

BARS AND BULLFIGHTS ON THE BORDER

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INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines an interview/ ethnographic research assignment which involved students living in the border city of Laredo in a total process of data collection, data analysis, and data presentation. Data were collected on leisure time activities popular in the border communities of Laredo (Texas)/Nuevo Laredo (Tamaulipas, Mexico), including data on bars, bullfights, bingo and boxing. The research process is discussed here, along with summary reports on bars and bullfights, the two leisure activities which involved border crossing experiences.

PERSPECTIVES ON LEISURE ACTIVITIES IN A CROSS-CULTURAL SETTING

The cities located on the border between Mexico and the United States are dynamic arenas of intermingling cultural patterns. People from both sides of the border migrate to the border to take advantage of economic opportunities. As people move from rural to urban areas, they bring with them their familiar ethnic identities and expectations of social and interpersonal ties. The practice and preservation of ethnic culture and association is particularly evident in leisure activities. Culture can be defined as the way of life of a group of people, including shared norms, beliefs, emotions, attitudes, aspirations, values, and symbols. Leisure time activities develop as shared expressions of the cultural expectations. Leisure represents time which can be enjoyed in its own right, a relief from the necessity and drudgery of work. People make recreational and leisure choices which allow them to participate in activities of personal meaning and self-expression (Bryjak, Soroka 1994; Fox 1977; Kabagarama 1993; Luce, Smith 1987).

Arreola and Curtis (1993) examined the development of the border cities and border culture. They observed that the 2000 mile border corridor has developed over the last 30 years

as one of the most urbanized regions in Mexico. Its largest cities are among the fastest growing in the Western Hemisphere... They exhibit aspects of Latin American as well as North American cities, but contain elements that are unique to the border as a place....

This bicultural zone... has been called 'the common ground' and a 'third country' between Mexico and the United States. Along this frontera, as the Mexicans call it, there is evidence of a cultural nationalism as well as a popular or vernacular culture specific to the zone. (Arreola, Curtis 1993)

Although the border communities are 'Americanized', they share the Mexican culture and influence in fundamental ways. This bicultural influence can be noted especially in the popular cultures related to leisure time activities. Along the border, cross-cultural encounters are strong tourist attractions which promise excitement and variety. Crossing the border represents an exotic attraction luring thousands of visitors. Border cities are distinct and popular tourist regions. Clare Gunn (1972) discussed four major components of tourist regions: people with the desire to participate, transportation to and from attractions, attractions which offer services and facilities for participation, and information to assist users in finding the attractions. Gunn also notes that visiting friends and relatives constitutes a strong motivation for leisure and vacation time activities.

Leisure activities along the border exhibit the characteristics of the Mexican fiestas in many ways. In his analysis of fiestas in rural Mexico, Brandes (1988) notes that fiestas operate as mechanisms of social control. Recreation and leisure provide important sources of tension release by providing socially approved outlets for pent up feelings and aggressions which cannot be expressed in the home or work setting. Brandes notes that fiestas are a time of excess and squandering, and an experience of pure being. Eating, drinking of alcoholic beverages, music and dancing are usually included. "Fiestas, in other words, are literally feasts, shared events that people plan for and participate in jointly" (Brandes 1988 9).

Pierre Bourdieu (1991) identifies a social class distinction in leisure activities. He notes that spectator sports provide the important function of imaginary participation for working class and lower middle class adolescents. The working classes choose

sports requiring a considerable investment of effort, sometimes of pain and suffering (e.g. boxing) and sometimes a gambling with the body itself. (Bourdieu 1991)

LAREDO (TEXAS) AND NUEVO LAREDO (MEXICO)

Laredo, with a population of 155,000 (Explore 1995) is located on the banks of the Rio Grande River. In 1990, 90 percent of the population was of Mexican ancestry. Because of its location as a gateway for trade between the United States and Mexico, the economy is booming. However, it is also the poorest city in America, with 37 percent of the residents living below the federal poverty line. The population of Laredo is predominantly young. Over 50 percent of the population is below 25 years of age. One fourth of the families are headed by single parents, predominantly women (Loe 1992; Quilodran 1992). Laredo's growth as a boom town is seen by its growth of 31,000 residents between 1980-1990. Unemployment hovers around 10 percent. Much of the growth is attributable to immigration from Mexico and Latin American countries in search of jobs in the maquiladoras.

With the exception of Nuevo Laredo, a city of about 350,000 located across the Rio Grande in Tamaulipas, Mexico, Laredo is isolated from other metropolitan areas by 140 miles of scrub brush and desert. The origins of Laredo extend back to the 1700's. The twin border city of Nuevo Laredo was established in the nineteenth century when the Rio Grande River was designated the boundary between the United States and Mexico.

The founders of Nuevo Laredo were former residents of Laredo who preferred to remain Mexican and so crossed the river to establish a new community. (McKee 1992)

Many friendship and family ties exist between these two communities separated by the Rio Grande. Weekends often become times of reunion with friends and family. Two major bridges link the towns of Laredo and Nuevo Laredo providing access for cross border visiting. Partying across the river is a popular weekend activity. Weekend traffic on the international bridges becomes jammed as revelers cross the border to celebrate the weekend. Friends and families reunite to relax and enjoy their leisure. The following excerpt from a promotional brochure distributed by the

Laredo Chamber of Commerce (1991) captures the drama of the twin cities.

Los dos Laredos. The two Laredos. Conquistadores and cowboys. Haciendas and mansions. Old world charm and new frontier spirit. Laredo has a dual personality. She's a little bit of Mexico, a little bit of Texas and a little bit something more. Seven flags and seven cultures have created Laredo's special aura. Spain. France. Mexico. Texas. The Republic of the Rio Grande. The United States and the Confederate States.

STUDENT RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES ON BORDER LEISURE ACTIVITIES

This paper represents the process and results of sociology class research assignments which were compiled over several semesters and presented at the Southwestern Sociological Association (SSA) Meetings in Dallas, Texas in March of 1995. The process began with an ethnographic research paper which was assigned as a requirement in the summer (1994) class of Study of Society. The students were free to observe and write about an experience of their choice. Interesting studies dealing with visits to bars, bullfights, bingo parlors and boxing matches formed the incentive to explore further these leisure time activities. A fall (1994) class on group work discussed these activities, forming a list of questions that could be used to develop a questionnaire. In the fall of 1994 the author committed to present a paper at a regional meeting discussing these leisure activities. In spring 1995, the Study of Society class was drawn into the process of data collection. At the beginning of the semester, the students were informed that the class would include 'active sociology' through data collection, analysis, compilation, and paper presentation. The author agreed to spend the first two weeks of March preparing the paper from the data which would be collected by the students in February. Students were assured that all of their names would be included on the research report.

The class was divided into groups by each member choosing the leisure activity which he/she wanted to study. The groups met to develop questionnaires to be used for data collection. Each student in the class interviewed 10 respondents about the leisure activity of his/her respective group. Several class sessions were used to instruct the students in perspectives and orientations of research

collection and interview techniques (Backstrom, Hursh 1963; Frankfort-Nachmias, Nachmias 1992; Sullivan 1992). The importance of confidentiality and anonymity was emphasized. The students introduced themselves with the following statement.

Hello, My name is _____ and I'm a student in the Study of Society class at Texas A&M International University. We're doing a survey on leisure activities in the community. Would you take a few minutes to share your opinions and experiences at (bars, bullfights) in the area. I don't need your name, but I am interested in your insights.

The students located respondents for their ten interviews through convenience sampling. They were given the option to attend an event and interview people at the setting or to interview other college students about their leisure activities. They were instructed not to interview friends or acquaintances. Because the sample was not randomly drawn, it should not be concluded that the responses are representative of general behaviors.

After the interviews had been conducted, the students met in their groups to report, tabulate, examine, and analyze the data. Group meeting time was allowed in class, but most groups also found it necessary to meet outside of class to complete the project. The groups turned in a composite tally of responses along with a group generated evaluation and conclusion of the responses. All of the individual interviews and the group reports were turned in to the author for grading. A 27 page written paper consisting of survey tallies, selected ethnographic summaries and discussion was developed by the author in early March. Four students who attended the SSA Meetings in Dallas assisted in the presentation of the paper at the meetings. Copies of the paper were given to all of the class members with the instructions to thoughtfully read and analyze the information collected about leisure activities. Twenty-five percent of the final exam involved personal evaluation and discussion of the data and the research process.

Interviews and ethnographies are successful teaching tools because students become personally involved in observation and analysis of social relationships. These learning experiences are particularly useful in the exploration of border cultures. Many of the students have lived most or all of their lives on

the border. They have the advantage of being an insider familiar with both the 'American' and 'Mexican' cultures. Because most of the students are fluent in both Spanish and English, they are able to interview in Spanish, which is often necessary, and then translate and report the interview in English. Their bilingual and bicultural advantage places them in a position to be able to compare, interpret, and translate the feelings, attitudes, values, and experiences of one culture to another. This research experience increased the perception of the students, as they became aware of subcultures within their own community which many had previously overlooked or thought little about. The experience of analytically and critically examining these subcultures helped the students see with greater awareness familiar and local cultural behaviors. The following comments by students evaluate the usefulness of interviews, interaction and group work as learning devices and teaching tools.

This was a learning experience without a doubt. By going out and interviewing people on various topics we get first hand experience about the field of sociological research. This sort of research is more exciting than regular research projects and book reports. Personally, I had never been to a bullfight, and probably would never have gone if it hadn't been for this project.

I was actually surprised by the fact that people wanted to answer my questions.

Working in a group helped us to get to know each other and each others' beliefs. I believe that these surveys should be continued in future classes. One learns much more in going out and experiencing different situations and places.

Working in groups was a good idea. We communicated with each other and gave feedback on the surveys.

This assignment was a very interesting project. In order to learn a little bit of our society, interacting, communication, and learning about different cultures helps us look at society in a clearer way.

BARS ON THE BORDER

Sixty surveys and four ethnographies are used here to focus on the leisure activity related to visiting bars on the border. The six

Table 1: Characteristics of Respondents Who Visited Bars

(N=Number of responses to item)

(57) 93% were below 30 years of age

(50) 100% were high school or college students or graduates

(54) 40% go to bars at least once a week

(54) 84% go at least once a month

(48) 66% had family income below \$30,000 a year

(51) 18% expressed feelings of concern/anxiety

(59) 49% agreed that they sometimes drink more than they should

(60) 63% go to bars in Nuevo Laredo

(49) 6.6 = average drinks per visit (range 3-14)

(54) \$33 = average \$ spent per visit (range \$10-69+)

students who surveyed bar behavior conducted interviews in many locations in the community, including the community college, the university, commercial gyms, bars, workplaces, and the mall. The data show that the respondents were primarily college students in their 20's who visited bars 2-10 times a month. Five of the respondents said that they do not or seldom visit bars. The survey respondents were evenly divided by sex, with 31 females and 29 males. They spent (an average of) \$33 on (an average of) 6.6 drinks per visit. Sixty-six percent were from a family with income below \$30,000 per year. Table 1 presents a profile of the respondents who visited bars.

Some of the respondents (N=9) had concerns about bar related behaviors and about half of the respondents (N=29) agreed that they sometimes drink more than they should. However, most of them felt comfortable with their participation, enjoying the socializing, dancing, flirting, music, eating, and drinking. Table 2 lists the causes of concern which were expressed.

Sixty-one percent of the respondents said that they go to bars in Nuevo Laredo. Students in the class noted that because identification is not required for drinking in Nuevo Laredo, many high school students and underage young adults cross the bridge on the weekends to 'party'. Many bars charge one price for unlimited drinks, and some stay open all night. These are pull factors for partying across. However, there were also dangers and concerns expressed. The weekend traffic of people, mostly young people, crossing the border to party creates traffic jams on the bridges across the Rio Grande. Reasons for going (or not going) to Nuevo Laredo are listed in Table 3.

Table 2: Causes of Concern About Visiting Bars

Too many teenagers at the bars across border

Too many drunk drivers

My wife gets mad when I stay out late

People sometimes get into fights

People are getting too drunk

Hearing gunshots

Calories in a drink

My temper and getting into fights

Excerpts from ethnographies develop vivid snapshot images of the leisure activity of visiting bars. "A bar is a place where you go to have a good time, but each bar has its own different atmosphere. It all depends on which bar you go to" (Guerra 1995).

Bars are interesting places to go and observe how people interact with others. Even though Laredo is considered a small city, it has its share of different bars to choose from. There are sports bars where one can go to have a drink and watch a favorite sports event. These types of bars are mostly frequented by men. Their conversation is focused mainly on the event that they are watching. The more people drink, the louder they become. (Garcia 1995)

Certain bars have a karaoke system. This is where anybody can go up to the stage to sing a song chosen using the lyrics. It's a lot of fun because people usually sing after they get drunk because they wouldn't dare go sing if they were sober. It's really funny because people make fools of themselves because some of them don't know how to sing. (Noyola 1995)

The bar I visited is located at a mall & is very popular among young adults. Most of the people at the bar were in groups of 4-6 individuals. There were a few individuals who came in by themselves, but by the time I left, they had met people there... The majority of the young people at the bar were mostly single. Some came with a partner, but others were not going with anybody at that time. A single lady that was there stated that she had just broken up with her boyfriend, and had come to the bar to try to get over her loss. She just needed to talk to other people her own age.

Whatever the reason for being there, everybody seemed to be having a good time. People that go to bars seem to be the type that like to be with other people. Most of them agreed that even

Table 3: Reasons for Going/Not Going to Bars in Nuevo Laredo

Reasons for Going	Reasons for Not Going
Most places don't ask for ID.	Too many teenagers at bars across.
Out of town guests suggest going.	Cars get stolen/windows broken.
I get to meet young girls.	Too risky.
I don't like bars in Laredo.	Don't like the law across.
They close late.	It's easy to get in trouble with the police.
A different atmosphere.	It's too dangerous.
More classy clubs.	Too many kids and people looking for trouble.
Because I'm underage and can get in.	
It's cheaper to party across.	
One price lets you drink all you want.	

though they enjoyed drinking, they were not there to get drunk. (Garcia 1995)

I've gone to several bars in Laredo and Nuevo Laredo and they get really wild. When I mean wild, I mean that there is a lot of heavy drinking, and people are dancing on top of the tables. There are also fights because people get so drunk or just because they spill a drink on each other. (Noyola 1995)

I'm from Zapata (about an hours drive from Laredo) and I visited a bar there. Zapata is not a good place to visit bars. The bars are full of low class people, or shall I say 'cholos'. When they attend bars they seem to cause trouble. For some reason they end up in fights because they cannot control their drinking.

I interviewed college students from Zapata. The majority said that they visit bars in Nuevo Laredo, and that they spend an average of 20 to 30 dollars on drinks. Some of them had concerns about drinking and driving back to Zapata. (Guerra 1995)

I visited a bar in Nuevo Laredo. I was surprised because there were people that weren't even 18 and they were drinking. In Nuevo Laredo the legal age is 18 but these youngsters were about 15 or 16. Some of them were so drunk that they didn't know what they were doing. They were dancing on top of the tables with their partners... I asked why they come to Nuevo Laredo to drink rather than staying in Laredo. They responded it was because at some bars across the river it is only necessary to pay a cover charge at the door of about \$10-\$20 and they get to drink all night until 4am. They enjoy that instead of having to pay for every drink. (Noyola 1995)

The following ethnography describes an

afternoon visit to a bar in Nuevo Laredo. This account describes several activities related to the underground economy, such as street peddlers selling jewelry and tamales, shoeshine boys, and strolling mariachis. These economic activities are an important and necessary part of the third world survival strategy.

My son, three of his friends, and I visited this establishment (in Nuevo Laredo) on a Friday afternoon. The entrance of the bar is down a flight of stairs. The stairs lead into a small basement type room. A jukebox was at the opposite end of the entrance. Booths lined the wall opposite the bar. The room was dimly lit and the motif on the walls is bullfighting. The pub was old, but seemed to be relatively clean.

Ninety-nine percent of the people in the bar were Spanish speakers. Folks came in, had a beverage or two and left. Nothing out of the normal. The interesting people were the regulars that would wander in and out.

One of these regulars I will call 'Ring man'. He is a young man in his twenties, very polite and gentle. 'Ring man' designs and crafts rings made of nickel or bronze. His rings sell for about ten dollars. He learned his skill from his father. He is saving money to emigrate to the United States. He wants to live in New Orleans and sell rings in the French Quarter section of the city. He comes to the bar every night to sell his rings.

Next, I want to describe 'tamale lady'. She comes to the bar each evening about six o'clock. She carries a baby blue porcelain bucket on her head. The 'tamale lady' did not sell any tamales the evening we were there. People did not pay any attention to her. The people would wave her on to the next table.

There were several groups of shoe shine boys who walked through the establishment. This was rather sad to see. The boys were very young, not much older than nine or ten years. All

of the patrons just waved them on to the next table.

Groups of mariachis would stroll around the tables wanting to play music for hire. These people were also waved away by the patrons, probably because the jukeboxes were always playing. I learned that there are so many different ways of living. I felt safe while in this establishment. I never once felt uneasy. (Porter 1994)

Several of the ethnographies describe experiences of excess and wild excitement similar to the descriptions of Mexican fiestas outlined by Brandes (1988), who identified these events as important sources of tension release. In summarizing the response data, it was found that the 55 respondents made approximately 46.75 visits per week to bars. At an average expense of \$33 per visit, \$1542.75 per week was spent by them at the local bars in Laredo and Nuevo Laredo. This leisure activity represents a significant economic contribution and tourist industry for these border cities. Student comments in class confirmed that the interview summaries were representative of their personal bar experiences with their high school and college friends. One student interviewer poetically portrayed the drama and ambiance of bars.

There is something unique and different about the environment which permeates bars. There is that overwhelming aroma of spilled liquor and stale cigarette odor that in a strange way reminds one of past experiences, friends, lovers, and even sad times. Within the confines of bars people laugh and talk. They share experiences with friends and even strangers whom they will probably never see again. The liquor that flows from the reserves of these bohemian lodges creates a liquid euphoria that is reflected in the loud and continuous laughter of many who consume the intoxicating spirits. Within these barracks, friends are made and lovers lost. Ideas that are supposed to change the world are sketched on paper napkins and disposed of, along with dreams, ambitions, and cigarette butts...

Bars are sanctuaries for the happy and the sad, for the lover and the adulterer, for the friend and the foe. An artificial escape that allows many to enter a vacuum where problems do not co-exist with their lives and where solutions are just one more drink away. "Cheers everyone". (Ehrenzweig 1995)

BULLFIGHTS ON THE BORDER

Five students examined the leisure time activity related to bullfights. Thirty survey interviews and 4 ethnographies were included. Twenty interviews were obtained in Laredo and ten were obtained at a bullfight across the border in Nuevo Laredo. Most (N=17) of the 20 respondents from Laredo were of Hispanic descent who had lived in Laredo, Mexico, or south Texas all of their lives. When asked about frequency of attendance, the responses were 'only once', 'seldom', 'several times', and 'now and then'. Although the respondents did not attend the fights often, many of them had first attended bullfights at an early age with their family or a family member. Seven respondents stated that they first attended the bullfights with their father, their parents, or their family before they were 10 years old. One student observer who has attended bullfights with his family since childhood writes the following descriptive account.

Ole! Ole! These are the cheering words that the bullfighting fan (aficionado) hollers when a "faena" (pass) is being executed by the bullfighter. Ole! is an expression that is shouted by the "aficionados" when they are excited about a well-performed pass...

Bullfighting is big business... The posters that announce the fights are actual reproductions of paintings created by famous artists of yester-year. These paintings fill the top part of the poster, along with the name of the bullring (plaza de toros), while the bottom section is used to announce the date and hour of the fight (corrida), the matadors, the number of animals to be fought, the name of the ranch (ganaderia) and color of the emblem (divisa)... A normal "corrida" is one in which three matadors alternately fight six bulls.

One of the most exciting and emotional things to me is the entrance to the bullring. The smell of cigar smoke and mezcál make me go into a trance which takes me all the way back to when I was a small child, for I remember how my grandfather and my uncles used to smoke and drink before and throughout the "corrida"...

A matador who has performed brilliantly with cape and muleta can have his triumph turn to disaster if he does not kill well. I guess that is why they call it the moment of truth. It is the most dangerous part of the fight...

There are many mixed feelings about the "fiesta brava",... bullfighting is like wine, if you drink it for the first time and like it, you will

Table 4: Expressions of Purpose and Meaning in Bullfighting
N= number of respondents mentioning item

Purpose

- 8 It is a symbol representing man's power to control the beast.
 7 It is a historical Spanish tradition.

Bullfighter

Brave, Courageous, Skillful, Awesome, Graceful

Feelings

It is a thrilling feeling that keeps you off your seat. The adrenaline pumps inside your body.
 Very exciting, thrilling.
 I love to watch an animal get killed with honor and dignity.
 I like the fact that it's a Spanish tradition, but the bull does get hurt.
 I feel sorry for the bull.
 I did not enjoy it.

What happens to the bull?

- 7 He is butchered.
 4 He is butchered and given to the poor.

What does the matador do after the fight?

- 7 He prays and thanks God for his life.
 4 He celebrates.
 2 He gets drunk.

Highlights of the event

The moment of truth - who will die? the bull or the matador.
 Seeing the skill of the matador.
 When the matador sticks the sword in the bull.
 When the horse jumps over the dead bull.
 The whole thing is fascinating!

continue to drink it, and if you taste the wine and you don't like it, let it be - the wonderful world of bullfighting. (Rivera 1995)

The following ethnographic report describes how the love of bullfighting is passed on from one generation to the next.

A bullfight signifies beauty, art, grace, passion, determination, excitement, skill, but most importantly, danger, bravery and bloodshed. It is an event which, once you've seen, will either cause you to abhor it or love it.

I never thought I'd ever find myself witnessing a bullfight one Sunday afternoon, recently in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. My mother, an avid bullfight fan, grew up attending bullfights with her father and developed a passionate taste for the art. She had, on many occasions, told me about the above mentioned characteristics...I never expected to feel the thrill, excitement, and bubbling anticipation that I began to experience once I got to the bullring arena. As I listened to the band begin to play "La Virgen de la Macarena", which is always played before the fight,

my grandfather's and my mother's love for bullfighting began to take root in me...

How can I describe the thrilling, yet fearful, excitement I felt in my entire being as I first heard the drum and trumpet signal, then as the crowd hushed and the toril gate jerked open, and finally, as I saw that first bull charge out of the bullring? I remember my mother relating to me what her father would say to her as each bull charged out. "Mira nomas, que lindo animal!" which in English means "Look at that beautiful animal!"...

I couldn't help but admire the courage and bravery exhibited by the bullfighter as he faced the charging bull. Each pass he made looked so simple, and yet it was so dangerous for him. I was overwhelmed with the grace and skill with which he handled the cape.

Then came time for the two picadores to enter the arena on horseback. Each picador carried a lance which was forced into the bull's neck to weaken the bull's muscles. The horses were blindfolded and protected by padding...

After the picadores left the ring, the banderilleros entered. Two of them took turns placing

three pairs of banderillas behind the bull's neck. A banderilla is a wooden stick decorated with colored paper and has a sharp barbed steel point...

The trumpet sounded for the last part of the bullfight, and the matador entered the ring carrying a sword and a muleta, a red cloth draped over a stick...I found myself shouting "Ole!" with the rest of the crowd...I had become a part of the cheering crowd, applauding for the matador and praying that he be kept safe from the bull's horns. (Cruz 1994)

Respondents were asked to explain their understandings and feelings about many aspects of bullfighting. They were asked to discuss the purpose and meaning of the bullfight, the feelings they had when attending, their description of the bullfighter, the highlights of the event and what they thought happens to the bull and matador after the fight. The bullfight is portrayed as an historic and symbolic event which exalts the bravery and courage of the matador as he overcomes the wild, savage beast. Although the feelings of excitement are predominant, concern for the bull was expressed by several respondents. A justification for the death of the bull is seen in the perception that the meat of the butchered bull is given to the poor. These responses are outlined in Table 4.

One student interviewer stated,

Most of the individuals were entirely supportive of the event. They cited reasons for support of bullfighting from symbolic religious importance to heritage and tradition in the Mexican culture. Bullfighting was as relevant to them as apple pie and baseball are to Americans. Their support was evident in their passion as they spoke of the event, citing favorite parts of it such as the kill or the artistry in the bullfighter himself...

The best justification for killing the bull lies in man's dominance over beast. This is important from a symbolic point of view, as the pre-civilized society provided many occasions by which man would battle beast as a means of pure survival. The symbolic gesture of a bullfighter dominating the bull provides for the viewer a sense of security, in knowing that man would prevail over beast if in fact he had to.

Further justification lies in its historical value. Bullfighting was an integral part of the Spanish (European) culture, one which holds much relevance & is strong in tradition. (McDonald 1995)

Another student interviewer who collected 10 interviews at a bullfight in Nuevo Laredo writes:

It's 4 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon at the Lauro Luis Longoria Plaza, which will be the sight of a celebrated tradition in Mexico known as the "corrida de toros" also known as bullfights.

As people start arriving, an ambiance of anticipation and excitement fills the air from the excited voices in the crowd. People with tickets are shuffling in a hurry to enter into the plaza, while others are still waiting in line to buy their tickets. It is from these people that I collected my data (N=10) on feelings and opinions about bullfighting in Mexico.

When I asked what is the intriguing and fascinating excitement about watching a bullfight, many responded by saying that they enjoyed watching the bull fiercely charge toward the matador as he gracefully and skillfully moves away from the bull's gorge by passing him through his cloak with either a Veronica pass or a chest pass. Some admire the bullfighters skill and courage to choose to fight against a beast ten times his strength and size. Others stated that they liked to watch the cuadrillas (the matador helpers) make the bull run in the ring. This serves the purpose in helping the bullfighter study the bull, and letting the crowd observe the fierceness of the beast, while at the same time raising the anticipation of the crowd. Most of the people I asked stated that aside from the fact that they enjoyed watching bullfights, they also came to have fun, relax and have a few beers with friends. (Gutierrez 1995)

Two of the student interviewers questioned the respondents about whether or not they thought the bulls were being tortured or subjected to cruelty. The respondents in Mexico did not see bullfights as cruelty. They contended that the bull loves to fight, and that the fight is fair because the man also can be killed. Seven of the respondents in Laredo admitted that they could see some cruelty in bullfighting. Two respondents were unequivocal in stating that cruelty was involved. One said, "The bull is being provoked I feel to defend itself from harm of the bullfighter". Another said, "The bulls are starved and tortured before the event. They are raised to be mean and tortured throughout their growth." Although attendance at bullfighting events was an occasional occurrence, the 30 interview respondents and 4 ethnographers presented vivid and emotional

impressions of their visits to bullfights. The predominant impression was the drama and excitement of the Spanish tradition which symbolized the struggle of man to overcome the savage beast.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSES

Leisure time activities and popular culture along the border exhibit the bicultural blending of influences from Mexico and the United States. This paper reports the results of student research on two leisure time activities popular in the border cities of Laredo and Nuevo Laredo. Interviews and ethnographic reports were used to examine behaviors, experiences, characteristics, and attitudes of people who participate in border crossing leisure activities related to bars and bullfights. Because most of the students in the class were bilingual and bicultural, the research process provided them the opportunity to evaluate and analyze their bicultural heritage. The following evaluations and analyses of the study were written by students in the final examination for the class. Similar statements have been grouped to form a composite summary of the research process and leisure experiences.

Laredo is highly influenced by the Mexican culture. This interdependence was evident in the data that were gathered on bars and bullfights. Conducting this research brought to realization the strong association between Mexico and the U.S. in Laredo. My group really worked hard to get all the information necessary for the paper. I was proud of our group. I learned a lot from the whole survey process, more than I would have by reading a textbook. At the same time, it has been fun. The booklet developed from the data we gathered was very interesting to read. The research shed light on some topics that may lead to more research, but this study provides a start in figuring out what is wrong in society.

The data on bars suggest that most people go to unwind and socialize. A significant amount of money is being pumped into the economy by the people who frequent bars. Many in Laredo say that there is nothing better to do in the Gateway City, so they go to bars to relieve stress. This is why, especially for the young population, that so many go to Nuevo Laredo to dance, drink, and have a good time. I was surprised (though I should know better) by the number of minors found at bars, especially across the bridge. Bars in Nuevo Laredo are catering with cheap prices to youngsters

who want to live their lifetime in one evening. People who went to bars usually had a lot to drink, and most had no concerns about their drinking. I do agree that bars provide a good place for meeting new people and spending time with your friends, but the overdrinking part really bothers me. Alcohol in our society is responsible for great social problems such as spouse abuse, drunk driving, crime and substance abuse. Very few people were concerned about their health and what alcohol does to the body. There was also little concern about driving while intoxicated. This explains why there are so many accidents among young drinkers. Data from this research makes me believe that people, especially here on the border, need to be educated about the effects of alcohol on our society.

The survey data on bullfights provided a descriptive view of the feelings and attitudes surrounding the tradition of bullfighting. I can now understand the meaning behind this cultural tradition which I once thought to be only inhumane. I still do not approve of them, but I won't condemn them. Respondents identified bullfighting as a rich Spanish/Mexican tradition, stressing the honor and dignity of the bullfighter, praising his bravery and skill. The common symbolic belief of killing the bull represented the superiority of 'man over the savage beast'. This was especially true of the respondents interviewed in Mexico. Those interviewed in Laredo had a similar but somewhat contrasting view. Most of these respondents had attended a bullfight only once or a few times in their lives. A portion of them did feel that the bull is subject to cruelty, and they were not in favor of bullfights. The findings stress that the importance of bullfights lies in tradition, heritage, dominance over animals, culture, pride, and religion - elements and values that are important to the Mexican people. Understanding this provides a clearer picture of this special event.

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STUDENT RESEARCHERS and THEIR SUBJECTS OF STUDY

Name	Subject
Cruz, Denise Y.	Bullfights
Ehrenzweig, Cesar	Bars
Garcia, Guillermo	Bars
Guerra, Belinda	Bars
Gutierrez, Claudia C	Bars
Gutierrez, Iris	Bullfights
McDonald, Patricia	Bullfights
Noyola, Clarissa Laura	Bars
Porter, Jane E	Bars
Rivera, Pedro	Bullfights
Sanchez, Gerardo Javier	Bullfights
Santillan, Carlos Ismael	Bars