On Bullfights and Baseball:  
An Example of Interaction of Social Institutions

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Los toros dan y los toros quitan.  
Mexican proverb

The typical American male strikes out the Yankee side before going to sleep at night.  
James Thurber

A "social institution," typically considered, is "a comparatively stable, permanent, and intricately organized system of behavior formally enforced within a given society and serving social objectives regarded as essential for the survival of the group." Four major social institutions are found very widely in human society: 1) economic, 2) familial, 3) political, and 4) religious. Through these the society strives to achieve material well-being, an adequate population, organization, and some feeling of control over the unknown or unexpected. As a society becomes more urbanized, more "highly developed," it may evolve additional institutions, such as the recreational, the educational, and the aesthetic, which take over functions no longer adequately performed by the basic four.

Since individuals have overlapping roles in a number of the society's institutions, and since each institution is a functional segment of the total, ongoing society, the interaction of institutions presents itself as a fruitful area for study. This interaction is a key variable in the process of social change and highlights cultural themes running through the structures of a society.

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The central institution of a society and its primary agent of socialization is the family – which interacts in various degrees with other institutions. Whiting and Child, for example, have described the impact of values learned in the family upon behavior in other social institutions. Kardiner has written of the ways in which the religious institution is shaped by family patterns. Tumin has described the interaction between the family and the economic institution.

In this paper the authors will focus their attention on some aspects of the interaction between two social institutions: 1) the family and 2) the institutionalized recreation form known as the “national sport.” It is hypothesized that the national sport symbolizes in its structure and function the processes in the modal family that both engender and restrict hostility toward authority, and that it also exemplifies a socially legitimized means for the expression of that hostility.

As Dollard has described it, the socialization process itself engenders hostility toward authority. The demands of socialization, which of course have their focal point in the family, conflict in many instances with the child’s own behavioral choices. The child is thus frustrated and desires to move against the restrictive figure but does not do so because he fears punishment. This fear acts as a catalyst, inciting further aggressive feelings toward the frustrating agent. Repression of this aggression is not complete and the individual seeks sources for its legitimized expression.

Hostility toward authority is especially generated in the authoritarian family milieu, or when some characteristics of the parents create for the child an uncertainty of or rejection of his or the parent’s familial role. Situations such as this not only arouse keen hostility but are also usually unyieldingly restrictive and harshly punitive of any demonstration of that hostility.

From another view, it is quite possible that hostility toward authority is a lesson of, as well as a reaction to, socialization. That is, the characteristics of the society may be such that a general distrust for or hatred of authority has become part of the cultural value system. This is particularly the case in those societies which have undergone long periods of manipulation and oppression under a tyrannical or exploitative power structure.

Since every society depends, from the family up, on authority to maintain relative consistency of behavior, and since not all the members of the society will take well to that restrictive authority, it follows that the society must provide as a further means of control some outlet for the resultant hostility toward authority – not only that incited in the family situation or learned in socialization, but also the generalized forms of hostility that are re-awakened and intensified by the demands of interpersonal relations. The provisions for

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