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Honor, Ritual and Violence in Ice Hockey

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Abstract. This paper examines the symbolic or expressive dimension to illegal assaults among players in ice hockey. Based upon the author's qualitative field research in Toronto and Indianapolis, a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence is proposed to account for the fact that players distinguish the fist-fight in ice hockey from other violent acts. The fist-fight is formulated as a social ritual involving respect and honor among players to explain this fact, qualities which are absent in other types of assaults. Some of what has been labeled by previous researchers as hockey violence, it is suggested, should be viewed as an informal mode of social control among players that has a moderating effect upon the commission of more serious assaults between players.

Résumé. Cette étude cherche à démontrer la valeur symbolique ou expressive des actes d'agression illégaux entre joueurs de hockey. La recherche qualitative de cet auteur, faite à Toronto et à Indianapolis, mène à l'établissement d'une distinction entre un acte de violence légitime et un acte de violence illégitime, ce qui justifierait la distinction que les joueurs eux-mêmes font entre les coups de poing lors d'un match de hockey et d'autres actes de violence. Selon ce chercheur, les coups de poing seraient un rite social comprenant le respect et l'honneur, qualités absentes dans d'autres actes d'agression. Ce que d'autres chercheurs ont appelé auparavant la violence dans le hockey devrait être considéré, en grande partie, comme un genre non officiel de contrôle social qui sert à modérer la perpétration d'actes d'agression plus graves les joueurs.

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Introduction

Previous sociological research on ice hockey violence (cf. Faulkner, 1974; Smith, 1979; Vaz, 1972) has focused upon what could be called an *instrumental orientation* among players involved in interpersonal assaults. That research, utilizing an occupational subculture of violence perspective, has demonstrated that many, if not all, illegal assaults in ice hockey reflect an occupationally directed and controlled means of achieving occupationally approved ends (e.g., winning the game, career advancement). Such violence can be referred to as instrumental for the reason that it is engaged in by an actor not as an end in itself but rather as a means to the realization of some other end.

This paper complements previous hockey violence research by offering a description and analysis of what could be termed a *symbolic* or expressive orientation on the part of the players involved in one particular type of illegal assault that occurs routinely on the ice, namely, the fist-fight. On the basis of my qualitative field research, including the direct observation of violent incidents among players, and both formal and informal conversations with players about their views of such incidents,[1] I will show that the fist-fight in ice hockey represents a social ritual of honor enacted by opposing players that serves to highlight or symbolize the value of respect between competitors to the play of the game. In this respect, the fist-fight belongs to a category of social phenomena referred to by Geertz (1973) in his interpretation of the Balinese cockfight as that of "deep play." The term refers to social conduct which is, from a strictly utilitarian standpoint, irrational in the sense that the material stakes involved are either high or so low as to provide little incentive for an actor to engage in it. Persons nevertheless engage in such activity because what is at stake in their conduct are such social goods as self-esteem, honor and respect which are intrinsically, if not extrinsically, rewarding and valuable.

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1. The research upon which the present paper is based derives from two sources. First, it makes use of the data gathered through the participant observation of several field researchers (including the author) in the project, "The legitimation of violence in Canadian hockey," Canada Council Grant No. 574-1693, Michael D. Smith, principal investigator. In addition to researchers' field notes containing descriptions of the social context of violent incidents on the ice, about 160 players at both amateur and professional levels of organized hockey were individually taped in sessions with researchers who had come to be known to members of teams during the course of the 1975-77 seasons. Second, this paper relies on the author's field research with a minor league team that consists of direct observations of interpersonal assaults and informal conversations with players about such events during the 1980-82 seasons. Most of the transcriptions of interviews with players presented in this paper come from the data collected by the author and other researchers in the Canada Council project. However, the generalizations offered in the present paper concerning the ritual of the fist-fight are consistent with all data that has been directly or indirectly collected by the author in both field projects.

In what follows I will begin by establishing a fact that has not been previously reported in the literature, namely, that players reserve a special status for the fist-fight, excluding it from their conception of violence. I propose the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate assaults to highlight this fact. I will then examine the normative features of the fist-fight, showing how they conform to the analytic requirements of a social ritual. The conceptual and historical connection between the fist-fight in ice hockey and the duel in traditional codes of honor will be demonstrated, and the consequences for the fist-fight *qua* ritual will be worked out. Finally, the functional significance of the fist-fight in ice hockey thus formulated will be considered in relation to its legitimacy for players. Liberal use of players' comments, derived from transcripts of interviews with players, will be made throughout the paper to provide the reader with a first-hand encounter with the kinds of material on which this analysis is based.[2]

Legitimate versus illegitimate assaults

Violence, not unlike beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. There are, of course, legal definitions of what constitutes violence — physical assault with the intent to harm, for example — but it is problematic whether all members or classes of society would subscribe to such a definition. Even if they did, there is the further problem of the circumstances under which this label is applied, and to whom by whom. Violence is, in other words, situated action.

2. A few words concerning the direction along which the following analysis will proceed seem to be in order at this point. The analysis of data to be offered in the pages that follow is directed to the construction of an ideal type of action as represented by the many instances of the fist-fight in ice hockey. I am concerned with interpreting the data under consideration with an eye toward the formulation of a type of social action (i.e., a ritual) that is primarily expressive rather than instrumental in orientation. This ideal type may be only partially and imperfectly observable in the various empirical manifestations of its occurrence on the ice and in the accounts of players. For this reason it is best, perhaps, to view the cases of players' accounts offered throughout this paper as illustrative rather than as definitive examples. Weber is, of course, the authority for this mode of analysis: "An ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified *analytical* construct" (1949: 90). Since I am concerned with a formulation of an ideal type for the fist-fight in ice hockey, it should be clear to the reader that I do not attempt to inquire into such topics as the nature of the reflexive practices utilized by players in concrete situations where normative concerns are brought into actual use and interpretation by players. My concern in this paper is with establishing the existence and plausibility of viewing the fist-fight as a social ritual of expressive and ideological significance to the sport. Variations related to how this ritualistic conduct may be performed and interpreted by players in various circumstances of use and interaction is not a topic of this paper. In a way it could be said that the analysis offered in the pages that follow tends to invite further research along such lines by first of all opening up or sensitizing researchers to a dimension of human conduct — the symbolic — often overlooked.

Sport seems to constitute one such set of circumstances. Perhaps nowhere is the relevance of the social setting to the definition of violence more apparent than in the case of hockey violence. Here such behavior as fist-fighting, were it to occur on the street instead of on the ice, would qualify as an instance of legal assault. In fact, fist-fighting along with other assaults are prohibited and offenders penalized by the rules of ice hockey. Yet, to an extent unparalleled in any other major sport, fist-fights in amateur and professional ice hockey tend to be fairly commonplace and unremarkable events to players, fans and officials alike.

The major focus of my field research has thus been to learn how players define violence on the ice, that is, to become familiar with the normative constraints and meanings to the typical player's view of violence. That research suggests that not all illegal assaults are viewed by players as acts of violence, for players tend to distinguish the fist-fight from all other kinds of assaults. It is especially common for players to contrast fist-fights with stick assaults, the latter but not the former being seen as an instance of violence. The following statements by players are typical expressions of this viewpoint:

(A) I can't really say your fighting in hockey is violent because I'd rather see a guy fight than using a stick on somebody else. I think that you should have fights.... If you're mad at a guy...it's better to fight the guy, you know, he's not really going to get hurt in a fist-fight, rather than to come out and stick him with your stick because a stick can do a lot of damage...I've never seen a guy really hurt in a fist-fight.

(B) I think high-sticking...I think that's violence. Spearing and butt-ending, that's crap, that's not hockey. I don't think fighting is really violence...I think fights, once in awhile, they're alright 'cuz, you know, that's part of the game.

(C) Nobody gets hurt in a fist-fight. It's when the crazy stuff starts coming in, like guys getting picked up and thrown over the boards, and heads banged on the ice. In a fight where punches are thrown, like what the hell, you've got maybe eight, six inches of your head that's showing, the rest of you is covered in equipment. So in a fight maybe you'll get hit, or maybe you'll get a fat lip, but I've never seen any teeth knocked out in a fist-fight. All the teeth I've seen knocked out are by sticks. Crazy. The fight I think does a lot of good, 'cuz guys are taken out. They're throwing punches or hitting them in the shoulder with pads on, nobody is getting hurt. That does a lot of good because they're tired and more relaxed....

Fist-fights, unlike stick-assaults, are viewed by players as a legitimate, if formally proscribed, form of assault; they are generally not considered by players to be violent acts. On the other hand, players almost always seem to regard stick-assaults as a case of violence. I propose the sociological distinction between legitimate and illegitimate assaults in ice hockey to underscore the fact that players tend to view the fist-fight in a positive light, in sharp contrast to other illegal acts such as stick-assaults. Thus a basic finding of my research is that the formal rules of ice hockey do not coincide with the informal, social norms held by players as these pertain to the definition of violence. Fist-fights may be proscribed and their occurrence penalized by the

official rules, but players view the matter differently.[3] As I have heard many players, fans, and officials say on numerous occasions, fist-fights are "part of the game."

A corollary to the legitimacy imputed by players to the fist-fight is the almost universally held and expressed belief among players, fans, coaches, and officials that fisticuffs rarely, if ever, result in serious injury to participants. As one player graphically puts it: "They're getting cut and stuff like that [in fist-fights], but they're not giving guys brain tumors and stuff like that, or pounding their head to a pulp until their heads puff out." Or consider the words of another player.

I know guys that will throw bodies, stick a guy. I've done it myself. You're always worried about that 'cuz like I've gotten my nose broken and cut so many times that it's incredible now, and my teeth have all been knocked out. That was from a fight with open sticks. Worse I've come out of a fist-fight is a black-eye or a fat-lip.

It is evident that the use of sticks as opposed to fists can and does result in serious, even fatal, injury to players. More than one player has pointed out to me that a hockey stick is a weapon capable of inflicting serious injury upon an opponent. On this basis alone, it seems reasonable that players should be reluctant to include fist-fights in the same category as stick-assaults.

Yet I believe the exemption of the fist-fight from other kinds of illegal assaults represents a moral consideration on the part of players. Certain assaults are viewed by players as illegitimate not only because of the danger involved, but also because of the *unnecessary exposure to physical injury* to which they expose competitors. They may be looked at as morally objectionable because they violate players' informal expectations concerning the manner in which players feel entitled to be treated by competitors. In order to demonstrate the appropriateness of this assertion, it will be necessary to examine in some detail the normative character of the fist-fight in ice hockey

3. Most players generally do not include fist-fights in their conception of violence. However, some players do recognize the possibility of fisticuffs being employed as a tactic of intimidation and, hence, as a case of violence. Consider the words of an amateur player: "I don't know, I think maybe when a guy gets really beat up, when two guys are really fighting, it's all right. I guess it's all right if two guys just blow-up and you can't take it any more. If both of them are willing to fight, I think that's okay, but when you get guys, get games like guys just jumping off the bench and running over and getting this guy and that guy. I think that's, I can't see that. It's no good. But I think fights, once in awhile they're all right. [Interviewer: "So you mean sometimes a fight develops out of the play?"] Yeah. It seems to happen in the corner or the net. You get a stick or a guy pushing you too hard in front of the net, you'll retaliate. Away you'll go. I think that's how the majority of fights start. But some of the fights start, guys just, they know they're going to fight before they even leave or jump off the bench." Interestingly, this player's comments tend to confirm the analysis of the fist-fight that subsequently follows in that he stresses the calculating or premeditative quality to violence, i.e., illegitimate fist-fights, in contrast to a natural or legitimate fight that involves "willing" players who apparently engage in fisticuffs spontaneously.

and how it differs from other illegal assaults referred to by players as "cheap shots."

The fist-fight as social ritual

Although Durkheim (1965) first proposed the theory of social ritual to account for certain aspects of religious behavior which he regarded as unique to religion, it has become widely recognized in contemporary sociology that his theory possesses a significance and range of application extending beyond that of religious conduct to the secular realm of everyday life (cf. Birrell, 1981; Collins, 1982: 53-59; Goffman, 1967; Parsons, 1968: 429-441). Briefly, that significance resides in the sociological recognition of a type of activity which, although apparently serving no utilitarian purpose, nevertheless contributes to social solidarity through its expressive or symbolic affirmation of collective values and the fostering of a positive attitude on the part of members toward them.

An examination of the characteristic features of the fist-fight in ice hockey reveals an institutionalized pattern of conduct that conforms to the analytic requirements of a social ritual. These are: (1) a protocol or definite pattern of how the activity in question is to be performed, including social sanctions that provide consequences for the actor who does not comply with the established protocol; (2) a sacred object that is given focus in the ritual and which symbolizes a collective value or moral principle, including ideal-typical attitudes attributed by members of the group to participants of the ritual; and (3) the public enactment of the ritual before assembled members of the group, on occasion resulting in the emotional renewal on the part of members of the group. Each of these three points will be shown to hold in the case of the fist-fight in ice hockey.

Protocol for conduct

The fist-fight in ice hockey, in contrast to all other illegal assaults, is characterized by a definite set of normative expectations concerning how players are to conduct themselves during the course of their involvement with each other. Although these expectations are not formulated by players into an explicit code of conduct that can be articulated from beginning to end, they nevertheless constitute an informal set of understandings that are used by players to make sense of illegal assaults on the ice. I will present my ideal-typical reconstruction of the protocol involved in the fist-fight, followed by examples of players who make reference to this protocol.

The first step of this protocol consists of a player dropping his gloves as a prelude to his initiation of fisticuffs with an opponent. This glove dropping occurs when players are squared off to one another in a face-to-face encounter: the antagonist drops his gloves and stick in plain view of an opponent, so that an opponent has the opportunity to see the gloves drop. The second step

involves the response of the player who has had the gloves dropped at his feet. Two responses are possible for this player, and these choices are not without consequences in the form of sanctions connected to one's reputation or identity. The preferred course of action, the one positively sanctioned and recommended by most players if not always adhered to in practice, is for the challenged player to also drop his gloves (and, of course, stick) and engage in fisticuffs with the challenger. The deferred course of action is for the challenged player to walk or skate away from the other player. While this can be and occasionally is done by players, it usually cannot be done repeatedly without risking the possibility of damage to one's reputation through acquisition of the label of "chicken" or "turtle."[4] It should be noted that a third, logically possible response, namely taking advantage of the challenger's defenselessness brought about by his dropping of gloves and stick through the use of one's own stick upon the challenger, is inconceivable among players. I have never witnessed such an occurrence nor found a player who had witnessed or heard of such an event occurring.

The following statements by players illustrate not only the features of this protocol, but also its sanctioned character.

(A) Interviewer: If someone slugs you...what would the rest of the team think if you backed down?
Player: I don't think the rest of the team would get on you too bad but you'd probably be known as a turtle. I don't think that too many guys would do that though. I don't know why, you know, it's known if a guy's going to fight you, you'd drop your gloves and fight. It doesn't matter if you win, lose or draw, that's it. I don't see, I know a few guys that are turtle, not too many.

(B) Interviewer: What kind of situation could you be in where you couldn't help but fight? For example, we spoke about the one in December. You said that you were at fault because the other hadn't really given sufficient provocation. What if he had dropped his gloves, what would you have done?
Player: If anybody drops his gloves, I'll drop my gloves, to defend myself. I am not going to, lots of guys just say hold your head and you'll be all right and let that guy get the penalty and you don't get a penalty. It doesn't work because they know they've got you in the long run. You're not going to fight and you can be intimidated easily. They know they can give you the [cheap] shot and you're not going to do anything. But by standing up to the guy they know the next time this guy's going to fight back.
Interviewer: So the consequences of walking away?
Player: Would be bad. I think its bad if you walk away. If a guy comes to you, you haven't

4. There appears to be much greater emphasis in professional hockey concerning the irreparable damage to one's reputation in consistently backing down from fights. A pro speaks: "I'd rather see a guy fight and lose than turn his cheek and not fight at all, and I think a lot of the players are like that. You pretty well realize that you have to fight, otherwise the guys look down on you." Obviously some of this concern for reputation is related to occupational tasks; yet it seems also likely that some of the concern reflected in, for example, the prior player's comments is not restricted to occupationally connected features of reputation but simply the value in itself of an honorable identity.

got much choice.
Interviewer: Have you ever tried walking away?
Player: No, not really, no. Lots of times I can sense there's going to be a fight. I'll just walk away, that's before the gloves are off.

(C) Interviewer: Yet I've seen times when, you know, some fists have been exchanged and it's been called [by referees] as roughing.
Player: Ya. Well, it's not really fighting because they're not really squared off with each other and know that they're going to fight. I'd say that's roughing. Fighting, I think, is that you go in a corner or anywhere and two guys are elbowing each other or doing something to each other and they, you know, you can see it, they're going to drop their gloves and start fighting. Instead of in a corner, you be in a corner and you know somebody else on your team is coming so you throw your fists at him or something, that's roughing, just because fists are thrown, it doesn't have to be a fight.

Honor as sacred symbol

From what has thus far been said concerning the protocol for the fist-fight in ice hockey, it should be apparent that the fist-fight, with its characteristic dropping of gloves and sticks by participants, emphasizes the *norm of fairness* in that both challenger and challenged have roughly the same opportunity to defend themselves. It suggests that, while a dispute may exist between two players concerning the appropriateness of the conduct at issue, it will be settled without the risk of serious physical injury as, for example, in the use of sticks or skate-blades. Thus, whatever else players may be disagreeing about and seeking to resolve by their participation in a fist-fight, they are first of all agreeing to resolve their difference in a way that affirms the norm of fairness and respect for one's opponent.

This norm is implicit in the protocol of the fist-fight and the language in which players refer to this protocol, both of which have already been examined. It is also apparent in the way that players characterize the different motives or intentions involved in one who engages in the fist-fight and one who engages in what I have termed illegitimate assaults and what players refer to as "cheap shots." As one player puts it: "It's not so much the [fist] fighters that you worry about but the cheap shotters, the guys with the sticks, the guys with the blades. The fighter will usually throw punches so you're both on equal ground so you both have sporting chances; but the guys in behind you can stick you." 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.

Players, and such interested observers as parents of players, referees, coaches, and the like, view the fist-fight always with an implicit if not explicit comparison of it to the illegitimate category of assaults they refer to as "cheap shots." Consider the following two statements, one from an interviewer with a player and the other from a discussion among parents of

midget (10 to 12 year-olds) players:

(A) Interviewer: Short of anybody taking his gloves off, would there be something else that could provoke you into a fight?
Player: I think if a guy takes a cheap shot at me, I'll throw down my gloves.
Interviewer: What's a cheap shot?
Player: Hitting you from behind when you're in the corner or something, cross-checking you from behind, something from behind.
Interviewer: Did that happen to you this year?
Player: I once, I was in the corner and the guy came and got me from behind so I dropped my gloves instead of letting it go. You can't back down from guys like that or else they'll do it all the time.
Interviewer: Did he have a choice? Could he have skated away when you dropped your gloves?
Player: I suppose he could've. Although I think he was ready to go as much as I was so he wasn't going to skate away.
Interviewer: What would've happened if he did skate away?
Player: I don't know. A bit of a back stabber. He gives it from behind and skates away, he's going to get it later, anyways. I think I'd get him back later.

(B) Father A: There's nothing wrong with a good fist-fight in hockey as long as everyone drops their gloves and sticks first. Having skates on is the great equalizer anyway. No one is really going to get hurt during a hockey fight. If the referees see that one guy is killing another guy they'll break it up fast enough.
Mother A: I agree. The fights seem to do some good. The boys get it out of their systems and they usually end up playing better hockey in the long run.
Father B: I think if the boys had dropped their gloves earlier in the game the other night, X wouldn't have gone after Y with his stick.
Father A: That's the sad part now. Everyone is hitting everyone else with their sticks. I think fighting with the fist is a good way to toughen a boy up. He's got to learn to take his lumps as well as give them out. The problem is that everyone in hockey is so sneaky now. They hit you when you're not expecting it. I haven't seen a good fist-fighter in two years in the MTHL.

The initiation of a fist-fight by a player may be viewed, ideal typically as an honorable response to another player's dishonorable act. It is a legitimate response to the wrong and disrespect that a player believes has been inflicted upon him by another player's commission of a cheap-shot. The fist-fight is an honorable response because it does better than return tit for tat: unlike one who commits a cheap-shot, the player who initiates a fist-fight by dropping his gloves shows respect for his opponent by providing the latter with advance notice and warning as to the existence of a grievance. In so doing, the player who initiates a fist-fight has provided his opponent with the opportunity to defend himself on roughly equal terms — an opportunity the player who initiates the fist-fight has presumably been denied by his opponent in the latter's commission of a cheap-shot.

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.

Although players do not themselves employ the term of honor, the resemblance between traditional codes of honor and the ritual of the fist-fight is striking. The logic of the concept of honor appears to be reflected in the protocol of the fist-fight, and a consideration of this logic by an overview of traditional codes of honor will make more clear the meaning of honor as a sacred symbol in the fist-fight.

Honor is an extremely personal matter. It is traditionally identified so closely with the individual that it becomes almost impossible to distinguish self-identity from the quality of honor associated with it. Pitt-Rivers (1966: 28) emphasizes the relationship between honor and person: "A man is therefore always the guardian and arbiter of his own honour, since it relates to his own consciousness and is too closely allied to his physical being, his will, and his judgement for anyone else to take responsibility for it." Honor is a highly individualized affair which concerns all that bears upon the individual, his possessions, and his activities — including certain social relationships (e.g., family or kinship obligations).

Several consequences follow from the nature of honor so understood, consequences which have been displayed in societies that have valued honor. One concerns the close connection between the claim to honor by a person and affronts to that person's honor by others: insults, by word or deed, demand satisfaction if one's honor is to be preserved. Since the possession of honor by a person signifies a status deserving of respect by others, for another to demean one's self is to call one's status — and hence one's claim to honor — into question. Honor is thus the obligation to compel respect from others who should, by virtue of a shared situation as social equals, owe respect to one's self. And, as Horowitz and Schwartz (1974: 240) have pointed out in this connection, this is not to imply that responses to insults are necessarily defensive reactions. To be bound by the concept of honor is for one to be unusually sensitive to any action that could be construed as disrespectful. Honor implies that one be both a defender and promoter of respect from others.

The ultimate satisfaction to affronts upon one's honor resides in physical, violent retaliation. Since one's person, including the body, is thought to represent one's honor, physical affronts as well as satisfaction from affronts are not unusual in the domain of honor. Historically this has meant, as Pitt-Rivers (1966: 29) writes, the duel or judicial combat:

> Within the formal code, the duel displays the principles involved: the offended party, judging that his honour was impugned, issued a challenge by which he invoked the honour of the offender and demand satisfaction. The offender was obliged then either to retract and offer apologies (a course of action which was incompatible with the conception which many men had of their own honour) or to accept. Yet "satisfaction" is not synonymous with triumph, only with the opportunity to achieve it under conventionally defined conditions...the feud... requires none of the formal equality of the duel nor its ceremonial setting.

The duel of honor emphasizes respect for one's opponent, as indicated by the ceremonial concern with establishing equal and fair conditions between parties of the duel. Whatever their differences, the form of the duel suggests, opponents are united first of all by their recognition of the need for mutual respect: opponents are *equals*, they are peers. Pitt-Rivers (1966: 31) writes: "A man is answerable for his honour only to his social equals." Insults from inferiors, as well as superiors, do not involve one's honor to the same extent as those from the same status.

Two points are worth emphasizing in this connection: firstly, the personal nature of honor means that one person's honor is not in principle transferable to another. One is expected, as a general rule, to act as the guardian of his own honor and not become involved in disputes involving others' honor. (Cf. below with respect to ice hockey.) Second, honor is defended and insults satisfied more by a showing of one's willingness to participate in the duel than by the actual outcome of that participation. Not victory or loss, but one's willingness to respond to the demand for a concrete sign of one's commitment to the code of honor is viewed as satisfactory evidence of one's own honor. In this respect the duel of honor would seem to be of more symbolic than strictly instrumental value in settling disputes: the settling of individual differences of opinion by the duel is secondary to the primary function of stressing the likeness between opponents. The duel of honor thus seems to fit the definition of a social ritual: it serves the expressive function of highlighting a collective value (respect among peers) and reinforcing this attitude among members of the collective.

The purely symbolic rather than judiciary nature of the duel perhaps explains the long-standing conflict between codes of honor and the legal apparatus of the state. The emergence of the state in its modern form, involving its monopoly on the use of force and claim to judicial authority, required it to outlaw duels of honor as well as to disallow persons the right to settle disputes outside the courts. Such codes of honor resulting in duels may nevertheless persist informally, even though outlawed by the state, for "it is not honourable to demand police protection" (Pitt-Rivers, 1966: 30) when challenged to a duel.

Finally, to conclude this review of traditional codes of honor, the issue of another's intention to insult must be considered as an essential, if problematic, feature of affronts to one's honor. Much depends, as Pitt-Rivers (1966: 27) emphasizes, on one's estimation of another's motive in determining whether an act constitutes an offense: "everything depends on how an action is interpreted." Obviously there can be errors in reading another's intention; one can believe another has intended to offend one by the commission of certain behavior without this, in fact, being the case. Interestingly enough, however, the highly personalized nature of honor suggests that such matters of fact are irrelevant: it is up to every person to decide for himself whether an

act constitutes an infringement upon his honor. Once this decision is made and acted upon by a direct and public challenge to the other, what matters is that the other has been put in the position of one whose honor is unambiguously at stake. Whether or not the other believes he has been challenged for just cause, he has been accused of insulting conduct and must act to defend his honor against such a charge. The initiative thus resides with the one who issues a public challenge to another; the one who receives such a challenge can only respond within a framework that regards highly the willingness to accept participation in the duel. Failure to do so when challenged by an equal casts doubt on one's integrity: does this person indeed possess the character of a scoundrel, that is, one who treats another with disrespect but does not have the courage to stand up to the other face-to-face when called upon to do so?

The fist-fight in ice hockey is regulated by the logic of honor as it has been described in the foregoing. The cheap-shot, whether stick-assault or some other act, represents an affront to a player's honor. A player typically responds to this insult by dropping his gloves (reminiscent of the medieval throwing down of the gauntlet), thereby challenging the other to a fist-fighting duel. The challenge for the other is to show that he, too, is committed to the code of honor of which opponents are a part, which he accomplishes by likewise dropping his gloves and engaging in fisticuffs. As players emphasize, it does not make any essential difference whether one loses, wins, or draws in the fight: one has defended his honor, that is, shown that he is committed to the code and thereby entitled to be treated as an honorable and not dishonorable person. In effect, the player challenged is communicating, by his acceptance of the ritual of fist-fighting, that he is not the type of person who commits cheap shots.

Thus while it is possible for a player to walk away from another in a scuffle without dishonor before gloves are dropped by another, this becomes more difficult after gloves are dropped because such a public challenge requires a response to the issue of personal honor. To walk away is to risk public disgrace — loss of one's claim to honor — by the implicit admission that one is, after all, a cheap-shotter: one who takes a shot at another behind his back, but not to his face; in effect, a coward. There is, then, no dishonor in being accused of a cheap shot, that is, challenged by another player to fight. There is only dishonor in failing, consistently and without adequate reason, to stand up to another's challenge.

There are, of course, many occasions on the ice in which players could mistake the intentions of another player: perhaps the other did not *intend* to hit one with his stick, in which case one did not receive a cheap-shot. Players nevertheless make these judgements about others, and feel entitled to do so, because their honor is at stake. Even if, as many often be the case, there is ambiguity about whether a certain event was a cheap-shot (i.e., intended dis-

respect) or an accident (i.e., unintended and not disrespect), the challenge issued to another in the form of glove-dropping leaves no doubt as to intention: the player who drops his gloves is displaying *his* respect for an opponent (he is not, after all, returning cheap-shot for a presumed cheap-shot) and demanding that his opponent likewise affirm that commitment. It should also be appreciated in this context that it is the existence of a code of honor that makes it unthinkable for a player to take advantage of an opponent's defenselessness brought about by the latter's dropping of gloves and stick. Thus while the dropping of a player's gloves may be taken as a sign of his belief that he has received a cheap-shot, the dropping of gloves makes no claim as to correctness of this belief. Rather, it defers the whole matter of factual accounting in favor of a symbolic reaffirmation of the code of honor; it asks: are you a cheap-shotter or a man of honor? To drop one's gloves and engage in fisticuffs, in response to a challenge, is for one to answer that he is honor-bound.

The fist-fight, like the duel, stands outside the legal norms of the game of ice hockey: officially, the sport recognizes no qualitative difference between fist-fights and other prohibited assaults. Yet it is clear that players claim the right, whether officially sanctioned or not, to personally settle disputes concerning treatment of each other. This is reflected in the statement by players that every person has "to stick up for himself," and it is informally acknowledged by other players, referees, and other officials who tend to take the back seat role of onlookers to players involved in fisticuffs. The very fact that participants of fist-fights are given relatively lenient penalties (usually five minutes in the penalty box), rather than ejected from the game, suggests the implicit cooperation of officials in permitting this code of honor to operate.

The personalized nature of honor assumed by players suggests the reason why, as a rule, players do not become involved in other players' disputes even though this includes fellow teammates: each player is the guardian of his own honor (consider the "third-man-in" violation in ice hockey, which provides a very severe penalty for the third party who becomes involved in an ongoing fist-fight). At the same time, the concept of honor explains why, on occasion, benches empty and all team members become embroiled in fisticuffs. This occurs when an unfair advantage accrues to one party of a fist-fight, and is not immediately corrected by the referee or linesman; for example, a third person enters what was, up to that point, a fair and honorable fight, or one player gains a decisive advantage over another and continues to beat him. Perhaps a team's goalie is threatened at his net by a member of the opposing team, and a player on the goalie's team stands in for the goalie. Because of their bulky equipment, goalies are always at a disadvantage in a fist-fight and tend to have their honor defended by other players. A goalie emphasizes the ideal of even terms in a fist-fight: "Well, for myself, I think the only way that I'd get in a fight is if both benches cleared

and I'd probably grab another goalie. That way, if we ever did you know, break up into a fight, it would be even more fair because a goalie really does have a disadvantage." In fist-fights where one player gains a decisive advantage over another, the symbolism of equality among opponents is shattered in the ritual, and players act to restore a sense of propriety to the proceedings. It is usually a flagrant violation of the norm of even terms among players in a fist-fight that results in such mass action as benches emptying.

The honor of a player — that which is both offended and, as we have seen, defended in a fist-fight — is the symbolic representation of a sacred belief: namely, the value placed by competitors upon respect for rules of the game. It is helpful in this connection to distinguish between the *process* and the *outcome* of the game, between what Merton (1938) has referred to as the institutionally approved means and culturally sanctioned ends of activity. In the case of sport in general and ice hockey in particular, a concern with process or the means of play involves a respect for the rules of the game that define and provide a common framework for athletic endeavor and achievement. Without the constraints or limitations provided by the rules, athletic achievement becomes meaningless and the idea of victory or winning loses its significance because winning can no longer be understood as the mastery and display of excellence within a particular set of conditions (cf. Weiss, 1969).

In a sport like ice hockey, opponents are a feature of this set of conditions to be overcome or mastered during the play of the game. For example, the basic goal or task around which play is organized consists of putting a puck in the opposing team's net, thereby winning a point. This task, upon which the claim to victory depends in the final analysis, is only meaningful as a worthy accomplishment given the existence of spirited competitors who attempt to oppose one team's efforts in this direction and, of course, undertake an effort on their own behalf to score a point. The fact that opponents are a part of the very set of conditions that makes possible the meaningfulness of the game is perhaps the most obvious in the placement of a goalie in front of the net who acts a contender to be struggled against for mastery: scoring a goal is no challenge, offers no opportunity for the development of skill or mastery, without the active opposition of competitors who in effect provide the task with the requisite resistance to warrant claiming its accomplishment as an exercise of skill and talent. The ritual of the fist-fight symbolizes the collective regard for the process of the game, without which a concern with the outcome becomes meaningless. The fist-fight upholds the norm of respect among competitors, and in so doing, affirms the value placed on the process of play. This is what respect for one's opponent, demanded by the equation of the self with honor, amounts to: respect and observance of the conditions which make possible the play of the game.

Thus, while honor is inextricably the possession of an individual player, *honor's possession by individuals serves the collective end of social order by*

promoting a degree of trust and respect among members without which their competitive activities become a risk too dangerous for all to undertake. The ritual of the fist-fight, with its emphasis upon players' honor, symbolizes the importance to the game of such respect among competitors. Without such trust and respect among competitors for the process of the game, play becomes not only impossible but too dangerous to undertake: it resembles Hobbes' "war of each against all," where anything goes, and the risk of playing overshadows the benefit of possible victory.

Public display

From the data which has been made available, it should be clear that the fist-fight in ice hockey is a performance which occurs in the full view of players and spectators in the arena. Glove-dropping gives public notice of the existence of a dispute, moving the resolution of that dispute from the private to the public realm. This public character to the fist-fight is in direct contrast to cheap-shots which are seldom perceived by anyone other than the parties involved. Fist-fights, unlike cheap-shots, become a matter of collective, and not simply private record.

It is worth pointing out the positive, emotional uplift that players attribute to viewing the spectacle of a fist-fight. The following player's comments are illustrative of this view:

Interviewer: You've mentioned "good" fights and the fact that they help to get a team "up"; what do you mean?
Player: Say, if you're down and the game kind of drags along, you know, a good fight, not a real dirty fight or nothing, a good fight, if your team wins it or comes out pretty good in it, then it gets the guys going more. It gets sort of contagious and you know, that type thing, and let's go out there and show them we can do it, you know. I like to see a good fight.
Interviewer: You do?
Player: Oh sure. If it's a good fight because, I don't know, sometimes it just makes you feel that, you know, no one can beat you, if you see a good fight and we win or if you're in a good fight.

A "good" fist-fight, unlike a "dirty" one, is one that conforms to the protocol already outlined. In addition, when fairness has been achieved *and* a player also establishes superiority, a "good" fist-fight serves as a morale boost for members of the player's team by being a sign of spirited play and lending support to what could be called the myth that, given equal chances, the best man (or team) will triumph ("may the best man win"). Players viewing such a fight participate in that myth, for this identification of players with the fighter who wins *fairly* serves as the basis for the feeling that "no one can beat you."

Functional considerations

The fist-fight in ice hockey has been formulated as a social ritual that gives symbolic expression to the norm of respect for an opponent, which is shown by establishing a roughly equal advantage between competitors. Thus, even

though the fist-fight is, strictly speaking, a violation of the rules of the game, it nevertheless represents a special or extraordinary deviation from those rules in that the fist-fight stands on the side of those rules — unlike cheap-shots, which do not.

I have already alluded to one function of the fist-fight in ice hockey, namely, the symbolic affirmation of an unwritten norm of respect between competitors without which the trust necessary for players to engage in play in nonexistent. Without a degree of trust, the willingness to serve as an opponent is made difficult because the situation defined as that of sport becomes instead redefined as that of war. Even in war, it seems, much is made of so-called "rules of war" which, however often ignored in practice, could be seen to serve the function of reducing the anxiety of combatants were the situation viewed as totally anomic or rateless.

There is another function of the fist-fight in ice hockey, namely, it serves as an informal mode of social control enacted by players. In a sense, players could be said to deputize themselves to enforce rule-violations. This is necessary in ice hockey for two reasons. First, it is, from an empirical standpoint, physically and practically impossible for an official or referee to be in a position to observe most illegal assaults. These often occur in the corners, around the nets, or in general when players' backs are to the referee. The difficulty of detection of illegal assaults is only compounded by the speed as well as the continuous play on the ice. In order to accommodate both these conditions of the game and also the demand for a hard-hitting, contact type of sport,[5] rule-enforcement in ice hockey has, to a greater degree than in any other major sport, been partially delegated to individual players. Hence, a rule structure that deals fairly leniently with two person fist-fights as calling for a five-minute penalty rather than ejection from the game as in most other sports.

Second, the existence of the fist-fight as an informal mode of social control can only exist as a deterrent upon potentially more dangerous forms of assaults — stick assaults, for example — given a commitment on the part of most players to the notion of honor. Given players' sense of honor, they are bound to reserve for themselves the final disposition of alleged insults and

5. The context for the present paper's discussion of ice hockey violence is the style of play characteristic of professional and amateur leagues in North America. This style of play involves substantial physical contact and has influenced European ice hockey as well. It is related to the introduction of the red line which divides the arena playing surface into two opposing zones, leading to such new game strategies as shooting the puck into the opposing team's zone. Corners of the ice in each zone have thus become a "no man's land" and struggle for control of the puck by players in these areas is intense and physical, often resulting in fisticuffs. An interesting document representative of the legal and what might be called middle-class review of hockey violence is the McMurtry Commission Report (McMurtry, 1974).

challenges.

Here we come to the problem of why fist-fights occur in ice hockey but not in other sports, and the answer proposed in this paper is twofold: it is due partly to the contingent features of the sport such as speed which make detection difficult, and it is due partly to the cultural value placed on honor, the right of the individual to take matters of violation of the law into his own hands (note: this is the definition in an honor-bound culture of what a man is). Perhaps the theory that sport reflects cultural values is applicable here: ice hockey is a Canadian sport that reflects the cultural value placed on self-reliance and individual sovereignty rather than reliance on others, least of all on bureaucratic organizations. American football is, from this standpoint, alien to Canadian values: several referees, an impersonal model of authority, claim total right to enforce all rule infractions which may occur on the field. It is a model of federation, not confederation. In this connection it is worth remembering that, up to the present, the overwhelming majority of players in the NHL have been Canadian. One could suspect that as fewer Canadians dominate professional ice hockey, the concept of honor will be held by fewer players, and the fist-fight will lose its ability to function as an informal mode of social control. The indicator of this would be the frequent occurrence of the third response to a player's challenge, at present virtually nonexistent in ice hockey: namely, the taking advantage of the challenger's defenselessness brought about by his dropping of gloves and stick.

Conclusion

Given that players do not define all illegal assaults on the ice as violence, this paper has shown that the legitimacy of one type of illegal assault, the fist-fight, resides in its status as a social ritual. The fist-fight's legitimacy for players, it has been suggested, is rooted in its symbolic significance as an expression of such values as honor, fairness, and respect for an opponent.

The functional necessity of the fist-fight to the play of the game has also been considered, and seen to reside in the fist-fight's ability to restore trust among competitors and also as an informal mode of social control utilized by players as an alternative to more serious forms of illegal assaults.

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