When bodies are weapons: Masculinity and violence in Sport

Michael A. Messner

International Review for the Sociology of Sport 1990 25: 203
DOI: 10.1177/101269029002500303

When bodies are weapons: Masculinity and violence in Sport[1]

Michael A. Messner

Program for the Study of Woman and Men in Society, Taper Hall 331M
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089-4352 U.S.A.

Abstract

This paper utilizes a feminist theoretical framework to explore the contemporary social meanings of sports violence. Two levels of meaning are explored: first, the broad, socio-cultural and ideological meanings of sports violence as mediated spectacle; second, the meanings which male athletes themselves construct. On the social/ideological level, the analysis draws on an emergent critical/feminist literature which theoretically and historically situates sports violence as a practice which helps to construct hegemonic masculinity. And drawing on my own in-depth interviews with male former athletes, a feminist theory of gender identity is utilized to examine the meanings which athletes themselves construct around their own participation in violent sports. Finally, the links between these two levels of analysis are tentatively explored: how does the athlete's construction of meaning surrounding his participation in violent sports connect with the larger social construction of masculinities and men's power relations with women?

Introduction

"Violence in sport" is widely viewed as a social problem. Scholars of sport have typically focussed on two clusters of questions, two first being the problem of definition: what is violence? – how can we differentiate between aggression and violence? – between legitimate and illegitimate violence? (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986; Smith, 1986). The second common cluster of questions concern cause and effect: do organized sports offer a socially-acceptable context in which to express a naturally aggressive human essence – the catharsis thesis of Moore (1966) and Lorenz (1966) – or is sports violence a socially-constructed and learned behavior which actually serves to legitimize and foster more aggressive behaviors? On this question, the weight of social-scientific evidence clearly supports the social constructionist argument (Coakley, 1978; Schneider & Eitzen, 1983). As for the issue of defining aggression and violence, there is a clearly no consensus. In fact, though precise definitions of aggression and violence are necessary for laboratory experiments common among psychologists, those intent on interpreting the broader social meanings of violence in sport may find that "no single definition of sports violence is either possible or desirable" (Goldstein, 1983). Instead, it seems reasonable to simply begin with the assumption that in many of our most popular sports, the achievement of goals (scoring and winning) is predicated on the successful utilization of violence – that is, these are activities in which the human body is routinely turned into a weapon to be used against other bodies, resulting in pain, serious injury, and even death (Atyeo, 1979; Underwood, 1979; Sabo, 1986).

Int. Rev. for Soc. of Sport 25/3 (1990)

This paper utilizes a feminist theoretical framework to explore the contemporary social and psychological meanings of sports violence. In any analysis of sport it is crucial to recognize the distinction between, on the one hand, its broader social, cultural and ideological meanings as mediated spectacle, and, on the other hand, the meanings which athletes construct as participants (Oriard, 1981). This paper will focus on these two levels of meaning, linking them through a feminist analysis of violence and masculinities. On the social/ideological level, the analysis will draw on an emergent critical/feminist literature which theoretically and historically situates violent sports as a practice which helps to construct hegemonic masculinity. And drawing on my own in-depth interviews with former athletes[2], a feminist theory of masculine gender identity will be utilized to examine the meanings which athletes themselves construct around their own participation in the violent, rule-bound world of sport. Finally, the links between these two levels of analysis will be explored: how does the athlete's construction of meaning surrounding his participation in violent sports connect with the larger social construction of masculinities?

Sport, Violence and the Gender Order

The modern institution of organized sport, as we now know it, emerged as a male response to social changes which undermined many of the bases of men's traditional partriarchal power, authority, and identity. Proletarianization, urbanization, modernization and (in the United States) the closing of the frontier all served to undermine patriarchal forms of masculinity. And, especially by the turn of the century, the conscious agency of women provided a direct threat to the ideology of male superiority. Within the context of this "crisis of masculinity" (Kimmel, 1987), organized sports became increasingly important as "a primary masculinity-validating experience" (Dubbert, 1979: 164). Sport was a male-created homosocial cultural sphere which provided (white, middle- and upper-class) men with psychological separation from the perceived "feminization" of society, while also providing dramatic symbolic "proof" of the natural superiority of men over women (Messner, 1988). But it is not simply the bonding among men and the separation from women, but the *physicality* of the activity, which gives sport its salience in gender relations. Crossett (1990) traces in the rise of 19th century sport in Britain an ideological elevation of male sexual superiority, and by extension, a naturalization of men's power over women. And women's exclusion from most aspects of this physical activity contributed to men's continued control over women's bodies (Lenskyj: 1986).

A number of feminist analyses have suggested that one of the key elements in the elevation of the male-body-as-superior is the use (or threat) of violence. Brownmiller (1975), for instance, argues that although various forms of control (psychological, ideological, etc.) are utilized, ultimately men's control of women rests on violence. According to Dunning (1986), historical and cross-cultural evidence shows that the balance of power tips more strongly toward men when violence and fighting are endemic parts of social life. With industrialization and modernization, as social life became more rationalized and "civilized," more controls were instituted on the use of violence, and thus the balance of power

tended to shift more toward women. Men responded to this threat to their power by instituting "combat sports" such as boxing and rugby:

> ... such games were justified ideologically, partly as training grounds for war, partly in terms of their use in the education of military and administrative leaders in Britain's expanding empire, and partly as vehicles for the inculcation and expression of "manliness" (Dunning, 1986:271).

Clearly, it was not simply a "feminization of society" which men feared: that could have been countered simply by creating homosocial clubs for men. It was also the fear of the *loss of male power and privilege* – especially among middle class men – which formed the basis for the popularization of violent sports (Gorn, 1986). Sport, in its present (violent) forms, then, tends to support male dominance not simply through the exclusion or marginalization of females, but through the association of "males and maleness with valued skills and the sanctioned use of aggression/force/violence" (Bryson, 1987:349). In promoting dominance and submission (Bennett, et. al, 1987), in equating force and aggression with physical strength, domination, and power (Theberge, 1987), modern sport naturalized the equation of maleness with violence, thus lending support and legitimation to patriarchy (Bianchi, 1980; Hall, 1987; Komisar, 1980; Sabo & Runfola, 1980).

Yet the simple equation of "male violence" with "patriarchy" is analytically problematic. First, the term "male violence" tends to suggest that violence is an essential feature of maleness, rather than a socially-learned feature of a certain kind of masculinity. Indeed, concrete social-scientific examinations of violence show that there is no convincing evidence that men are genetically or hormonally-predisposed to violent behavior (Fausto-Sterling, 1985; Pleck, 1982). In fact, the weight of evidence supports the contention that most males are not comfortable committing acts of violence: Violent behavior is learned behavior, and some men learn it better than others (Ewing, 1983; Pleck, 1982 Scher & Stevens, 1987). As Connell (1985: 4) has argued,

> A crucial fact about men is that masculinity is not all of a piece. There have always been different kinds, some more closely associated with violence than others. This is why one should not talk of "male violence" or of "males" doing this or that – phrasing which smuggles back in the idea of a biological uniformity in social behaviour.

The recognition that at any given moment there are various masculinities – some hegemonic, some marginalized, some subordinated – suggests that the term "patriarchy," as it is commonly used, is overly simplistic (Carrigan, et. al., 1987; Connell, 1987). Not only does the concept of patriarchy tend to view "men" as an undifferentiated category, it tends to downplay the fluidity and contradictions that exist within and between gender categories. Connell suggests instead that we utilize the term "gender order," which can be defined as "the current state of play" in the dynamics of the power relations of sex, gender, and sexuality. Men as a group do enjoy power and privilege at the expense of women. Yet this power and privilege is by no means complete, total, or uncontested, nor is shared equally among all men. Hegemonic masculinity – that form of masculinity which is ascendent – is defined in relation to the subordination of women *and* in relation to other (subordinated, marginalized) masculinities.

The utilization of this more fluid concept of the "gender order" allows us to begin to shed light on an otherwise confusing irony: although men are the major perpetrators of violence, and one overall effect of this violence is the continued subordination of women, a large proportion of men's violence is directed at other men (Connell, 1987: 13). Within the world of organized sport, men are almost exclusively the perpetrators as well as the victims of violence (Sabo, 1986). Conceptualizing the gender order as a system of competing masculinities allows us to begin to ask the question us to how violence among men contributes to the construction of power relations between men and women. In order to begin to shed light on this issue, it is necessary to explore (1) how and why some men become violent: what meanings do men construct around their own violence against other men? And (2) what is the broader cultural meaning of men's violence against other men? What role does some men's violence against other men play in the current state of play of the gender order?

Organized sport is a perfect place to investigate these questions, since it is an arena in which individual males actively construct meaning around their acts of aggression and violence *and*, given the fact that sport is a public spectacle, these acts often take on important and controversial ideological meanings. Next, the meanings that former athletes have constructed around their own participation in violent sports will be examined. After analyzing these meanings within a feminist social-psychological theory, we will then return an examination of how these men's actions and self-definitions fit into the current state of play of the present gender order.

Athletes: The Meaning of Violence

With the possible exception of boxing, perhaps the position in modern sport which requires the most constant levels of physical aggressiveness is that of lineman in U.S. football. Though T.V. cameras focus primarily on those who carry, throw, catch, and kick the ball, the majority of the players on the field are lining up a few inches apart from each other, and, on each play, snarling, grunting, cursing, and slamming their large, powerful, and heavily armored bodies into each other. Blood, bruises, broken bones, and concussions are commonplace here. Marvin Upshaw, now 36-years old, was a lineman in professional football for nine years, following successful high school and college careers. Obviously an intelligent and sensitive man, he seemed a bit stung when asked how he could submit himself to such punishment for so many years.

> You know, a lot of people look at a lineman and they say, "oh, man, you gotta be some kinda *animal* to get down there and beat on each other like that." But it's just like a woman giving birth. A woman giving birth. Everybody says, you know, "That's a great accomplishment: she must be really beautiful." And I do too – I think it's something that's an act of God, that's unreal. *But*, she hasn't done nothing that she wasn't *built* for. See what I'm saying? Now here I am, 260, 270 pounds: and *that's my position*. My physical self helped me. I can *do* that. I can *do* that. I couldn't run out for no pass – I'd have looked like a *fool* runnin' out for a pass, see what I mean? But due to my good speed and my

> strength and my physical physique, that's what I'm built for. Just like a truck carrying a big caterpillar: you see the strain, but that's what it's built for, so as far as that being a real big accomplishment, it is, but it's not. That's all you were built for.

Upshaw's comparisons of the aggressive uses of his body in football with a woman giving birth and with a truck is telling: it suggests one of the major paradoxes of men's construction of meaning surrounding the uses of their bodies as weapons. On the one hand, so many of the men I interviewed felt a strong need to naturalize their capacities for aggression and violence: men wearing helmets and pads repeatedly engaging in bonecrushing collisions with each other is simply "an act of God," "like a woman giving birth." Yet on the other hand, there is the clear knowledge that the bodies of successful linemen are, like trucks, "built" by human beings to do a specific job. Time after time, I heard former athletes, almost in the same breath, talk of their "natural" and "God-given" talent *and* of the long hours, days, and years of training, work and sacrifice that went into the development of their bodies and their skills. "I was a natural," former professional football star Macarthur Lane told me, "Just about every hour of the day when I wasn't sleeping or eating, I'd be on the playground competing."

Similarly, Jack Tatum, who in his years with the Oakland Raiders was known as "The Assassin" for his fierce and violent "hits" on opposing receivers[3], described himself as a "natural hitter." But his descriptions of his earliest experiences in high school football tell a different story. Though he soon began to develop a reputation as a fierce defensive back, at first, hitting people bothered him:

> When I first started playing, if I would hit a guy hard and he wouldn't get up, it would bother me. [But] when I was a sophomore in high school, first game, I knocked out two quarterbacks, and people loved it. The coach loved it. Everybody loved it... The more you play, the more you realize that it is just a part of the game – somebody's gonna get hurt. It could be you, it could be him – most of the time it's better if it's him.

This story suggests that the tendency to utilize violence against others to achieve a goal in the sports context is learned behavior. Two excellent studies of young ice hockey players corroborate this: the combination of violent adult athletic role models as well as rewards from coaches, peers, and the community for the willingness to successfully utilize violence create a context in which violence becomes normative behavior (Smith, 1974; Vaz, 1980). Athletes who earn reputations as aggressive "hitters" can often gain a certain level of status in the community and among peers, thus anchoring (at least temporarily) an otherwise insecure masculine identity. Louie Gelina, for instance developed a reputation as a very successful high school athlete, largely due to his often ruthless aggressiveness. By his own admission, he would often

> ... do mean things, like beat people up. On the football field, I'd be dirty, like I'd kick guys in the groin... or in basketball, I'd undercut people. And I think it was mainly to earn their respect. It was like I *had* to let them know that, hey, I'm superstud and you, you're second class, you're not as good.

But Gelina discovered, as have many athletes, that the use of his body as a weapon – and the support of the community – can cut both ways. His athletic career, and his sense of identity that came with it, unraveled quickly when he injured his knee just before the state championship game.

> I was hurt. I couldn't play, and I got a lot of flack from everybody. The coach, you know: "Are you faking it?" And I was in the whirlpool and [teammate] John came in and said "You fucking pussy!" I still remember that to this day. That hurt more than the injury. Later, people told me it was my fault because we lost, and I just couldn't handle that – not just coaches and other players, but people in the whole town... it hurt, it just really hurt.

Gelina's "sin" was to refuse to conform to what Sabo (1986) calls "the pain principle," so important a part of the structure and values of the sportsworld. Gelina had previously found himself rewarded for using his own body to punish other men, but that violence against other men ultimately resulted in violence against his own body. Yet what ultimately "hurt more than the injury" was finding himself ostracized, his masculinity called into question, when he refused to further "give up his body for the good of the team." And it is highly significant that this insult, hurled at him by a teammate, is phrased in relation to a violent reference to a female body-part.[4] Here we can see an illustration of what Kaufman (1987: 2) calls "the triad of men's violence," the three corners of which are violence against women, violence against other men, and violence against one's self.

Louie Gelina never played organized sports again. He had not only lost his status in the community; he had also lost that tentative and precarious sense of masculine identity which he had constructed through his sports successes. Given these high stakes, it is not surprising that many athletes do "choose" to be hitters, and to "give their bodies up for the team." But it is not enough to explain away the use of physical violence in sports as simply the result of rewards and punishments handed out by coaches, peers, and the community for compliance or non-compliance with "the pain principle". Despite the intentions of some coaches and sport psychologists,athletes are not simply the result of some Pavlovian system of reward and punishment. They are human beings, capable of reflection and moral deliberation. Their decisions to participate – or not participate – in violent sports take place within a complex social/psychological context. And, as we shall see, their decisions – and the meanings that they attribute to them – are deeply gendered.

Masculinity, the Rules, and Violence

In order to properly conceptualize the masculinity/sports relationship, it is crucial to recognize that young males do not come to the institution of sport as "blank slates," ready to be "socialized" into the world of masculinity. Rather, young males come to their first experience as athletes with *already-gendering*[5] identities (Messner, 1987a, 1987b). As Chodorow (1978) has argued, early developmental experiences, rooted in the fact that it is women who mother, create a very different balance between separation and attachment in males and females, thus setting the stage for different kinds of problems with relationships, identity, and sexuality throughout the lifecourse (Rubin, 1982). One of the results of these differences is that young males tend to approach sports – and violence in sports – differently than females do. Despite the fact that few males truly enjoy hitting, and one has to be socialized into participating in much of the violence that is commonplace in sports, males appear to be predisposed to view aggression,

within the rule-bound structure of sports, as legitimate, natural, and even "safe" in a psychological sense.

Gender identity is never a completed project, but always a developmental process which unfolds within a social context. Sports is a fascinating context in which to examine the unfolding of masculine gender identity. One of the most important developmental themes for males is their ambivalence toward intimacy: while craved by males, attachment also constitutes a major threat to the firm psychological boundaries around a fragile masculine identity (Chodorow, 1978; Rubin, 1982). In fact, males tend to perceive vulnerability, danger, and thus the possibility of violence in situations of close affiliation (Gilligan, 1982). Young males bring this ambivalence toward intimacy to all their social interactions, including their first sports experiences.[6] In observing differences between how girls and boys play games and sports, Piaget (1965) and Lever (1976) noted that girls tend to have more "pragmatic" and "flexible" orientations to the rules – they are more prone to make exceptions and innovations in the middle of a game in order to make the game more "fair." Boys, on the other hand, tend to have a more firm, even inflexible orientation to the rules of the game – to them, a clear and consistent set of rules are what *protects* "fairness." This masculine reification of the rules, according to Gilligan (1982), creates a "safe" place for the ambivalent and insecure structure of a developing masculine identity not simply because it meshes with their conception of "fairness," but perhaps more importantly, because it provides clear-cut boundaries around men's affiliations with each other. Here men can develop a certain kind of closeness with each other while not having to deal with the kinds of (intimate) attachments that they are predisposed to feel fearful of.

Within the athletic context, individuals' "roles" and separate positions within hierarchies are determined by competition within a clearly-defined system of rules which govern the interactions of participants. Although most athletes will "stretch" the rules as much as they can to gain an advantage over their opponents, most have a respect, even a reverence, for the importance of rules as a code of conduct that places safe boundaries around their aggression and their relationships with others. Without the rules, there would be chaos – both physically and psychologically; there would be an incredibly frightening need to constantly negotiate and renegotiate relationships. And this is what feels truly dangerous to men. So to Marvin Upshaw, the constant physical aggression that is part of being a lineman in football felt more than "natural" to him – it clearly provided a comfortable context within which he developed a certain kind of relationship with other men.

> I had this guy we played against in Denver by the name of Mike Kern... We battled. He enjoyed it, and I enjoyed it. But never was it a cheap shot, never did he have me down and just drive my head into the ground, you know, unnecessary stuff. We played a good, clean game of football, because we respected each other. Now, if he could knock me on my butt, he'd do it. And I'd do it to him and help him up. Talk to him after the game, sit and talk with him like I'm sittin' here talkin' to you. But while we're out there, now, we go at it. And I loved it. Yeah, I loved it...

For most of the men whom I interviewed, successful competition within the rulebound structure of sport was – at least for a time – the major basis of their

relationships with the world, and thus their identities. Aggression "within the rules," then is considered legitimate and safe (Bredemeier, 1983). But what happens when legitimate ("legal") aggression results in serious injury, as it so often does in sport? Two of the men whom I interviewed, football player Jack Tatum (discussed above), and former professional baseball player Ray Fosse, were involved in frighteningly violent collisions, each of which resulted in serious injury. In each incident, the play was "legal" – there was no penalty issued by officials. And in the aftermath of each case, there was a lively public controversy concerning "violence in sports." A brief examination of these two men's retrospective definitions of these situations are instructive and helpful in beginning to draw a link between, on the one hand, the athlete's experience and construction of meaning surrounding his participation in violence, and on the other hand, the larger social meanings surrounding such public incidents.

As was mentioned above, by the time Jack Tatum – "the assassin" – got to the pros, he had become the kind of fearsome hitter that coaches dream of. And though he took pride in the fact that he was not a "dirty" player (i.e., his hits were within the rules), his problem was that he was perhaps *too good* at his craft. "Intimidation" was the name of the game, but there was a growing concern within football and in the sports media that Jack Tatum's "knockouts" were too brutal. In 1978, Tatum delivered one of his hits to an opposing wide receiver, Darryl Stingley. Stingley's neck was broken in two places, and he would never walk again. All of a sudden, Tatum was labelled as part of a "criminal element" in the NFL. Tatum was confused, arguing that this had been a "terrible accident," but was nevertheless simply a "routine play" which was "within the rules."

> I guess the thing that mystified me was that I could play for nine years and one guy gets hurt and then everybody comes down on me, you know. It's just like for nine years I've been playing the game the wrong way: but I've made All-Pro, I've been runner-up for Rookie of the Year, I've got all the honors playing exactly the same way. So, you know, it just kind of mystified me as to why there was just all of a sudden this stuff because a guy got hurt. It wasn't the first time a guy got paralyzed in football, so it really wasn't that unusual. The [NFL] Commissioner told me at one point that I should push people out of bounds instead of hitting them. And nowhere in football have they ever taught you that. As long as the guy's on the football field, you're supposed to hit him.

Ray Fosse was the recipient of a violent hit from Pete Rose in the 1970 All Star game, as an estimated sixty million people watched on television. The situation was simple: It was the twelfth inning, and Pete Rose, steaming around third base, needed only to touch home plate in order to score the winning run; Fosse's job as the catcher was to block the plate with his body and hope that the ball arrived in time to catch it and tag Rose out. Rose arrived a split second before the ball did, and, looking a lot like a football player delivering a "hit," drove his body through Fosse, and touched the plate safely. Fosse's shoulder was separated, and despite his youth, he never fully regained the powerful home run swing that he had demonstrated earlier that summer. Again a serious injury had resulted from a technically "legal" play. Rose was seen by some as a hero, but others criticized him, asking if it was "right" for him to hurt someone else simply to score a run in what was essentially an exhibition game. Rose seemed as mystified by these questions as Jack Tatum had been. Everyone knew that he was known as "Charley Hustle": "I play to win," responded Rose, "I just did what I had to do."

When I interviewed Fosse years later, well into retirement as a player, he lamented the effect of the injury, but saw it not as the result of a decision on the part of Pete Rose, but rather, as "a part of the game." It was fate, an impersonal force, which had broken his body – not an individual person. In fact, he felt nothing but respect for Rose.

> I've seen that play a million times since, replays they keep showing and showing, but I never once believed that he hit me intentionally. He's just a *competitor,* and I only wish that every other major league ball player played as hard as he did, 'cause then you wouldn't have fans upset because players were making so much money and they're not performing. But he's a competitor. But I would say that that was the beginning of a lot of pain and problems for me...

Clearly, one of the things that is happening in the Tatum and the Fosse cases is what Bredemeier & Shields (1986) call "contextual morality": the reification of the rules of the game provide a context which frees the participants from the responsibility for moral choices. As long as the participants "play by the rules," they not only feel that they should be free from moral criticism, there is a perhaps subconscious understanding that they are entitled to "respect," that form of emotionally-distant connection with others which is so important to masculine identity. Flagrant rule-violators, it is believed, are "violent," and deserve to be sanctioned; others like Tatum and Rose are "aggressive competitors," deserving of respect. But this distinction is shaken when serious injury result from "legal" actions and public scrutiny raises questions about the individual morality of the athletes themselves. Both Tatum and Fosse appear "mystified" by the framing of the issue in terms of individual choice or morality: they just play by the rules.

The Costs of Violence for Athletes

I interviewed former pro football star Macarthur Lane in the upstairs office of the health spa that he owns and manages. Retired now for several years, he appears to be in excellent physical condition, and he makes his living helping others achieve strong, healthier bodies. He was relaxed, sitting in a chair and resting his feet on a table, talking about basketball. When I asked him how tall he was, I received a startling reply:

> Oh, I used to be about 6'2" – I'm about six even right now. All the vertebraes in my neck, probably from all the pounding and stuff, the vertebraes used to be farther apart – just the constant pounding and jarring. It hurts all the time. I hurt all the time. Right now, that's why I put my legs up here on the table, to take the pressure off my lower back.

Here is one of the ultimate praradoxes of organized combat sports: top athletes, who are often portrayed as the epitome of good physical conditioning and health, are likely to suffer from a very high incidence of permanent injuries, disabilities, alcoholism, drug abuse, obesity, and heart problems. The instrumental rationality which teaches athletes to view their own bodies as machines and weapons with which to annihilate an objectified opponent ultimately comes back upon the athlete as an alien force: the body-as-weapon ultimately results in violence against one's own body. In fact, a former professional football player in the U.S. has an average life-expectancy of about 56

years (roughly fifteen years shorter than the overall average life-expectancy of U.S. males). U.S. football, of course, is especially brutal: Delvin Williams told me that in his pro career, "six of eight off-seasons I had surgery, twice a two-for-one – they cut me twice." In a recent survey of retired professional football players, 78% reported that they suffer physical disabilities related directly to football, and 66% believe that having played football will negatively affect their life-spans (Wojciechowski & Dufresne, 1988). But this situation is not limited to football. Baseball has had its share of casualties too. Ray Fosse's interview with me seemed to be an almost endless chronicle of injuries and surgeries. When someone got injured, he explained, "We had a saying: 'Throw dirt on it, spit on it, go play.'" And Fosse did constantly "play hurt," often with

> ... a lot of cortisone and just anything to kill the pain, just to go out and play. I don't know how many shots I had – I know I had a lot, because it was killing me. And now, as I rotate my left arm, I can hear bone to bone, you know [laughs ironically], because it healed back wrong.

And this parade of injuries is not limited to professional athletes. Nearly every former athlete I interviewed had at least one story of an injury which disabled him, at least for a time. Many had incurred serious injuries which had a permanent impact on their health. Despite the fact that most wore these injuries with pride, like badges of masculine status, there is also a grudging acknowledgement that one's healthy body was a heavy price to pay for glory. But to question their decisions to "give up" their bodies would ultimately mean to question the entire institutionalized system of rules through which they had successfully established relationships and a sense of identity. Since this is usually too threatening, former athletes instead are more likely to rationalize their own injuries as "part of the game," and claim that the pain contributed to the development of "character," and ultimately gained them the "respect" of others.

Other costs paid by athletes who play violent sports are not so easy to measure. But there is strong evidence that the extremely instrumental relationship to self and others which athletes must develop in order to be successful in aggressive competitive sports commonly results in personalities that are more quick to anger (Goldstein, 1984), in an increased devaluation of women and gay men (Connell, 1990; Sabo, 1985), and in an amplification of men's already-existing tendency to have problems developing and maintaining intimate relationships with women and with other men (Messner, 1987a, 1987b).

In short, heavy personal and interpersonal costs are paid by those who participate in violent organized sports. And it is absolutely crucial to recognize who these men are. As Edwards (1984) points out, poor and ethnic minority males, because of poverty, institutionalized racism, and lack of other career options are "channelled" disproportionately into sports careers – and into the more dangerous positions within the "combat sports." Males from more privileged backrounds often play sports while in school, and their experience as athletes may be status-enhancing, but because they face a wider range of educational and career choices, they often opt out of sports at a relatively early age, choosing instead to seek status and respect within less (physically) violent competitive rulebound structures (Messner, 1989). Young men from poor and ethnic minority backgrounds face a constricted range of options (Gibbs, 1988). Lacking other resources and choices, sports may appear, as they did for

Macarthur Lane, to be the one legitimate context in which a youngster from a disadvantaged backround may establish a sense of (masculine) identity in the world:

> I'd put my pants on and I'd go out on the football field with the intention that I'm gonna do a job. And if that calls on me to hurt you, I'm gonna do it. It's as simple as that. I demand respect just like everybody else.

As the examples of Fosse and Tatum have illustrated, the meanings that athletes construct around their participation in violent sports may come into conflict with larger cultural meanings when these actions are framed as public spectacle. The final section of this paper will draw some tentative conclusions concerning the larger social meanings of sports violence for the construction of the contemporary gender order.

Violence, Sport, and the Contemporary Gender Order

The mythology and symbolism of contemporary combat sports such as football are probably meaningful and salient to viewers on a number of levels: patriotism, militarism, and meritocracy are all dominant themes. But it is reasonable to speculate that gender is a salient organizing theme in the construction of meanings around sports violence. Consider the words of a thirty-two year old white professional-class male whom I interviewed:

> A woman can do the same job as I can do – maybe even be my boss. But I'll be *damned* if she can go out on the field and take a hit from Ronnie Lott.[7]

Imbedded in this man's statement are what I will argue are the two sides of the male spectators/sports violence relationship for the construction of the contemporary gender order: Violent sports as spectacle provide linkages among men in the project of the domination of women, while at the same time helping to construct and clarify differences between various masculinities. The statement by the man above is a clear indication that he is identifying with Ronnie Lott *as a man*, and the basis of the identification is the violent male body. Football, based as it is on the most extreme possibilities of the male body (muscular bulk, and explosive power used aggressively) is clearly a world apart from women, who are relegated to the role of cheerleader/sex objects on the sidelines, rooting their men on. In contrast to the bare and vulnerable bodies of the cheerleaders, the armored male bodies of the football players are elevated to mythical status, and as such, give testimony to the undeniable "fact" that here is at least one place where men are clearly superior to women. Yet it is also significant that this man was quite aware that he (and perhaps 99% of the rest of the male population of the U.S.) was probably equally incapable of taking a "hit" from the likes of Lott and living to tell of it. These tow themes – identification and difference among men – will briefly be discussed next.

Mishkind (1986) argues that with the decline of the practical relevance of physical strength in work and in warfare, representations of the muscular male body as strong, virile, and powerful have taken on increasingly important ideological and symbolic significance in gender relations. Indeed, the body plays such a central role in the construction of the contemporary gender order because

it is so closely associated with the "natural." Yet a concrete examination of athletes shows that the development of their bodies for competition takes a tremendous amount of time, exercise, weight-training, and even use of illegal and dangerous drugs such as steroids. Though the body is popularly equated with nature, it is nevertheless an object of social practice (Carrigan, et. al. 1987; Connell, 1987; 1990).

The embodiment of hegemonic masculinity entails the imbedding of force and skill in the body. Men's power over women thus becomes "naturalized," and clearly linked to the social distribution of violence (Connell, 1987:85). Sport is an important organizing institution for this embodiment of masculinity. As a practice, sport suppresses natural (sex) similarities, constructs differences, and then, largely through the media, weaves a structure of symbol and interpretation around these differences which naturalizes them (Hargreaves, 1986: 112). Several recent theorists have suggested though, that the major ideological salience of sport as mediated spectacle may lie not so much in violence as it does in male spectators having the opportunity to identify with the muscular male body. McCormack (1984), for instance argues that boxing films so routinize instrumental violence that the psychological impact of the violence is diminished. The films are really more about "Jock appeal" – a narcissistic preoccupation with the male body. Morse (1983), in a fascinating analysis of the use of slow-motion instant replays in football, argues that the visual representation of violence is transformed by slow motion replays into "gracefulness." The salience for gender relations of the image of male power and grace lies not in identification with violence, Morse argues, but rather, in the opportunity to engage in an identificatory male gaze which is both narcissistic and homoerotic. An additional interpretation is possible here. Rather than concluding that the violence has no meaning, it is reasonable to speculate that if men are using sports spectatorship to narcissistically identify with the male body as a thing of beauty, perhaps the violence is an important aspect of the denial of the homoerotic element of that identification.[8]

It is also possible that the violence plays another important role: the construction of difference among men. As was stated above, it is disproportionately males from lower socio-economic and ethnic minority backgrounds who pursue athletic careers in violent sports. Privileged men might, as Woody Guthrie once suggested, commit violence against others "with fountain pens," but with the exception of domestic violence against women and children, physical violence is rarely a part of the everyday lives of these men. Yet violence among men may still have important ideological and psychological meaning for men from privileged backgrounds. There is a curious preoccupation among middle class males with movie characters who are "working class tough guys" (Biskind & Ehrenreich, 1980), with athletes who are fearsome "hitters" and who heroically "play hurt." These violent "tough guys" of the culture industry – the Rambos, the Jack Tatums, the Ronnie Lotts – are at once the heroes who "prove" that "we men" are superior to women *and* they play the role of "other," against whom privileged men define themselves as "modern." They are, in a very real sense, contemporary gladiators who are sacrificed in order that the elite may have a clear sense of where they stand in the pecking order of inter-male dominance. Their marginalization as men – signified by their engaging in the very violence that makes them such attractive spectacles – contributes to the construction of

hegemonic masculinity. In the U.S., a particularly salient feature of this contemporary construction of masculinities in sport is racism: it is indeed ironic that so many young black males are attracted to sports as an arena in which to become "respected," yet once there, to be successful, they must become intimidating, aggressive, and violent in order to survive. And then, the media images of, for instance, Jack Tatum "exploding" Darryl Stingley, become symbolic "proof" of the racist stereotype that black males are indeed "naturally more violent and aggressive."

This research has demonstrated that contemporary "combat sports" provide a context in which a certain type of (violent) masculinity is embodied. The athletes themselves often pay a heavy price in terms of health and relationships for their participation in violent sports. Yet it has been suggested here that as cultural symbols, these men serve to stabilize a structure of domination and oppression in the gender order. The media's framing of violent sports as public spectacle serves both to unite men in the domination of women and to support the ascendence of hegemonic masculinity and the continued marginalization of other masculinities. Future research should focus on sports violence as an important axis through which class, race, sexual preference, and gender difference and inequalities are constructed and naturalized.

References:

ATYEO, D., 1979: Blood & Guts: Violence in Sports. Paddington Press, New York.

BENNETT, R. S., WHITAKER, K. G., SMITH, N. J. W., & SABLOVE, A. 1987: "Changing the Rules of the Game: Reflections Towards A Feminist Analysis of Sport." Women's Studies International Forum 10 (4).

BIANCHI, E. C. 1980: "The Super Bowl Culture of Male Violence." in Sabo & Runfola (Eds.), Jock.

BISKIND, P. & EHRENREICH, B., 1980: "Machismo and Hollywood's Working Class." Socialist Review 10 (2/3).

BREDEMEIER, B. J., 1983: "Athletic Aggression: A Moral Concern." in J. H. Goldstein (Ed.), Sports Violence.

BREDEMEIER, B. J. & Shields, D. L. 1986: "Athletic Aggression: An Issue of Contextual Morality." Sociology of Sport Journal 3 (1).

BROWNMILLER, S., 1975: Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape. Simon & Schuster, New York.

BRYSON, L., 1987: "Sport and the Maintenance of Masculine Hegemony." Women's Studies International Forum 10 (4).

CARRIGAN, T., CONNELL, B., & LEE, J., 1987: "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity." in H. Brod (Ed.) The Making of Masculinities: The new Men's Studies. Allen & Unwin, Boston.

CHODOROW, N., 1978: The Reproduction of Mothering. University of California Press, Berkeley.

COAKLEY, J. J., 1978: Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies. C. V. Mosby Co., St. Louis.

CONNELL, B., 1985: "Masculinity, Violence and War." in Patton, P. & Poole, R. (Eds.), War/Masculinity. Intervention Pub., Sydney.

CONNELL, R. W., 1987: Gender and Power. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA. 1990 "An Iron Man: The Body and Some Contradictions of Hegemonic Masculinity." in

M.A. Messner & D. F. Sabo, (Eds.) Sport, Men and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives. Human Kinetics Publishers, Champaign, IL.

CROSSET, T. W., 1990: "Masculinity, Sexuality and the Development of Early Modern Sport." in Messner, M. A. & Sabo, D. F(Eds.), Sport, Men and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives. Human Kinetics, Publishers, Champaign, IL.

DUBBERT, J. L., 1979: A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition. Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.

DUNNING, E., 1986: "Sport as a Male Preserve: Notes on the Social Sources of Masculine Identity and its Transformations." in N. Elias & E. Dunning (Eds.), Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process. Basil Blackwell, New York.

DUQUIN, M., 1984: "Power and Authority: Moral Consensus and Conformity in Sport." International Review for Sociology of Sport 19 (3/4).

EDWARDS, H., 1984: "The Collegiate Athletic Arms Race: Origins and Implications of the 'Rule 48' Controversy." Journal of Sport and Social Issues 8 (1), Winter/Spring.

EWING, W., 1982: "The Civic Advocacy of Violence." M: Gentle Men for Gender Justice 8 (Spring).

FAUSTO-STERLING, A., 1985: Myths of Gender: Biological Theories About Women and Men. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

GIBBS, J. T. (Ed.), 1988: Young, Black, and Male in America: An Endangered Species. Dover, MA: Auborn House.

GILLIGAN, C. 1982: In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

GOLDSTEIN, J. H. (Ed.), 1983: Sports Violence. Springer-Verlag, New York. 1984 "Sports Violence." in D. S. Eitzen (Ed.), Sport in Contemporary Society (Second Edition). St. Martin's Press, New York.

GORN, E. J., 1986: The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America. Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

HALL, M. A. (Ed.), 1987: "The Gendering of Sport, Leisure and Physical Education." (Special Issue) Women's Studies International Forum 10 (4).

HARGREAVES, J. A., 1986: "Where's the Virtue? Where's the Grace? A Discussion of the Social Production of Gender through Sport." Theory Culture & Society 3 (1).

KAUFMAN, M., 1987: "The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence." in M. Kaufman (Ed.), Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power, and Change. Oxford University, Toronto.

KIMMEL, M. S., 1987: "Men's Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century." Gender & Society 1 (3) September.

KOMISAR, L., 1980: "Violence and the Masculine Mystique." in Sabo & Runfola (Eds.), Jock.

LENSKYJ, H., 1986: Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality. Women's Press, Toronto, Ont.

LEVER, J., 1976: "Sex Differences in the Games Children Play." Social Problems 23.

LORENZ, K., 1966: On Aggression. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., New York.

McCORMACK, T., 1984: "Hollywood's Prizefight Films: Violence or 'Jock Appeal'?" Journal of Sport and Social Issues 8 (2) Summer/Fall.

MESSNER, M., 1987a: "The Meaning of Success: The Athletic Experience and the Development of Male Identity." in H. Brod (Ed.), The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies. Allen & Unwin, Boston. 1987b: "The Life of a Man's Seasons: Male Identity in the Life Course of the Jock." in M. S. Kimmel (Ed.), Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity. Sage, Beverly Hills. 1988: "Sports and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as Contested Ideological Terrain." Sociology of Sport Journal 5 (3). 1989: "Masculinities and Athletic Careers." Gender & Society 3 (1).

MISHKIND, M. E., RODIN, J., SILBERSTEIN, L. R., & STREIGEL-MOORE, R. H., 1986: "The Embodiment of Masculinity: Cultural, Psychological, and Behavioral Dimensions." American Behavioral Scientist 29 (5) May/June.

MOORE, R. A., 1966: Sports and Mental Health. Charles C. Thomas, Pub., Springfield, Illinois.
MORSE, M., 1983: "Sport on Television: Replay and Display." in E. A. Kaplan (Ed.), Regarding Television: Critical Approaches. University Publications of America, Los Angeles.
ORIARD, M., 1981: "Professional Football as Cultural Myth." Journal of American Culture 4 (3), Fall.
PIAGET, J., 1965: The Moral Judgement of the Child. The Free Press, New York.
PLECK, J. H., 1982: The Myth of Masculinity. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
PRONGER, B., 1990: "Gay Jocks: A Phenomenology of Gay Men in Athletics." in M. A. Messner & D. F. Sabo (Eds.), Sport, Men and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives. Human Kinetics Press, Champaign, IL.
RUBIN, L. B., 1982: Intimate Strangers: Men and Women Together. Harper & Row Pub., New York.
SABO, D., 1985: "Sport, Patriarchy, and Male Identity: New Questions About Men and Sport." Arena Review 9 (2), November. 1986: "Pigskin, Patriarchy and Pain." Changing Men: Issues in Gender, Sex and Politics 16 (Summer).
SABO, D. F. & RUNFOLA, R. (Eds.), 1980: Jock: Sports and Male Identity. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
SCHER, M. & STEVENS, M., 1987: "Men and Violence." Journal of Counseling and Development 65 (March).
SCHNEIDER, J. & EITZEN, D. S., 1983: "The Structure of Sport and Participant Violence." Arena Review 7 (3), November.
SMITH, M. D., 1974: "Significant Other Influence on the Assaultive Behavior of Young Hockey Players." International Review of Sport Sociology 3/4 (9). 1986 "Reaction to 'Athletic Aggression: An Issue of Contextual Morality' by Bredemeier and Shields." Sociology of Sport Journal 3 (1).
THEBERGE, N., 1987: "Sport and Women's Empowerment." Women's Studies International Forum 10 (4).
UNDERWOOD, J., 1979: The Death of an American Game. Little, Brown Co., Boston.
VAZ, E. W., 1980: "The Culture of Young Hockey Players: Some Initial Observations." in Sabo & Runfola (Eds.), Jock.
WOJCIECHOWSKI, G. & DUFRESNE, C., 1988: "Football Career is Taking Its Toll on NFL's Players." Los Angeles Times (June 26), Section III, pp. 1, 12-13.

Notes

[1] The author is indebted to Bob Connell, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Don Sabo, Charles Varni, and the anonymous reviewers of *IRSS* for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

[2] Thirty men – each retired from athletic careers for at least five years – were interviewed between 1983-1985. Most had played the "major" U.S. sports: football, basketball, baseball, and track. Their ages ranged from 21-48, with the median being 33. They were of diverse racial, ethnic, and social class backgrounds. Twelve had played organized sports through high school, eleven through college, and seven were former professional athletes. (See Messner, 1987a, 1987b.) With the exception of one man who asked to remain anonymous, I have used the real names of the athletes in this paper. I have reasoned that using their actual names will be useful to readers who are familiar with the public controversies surrounding the two violent incidents in U.S. professional baseball and football, discussed later in the paper.

[3] Another former football player whom I interviewed told me that "When Jack hit you, he'd put your balls in your back pocket."

[4] I am grateful to Cheryl Cole for this insight.

[5] I use the term "gendering" rather than "gendered" to emphasize that gender identity is never a completed project, is always in construction as a person interacts with the social world.
[6] Females, on the other hand, bring different developmental issues to their interactions with the social world. Whereas the major developmental issues for males involve ambivalence with attachment, females' major problems concern separation. And this has an impact on how females play – and think about – sports (Duquin, 1984).
[7] Lott is a contemporary "hitter" in the National Football League, along the same lines as Jack Tatum once was.
[8] There is ample evidence that the extreme "compulsory heterosexuality" of the sportsworld contributes to the continued subordination of gay men, and thus the perpetuation of heterosexual masculinity as hegemonic (Pronger, 1990).

Quand les corps sont des armes
Masculinité et violence dans le sport

Résumé

Cet article se base sur un cadre théorique féministe pour explorer les significations sociales contemporaines de la violence dans le sport. Deux niveaux de signification sont explorés: en premier lieu, les significations socioculturelles et idéologiques de la violence sportive en tant que spectacle médiatisé, en second lieu, les significations construites par les athlètes masculins eux-mêmes. Sur le plan social/idéologique, l'analyse puise dans une litérature critique/féministe en émergence qui situe théoriquement et historiquement la violence dans le sport comme une pratique contribuant à élaborer une masculinité hégémonique. Et, sur base de mes propres interviews approfondies d'anciens athlètes masculins, une théorie féministe de l'identité sexuelle est utilisée pour examiner les significations que les athlètes construisent eux-mêmes autour de leur propre participation aux sports violents. Enfin, l'article tente d'explorer ces deux niveaux d'analyse: comment la construciton de la signification de l'athlète concernant sa participation aux sports violents est-elle liée aux constructions sociales plus vastes des masculinités et des relations de pouvoir des hommes avec les femmes?

Wenn der Körper zur Waffe wird
Männlichkeit und Gewalt im Sport

Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag verwendet einen feministischen, theoretischen Bezugsrahmen, um die gegenwärtige soziale Bedeutung von Gewalt im Sport zu bestimmen. Zwei Bedeutungsebenen werden erklärt: erstens die breite, sozio-kulturelle und ideologische Bedeutung von Gewalt im Sport als vermittelndes Spektakel, eine Bedeutung, die männliche Athleten selbst konstruieren. Auf der sozialen/ideologischen Ebene bezieht sich die Analyse auf eine bekannte kritisch-feministische Literatur, die theoretsich wie historisch Gewalt im Sport als eine Praxis beschreibt, die dazu beiträgt männliche Überlegenheit zu konstruieren. In der Auswertung eigener narrativer Interviews mit ehemaligen männlichen Athleten wird eine feministische Theorie der Geschlechtsidentität verwendet, um die Bedeutung zu überprüfen, die Athleten selbst ihrer eigenen Teilnahme an einer Gewalt am Sport beimessen. Schließlich wird der Zusammenhang zwischen diesen beiden Analyseebenen versuchsweise ergründet: wie ist die Interpretation der Teilnahme an Gewalt im Sport verbunden mit der umfassenderen Konstruktion von Männlichkeit und männlicher Kraft.

Cuando los cuerpos son armas: masculinidad y violencia en el deporte

Resumen

Este artículo utiliza un marco teórico de referencia feminista para analizar el significado social contemporáneo de la violencia en el deporte. Se analizan dos niveles de significado: en primer lugar, el significado sociocultural e ideológico de la violencia en el deporte como espectáculo; en segundo lugar, el significado que los mismos atletas atribuyen a este fenómeno. A nivel social e ideológico, el análisis se basa en la literatura feminista emergente la cual sitúa teórica e históricamente la violencia deportiva como una práctica que ayuda a construir la hegemonía masculina. La teoría feminista respecto a la identidad del género es utilizada en el análisis de las entrevistas donde los atletas exponen los significados que atribuyen a su participación en deportes violentos. Finalmente se intentan examinar los lazos existentes entre estos dos niveles de análisis: ¿de qué modo los significados atribuídos por los atletas en relación a su participación en deportes violentos conectan con la construcción social de la masculinidad y las relaciones de poder de los hombres frente a las mujeres?.

身体が武器であるとき：スポーツにおける男らしさと暴力

〈抄録〉

本研究は、スポーツ暴力の現代の社会的意味を説明するため、フェミニスト理論の分析枠組みをもちいる。2つの水準の意味が説明される。一つは調停された見せ物としてのスポーツ暴力の一般的、社会文化的、イデオロギー的意味。もう一つは男性競技者自身が生み出す意味である。社会的、イデオロギー的水準では、分析は、理論的かつ歴史的にスポーツ暴力を主導的男らしさの確立を助ける実践として位置づける、新しい批判的でフェミニスト的な文献に基づいて行われている。男性の引退した競技者に対して行った私自身の深層的インタビューにおいては、ジェンダーアイデンティティのフェミニスト理論は、暴力的スポーツへの参加をめぐって競技者自身が最後に構成する意味を調査する目的で利用される。最後に、これら2つの水準での分析の連関は以下のように試験的に探求される。競技者の暴力的スポーツの参加をめぐる意味の構造は、男らしさのより広い社会構造と、女性との関係における男性のパワーとどのように関わっているのか。

Когда тело станет орудием
Мужественность и насилие в сорте
/резюме/

Статья использует феминистическую теоретическую систему для того, чтобы разыскать сегоднящние общественные значения спортивного насилия. Она иследует два уровни знаменательности: во-первых общественно-культурное и идеологические значение как посредственный круг интересов, во-вторых знаменательность, образованную самыми мужчинами-спортсменами. На общественно-идеологическом уровне анализ указывает на новопоявляющюся критически-феминистическую литературу, которая представит спортивное насилие теоретически и исторически как практику, помогающюю выработать превосходную мужественность. Анализ делает ссылку на мои глубокие интервью с мужчинами-спортсменами, использует феминистическую теорию о полевой идентичности, чтобы рассматривать те значения, которые сами спортсмены вырабатывают своём участвии в спортивном насилии. Он наконец рассматривает связи между двумями уровнями анализа: как связывается конструкция значения о участвии в спортивном насилии с расширенной общественной конструкцией мужественности и главенство мужчин по сравнению с женщинами.