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An inside look at hockey player's and official's perspectives on hockey violence and control.

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AN INSIDE LOOK AT HOCKEY PLAYER'S AND OFFICIAL'S
PERSPECTIVES ON HOCKEY VIOLENCE AND CONTROL

By

Dan Power

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of Sociology and Anthropology in
Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
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1991
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ABSTRACT

This study provides the reader with an insider's view of North American professional hockey. It is a qualitative study which utilizes a symbolic interactionist theoretical framework to examine the in-group perspectives. It is suggested that violence has a distinct meaning within the North American professional hockey community, and this meaning is shared among the majority of the game's participants. It is also proposed that this professional hockey community represents an occupational subculture of violence, and proviolence perspectives emerge from common experiences and interaction with other group members.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all of the young hockey players who dream of making it to the pros. someday. Hard work and determination will be the key to your success.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My special thanks goes out to my committee members beginning with the Chairperson Dr. C.L. Vincent. Dr. Vincent took a lot of time out of his busy schedule to consult with me throughout this project. He provided me with both the support, and the discipline I needed to complete this study. Special thanks also goes out to the Readers, Dr. M. Shuraydi, and Dr. R.M. Daly who took the time to peruse and critique the rough drafts of this paper. I also thank Sue of the sociology department for her continual encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

When Canadians compare the atmosphere in their homeland with that of the United States, they are proud of themselves because of the relatively lower level of violence in Canada (Sacco, 1987). Nonetheless, Friedenberg (1987:1) notes that Canadians still perceive violence to be a crucial and escalating problem in Canada. During the past decade it seems that perceptions of sports violence have followed a similar pattern. Although many people seem to enjoy viewing sports events that are a definite risk to the physical health and well-being of their participants, according to Goldstein (1983:1), "contrary to the popular belief, there seems to be growing dissatisfaction with sports violence." This dissatisfaction is reflected in the controversy and scrutiny surrounding popular body-contact sports that are played on Canadian and American soil. Sports including boxing, football, and hockey are prime examples. It is also reflected in stricter control measures that are increasingly being imposed by league commissioners and officials in an attempt to 'clean-up' their respective sports. Specifically, North American hockey has recently been targeted because of the high incidence of violent physical assaults that take place between opposing players during the heat of the game.

Hockey is widely recognized as the premier sport of Canada (Stebbins, 1987), and its popularity seems to be steadily increasing in the U.S. From the point of view of a recreational
player and regular observer of the game, hockey is exciting, competitive, emotional, aggressive, and entertaining. Ideally, hockey is "a beautiful sport - a sport of skill, speed, endurance, and strength" (Yeager, 1979:243). However, hockey also fits into the violent sport classification. Newman (1979:176) states that, "in these games (violent team games), although their main focus is on skill, team play, and winning (naturally), violent physical contact is a traditional and often essential aspect of the game."

For the most part, hockey violence is manifested through injurious body checking, fist fighting, and assaultive misuse of the hockey stick (which coincidentally is often referred to by players as the 'weapon'). Yeager (1979:22) points out that hockey is, "perhaps the most vicious sport for participants."

Traditionally in the professional ranks of North American hockey, the adage, "if you can't beat them in the alley, you can't beat them on the ice" (Yeager, 1979:22), has been a common approach to the game. However this approach has recently been attacked and challenged. The opposition comes from various sport scholars, broadcasters and journalists, members of the hockey establishment, and the fans, many of whom would rather observe participants play the game without taking 'cheap shots' at each other in the process. The focus of the criticism ranges from minor hockey leagues to the professional ranks.
If there is a genuine desire to 'clean-up' the sport, several issues must be addressed. First, do the players and officials consider their game to be violent? What types of physical contact between players, besides 'clean' body checking, should be accepted or tolerated? Can hockey violence be controlled much more than it is already? Are the formal rules and regulations, and the corresponding internal control and disciplinary systems of each respective league, adequate enough to minimize or eliminate player violence? For example, do the current sanctions serve as deterrents, or should player violence be subject to external control (i.e. criminal prosecution)? These are some of the focal issues that are addressed in the following study.

This research study is primarily concerned with violence in North American professional hockey. A symbolic interactionist theoretical orientation is utilized to describe and examine junior level players, active and retired professional player's, and official's perspectives toward hockey violence and its control. The players and officials are directly involved in the action. The players break the rules intentionally or otherwise, and the officials police their behaviour and enforce the necessary sanctions to deter further violation of the rules and regulations. Who knows the game better than those persons directly involved? Personal insights from the researcher as a
lifelong player and observer of the game are sparingly incorporated.

The material for this study was collected through 'guided conversations' (i.e. interviews) with fourteen people who are, or have been directly involved in the game at a highly competitive level. This exploration into the 'hockey world' provides the reader with an inside look at some of the realities of professional hockey. It explains why the physical side of hockey endures. One retired professional player provides his view on the game of hockey,

We've had some very serious injuries over the years, but hockey's not a sissies game; it's a man's game. There's an old saying - you separate the men from the boys - when you go out on the ice, you've got to realize there's a chance you might get hurt - you're not gonna die. There have been very few deaths, and they've been accidental. It's a rough game; you want to turn it into a sissies game, well then go play tennis or golf. Hockey's a very physical game, and that's the way it's meant to be played, and that's the way it will continue to be played, hopefully.

The meaning of the game to this player coincides with most of the other hockey personnel who contributed their input to this study.

The researcher chose to examine hockey violence because of its controversial nature. Furthermore, when the researcher began exploring this issue, his interest was sparked by the enormous
amount of media attention that the National Hockey League was receiving because of the vicious player assaults that were taking place. He became curious to find out what the game, with its violent confrontations, means to professional hockey personnel. Finally, the researcher has a keen interest in the game because of his lifelong participation in the game, and his lifelong observation of NHL games. The chapter which follows is a review of contemporary literature which deals with hockey violence and control.
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter consists of a review of contemporary literature which focuses on violence in sport, and more specifically, violence in the context of North American professional hockey. The chapter explores: how violence is defined and categorized in the sport context; the two most common types of hockey violence which are continually scrutinized, those being fighting and stick assaults; the means by which hockey violence is presently controlled; and proposed solutions to hockey violence including, 'external constraints' and 'internal restraints'. The information sources include: books, journals, magazines, and newspapers.

Violence in the Sport Context

Professional hockey has been labelled a 'violent' sport time and time again. The word violent is a descriptive term which simply stated is something which is, "characterized by the exertion of force accompanied by rapidity," and violence is, "the quality of being violent" (The New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of The English Language, 1980:937). Violence can be used interchangeably with terms such as: violation, unjust force, outrage, attack, and assault (Same source). A general definition of violence is provided by Airaksinen (1988:64). Airaksinen
states, "violence means the use of force so that the likelihood of personal harm increases. The term harm refers to physical harm and to strictly analogical psychological harm, at least in all paradigmatic cases." Violence is closely related to aggression which is, "behaviour whose intent is the physical or psychological injury of another person" (Goldstein, 1986:viii). Further, according to Smith (1983:2), "violence, more often than not, refers to the physical side of aggression, hence the term "violent aggression"." Both terms 'violent' and 'aggressive' are often employed as adjectives to describe the game of hockey.

Although violence most often refers to a physical act, it is interesting to note the socio-legal perspective that, "violence is not defined by acts, but by value judgements" (Mohr, 1987:75). This point is especially applicable in the sport context. Bredemeier (1983:47) clarifies this point in the following description of sport: "sport is an arena of human interaction where aggression and violence are sometimes idolized, sometimes condemned, but most often legitimated and at least tolerated." In addition, Smith (1983:9) notes, "the fact is, sports violence has never been viewed as "real violence"." Smith's socio-legal 'typology of sports violence' (1983:8-23) provides insight into what was and was not considered violence in the sport and hockey contexts in the early eighties.
In his 'typology of sports violence', Smith (1983:8-23), categorizes sports violence into four types, based on their legitimacy. Further, the typology is based on the viewpoints of the law, players, and the public. The focus is on incidents which take place on the ice while a game is in progress, or in the immediate hockey context. Following is a brief summary of Smith's typology.

The first and the mildest type of sports violence is 'brutal body contact' which, "conforms to the official rules of the sport, hence (is) legal in effect under the law of the land; (it is) more or less accepted." In hockey, the body check fits into this category. According to former NHL referee Bruce Hood, "Hockey is a contact sport, and hitting helps make the game the exciting sport it is." Hood elaborates, "If there is a lot of hitting going on, even if it's borderline legal, he (the referee or linesman) should let it go unless the stick or an elbow is used" (1988:64). Thus, body contact in the form of 'clean' body checking, is pretty much taken for granted as a legitimate part of the game.

The second type is 'borderline violence' which, "violates the official rules of the sport and the law of the land, but (is) widely accepted." The typical hockey fight fits into this category. Whereas, these two types of sports violence are classified as 'relatively legitimate', (i.e. "not defined by
practitioners as violence" Smith, 1983), and/or 'constructive',
(i.e. "the aggressor's act is within the formal rules or the
informal norms of the contest, and the recipient of the
aggressive act does sustain an injury beyond what would be
considered "appropriate"), the next two types described by Smith
are considered 'relatively illegitimate', and/or 'destructive'.

The third type of sports violence is 'quasi-criminal
violence' which, "violates the official rules of the sport, the
law of the land, and to a significant degree informal player
norms; (it is) more or less not accepted." In the hockey context,
stick assaults fit into this category. The hockey stick is
appropriately termed a 'weapon' when a player uses it to score
goals, but not when a player aimlessly or intentionally swings it
at an opposing player's head in an attempt to injure the player.

The final and most serious type is 'criminal violence'
which, "violates the official rules of the sport, the law of the
land, and players informal norms; (it is) not accepted." Death
often results from this type of violence and it is rare in
hockey. An example of 'criminal violence' is a brawl that takes
place between players in the arena parking lot after the game has
ended.

The following two sections of this chapter focus primarily
on 'borderline violence' and 'quasi-criminal violence' in the
NHL; these types of violence are common in this league, and they
are increasingly being subject to stricter regulation and control. Although, these types of violence correspond to various forms of assault which occur in non-sport settings, they are often perceived differently in terms of acceptability and severity, and they are subject to their own set of laws, separate from those of the wider society.

The Hockey Fight

One aspect of hockey that has always been regarded as a big 'part of the game' is the hockey fight. The fist-fight is such a big part of North American professional hockey that currently almost every team has at least one 'fighter' or 'enforcer' on its player roster. Edmonton Oiler general manager Glen Sather explains the current state of affairs in the NHL in simplistic terms: "it's there so you have to counter act it (by having fighters on your team)" (Toronto Star, Feb 1989:G8). Even the popular Nintendo video game "Blades of Steel" has body contact and fighting between the imaginative players on the screen.

When former NHL player Bob Clarke was the General Manager of the Philadelphia Flyers, he looked into the possibility of getting professional boxing lessons for some of his players, but he disregarded the plan because he felt that it might tarnish his teams image ("Sport", May 1989:11). Taking this a step further,
in 1988 the Detroit Red Wings sent their two 'enforcers' Bob Probert and Joe Kocur to the Kronk Gym in Detroit, to get some boxing tips from Emanuel Steward. Steward trains top ranked professional boxer Thomas "Hit-Man" Hearns, and is the head person in charge of operations at this training ground ("Sport", May 1989:11). These players were not sent to Steward for ballet lessons. Currently, Probert is considered to be the best fighter in hockey, and his popularity and effectiveness is apparent because of this.

Most of the sport literature that examines the hockey fight (at least at the professional level), reveals that essentially, this activity is defined as legitimate (acceptable) and at least, tolerable by its practitioners, the league, and the fans (see Yeager, 1979; Goldstein, 1983; Smith, 1983; Colburn, 1986). Although this may be changing somewhat since Smith conducted his research, Smith (1983:12-23) found that, "most players insist that nobody gets hurt in a punch up" and "the periodic public fuss over hockey fighting is simply a product of the rantings of publicity-hungry politicians. " Closely related to the latter belief is the perception that the media focus too much on the fights (see Smith, 1983; Coakley, 1986; The Hockey News, 1989). Despite its support, the call for the elimination of the hockey fight is also supported by a select group of players, coaches, referees, and others who perceive fighting as negative and unnecessary. This
group believe that other aspects of the game like skill and speed outweigh the fisticuffs, and that fighting tarnishes the public's image of the game.

Opponents of hockey violence have recently spoken out against fighting, and their concerns, although seemingly valid, have been both accepted and rejected. For example, hockey player Wayne Gretzky, alias 'The Great One', recently attacked hockey violence and went so far to say that fighting will be banned from the NHL within five to six years (Maclean's, Feb 1989:36). Gretzky spoke out against fighting based on his conviction that fighting is pushing potential hockey fans in the U.S. away from the sport (THN, Feb 1989:8). Former Canadian junior hockey team coach Dave Chambers agrees with Gretzky; Chambers states, "the sport will not rise above the level of roller derby in the United States until fighting is banned" (The Globe and Mail, Jan 1989: A12). Perhaps John Ziegler's explanation best explains why the elimination of hockey fisticuffs has not gained substantial support from NHL executives and team owners.

The approach offered by NHL president John Ziegler represents that of hockey establishment, which, as Yeager (1979:105) points out, "has long admitted that the game's vicious fights pack arenas." Ziegler analyzes the situation in business terms (i.e. an attractive product which is being sold to satisfied customers). Thus, he is hesitant to support any drastic
Former professional goaltender Rick Heinz elaborates (1988:7),

Hockey like all other professional sports, has been swallowed up by the world of big business. The business side of hockey has turned what appears to be a very simple sport, into a complex, billion dollar operation. The league's (NHL) decision-making process is now determined by the profit/loss statement.

Whatever the case, conflicting viewpoints on the place of fighting in hockey are common. However, up to this point in time, the hockey fight endures.

It was mentioned earlier in this chapter that the hockey fight fits into M.D. Smith's 'borderline violence' category (see Smith's 'socio-legal typology of sports violence', 1983).

Regarding the regulation and control of this type of violence, Smith notes (1983:12),

borderline violence is essentially the province of referees, umpires, and other immediate game officials, higher league officials and law enforcement authorities seldom become involved. Sanctions never exceed suspension from the game being played, and perhaps a fine.

The usual penalty enforced against fighting is a five minute fighting major, which means the player must spend five minutes in the penalty box, and a player who draws three major penalties in one game is automatically ejected from the contest (THN, Feb 1989:8). Results from a survey of NHL all-stars conducted by
THN (Feb 1989:8) revealed that out of twenty players questioned, thirteen stated that they are satisfied with current NHL laws which govern fighting infractions in the league. Considering the relatively lenient penalties imposed by the NHL for fighting infractions (although they are more strict than they were in the past), it is not surprising that fighting prevails as a major aspect of the game. Fortunately, stick assaults are not as common or as readily accepted.

**Stick Assaults**

Stick assaults are common in professional hockey games, despite the fact that they are an undesired, and often a criticized part of the game. The hockey stick can cause a lot of damage when it is used as a weapon, and this is probably why most, if not all hockey personnel frown on its misuse. No player wants to lose an eye, or sustain a bruise or cut because an opposing player carelessly, or intentionally high sticks them in the face. Yet, it happens too often and the consequences can be too serious let pass by as 'part of the game'.

Serious stick infractions fit into Smith's 'quasi-criminal violence' category (1983:14), and specific examples include: high-sticking, butt-ending, spearing, slashing, and cross-checking (especially to the face and head). Regarding the consequences and the regulation of this type of violence, Smith
(1983:14) notes,

quasi-criminal violence usually results, or could have resulted in serious injury, which is what brings it to the attention of top league officials and generates public outrage in some quarters. This in turn puts pressure on legal authorities to become involved. League imposed penalties for quasi-criminal violence usually go beyond the contest in question and range from suspensions from several games to lifetime bans, depending on the sport; each league seems to decide how much and what types of violence it will tolerate.

Fortunately, the NHL is displaying a willingness to control and reduce unnecessary stick assaults from their sport.

Prior to the 1988-89 season, the NHL introduced a new rule calling for stricter enforcement and stiffer penalties for excessive player violence and illegal stickwork. The new 'stick rule' which was strictly enforced throughout the 1988-89 and the 1989-90 seasons carried the following penalty, "a game misconduct to any player who draws a five minute major for a stick offense. And subsequent to that, a one-game suspension for two of them, two games out for a third, three for a fourth, etc." (The Windsor Star, October 19, 1988:B2). This penalty was enforced in every case; whether the high sticking incident was intentional or accidental, the offender was ejected from the game. The NHL made some minor changes in this rule prior to the 1990-91 season. It is now left to the referee's discretion as to whether or not the high stick was deliberate or accidental. Thus, a player
does not necessarily receive a game misconduct for high sticking an opponent. If the incident was perceived as deliberate, the player is removed from the contest, and further disciplinary action may be taken. However, if the incident is accidental, the player will simply be given a five minute penalty in most cases. The NHL just recently introduced two new rules for the 1991-92 season. First, if a player crosschecks, or pushes another player from behind who is not prepared to receive the blow, the aggressor will be given a major penalty and a game misconduct. Secondly, the league has decided to reduce a team's roster size from eighteen players and two goalies, to seventeen players and two goalies. According to the NHL Notebook (The Chatham Daily News, 1991:11), this was done, "For economic reasons, and because many teams were dressing goons with their final roster spots."

**Internal vs. External Control of Player Violence**

The new rules the NHL implement each year reflect their attempt to clean-up the game, but they also reflect a desire to handle player misconduct through the league's internal control system. According to American lawyer Rick Horrow (1981:14),

> there appears to be a conventional understanding within the sports establishment that complaints of excessive violence are to be resolved within the internal fine and
suspension mechanism of each respective league. For excessive violence which goes beyond what most everyone would consider "part of the game," there is a strong tendency to keep the courts out and deal with such conduct "within the family."

In an attempt to keep disputes "within the family," each league decides what type of conduct it will and will not tolerate.

Once each league develops its own "law," most management suggests that the league's internal disciplinary proceedings provide an adequate means of controlling player's behaviour in the hockey rink and on the football field; the league, they say, knows the sport better than any court does; that if the courts get involved, the game will become more tame, less competitive and less appealing; and that the minute the courts have the right to litigate the game, a Pandora's Box will be opened.

The players seem to have adopted a similar attitude.

External control of player violence in the NHL is a touchy issue to say the least.

Regarding legal intervention into the hockey context, "Inside Hockey" writer Jeff Hale (Nov/Dec 1988:13) reveals that most hockey players, officials, and fans oppose legal intervention by the criminal justice system into the game of hockey. Citing the Law Reform Commission of Canada's 1984 working paper on assault, Hale notes, "normally, Canadian society condemns the deliberate acts of violence and accepts criminal prosecution as the appropriate remedy. But when the criminal law invades the Canadian ice rink, it treads on unusual and maybe sacred ground."
The amount of legal intervention into hockey has been sporadic and selective. For example, Hale (Nov/Dec 1988:16) notes,

Between the turn of the century and 1982, said Watson (University of Western Ont interim athletic director who did a six year study on hockey violence and law in Canada), there were 66 Canadian court cases relating to on-ice hockey violence, 44 the result of amateur games. From 1931 to 1963 there were no cases at all and, after the 'Investigation and Inquiry Into Violence In Amateur Hockey' by Toronto lawyer William McMurtry in 1974, there were 48 charges laid in the next eight years.

The most recent NHL incident that reached the courts took place in a game at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto during the 1987-88 season.

The Toronto Police Force invaded the Gardens and laid criminal charges against Minnesota player Dino Ciccarelli (now a Washington Capital), for deliberately slashing Toronto player Luke Richardson three times in the face with his stick. Consequently, Ciccarelli was issued an NHL suspension, was convicted of assault in a court of law, and was sentenced to serve a day in jail along with a $1000 fine (Hale, Nov/Dec 1988:13). This seems highly selective and unwarranted in light of more violent incidents that have occurred on the ice during the past two seasons and that have been dealt with exclusively by the NHL. However, by charging Ciccarelli, the Criminal Justice System
made the NHL and the public aware that they are not immune to blatant displays of on-ice violence.

Although some members of the legal community feel that the courts should intervene when sports violence becomes excessive (see Horow, 1981; Smith, 1983; Hale, 1988). Ron Watson's comments seem to represent the general consensus. According to Hale (Nov/Dec 1988; 21),

Ron Watson said the relationship between law and hockey has progressed, and praises hockey administrators for that.

"The changes they make (in the hockey world) will be gradual, but they will make them," he said. "The courts have been very hesitant. They don't want to change the character of the game. I see the court as the very last resort."

As long as the NHL takes a 'hard-line' stand against violence in their league through strict enforcement of sanctions, the legal community will probably continue, for the most part, to maintain a 'hands-off' approach. This seems to be the case with the NHL which is attempting to set new standards for player conduct both on and off the ice. According to John Ziegler, the president of the NHL,

acts of attempt to injure are down in the league. In the last ten years, there's been more legislation...to take the brawling, the multiple fights and the use of the stick out of the game than in the 63 years of the National Hockey League history before that.
There are less fights and bench-clearing brawls are a thing of the past. (The Globe and Mail, Feb 21, 1989:A13).

From this we can see that hockey violence seems to be diminishing, but it has been a slow process and the elimination of hockey violence will not take place overnight, if at all.

**Proposed Solutions To Sports Violence**

It seems appropriate to end this review with some of the proposed solutions to sports violence cited in the current literature. Goldstein (1983) and Yeager (1979), highlight possible ways in which sports violence can be reduced and/or eliminated. Goldstein refers specifically to 'external constraints' and 'internal restraints'. Regarding player violence in hockey, external constraints include: rule changes and stricter enforcement of rules by on and off ice officials; modifications in protective equipment for players; a reduced focus on violent incidents by the media personnel who provide coverage of games (Goldstein, 1983:4), and changes by the legal system (Yeager, 1979:219). Internal restraints include, "changes in the attitudes, values, and perceptions of athletes, management, and fans (toward hockey violence)" (Goldstein, 1983:4).

Beginning with external constraints, Smith (1983) believes
that for the most part, stiffer penalties could eliminate hockey violence. However, former NHL referee Bruce Hood explains the current situation (1988:74),

Rule changes tried out in the exhibition schedule rarely get a fair shake. Usually there's a lot of opposition to change from the teams, which is why it takes so long in the NHL to get anything done. Most changes are still the result of seeing new rules in the Junior leagues or American League and following suit.

The question still remains: Is hockey so violent that it is necessary to stiffen the penalties, or has the violence waned since Smith and others conducted their research in the early eighties?

Regarding changes in equipment, the primary focus has been on head and face gear. Although most players wear helmets in the 'pros', most players discard the face shield once they reach this level. A lot of retired and active players argue that, perhaps if none of the players wore any head or face gear in the first place, they might keep their sticks down. However, at present there are only a handful of active NHL players who do not wear helmets and it is unlikely that many younger players will follow the lead of these few veterans. The viewpoint offered by former referee Bruce Hood is as follows: "we're at a stage now where almost every player in the NHL grew up wearing a helmet and a visor. Consequently, they have no conception of how much
damage a stick can do so they carry them high all night (The Windsor Star, Dec 8, 1988:B2).

Regarding a reduced focus on sports violence by the sport media, this seems almost impossible considering that violence attracts public attention and interest, and this is what the media thrive on; sensationalism sells. Finally, regarding changes in the legal system, the literature (see Horrow, 1981; Smith, 1983; and Hale, 1988) indicates that most hockey leagues are convinced that their internal control system is adequate to regulate player misconduct.

Although external constraints seem to be a step in the right direction, internal restraints seem to be equally important. NHL vice-president Brian O'Neill states, "we can have suspensions until doomsday. But until the players respect one another's careers, there are going to be troubles" (The Windsor Star, Nov 9,1988:B2). Bruce Hood agrees with O'Neill, and he blames the various violent incidents which took place during the first two months of the 1988-89 season on the players lack of respect for the game and their opponents (The Windsor Star, Dec 8,1988:B2). Consequently, both O'Neill and Hood believe that to a large extent, the players are responsible for cleaning up their sport. Even former Philadelphia Flyers player and active Minnesota North Stars General Manager Bob Clarke agrees that the onus is on the players. However, Clarke also maintains that, "we've got far too
many rules. Rules upon rules upon rules. But it's not the rules. It's not the officials. The suspensions and the fines haven't stopped it" (The Windsor Star, Nov 9, 1988:B2). Perhaps the penalties have not been strict enough to stop it. Although there are no simple solutions, it seems that a combination of both external constraints (in the form of stiffer penalties and stricter enforcement practices by NHL officials), and internal restraints (changes in the attitudes, values, and perceptions of athletes, management, and fans toward hockey violence), might diminish the so-called 'problem' of hockey violence.

**Final Remarks**

This chapter outlined several important issues surrounding hockey violence. Many of these issues were discussed at some length with the 'hockey personnel' who shared their perspectives for this study. Before moving to the description and analysis of the research findings, an outline of the theoretical orientation and the corresponding methodology utilized for the study is in order.
CHAPTER 3 - THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Symbolic Interactionism

A social psychological approach to understanding and explaining social interaction and behaviour called symbolic interactionism guides this study. Symbolic interaction is, "the interaction that takes place among the various minds and meanings that characterize human societies. It refers to the fact that social interaction rests upon a taking of oneself (self-objectification) and others (taking the role of the other) into account" (Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1980:1).

Symbolic interactionists are primarily concerned with describing and analyzing the process by which individuals act and interact in each situation they are involved in.

Its primary foci are on the individual "with a self" and on the interaction between a person's internal thoughts and emotions and his or her social behaviour. Most of the analysis is of small-scale interpersonal relationships. Individuals are viewed as active constructors of their own conduct who interpret, evaluate, define, and map out their own action, rather than as passive beings who are impinged upon by outside forces. Symbolic interactionism also stresses the process by which the individual makes decisions and forms opinions (Wallace and Wolf, 1980:220).

To the symbolic interactionist, each situation the individual enters is unique, and "the form interaction takes emerges within each situation concerned" (Wallace and Wolf, 1980:220).
A description of symbolic interactionism is not complete without introducing Herbert Blumer's three basic premises, which are common to various orientations of symbolic interactionism:

(1) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; (2) these meanings are a product of social interaction in human society; and (3) these meanings are modified and handled through an interpretive process that is used by each person in dealing with the things he/she encounters (Meltzer, Petras, Reynolds, 1980:54).

Herbert Blumer is the chief proponent of the 'Chicago school' of symbolic interactionism. Stryker (1981:9), briefly outlines Blumer's view of society,

he conceives society as consisting of people's actions taking place in and with regard to a situation and constructed by interpreting the situation, identifying and assessing things that must be taken into account, and acting on the basis of the assessment. He insists that even in situations in which there exist common understandings or definitions developed through prior interaction, an interpretive process occurs in which the actions of participants are constructed. He contrasts this view of society with the view held by conventional sociologists, for whom society is a structure or organization. According to Blumer, symbolic interactionism sees social organization as entering action only to the extent that it shapes situations and provides symbols used in interpreting situations.

Although symbolic interactionists of the Chicago school prefer to de-emphasize predetermined rules and external factors
when they explain an individual's actions, they are not completely ignored in this study of hockey violence simply because professional hockey is highly organized and structured. However, what is of primary importance in this study is how professional hockey personnel describe and explain hockey violence based on the meaning it has for them. The meaning that hockey violence has for those persons who are directly involved in the game provides outsiders with a better understanding of what hockey is "really" like.

Unlike the 'Iowa' school of symbolic interactionism which has a more predictable and deterministic view of human behaviour, the Chicago school generally downplay the importance of such structural factors as: norms, roles, status, position, and rules as solely determining the individuals course of action. The latter is more concerned with the process by which the individual constructs his action. Wallace and Wolf (1980:244) explain,

...neither Blumer nor Mead totally denies structured action or defined situations. After all, human behaviour would be far too complicated and would have too many potentially disastrous opportunities for mutual misunderstanding if every activity had to be defined from scratch! What the symbolic interactionist perspective points out is that there are many unstructured or undefined situations in which human beings must devise their own conduct. Further, even situations in which much is defined in advance include action that is not.
Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds (1980:61), clarify Blumer's image of human behaviour as free rather than determined,

Conceiving such behaviour in terms of an interplay between the spontaneous and the socially-derived aspects of the self, Blumer builds into behaviour an unpredictable, indeterminate dimension. For him, this interplay is the fundamental source of innovation in human society. By contrast, exponents of the Iowa school reject both indeterminism in human conduct and the explanation of social innovation in terms of the emergent, creative element in human acts. The key issue is the place of impulse in conduct.

This study is guided primarily by the orientation outlined above. In sum, the Chicago school of symbolic interactionism views the human being as, "more complex, less predictable, more contradictory, more situational, more dynamic, and less passive," than do other social-scientific perspectives (Charon, 1985:26). Symbolic interactionism provides the researcher with some key concepts which are incorporated in the analysis phase of the research process.

Key Concepts

Symbolic interactionism provides a researcher with several concepts which can be used to analyze various groups in society. In this case, symbolic interactionism provides the necessary tools to analyze perceptions of violence in professional hockey.
Some of the concepts employed in chapter 5 of this study include: self, definition of the situation, socialization, reference group, norms and roles. All of these concepts emerge from the interaction process between human beings. This section outlines these key concepts. The importance of these concepts is not that they dictate hockey player's actions; they merely shape situations in which players get involved. Furthermore, these concepts are not "definitive" (prescriptions of what to see), rather, they are "sensitizing" (they simply suggest directions along which to look) (see Charon, 1985; Lauer and Handel, 1983; Stryker, 1981; Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1980; Wallace and Wolf, 1980). They provide a framework or a structure that the individual as an active participant must act within.

To begin, when players enter into a situation where a confrontation might occur, they must first "define the situation." The definition of the situation is a central concept and tool of analysis utilized by symbolic interactionists. Lauer and Handel (1983:127) note, "The classic formulation for "definition of the situation" was provided by W.I. Thomas (1937:42): "Preliminary to any self-determined act of behaviour there is always a stage of examination and deliberation which we may call the "definition of the situation." It is part of the decision making process of human beings, and it occurs prior to the individual's response in the situation at hand. It should be
noted that the individual's definition of the situation can also be altered or undergo redefinition throughout any given interaction. This concept, as well as those which follow, are utilized in chapter 5 to analyze some of the perspectives on hockey violence put forth in this study.

Although in many cases hockey players on-ice behaviour is spontaneous and undefined, it is safe to say their behaviour and corresponding perspectives on issues surrounding the game (i.e. hockey violence), are also influenced to a certain extent by their lifelong participation and "socialization" in the game. Socialization is defined as, "an interaction process that involves the acquisition of shared meanings; such meanings are manifested in the symbol system of a group and in the attitudes that prevail among group members" (Lauer and Handel, 1983:98). Furthermore, within the context of professional hockey, most players still enjoy playing the game, but they are also paid large salaries to perform a job. Many demands are put on players by the organization they play for; at the professional level, hockey has become the players' occupation and career, rather than simply his pastime. The research findings illustrate that the group of professionals in this study are socialized into an occupational subculture. For the most part, this group shares a set of values and norms which appear to be at odds with those of the outside society. Again, this socialization is an ongoing
process throughout the actor's (i.e. hockey player's) career. This is important to keep in mind when the concern is how they define and interpret their world in the present.

Charon (1985:30) indicates, "perspectives are learned, altered, transformed, and replaced in interaction. Each actor has many perspectives, each one associated with a reference group or society." Reference groups, as they are referred to in this study are, "those groups whose perspectives the individual shares" (Charon, 1985:24). Just like the individual has many perspectives, he/she also has several reference groups. However, the consensus in the responses found in this study illustrates that the main reference group for professional hockey people is their group of peers. This may not be the case when they discuss other matters, but when discussing potential or actual examples and/or situations of hockey violence, hockey people usually offer similar perspectives. It is through interaction within their group that their common perspectives, and definitions of hockey violence emerge. Thus, when the researcher is analyzing their perceptions and their reality, he/she must look at, "how one defines the situation, the reference group one identifies with in that situation, the perspective one draws on, and how one's role, reference groups, and/or perspectives undergo change in the situation in interaction with others" (Charon, 1985:25).

When discussing 'their world', hockey players often
associate players' behaviours with what they call player roles. In social-psychology, a role is defined as, "what actor is expected to do; the actions considered appropriate for the occupant of a particular position" (Heiss, 1981:94). In professional hockey, participants equate the term role to a player's main purpose, his specialization, and/ or his job. Every player is an employee of the organization that he plays for and as such, team management or the organization (his employer) expect him to make a significant contribution toward the team's success. Management's primary goals are to put a winning team on the ice, and/or to maximize profits by putting a product on the ice that will attract fans to the arena box office. They pay the players salary and expect him to act according to their demands. For example, if a coach feels that his team needs to intimidate their opponents, or 'throw them off their game', he may advise one or two of his 'enforcers' to "get out there and mix it up." Given these instructions, there is a good chance the player will comply if he wants to keep his job. However, how the interaction between opposing players on the ice unfolds, is a different story. When the player steps onto the ice, he must also devise his own conduct on the basis of what is going on around him.

Regarding player violence in professional hockey, it is the researcher's conviction that the player's behaviour may also be influenced to a certain extent by his knowledge of predetermined
formal rules and regulations, along with informal player conduct norms. However, these factors alone do not fully determine players' decisions and actions on the ice. Blumer would agree that their behavior emerges through interaction with others in the immediate setting and situation; many acts are spontaneous and undefined. Furthermore, player's are able to regulate their conduct on the ice through self-control, and self-judgement; they are not mindless creatures simply responding to any given stimuli.

In analyzing the material which emerged from the interviews, the researcher takes into account how the respondents perceive, interpret, and define themselves within their organization, which is highly structured by rules and regulations. Secondly, the researcher takes into account how they perceive, interpret, and define their occupational world. Finally, the researcher takes into account how they perceive, interpret, and define themselves in relation to their occupational world. It should be noted that a player's perspectives or perceptions of hockey violence, may or may not correspond with his behavior on the ice. Perspectives are, "guiding (not determining) influencers" (Charon, 1985:30).

Most of the research that has been conducted within the last ten years on sports violence, and specifically, hockey violence, is valuable to this study (see references). This study complements and updates the earlier work which was directed by
a symbolic interactionist model (i.e. Smith, 1983; Colburn, 1985). The next chapter outlines the methodology of the Chicago school of symbolic interactionism, which flows from the theoretical orientation outlined above.
CHAPTER 4 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Chicago School of Symbolic Interactionism

Kenneth Bailey (1982:32) describes what is meant by methodology in the following explanation,

By "methodology" we mean the philosophy of the research process. This includes the assumptions and values that serve as a rationale for research and the standards or criteria the researcher uses for interpreting data and reaching conclusions.

This study was guided by the philosophy which symbolic interactionists of the 'Chicago School' adhere to in their research. The 'Chicago School' of symbolic interactionism stresses the, "methodological necessity of 'getting inside' the reality of the actor in an effort to understand this reality as the actor does" (Meltzer et al., 1980:54-55). Meltzer et al. (1980:57-58) outline Herbert Blumer's position on methodology:

The student of human conduct, he contends, must get inside the actor's world and must see the world as the actor sees it, for the actor's behaviour takes place on the basis of his/her particular meanings. Through some form of sympathetic introspection, the student must take the standpoint of the acting unit (person or group) whose behaviour he/she is studying and must attempt to use each actor's own categories in capturing that actor's world of meaning.

Blumer's position is the position taken by the researcher in this study, based on the assumption that the world of
professional hockey is like a small, self-regulated society, within the larger society. Thus, only those actors who actively participate, or have participated in the game in a competitive capacity, can provide the fullest insight into how the game should be played and controlled, and where hockey is heading. By examining their world, through their eyes, the researcher was able to capture the 'inside view' of the reality of hockey violence.

Blumer's research philosophy is linked to his desired methods of data (or material) collection. Blumer advocates various qualitative methods (Meltzer et al., 1980:58). These include: "life histories, autobiographies, case studies, diaries, letters, interviews (especially of the free, or non-directive type), and, most importantly, participant observation. Only through intimate association with those who are being studied, he maintains, can the investigator enter their inner worlds." The technique that was utilized in this study was, the semi-structured, intensive interview.

Following Blumer's lead, this study is a qualitative analysis of hockey violence. Lofland (1971:13) explains the kinds of questions qualitative researchers ask, and what they address:

What kinds of things are going on here? What are the forms of this phenomenon? What variations do we find in this phenomenon? That is, qualitative analysis is addressed to the task of delineating forms, kinds, and
types of social phenomena; of documenting in loving detail the things that exist.

This study is non-numerical, and non-statistical in nature. Instead, it is an exploration, investigation, and analysis of the perspectives of active and retired professional hockey players and officials (i.e. referees and linesmen) and, junior level players who often model their behaviour after the elite professionals. The study focuses on various issues that relate to the violence that is an integral part of the North American game. To phrase it in the way Stebbins does in his ethnographic study of Canadian football (1987), the players and officials supplied "The View From The Helmet."

Methods of Material Collection

The material for this study was collected through intensive interviews with fourteen hockey personnel. Since this study is qualitative, the preferred term for the information gathered during the interviews is "material" rather than "data". Lofland (1971:73), distinguishes between the two terms,

In a quantitative context, the term "data" is the typical designation for gatherings from the empirical world. It is an appropriate term for that context. It has a numerical and hard ring to it. "Data" are quantified, can be manipulated very systematically, and can be processed by sophisticated technology—most notably by computers. The gatherings of
qualitative researchers tend not to have these properties. Because they do not, it would not seem appropriate falsely to harden them with a term like "data." Instead, qualitative gatherings may be called "materials."

The group being put under the microscope in this study consisted of: 1. five active professional players; 2. two retired professional players; 3. four active professional officials; 4. two active junior players; and 5. one junior team owner and scout. Figure one provides a breakdown of each player according to the league to which they belong or belonged, their position, and how they categorize their role or specialization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAMPLE</th>
<th>POSITION</th>
<th>SELF-PERCEIVED ROLE/OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALIZATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retired (NHL)</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>-playmaker; average goal scorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired (NHL)</td>
<td>Winger</td>
<td>-grinder; two way player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active (NHL)</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>-goal scorer; offensive threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active (NHL)</td>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>-playmaker; provide experience; nucleus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active (OHL/NHL)</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>-goal scorer; finesse player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active (AHL/NHL)</td>
<td>Winger</td>
<td>-grinder; fighter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active (European Pro. League)</td>
<td>Winger</td>
<td>-goal scorer; offensive threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active (OHL)</td>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>-goal scorer; offensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active (Western Ont. Jr. B.)</td>
<td>Winger</td>
<td>-grinder; checker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Sample of Players According To League, Position, and Role/ Occupational Specialization.
These persons represent a small group of the key actors in the sport who participate at its highest level, have participated at this level, or are striving to reach this level. They were chosen because the game of hockey occupies most of their time; hockey is their life, and they have a lot at stake participating at the higher levels. Furthermore, the junior and professional ranks attract the largest audiences, the most attention and scrutiny, and they demonstrate how the game of hockey should be played. The higher levels of the sport write the script that socializes and teaches the public, including youngsters who play and admire the game, what hockey is all about.

The researcher began the study by examining as much contemporary literature that he could gather on hockey violence. Throughout this discovery process, he jotted down some of the key issues that he thought were worth further exploring through those persons directly involved in the game. The first interview was conducted with a professional player with whom he played on the same team for one year in minor travel team hockey. This interview went very smoothly and additional respondents for the study were pursued with confidence. This interview also helped in the development and focus of the interview guide. Most of the rest of the sample was accessed through friends and acquaintances. These people were very cooperative in contacting and informing their hockey friends that they will soon be
contacted by a sociology student, who wishes to schedule interviews with them, and discuss their views on hockey violence.

Once each respondent was aware that he was going to be contacted sometime in the near future, they were not surprised when contact was made to schedule a convenient time and place for the interviews. When the researcher contacted each respondent, he identified himself, and the purpose of the study, and he assured each respondent that his identity would remain anonymous. Throughout the interviewing phase, only one respondent (an office official) out of fourteen was hesitant to discuss his perspectives on hockey violence. Although he was told he would not be identified in the study, he still appeared to be suspicious and answered the questions with caution. For example, he would not comment on elimination of fighting. Nevertheless, the rest of the interviewees were extremely cooperative, and some were even enthusiastic. They appeared to enjoy sharing their perspectives on 'their' game.

The sample for this study was chosen based on convenience. Bailey (1982:97), notes the obvious disadvantage of this technique, "since the probability that a person will be chosen is not known, the investigator generally cannot claim that his or her sample is representative of the larger population. This greatly limits the investigator's ability to generalize his or her findings beyond the specific sample studied." This
investigator would have preferred to travel through the United States and Canada and interview a random sample of NHL personnel. However, he did not have the time and the necessary funding required to conduct such a study. He had to interview hockey personnel that were convenient based on mutual availability and proximity. Despite these limitations, the investigator believes that the information provided by his small sample gives the reader a good idea of what the larger population of persons involved in higher levels of North American hockey might say about their game. Further and more extensive studies on hockey violence will confirm this.

Each interview was guided by several open-ended questions (see "appendix" for the list of questions that guided the interviews). This flexible research technique enabled the researcher to probe deeply into certain issues where elaboration was required. The interviewer made an attempt to develop conversations that stimulated the respondents to provide thoughtful, and meaningful information. This technique also allowed for recording of spontaneous answers which as Bailey (1982:182) points out, "may be more informative and less normative than answers about which the respondent has had time to think."

The interviews were somewhat structured in advance by a list of questions that were utilized to guide the discussions.
The focus of the discussions was on the specific area being covered, (i.e. player violence, control of player violence, and possible solutions to player violence). Although the interview technique provided a great deal of useful material for analysis, the writer would have preferred to conduct this study as a participant observer. However, this was impossible because he does not possess the skills to compete in hockey at the professional level.

Each interview was recorded on a small cassette recorder. None of the respondents objected to this technique, and it did not seem to have any limiting affect on their responses. The respondents appeared to be at ease, and a good rapport was established with these persons; they could recognize that the interviewer was familiar with hockey. After each session ended, the discussions were transcribed onto paper, verbatim. This technique allowed the researcher to become more familiar with the material in preparation for more articulate examination.

Throughout the material collection phase, the researcher familiarized himself with the material and he began grouping the responses into sections covering the wider areas (i.e. topics including: violence, control, solutions). After reading the material over several times, the researcher discovered which topics would be most valuable to this study. Next, the researcher further broke down each large section into smaller and more
focused subsections by using a colour coding scheme, and inserting comments and reminders in the margin of each completed questionnaire. The subsections include: fighting, stick fouls, internal and external control, and how hockey is changing. Their was a lot of overlap within the subsections, but this did not cause any problems.

Hockey is a sport that touches the lives of many people. Before this research project began, the writer believed that he had an acute understanding and knowledge of hockey since he has been a participant and an observer for twenty two one out of the twenty-eight years of his life. However, after the material collection phase of the research was complete, he realized that the perspectives given by the professionals provided a much more complete picture of the realities of hockey at a level where it is much more than a Canadian pastime. During an interview, one professional player stated, "People don't realize - it's a sport to them, a job to us." The chapter which follows reveals, in some detail, what hockey violence means to those persons directly involved in the action. The research findings chapter is written according to Lofland's commitment to, "represent the participants in their own terms;" it is, "factual, descriptive, and quotative" (Lofland, 1971:4).
CHAPTER 5 - RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter consists of a description and examination of the perspectives of fourteen hockey personnel on hockey violence and control. Each is, or has been actively involved in the game at a highly competitive level; they represent a small group of hockey's elite. The respondents occasionally provided conflicting viewpoints and perspectives on some of the focal issues that were highlighted in this study. However, the research findings indicate that for the most part, there is a great deal of agreement and consensus among hockey personnel when they discuss hockey violence and control. This select group of individual's definitions of the North American game are based primarily on their previous, common, and ongoing socialization, and unique interaction experiences within their peer group.

With this in mind, this chapter is essentially broken down into four areas. The first area outlines how hockey personnel define and categorize hockey violence. The second area examines issues surrounding the two most common types of hockey violence in some detail; these include fisticuffs and stick assaults. The third area focuses on an evaluation of the means by which hockey violence is controlled. The final section outlines perceptions of how the game of hockey is changing. Symbolic interactionism provides the necessary tools to analyze each area.
The Meaning of Violence In Professional Hockey

Violence in the North American professional hockey setting is considered different than violence on the street or in the North American community. The key terms that constitute violence in both settings are: intent, and potential or actual harm and/or injury. Although in both settings fighters intend to harm one another, in most cases, a lot more harm results, or could result from a street fight than a hockey fight. The penalties in each setting also differ. For example, during a hockey game, two players can square off and exchange punches, and in most cases each player's penalty will be five minutes spent in the penalty box. On the other hand, if two combatants exchange blows in the community, assault charges and a possible jail sentence could result. In both settings, there is greater concern if their is a weapon involved because potential harm may significantly increase. The point is that the context of the violence differs, and violence has a distinct meaning in both settings.

Professional hockey has several ingredients that put it into the violent sport classification. Hockey players use physical force every game they play. Although in some cases players do not intend to physically injure their opponents, injury results. In other cases, there is obvious intent to injure and harm or injury is the outcome. Players are well aware of the risks involved when they choose to play the game, and when it becomes
their occupation. Like earlier studies of hockey violence (see Colburn, 1986; Smith, 1983), a lot of people involved in professional hockey still accept the way the game is played and controlled despite its rough and aggressive nature, and the risk of injury that is apparent.

This study illustrates that violence has a distinct meaning in the hockey context, and this meaning is shared among most hockey personnel. It is clear which types of behaviour are and are not considered violent. An enforcer provides his definition of hockey violence:

In the sense of sports, maliciously hurting someone - intent to injure. I think when you see Ron Hextall two hand a player over the head like he has, or Dave Brown cross-check a guy across the face - I think that's violent you know - maliciously trying to injure somebody. On the other hand, two fighters or combatants more than anything, it is violent, but it's not really violent.

A passive player provides his definition of hockey violence:
"Deliberate aggression, intimidating, this type of thing is violence. Also, I guess the second thing is usually the weapon, and they (people deliberately swinging their stick), can really hurt someone." Finally, a junior team owner provides his definition of hockey violence: "Violence to me is an act on the ice or close to the ice that constitutes an injury type infraction - spearing, stick swinging, things of that nature."
That to me is violence. Good hard hitting, clutch and grab hockey with the odd fight, or two or three fights in a game to me is normal." These definitions are representative of each definition provided by the other eleven respondents. For example, in most cases fighting is not considered violent because no one usually gets seriously injured in a fight. However, most high sticking fouls are considered violent because of the potential and actual harm involved, which can be quite severe depending on the altercation.

Subsequent sections in this chapter will illustrate that the views documented in this study correspond to many of the findings of other studies conducted on hockey violence in the early to mid 1980's (see Smith, 1983; Colburn, 1985). For example, this study supports Colburn's finding (1985:160): "An attitude of respect for one's opponent is thus imputed by players to participants of fist-fights, an attitude that is conspicuously absent in the case of players who assault others with sticks or blades." Intentional stick fouls like: spearing, butt-ending, cross-checking, slashing, and high sticking, are primarily considered violent in professional hockey. This is especially the case when the face and/or the head area is the target, and injury results.

In hockey, their is a unique jargon used to describe specific acts of violence. Within the North American hockey community, some violent acts are categorized by participants as
"cheap shots". There are various examples of cheap shots in hockey. A body check that does not coincide with what the rules and the players consider to be 'clean', is called 'dirty' or 'cheap'. In a hockey fight, punches that are thrown unexpectedly (i.e. sucker punches) are considered cheap shots. Kicking, which is extremely rare in hockey, is also considered cheap. Colburn (1985:161) indicates, "Cheap-shots are an illegitimate form of violence because they violate the informal norm of respect between competitors. The protocol involved in the fist-fight, on the other hand, establishes the legitimacy of the fist-fight in players' eyes because it affirms the norm of respect." This study indicates that cheap shots often result in some type of retaliation from the victim. Players who retaliate are usually penalized according to the formal rules of the sport. However, retaliation for a cheap shot does not oppose the informal rule system or player values and norms. Retribution is alive and well in professional hockey.

Given some of the games qualities as outlined above, it seems safe to call hockey a violent sport. Yet, most of the hockey personnel who participated in this study indicate that it is not as bad as it seems. One active professional official indicates that there is no 'real violence' in the National Hockey league. Essentially he is saying that it is not serious enough to attract the attention that it does. It is as though a lot of
group member's extensive involvement in the game causes them to become insensitive, or take for granted acts which an outsider to the game might frown upon and define as violent. Furthermore, they believe that the public's conception of their game is influenced a great deal by the media. They believe that hockey violence is exaggerated by selective media coverage and over exposure of what they often refer to as isolated incidents. A retired NHL player provides his view, "The media only do their job, but they love to get something that's bad - we all know that - and create a bigger problem than there really is." An active NHL official supports this point and elaborates,

The violence is exaggerated by the media. They try to focus too much attention on isolated incidents. They show a fifteen minute clip of all the incidents that occur over four or five years and when you consider that every team plays eighty games a year, this doesn't amount to very much violence. Last year, I didn't see any really violent incidents in any of the games that I worked over the whole season. I don't think the media looks at the whole picture; they are very selective.

Most hockey personnel agree with this official's perspective. Some also believe that hockey is tame compared to other sports like baseball where bench clearing brawls take place more often, and football where severe career threatening injuries are more prevalent. However, to the observer in the stands, or in front of the television, hockey is far from tame in its own right. Some of
the game's more noticeable features like, hard body checks, fist fights, and stick infractions confirm this point.

One hypothesis that previous sociological research on hockey violence supports is the "violent occupational subculture hypothesis." According to Smith (1983:41),

An occupational subculture is one in which people doing the same work have developed a somewhat unique system of values and norms that guides their conduct and helps them cope with and make sense of the demands of their job. Several sociological investigations of violence in amateur and professional hockey explicitly or implicitly characterize the game as having an occupational culture based on a theme of violence (e.g. Faulkner, 1974; Vaz, 1976; Smith, 1979a); that is to say, players purportedly adhere to a set of proviolence values and norms derived from the occupation of professional hockey.

The preceding information in this section, as well as the material put forth in subsequent sections illustrates that for the most part, professional hockey represents an occupational subculture of violence. Gammon (1978:3) indicates, "The violent subculture assumes the existence of a smaller group than a total society which emulates values different than that of the dominant culture." It is clear that the persons involved in this study define hockey violence on the basis of their personal experiences in the game, and within their primary group of reference and significant others, which in this case is their group of peers. This includes their lifelong socialization process, their
interaction with others who for the most part, share identical or similar perspectives, and the common situations they encounter within their somewhat hostile environment.

The next section, which examines the inside view of fighting and stick assaults in professional hockey, supports the violent occupational subculture hypothesis. Also, like Dietz's study of the violent subculture within the lower class (Dietz, 1978), this examination utilizes the dynamics of symbolic interactionism. Dietz (1978:15) elaborates:

In a theory that conceives of violent conduct as essentially acceptable, approved behaviour within a violent subculture, it becomes important to examine the conditions in which violence is required. We need to learn when a violent response is preferred, when it is tolerated and if there are situations under which it is not acceptable, even in a violent subculture. If the structural components can be delineated, including the general normative limitations, it will then be possible to determine what personal and situational conditions lead to the decision to use nonviolent alternatives or to control the violence once it has been initiated.

**Fighting and Stick Fouls**

Fighting is a traditional and common aspect of professional hockey. All of the fourteen persons who were interviewed in this study accept fighting as 'part of the game'. Their was a general consensus that fighting is alright and in some cases necessary,
depending on the situation at hand. For example, they believe fighting is okay if it is one-on-one, and it has to be a fair fight. That is, each opponent must be ready, able, and willing to participate, and it should be between two players who have an equal, or close to equal chance of winning the battle. For example, it is not acceptable for a good fighter like Bob Probert to attack a superstar like Wayne Gretzky. This scenario would undoubtedly cause outrage within the hockey community. Again like Colburn's study (1985), these beliefs point to player norms of respect and fairness. One or two fights a game is also considered normal behaviour. An active NHL official offers his perspective on fighting:

I think fighting is part of the game, but more than one fight at a time is not necessary, and fighting occurs more frequently than necessary. The majority of fights take place because of emotions, like when a player hits another with his stick, the guy that gets hit will probably retaliate. Although it doesn't occur as often, some guys will go out and intentionally look for a fight.

Fighting gets out of hand when it is lopsided and someone gets seriously injured, or if it escalates into a brawl situation. However, in professional hockey, no one usually gets seriously injured in a fight, and brawls are few and far between. As far as injury is concerned, one retired NHL player indicated, "The worst I ever saw a guy get in a good fight was a black eye or a
bloody nose, so that never bothered me."

Although a lot of plays are well rehearsed in practice sessions in preparation for game situations, player's definitions of situations may be altered or re-defined through the course of interaction. A lot of spontaneous action takes place in a game situation; after the referee drops the puck in a game, anything can happen. This is similar to Blumer's example of a football game: "Although most plays can be predefined and precharted, when the ball is intercepted the situation becomes undefined, and self-indication and interpretation are necessary" (Wallace and Wolf, 1980:245). Each player acts according to each unique situation he faces. For example, in a game situation where a player gets a 'cheap shot' from another player, he may act on impulse and retaliate, he may choose to wait and get even later in the game, or he may simply take the blow and skate away. Many factors affect the player's definition of the situation and his corresponding behaviour, but whatever the actor decides to do, he is constructing and determining his own course of action within the situation at hand.

In a lot of cases, a hockey fight is thought to be an emotional response of one player toward an opponent because of what he perceives to be an opponent's deliberate misconduct. It is referred to as impulsive behaviour or a spontaneous outbreak. This may be the case, but most fighting situations are not devoid
of social definitions. A player also responds to a potential fight based on his 'definition of the situation.' For example, an active player shares an experience he encountered during his first NHL training camp:

_________ gave me a hard time from the Canadiens, and he knew I was scared because it was my first game in the Forum. _______ had to go up to _______ and say, you know, shut the fuck up or I'm gonna tune ya, eh. I was scared - he knew I was scared. But this year I'm not scared. I'll go right in after him - if he wants to fight me, I'll fight. I won't pick it, but if he's gonna start buggin' me again, then we're gonna start throwin' em. He'll think I'm scared like last time, but I won't be.

This player did not choose to fight the opponent in this case because he was surprised and scared. He was clearly intimidated by the opponent whom he used to admire when he was growing up. Although another teammate was there to protect him, he was being tested. He feels that if it happens again, he will be ready and willing to drop the gloves and exchange punches. If he shies away again, this player will probably continue to bother him, and attempt to intimidate him. His respect within his group of peers is an important consideration in this scenario. Players who display fear in a potential fight situation may become targets of further intimidation tactics by other players throughout the league. Thus, depending on who is involved, when challenged to a fight, there is usually a lot of peer pressure
involved to answer the challenge and drop the gloves. This is also important for a player's self-esteem. He must act tough and defend himself, or he will be perceived as a coward. Based on these factors this, player will alter his definition of the situation the next time he is challenged to a fight; he will be prepared to exchange punches, and utilize the proper techniques necessary to win the fight.

Smith (1983:103-106) describes the hockey fight as a process of interaction. Utilizing Goffman's terminology, he refers to the interchange as a 'situated transaction' (Goffman, 1963) which is, a chain of interaction between two or more individuals, which lasts for the time they are in one another's immediate physical presence. Such interactions take place in a social setting where there is some mutual understanding as to what kinds of transactions are appropriate and inappropriate. A situated transaction of violence begins with an initial provocation and ends with a final violent eruption.

Smith analyzes the situated transaction which occurs during the hockey fight, based on Luckenbill's (1977) six stage model which Luckenbill developed, based on his analysis of seventy situated transactions resulting in murder. He calls the individuals involved in the confrontation 'self' and 'other'. What follows is a condensed version of Smith's analysis:

1. The opening "move." Other performs an act that Self interprets as an insult or a threat to his identity, the situated identity he claims for himself in this type of situation and perhaps his reputation in general. Other's objectionable
behaviour may be unintentional; it is Self's interpretation of the behaviour that counts;

2. Self seeks the meaning of Other's act;

3. Self reacts to Other's impropriety by making a countermove aimed at demonstrating strong character and saving face;

4. At this juncture, the completion of the first cycle, Other is in the same problematic situation as Self; return the challenge and demonstrate strong character (and risk a fight), or back down and reveal weak character;

5. The physical battle erupts;

6. The transaction terminates.

The point is that player's are constantly interpreting, defining, and re-defining their situation throughout the interaction. Many thoughts go through their mind prior to action, or as in the model above, prior to stage 5 where the physical battle erupts. Some players, like the player above who backed down from a challenge to fight, only reach stage 3 of the model.

Charon (1985:138) provides a diagram which illustrates a symbolic interactionist interpretation of, "the manner in which living actors analyze the situation." This diagram is utilized in Figure two located on the following two pages to display the manner in which hockey players might analyze a typical fighting situation. The material which is applied to this diagram is based on material from the interviews.

The player who decided not to fight because he was scared, was also going through an initiation process, or part of a
ACTOR ENTERS SITUATION
(with Self, Mind, Symbols, Perspective, Significant others, Reference groups, Role-taking ability, Memory of past)

Situation - body contact with opponent to gain control of the puck.

ACTOR DEFINES SITUATION TO SELF

- other gave actor a cheap shot; other is looking for a fight.

ACTOR:

Determines goals - retribution; intimidation.

Applies appropriate perspective - actor must fight to display physical superiority; cannot exhibit fear in this situation or he will lose respect within peer group.

Takes the role of the other in the situation - other gave actor cheap shot because he wants to fight actor.

Pulls out, points out, defines to self the objects in the situation - in this case, actor defines other as a target of actor's aggression.

Applies past experience - previous fights with other(s).

Considers future - win or lose; penalties: beneficial or detrimental to self and/or teammates.

Views self in situation - good or poor fighter; stronger or weaker than other.

ACTOR DETERMINES LINE OF ACTION TOWARD OBJECTS (INCLUDING OTHER ACTORS)

- decides to fight other
ACTOR ACTS OVERTLY (A SOCIAL ACT)

- actor drops his gloves (cue that the fight is about to begin); actor attacks other.

Other(s) gives meaning to actor's overt act according to their perspectives and definitions of the situation (including taking the role of the other) - actor has dropped his gloves and he is attacking.

Other(s) determines line of action - fight and defend self.

Other(s) act overtly (Also social acts) - other drops gloves, and counter-attacks actor; wrestling and/or boxing match begins.

- other players skate directly to their respective benches.
- officials intervene immediately; or they stand nearby, observe, and wait for fighters to get tired; then they break up the fight and direct the combatants to the penalty box or the gate way to their dressing rooms.

ACTOR INTERPRETS OWN ACTS IN LIGHT OF OTHERS' ACTION (AND) INTERPRETS THE OTHERS' ACTS (DETERMINES WHAT THEY MEAN, STAND FOR) --- (interpretation is based on taking the role of the other(s).

- other deserved the beating actor gave him. Actor believes other thought he would intimidate actor, but actor ended up winning the fight and the psychological advantage. Actor feels that after observing and hearing about this fight (if other was defined as a good fighter), other players in the league will think twice before they start a fight with actor or give him a cheap shot.

ACTOR REVISES PERSPECTIVE, DEFINITION OF THE SITUATION, AND LINE OF ACTION

- maybe actor will fight again if a similar situation arises. It depends on many factors.

Figure 2. Hockey Players Analysis of Typical Fighting Situation
testing period. New players often become the victims of intimidation in the NHL. Another player explains how he was welcomed into the NHL,

Heck, I can remember my first year pro. when I got called up to ________. I was back-checking and the puck was just going back into ________'s end, so I was going off the ice, and I was just stepping into our box and all of the sudden, I got smacked - driven right in the back of the head, and I ended up going flying right into the plexiglass in behind the bench. I drove right into it, down I went. Of course everybody...I said, what happened? And they (teammates) said, ________ just welcomed you to the league (NHL).

A lot of players must prove they are tough and will not put up with intimidation tactics like the one outlined above. This is all part of the socialization process within the occupational subculture of professional hockey.

It is not the fighting that bothers most players and officials, it is the stick fouls. An active NHL player stated,

As far as I'm concerned, I think it's (fighting) necessary, but I don't like to see an abundance of it. It's okay as long as it doesn't get out of hand. Fighting is allowed, and I'd much rather see fighting instead of stickwork. There is no place in the game for the stickwork, and nobody condones misuse of the sticks.

Every person that contributed their input for this study provided a similar response to the one just noted. When fighting
was the topic of discussion, each respondent also went onto discuss stick fouls without being asked about the sticks. The consensus was that in most cases, fighting is okay in hockey, but there is no place in hockey for intentional stick fouls or assaults. Although the latter is considered 'real violence' by most persons involved at the professional level, the former is a taken for granted aspect of the game. These beliefs fit into Smith's 'Typology of Sports Violence' (for a full discussion of this typology, refer to Smith, 1983:8-23; for a summary, refer to Chapter 2 of this study). The literature review indicates the hockey fight is only a topic of concern for a select few of the game's superstars who would like to see it banned. This is apparent when the elimination of fighting is the topic of discussion.

Elimination of Fighting

Despite the attention and in some cases, the scrutiny fighting receives from both insiders and outsiders, when asked if fighting should be eliminated from professional hockey, a majority thirteen of fourteen respondents involved in this study stated that it should not be eliminated, and each provided what they consider to be sufficient reasons why they feel this way. One out of the thirteen provided reasons both why it should and should not be eliminated, and one out of the fourteen respondents
refused to comment either way. The majority of the respondents reiterated this retired NHL player's feelings:

Fighting is always part of the game. I think if you take that out, you'll be eliminating part of the game, and what you'll be doing in a roundabout way is encouraging people to use their sticks. I think fighting is a spontaneous situation. I mean if somebody does something to you (on the ice) and you don't think it's right, then I think you should have the option of letting that person know without having to take a stick and two handing him.

Another active professional player who rarely fights furnishes a similar outlook:

No, I don't mind a good fight, where they drop their gloves and go at it for thirty seconds and that's it...and that settles the whole game down sometimes. Let's face it, hockey is getting pretty big and pretty serious...you have so much pride on the line; sometimes a fight is the best thing for it. It calms everything down and I'd rather have a fight than see sticks come up and lose eyes and teeth, 'cause the fights are there so the sticks don't come up - that settles everything down.

There is obvious consensus in this study regarding the question of whether or not fighting should be eliminated. This is also the case regarding the question of whether or not fighting will be eliminated from hockey. The explanations to this issue were also fairly consistent; in many cases, the same reasons were given when the respondents discussed why fighting should remain in the
game, and why it will remain in the game.

When asked if fighting will be eliminated from professional hockey, a majority ten out of fourteen respondents indicated that it definitely will not be banned. Out of the remaining four respondents, one indicated that it is possible, but it will not happen overnight, and one respondent would not give a definite yes or no. Another respondent indicated that fighting will be eliminated, but not at the professional level. Only one respondent indicated that fighting will definitely be eliminated and like Wayne Gretzky, he estimated that this will occur in about five years. This latter response is limited to a small subgroup within the North American professional hockey community.

The most common and simplistic reason given why fighting will remain in hockey is because it is 'part of the game', always has been, and always will be. For example, one NHL official states, "It's not possible (to eliminate fighting). It's so much a part of the game it's ingrained. It's like someone suddenly taking your pillow away from you when you've slept with it all your life." This is where the traditional in-group values and norms affect their perspectives. Yet, this over used 'part of the game' rationalization does not carry much weight without a subsequent explanation. Another NHL official indicates that fighting will not be eliminated because,

Owners think it's part of the game. It attracts
the fans and the owners want to cater to both types of fans – the fans who enjoy the fights and the fans who are attracted to the game because of the skill aspect. The bottom line is money and the entertainment value that fighting provides.

This explanation carries a lot of weight; it sells so it stays. The owner who was interviewed in this study also echoed the above comment. Once again, these comments reiterate the violent occupational subculture theme which is outlined in the previous section of this chapter.

Furthermore, most players and officials do not feel that anyone gets seriously injured in hockey fights, and the NHL will not eliminate fighting because when players get frustrated, it allows players to 'blow off steam', or 'vent aggression', that might otherwise be vented in a more violent manner (i.e. stick assaults). These latter two points are directly related to two psychology theories. The first is the "frustration-aggression theory" (Dollard et al., 1939), which regards frustration as the required forerunner of aggression (Jegede, 1983). Closely related to the frustration-aggression hypothesis is the "catharsis hypothesis" (Dollard et al., 1939). Catharsis refers to, "reductions in peoples aggressive behaviour which occurs as a result of their either behaving aggressively, or merely observing others behave aggressively" (Russell, 1986:158). Neither explanation has gained much support from sport scholars.
(see Smith, 1983; Russell, 1986; Coakley, 1986). These studies display that explanations such as, if fighting is banned, players will let out their frustrations by 'sticking' each other, are simply misconceived perceptions, or rationalizations.

Although the group of hockey people in this study support fighting, as was previously mentioned, the stickwork is a definite NO-NO in the world of professional hockey; fighting is acceptable, but stickwork, especially with intent to injure, violates their norms. One NHL player states,

I don't like sticks coming up. If I see a stick come up and a slash, that ain't right. They should be more penalized that way - say slashing or something, a good swipe at the leg, intent to injure. That's the stuff you gotta take care of. Fighting, you'll never get hurt. When did the last guy die? I could see if some guy was so tough he was snapping necks with punches, then you'd have to stop it.

The respondents who share the perspectives outlined above believe, if anything, fighting may be reduced through stiffer league imposed penalties. However, they are adamant that fighting will endure. The player quoted above states, "As much as people whine and cry, fighting will never come out of hockey. They'll (the league) just stiffen the penalty," thus reducing the amount of fights which occur.

The player who indicated that fighting may possibly be
eliminated provided a logical explanation to support his answer. This active NHLer states,

The fighting seems to be gradually diminishing on its own anyway. It's gradually diminishing because of the style of play that is taking over. You're not seeing as many guys coming into the league that are fighters. You're seeing more skilled players coming into the league, like the Soviets. I would say that presently, only about twenty percent of the players account for about ninety percent of the fights. There are only certain players designated as fighters; it's not like it used to be.

This player is saying that fighting might gradually diminish if the player skill level continues to increase to the point where fighters or enforcers are perceived as useless. However, Vaz (1980) indicates otherwise. Vaz indicates the fighting and violence is normative, institutionalized behaviour, and only major structural changes in the game will eliminate hockey violence. This issue is worth further exploring since the game has changed considerably during the past ten years.

The latest NHL rule implemented for the 1991-92 season (see Chapter 2, p.15) regarding a cut in the team game roster illustrates that the league is taking a step to discourage the use of less skilled players, or so-called tough guys, enforcers, fighters, or goons. Presently each team still has one or two players who are prepared to drop their gloves and mix things up when the appropriate situation arises.
These particular players are called 'enforcers' because their job is to make their opponents feel intimidated and threatened when they are on the ice. These players are fully aware that this is their job, and a primary reason they are on the team. The enforcer who supplied his perspectives on hockey violence in this study indicates that he gets paid to do the thing he does best. He indicates he is expected to fight and protect his more skilled teammates when an opponent gives them a cheap shot or attempts to intimidate them. He also feels that intimidation is a big part of the game. He suggests that he gains an advantage by intimidating opponents, "If I can show that I'm tougher than the right winger that's going against me, it's a psychological advantage right there; he's going to be intimidated for the rest of the year." Like the other persons involved in this study, this player accepts fighting, but rejects stick assaults.

Finally, the player who stated that fighting will be eliminated is a retired NHLer. His explanation is more a critique of the people running the NHL than anything. He feels that fighting should remain in hockey, but in his words, it will be eliminated because,

"You're dealing with people who are setting these rules up who have never played the game. I think it's pressure from the minor part of the game. I don't think it's going to happen overnight, but it will definitely happen. I'd say five years."
This player is making a distinction between people who are directly involved in the game, or insiders, and those who he believes do not really know what the game is about, but are imposing outside societal values and beliefs that fighting is wrong and should be banned. Based on this research, the writer believes that the belief that fighting will soon be banned is shared by a minority of the game's participants. If the majority of in-group beliefs are any indication of where fighting stands in hockey, it will remain in the game for quite sometime.

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher asked each respondent to provide a brief description of his role (i.e. his job and his specialization). The players involved used a wide range of terms to describe their role. These include: play maker, goal scorer, offensive threat, solid two-way player, checker, tough player (i.e. fighter), grinder, scrappy player, and all around player. The researcher was fortunate to be able to talk with a variety of player types. However, this research indicates that for the most part, the player's position and/or his specialization or role, has a limited effect on his perspectives on hockey violence. In other words, whereas a player's role may influence his behaviour, whether the player's primary specialization is to score goals, or whether it is to fight or create havoc on the ice, this does not determine whether or not he accepts or rejects body contact, fighting, or stickwork. It is
interesting to note that the owner/scout, and the officials involved in this study also share the players' perspectives on hockey violence. Although the official's job is to police player conduct, and enforce league penalties for rule violations, they share a lot of the players' values and norms in the area of hockey violence; the officials in this study are also part of the violent occupational subculture of professional hockey.

Research conducted by Mummendey and Mummendey (1983:111), outline some factors that influence the aggressive behaviour of soccer players; these factors might also be applicable in the hockey setting. These include: whether the game is being played at home or out of town, the score of the contest, how important the result of the game is to both teams, whether the game is divisional or non-divisional, how much time is left to play, the player's position, the task of the player and the referee, and where the incident took place. Additional factors which emerged in this study include: it is expected behaviour in certain situations. For example, if a player is frustrated, he may lose his composure and attack an opponent. Aggression may also be a spontaneous reaction to a cheap shot against the actor or his teammate(s), and players value the intimidation factor which they feel provides their team with a psychological advantage. Although these factors affect the players' course of action, following the lead of the Chicago school of symbolic interactionism, the
researcher believes that these factors act as guides to the actor's behaviour; ultimately, the individual must direct and determine his course of action within the immediate setting and situation.

This study illustrates that the social setting of the professional hockey community provides those involved with a similarity of circumstance of action. Fighting is part of hockey because the people involved in the game choose to participate in it, and allow it to occur. A lot of players, coaches, managers, owners, and officials consent to a style of hockey which they describe as: rough, tough, aggressive, and emotional. Furthermore, they are convinced that to a large extent, their audience (i.e. fans) is attracted to hockey because of these qualities. Skill aspects are also important, but at the higher levels of the game, whatever sells and produces profits for the teams and the league is a top priority. The next section briefly touches on the theme of fighting as an attractive, entertaining, and money making feature of the game.

**Fighting and Financial Considerations**

Professional hockey has become a billion dollar entertainment business. Players are paid large salaries to play hard and win. This includes putting on a display that will attract audiences and a financial profit for their team and the NHL. The question that comes to mind is this: Would the NHL be a
able to survive financially if fighting was eliminated? Despite the almost unanimous support fighting gained in this study, ten out of the fourteen respondents indicate that the NHL would still survive, and some say even thrive, if fighting was taken out of the game.

Most of the players and officials involved in this study feel that the elimination of fighting would not hurt the game. Some even believe that it might help the game financially, based on their conviction that the game's skill aspect is a more important and attractive feature than the fisticuffs. An active NHL player supports this notion,

I think the league would be stronger without it (fighting). This would especially be the case if people in the southern U.S. were educated on the game. This is where the money is. These people don't know what the game is really like. All they hear about is the fighting so they think hockey is barbaric and stupid. They have a misconception of the game. They don't realize that there's a lot more to hockey than fighting. It's kind of ridiculous - When I talk to people in the states who don't know the game that well, once I tell them I'm a hockey player they ask me: Where are your scars? Do you have all your teeth? Do you fight?

In support of the skill over fighting argument, Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux, the world's two premier hockey players fill arenas everywhere they play. This is because of their skill level and mastery of the sport; neither player is a fighter. However, every team does not have a superstar like Gretzky and Lemieux on
their roster.

Although other players and officials indicate that the NHL would still survive, the question of whether or not it would survive, or would be stronger, has yet to be seen. Still, this NHL official's statement sums up the current situation, "Let me put it this way, there is less fighting today, and the buildings are fuller than they were thirty years ago." Thus, the NHL must be doing something right in their marketing scheme. Two additional arguments were that the NHL would get more television contracts without fighting because it would speed up each game. Secondly, people want to watch a winner, so if a team puts a winner on the ice, it will attract a larger viewing audience with or without fighting.

Only one respondent who is a retired NHL player, indicated that the NHL would struggle financially if they eliminated fighting. This perspective is based on his belief that the NHL is just getting its feet on the ground in some cities that have had problems drawing crowds in the past. Still, if one looks at a team like the Minnesota North Stars of the 1990-91 season, during the regular season they did not fair very well in the standings, and were the lowest point team to make it to the playoffs. It seems that their poor play was a primary factor in their limited fan support; their average home game attendance was 4,000 to 5,000 people. However, once they began succeeding
in the Stanley Cup playoffs, their building was full every game. This was not because of the fights. People were attending because they were playing good, solid, tight checking hockey and they were winning.

Until fighting is eliminated, if this ever happens, no definite conclusion can be drawn on this issue. Although the majority of the respondents in this study indicate that the NHL would still prosper financially without fighting, this has yet to become a reality. One thing is certain; the NHL does not seem to want to take the chance at this point in time. Their definition of the situation is that the risks of such a business decision could prove costly, so they are not willing to make any drastic changes at the present time. Like an NHL official said, the league is catering to both types of fans, and they acknowledge those fans who like to see fights. Let us now turn to some issues surrounding the formal and informal control of hockey violence.

**Control of Hockey Violence**

Every crime in our society has a penalty and these penalties are designed to deter further rule violations. This is also the case in the hockey arena. Each hockey league has its own set of formal rules and regulations which represent the law of each respective league. One NHL official explained that the NHL's disciplinary system is set up like a court of law. It begins on
the ice. The league has its own officials who police the games in progress. If they feel that a player has committed a major offence, that should receive further attention by their superiors, they write a report which is sent to the league's one man judge and jury Brian O'Neill who decides what punishment the offender should receive. The NHL usually hands out fines and suspensions to control excessive player violence.

The NHL makes rule changes every season in an attempt to improve the quality and attractiveness of their game. Another NHL official informed the researcher that during every off season, a rules committee meets and draws up proposals of possible changes that it feels might improve the game. These proposals are passed on to team owners who vote on them. If they pass, they move on to a select few team owners who make up a board of governors. This board has the final vote. During the exhibition season, the league tries out the new rules, and the ones the owners feel are effective, are implemented during the regular season. The question becomes: does the NHL's internal disciplinary system adequately regulate and deter player misconduct?

It was mentioned that penalties are designed to deter negative or criminal behaviour. The current penalties imposed for fighting do not have this effect. For the most part, the respondents in this study indicate that the NHL's rules and corresponding disciplinary system are fairly good at controlling
violent incidents, but they could certainly use some improvement. Most believe, in many instances penalties for violent outbursts should be more severe, or at least more consistent. When discussing control of hockey violence, the respondents in this study focused their attention on the control of fights and stick fouls.

The players, officials, and the owner accept fighting (as long as it conforms to their informal code i.e. must be fair, one on one, etc.), so they are satisfied with the lenient punishments that are issued for the typical fight. The NHL seems to be equally satisfied or they would increase the sanctions. However, most of the respondents are not satisfied with the punishments players are given for blatant stick fouls. They believe that the current sanctions for stick violations which include fines and suspensions, do not act as specific or general deterrents. That is, these punishments do not reduce future violation in the penalized offender, or in the rest of the players in the league (for a discussion of specific and general deterrents, see Gibbs, 1981; Pfohl, 1985). The league's penalties are swift, but they are not always certain or severe. On and off ice officials make a lot of judgement calls, and most of the respondents in this study believe that increased fines and suspensions are the only solution to intentional stick assaults; the more severe the incident is, the more severe the punishment should be.
The consensus is that the punishment does not fit the crime. One NHL official insists that the fines are nothing compared to the players' salaries, and in most cases, the suspensions are too short to have any strong effect on future violation. Given this perception, the question which comes to mind is: why are the penalties for fights and stick fouls so lenient? One professional player offers his viewpoint:

As long as they're (NHL) trying to market a sport, you can't hand out big suspensions you know, because people are paying to see a product. People buy tickets to see Rick Tocchet who might get suspended for five games for doing something stupid. You can't afford any more of a suspension on these guys because they're entertainers.

The view of hockey as an entertainment business scenario is common among the persons involved in this study, and these views reaffirm the importance of the business aspect of professional hockey to team management and league representatives.

Two respondents criticized the way the NHL's disciplinary system is set up, along with its inconsistencies and biases. In particular, they are unhappy that one man has the final say on penalties which are handed out to players for more serious and violent infractions. They believe a committee should jointly decide on an appropriate sentence. This committee would be set up like a jury in the community court of law, except it would consist of a panel of experts rather than average civilians. The
other argument is that the league's decisions on penalties are biased depending on who is involved in the incident at hand. One player points his attention to the Dave Shaw, Mario Lemieux incident which took place in October 1988. Associated Press writer Mike Nadel (The Windsor Star, Nov 9, 1988:B5) describes the incident,

In the ugliest incident of the season, David Shaw of the New York Rangers tried to chop down Pittsburg's Mario Lemieux, bruising the chest of the NHL's best gate attraction this side of Gretzky. O'Neill ruled that Shaw displayed intent to injure and suspended him for 12 games.

Contrary to Nadel's description of the incident, the player noted above states, "It was a farce. Shaw was suspended for ten games when he barely hit Lemieux. But, because it was Lemieux that he hit, he was given a stiff penalty. If it had been myself that he hit or another less popular player, he probably would have been given at most, a roughing penalty." In this instance, there is a definite contrast between the insider's and the outsider's perception and interpretation of this incident and its outcome.

**External vs. Internal Control of Hockey Violence**

When asked if it is ever necessary to bring in external control agents, like the criminal justice system, for violent incidents which occur on the ice while a game is in progress, the response was almost unanimous that the NHL should handle its own
affairs. Despite the dissatisfaction there is for some of the league's handling of violent player behaviour, most are convinced that the league is capable of handling its own affairs. The thought is that the game is separate from the outside society, so it should operate with its own laws, policing, and penalties for rule violations. This coincides with earlier studies conducted on hockey violence and external control. An NHL official explains,

They (outside authorities) should only be involved in policing the outside world. Since they're not involved with incidents that occur in hockey everyday, they would probably take a stricter approach if they became involved. Also, since they're not directly involved, they don't know enough about what happens on the ice.

This official places hockey in a world of its own, and he is convinced that the NHL can adequately police their own game. A retired NHL player agrees and is strongly opposed to any type of intervention into the game. He states,

We should handle our own affairs. I mean, what do they know about justice in hockey. Why doesn't The NHL get a chance to get the guy who robbed the bank, or assaulted somebody? Make his opinion, it's nuts; a policeman standing there and I beat the shit out of you and I'm a big guy. Maybe you speared me and the policeman didn't see that the time before. There's an old philosophy in hockey - you don't get mad, you get even, and politicians and authorities like that, they don't realize that you can't change the game of hockey. It's (violence) been going on for a long time.
It is perfectly clear that most participants feel only in extreme cases, like if death occurred as the result of an on ice assault, should outside authorities intervene and lay charges. This is extremely rare in hockey, so the belief is that outsiders should simply butt out. This player’s words tell the tale: "It’s a completely different world on the ice. It’s a fantasy world out there, that’s what it is. All sports are. So we have our laws, the police should just fuck off and do (control) the fans."

It is not surprising that most hockey personnel do not want the police and courts to interfere in their game; after all, they do not want to be labelled as criminals and they do not consider their behaviour to fit into the criminal category. Surprisingly, the team owner and scout who was interviewed in this study disagrees with the general consensus. He states,

I suppose it's based on the severity of the incident that would constitute whether a criminal charge should be laid. I suppose if an incident took place where bodily harm was done to a person and the hockey stick was used as a weapon, okay. Then yeh, I guess you should look at that the same as if you're walking down the street and someone hits you with a baseball bat. I suppose it's basically the same; it's a public place. If he used it and the intent was there to hurt somebody, yeh, it's a charge under the Criminal Code of Canada as we both know, and the police are gonna respond to that, and I'm sure charges are gonna be laid. I guess that's right.

Whether it is right or wrong, this study coincides with the
literature confirming that it is rare and undesirable for the police to invade the North American hockey rink.

Whereas violence in the form of fighting and illegal stickwork is much more prevalent during regular season play, this type of behaviour is limited during international tournaments and NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs. For example, The 1987 and 1991 Canada Cup tournaments, which featured all-star teams from various countries, was high calibre and relatively clean. This along with the 1990 Stanley Cup Final series where there were no fights, illustrates that violence is not necessary and players can control their on-ice behaviour. In these situations, player's usually rely more on their hockey skills, rather than intimidation tactics. Although penalties are more severe for fighting and stick violations in international tournaments, they do not change from the regular season to the post-season in the NHL.

This section illustrates that the hockey community focuses their attention on external constraints rather than internal restraints. When they discuss control of hockey violence, they focus too much attention on rules and penalties, when perhaps they should take a closer look at the way they perceive, and play the game. If players attack each other, it is because they make a conscious decision to do so through interpreting and evaluating their situation at the time of the interaction. They act on the
basis of this evaluation and definition of the situation, which is also shaped by factors preceding the immediate situation.

Perceptions of Hockey Violence: Is The Game Changing?

Most professional hockey personnel indicate that their game is changing for the better. That is, they believe the quality of the game is improving. Improvements in various aspects of the game attribute to this change. For example, today's game has become faster, and for the most part, players are bigger, stronger, and possess superior hockey skills compared to players of past generations. When discussing hockey violence in today's game, some of the participants in this study compared the current situation with the so-called 'goon era' of the seventies. At that time, the game was slower, and players lacked the finer skills they possess today. In addition, the game is considered to be more violent in the seventies. One active NHL player provides a broad explanation of the NHL's misfortune in the seventies,

From about 1972 to 78, that was a bad time for hockey. What happened was because of the rival business (the World Hockey Association), all of the sudden the NHL was losing players and elements got into the game. Because the game came down in quality because of the two leagues competing, sort of an evil, bad aspect came out of it - violence. Those six or seven years, I don't think we've completely recovered from that. I played my career in the states and I don't think the backlash from that has completely mended yet; those six or seven years
hurt us. Just recently in 1979, the WHA folded and four teams joined the NHL and it started to build up again. So it kind of took a detour and mainly because of the violence. But since 1979 to 90, the game has patched up to ninety percent and we're at ninety percent capacity. So it's back to where it should be, and also the violence is nowhere near what it was.

The most obvious display of violence that occurred in hockey in the seventies was the bench clearing brawl.

Although bench clearing brawls are few and far between in today's game, it was common to witness them during any given NHL game in the seventies. One retired NHL player explains how he felt during this decade,

I have memories in my mind of violence. I mean there were some nights I was pretty scared. Big brawls break out, guys getting the heck kicked right out of them. I only got it a couple times, and I got my licks in a few times, but I was never a big brawler. But, I mean, when we played in Philadelphia when Philly were the big broad street bullies, I mean that wasn't a lot of fun when you played for the __________. They thought we were punching bags. I mean, we had a brawl almost every night we played them.

Fortunately, today's players do not usually have to worry about a brawl breaking out. However, a new problem has surfaced during the past few years. That is, player misuse of the stick is getting out of hand. One retired player attributes this to players adopting helmets and facemasks. He believes that this gives the smaller players more confidence because of the added
protection. He also feels that in today's game, there is a lack of respect between players and for the game itself.

Whatever the case, hockey has changed considerably during the past two decades. It has become part of the entertainment industry, players are playing for larger amounts of money, and the game has become much more competitive. Although most NHL teams still have one or two players on their roster that are there to protect the better players and make sure the game is played fairly, these so-called 'nuclear missiles', 'enforcers' or 'fighters' cannot rely on aggression alone. They must also possess good hockey skills to compete in the league. The days of 'goon' hockey are almost gone.

In a previous section it was mentioned by a player that fighting might gradually diminish on its own if the player skills continue to increase. If every team recruited players based on skills alone, and eliminated the enforcers in the process, the fights and the violence might be greatly reduced and eventually cease to exist. This being the case, the violent occupational subculture would be replaced by an occupational subculture who adopt a frame of thinking based solely on the mastery of the skill and finesse parts of the game. Although this is an ideal situation which is unlikely to occur in the near future, it cannot be ruled out entirely.

It is the researcher's belief that the NHL will make
stronger attempts to eliminate vicious stick infractions from their sport, through stiffer penalties and increased awareness of the potential harm involved. Fighting may be eliminated sometime in the future, but if this study is any indication of the overall consensus within the entire professional hockey population, it seems highly unlikely that this will happen anytime soon. Future changes in the game may result from both rule changes, as well as changes in the thinking of those persons involved in the game. This chapter has dealt with several important issues which leave the reader with a greater knowledge of how and why violence is a quality of North American professional hockey. The final chapter closes the study by providing a summary of the findings.
CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSIONS

This study illustrates that although the game of hockey is changing somewhat at the North American professional level (i.e. most players and officials indicate the game is faster, and the players are bigger, stronger, and more skilful than they were in the past), their perspectives on hockey violence are not accompanying these changes. North American hockey personnel have their own conception of what hockey means to them, and there is a great deal of consensus when they discuss hockey violence. This study supports the violent occupational subculture hypothesis, and it illustrates that violence is more prevalent in the North American game than the European game.

Violence has a distinct meaning within the hockey setting. This meaning differs significantly from violence which takes place in other settings (i.e. street violence, domestic violence, etc.). From an 'insider's' point of view, (i.e. the person's involved in this study), there is consensus regarding what is and is not hockey violence. The insider's definition of hockey violence is based on: 1. the act (i.e. fighting is categorized as non-violent in most cases, whereas, stick assaults are classified as violent); 2. the player's intentions (i.e. did the player deliberately swing his stick at the opponent?); and 3. the result (i.e. potential and actual harm resulting from the act). When hockey personnel discuss hockey violence, they focus their attention primarily on the fist fight and stick assaults.
Like earlier studies on hockey violence (Colburn, 1985; Nash and Lerner, 1981; Smith, 1983), most players and officials in today's game accept and support the fist fight as part of hockey, and they do not generally categorize it as violent. Similarly, like these earlier studies, they do not accept stick assaults, and they place this activity into the violence category. The fighting does not fit into the violence category as long as it conforms to certain conditions. For example, a "good fight" must be fair. Furthermore, in a fight, combatants intend to harm each other, but serious injuries are uncommon. One of the main reasons why they classify fighting as non-violent is because of the usual outcome. If the typical outcome of a fight was career threatening, these views would probably change.

Injury in a fighting situation was much more common in hockey of the 1970's, where bench clearing brawls were getting out of hand in the NHL. This type of activity fits into the hockey violence category, because it is usually a reckless situation and the risk of injury is apparent. However, brawls are almost nonexistent in today's professional game. As long as fights are limited to an average of one or two a game, and no one is getting seriously injured, then the hockey fight is not perceived to be a problem. On the contrary, player misuse of the stick is perceived as the major problem in hockey today.

When utilized by a player as a weapon to intentionally harm
an opponent, the hockey stick is clearly being misused, and severe injury can, and often times results. The professional hockey community is strongly opposed to what they call stick work, and they would like to witness the elimination of this activity. Stick assaults are classified as 'real violence' in the hockey world. Players who attack opponents with their stick gain disrespect within their peer group, but it still occurs too often to ignore. On the other hand, player's who fight, often gain the respect of their teammates, as well as other players throughout the league.

The hockey fight is described in many different ways. It may be described as: impulsive behaviour, a spontaneous reaction, or a retaliation to a preceding act which was regarded as cheap, dirty, or simply uncalled for. It is also described in some cases as a planned activity utilized to intimidate members of the opposing team. Intimidation tactics are used as a means of winning. Also, in North American professional hockey, revenge is sweet, and duking it out is one way players obtain their revenge. It is as though they believe that retribution is their right or privilege. One way to seek justice and settle scores on the ice is through fisticuffs. Whatever way it is perceived depends on how player's interpret, evaluate, and define the situation at hand. Players are well aware of what they are doing; they are not mindless and completely predictable creatures acting in a robotic
fashion.

Despite a few citations in the literature which state otherwise, most members of the professional hockey community believe that fighting should and will remain in their game. A lot of hockey people support and justify the existence of fighting by saying it allows players to let off steam, or vent frustration and anger. They indicate if fighting is banned, stick assaults will increase. It is said to have a calming effect so that the players can get back to the business at hand, which is usually outscoring the opponent. However, previous research on hockey violence has discredited these beliefs.

Finally, North American hockey personnel focus on what they consider to be the positive features of fighting. They believe that fighting is exciting and entertaining to the fans. This is where the business part of the game influences their thinking. As long as the professional hockey community continues to rationalize the existence of fighting, it will probably remain in their game.

Although fighting is widely accepted, and there is a belief that it attracts people to the games, this study indicates there is a belief in the professional hockey community that the elimination of fighting would not hurt the game financially. Some say it might even thrive without fighting. It should logically follow that the game can survive on skilful play and solid body
checking alone. If this was the case, the NHL could take a stand, stiffen penalties, and eliminate fighting without worrying about their profit/loss statement. However, it is obvious that the league does not seem convinced that such a drastic change would be a wise business decision. The NHL is not prepared to shock anyone; if this pattern continues, then any changes they attempt to implement will be gradual.

Despite the rule changes that are made every season, most players and officials believe the NHL's internal disciplinary system is fairly good at regulating and deterring player misconduct. However, at the same time, they are not totally satisfied with their legal system. When discussing a reduction in hockey violence (i.e. stick fouls), they point to improvements in the rules. They believe that stiffer penalties in the form of increased fines and suspensions would combat the problem. This is especially the case for stick infractions. They still believe that the league is capable of handling its own affairs. Only in extreme cases of on-ice violence (i.e. where the result is death), do they feel the police or the courts should intervene. The consensus is that the police's job is to control the area surrounding the ice rink; whatever happens on the ice should not be their concern. Too often, players point to stiffer penalties as the solution, and they neglect to put the onus on the self-control of the players themselves.
One player indicated that the hockey world is a fantasy world. This may be true when it is compared to North American society, but it is also a real world to those living it. Hockey has become very serious. Players and officials employ adjectives like, exciting, intense, emotional, rough and competitive to describe the atmosphere during a game. However, they are also performing under a lot of pressure. One retired NHLer indicated, "It's like the old cliche, it's tough to get there (into the NHL), but it's tougher to stay there." If players do not perform their job effectively, they are replaced by someone who will. There are thousands of young hockey players trying to get a chance to prove their worth in the NHL.

The researcher recalls when he was a boy, his father told him that he asked a professional hockey player a question about player toughness. This player of the seventies and eighties stated that every player in the NHL is tough; if you are not tough, you will not survive in the league. This player was not talking about tough in relation to fighting; he meant healthy, and strong both mentally and physically, and determined to do their best. Another NHL player told the researcher that there are no "floaters" in the NHL. Floaters are players who look like they are out for a casual Sunday afternoon skate. The NHL consists of "diggers". Diggers give 100% effort every time they are on the ice, or they are demoted to the minor leagues.
Final Remarks

It is the researcher's hope that this study provides a clear picture of what today's professional game of hockey is really like in North America. The perspectives provided by the insiders are very important for outside observers to fully understand why the game is like it is, and why violence is an integral part of the picture. It does not necessarily follow that hockey has to be as rough or as violent as it is, but until those people directly involved in the game change their thinking about hockey violence, their behaviour will remain the same.
APPENDIX:

A. QUESTIONS USED TO GUIDE DISCUSSIONS WITH PLAYERS

PLAYER'S NAME: __________________________ DATE: ____________

POSITION: __________________________

TEAM: __________________________

Q1. - How long have you been playing in the NHL?

Q2. - What is your role on your team and has this always been your role?

VIOLENCE:

Q1. - Please define violence

Q2. - Do you prefer a clean style of play (i.e. no fighting; no vicious stickwork)?
   - Why do you feel this way?

Q3. - Do you feel that fighting should be eliminated in the NHL?
   - Why do you feel this way?

Q4. - Do you feel that fighting will be eliminated in the NHL?
   - Why do you feel this way?

Q5. - Do you feel the NHL can survive financially without fighting?

Q6. - Is the so-called problem of hockey violence exaggerated? (If yes, by who)?

Q7. - What are the main reasons why players assault each other?
CONTROL OF HOCKEY VIOLENCE:

Q1. - Should changes be made to clean up hockey?
   (If there are to be changes made to clean up the game...)  
   - Who is responsible to make the changes?  
   - What types of changes should be made?  
   - How will they go about it?

Q2. - Do you think league imposed penalties are adequate enough to properly regulate and deter player misconduct?

Q3. - Do you think it is ever necessary to bring in external control like the C.J.S. for incidents which occur between players during a game?
B. QUESTIONS USED TO GUIDE DISCUSSIONS WITH OFFICIALS

OFFICIAL'S NAME: 

DATE: 

POSITION: 

Q1. - How long have you been an NHL linesman? (OR referee)?

Q2. - Can you please give me a brief job description (i.e. duties that you must carry out during a game - too further clarify this, what are the differences between a referee and a linesman)?

VIOLENCE:

Q1. - Please define violence...

Q2. - Do you prefer a clean style of play (i.e. no fighting; no vicious stickwork)?
   - Why do you feel this way?

Q3. - Do you take a hard or a soft approach when you police a game?
   (Please explain).

Q4. - Do you feel that fighting should be eliminated in the NHL?
   - Why do you feel this way?

Q5. - Do you feel that fighting will be eliminated in the NHL?
   - Why do you feel this way?

Q6. - Do you feel the NHL can survive financially without fighting?

Q7. - Is the so-called problem of hockey violence exaggerated? (If yes, by who)?

Q8. - What are the main reasons why players assault each other?
CONTROL OF HOCKEY VIOLENCE:

Q1. - Should changes be made to clean up hockey?
   (If there are to be changes made to clean up the game...)
   - Who is responsible to make the changes?
   - What types of changes should be made?
   - How will they go about it?

Q2. - Do you think league imposed penalties are adequate enough
to properly regulate and deter player misconduct?

Q3. - Do you think it is ever necessary to bring in external
control like the C.J.S. for incidents which occur between
players during a game?
C. QUESTIONS USED TO GUIDE DISCUSSION WITH TEAM OWNER

OWNER'S NAME:  DATE:

TEAM:

Q1. - How long have you owned the

Q2. - Can you give me a brief description of what you do as an owner?

VIOLENCE:

Q1. - Do you think that hockey is a 'violent' game (i.e. at the junior and pro. levels)?

Q2. - Do you prefer a clean style of play (i.e. no fighting; no viscious stickwork)?
   - Why do you feel this way?

Q3. - Do you feel that fighting should be eliminated in (your league; in the NHL)?
   - Why do you feel this way?

Q4. - Do you feel that fighting will be eliminated...?
   - Why do you feel this way?

Q5. - Do you feel that the Jr. leagues and the NHL can survive financially without fighting?

Q6. - Is the so-called problem of hockey violence exagerrated? (If yes, by who)?

Q7. - What are the main reasons why players assault each other?
CONTROL OF HOCKEY VIOLENCE:

Q1. - Should changes be made to clean up hockey?
   (If there are to be changes made to clean up the game...)
   - Who is responsible to make the changes?
   - What types of changes should be made?
   - How will they go about it?

Q2. - Do you think league imposed penalties are adequate enough to properly regulate and deter player misconduct?

Q3. - Do you think it is ever necessary to bring in external control like the C.J.S. for incidents which occur between players during a game?
REFERENCES


VITA AUCTORIS

Dan Power was born in Owen Sound, Ontario in 1963. He grew up in Chatham, Ontario where he graduated from John McGregor Secondary School in 1982. From there, he attended the University of Windsor where he obtained a B.A. in Sociology in 1986. He is currently a candidate for the Master's degree in Sociology at the University of Windsor and hopes to graduate in Fall 1991.