

# Between Rock And a Hard Place: Further Explorations Along a Vietnam Era Fault

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During the Vietnam Era (ca. 1962-1972), the two vanguard institutions of American youth socialization—organized sport and rock and roll—battled on opposite sides of a cultural conflict involving allegiance to the “American One Way.” A mindset that transcended political consensus to encompass social, intellectual, and moral dispositions, the “One Way” embraced organized sport but resisted rock music despite the latter’s native roots. The disparity of treatment sprang from specific developments within the era’s culture chaos that effected perceptions of the two institutions with regard to effort, ethics, sensual (and physical) experience, and tradition.

Sport and rock and roll were most widely split, however, by the issues of manliness and fun. The

conventions of sexuality were embodied in sport within narrow limits that stressed aggression, violence, and competitiveness. The pop music business, while also a male form, offered in the 60s a framework within which male sexuality found a broader range of acceptable heterosexual expressions, many of which included theretofore “feminine” aspects. The notion of fun, more generationally specific, was dangerous to a culture raised to its exalted world standing by a belief in the work ethic and sacrifice. By virtue of its century-long tie to “character-building,” organized sport had become self-consciously serious by the late 60s. On the other hand, even at the height of politically weighted lyric-writing, rock musicians symbolically implored youth to “kick off their shoes, heed their hormones, and have fun.”

The messages from sport and rock and roll were divergent. The unacceptability to the young of traditional tenets of the “One Way” forced sport to surrender some of its influence upon those tenets, yielding to the era’s fragmentation and resulting compromise.