

Athlete Aggression on the Rink and off the Ice

Athlete Violence and Aggression in Hockey and Interpersonal Relationships

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Because male athletes have exhibited aggressive tendencies in a variety of settings, they may be at risk for using violence both within and beyond their sports involvement. Five former college/professional hockey players were interviewed to determine their perspectives on the nature of aggression and violence in sports competition as well as in social relationships. The informants were asked about athletes' violence and aggression toward teammates, acquaintances, and female intimates. This analysis includes participants' experiences, observations, and explanations of the instances of violence in hockey culture. The study findings yield (1) a greater understanding of the ways in which hockey socialization and athletes' notions of masculinity combine to create a culture of aggression and violence and (2) two major factors—consumption of alcohol and the objectification of women—that contribute to exporting violence outside the athletic arena.

Key words: hockey violence; athlete violence; interpersonal violence

Athletes recently have appeared on television and in news headlines because of their involvement in instances of aggression and violence. Although much of the documented violence takes place in the context of sports competition, not all athlete aggression is restricted to sports opponents. Indeed, the past decade has witnessed documentation of athlete aggression directed toward other males outside the sports arena, as well as aggression directed toward women in both intimate and nonintimate situations. What remains unclear, however, is whether athletic participation—in particular, the violent strategies learned in sport—contributes to the likelihood that athletes will be violent in interpersonal relationships (Coakley 1998; Crosset 1999).

Public concern about the links between sports participation and interpersonal violence has spawned work over the past decade that documents athlete

violence, especially in the area of sexual aggression. Specifically, several studies have indicated that college athletes are overrepresented among those who are involved in aggressive and violent sexual behavior on college campuses. In a study of male undergraduates at a large southeastern university, Boeringer (1996) found that 60 percent of athletes reported at least one instance of using verbal coercion to obtain sexual favors, 28 percent reported using alcohol and drugs to obtain sexual favors, and 15 percent reported using physical force. Moreover, Boeringer found that athletes reported higher percentages than nonathletes in all such categories of aggressive behavior. In a similar vein, Frintner and Rubinson (1993) found that although the population of male athletes at a large midwestern university was less than 2 percent of the male student population, 21 percent of the reported sexual assaults, 18 percent of the attempted sexual assaults, and 14 percent of the cases of sexual abuse were committed by members of sports teams or sports clubs on campus. Berkowitz (1992) similarly reported that in one review of alleged gang rapes by college students since 1980, twenty-two out of twenty-four documented cases were perpetrated by either members of fraternities or intercollegiate athletic teams. And Crosset, Benedict, and McDonald (1995) reviewed police records at twenty colleges and universities as well as the records of offices of judicial affairs and found that male athletes were overrepresented in reports of sexual assault; while athletes accounted for 3 percent of the male student population, they perpetrated 35 percent of the physical battering reports on the college campuses.

Young (1993) argues that the links between sport and interpersonal violence parallel the problems of violence elsewhere in society. In fact, this notion is consistent with research that indicates that violence in one social domain is highly correlated with violence in other domains (Fagan and Browne 1994; National Research Council 1996). Yet it should be noted that while much is known regarding athlete-athlete violence as a part of the sport, there is little empirical validation of athlete violence outside the sports arena (Benedict and Klein 1997; Coakley 1998; Young 2000). Moreover, while initial explorations have theorized a link between athletic participation and interpersonal violence, many studies have found only a weak association between sports violence and outside the sport violence (e.g., Koss and Gaines 1993) and some have found no association at all (Carson, Haltzman, and Stacy 1997; Schwartz and Nogrady 1996).

The mixed results of early empirical research highlight the need to clarify the connections between athletic participation and violence. Indeed, researchers such as Boeringer (1996) and Crosset (1999, 2000) note the pressing need to explore the dynamics surrounding athlete violence beyond the sports context, including inquiries into how team members, coaches, and fans promote and defend violent behavior, variations in the experiences of athletes in different sports contexts, and the role of intervening variables that may be more predictive of male violence than athletic participation per se (Crosset 1999,

Crowell and Burgess 1996). One intervening variable, alcohol consumption, is worth particular note. As Crosset (1999) argues, missing from current discussions of athletes and violence is any discussion of drinking. This omission is conspicuous in light of the strong association between drinking and sport. Furthermore, alcohol has been strongly implicated in much of the research on violence against women; although alcohol consumption is not necessarily considered a cause of such violence, many scholars theorize that it has a complex role in men's violence.

The need for such exploration is perhaps nowhere more pertinent than in the sport of hockey. In recent years, several incidents in professional hockey have resulted in an intensified concern regarding aggression and violence associated with the sport. For instance, Toronto Maple Leafs' Nick Kyupreos sustained a severe concussion that led to his early retirement from hockey. In another incident, Vancouver's Donald Brahshear was struck on the head by Boston's Marty McSorley; he missed 20 games because of the injury. Furthermore, several publicized incidents of athlete violence outside the sports context have caused substantial concern, in particular, about the links between male athletic participation and violence against women. One case, for example, involves AHL Wilkes-Barre rookie, Billy Tibbetts, who lost four seasons of hockey due to a jail sentence for raping a 15-year-old girl at a party.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore, through in-depth interviews with five former college/professional hockey players, the nature of aggression and violence in their sport and its relationship to violent interpersonal behaviors both inside and outside the sport. Violence is defined as male-to-male physical sport-related violence, male-to-male physical out-of-sport interpersonal violence; and male-to-female physical, sexual, and emotional aggression and abuse.

SOCIALIZATION FOR VIOLENCE

While an instinctive drive and a drive stimulated by frustration may partially explain sports aggression, Terry and Jackson (1985) contend that a powerful socialization process is the primary determinant of sport and sport-related violence. Hargreaves (1986) notes that sports offers an ideal means for males to develop and exhibit traditional masculine qualities including power, strength, and violence while rejecting traditionally ascribed feminine values. Terry and Jackson see sports aggression as behavior learned in a culture that reinforces and models violence. In sport, reinforcement for acts of violence emanate from a variety of sources, which may be grouped under three categories: (1) the immediate reference group of the athlete, especially coaches, teammates, and family; (2) the structure of the sport and the implementation of rules by governing bodies and referees; and (3) the attitude of the fans, media, courts of law, and society in general.

REFERENCE GROUPS

Cultural ideals of sport and of masculinity combine to create a context within which violence in athletics is not only tolerated but encouraged (Messner 1995). Coaches and parents contribute to the legitimacy of sports violence as they argue that sport aggression prepares boys for success as a man in an adult world (Fine 1987). Messner and Sabo (1990) contend that male tolerance of risk and injury in sports is not a socially passive process but rather is one through which violence, injury, and disablement become reframed as masculinizing by society at all levels. Demonstration of these behaviors is thus linked to gender legitimacy.

In a review of biographies of athletes who come to understand the rewards of aggression and violence, Crosset (1999) suggests that these individuals learn from coaches and peers to be violent. Studies of hockey players, in particular, provide prototypic examples of such socializing influences. For instance, Smith (1979b) found that displays of toughness, courage, and willingness to fight are important means of establishing a positive identity among both peers and coaches in hockey. Moreover, Weinstein, Smith, and Wiesenthal (1995) found that players' aggression, demonstrated especially through fistfighting, often produced greater teammate and coach perceptions of player competence than playing or skating skills. In general, players who backed away from fights were often labeled as "chicken" and were viewed as exhibiting signs of personal failure and weak character. These authors suggest that players will often participate in hockey fights and violence to avoid demeaning labels, which are not easily removed.

Key concepts from West and Zimmerman's (1987) classic work on "doing gender" provide an apt interpretive framework for understanding the impact of hockey culture on athletes' displays of violence and aggression. Under this view, violent behavior can be seen as a way of constructing oneself as masculine and demonstrating one's place in the masculinity hierarchy (Connell 1995). Violence and aggression may be displayed as a way to meet the gender expectations of the peer group as well as the hegemonic notions of masculinity more broadly (Coakley 1989; Levinson 1989).

Furthermore, Crosset (1999) argues that training for sport in the context of an already patriarchal society may also be training men to be violent toward women. For example, coaches employ images of antifemininity and castration to chastise players. The descriptive works of Curry (1991, 1998, 2000), found team dynamics that openly express support for violence against women and demonstrate how resistance to these norms is discouraged. Indeed, teammates in many contact sports clearly reinforce and model sexist behaviors, focusing on sex, aggression, and negative attitudes toward women (Curry 1991).

STRUCTURE OF THE SPORT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RULES

Many athletes are presented with a conflict inherent to competitive sports—that is, they are presented with the apparent dilemma of having to win at all costs and yet, at the same time, to adhere to moral and ethical sport behavior. Young (1993) reflected this conflict when he compared professional sports to a hazardous and violent workplace with its own unique form of industrial disease. Male athletes are expected to be tough and to live up to cultural expectations of manliness, which often encourage the use of violence and performance-enhancing drugs such as steroids. Indeed, Messner (1990) contends that violent behaviors are occupational imperatives in contact sports with practical consequences if not performed. Athletes constantly are encouraged to ignore their own pain and at the same time are encouraged to inflict pain on others or they risk being belittled by their coaches and peers.

Smith (1979a) specifically describes the hockey subculture in terms of an occupational culture based on a theme of violence. By age 15, boys are identified by coaches for their ability to mete out and withstand illegal physical coercion—attributes desired by professional hockey teams. The structure of the system compels conformity to prevailing professional standards that include the necessity of employing violence. Weinstein, Smith, and Wiesenthal (1995) found even among youth and preprofessional junior hockey teams that there was a strong imperative toward violence. These authors state that fighting and intimidation are essential elements in the tradition and culture of hockey.

From an early age, hockey players undergo a specialized socialization process in the production of a tough fighting unit; players are taught that competence is linked to aggressive play, including penalties (Vaz 1979, 1980; Weinstein, Smith, and Wiesenthal 1995). Toughness and willingness to fight are attributes that impress coaches and management (Smith 1983). Players understand the possibility of violence on the ice, and they know that fighting is advocated as a proactive means for not being easily intimidated and guarding against further aggression. Players also are required to create trouble for opponents and to employ tactics that create anxiety in adversaries (Faulkner 1974; Weinstein, Smith, and Wiesenthal 1995).

ATTITUDES OF THE COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN GENERAL

In general, there appears to be widespread support, both institutional and community, for violence associated with sport, both within and outside the sports context. Institutional support for alleged perpetrators of violence

outside the sport often blames the victims and fails to hold athletes responsible for their actions. The inability of institutions to hold athletes accountable also extends to the court system (Crosset 1999). In spite of higher rates of violence within sport communities, conviction rates present a striking difference that favors the accused athlete (Benedict and Klein 1997). Benedict and Klein examined arrest and conviction rates for collegiate and professional athletes accused of felony sexual assaults against women and compared these with national crime data to determine differential patterns of treatment in the criminal justice system. In sum, these authors found that of 217 athletes who were initially reported to police for a felonious sex crime, only 24 percent were successfully prosecuted. The comparison national sample was 54 percent of arrests leading to conviction. In addition, Benedict (1997) found in their 150 case studies of reported violence that athletes were convicted in only 28 cases, mainly through plea-bargaining agreements. Only 10 cases went to trial, and 6 of these resulted in guilty verdicts.

Curry (2000), among others, has focused on the sports bar as a safe haven in the community arena for aggression outside the sport. Curry found that aggression and assault are encouraged by bars' privileging of male athletes—allowing them to drink for free, taking their sides during fights, and giving them an arena in which to operate. Curry describes the striving for status among peers in the bars through drinking, fighting, and public display of sexual activity. Indeed, Curry (1998) contends that these bars were permissive to the point of allowing the male athletes to take advantage of situations where they could prey on the physical inequalities of others.

Fans also play an important role in the reinforcement of violence, in particular within hockey culture. For example, in a national opinion poll, 39 percent of Canadians reported that they like to see fighting at hockey games (Maclean-Goldfarb 1970, cited in Smith 1979a). In a similar vein, Smith (1979b) found that 61 percent of the players he surveyed perceived spectators at these games as approving of fighting.

Based on this overview of the literature and the socialization into a culture of violence theoretical perspective, the following research questions were developed and addressed: (1) In what ways does participation in hockey promote a culture of aggression and violence? and (2) To what extent does hockey aggression and violence affect off-ice behavior, and what factors seem influential?

METHOD

Participants in this study were five former hockey players whose ages ranged between twenty-five and thirty years old with a mean age of twenty-six years. Four of the five athletes consisted of former players that the researcher formerly coached at the collegiate level. Each of the athletes had

competed at either the collegiate level, the professional minor league level, or both. Four of the athletes played collegiate hockey, two of the athletes played professionally in the minor leagues, and one player played both college and professional hockey. Three of the five players were Canadian and played Canadian junior hockey before playing collegiate or professional hockey. It is important to note that the style of Canadian junior hockey is fundamentally different from collegiate hockey in that it allows and encourages fighting to a much greater extent than American collegiate hockey. The two American players had competed at either the high school and/or prep school level before playing collegiate hockey.

The first author has a history of extensive involvement in the culture of ice hockey, with a keen understanding of the perspectives of the players, as well as the phenomenon of violence inside and outside the sports arena. This experience has occurred through participation in American and Canadian junior hockey, over five years of professional playing experience in both the minor leagues and in Europe, and coaching at numerous levels, including three years at the men's collegiate level. It is through being deeply involved in the culture of ice hockey as both a player and a coach over the span of twenty years that the first author has a unique, insider knowledge of ice hockey and its associated violence.

In fact, the first author's unique position as a participant observer within the culture of hockey allowed him ready access for recruitment of players to participate in this study. Four of the five informants were players that the first author coached in college, and the fifth was a referral from one of the four former players. Each of these athletes has at least ten years of professional competition and is thought to be fully immersed into the culture of ice hockey. In addition, the researcher has a long personal and professional relationship with the four players he coached.

The primary source of data for this study was in-depth interviews. The interviews can be considered as semistructured because they were guided by a set of predetermined questions with a number of branching questions that were used to facilitate more detail and more focused attention to the study's domains of interest. Probing questions were also used in a spontaneous manner to prompt elaboration and specificity. The questions were derived from previous inquiries into sport violence as well as previous focused discussions with participants in ice hockey regarding the use of violence. Five major questions were asked during the interviews: (1) Describe your overall experience as a player in organized hockey; (2) How do you think contact sports such as hockey promote violence/aggression within the sport itself; (3) Describe any situations of violence/aggression perpetrated by athletes that you have either seen, heard of, or participated in that occurred outside of sports competition; (4) What are some of the ways that you think participation in hockey encourages off-ice aggression; and (5) What are some ways to prevent athlete violence and aggression off-ice. The participants determined

the settings for the interviews, which, in four of the five cases were their homes; this helped to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

It is important to note that these participants were asked to (1) discuss their own personal involvement in hockey, both on and off the ice and (2) to comment on their observations of others in the sport and their overall view of violence and aggression associated with the culture of hockey. Because the principal investigator had a strong personal connection to and history with the respondents, and because he wanted to ensure honest and open exploration of sensitive topics such as violence, sexual aggression, and alcohol and drug use, he did not insist that participants specify whether their narrative responses pertained to their own personal experiences or experiences observed of other athletes. Thus, these participants are best considered key informants who inform this in-depth exploration of the culture of violence and aggression among hockey players.

The data analysis began with a verbatim transcription of the audio-recorded interviews. Once this was completed, a qualitative content analysis was conducted by two independent coders. Specifically, coders first identified and subsequently organized themes that emerged from the transcribed text. The interview responses were examined for salient topics covered, patterns, regularities, and differences within and across the cases. Then, initially coded categories were generated from the topics and patterns, and these coding schemes were developed, continuously modified, and redefined through the data collection process and afterwards (Miles and Huberman 1994). Finally, the topics and patterns were placed into conceptually focused analytical themes related to the study's theoretical foundation (Berg 1998; Bogdan and Biklen 1992).

RESULTS

All of the participants' narratives contained detailed accounts of both their own and other athletes' involvement in violence and aggression within the context of sports competition, as well as outside of the competitive arena. These narratives described varied experiences with and observations of aggression perpetrated against teammates, opponents, bystanders, and women. Moreover, each of the participants provided their own subjective insights about the interconnections between hockey and aggression/violence. In this analysis, we first discuss, in an introductory fashion, the participants' accounts of the extent of violence in ice hockey. Next, we review the ways in which hockey socialization and athletes' notions of masculinity combine to create a culture of aggression and violence. We then turn to an examination of two central factors—consumption of alcohol and the objectification of women—that contribute to exporting violence outside the athletic arena.

FREQUENCY OF VIOLENCE

All of the research participants were easily able to identify a number of situations in which they had either participated in violence or they had observed such violence among their friends and teammates. Moreover, these narratives illustrate the way in which such violence and aggression is considered routine in this population. For example, one athlete described his social life in this way:

It seemed like every time we would go out . . . at someone's house or a bar . . . at least once a weekend, there would probably be a fight . . . if you took a random sample of 20 guys that didn't play sports and went out on a Friday or Saturday, I don't think you would find the frequency in them getting into fights compared to the 20 guys that I hung out with that I played hockey with.

The narrative accounts of two other participants reflected parallel sentiments with respect to the conventions of aggression and violence in this community:

More things I've seen has been guys hitting other guys—in a bar—get a couple of drinks in some of these guys, and they want to fight everyone as if they're invincible—the worst I've seen is that guys will get a bunch of teeth knocked out or their face beat in—black eyes and brown eyes and all of that . . .

I mean, I had quite a lot of brawls in the summer—one time, a guy had sold drugs to my younger sister and I confronted the guy, and he brought back a bunch of his friends, and I went after the whole gang of them and . . . I beat them up quite badly . . . they beat me over the head with a fishing bat and they cut me open, but I'd also cut a bunch of them open pretty bad too—and I went to the hospital and they had come after me at the hospital. I was out of town very shortly after that, so that was good.

These players' perspectives align well with extant research that asserts that conformity to a violent sport ethic is common and that this conformity can lead male athletes to see aggression as a natural part of their sport and a natural part of who they are as athletes and men (Young 1993). The question that remains, however, is, Are people who choose to play heavy contact sports more likely than others to see aggression as an appropriate way to deal with life stressors? An answer to this question is embedded within the research participants' reflections on the potential causes of aggressive behavior among hockey players. In particular, several respondents speculated that men with aggressive tendencies may be attracted to the sport of hockey:

It's the old what-came-first-the-chicken-or-the-egg syndrome—were these guys violent before they played hockey or did they become violent because they played hockey . . . I think that guys I played with . . . had some antisocial behavior and had it before they ever got into hockey, and then you mix the two

and you can get yourself into a lot of trouble. . . . I played junior C in Canada, and guys were getting out of jail on weekends to play hockey—you know, get in trouble with the law and all sorts of crazy stuff before they were really ever really involved with the game, and I think the game for them was almost a chance to vent their anger or whatever it was they were dealing with in a way that wouldn't get them thrown [back] into jail . . .

I played against guys that do a lot of fighting in hockey that were just plain whacked—you know, that would sit there across from you before the game, hyperventilating and stuff, some of them I knew that were actually crazy—but . . . with one guy in particular, I knew that he had a chemical imbalance and he just happens to also be a really good hockey player that snaps . . .

I think, from my experiences, with some of these guys who are getting into trouble on the ice have a lot more going on off the ice than you think. The rink becomes the hunting grounds for a lot of these guys, and I don't know all their stories in and out, but troubled guys getting in trouble on the ice as well whether its family, school, or what. . . . I think it's a place for violence to come out—because it's allowed.

These narratives are somewhat inconsistent with a sports socialization perspective. That is, these informants' speculations that men with preexisting aggressive tendencies actualize such proclivities within the acceptable context of hockey play is somewhat contrary to an explanation that emphasizes the socialization of the athlete in which violence learning takes place within sport culture. However, the multifaceted interpretations offered by the informants in this study are compatible with Coakley's (1989) assertion that the origins of this phenomenon are heterogeneous, and that there is no single cause of violence in sport.

HOCKEY SOCIALIZATION AND THE CULTURE OF MASCULINITY

The socialization of hockey differs from socialization for other contact sports because fighting plays a central role in hockey competition. Indeed, according to Gruneau and Whitson (1993), high rates of violence in hockey are to be expected because physical contact affords opportunities for hockey sticks to be defined and used as weapons, and norms within the community celebrate toughness and a willingness to fight, seek retribution, and intimidate opponents. According to the participants in this study, this context promotes a unique set of dynamics that is unlike most other contact sports. Players enhance their value to their team by demonstrating toughness through display of fighting skills; indeed, the ability to fight effectively becomes a coveted trait, operating even as a means to indirectly win games through intimidation of the opposition and targeting of key opposing players. Fighting is seen to be far more important than skating skills to player success

(Weinstein, Smith, and Wiesenthal 1995). These concepts can be seen in the following observations of three study participants:

Hockey definitely promotes violence. . . . I mean, they have a penalty for fighting . . . and just the reasoning behind that is that they say hey, we don't want fighting in the game, but if they didn't want fighting in the game, they wouldn't have a penalty for it—they would just basically kick the person out of the sport . . . and just the nature of the sport . . . how you win a game—you're physically dominant over another person—being bigger, stronger, faster than the person . . . it's just inherent in the nature of the sport . . . that promotes violence . . .

Hockey players or others in a contact sport could be prone to instigate a fight . . . hockey players instigating fights is part of the game . . . instigating a fight can work to your advantage . . . you can get them [opposition] off their game . . . you know . . . make them push themselves, push their manhood . . . I'm not sure if it [hockey] makes you more prone to violence, but it almost does . . .

Actually, it [fighting] was the thing that was paying my meal ticket so to speak, you know—and you get good at it and you have to do it—or you weren't going to play or they would find somebody else that would do it. I mean, if I was going to make it to the NHL, I was going to have to fight my way there, and it wasn't going to be through some other role on the team, and you have your role on the team.

The narrative data in this study also reflect the pressure that hockey players feel from coaches who are perceived to promote aggression in their players. These athletes' accounts are replete with references to coaches' win-at-all-cost mentality, as well as descriptions of the ethically questionable methods that a number of their former coaches used against their players to motivate them toward aggressive behavior. For example, one player described the way in which a coach used aggression himself as a sort of modeling strategy:

There's pressure from all around. The coaches will use name calling or in some situations use physical—not to hurt, but wrestle you around a bit—if they don't think you are doing your job and being aggressive and taking guys out of the play, that kind of thing. I've been in situations where coaches have used their hand or their stick in certain ways to get you fired up—hand in the back of the head, stick in the balls, you know.

Other coaches may not have engaged in aggressive behavior themselves, but players certainly believed that their coaches had a role in encouraging aggression, perhaps by active promotion or simply tacit acceptance of violent and aggressive behavior. The following narratives serve as prototypic examples:

Your teammates may expect you to watch their back . . . but, generally, it's the coach that will tell you to start with the violence . . . to agitate—sometimes

those are elements that the team is lacking . . . it really is . . . coaches like guys . . . who take a hit . . . most coaches I've played with have not had a problem with sending someone out . . . a heavy person [enforcer] out . . . if they believe that a rival would possibly injure one of his good players . . . it makes sense . . . you've got to keep your scorers to win the game . . .

I've been involved in situations before where people are asked to go and fight [by the coach]. Someone is being dirty on the ice—takes a cheap shot at a smaller guy and basically they [coach] will . . . say, hey, I want you to go fight that guy just because they don't want them to take liberties and try to intimidate . . . so that's a definite influence, and, of course, you are rewarded by the coaches . . .

I smacked a guy in the dressing room one time and the coach asked me why I did it at the next practice. I said he shot his mouth off in front of the whole team and I told him to shut it or I was going to smack him—if I back down in front of the whole team and let him shoot his mouth off, how do you expect these guys to rely on me the next game out there—he [coach] said that's fine.

These quotes are consistent with Crosset's (1999) findings that athletes fully understand that their knowledge of the rewards for being mean are linked to coaching behaviors.

Fan pressures and influences also promote aggression and violence because the reinforcement through cheering and positive comments is extremely appealing to the athletes. Although winning was usually viewed as being most important, the use of aggression and violence could at times be considered an extremely significant secondary aspect in terms of what hockey fans wanted to see. The pressure players felt as a result of spectator comments is described through the following accounts:

The first thing that comes into my head is the cheering every time somebody gets hit into the boards and a fight breaks out everyone stands up and cheers—that kind of thing, and when they see blood. A lot of fans came to see that and they got bored if there wasn't some kind of violence going on. In my personal conversations with them and how they react to the game, it was enough for me to see that they wanted to see that violence thing, and it does promote it—I mean, when the crowd is behind you and cheer when you knock people into the boards—I'm not going to lie, it gets you fired up and wants to make you do more banging of guys into the boards, and lots of times, if it takes that to get the team fired up, then that's what you're going to do. It always helps to get the fans behind you—they definitely have a role in promoting violence in the sport.

Like even at universities or . . . back in the days of juniors . . . basically, if you go out in a fight and beat someone up . . . after the game . . . you'd get recognition for that—fans would come up to you and say, that's a great fight you were in, you really beat the crap out of that guy . . . and, basically, you're getting rewarded for . . . fighting with someone, and people remember that . . . if you're constantly getting rewarded for something you do . . . you're going to do that again and again.

Such findings are consistent with Smith's (1979b) findings that 61 percent of the players perceived spectators at hockey games approved of fighting.

The reinforcement of violent behaviors can be usefully framed with the observations offered by Vaz (1980). He found that violence is virtually nonexistent among young boys just starting to play hockey. But as they are influenced by older players and professionals within the hockey community, rough play is encouraged and "under certain conditions, failure to fight is variously sanctioned by coaches and players" (145). This hockey subculture plays itself out against a larger backdrop of conventions of masculinity in contemporary society. For instance, several players discussed the ways in which hockey players are likely to equate manliness with a willingness to engage in violent behavior. Three narratives, in particular, illustrate this inclination:

I think of people that you know and hang out with . . . expect you to be strong, kind of macho, and stick up or you know stick up for yourself . . . someone would never walk up to you and say, hey that was a great move you made walking away from fighting that guy, I mean I probably never heard that in my life but I definitely heard a person being put down because he backed away from a physical confrontation both on the ice and off the ice . . . you were generally perceived as weak if you didn't go fight . . . it would lower their opinion of you whereas if you went out and fought . . . you were generally seen . . . in higher standards . . . you're a team guy, you're a guy that would stick up for the other players . . . you were tough . . . you're a lot of things that people respected back then . . .

I think it's more trying to prove yourself . . . trying to prove your physical dominance . . . to yourself, your coach, your teammates, the fans that you know . . . hey, I might have lost the last fight, but hey, I'm strong enough to win this fight against this guy . . . and trying to make yourself look better in front of . . . especially your teammates . . . your teammates tend to remember a lot of things that I think most of the fans that come will forget . . .

If someone were to try to fight you on the ice and you backed away . . . it would be more perceived as he's weak, he's backed away from a physical confrontation and generally most people don't want to be seen like that . . . so I think there was a lot of pressure to stick up for yourself and I think the same goes over into your social behavior often . . . you're kind of expected to stick up for yourself and people think you should and kind of have the perception that if you are not, you're not as manly.

As this last narrative reflects, embedded within many of these players' narratives is the implicit recognition that the tendency to draw parallels between manliness and violence extends beyond the competitive arena into broader social relations (cf. Coakley 1989). For example, one player described the similarities between problem solving in hockey competition and problem solving in social relationships in this way:

You might have something like guys having problems in school and with their girlfriend or . . . away from home and pressure from not being around his family . . . maybe at an older level, like in juniors, maybe leaving home for the first time, a combination of all those things contributing to maybe a little bit more of a downer attitude—not feeling good about themselves—and maybe having to beat someone up to feel better about themselves—you get a lot of that with athletes.

As this thematic analysis indicates, hockey socialization and players' ideals of masculinity combine to create a culture of aggression and violence within the sport. Specifically, the socializing influences on which the research participants focused their attention included hockey competition *per se*, teammates, coaches, and fans. Cultural imagery surrounding masculinity—in particular, ideals of physical dominance, strength, and toughness—joins with these primary hockey influences to create a culture within which violence and aggression are not only tolerated but even encouraged. Moreover, the narrative data in this study demonstrate that the conventions of aggression and violence that typify sports competition apply as well in the nonsports environment. In fact, one player's narrative powerfully illustrates his belief that this link is indeed inevitable:

They make demands on athletes to be tough because they want to see it, it [aggression] automatically carries over when you see some guy who's huge and charged with beating his wife. It's like, what—so they think this is some sort of surprise, because if you're paying a guy three million dollars a year to knock somebody's block off, do you expect them to turn it off? No way, and you're praising him to be this animal, you know, you want him to be a destructive force on the field but then you want him to be some sort of pussy cat off the field?

In addition to discussing this inherent connection between violence within and outside of sports competition, the athletes discussed two factors that promoted the exportation of violence outside the athletic context: (1) consumption of alcohol and (2) objectification of women.

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Previous research—for example, Gallmeier (1988)—has found that alcohol use is nearly universal among professional hockey players. Its use is apparently related to the extreme pressures of the game, as well as to the desire to suppress or deaden feelings. Likewise, all of the participants in this study discussed the common role of alcohol in the lives of hockey players. Moreover, these athletes associated violence with consumption of alcohol and other substances. For some, alcohol consumption was mentioned merely as a contextual feature in their descriptions of violent episodes. Some of the participants, however, perceived alcohol as a causal agent, explaining that it

facilitated the transition of violence from the competitive venue into everyday social interaction. One player explained it in this way:

It is the major factor of talk and off-ice violence—alcohol and testosterone and after-sport smack talking—you know, I was doing this and I did that and I played great, and when they start drinking, they think that they can do anything . . . it's the major factor in off-ice violence. Alcohol is the thing that leads to fights—in my experience in college, there wasn't one sober, off-ice violence [incident] that I ever witnessed or heard of or anything—never.

Other players may not have identified alcohol as “the major factor” but they certainly described, with great clarity, the role alcohol and drugs often play in creating a context within which athletes can act out their machismo. Two narratives illustrate this phenomenon:

Alcohol after a game adds a strange element—I think it makes a person more conducive to violence off the ice—definitely—just because beer and muscles . . . you feel a little bit more invincible once you have a six-pack in you . . . that much more macho . . . alcohol is good for socializing, helps you relax, but it can also get people on edge . . . especially more high-strung people . . .

I think it just adds fuel to the fire—if you've already got a kid who's aggressive by nature and you throw a catalyst in there [alcohol], it just makes everything worse—especially with hockey as there's a lot of drinking that goes on with it—you mix that with guys who are maybe lonely or depressed and you got trouble off the ice—if things are going on on the ice that they may not be happy with and then you're drinking and doing drugs, it makes everything worse—so it's just adding fuel to the fire.

In essence, all these players describe some way that alcohol and drugs act to promote aggression and violence. Indeed, these findings are consistent with previous work in this area. For instance, although alcohol has not been identified as the cause of abuse, it has been associated with violence and is thought to play a complex role in its occurrence; it may impair reasoning and communication, be part of premeditated strategy (Crowell & Burgess 1996), and/or be used to excuse violent behavior (Benedict 1997). Furthermore, the complex relationship between alcohol, violence, and constructions of masculinity that is implicated in the narrative data in this study is mirrored by Messerschmidt (1993), who theorizes that alcohol cannot be separated from demonstrating masculinity as it is often used to decrease communication and increase men's capacity to be violent.

Although the athletes in this study talked about the connection between alcohol and violence rather generally, there is research to indicate that excessive alcohol use within male peer groups contributes to sexual violence against women (Koss and Dinero 1988). In addition, Koss and Gaines (1993) linked alcohol consumption, athletic participation, and violence against women; they found that while athletic participation per se was associated

with sexual aggression, alcohol consumption was even more highly correlated with sexual aggression. Thus, this analysis now turns to an examination of the role of hockey players' sexual relationships with women.

OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN

Commentaries, theoretical analyses, and empirical studies have begun to focus on whether participation in certain sports is related to misogyny, high rates of physical and sexual assault, and the occurrence of rape and gang rape (Coakley 1998). For instance, Sanday (1990) argues that when men become emotionally bound together in all-male groups that emphasize physical dominance, they often express their sense of togetherness by demeaning women. The narrative data in this study provide support for these assertions. For example, two participants talk extensively about the way in which their peers objectify women:

I think that date rape is prevalent among the jock culture. There are things that are not violent but they just seem kind of wrong that guys do in terms of how they relate to women—off ice. They treat women like objects—sexual objects. They talk about them as if they aren't there, as if they [the athletes] were in the locker room talking . . . and don't care what they say at all because they think they're still going to have sex or whatever. Things like that machismo group mentality, that locker room mentality, comes out in off-ice behavior . . . treating women really bad . . . like one-nighters or short-term girlfriends or someone they didn't care very much, just as objects or sex partners.

Locker room talk [is] definitely machismo without doubt, and that carries over when the team is all out . . . you're talking to a girl and all the team's around and they say, what are you going to do to her—and all that stuff. That kind of talk breeds, does breed that kind of certain behavior in the group when men have the group thing going with a not-caring attitude towards women—that kind of carries over when a guy's with a girl—he doesn't care what happens to the girl as long as he is getting what he wants—or getting what the group wants—like, sometimes, I've heard where two guys will have sex with one woman, group sex, or, if she's drunk or passed out or whatever—sometimes, the girl's into it—and that's a rarity—and then you hear about that stuff in the locker room—I mean, it happens, and sometimes they're willing and sometimes they're not—I'm not sure . . . if they're kind a coaxed, you know, 'cause there are more than one male in the room—stuff like that.

From the first author's knowledge of athlete behavior, these players are describing situations that are very common to the male sport culture, and they reflect only a small extent of the actual sexual behaviors that occur. It has been this researcher's experience that objectification of women occurs as a natural outgrowth and continuation of traditional male socialization that begins in early childhood. Such socialization encourages boys and men to see women as inferior and as sexual objects who are supposed to meet the needs

of men. The culture of hockey reinforces this objectification because of the focus on traditional male behaviors conducive to sports success and the large amount of time men spend exclusively with other males. These conversations occur frequently as part of the bonding experience.

Moreover, according to the athlete informants in this study, such demeaning attitudes and talk often carry over into actual violent behaviors. One player's account provides an apt illustration:

A guy back in juniors I played with when he was 16—a tough kid off the farm—cucumber farm—he got his girlfriend pregnant—knocked her up—she was about 15—and while I never saw it—he was actually taken away right out of the rink one night because she went to the cops and told them he had been beating her when she was even pregnant with the kid—so that was probably one of the worst stories I had heard because there was a baby involved.

Two other players also commented on their knowledge of violence against women. Although these athletes do not concede to engaging in violence against women themselves, they discuss it as if it is a somewhat routine occurrence within male hockey cultures:

Yeah, I remember certain things that had happened. . . . My friends would get abusive with their girlfriends and stuff like that. I definitely know people that have gotten like that—not necessarily hit, but they'd be abusive and kind of push them and things like that, and we'd always stop them.

I'd heard stories of guys roughing up a girl a bit. Most of it was guys talking about other guys they knew that were in situations like that.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that interpersonal aggression is common in the lives of these hockey players, both on and off the ice. For these hockey professionals, aggressive behaviors were seen as manifestations of existent tendencies as well as products of sport socialization. Future studies should examine personality characteristics and psychological symptoms of particularly aggressive athletes to determine the role of individual factors as opposed to the culture of sport in producing violent behaviors. Increasingly, studies of interpersonal violence are employing biopsychosocial perspectives, noting the relevance of all three domains in predicting violence (e.g., McKenry, Julian, and Gavazzi 1995).

The participants in this study readily explored the ways in which hockey socialization created a context within which violence and aggression are not only tolerated but also encouraged. Much was said about the culture of hockey itself as an instigating mechanism of male violence. Clearly, hockey was viewed as a violent sport and a sports culture that encouraged violent

behaviors on the ice; the players, management, and indeed the fans expected and desired it. It was not mindless violence but functional despite some prohibition. Consistent with Weinstein, Smith, and Wiesenthal's (1995) survey of youth and preprofessional junior hockey players, violent behaviors were seen as only mildly penalized and generally viewed as essential for team and individual player success. For example, referees do not intervene in professional hockey fights as long as only two players are involved, and teammates and coaches judge players' competence more on their willingness to engage in violence (especially fist fighting) than playing and skating skills. Messner (1995) notes that men are raised to view the world as competitive and hierarchical, taught to get the job done regardless of the consequences to others—what Balkan (1966) termed “unmitigated agency.” Thus, when tasks become more important than people, violence is sometimes a problem-solving mechanism, for example, intentionally hurting an opposing player. Aggression and violence were important components to competitive success, and they were not limited to the ice rink; a united front perpetuating violent behaviors carried over to social situations. In addition, coaches often were negligent, if not somewhat encouraging, of players remaining tough and aggressive off the ice.

A culture of masculinity can be seen to characterize the teams the players described. The athletes tended to share a set of ideological beliefs related to traditional forms of masculine expression, for example, preoccupation with achievement and maintaining status through fighting or risk taking, acquiring an identity of toughness (Weisfeld et al. 1987). Research has found that hockey players with the strongest levels of endorsement of traditional masculine ideologies are more likely to fight than are other players (Weinstein, Smith, and Wiesenthal 1995). Kilmartin (2000) contends that violent behaviors by athletes are motivated by one athlete's perception that another is trying to hurt him. This too was represented in the players' comments regarding the need to be on guard, the necessity to protect oneself from the violence inherent in the game, and the dominance perspective wherein the athlete is constantly battling against teammates and opposition who are motivated toward domination. The culture of masculinity was also seen in the pack mentality that emerged among the players and carried over to off-ice activities. The strong bonds that emerged reinforced aggressive behaviors but also resulted in strong bonds of allegiance and loyalty.

In his examination of sport and violence, Young (2000) asserts that while knowledge of player violence within sport is substantial, little is actually known about other forms of sport-related violence. This in-depth exploration of hockey culture begins to fill this knowledge gap; its unique contribution is a more nuanced understanding of athletes' expressions of aggression and violence outside the sports context. As noted previously, the players in this study viewed aggression in broader social relationships as a logical extension of on-ice violent behavior. This relationship between participation in vio-

lence in sport and in other social contexts is consistent with the well-established relationship between and among various types of violent displays consistently found in the literature (Fagan and Browne 1994; Levinson 1989). Moreover, when asked specifically to provide explanations for off-ice violence based on their experiences, many mentioned the role of alcohol specifically, but also in combination with other factors. The players typically drew a causal relationship between alcohol use and violent behaviors. Alcohol was used to a great extent to self-medicate as a means of handling the stresses associated with the game. Gustafson (1986) contends that alcohol is a societally sanctioned aggressive solution for men to use when frustrated. Also, hockey seems to be a culture that is defined, in part, by the use of alcohol in leisure. Others have noted that drinking is a cultural symbol of masculinity (Lemle and Mishkind 1989). The complex role that alcohol plays in aggression should be explored in greater depth, especially as it interacts with social situations, psychological factors, and other drugs.

The informants in this study also identified athletes' tendency to objectify women as a factor that contributes to the exportation of violence off the ice. Interestingly, the men defined sexual abuse of women broadly to include verbal aggression and general disrespectful behaviors, that is, treatment of women as sexual objects. Some connected sexual aggression or violence to what they termed a locker-room-talk mentality wherein certain male sexual bravado in the peer culture was carried off the ice to their relationships with women. The respondents tended to differentiate between general physical violence and sexual aggression or violence, seeing the latter as less serious and more understandable than general physical violence. In general, the athletes seemed to speak of a culture that had a lesser regard for women.

In general, the findings of this study have illuminated men's subjective experiences as participants in the sport of hockey. As such, they have brought personal insights to bear on our understanding of aggression and violence in sports. Because this was a small-scale intensive study, the voices of a variety of other participants who could have provided more insights into couple violence were excluded, for example, actual male aggressors of women and women victims. The researchers rely on the perspectives of respondents who had a particularly close relationship with the first author; perhaps a larger number of informants who were not acquainted with the researcher would have yielded additional information. Many questions remain to be addressed. Because violent behaviors first emerge in high school and continue into college play, these would be useful arenas for generating a fuller understanding the development of violent behaviors in this sport. Other sports have also been associated with violence outside the sport itself, for example, football and basketball; a question emerges as to whether the development of violence is similar for other sports. In addition, as more women enter contact sports, it would be interesting to see if they create a similar sport culture and become more aggressive both in and outside the sport. Factors that have been

implicated in domestic violence research in general, for example, masculine identity, family-of-origin issues, male peer group influences, and stress need to be explored in future work on this topic.

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