVs and campers. Once the lots have been filled, fans may park at the town park and are then bused over to the rodeo grounds. Fans may purchase tickets from the booths at the entrance or may present proof of an online purchase to rodeo personnel before entering the grounds.

Bleachers surround the arena on three sides. The announcers’ booth and chutes are located on the far side of the arena. A pass is required to access the booth, chutes, and the large parking lot located behind them. In this area, association members, rodeo personnel, competitors and stock contractors are able to park, camp, and prepare for events. Upon entering the rodeo grounds, fans are presented with an opportunity to

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1 Chutes are small, narrow pens in which rough stock are individually held while the competitor prepares for his or her ride. A gate leads into the arena and is opened and the animal released when the competitor is ready.
purchase raffle tickets. Fans may then continue past the bleachers and portable toilets to purchase souvenirs from vendors and refreshments or may simply find a seat in the stands.

A sheltered area, a beer stand, a concessions stand, and picnic tables are located behind the arena. Just outside of the sheltered area, a mechanical bull had been set up for the enjoyment of fans and partygoers. Rodeo personnel check fans’ identification before they are permitted to purchase alcohol. Fans who have been verified as being twenty-one or older who wish to consume alcohol are given wristbands. The association hosts an after-party following each evening show and locals need not purchase a rodeo ticket in order to attend the parties though may not bring in alcohol from outside. A band hired by the association performs live each night, giving partygoers an opportunity to enjoy the music and dance. The rodeo association also hires off-duty police officers from a nearby city to act as security for the event. Many of the same officers work the event each year and make an effort maintain order throughout the weekend.

**Atmosphere**

**The Changing Mood of Latigo**

A shift in the local demographics accompanies the arrival of the rodeo. The number of strangers increases as participants, stock contractors, and fans arrive from other parts of the United States as well as Canada and Mexico to attend and/or participate in the events. Four times the population size of the town will pass through Latigo during the rodeo weekend. As one respondent explained, “the town is flooded with people and bustling” when the rodeo arrives. The stock contractors bring trailers full of livestock for
roping, steer wrestling, and the “rough stock” events. Timed event participants bring their own trailers and animals. Rodeo association members, participants, and fans may bring their campers. The impact of the influx of population size and density reaches far beyond the event itself. The rodeo brings increased commerce to the area as groupies, fans, and participants interact in local bars and other town venues before, during, and after the rodeo.

The changes brought about by the arrival of the rodeo are nearly impossible for locals to avoid even if they wanted to. As a local hotel employee explained:

Oh yes, the spirit of the town changes. It’s the rodeo spirit . . . You know, like Christmas with those red hats . . . hip-hop cowboy style. Our guests like seeing cowboys walking around in their hats and boots. It’s fun and very good for business.

One of my first respondents, a local woman in her late twenties, explained that “It gets crazy! You can never find a parking space.” While later observations revealed this statement as an exaggeration, it captured the local perception of the rodeo weekend very well.

Even those respondents most unfamiliar with the rodeo noticed the increased traffic. In the days preceding the rodeo, out-of-state license plates had been a rarity; but, over the course of the weekend, I regularly observed license plates from Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ontario, and elsewhere. Signs reading “No Parking by Order of Police” were posted along the road between the park and rodeo grounds during the
rodeo weekend. A store located across the street blocked off their lot with yellow caution tape and put up a sign which read “For Customers Only.”

Nearly all respondents indicated that they were excited for and supportive of the rodeo even if they did not attend the event themselves. A clerk at a local store explained that “people get really excited and start wearing their country outfits. Kind of a proud to be from the sticks type of thing.” Though not a regular attendee or familiar with the rodeo, a local tattoo artist observed that “everybody talks about it.”

A small country concert is held on the evening prior to the beginning of the rodeo weekend. Rodeo association members and personnel put on simple demonstrations for the local community, including trick roping and horseback riding, and advertise for the rodeo. Members of the local community filled the local outdoor venue to enjoy the concert. While some children and older couples got up to dance, most of the audience used the time to socialize. Many adults drank beer and wine, despite being in a public location, and relaxed as they chatted with family and friends. Children, in particular, seemed to enjoy the demonstrations. Sherry, a long-time Latigo Rodeo Association member, explained that children seemed enthralled by the opportunity to touch the horses.

Banners displaying the dates, times, and location of the rodeo are put up along the main street. Signs just outside of Latigo advertise the attraction to passing motorists. Local businesses attempt to capitalize upon the rodeo by printing rodeo themed advertisements and extending business hours. A restaurant located just outside of Latigo had put up a banner which read “Welcome Rodeo Fans.” A convenience store manager
stated that they order extra alcohol and tobacco products for the weekend. The local hotel also experiences a significant increase in business and identified the weekend as the busiest of the year. The hotel reported raising prices during the week of the rodeo. One respondent also reported that her place of employment raised prices of rodeo themed items such as low quality cowboy hats.

Locals, rodeo personnel and officials, and local police consistently reported that the rodeo itself had become very self-contained. The majority of rodeo activity occurs exclusively within the confines of the rodeo grounds. While business owners and employees throughout the community reported increased business during the rodeo weekend, several respondents including a local restaurant owner suggested that this had declined over the years. With the availability of food and presence of vendors at the rodeo grounds, rodeo fans, participants, and officials have less need than in the past to leave the grounds. Despite this high degree of self-containment, the neighborhood surrounding the rodeo grounds experiences the greatest increase in noise and traffic. Several respondents reported being able to hear noise from the rodeo events and music from the after-party from their residences in the surrounding neighborhood. The rodeo association, in an effort to maintain a positive relationship with the community, furnished free tickets to a show to the rodeo ground’s immediate neighbors.

The Rodeo Atmosphere

The ambience of the Latigo Rodeo varies from show to show; however, a reverence to tradition and display of cowboy culture can be consistently observed. The importance of family, tradition, and religion to the cowboy image appeared as a recurring theme in my interviews with rodeo participants, officials, and other rodeo personnel. A cowboy is viewed as a
rodeo organizers and announcers make a conscious effort to honor veterans and demonstrate a sense of patriotism. Interviews with rodeo participants and personnel revealed great respect for tradition, family, and “the cowboy way of life.” Sherry stated that the organizers want foster a fun, but family friendly atmosphere. Each event opened with the national anthem and a prayer. During one of the events, I overhead middle aged, male fans discussing how this contributes to the positive, family oriented atmosphere of the rodeo. “You would have to be a real atheist not to pray for these bull riders,” one man stated.

The vast majority of rodeo attendees, participants, fans, organizers, and officials are Caucasian and many appear to be politically conservative. With the exception of the final afternoon performances, the crowd appeared less than representative of local demographics. Before the beginning of a performance, I struck up a conversation with a middle aged couple. When I inquired about the rodeo atmosphere, the husband immediately observed that “It’s nice that there aren’t many Hispanics or blacks . . . not like in the city. I miss that.” This racially biased statement certainly does not portray the attitudes of all attendees and rodeo personnel but is still noteworthy as it reflects the sentiments of at least a portion of rodeo-goers. The rodeo announcer and rodeo clowns cracked politically conservative jokes. When a bronc entered the ring and did not buck for the full eight seconds, they joked “We’ve got a union horse. He’s part of the Obama

tough, hardworking, honest, and respectful individual who is will to go out of his way to help another person. Individuals exhibiting these traits were often referred to as “real cowboys” by respondents.

3 Many rodeo officials, organizers, and participants stated that they were the third or fourth generation of their family to be involved in the rodeo and several rodeo organizers were second or third generation members of their families to be involved with the Latigo Rodeo.
administration.” Numerous fans wore shirts protesting the S.A.F.E. Act and others wore NRA t-shirts and ball caps.

Rodeo participants, organizers, officials, and other personnel dressed in traditional Western attire. During the performances and after-parties, they wore button-down shirts, cowboy hats, boots, and jeans. Many fans and locals attempted to imitate this style of dress. Numerous fans and locals wore brand new cowboy boots and brightly colored hats. Shorts and short dresses with cowboy boots were popular among young women attending the events.

Ten to fifteen different vendors set up booths to sell souvenirs and other items and advertise for their business. Vendors included local artists, tack stores, and feed supply companies. Respondents identified the homemade baked goods sold by a local church group as a favorite. Church volunteers reported that they would sell over one hundred pies that weekend. The rodeo provides vendors with an opportunity not only to sell goods but to network and to advertise.

Rodeo organizers aim to please the audience by encouraging audience participation. Adults who purchased raffle tickets could win prizes. The calf scramble gave children an opportunity to participate in the festivities. Children poured out from the audience into the arena and chased a calf, attempting to grab the ribbon from its tail in order to win the prize. Rodeo participants and performers attempted to promoted audience involvement. The rodeo queen smiled and waved at the children crowded around the arena’s fence and the rodeo clown ventured over to give high-fives. During the final show, the rodeo clown climbed into the stands to take a picture with a fan. The
clown and announcer joked with each other, the audience, and participants. Some participants made displays of showmanship such as throwing their hat in the air or performing a small dance after their rides.

The mood of the afternoon and evening performances differed significantly. The afternoon events attracted more families than the evening events. Less noise and energy filled the rodeo grounds. Lower levels of alcohol consumption in the afternoon and the absence of the live band created a quieter, more relaxed atmosphere. While the sound of fans cheering still filled the stands, the area surrounding the concessions stand was relatively quiet and the sheltered area was used for picnics and child’s play rather than drinking and dancing. Fans appeared more interested in enjoying the shows than in partying. As the rodeo association hosts no after-party for these afternoon events, fans vacated the grounds quickly after the show’s conclusion.

The evening events attracted a different crowd. While many families still attended these performances, they appeared to account for a much smaller proportion of the crowd. Young and middle-aged adults socialized with their peers. From the time that fans arrived until security began clearing the grounds after the last call, many attendees could be seen consuming alcohol and carrying cases of beer with them. In part by design, evening shows exuded a louder, more rowdy feeling. While mostly children ride the mechanical bull during afternoon performances, a greater proportion of young adults tried their hand at it during evening shows. The tone of evening performances may still be properly characterized as family friendly but is not unlike that of other professional
sporting events. Fans consume alcohol in the stands and some may become loud; however, I observed no instances which I would characterize as true disorder.

The after-parties also possess qualities unique from the rodeo events. Before the rodeo events had reached their end, the band began to play and the dance floor and sheltered area filled with party-goers. As rodeo fans uninterested in the after-party began to leave, rodeo participants and personnel in addition to locals began to join the party. The mechanical bull attracted more intoxicated than sober customers during the after-parties. A small number of security officers, approximately three, kept a watchful eye on the crowded dance floor and surrounding area. The security officers stepped in the break up conflicts before they escalated into physical confrontations.

**Perceptions of Deviance and the Rodeo**

**Fan and Local Perceptions**

Overall, locals seem to welcome the rodeo. Locals value the business brought in by the rodeo and most view the rodeo personnel as “wonderful people.” Respondents indicated that they heard almost exclusively positive things about the rodeo and after-party from their friends and family. Many looked forward to its arrival. A local volunteer selling refreshments at the rodeo explained that “the rodeo draws a lot of people . . . it’s good fellowship.” At the same time, however, many locals looked forward to “letting loose” and consuming alcohol at the after-parties and perceived of cowboys and other rodeo folk as “rough and rowdy.”

Many respondents seemed to perceive of the rodeo week as a time to party and let loose. Younger interviewees explained that they did not usually attend the rodeo but
enjoyed the after-party put on by the rodeo association. A long time Latigo resident believed that many perceived of the rodeo as a “drinking fest” and another respondent explained that “it’s a party, you can do what you want.” A rodeo attendee described the rodeo weekend as “the biggest drinking weekend in the town.” Respondents perceived of the after-party as an excuse to drink and several commented that they believed they, in the words of Jessica, a local convenience store employee, “could get away with stuff.”

Such feelings or frames of mind may be fostered by an increased sense of anonymity. The Latigo Rodeo attracts approximately 10,000 fans over the course of one weekend. This suggests that the total number of people within the town limits may more than double for an extended period of time during the rodeo weekend. The effect on locals may be akin to that experienced by college students on Spring Break or tourists during Mardi Gras.

Krissy grew up near Latigo and attended the rodeo and after-party regularly. When asked to describe the rodeo people, she said “when they want to drink, they drink.” Jessica stated that she believed cowboys to be very different from locals but was unable to explain these differences. She stated that drunken individuals dressed in Western attire, who she labeled as cowboys, would come into the convenience store to purchase food and alcohol. She described these individuals as being very “rowdy.”

Locals also believed the weekend to be a busy time for police. During my interview with Justin and his friends, one group member suggested that “the police are all over the place that weekend and must be busier than the rest of the year.” Jessica had also believed that the rowdy behavior of cowboys and partygoers would become
problematic. She explained that she expected numerous people to be “thrown out of the party” and also expected that her drunken customers would “destroy stuff.” Ivan, a local hotel employee, also expressed a belief that “cowboys can get out of control.”

**Rodeo Participant and Personnel Perceptions**

The locals’ and fans’ perception of the rodeo clearly differed from that of rodeo competitors, officials, and professionals. Latigo Rodeo Association members vocalized their pride and ownership in the event consistently in interviews and conversations. While rodeo organizers acknowledge that “things [at the after-parties] can get a little crazy,” they maintained that they experienced very few problems.

In contrast to the local perception of the rodeo as a break from daily routines, rodeo organizers, officials, personnel, and participants perceive of the rodeo as a way of life and as their livelihood. In a discussion about his past as a bull fighter, Bobo, a rodeo clown, observed that “some people said that I must be crazy for doing it but that’s just a job. I respect them animals, I’m not scared of them.” Likewise, Lea, an administrative rodeo official, explained “In this business or sport; this lifestyle. We call it a lifestyle because that’s what it is”. Lewis, an all-around cowboy, stated that:

The cowboy image is just living a way of life that is traditional to farmers and ranchers. Living on the animals rather than the city. Fun, competition. Its ranchers getting together. All of them have been around ranching and the western way of life. Rodeo is part of the tradition.

Rodeo organizers spend an entire year planning the event. As the rodeo announcer, Isaac, put it:
Fans would be surprised by what goes on behind the scenes, putting on a show. The committee here will start working on next year as soon as this is over. For every town like this, their rodeo is the National Final Rodeo. They have worked for this all year.

Lea explained that rodeo administrators will spend the week preceding and the week following the rodeo completing paperwork and stock contractors invest an incredible amount of time and money in breeding and transporting livestock. Rough stock riders Nate and Rob stated that they “put 3,500 miles on a car each weekend, minimum.” Participants compete in multiple rodeos each weekend and ride hurt in order to make money. Most competitors hold down full-time jobs during the week in order to support their rodeo careers and families.

Rodeo professionals appreciate and value rodeo fans; however, most believed that fans did not understand the cowboy or Western way of life. They believed that rodeo exists only as a spectacle or novelty for most Eastern fans. While interviewing Saul, a local horse trainer and cowboy, a middle aged woman walked by in jeans and brightly colored cowboy boots with a matching shirt. Saul commented that “Those are real buckaroo boots. The rodeo is an excuse for people to dress up and I’m okay with that as long as they don’t claim to be what they aren’t.” The man showed me the spur marks on

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4 Rodeo professionals and participants explained that rodeos held in Eastern states differ drastically from those held in Western states. Western fans tend to be more familiar with the cowboy way of life and have a better understanding of the rodeo rules. These fans tend to view the rodeo as a sport and possess a better understanding of its cultural significance. Respondents believed that most Eastern fans do not possess the same knowledge of the rodeo and rodeo culture as Western fans. Interviewees described Eastern rodeos as more of a novelty or spectacle for fans.
his boots and observed that “real cowboys have these.” A young man working for one of the vendors believed that “most [of the fans] are wannabes. You know, city slickers.”

While locals tended to believe that rodeo participants were inclined to be more wild and rowdy, rodeo participants and officials tended to disagree. A paramedic who had attended or worked the event for the past twenty-three years believed that “it is the locals rather than the cowboys who go wild.” She stated that the participants mostly keep to grounds if they are not leaving for another event. As former rodeo association member John explained during an interview, “Younger locals tend to be the ones that get real wild.” Brandon, long-time local and former rodeo competitor, commented that he believed the stereotype of the rowdy cowboys “came from a local kid in boots and a cowboy hat who went a little wild.”

Ike, a veteran competitor, also believed that locals were likely primarily responsible for most wild or deviant behavior. He commented that:

There are a lot of bad stigmas [associated with cowboys]. Some guys are like that . . . but there are a lot of good, Christian guys. They can be rough and rowdy. They like to have fun, this is their family. Sometimes there is an after-party but a lot of times a couple guys will just around and share some beers.

Other competitors described similar after-rodeo gatherings. Lewis explained that after the rodeo he would sit down, relax, and “have a cold one” with several other competitors.

**Perceptional Differences**

Local respondents perceived of cowboys and cowgirls as the perpetrators of deviant and criminal behavior while rodeo participants, officials, and organizers seemed
more inclined to believe the locals to be responsible. Brandon suggested that local young people and fans often dress up in cowboy boots and hats for the rodeo. When these individuals engage in disruptive and deviant behavior, observers may notice their style of dress and assume affiliation with the rodeo life. Another possible explanation for the dichotomy is the substantial degree of homogeneity between these groups of people, including but not limited to style of dress, dialect, and mannerisms. “Cowboys aren’t really very different [from locals] . . . it’s a pretty country area.”

Despite the rural, country nature of Latigo and the surrounding area, the cowboy or “western” way is a foreign concept to many locals. That is, while locals may identify in many ways with the rodeo community and find it easy to play that role, they may lack understanding of important though more subtle aspects of the rodeo subculture. This may influence local perceptions of the rodeo and rodeo participants.

The perception of either group is likely not entirely accurate. Although I observed a number of rodeo participants and personnel engaged in “rowdy” behavior, rodeo cowboys and cowgirls lead a transient lifestyle. Many competitors and performers leave for the next rodeo after competing or immediately following the conclusion of the show. Respondents reported that they may compete in as many as three to seven rodeos in one weekend. Bobo, the rodeo clown, suggested that “some of the really serious ones [rodeo competitors] will go to 150 rodeos in a year or more.” Two young rough stock riders planned to leave for another rodeo in Canada immediately after riding. As one of these young men put it, “you get to be a better driver than bull rider.”
Rodeo competitors also find themselves under formal rules and regulations put in place by sanctioning bodies. Over time, the institutionalization of the rodeo has resulted in a more professional atmosphere and introduced behavioral expectations for competitors. Brandon explained that rodeo athletes engaging in inappropriate behavior may now face sanctions. “The [sanctioning] associations will suspend cowboys if they hear that a local cowboy has really been tearing it up.”

**Deviance, Law-Breaking, and the Rodeo**

While my discussion focuses on deviant behavior, it is not my intent to portray the rodeo as an unsafe environment or safe hold for seedy types and law-breakers. That would be far from the truth. The data collected for this study indicate that some fans and community members may view the rodeo as a time to let loose and party. In some cases, this perception results in assumptions, or actual accounts, of various forms of criminal and deviant behavior. The observed and reported behaviors, as described by multiple informants, do not differ significantly from those which typically accompany alcohol consumption. Incidents of deviant behavior discussed below vary from violations of norms to violations of the law. The rodeo association and local community manage, often through forms of informal social control, to contain and control most instances of rowdiness and law-breaking.

**Alcohol Consumption**

High levels of alcohol consumptions and binge drinking accompany the Latigo Rodeo. Beer sales at a local convenience store triple. The local supermarket and other convenience stores also reported dramatic increases in alcohol and tobacco sales during
the rodeo weekend. The spouse of a rodeo organizer suggested that rodeo and party goers would consume as many as five hundred cases of beer in one night. The high level of alcohol consumption was furthered evidenced by information gathered from an interview conducted after the conclusion of the final event. The respondent, one of the rodeo organizers, reported that they had broken their previous record for the number of cans and bottles collected and recycled during the rodeo weekend. The greatest portion of observed and reported deviance related directly to alcohol consumption.

Rodeo attendees consumed greater amounts of alcohol at evening performances and I observed more intoxicated individuals at the after-parties than the actual events. During a focus group session, several young men from the area explained that they would drink at another location during the actual rodeo event and then, already intoxicated, attend the after-party on the rodeo grounds. Young men and women carried cases of beer around the rodeo grounds. A young man dressed in a cowboy hat and boots, jeans, and a button-up shirt held onto a case of beer and consumed several drinks while on the dance floor with a young woman. Others carried beer cans with them while they danced. Another young man, who possessed some association with the rodeo, danced and stumbled around the rodeo grounds, shirtless and carrying a case of beer, on several evenings. During an after-party, I observed a group of intoxicated young people attempting to ride the mechanical bull. Those observing their friend’s ride cheered him on, yelling things like “don’t look him in the eye” while the intoxicated rider cursed at the bull and struggled to stay on.
While the security officers refrained from alcohol consumption, rodeo organizers took part in the festivities, enjoying the payoff of the past year of planning for the event. Some rodeo association members camp out on the rodeo grounds, drink, and party during the rodeo weekend. Aaron, a rodeo association member, explained that “we drink a lot” and described a number of drinking games he planned to play. Some competitors and rodeo personnel also consumed alcohol prior to the rodeo. Mark, a bull fighter, told me that his partner had been drinking quite a bit before working that evening. He claimed that he had only consumed one or two alcoholic beverages before that evening’s show. Mark seemed unphased by this pre-rodeo consumption of alcohol, even though he could potentially find himself in a very dangerous situation.

Though the rodeo grounds prohibits rodeo attendees and party-goers from bringing in outside alcohol, fans and locals “sneak in booze from outside.” While parking my truck before the first show, I observed some young men carrying cases of beer from a vehicle parked in the fan parking lot back to the contestants’ lot. Discussions between rodeo organizers and security officers demonstrated their awareness of the problem. A security officer explained that he had caught several people bringing in cases of beer. He had simply told them to finish what they had and purchase whatever other alcohol they wished to consume from the rodeo grounds.

Likewise, although the volunteers selling alcohol and security check identification to verify age, underage drinking still presented a problem. Several respondents had mentioned this issue in interviews. Each night at the after-party, I observed several young people who appeared to be underage consuming alcohol without wristbands. A
group of high school aged partygoers discussed doing jello shots one evening and then disappeared into the association members’ and contestants’ lot, out of sight of security.

**Sexual Deviance**

During a focus group with several young cowboys, a bull rider joked that he continued living the rodeo lifestyle for “all of the hot women.” Another cowboy explained that he and his friends typically spent any winnings on “gas, entry fees, food, beer . . . and ruffies.” While Nate clearly explained that he had meant the comment as a joke, these respondents’ interest in using their cowboy image to seduce women, particularly while on the road, supports data obtained from other interviews and my own observations.

One year, rodeo association members became aware of “a lady of the night was working out in the contestant’s parking lot.” I mentioned this in passing to a rodeo organizer. He indicated that he believed that such activities likely occur more frequently than many would suspect and officials simply remained unaware.

Brandon discussed the subject of buckle bunnies openly. When I broached the subject, he laughed and said “‘Curiosity killed the cat I guess.” He explained that buckle bunnies were typically curious fans interested in cowboys, particularly bull riders. He said that they could typically be found in local bars after rodeos and could easily be picked out by competitors as well as locals. He stated that “A lot of local guys take

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5 No respondents suggested that sexual assaults posed a problem at the Latigo Rodeo; however, rapes remain underreported in the United States. The prevalence of sexual assaults increases with higher levels of alcohol consumption (Abbey et al, 2001; Abbey et al, 2004). While respondents did not perceive of this as a problem and did not report any incidents, the possibility that rodeo attendees and partygoers may have engaged in nonconsensual sexual activity cannot be dismissed.
advantage. They’ll dress the part of a cowboy with hat, boots, jeans, and a belt buckle and may know just enough to pass as the real deal.” Local men manage their impressions in order to take advantage of competitors’ groupies.

Fans and rodeo attendees also viewed the rodeo as a time to engage in casual sexual encounters. During the after-parties, men and women alike sought out sexual partners. A group of young men told me that they came to “go hunting” for potential partners. Young attendees paired off with significantly older partygoers. Scantily clad young women danced in a sexually provocative manner. One young woman told her friends of her sexual encounter with a man on the rodeo grounds. As a local young man had told me earlier that week, “if you’re an even average looking girl and you show up, you’ll have a guy on top of you. At least two.”

Public Mischief

Several respondents reported incidents which may generally be characterized as public mischief. The town puts up banners along the main street advertising the dates, times, and location of the rodeo events. John explained that “people get up on pickup trucks and steal these as souvenirs.” One year the rodeo association spent nearly $2,000 to replace the stolen banners.

An employee at the local hotel provided insight into the behavior of visitors from out of town during the week of the rodeo. Ivan explained that the hotel raised its prices during the rodeo week to help compensate for damages. While the respondent characterized the troublesome hotel guests as cowboys and cowgirls, this conclusion may have been a misperception. The hotel administration had become aware that young
guests would invite friends to stay at the hotel with them, filling the rooms above their maximum capacity. After returning from the rodeo and after-party in an inebriated state, some guests would throw beer cans and bottles onto the roof. Ivan stated that the staff generally avoided calling the police. He said that they believed that their guests didn’t mean any harm by their behavior and were only looking to have a good time.

The cowboys can get noisy and out of control . . . but they were just having fun. I couldn’t ruin that for them . . . [they are] out to have fun and we just have to work with them. We like the business, just not the drunk behavior. We try to keep it quiet for other guests.

He explained that damage and disruptive behavior could usually be minimized when he walked around the property and maintained a visible presence throughout the weekend and especially as guests returned from the party.

**Rule Breaking**

Deviant behavior includes actions and ideas that differ from or violate socially constructed norms dictating the limits in which individuals are expected to behave (Coakley, 2007). Many rule breaking behaviors are inherently deviant as they violate social norms reflected in formal rules. However, not all such infractions violate the law. Interviews and observation reveal several instances of rule breaking behaviors at the Latigo Rodeo.

The Latigo Rodeo Association responded to past fan complaints by prohibiting smoking on the rodeo grounds. Despite the introduction of this rule, many rodeo attendees still enjoyed their cigarettes throughout the events and after-parties. Fans and
partygoers smoked by the beer stand and behind the bleachers, many within sight of clearly displayed “No Smoking” signs.

Participants, contractors, organizers, and officials may also violate the administrative and event rules. A rodeo judge explained that the competitors must follow rules and regulations that are in favor of the animals. Interviews with current and former rodeo organizers, officials, and participants revealed that while these rules are taken seriously and generally respected, infractions still occur. John recalled one such instance. He explained that maintaining a good reputation is essential to the rodeo business but that some individuals will always disregard the rules. “A bronc rider put a chain under the horse’s jaw to help keep better control it . . . the stock contractor set it up. It made me angry . . . He was never hired to come back to Latigo again.” Stock contractors may also be required to pay fines by the sanctioning associations for failing to comply with the rules or adequately perform their duties.

**Risk Taking**

A discussion of deviant behavior ought not to be limited to behavior which violates the law or formal rules. Many aspects of the rodeo lifestyle may be considered deviant in and of themselves. Competitors risk debilitating injury and even death each time they compete. An ambulance must be present at each show. Not only do many of the rodeo events pose great danger to competitors, relying on the rodeo lifestyle for income can prove to be financially risky. Relying on the rodeo for income can be considered a gamble. Many competitors hold down jobs during the week in order to

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6 Interviews with members of the rodeo subculture consistently revealed the value placed on reputation, honesty, and respect for the rules of the sport.
support their rodeo careers. Participants and other professionals invest large amounts of money in the sport with no guarantee of payback.

Rough stock riders in particular expose themselves to risk each time they ride. “Most people think of getting on a bull: not worth it. But it’s about the adrenaline, the rush,” explained one rough stock rider. Mitch, a bronc rider, described the event as “tying your hand to a freight train and jumping off of a cliff.” Rough stock riders all could share stories of injuries but explained that they preferred not to focus on them. Mitch explained that:

Pain makes most people shut down but [for cowboys] it’s like a fire underneath you. If you don’t try as hard, it’ll just be worse. We compete through injuries. It’s part of the sport. It happens. We don’t talk about it much so we don’t process the negativity. If you need to make money, you climb on. I once got on with the flu. I was puking in the cute but for that eight seconds, you block out the pain.

Rodeo competitors accept injury as part of the sport and value toughness. Respondents were well aware that they could not make money if they did not ride and chose to compete through injuries. Competitors accept the risks of rodeo as part of the sport.

Respondents reported having competed since young ages. One rough stock stated that he had been riding bulls since he was eight years of age. The Latigo Rodeo allows minors to compete. Preteens competed in “junior rodeo” events, riding broncs, steers, and even bulls. When a fourteen year old prepared for this ride, the announcer commented that “this is the very last legalized form of child abuse.” Several respondents
had children who had ridden bulls. When asked what he thought of the danger, one
parent commented “If you’re going to get hurt, you’re going to get hurt.”

Rodeo competitors understand the danger of the sport. They support one another
and express a willingness to help each other. One competitor, Mitch, said: “If someone
gets in trouble, twenty guys who may not even know him will be over the gates to help
him out. You would want them to do the same thing for you.” Some cowboys and
cowgirls work as bull fighters and pickup riders, making a living out of protecting their
brethren.

Three respondents, Mark, Landon, and Bobo, had worked as bull fighters during
their rodeo careers. Bull fighters are employed to protect bull riders after their rides by
helping them safely exit the arena and distracting the bull. Mark, a younger and
relatively inexperienced bull fighter, explained that he loved the thrill of knowing that he
could die. Landon recounted a memorable story:

I didn’t know how I wasn’t stepped on. I could feel the hooves grazing my head
but I knew I needed to get to him [the bull rider]. I just stayed low and crawled
toward him . . . It feels like it’s in slow motion when you’re there. You know
how the crowd sounds in slow motion? [Landon imitates sound of slow motion
applause.] That’s how it sounds. You have to know what the bull is going to do
next . . . Some people say that you have to be crazy or you do it for the adrenaline
. . . but you have to be so calm because if you’re going crazy, someone could end
up dead.
Bobo also explained that he believed it was important to respect rather than fear the animals. He and Landon concurred that having been brought up in the rodeo lifestyle served as a primary reason for their continued involvement. Bobo explained that “We love the lifestyle . . . and we are fans of the rodeo too.” The job is dangerous but critical to the safety of competitors.

**Local Police and Archival Evidence**

Despite observed and reported deviant and law-breaking behavior, local law enforcement recounted minimal interactions with the rodeo. The Latigo police chief stated that he did not expect many changes to accompany the arrival of the rodeo. He explained that traffic would increase but that the weekend would essentially be “business as usual” for the police. In preparation for the interview, he had reviewed officers’ reports from recent years but stated that none contained any record of contact with the rodeo. A former Latigo police chief also reported few issues associated with the rodeo. A state police officer stated that:

> We usually make a few arrest, mostly for underage drinking, some DWIs, and a few assaults. But this isn’t really any different from the local tractor pulls or concerts . . . and typical of getting a lot of people together, drinking.

An analysis of the local news outlets supports the claims of police officials. Local news sources published no incidents of law breaking, deviance, or disorder during the weekend of the rodeo.

Of course, the low level of police involvement likely results, at least in part, from the emphasis placed on informal social controls by rodeo organizers. Because locals, like
the hotel management staff, and rodeo organizers attempt to manage any rowdy, deviant, or law-breaking behavior informally, the police remain unaware, or feign ignorance, of such behaviors and thus are not required to respond. Additionally, past rodeo organizers made a conscious effort to minimize police interference. John explained that:

[A former] chief was a real city dick. He was going to set up road blocks outside of the rodeo grounds a couple years ago to try and catch all of the drunks. Someone in the rodeo company heard about it and went to the mayor at the time. The mayor confronted the chief. They had an argument and the mayor said “I hired you and I can fire you.” The police didn’t set up the road block. One mayor had told me that the rodeo brought in a few hundred thousand in revenue in a weekend. The town officials appreciate the business.

Rodeo organizers have managed to keep the majority of deviant incidents contained to the rodeo grounds through an interesting blend of personal and impersonal factors. Respondents believed that the rodeo association minimized problems and police involvement by “keeping everyone on the grounds.” Brandon explained that “it gets crazy after rodeos when people go to bars but will anytime you get 500 people into a bar that should only have 100.” He suggested that the open space and isolation of the rodeo grounds helped control behavior.

Interviews with rodeo organizers revealed a strong sense of ownership. Many of the organizers reside in Latigo or a nearby community. Additionally, many of these individuals are second or third generation members of the Latigo Rodeo Association and hoped that future generations may benefit from and contribute to the event. The owner of
local restaurant stated that “members watch over things . . . and want to pass it down.”

On the other hand, the rodeo association also utilizes more impersonal methods of control. The association hires police officers from a nearby city to work as security for the event. While the same officers may work at the event on a regular basis, the fact that they are outsiders to community adds a curious dynamic. This serves as an interesting contrast to the involvement of family and the community. The association not only introduces a more formal method of control, but a more impersonal one.

Rodeo competitors, officials, and performers describe the rodeo as a family or a brotherhood. Respondents explained that their “gypsy lifestyle” had a way of bringing people together. Lea explained that “the rodeo is bonding. If you’re stuck riding in a car with someone for fifteen or sixteen hours, you’re really going to love them or you’re going to hate them by the end of it.” The role of the rodeo subculture as a surrogate family to its members may also serve as a form of social control. Rodeo competitors, officials, personnel, and performers can hold each other accountable for their behavior.

In Chapter 5, I will provide summary responses to the research questions and further develop the theoretical orientation discussed at this beginning of this Chapter and in Chapter 2.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

In my exploration of the different groups’ perceptions of deviance, I discovered that rodeo and non-rodeo perceptions differed drastically, not only from one another but also from “reality.” This emerged as a primary theme. Additionally, as the wording of the research questions suggests, I originally suspected that an increase in crime and deviance in the local community would accompany the arrival of the rodeo. However, it quickly became apparent that the effect was not as dramatic as I had anticipated. Interviews with key interlocutors from the rodeo association and local law enforcement suggested that deviant and criminal behavior did not increase significantly. The association attempted to manage any inappropriate behavior which did occur at the rodeo grounds and address problems informally. Guests and business owners alike placed a great emphasis on methods of informal social control to maintain order during the rodeo weekend.

It is important to note that the Latigo Rodeo exists as a unique social setting and differs from many other rodeos. While fans and attendees openly expressed their enthusiasm for the rodeo, few possessed a concrete understanding of the history, culture, and rules of the rodeo. The Eastern location of the rodeo likely contributed in exaggerated perceptual differences between the rodeo and non-rodeo communities discussed below. As such, these differences may not be observed, or at least not with such intensity, in communities more familiar with the cowboy lifestyle. Furthermore, the “after-parties” hosted by the Latigo Rodeo Association were unique to this event and

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appear to have greatly contributed to the Association’s ability to contain and mitigate deviant behavior.

This chapter builds on the findings presented in the previous pages of this manuscript. I provide summary answers for each of the research questions as well as discuss their theoretical orientation, the limitations of this research, and implications for future research.

**Response to Research Questions**

*First, in what ways does the arrival of the rodeo impact the local attitudes of community members and of rodeo participants?* That is, do the personal accounts of the rodeo organizers, participants, fans, and local police suggest a change in local mentality? If so, how are the changes in attitudes described?

A shift in local demographics accompanies the arrival of the Latigo Rodeo. The once quiet, empty town experiences a dramatic increase in traffic and commerce. “The town is flooded with people and bustling” when the rodeo arrives. Four times the population size of the town will pass through Latigo during the rodeo weekend. Local respondents and law enforcement representatives alike noticed the increased traffic. Local businesses reported benefiting from the increased level of commerce and even printed rodeo themed advertisements during the rodeo week to promote sales.

Nearly all respondents indicated that they were excited for and supportive of the rodeo even if they did not attend the event themselves. As a local clerk observed, “people get really excited and start wearing their country outfits. Kind of a proud to be from the sticks type of thing.” Local business owners anticipated increased sales during the rodeo
and appreciated the increased business. Younger locals looked forward to the weekend as a break from the daily routine and a time to party.

*Second, how might the rodeo atmosphere be conducive to deviance, rule breaking, and/or risk taking?* This question builds upon the first research question by asking how any changes in local mentality are reflective of, contribute to, or encourage deviant behavior and risk taking. Do respondent perceptions suggest that rodeo participants engage in these behaviors more frequently during and following the rodeo? Do fans perceive of the rodeo as a time to take risks and engage in deviant behavior?

While most locals and rodeo personnel viewed the rodeo as a family friendly, tradition oriented event, many respondents perceived of the rodeo as a time to “let loose” and the weekend was described by a local as “the biggest drinking weekend in town.” One local resident explained that many perceive of the rodeo as a “drinking fest” and another respondent believed that “it’s a party, you can do what you want.” Respondents perceived of the “after-party” as an excuse to drink and an opportunity to, as a convenience store employee put it, “get away with stuff.” The effect on locals may be akin to that experienced by college students on Spring Break or tourists during Mardi Gras (see Redmond, 2003).

*Third, does the community experience a rise in social deviation and/or law breaking activity while the rodeo is in town?* What, if any, changes do local business and law enforcement observe and/or put into place? Do the personal accounts of police, business owners, or local news outlets indicate a rise or change in criminal activity?
High levels of alcohol consumptions and binge drinking accompany the Latigo Rodeo. The local supermarket and convenience stores reported dramatic increases in alcohol sales during the rodeo weekend. The spouse of a rodeo organizer suggested that rodeo and party goers would consume as many as five hundred cases of beer in one night. The high level of alcohol consumption was further evidenced by information gathered from an interview with one of the rodeo organizers, who reported that they had broken their previous record for the number of cans and bottles collected and recycled during the rodeo weekend.

Several respondents reported incidents of public mischief. The town puts up banners along the main street advertising the dates, times, and location of the rodeo events. John explained that “people get up on pickup trucks and steal these as souvenirs.” An employee at the local hotel provided insight into the behavior of visitors from out of town during the week of the rodeo. Ivan explained that the hotel raised its prices during the rodeo week to help compensate for damages. After returning from the rodeo and after-party, some intoxicated guests would throw beer cans and bottles onto the roof. Ivan stated, however, that the staff generally avoided calling the police.

Despite observed and reported deviant and law-breaking behavior, local law enforcement described minimal interactions with the rodeo. The Latigo police chief described the weekend as “business as usual” for the department and stated that he found no reports of interactions between his law enforcement officers and the rodeo from the previous years. A former Latigo police chief and a state police officer also reported few issues associated with the rodeo. Furthermore, local business and rodeo organizers
reported a desire to handle problems or disturbances informally rather than calling on the assistance of the police. An analysis of the local news sources supports the claims of police officials. These outlets published no incidence of law breaking, deviance, or disorder during the weekend of the rodeo.

**Theoretical Orientation**

As this study was exploratory in nature, I applied grounded theory methodology, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Through the process of constant comparison during data collection and analysis, theoretical patterns began to emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Schwandt, 2001). Goffman’s (1959; 1963) dramaturgical approach has been applied to themes surrounding perceptions of deviances. My discussion the theme of containment and mitigation of deviant and law-breaking behavior will be guided by concepts developed by Cornish and Clarke (2003) as well as those proposed by Durkheim (1933).

**The Rodeo as Theater**

Goffman postulated that human behavior can be understood as a performance. That is, information gathered from others and the setting helps a person to identify the role which he or she will play in a given situation and what to expect from others.

On the stage one player presents himself in the guise of a character to characters projected by other players; the audience constitutes a third party to the interaction – one that is essential and yet, if the stage performances were real, one that would not be there. In real life, the three parties are compressed into two; the part one
individual plays is tailored to the parts played by the others and yet these others also constitute the audience (Goffman, 1959, p. xi).

As illustrated in my earlier discussion of the research setting and the rodeo atmosphere, the arrival of the Latigo Rodeo creates or revives a new, distinctive setting. Expressive equipment such as the arena, chutes, mechanical bull, dance floor, and beer stand serve as “the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon” (Goffman, 1959, p. 22) them. New actors arrive in the community with unique personal fronts. These representatives from the rodeo community dress in traditional western attire. Recall the cowboy who showed the spur marks on his boots to me and observed that “real cowboys have these.” Cowboys and cowgirls typically attempt to exude an aura of toughness and independence which is closely associated with their social image. The sharing of a common jargon allows fans to easily identify “greenhorns” (Pearson & Haney, 1999). In relation to both appearance and mannerisms, the easily observably aspects of this personal front are generally associated with that subculture by the community at large while the more subtle help insiders distinguish between members and nonmembers.

The audience and other players, the fans, partygoers, etc., observe and then interpret these sign vehicles. While these actors may have very limited familiarity with the rodeo subculture, especially in the eastern United States, they “can place the situation in a broad category around which it is easy . . . to mobilize . . . past experience and stereotypical thinking” (Goffman, 1959, p. 26). In the case of the Latigo Rodeo, the non-rodeo community has little past experience with the subculture. Respondents indicated
that this was typically limited to prior rodeo attendance, hearsay, and pop culture. Rodeo personnel and competitors observed that most Eastern rodeo fans and attendees lack a basic understanding of Western and ranch life. Thus, it was not uncommon for locals less familiar with the rodeo community to perceive the transient cowboys and cowgirls as the “rough and rowdy” individuals portrayed in Western films and novels and in country music. This understanding contributed to a local perception of the Latigo Rodeo and its after-parties as a “drinking fest” and a time to “let loose.” In this way, he rodeo grounds serve as a back space for party-goers and rodeo attendees. A place and time in which they may engage in stigmatized behavior without suffering the negative consequences of that stigma (Goffman, 1963).

Additionally, the lack of sufficient cultural understanding lead to the misinterpretation of fan appearances. Fans and party-goers assumed the costume associated with cowboys and cowgirls, consequently a number of local community members misidentified such individuals as members of the rodeo community. For locals, interactions with and observations of these individuals often served as experience upon which behavioral expectations were built.

In some cases, non-rodeo individuals attempted to assume the cowboy identity for purposes of the rodeo and after-party performance. “When we think of those who present a false front or “only” a front, of those who dissemble, deceive, and defraud, we think of a discrepancy between fostered appearances and reality” (Goffman, 1959, p. 59). Impression management occurs when individuals, consciously or otherwise, control the information they present within a performance (Goffman, 1959). Perhaps the clearest
example was local men managing their impressions in order to take advantage of competitors’ groupies and sexual appeal associated with the cowboy image. These men attempted to assume the personal front associated with rodeo community members and misrepresent themselves in order to deceive women.

**Containment and Mitigation of Deviance**

As established in the previous chapter, the Latigo Rodeo not only draws over 10,000 to the area over the course of the weekend but also facilitates the convergence of “rowdy,” party-minded individuals, who represent potential motivated offenders, with an opportunity to party. Despite the relatively high levels of alcohol consumption, in addition to perceptions of the rodeo and after-parties as time to “let loose” and an opportunity to “get away with stuff,” interviews with rodeo organizers and law enforcement representatives suggest that the town itself experiences little to no raise in officially reported law-breaking behavior and few problems occur on-site. The Latigo Rodeo Association managed to contain deviant and disruptive behavior to the grounds. That is, nearly all observed and reported incidents of deviant and law-breaking behavior occurred on the rodeo grounds. A number of environmental, social, and organizational features appear to have helped mitigate and minimize that behavior which did occur.

**Containment and mitigation techniques.** Situational crime prevention, as developed by Ronald Clarke, focuses on the interaction between the environment and potential, motivated offenders. This approach pragmatically emphasizes the importance of crime prevention. Cornish and Clarke (2003) posited that by increasing the effort required to commit a crime, increasing the risks and decreasing the rewards associated
with a crime, reducing provocation to commit a crime, and removing excuses, crime can be discouraged. In response to criticisms, Cornish and Clarke expanded their original models to include twenty-five situational crime prevention techniques based on these goals (Cornish & Clarke, 2003). A number of these techniques can be seen in the design and organization of the Latigo Rodeo. In this case, the techniques employed represent methods of containment and mitigation rather than pure prevention; however, these environmental, social, and organizational features resemble those described by Cornish and Clarke (2003).

Cornish and Clarke (2003) as well as others like Newman (1972) and Cohen and Felson (1979) suggested that adequate surveillance, natural, formal, or in the form of place managers or guardians, can help prevent crime. Facilitating natural surveillance, and utilizing place managers and security personnel increase the likelihood that offenders will be noticed (Clark & Cornish, 2003). The physical layout of the rodeo grounds promoted natural surveillance while rodeo organizers served as place managers and the presence of private security added an element of formal surveillance.

The design of the rodeo grounds promotes natural surveillance. The primary area of activity, including the beer stand, dance floor, mechanical bull, restrooms, vendors, and picnic tables, were all centrally located and easily observed from numerous vantage points. Rodeo organizers and security kept a watchful eye over the activity of partygoers on and off of the dance floor. Furthermore, a pass was required to enter the unsupervised contestants’ parking lot. This effectively kept the majority of party-goers under the surveillance of the rodeo association and security.
The presence of formal surveillance and place managers also contributed to order maintenance during the after-parties as well as rodeo events. Private security served as a form of formal surveillance. These off-duty police officers were professionals accustomed to dealing with “rowdy,” intoxicated individuals and handling disputes. On several occasions, I observed security stepping in to break up a disagreement before the conflict escalated. In addition, the Latigo Rodeo Association members were very much invested in the event. A location respondent accurately reported that “members watch over things.” Many represented the second or third generation of their family to serve on the board and expressed hope that they could pass it down to future generations. As such, association members recognized the value of maintaining order and minimizing problems. Volunteers and association members regularly conversed with the private security, reporting problems such as underage drinking, the bringing in of outside alcohol, and other potential conflicts.

By controlling access to tools used to commit or facilitate crimes, Cornish and Clarke argued that certain crimes can be prevented (Cornish & Clarke, 2003). The majority of concerns for the Latigo Rodeo Association directly related to the consumption of alcohol and underage drinking existed as a primary concern. In an attempt to control access to alcohol, the association prohibited fans and party-goers from bringing in outside beer and liquor. When security or rodeo organizers identified individuals who had brought in their own alcohol, they kept a watchful eye over its consumption, checked IDs, and required that all other alcoholic beverages be purchased from the rodeo grounds.
Cornish and Clarke (2003) provided several examples for how disputes could be avoided, including fixed cab fares and reducing crowding in pubs. The latter proved particularly applicable in the case of the Latigo Rodeo. Of course, it likely occurred more serendipitously than it did through intentional and deliberate planning. Recall Brandon’s observation that “it gets crazy after rodeos when people go to bars but will anytime you get 500 people into a bar that should only have 100.” Party-goers and rodeo organizers alike identified this element as being essential to the association’s success in containing deviance and minimizing problems.

**Informal social control.** It is difficult if not impossible to deny the influence of folk characteristics in containing and minimizing deviant and law-breaking behavior. Despite changes in local demographics, folk characteristics remained prevalent. Rodeo events attract a culturally homogeneous population and emphasize the importance of tradition, altruism, and mutual support (Durkheim, 1933). Additionally, the Latigo Rodeo exhibited elements of isolation. The rodeo grounds were located on the edge of the town and off of the main highway. The town of Latigo itself was geographically isolated, located at the intersection of lightly travelled state highways and nearly an hour from the nearest major city. These elements fostered relatively high levels of informal social control. Conformity with the rodeo values of respect and integrity was consistently promoted during social interactions with the rodeo community. The community was, in this way, able to avoid the social disintegration normally associated with abrupt changes from rural to urban environments (Durkheim, 1933).
Limitations

The use of partial participant observation, interviews, and archival analysis allowed for triangulation and permitted the collection of detailed information through minimally invasive techniques. However, some limitations must be acknowledged. Personal interviews with police representatives and officials and the analysis of news sources, even combined with other interviews and participant observation, may not provide a completely accurate representation of law-breaking activity during the rodeo weekend, and do not measure all deviant and rule breaking behavior.

Reactivity always serves as a possible limitation, particularly in field research. As suggested repeatedly throughout this data, rodeo organizers and officials place a high value on reputation. Additionally, due to the incredible level of commerce brought to Latigo by the event and local official’s prior interference with police practices, officials possessed a vested interested in portraying the event as unproblematic and downplaying the significance of deviant and law-breaking behavior. However, observations, archival analysis, and interviews with other types of respondents all yielded similar findings.

This study only examined the research questions in one setting. I collected data exclusively from the Latigo Rodeo during the summer of 2013. Due to the qualitative nature of the data, “[f]indings cannot be used for statistical generalizations” (Stewart, 1996, p. 47). Furthermore, the Latigo Rodeo featured several unique characteristics. The rodeo association sponsored an after-party, keeping most reported deviant behavior confined to the rodeo grounds. Several respondents indicated that this was not necessarily the case at other rodeos. Despite some similarities, differences between
Eastern and Western rodeos have been established in previous literature (see Lawrence, 1982). Respondents suggested that Eastern fans were less familiar with rules and cultural significance of the rodeo than Western fans and viewed the event as more of a spectacle or novelty. Fans’ enthusiasm, attitudes, and understandings likely influences their reaction to and interaction with the rodeo. These differences may have intensified the reported perceptual differences between the rodeo and non-rodeo communities. For these reasons, I do not attempt to generalize the findings. However, Stewart (1996) argued that perspicacity is an attainable goal. As such, I aimed to produce relevant and applicable insights based on the data.

**Directions for Future Research**

This research produces at least as many questions as it did answers. In addition to satisfying the need for replication, future research could continue in any one of several directions. Future studies could more directly explore the role of the misidentification in perceptions of deviance and the rodeo, address similar issues at Western or differently structured rodeo events, and examine the effectiveness of the measures resembling situational crime prevention tactics directly and through the collection of quantitative data.

**Conclusion**

The Latigo Rodeo exists as a unique social situation. What began as a small backyard event now attracts over 10,000 fans and 270 competitors annually. These changes temporarily amend the perceptions and nature of deviance and law-breaking in the Latigo community. A disjuncture exists between the rodeo and non-rodeo
perceptions of deviant behavior and between perceptions and reality. Behavioral expectations within the context of the Latigo Rodeo were heavily influenced by the rodeo setting as well as the appearance and manner, or personal front, of the actors (Goffman, 1959). Many locals perceive of the rodeo as a time to “let loose” and party, consuming copious amounts alcohol and engaging in a variety of law-breaking and deviant behaviors. Despite the demographic changes and local perceptions of the event as a time to “let loose” and “get away with stuff,” high levels of informal social control, resulting from elements of the physical environment as well as social factors, help mitigate and contain most deviant behavior and minimize the concern and scrutiny of law enforcement.
References


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