



# Games and Social Character in a Mexican Village†

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**G**AMES are best understood as one of many variables that influence the formation of character, along with child-rearing practices, folklore, religion, manners, and customs. Like these, games and forms of play are expressive of cultural traits and influential in the development of social and individual character. This paper reports a study of play and games based on a sociopsychological analysis of a Mexican village, which helped to uncover the roots of authoritarian, noncooperative attitudes and the nature of the conflict between the sexes. Although we do not conclude that games are a decisive influence in character formation, evidence also suggested that some of the newer village games reinforce less fatalistic and more productive tendencies.

In studying games and play in a peasant village, we had two general aims. The first was to compare the interpersonal relationships expressed in games, especially those of competition and cooperation, with these relationships as they have been observed by other anthropological and psychological methods. The second was to explore what influence games have on the development of social character in the village and whether the introduction of new games plays a role in social change. The village studied is a mestizo farming community of 850 inhabitants, 65 miles southwest of Mexico City in the state of Morelos.

The meaning and function of games are complicated by the fact that games may both express and form traits of culture. Huizinga has pointed out how play re-

flects culture and is "culture-creating," the foundation of equity, economy, respect for rules, controlled rivalry, and other civilized and civilizing aspects of society.<sup>1</sup> Caillois has developed this thesis, positing an interdependence of culture and games. He considers games to be a sensitive measure of the social character of a society, serving "to define the society's moral or intellectual character, provide proof of its precise meaning, and contribute to its popular acceptance by accentuating the relevant qualities."<sup>2</sup> For example, Caillois cites golf as a particularly Anglo-Saxon sport in which a player may cheat at will, but does not because the game would then lose all in-

<sup>1</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*; Boston, Beacon Press, 1955.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*; New York, Free Press of Glencoe, 1961: p. 82.

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terest for him; "this may be correlated with the attitude of the taxpayer to the treasury and the citizen to the state."<sup>3</sup> The analysis might be expanded by tracing the roots of golf in the moral values of nineteenth-century free capitalism. The golfer essentially plays against himself and his own best score; playing against others is a more recent development. The game demands individualism, conscience, and the constant measurement of one's efforts at self-improvement. Even if a player does better than his opponent, his triumph is clouded by an overly high score.

In contrast, one might postulate that American football corresponds to the rise of large organizations, with sharp divisions of labor, regulated by intricate rules. The linemen provide the muscle power for those who carry the ball and who literally must step over the heads of their teammates to score. Those who take fewer knocks receive more glory. Foul play is expected, and penalties are part of the game. Football is brutal, dangerous, surrounded by controversy (for example, over the subsidization of amateur athletes), yet often defended as "character-building." (One might ask, for what?) Baseball more unequivocally expresses the American ideal of cooperation among teammates, each of whom has a turn at bat and the opportunity to score. Unlike the situation in football, scandals in baseball have been rare and their effect on the American public—as in the case of the "Black Sox" scandal—profound. Baseball is the only game exempted by Congress from antitrust legislation. It might be said that while football expresses the reality of the society, baseball expresses its ideal.

On the level of individual psychology, play and games may also serve a dual function, liberating a child from repressed conflicts and helping him to master traumas of helplessness, and also teaching him new attitudes, values, and skills.<sup>4</sup> The same game which acts as a

safety valve or compensation may also be helping to form character. Piaget has suggested a relationship between the games of children and the attitudes of respect for rules, cooperation, and reciprocity, although it is not clear whether games teach or merely reflect this development.<sup>5</sup> George Herbert Mead postulated that games play a role in the growth of the self-concept (the "generalized other"), since in games one must be prepared to exchange roles and attitudes.<sup>6</sup> Games also both reflect and teach attitudes and values considered proper for boys and girls, and it is possible to see the blurring of sex roles in the United States since World War II in the increasing overlap of games preferred by the two sexes.<sup>7</sup>

Of particular interest to us was how character traits of cooperation, individualism, and rational authority develop and whether games might throw light on this question. A problem for the village (and for much of Latin America<sup>8</sup>) is the irrational use of authority and the tendency to produce political systems based on personal relationships of authority

*Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* 18:7-64; London, Hogarth Press, 1955. It has since been expanded by other psychoanalytic writers, the most original of whom is Erik H. Erikson, who discusses both the liberating aspects of play and its function in helping the child to master not only trauma, but his body and social demands as well (see *Childhood and Society*; New York, Norton, 1950). An analysis of the function of play in cognitive mastery has been made by Jean Piaget in *Play, Dreams and Imitations in Childhood*; New York, Norton, 1951. The first emphasis on play as practice in teaching children skills and behavior needed for maturity is to be found in Karl Groos's work, *The Play of Man*; New York, Appleton, 1919.

<sup>3</sup> See Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child*; Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1948.

<sup>4</sup> Mead distinguishes between play that reflects a child's age, tensions, and aspirations and the game which has all these elements but is itself an active socializing experience, molding the child's character. He writes, ". . . the child must be ready to take the attitude of everyone else involved in that game and these definite roles must have a definite relationship to each other." *The Social Psychology of George Herbert Mead*, edited by Anselm Strauss; Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1956; p. 228.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Sutton-Smith and Benjamin G. Rosenberg, "Sixty Years of Historical Change in the Game Preferences of American Children," *J. Amer. Folklore* (1961) 74:17-46.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Richard N. Adams and others, *Social Change in Latin America Today*; New York, Vintage Books, 1960. For a discussion of the more general implications of this problem for peasant societies see George M. Foster, *Traditional Cultures: The Impact of Technological Change*; New York, Harper, 1962.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2; p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> The analyses of the liberating and mastering functions of play are based, first of all, on Freud's discussion in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle,"



rather than on abstract law. The village lacks neither laws nor democratic values. The problem is one of social character.

#### SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE VILLAGE

As a background to understanding games and the development of social character in the village, it will be useful to have in mind an outline of the socio-economic structure. As Caillois has written, without such analysis it is impossible to determine which games "are in accordance with, confirm, or reinforce established values, and conversely, which contradict and flout them,"<sup>9</sup> as in our contrast between football and baseball in the United States.

For centuries, since a hacienda was constructed in the seventeenth century, sugarcane has been the base of the economic system. Before the Revolution of 1910-20, the villagers lived in peonage, but, as Wolf has written, without even the guarantees of the medieval serf, since the Mexican peon could be whipped, fined, expelled, or executed at will by the *hacendado*.<sup>10</sup> Starting in 1924, the land was partitioned to the peasants under the *ejido* system.<sup>11</sup> Yet the semi-feudal organization was not totally erased by the partition. The *ejiditarios* continue to plant most of their land in cane, under the direction of a large cooperative sugar

mill, which for villages in this region has taken over many functions of the old hacienda. It provides social services and loans, and influences the peasant to plant sugar even though profits are low in comparison to what he could make planting more intensive crops on his small plot, averaging five acres. These garden crops would demand more work and initiative, and involve more risk than does cane. Thus, though he is free and a landowner, the peasant tends to act as a peon in respect to the cooperative, trading independence and the chance of greater profits for security and direction.

Another factor reinforcing the semi-feudal system stems from the fact that while the population has doubled since the original distribution of land to all who wanted it (some families refused land for fear the *hacendados* would return to punish them), the amount of arable land has not. Of 150 heads of families, some 70 are landowners. The others must work as peons at bare subsistence wages, seek employment as migrant laborers in the United States, or leave the village for jobs in the cities. Thus a system instituted to give each peasant an equal stake has led over the years to sharp differences of income. A scale of possessions based on land, capital and consumer goods, and type of house ranges from zero to 343, with 26 percent of the cases at zero and the median at twelve.

Although the village ideology calls for a political system based on equality and democracy without regard to class differences, most often the *ayudante municipal* (mayor) is chosen from the *ejiditarios* (landowners). This is the result not of coercion or institutionalized power, but of lack of energy and interest among those who barely earn enough to live. In addition, as we shall analyze further, the real leaders of the town tend to shun positions of authority, since the villagers distrust and are hostile to all institutionalized authorities. Weak men, whom no one takes seriously, often occupy the most important offices, with the result that little gets accomplished.

The villagers' ideals include democracy

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 2; p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> See Eric R. Wolf, *Sons of the Shaking Earth*; Chicago, Phoenix Books, 1959; p. 204. Wolf writes, "... some writers have called the institution 'feudal,' because it involved the rule of a dominant landowner over his dependent laborers. But it lacked the legal guarantees of security which compensated the feudal serf for his lack of liberty and self-determination." Wolf also describes (p. 209) how the hacienda system produced peons who were submissive to authority and alienated from each other, seeing their fellow workers as rivals for the favor of authority.

<sup>11</sup> For a description of the *ejido* system and its effects on villages such as the one referred to here, see Nathan Whetten's *Rural Mexico*; Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948. Foster also describes the social structure of Mexican peasant villages (see footnote 8). See also Michael Maccoby, "Love and Authority, A Study of Mexican Villagers," *The Atlantic*, March, 1964, pp. 121-126. Oscar Lewis in *Life in a Mexican Village* (Urbana, Univ. of Ill. Press, 1951) describes the social structure of Tepotzlán, a village in the same area of Mexico. Although there are many factors in common, Tepotzlán is essentially an Indian village, without the hacienda tradition. However, the attitudes of the Tepotzlán villagers to authority appear to be similar to those described here (see p. 292).



and cooperation, in which everyone gives and profits equally. Community decisions are made in town meetings where all adults may vote. Although the sons of the richer villagers are more likely to study beyond primary school than are those of the poor, rich peasants neither live nor dress in a manner much different from the poor. The villagers, with few exceptions, disapprove of a person who tries to be different from the rest, to give himself "class" (*categoría*). Still fresh in the minds of the villagers are the ideals of the Revolution, particularly those of Emiliano Zapata, who lived and fought in this region.

It is not merely differences in wealth that keep the villagers from realizing these ideals. The centuries of the hacienda, of exploitation, of violence, and of scarcity have conspired to cause a mistrust of self and others, a tendency to seek security in submission, a fatalism often leading to alcoholism and apathy.<sup>12</sup>

#### METHOD OF STUDY

Three methods were used to investigate games. During two years of work in the village, two of the investigators were participant observers in children's play and in the games of older villagers. A playroom was established where younger children, aged approximately 4 to 10, would come to play, seemingly undisturbed by the investigator taking notes. We also made a point of asking some of the children to describe the games they played and which ones they preferred. Often we would ask children about the rules and variations of games they were playing spontaneously.

The second method employed was a formal questionnaire, administered individually to 76 children. Fifty, 25 boys and 25 girls between the ages of 6 and 12, were chosen randomly from the census lists. The remaining 26, 13 boys and 13 girls aged 13 to 16, were chosen from

<sup>12</sup> Foster notes that fatalism is common to peasant societies. The peasant is governed and exploited by the city; he cannot control the forces that determine his life, including politicians, disease, or vagaries of the weather that affect his crop. He is fatalistic because that is the way things are. See footnote 8; p. 47.

a larger random sample and interviewed catch-as-catch-can and therefore are representative of the more talkative and less timid teen-agers. The questionnaire asked the child to indicate which games were for boys, which were for girls, and which were played by both sexes. The child was also asked which game he liked best and why.

The third method of study was experimental, the introduction of new games.

In the following sections, the results will be analyzed in terms of age, sex, and cultural differences in games played, and, finally, the effects of introducing new games into the village.

#### AGE DIFFERENCES IN PLAY

On the basis of the questionnaire and observation, four age periods characterized by different forms of play were distinguished. The first includes ages 4 through 7; the second, ages 8 through 11; the third, ages 12 through 15; and the fourth describes the play of adults.

Dramatic play or mimicry most characterizes the play of the children under 8. Dolls are rare, but if there are kittens in the household, the children dress them in scraps of cloth and rock them like babies. Little girls seldom lack opportunities to rock real baby siblings. Children of both sexes play a simple version of house, making tortillas from mud, sweeping, and so on, with little spirit of fantasy. Indeed, if one playfully asks a little girl if her mud pies are tortillas, she will in all probability answer, without irony, "No, they're mud."

Children were not observed playing doctor or nurse, even though a doctor and a nurse often visit the village, and they were also not observed playing policeman or fireman, roles which were less familiar to them. Boys play at pistols. (Many of the grown men regularly carry them.) Sometimes a girl will pretend to be a teacher, usually playing at being a disciplinarian quieting an unruly class. One of the few roles often imitated is that of a drunk; for example, once a child fell down and said, "I fell, I'm drunk from two beers." The enjoyment of mimicry



does not end with childhood. Adults often mimic others as a form of ridicule, especially against those who aspire to *categoria*.

A form of play common both to the younger (4-7) and older (8-12) children is games of skill, which become more competitive with age. Boys climb trees and aim slingshots. They also play *balero*, the game of cup and stick—a rusty tin can frequently serving as the cup—which may be played either alone or in competition. Boys of this age play marbles with considerable expertise, always following the same pattern of play, the game essentially consisting of knocking the opponent's marble out of a circle drawn in the dirt. When questioned, they express no resistance to changing the rules and playing in new ways. But neither are they actively interested in rules; they are much more concerned with perfecting shots. Only rarely do villagers of any age argue about rules.

Children of ten and older who manage to scrape up a few centavos play a penny-pitching game which combines skill and competition with a new element, chance. The game is called *anteojos*, or eyeglasses, which are drawn with a stick in the dirt. Even if one child seems to win by pitching closest to the center of the eyeglasses, the other may still avoid losing by flipping his penny and calling it correctly. It seems as though the moral of the game is that skill is not enough to gain a living in this society; one must have luck also.

By the age of 8, except for games played within the schoolyard (generally tag or volleyball), girls and boys neither play together nor play the same games. Games of competitive skill played exclusively by girls include jump rope, in which they see who can jump the most times without missing, hopscotch, and bounceball. Neither jump rope nor bounceball is accompanied by chants. When girls play ball, often there is a leader who decides who will be next to catch. Sometimes the ones who miss are eliminated.

The type of game which most characterizes the ages of 9 to 12 is the central-

person game, the preferred game of two-thirds of the girls and thirty percent of the boys. We shall discuss more fully how the contents of the village central-person games differ from such games as they are played in the industrialized world. It is sufficient to say here that there are three types of central-person games. One, played mostly by boys, involves physical activity. *La rabia* (tag) is an example (in much of Mexico the game is called *la roña*). The game is often disorganized; sometimes there may be an *it*, but frequently everyone runs around, chasing and being chased according to his whim. A form of hide-and-seek (*escondidas*) is played in which the central person is the one to hide while the others try to find him. The game is also played in its more widespread form in which the *it* searches for the others, but there is no "home-free-all." In *cuero quemado* (burnt leather), a belt is hidden, and the one who finds it chases after the others, who flee to the base line. The one with the belt may whip all those who have not yet reached safety.

Team sports are most popular during the ages 12 to 16. Seventy percent of the boys preferred soccer, which had been taught to them only three years before by a volunteer from the American Friends Service Committee who worked with us. Those girls of this age who have not given up playing games as undignified play either volleyball or central-person games.

The young men over 16 fall into two groups. One group plays basketball, introduced into the village twenty years ago. Most afternoons at about 6 P.M., after work, one can find 15 to 20 young men practicing. A villager feels honored to be chosen for the first team, which plays on Sundays either at home, on the concrete court of the plaza built about 1950, or in a neighboring village. In all, some 30 young men belong to the *Club Deportiva* (Sports Club), which centers about basketball but also sponsors dances in order to raise money for basketball equipment. The team boasts of having won the state trophy, which is on display



in the municipal building. The other group is made up of young men who, if they play games at all, play cards or billiards.

A form of play that cuts across all types and is enjoyed even by married women is the pure game of chance. Those who can afford it play the national lottery. Others wager smaller sums in fairs that periodically pass through the district. During Easter week the village is host to itinerant proprietors of games of chance.

In summary, the average village child, as he grows up, proceeds from dramatic play to central-person games to team sports. While this development appears similar to that of industrial societies, a closer analysis will show that the central-person games differ significantly in content, and that team sports are innovations played only by particular villagers.

SEX DIFFERENCES IN GAMES

The analysis of sex differences, particularly in central-person games, first alerted us to more widespread differences in the social character of men and women. The central-person games of boys, such as *cuero quemado*, tag, and *escondidas*, are of two symbolic types. Either the central person has no authority and is chased by the group, or he has full permission to punish the others, who must try to escape. As contrasted with the central-person games of girls, they lack structure, they are more violent, and they conceive of authority only as an irrational punishing force. (When the *it* is chased, he represents the deviant rather than an authority, since he lacks any power.)

Central-person games of girls offer more variety, including those combining competition and chants such as *María Blanca* and *La Monjita* (The Little Nun), pure roundelays such as *Naranja Dulce* (Sweet Orange), and competitive verbal contests, of which *Matarili* is the prime example. What do these games reveal about girls as contrasted to boys?

First of all, the girls' games, which usually demand a circle, are more structured and orderly than those played by

boys. The girls take turns being leader, and the others neither rebel nor flee from the authority; they accept it. Second, the content of most games refers to danger from the male world, and especially from the sexually predatory male who threatens to capture and destroy the pure maiden. In *Naranja Dulce* the song tells us that because a girl has asked for an embrace and has lain down, death will carry her away.

*Naranja Dulce*

Sweet orange, parted lemon,  
Give me the embrace I beg.  
If my judgment were in vain  
Quickly would I forget.  
Play the march, my breast cries out,  
Goodbye my lady, now I am going.

Sweet orange, celestial lemon,  
Tell María not to lie down.  
But María has already lain down.  
Death came and took her away.

In *María Blanca*, *El Lobo* (The Wolf), and *La Monjita*, the drama is more explicit. If the girl leaves the protecting circle of women, she is likely to be destroyed by the male.<sup>23</sup> In these games of prepubescent girls, the war between the sexes, often a cold war, has already begun.

In central-person games of this type the wolf who eats a girl "whole" and the devil who wants the pure little nun both appear within the same formal structure and seem interchangeable, suggesting that the threat is more than a simple sexual assault. The unconscious fear seems to be that the male will try sadistically to incorporate the young girl, to use her sexually when he wishes, and, when he is hungry, to eat her. The danger lies not in sex, per se, although the threat may take a sexual disguise, but in the loss of personal integrity, the fear of being used, the extreme of which in a society of material scarcity becomes terror of being incorporated cannibalistically. Once the man has satisfied his impulse, he goes away, as in *Naranja Dulce*, leaving the girl unprotected, to die. *Na-*

<sup>23</sup> As a point of interest, Caillols notes that the roundelays of Europe, which are probably the originals of those in the village, sometimes referred to "marriage by capture" (see footnote 2; p. 61).



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*ranja Dulce* is a verbal warning not to trust romantic love. In *La Monjita* and *María Blanca* the circle tries to protect the girl.

In this society, in which the male often does exploit the woman, treating her alternately as a sexual object and a mother figure who must feed and baby him, the symbolism of girls' games approximates truth. But there is another dimension to the symbolism of wolf and man. The woman not only fears the predatory male; she ambivalently wishes to identify with his strength, to be swallowed whole. In *El Lobo*, the children form a ring with the wolf outside. They walk around singing,

We'll play in the forest while the wolf's not here,  
For if the wolf appears, he'll eat us whole.

They ask the wolf what he is doing. "Bathing," he answers. They repeat the question. "Putting on my shirt," is the next answer. After each verse he is more fully dressed;<sup>14</sup> and finally he closes the door of his house and says, "Ahí voy" (Here I come). The children flee, and the first one he catches is the new wolf.

Thus the girl who is caught by the wolf (or by the devil in *La Monjita*) in turn becomes the aggressor when the game begins anew. The threat to personal integrity stems as much from the desire to identify with the aggressor and trade weakness for strength as it does from the real threat of male exploitation.

In the purely verbal central-person game of *Matarili* (which means nothing, but is like saying, "To kill-ili-ili"), a characteristic weapon of the village women is sharpened through play. One player stands alone and must by her wits force the others, one by one, to her side. She does this by shaming the other girls, by finding such cutting phrases to describe them that they would rather join her than wait for even more devastating descriptions which would expose them to

still more ridicule and mirth from the others. *Matarili* is really killing with words. As each new victim joins the leader, she helps in thinking up new verbal attacks on the ones who remain, until all have joined the leader or, again, identified with the aggressor.

While the games of boys arouse open violence, the games of girls are sharpening the subtler weapon that destroys with words. Although *Matarili* is played with a happy and carefree air, as girls grow older the battle of words deepens in intensity. Mature women sometimes openly attack each other in the style of *Matarili* but far more ferociously, until one of them is so shamed that she retreats speechless. In like manner, the woman's weapons against the greater physical strength of her husband are words that undermine his manliness.

Why do words carry so much power to destroy? Two reasons come to mind. The first is the fear of ostracism, of being alone without the ties that keep one alive. Words that ridicule suggest that the victim is less than human, immoral, too ugly to be suffered, beneath contempt, fit only to be cast away by society. Second, the intelligence of the villagers is concrete rather than abstract.<sup>15</sup> Theirs is an astuteness that perceives the person beneath his façade of dignity, manliness, or decorum. Their insults fly directly at the victim's most vulnerable targets, his fears, his "secret name," and they are cleverly exaggerated and metaphorically designed to widen the wound. For when such intelligence is combined with malevolence, suggesting to villagers the woman with a penetrating "evil eye," it may seem as though the aggressor respects no limits in her destructiveness, that her words literally can kill.

In older indigenous societies, women often gained respect and mastery through learning the words of songs and rituals. Even in this mestizo village, where In-

<sup>14</sup> Speculating on the symbolic meaning of the wolf's dressing, we have thought that it might be a reversal of the latent meaning—that the wolf is actually undressing, preparing for a sexual attack; but it is also possible that the wolf, having satisfied himself sexually, is now hungry.

<sup>15</sup> This has been shown in tests of cognitive style and intelligence, comparing the village children to both Mexico City and U.S. children. See, for example, Michael Maccoby, Nancy Modiano, and Isidro Galván, "Culture and Abstraction," *VII Congreso Interamericano de Psicología*, Mexico D.F., Sociedad Interamericana de Psicología, 1963.



dian rituals, if they were ever known, are long forgotten, some of the women most skilled at insulting also lead the villagers in the Christmas Posadas and church prayers. But there are no women curers in the village; nor are there those traditional dances and liturgical dialogues which might serve as models for different types of central-person games. These games now express and reinforce the female distrust of men and teach the type of force she needs to protect herself from male violence.

What is the true social situation of women? Little girls are expected to obey their parents without question. Little boys are also, but in addition more work and responsibility is demanded of the girls at an earlier age than the boys. It often happened that a mother would allow a boy of 8 or 9 to take books from the small library we founded, but his sister of 10 would state regretfully that her mother insisted that she clean the house or care for the baby and not waste her time reading.

The grown-up woman, according to prevailing ideology, should adopt a submissive role. She has fewer rights than her husband, and, as some villagers put it, should obey him as a new father. Yet the woman is less dominated and stronger than she may seem. Her three ways of responding to the male attack are illustrated in the games. First is solidarity with other girls and isolation from men. When this is undercut by her sexual, romantic, or power-seeking impulses, she may identify with her husband as a second line of defense and obey him, as long as he remains strong. The urge to merge with a stronger power seems the most important factor in dissolving female solidarity, for in the end women distrust each other as rivals. A study by Lola M. Schwartz, one of our co-workers, of adultery cases brought to the local courts showed that the injured woman invariably blamed her rival and not her husband, whom she did not expect to resist a seductive woman.

The woman's identification with her husband lasts only as long as he demon-

strates superior force. Sometimes authority is thrust upon her by his desertion. More often, she takes over when he falters, because of age or alcoholism, sometimes leaving him if he is irresponsible and does not support her. As an authority her hand is more firm than his, since men remain more conflicted over taking command.<sup>16</sup> The village female, even as a child, seeks and enjoys authority much more than the male does. (Some girls said they preferred central-person games because they could be chief, a response never given by a boy.) The female does not hesitate when she sees the opportunity to take charge. One investigator associated with the study, Marta Salinas, related that in one family which she knew well the husband dominated as a tyrant until he reached the age of sexual impotence, when his wife turned on him suddenly, ridiculed him as less than a man, and grabbed the reins of household command.

#### CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN GAMES

No adequate descriptive and analytic study has been made of the games played at various stages of character development in Western societies. Yet by drawing from various studies one may construct a development from an egocentric attitude, which Piaget has related to the child's obedience and unquestioning acceptance of adult authority, to a social character which is at once more just (reciprocal) and more independent (autonomous).<sup>17</sup> Piaget has demonstrated, in his

<sup>16</sup> Support for this conclusion has been found by Isidro Galván in the comparison of the Rorschachs of men and women in the village. The women show more control and extensor Ms, while the men combine softer images (such as flowers and butterflies) with explosive outbursts ("Investigación Psico-social sobre el Machismo en Tres Culturas Mexicanas," unpublished master's thesis, National University of Mexico). This analysis is also consistent with the interpretation of Rorschachs in Tepotzlán, reported by Lewis. "As she grows older (over 40) the strict discipline, which has been impressed on the female from childhood in Tepotzlán becomes her strength: it appears that she realizes she can control and manipulate the world around her. She is undisturbed by daydreams, sexual urges and emotional needs. The older woman has somehow discovered that she can now run the show, and does so." See Lewis, in footnote 11; p. 313.

<sup>17</sup> See footnote 5; pp. 190-191. Piaget also writes, "There is, in our opinion, the same relation between mutual respect and autonomy as between unilateral



study of Swiss children, that changing concepts of rules reflect this process. While the findings of a number of other studies have not lent support to all of Piaget's conclusions, Kohlberg in reviewing the literature on moral development writes, "The age trends for several of the Piaget dimensions are consistent enough to warrant the conclusion that they are genuine developmental dimensions in both American and French-speaking cultures."<sup>18</sup> Among these dimensions, he includes changes in concepts of rules. The data are less clear on the consistency of development to the reciprocal-autonomous "stage," but in all the Western societies studied a high percentage of children do express this attitude, and as Kohlberg found, "A morality of reciprocity and equality was found . . . to be associated with lack of respect for adult authority . . ."<sup>19</sup>

Piaget does not make clear to what extent games are responsible for this development, but he does report that a greater sense of reciprocity in play precedes independence in moral judgment.<sup>20</sup> While it is more demonstrable that games reflect social character development, it remains hypothetical how much games influence this development, as compared to the influence of family, the school, folklore, and so on.

From the observations of Piaget, Erikson, and Sutton-Smith, and from our own

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respect and egocentrism, provided the essential qualification be added, that mutual respect far more than unilateral respect, joins forces with the rationality already incipient in the motor stage, and therefore extends beyond the phase that is marked by the intervention of constraint and egocentrism" (p. 89).

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Kohlberg, "Moral Development and Identification," in *Sixty-second Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I; Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963*; p. 317.

<sup>19</sup> See footnote 18; p. 320. Kohlberg questions Piaget's theory that autonomy and group participation are related, pointing to his finding that peer-group relations are not related to a reciprocal orientation. However, Piaget makes it clear that the development of reciprocity and autonomy depends on relations that are free of all constraint (see footnote 5; p. 190), and it must be asked whether the peer-group in the United States today does not at times impose an even greater constraint and demand for conformity than do parents and teachers, who seem to be becoming progressively more permissive. In the village, submission to authority sometimes seems to be directly transferred to become submission to the group, without any development of autonomy or reciprocity.

<sup>20</sup> See footnote 5; pp. 78-79.

experiences, we would characterize the path of social character development in terms of games played in industrial societies as follows.

For the egocentric child of 5 or younger, other children can only help or hinder *his* game, which both imitates adults and compensates for his feelings of helplessness. He must be the master and the winner; what other children do matters little. But the games of children aged 6 to 9 reflect a more cooperative spirit. Sutton-Smith has written, "The analysis of all the games played by children in the first three school grades shows that approximately three-quarters of these games are Central Person games. These are games in which one central person plays in opposition to the rest of the group."<sup>21</sup> As they are played in Western Europe, the United States, and Australia and New Zealand, these games share a central person who orders the others or tries to capture them (Giant Steps, Hide-and-Seek, or Red Rover Come Over) while the group has powers to fight back, sometimes banding together, sometimes freeing companions who have been caught.

From ages 9 through 12 this independent-fraternal attitude jells, as children play games with more complicated rules requiring what Piaget calls "reciprocity," which includes a rational respect for rules allotting equal justice to all of the players. During this period, the ethic of fairness is stressed both in games and in daily life. The games or sports that follow generally assume the characteristic of reciprocity, although the emphasis shifts, as we have noted, to winning, or beating the system.<sup>22</sup>

Viewing in this way the games of Western industrialized societies, it is possible to trace through games the development of social and psychological attitudes which underlie democratic, capitalistic

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<sup>21</sup> Brian Sutton-Smith, "A Formal Analysis of Game Meaning," *Western Folklore* (1958) 18:13-24; p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> John M. Roberts, Malcolm J. Arth, and Robert R. Bush have demonstrated a relationship between the complexity of a social system and the presence of games of strategy. Such games, they feel, are expressive models of mastering the social system. "Games in Culture," *American Anthropologist* (1959) 61:597-605.



social systems, based on a combination of voluntary cooperation, regulated competition, contracts, rational authority, and respect for laws which protect the rights of the weak and powerful alike. Although the system does not always live up to this ideal, it could not function unless these attitudes were formed in its members.

In the village, games and social character are different. A boy does not learn to disengage himself from authority and egocentrism by cooperating with his peers. He does not internalize reciprocal rights and learn the meaning of rational authority. Authority remains dangerous and impulsive, a force he must escape or imitate. The central person is either chased or chases brutally. The group is a mass whose tyranny precludes cooperation to achieve autonomy, regulated competition, or the practice of rational authority. One joins the group to chase an enemy but runs alone without recourse against the tyrant. In both games and village life, the tendency is for atomism rather than cooperation, and the formation of a mass rather than individualism and respect for differences.

Like their elders, the most capable boys shun leadership. Two real leaders refused the presidency of the agricultural club, one admitting privately that he did not want to push others around and be disliked. He did not believe that he or anyone else could act differently. In a more extreme protest, one of the town elders on being elected to office complained of incapacitating weariness and backache, which did not disappear until the village had chosen a substitute.

It is our hypothesis that cultural differences in both games and attitudes toward authority are rooted in socioeconomic differences which determine beliefs about what is necessary for progress and prosperity. In the village both games and social character reflect conservatism, authority relations branded by the feudal past and semifeudal present, and the distrust of all individualism as a threat to the status quo. There is only so much land, all of it in use. An ingenious new

idea or a competitive spirit can only mean one person's gain at the expense of the others. The wish for political authority equals the impulse to exploit.

The boy who plays games does not need to analyze his social system. He experiences adult authority by decree and threat of beatings. His successes are never rewarded, and his failures (to obey) are always punished. He may avoid opposing authority because his fear is too strong and because he lacks both allies and institutions to support his forbidden impulses. An experience which is too frightening or arouses too much hostility is not a subject for play, which demands distance and security. Only when authority is limited and children's rights are respected does it seem likely that the child can become independent without risking total rebellion and can learn how to be a rational authority.<sup>23</sup>

It is true that adolescents play cooperative team sports which are relatively new, despite their older roots in pre-Columbian cultures. Basketball and soccer are imports from the city, and both games are played by the villagers in less structured form than their counterparts in the United States. There is less division of labor, and even in basketball there are no pivot men, playmakers, or organized patterns of play. Whereas American games are based on reciprocity, interest in rules, and individualism, the village team sports are the outgrowth of a more simple group cohesion and cooperation without leaders, individual stars, or complex rules. Village sports also illustrate a more general finding—that villagers cooperate most when they can find an enemy or opponent.

#### THE EFFECTS OF NEW GAMES

In an effort to study how much games influence culture change, we have tried to analyze the effects of new games intro-

<sup>23</sup> The contrast between rational and irrational authority is explained by Erich Fromm in *Escape From Freedom*; New York, Farrar and Rinehart, 1941. Fromm shows how rebellion, of the type characteristic of the village, is an aspect of the authoritarian character and does not represent true independence.



duced into the village, both by local innovators and by ourselves.

Basketball, which was introduced in 1938 by a school director, early became the focal point for a group of young men who believed in "progress" and who opposed older local customs they considered wasteful. As one of the town elders who was among the first basketball players related, the young men used to have only three interests—*jaripeos* (local bull-fights), *naipes* (cards), and drinking.<sup>24</sup> The basketball players led the opposition to *jaripeos* and were also responsible for cutting down on costly religious festivals.

Many young men still embrace the cult of *machismo* (maleness), get drunk often, and show off their manliness with pistols or machetes, but for others basketball has become a substitute, a nondestructive way of displaying skill and endurance to the crowds who watch the games. The basketball players are the most productive young men, the best farmers, and the first volunteers to work on community projects. When we helped establish a library, the committee selected by the village for its direction was composed of three basketball players. The first group of players helped to found a community store, which failed later because of opposition from the town's other dominant group, centered around a powerful leader and his more *macho* followers.

Lola Schwartz attempted to form a club of young women, centered around a volleyball team. For a while the club flourished after an auspicious inauguration complete with new uniforms and flower-bearing *madrinas* (godmothers) for each player. But the team dissolved in dissension. Three factors were responsible. First of all, the question of leadership—which has never bothered the basketball players, whose captain

only reluctantly accepts the post—was important to the girls. They argued about who would be captain, who would decide on the color of the uniforms, and who would carry the volleyball. Second, the mothers of the girls were from the start suspicious of the club, some feeling that it diverted their daughters from work, others that it was an excuse for the girls to display themselves in front of the young men. Finally, when the leader of the club got married and shortly thereafter became pregnant, the group disintegrated.

What can be concluded from the experiences with basketball and volleyball? Basketball did not create the desire for cooperation and progress, but it institutionalized and reinforced these impulses. In the case of the girls' team, competition over the role of authority and the disapproval of the mothers destroyed the team before it could work any change on the girls' attitudes.

The fact that volleyball was introduced by an American anthropologist and not by a Mexican may also have contributed to its failure. It is true that soccer, which was enthusiastically accepted by boys of 12 to 16, was taught them by a Friends Service Committee volunteer who stayed in the village only two months and was in no way a charismatic leader. However, the fact that the game was played in nearby villages made the boys eager to form a team, and they may also have accepted the game more readily because they had already joined in a boys' agricultural club. The result of the new game was increased interest in agricultural work, in part to make more money to pay for equipment and for transportation to play teams of other villages. Soccer did not solve the problems of the boys' avoiding responsibility and roles of authority,<sup>25</sup> but it did increase the club's cohesion.

The popularity of a sport reflects in part the range of alternatives open to a society. The village is culturally barren, and the most intelligent and alert people

<sup>24</sup> Caillois points out that games of chance reflect passivity and fatalism and are particularly popular in Central America. Games of competition, on the other hand, express the idea that skill and work lead to success. "However, pure games of chance do not develop any physical or mental attitude in the player, since he remains essentially passive. Their moral consequences are also quite formidable, because they detract from work and effort in creating hope for sudden and considerable wealth." See footnote 2; p. 167.

<sup>25</sup> See Maccoby, in footnote 11, for a discussion of the vicissitudes of the boys' club and the results of efforts to stimulate a greater sense of responsibility.



are the first to take advantage of any new stimulus that breaks the monotony of peasant life. But as the battle against the *jaripeo* proved, attitudes toward sports may also reflect a deeper characterological structure or aspirations.

A brief experiment of introducing a new central-person game was aimed at seeing whether a more independent-fraternal attitude could be reinforced through symbolic play. In other words, we wondered whether the children, by banding together against authority in play, might begin to assert themselves more in real life. No such changes were forthcoming, for the experiment turned out far different from our expectations.

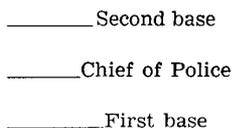
The experimenter had lived in the village two months, getting to know the children through her work in starting the library, before she asked the school director's permission to teach a game to children of the third and fourth grades, who share a classroom. The game was a variation of Red Rover Come Over, which Sutton-Smith points out is played with variations in all Anglo-Saxon countries.<sup>26</sup> It is typical of central-person games which demand cooperation against it, the authority. Here it was called *Jefe* or Chief of Police, with a chief and thieves. The instructions were given as follows:

Good morning. As some of you know, I'm here to learn your language and help with the library. I also want to see how you play, and I've already seen some of your games.

Today I want to show you a game from my country that perhaps some of you are going to enjoy. It's a game which the children play in the United States during recess or in the afternoons after school. Boys and girls can play together or apart.

In this game there is a person in the center of the field whom we may call the "chief," or "the chief of police," because all the others are "thieves."

There are two bases at the sides of the field and a position in the middle, like this [drawing on the blackboard]:



<sup>26</sup> See footnote 21.

Everyone begins at first base, standing on this line. The chief in the center calls someone. He says, for example, "Mario, Mario, come here." Then Mario, or whoever the chief calls, has to try to run across the field to second base. The chief of police tries to catch him. If the chief catches the thief, he has to remain in the center with the chief and help him catch the others. But if the thief can run to second base without being caught, then he can say to the other thieves, "Thieves, all of you, come on over here." Then the players, all of them, run to the other side, and the chief and his assistants try to catch all they can. Remember that only when one of the thieves has gotten to the other side can he give permission to run. The rest of the time the chief in the center is the one who may say who may run across.

Then the chief calls another name, and another thief tries to run to the other side. The game continues until all the thieves are caught except one. This last one, who doesn't get caught, becomes the new chief for the new game.

As the children played the game, it became expressive of their attitudes toward authority. The first day an attempt was made to combine boys and girls, but the girls left when the male *jefe* called none of their names. At this stage, the game was being played according to the rules. But the boys began to modify the game as they played on. At first they showed their anger against the authority figure. The field notes relate,

I had marked the boundaries with several stones and pieces of wood, which I soon regretted. The boys picked them up as weapons and as each boy was called, several people would run out of the line. Instead of just tagging, boys jumped on each other, and a general hassle arose.

The authority figure punished severely anyone he caught, and the others fought back.

But in the next stage of play, the "thieves" submitted. Instead of trying to escape, they waited patiently to be caught. Perhaps this was a reaction to the experimenter's attempt to calm them after the first game ended in violence. Those few who did get across safely never called to the others to come over. In the final stage of play, the game took on the



aspect of a typical village central-person game. The field notes continue,

Those who ran across safely the first time, instead of waiting to be called again, joined the *jefe* and his *ayudantes*. The game soon became an example of the group (*jefe* and *ayudantes*) persecuting the individual (the person named to run across), rather than one of the group against the *jefe*.

In successive stages, the boys demonstrated their reaction to irrational authority—first, they showed anger and violent rebellion; second, they reacted with patient submission; and third, the concept of the leader was lost as the group solidified to persecute the outsider.

Later, when the game was played with girls alone, there was a somewhat different reaction. The girls learned the rules and were much calmer than the boys, but they decided that the object of the game was to be chosen as *ayudante* by the chief. When called, they stepped forth proudly to be caught and to stand with the chief. No matter how many times the game was re-explained, it always became a game of the chief and her helpers, and the girl who was left considered herself an outcast rather than the winner.

It would appear that both boys and girls distorted the game to conform to their attitudes toward authority and to the formal structure of the central-person games they normally play. But before drawing conclusions as to the strength of this assimilating tendency, it is important to be clear to what extent the children understood and were trying to comply with the instructions. The first day, the boys were curious about the new game and seemed bent neither on pleasing nor opposing the experimenter. The second day, several boys who had played the first day declined, but those who did play appeared to do so of their own choosing. Each time they played, the game was explained, and they at first played according to the rules; but each time they soon distorted the game, seemingly not out of spite, but during the heat of action.

Some of the girls appeared eager to

win the experimenter's favor, clustering around her and begging to be taught the new game, and during play, they seemed to enjoy the game, expressing their enthusiasm by shouting and jumping. Although the experimenter only played the game with the girls on two mornings, and left the village shortly afterward, she was told on a return visit that the girls had played it on their own a number of times, but it is quite possible this was said with a mind to pleasing her. There is no evidence that the boys ever played it on their own.

Although the instructions were repeated several times and the game was played correctly at first, it is possible that some of the children never understood the instructions. Village children would hesitate to ask for clarification, preferring not to expose themselves to possible ridicule. However, even though it is necessary to exercise caution in drawing conclusions, the forms of distortion that did occur lent support to the analysis of the unconscious attitudes toward authority, and differences between the sexes, a conclusion we did not set out to prove with the experimental game. On the contrary, our purpose was to teach a new game which might stimulate cooperation and independence—an experiment that would have required continued attempts to teach the game.

To conclude, the analysis of games has enriched the understanding of how social character is formed in the village, of beliefs and attitudes expressed and reinforced through play. New games will not reform character and society, but they appear to support the process of culture change.

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# Games and Social Character in a Mexican Village†

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