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Exploring existing themes between violence in lacrosse and violent behaviors of its athletes

An Honors College Project Presented to
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College of Business
James Madison University

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Abstract

This project examined the research of past and present scholars in regards to the presence of violence in sport, specifically in regards to men's lacrosse and the correlation between on-field violence and violent tendencies in its athletes off of the field. This examination observed the Native American aspects of the sport and violent aspects of the traditional form that have been perpetuated into the modernized version of the sport. Such perpetuation of violence raised questions of the division of on-field and off-field violence and how they impact those who participate in the sport. While direct correlations in relation to men's lacrosse and off-field violence have yet to be discovered due to lack of previous research on the issue, this project revealed the importance of further examination of the issue, in order to protect current and future players from harmful effects of the sport's violent nature.

Introduction

The sport of lacrosse is continuing to grow at an exponential rate here in the United States. Often known for its reputation of being the "fastest game on two feet," the sport continues to sweep the nation, attracting players of all ages to participate in the action-packed field sport. Another title could potentially be added to this increasingly popular sport: that of being one of the most violent games played on two feet.

Born from Native American ceremonial war traditions, there are few other sports that combine the finesse and endurance of soccer with the brutal physicality of football and hockey, all while wielding a pole made of various types of metals. It's rather astonishing that such a sport can garner so much attention at a time where the sports world is adamant about the research and prevention of concussions and related complications. Yet, the sport has grown immensely in

popularity, with total participation at all levels of play increasing from 568,021 to 746, 859, a total of 31.5%, between 2009 and 2013, perhaps attracting the testosterone-driven adolescent population with its ability to serve as a hybrid of sorts between so many popular sports (US Lacrosse, 2013).

This violent nature of the men's version of the sport, combined with its recent growth in popularity, begs the question: Is there a correlation between the violence exhibited on the field and the potential for violence exhibited by its athletes off the field? And, if such a correlation does in fact exist, what causes violent actions on the field to translate into a violent, aggressive personal nature off of the field? These potential relationships could be seen as being fostered by the nature of the sport's rules, and the enforcement of such rules by officials. A wide range of physical contact, both with the stick and the players' bodies, is within regulation of the game's rules, with rather slight differences between what is deemed a legal or illegal check. As such, officials are often left to make quick judgment calls on the legality of contact based on their interpretation of the rules, and missing a call can set a precedent that if an athlete was able to get away with a certain action before, they may be able to do it again. Or perhaps it is the culture surrounding the sport that perpetuates the inherent association of lacrosse with violence? As stated previously, the game was born from Native American routines of ceremony and war, and the sport continues to encourage big hits and aggressive play in asserting superiority over the opponent.

It is crucial to diagnose the existence of these relationships in order to create methods of dealing with them, and help athletes to leave their violent tendencies where they belong: on the field. This project intended to examine such correlations by combining a comparison of the

research of both past and current scholars with semi-structured interviews and reflective journaling in hopes of identifying key causes for any existing relationships.

Literature Review

Native American Roots of the Sport

The sport of lacrosse is one of the oldest in history, dating back to Native American traditions between the different tribes that inhabited the region of North America prior to colonization. Known as “the Creator’s game,” the sport is often seen in the Native American context as being a gift, granting mankind the opportunity to engage in the sport of the spirits they worship (Laduke, 2014, p. 1). According to Native American legend, lacrosse originated with a game which pitted the Earth’s animals against the birds, with the birds “emerging victorious” thanks to the contributions of two animals who joined the ranks of the birds: the bat, formerly a field mouse who was given wings fashioned from “excess leather from a drumhead,” and a flying squirrel, a squirrel who “had the skin between his fore and hind legs stretched” (Carey, 2012, p.30). This mythical nature of the sport’s origin lends itself to the spiritual associations with the Native American form of the game, while also paving the way for the sport to take on a much more violent role as a tool to prepare, and often serve as a substitute, for conflict and battle.

Prior to contact with Europeans, Native American lacrosse was rooted in a very ceremonial nature, drawing on tribal traditions and rituals that allowed the players to feel connected to their ancestors and deities. Playing for their tribal ancestors “carried an import greater than winning on the field,” extending the impact of the game far beyond the playing surface (Carey, 2012, p.60). Lacrosse games were also seen as possessing capabilities to heal

individuals dealing with personal struggles. Such “‘medicine’ games” allowed for tribe members to engage in the sport simply for the sake of renewing their sense of vitality and personal strength, and to rejoice with their fellow tribe members (Price, 2010). Of all the individual aspects of the Native American version of the sport, perhaps the most ceremonial in nature is that of the lacrosse stick. Traditionally crafted from various types of wood, the lacrosse stick was one of the most sacred objects of all in Native American culture. “Males were given a miniature stick at birth...and take one with them into the grave,” signifying just how important the stick as well as the sport itself, was to Native American culture (Price, 2010).

The lacrosse stick perhaps serves as a bridge of sorts between ceremony and conflict in regards to the context which the sport often found itself being played. While the stick must be crafted to standards suitable for use to honor ancestors, it is also the primary instrument in carrying out the violence that takes place during play. Seen as “‘an icon of war’ and ‘as much of a weapon as a tool of play’” by some tribes, it is safe to assume that the Native American lacrosse stick truly represents the dual nature that the game of lacrosse served for these indigenous people (Carey, 2012, p. 46). As such, it is important to examine the violent, warlike nature of the lacrosse tradition, in order to gain a better understanding of the roots of violent aspects of the modern form of the game.

Translated as “little brother of war” in many native tongues, lacrosse was often seen as a “surrogate to warfare,” allowing members of differing tribes to settle disputes and relieve aggression in a manner that was not necessarily life-or-death in nature (Carey, 2012, p. 45). Yet, despite being safer in comparison to all out warfare, the sport was very violent in nature, lending itself to preparing warriors for battle. It is noted that values such as “honor, courage, and strength” were valued on both the playing field and the battle field, values which can be seen in

modern forms of such contexts today (Carey, 2012, p. 45). This commitment to a sense of valor and dignity on the field could in fact point to a correlation to the use of violence on the field as a means of ensuring victory by any means necessary. Such violence may have been perpetuated in the game of lacrosse due to the eventual decline in tribal warfare that occurred in the late 1700s, causing the sport to “take on more and more attributes of actual warfare” (Carey, 2012, p. 56). Tribal members needed some sort of outlet to release their aggression, without starting a massive war, so they turned to lacrosse. This increased physicality that ensued is perhaps the turning point in the history of Native American lacrosse, as the near-barbaric nature of the game struck European settlers as exotic and exciting, setting up the eventual transformation of the Native game into what it is today.

The Modernization of the Native American Game

As can be seen in the previous section, the modern version of the sport of lacrosse starkly contrasts with that played by the indigenous people of North America, primarily in regards to the incorporation of standardized rules and safety regulations. Canadian William George Beers is credited with the modernization of the native game in the late 1800s. Beers, like many Europeans of this time period, viewed the Natives as barbaric savages, and thus viewed their form of the game in a similar manner. Beers felt that modernizing the game would make it “much superior to the original as civilization is to barbarism...or a pretty Canadian girl to any uncultivated squaw” (Carey, 2012, p. 73). In doing so, he pushed to make it safer for participants. For the European settlers, unlike their indigenous counterparts, the game was no longer “related to warfare for them,” but rather it was “merely a sport” for their leisure (Carey, 2012, p. 71). This transformation eventually all but stripped what bit of Native identity there was left in the sport, leaving Native Americans vulnerable to the power of the Europeans to dictate the future of the

sport. Now, we see a sport generally played by white athletes wielding metal sticks with plastic heads, while donning helmets and extensive padding. Yet, while such differences do exist, and make the game seem completely different to that of the natives, it is crucial to examine the violent similarities that have remained throughout the generations of transformation.

While time has led to many vast changes in the nature of the game of lacrosse, similarities do still exist between the modern and Native versions, particularly in regards to the violence that occurs between the lines of the playing field. While the standardizing of the game, coupled with the production of increased safety equipment and safer techniques, did in fact increase player safety, a wide range of contact is still permitted within the sport's rules.

According to the *NCAA Men's Lacrosse 2015 Rules & Interpretations*, body checking is allowed when performed from the "front or side above the waist and below the neck," while checking with the stick is legal when the opponent "has possession of the ball...is within 5 yards of a loose ball or when the ball in flight is within 5 yards of the player," essentially standardized versions of the contact that occurred within the Native American game so long ago (p. 40). Thus, the perpetuation of such violence over so many generations begs the question: Would the game function as it does currently without some aspect of violence involved? If such a relationship does in fact exist, perhaps the nature of the game has always been one centered upon violence, and thus could potentially perpetuate violent action by its athletes beyond the confines of the playing field.

Violence in Sport

In order to examine the presence of relationships between male lacrosse players and violence on and off the field, it is important to first examine the existence of violence in relation

to sport in general. To do so, we need to understand what constitutes being labeled as violence. According to Coakley (2015), violence is defined as “the use of excessive physical force, which causes or has obvious potential to cause harm or destruction” (p. 148). Using this definition, we could characterize many sports as being violent in nature, particularly contact sports like men’s lacrosse. Violence occurs in many aspects of sport, as, according to Bodin and Robène (2014), “sport is violence imposed on oneself, against oneself, against others,” often as a result the competitive nature that is associated with the playing of contact sports (p. 1948). This interpretation makes it seem that violence is inherent in all sport, particularly in those incorporating legalized forms of physical contact. Such sports ultimately “create tension rather than eliminate it,” leading to increased opportunities for violent acts to occur (Coakley, 2015, p. 150). Thus, the question remains: Does this noted tension lead to a correlation between the violence that takes place on the playing surface and that which occurs off of it? For the purpose of this analysis, we will distinguish violence in sport by examining violence that occurs on the field, and that which takes place off the field, leading up to the relation of such general correlations to the sport of men’s lacrosse.

On-field violence is, as its name states, violence which occurs in the playing of a particular sport, whether allowed in the rules of a particular sport or not. According to Coakley (2015), such violence can be characterized as one of four designations: “brutal body contact, borderline violence, quasi-criminal violence, or criminal violence” (p. 150-151). Of these designations, brutal body contact and borderline violence are generally accepted in sports, with the latter two being fairly rare due to their increased level of severity in both their nature and the punishments associated with them. While this project will primarily focus in on the first two

designations and their relation to the violent nature of contact sports, it is important to acknowledge the presence of more extreme forms of on-field violence.

With brutal body contact, violence occurs through “actions common in certain sports and accepted by athletes as part of sport participation,” such as “collisions, hits, tackles, blocks, body checks, and other forms of physical contact” (Coakley, 2015, p. 150). This type of violence is obviously less severe than the other types, but is responsible for the majority of the violence that occurs in the course of a game. The acceptance of this type of violence is no excuse to dismiss the potential that it has to impact the lives of individuals participating in the sport. While this type of violence may be legal according to regulation, injuries can often occur from the most commonplace forms of in-game violence, generally falling under this classification, including fractures, dislocations, even concussions.

On the other hand, borderline violence “includes actions that violate the rules of the game but are accepted by most coaches and players as consistent with the norms of the sport ethic and as useful competitive strategies,” including actions such as the “‘brush back’ pitch in baseball or the forcefully placed elbow or knee in soccer” (Coakley, 2015, p. 150). According to Coakley (2015), this type of on-field violence provides the biggest challenge in regards to control, as it is “grounded in the culture of power and performance sports” (p. 160). Borderline violence is often performed out of impulse, or in response to something which took place earlier in the course of the particular sporting event. The emotion that is associated with this type of violence gives it a potential to be very dangerous to the safety of athletes, as performing such acts sets the tone for the game as being a struggle to constantly “one-up” each other, opening the door for potential injury, as well as actions of quasi-criminal or criminal violence.

In examining these types of on-field violence, we need to understand just why they take place, and what effects they can have on the athletes who either perform or fall victim to such violence. These two accepted forms of such violence have the potential to cause injuries such as “arthritis, concussions, brain trauma, bone fractures, torn ligaments, and other injuries,” many of which have long-term impacts of the quality of life for athletes as they grow older (Coakley, 2015, p. 158). So, why is it that such risks are accepted as commonplace in sports? The institutionalization and acceptance of levels of violence in contact sports has created a culture around contact sports that such actions are simply part of the game and without them, the product that is sport would cease to exist. The problem with this is that “controlling such institutionalized violence is difficult because it requires changing the culture and structure of particular sports,” changes which most involved in sport would ultimately disapprove of (Coakley, 2015, p. 156). Whether it be from a passion for the sport, the dedication to win at all costs, or even just the adrenaline rush that comes with physical contact, athletes are becoming more and more receptive to the presence of violence in sport, regardless of the potential consequences, and that does not appear to be changing anytime soon. And yet, perhaps the most severe of all of the consequences of on-field violence is not necessarily a particular injury, but rather the potential perpetuation of violence in the lives of athletes outside of the realm of sports.

In contrast to on field violence, off-field violence refers to violent tendencies that are exhibited by athletes in their everyday lives. Such violence includes, but is not limited to, aggressive actions such as instigating physical conflict, assaulting others, even sexual assault or rape. While many individuals possess a natural tendency to be aggressive in their actions, there is a potential for such tendencies to be related to the physical nature that is taught and praised in the different sports athletes participate in. Being conditioned to “leave it all on the field” and be

aggressive in defeating the enemy can potentially make it difficult for athletes to distinguish the appropriate contexts for such actions in their social lives. Such a notion relates to what is often referred to as the sport ethic, which is a set of four principles that create the idea of what it really means to participate in the sport. These principles, or norms, are a “dedication to the game, striving for distinction, accepting risks and playing through pain, and accepting no obstacles in the pursuit of success” (Coakley, 2015, p. 115-116). Athletes are often socialized to conform to these norms to a point where they become a part of their personality, making it difficult to define the line between acceptable behavior on the field and off of it. This phenomenon is perhaps best embodied by a comment from a former NFL player, stating that “During the game, we want to kill each other. Then we’re told to shake hands and drive home safely. Then a week later we try to kill each other again” (Coakley, 2015, p. 162). This back and forth effect on the emotional structure of athletes must ultimately take a toll on their mentalities, thus opening up the opportunity for the boundaries between right and wrong in social situations to become blurred or dissolve entirely. But, speculation aside, does the presence of a correlation between aggressive on field behavior and off field actions exist? According to Moesch, Birrer, and Seiler (2010) in their study regarding the violent off-field tendencies of adolescents in Switzerland who participated in various types of sport activities, “violent adolescents played significantly more team sports with body contact,” which could, in essence, “lead to a transfer of learned behavior in other domains” (p. 327). However, it is important to remember that the relationship between aggressive behavior and violent sports does not necessarily indicate causation. Coakley (2015) noted two other factors that could impact the existence of such relationships and the meanings that they possess. According to Coakley (2015), when considering such relationships, one should also consider that violent sports may attract people who “already feel comfortable about doing

violence on and off the field, regardless of what they may learn in their sport,” as well as the possibility that “off-the-field violence among athletes may be due to unique situations encouraged more often by athletes than other people” (p. 162). Simply put, while studies do seem to point to a correlation between the presence of off-field violence tendencies in athletes who participate in contact sports, the correlation is not necessarily a defining factor in determining that all cases of athlete violence off the field is caused by their sport participation.

Violence and Presence of Correlations in Men’s Lacrosse

Men’s lacrosse, like all contact sports, allows for a wide range of contact between athletes. However, what sets men’s lacrosse apart from other sports of this nature is the ability to make contact with both the body and the stick within the rules of the sport, creating the opportunity for a wider range of potentially violent actions.

While research on specific nuances of on-field violence in men’s lacrosse is rare, extensive research has documented potential injuries that can occur within the sport, with one in particular providing a large connection to the potential for violent tendencies off the field: concussions. Concussions, particularly when multiplied over time, are often linked to brain degeneration, memory loss, and injuries that can lead to altered mental states later in life, potentially leading to more aggressive social tendencies. Multiple surveys and studies show that “lacrosse concussions rank second only to football” (Vincent, Zdziarski, & Vincent, 2014, p. 3; Putukian & Crisco, 2014). Such concussions occurred as a result of “player-to-player” contact, as opposed to “stick or ball”, particularly in regards to players labeled as being “defenseless,” meaning that they were not anticipating the collision (Lincoln, Caswell, Almquist, Dunn, & Hinton, 2015, p. 758). It was also discovered that, in regards to players who were found to have

received concussions during lacrosse participation, “the striking player used his head to initiate impact in over 75% of incidents” (Lincoln et al., 2015, p. 759). This finding is paradoxical in nature in that the very mechanism which caused concussions, a brain injury, in defenseless players were most often inflicted by athletes leading with their heads, opening themselves up to potential for such injury as well. Thus, we can speculate as to why the tendency to lead with the head is so prevalent in these cases of concussions in lacrosse. Perhaps it is a lack of instruction of proper techniques when initiating contact with another player. Or, perhaps the aggressive nature of lacrosse athletes to want to inflict the most devastating contact they can, in order to gain possession of the ball and give their teams a competitive advantage over opponents. With the amount of attention that has been given to the issue of concussions in football as of late, it is astonishing that the same issue in lacrosse has received little to no publicity in mass media.

Much like that of on-field violence, research regarding the prevalence of off-field violence in male lacrosse players is rare. However, prevalent examples have been covered regarding off-field violence performed by lacrosse players. George Huguely, former lacrosse player at the University of Virginia, was convicted of murdering his girlfriend, fellow Virginia lacrosse player Yeardey Love, in the spring of 2010. Huguely was known for his aggressive and violent nature, referred to as having a “mercurial temperament,” and having a problem with alcohol which “had resulted in previous violence” (Nakamura, Yanda, & De Vise, 2010, p. 1). He was also cited for a “vicious” attack on a former teammate, where Huguely “went to the teammate’s apartment, where he was sleeping, and pummeled him” due to misguided speculation that he had kissed Love that night (Nakamura et al., 2010, p. 3). While was a major factor in the presence of Huguely’s violent tendencies, the underlying aggression that such behaviors extracted from him relate to the correlation that perhaps he was attracted to the sport due to the

ability to put his violent actions to work in a legalized context. Huguely's consumption of alcohol also qualifies with Coakley's condition of violence being in relation to situations brought on by the athletes themselves. No evidence has been cited regarding the presence of concussions in Huguely's history, therefore leading to the assumption that such actions were in fact a result of the combination of alcohol consumption and a potential tendency to behave in a violent manner. Regardless of the true cause of Huguely's violent behaviors, evidence that such a correlation exists across the entire population lacrosse players is severely lacking, leading to an uncertainty regarding the true relationship of the correlations of violence in men's lacrosse.

The purpose of this project was to utilize the research of past and present scholars in order to examine any existing correlations between the violent nature of men's lacrosse and the violent actions of its athletes off of the field. In doing so, the Native American roots and the eventual modernization of the Native form revealed the perpetuation of certain violent actions from as far back as the sport's creation. This influence helps set the stage for the types of violent acts that we see in the sport today, and how they can lead to different types of injuries. While no direct correlations have been discovered at this time, it is important that continued examination of this issue is pursued in order to increase the safety of the athletes and those around the sport.

Research Question

The following research questions was the basis from which the research process was carried out:

RQ1: How do on-field aggressive actions shape the off-field behaviors of recreational lacrosse athletes?

Methodology

This project utilized qualitative research methods to explore the presence of any prevalent themes between violent actions on and off of the field in male lacrosse athletes. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research is a method of research that seeks to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 36). In this sense, qualitative research seeks to explore the manner in which a particular factor or set of factors shape the various experiences of individuals. This focus of qualitative research places the researcher in a position of seeking how individuals understand their personal situations in response to the internal and external factors being observed in a given study (Merriam, 2009). With this information, researchers can begin to take these individual interpretations and begin to delve deeper into understanding their roots and identifying potential trends that may exist within a given group of individuals.

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research methods generally consist of a number of commonalities, many of which will be specifically emphasized in this project. For one, researchers must acquire a wide range of data in a variety of formats (Creswell, 2007). This ensures that research is not completely one-dimensional but encompasses a variety of information through various formats and mediums. Along with this notion, qualitative research must “focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers from literature” (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). This caveat preserves the voices of the participants, emphasizing the observation of how the experiences of participants are shaped by a given phenomenon, which may or may not contradict the previously accepted views of scholarly research. Finally, qualitative research is classified as “interpretive inquiry,” where “researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand” which “cannot be separated from their own background, history, context,

and prior understandings” (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). This is important in that, while the emphasis should be on the thoughts and experiences of the participant, researchers will inherently use their background experiences with the topic in order to make sense of the data that they collect from participants, which can create the potential for subjective data analysis based upon the influence of the predispositions of the researcher.

The research methods utilized in this project are consistent with those of typical qualitative case studies. According to Creswell (2007), case study research is defined as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes” (p. 73). Perhaps one of the most vital identifiers of this method of research is this concept of a bounded system, as it sets the framework in which the study will be carried out. A bounded system is defined by Merriam (2009) as “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” such as “a single person who is a case example of some phenomenon, a program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy) (p.40). Both of these definitions reveal that the intent of case study research is not to observe grand-level correlations that impact widespread populations of individuals. Rather, the case study approach is a means of identifying how the experiences of individuals within a certain population are shaped by a particular phenomenon. However, the benefit of this narrowed approach lies in the fact that it acquires an effective understanding of the particular population observed while promoting similar research in similar populations in other areas, which creates the potential for studies utilizing their findings in order to come to an understanding of the experiences of the greater population as a whole.

Expanding upon this definition of a case study, this project is consistent with what Creswell (2007) defines as a “single instrumental case,” in which “the researcher focuses on an issue or concern, and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue” (p. 74). This project is ultimately aimed at examining the phenomenon of the presence of violence in sport, and how it shapes athlete behaviors beyond the playing field. With this goal in mind, the bounded system of a major Mid-Atlantic university was selected, specifically focusing on the views and experiences of the university’s men’s club lacrosse program. This process of topic selection allows for the emphasis of the project to lie on the concept of violence in sport, using the university’s lacrosse student-athletes solely as an avenue through which to observe this phenomenon.

The observation and journaling portion of the data collection process was consistent with autoethnographic research methods and narrative writing. Ellis and Bochner define autoethnography as "an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (as cited in Mendez, 2013, p. 281). This definition reveals that research in this area seeks to utilize what is being observed by the researcher to construct the greater themes that are guiding the research process. Through the eyes of the researcher, autoethnographic research explores the existence of prevalent themes in the area of research. This form of research is conducted through a number of mediums. As noted by Mendez (2013), autoethnography can take the shape of a personal reflection on the part of the researcher, or as a more introspective and involved exploration of the experiences of both the researcher and the participant throughout the research process (p. 281). In the case of this research project, the methods of autoethnography coincide with the former, as the experiences and observations of the researcher served as the primary means of data collection. These observations and experiences were documented in a narrative style, defined by Ellis, Adams, and

Bochner (2000) as “texts presented in the form of stories that incorporate the ethnographer's experiences into the ethnographic descriptions and analysis of others.” In essence, this style utilizes the experiences of others from the perspective of the researcher to construct and explore prevalent themes that may be governing a particular situation or environment. In doing so, the researcher provides a first-hand perspective of the happenings taking place in a given environment and how said themes are shaping the behavior of those involved.

Participants. Student-athletes from the university’s men’s club lacrosse programs were invited to participate in this study. Inquiries were made through the team’s official contact person to invite student-athletes to participate in the study. All participants were age 18 years or older, and proper consent was received prior to participation. Participants were all asked the same set of questions in conjunction with this study, in order to gauge the general opinion of each student-athlete on the various topics covered throughout the study.

Procedure. Initial data collection for this project was accomplished through observations conducted by the researcher, observing athletes of a high school club lacrosse program in the Mid-Atlantic region. Observation research methods are vital for a researcher in that, according to Merriam (2009), they are most effective when utilized “in conjunction with interviewing and document analysis to substantiate the findings” (p. 119). This ability to support and justify other forms of qualitative research and data collection allows the researcher to delve even deeper into a particular issue by seeing it play out first-hand. Simply put, observations provide the researcher with the opportunity to witness a particular behavior instantaneously, and react accordingly based upon the scope and foundation of their study (Merriam, 2009). Field notes will record these observations of violent aspects of the on-field action, in hopes of better understanding how this inherent violence found in the sport of lacrosse is experienced by student-athletes and their

physical responses to it. According to Merriam (2009), these field notes should be completed in a very clear and concise manner, which allows for readers to see the observed event through the eyes of the researcher and can gain a solid understanding of the happenings which took place. This level of detail allows for the field notes to be effectively utilized throughout the remainder of the research process. Through analysis of the data recorded from these field notes, these understandings were formalized and prepared for comparison with the individual perspectives of student-athletes through the subsequent interview process.

Following these observations, a selection of questions will be developed, each relating to the subjects' thoughts on the violence that were inherent within the sport of lacrosse and the possible presence of violent tendencies in their daily lives. Questions were administered orally from an examiner, with participants responding in a semi-structured interview format. According to Merriam (2009), a semi-structured interview "includes a mix of more and less structured questions" (p. 89). This mixed structure allows for a large amount of flexibility on the part of the researcher, as the interview becomes much more conversational and guided by the nature of the interaction between the researcher and the respondent. With this, researchers can "respond to the situation at hand, to the worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). In this regard, the list of questions merely serve as a loose outline for the interview, allowing the researcher to veer away from the set order should it aid the quality of the interaction. This is key in establishing an environment in which the respondent feels comfortable sharing their true feelings on the issue, providing genuine feedback and opening the door for exploration of other topics that may not have been previously considered when structuring the interview. Interviews were conducted based upon agreement to participate and to the point at which saturation could be effectively reached.

Findings

The following section outlines the major themes that were constructed from the analysis of the observation and interview process.

Creating a Positive Atmosphere

The importance of creating a positive atmosphere was a theme of the data collection process. A commitment to creating a team where everyone feels welcome and genuinely wants to be a part of it may be a challenge for coaches, but it was something that our coaching staff has made a concerted effort to achieve. This atmosphere is key in creating a culture of acceptance around the team and a sense of buy-in that will motivate players to perform at their best. While if mismanaged, this can become an issue, it also allows us to encourage behavior that shows that our guys are loose and creates an environment where guys are enjoying themselves.” As demonstrated in the observations, creating this atmosphere is something that requires a multi-faceted approach, as there is not just one means of creating positive culture.

Concerted effort in building relationships between coaches and players is a great way to create the foundation of this positive culture. As stated in the observations, as a coach, “I like to portray myself as someone the players can feel comfortable around and come to if they ever need anything.” In doing this, the goal is to create positive, trusting relationships that allow me to go beyond just being a coach but being someone that players can turn to when in need. Without that level of trust, it is unlikely that a genuine positive culture will be created. Having that positive culture is vital as a coach in that it creates a sense of buy-in around the team and builds up the camaraderie that makes players want to be part of the team. What is also important to keep in mind here is that it is not only the relationships that are shared between coaches and players, but

how those relationships are expressed and carried out. For example, as noted in the journaling, on our team “we exchange a lot of sarcastic and joking remarks with one another,” as “I feel that this is an effective way to connect with the players and create a positive and open relationship.” Interacting in this way makes it easier to connect with players and creates a stronger relationship that can extend beyond the playing field.

Player Motivations

The aspects of the sport that motivate players was a major theme constructed from the observations that were conducted. In examining this, it was found that some of the biggest motivators for the observed players participating in the sport were the system of rewards incorporated into the structure of practice and positive support given from coaches. But, the biggest motivator was simply the opportunity to engage in the physical aspects of the sport. Players seemed to embrace the opportunity to get more physical with one another and see what the contact side of the sport was like. Having this knowledge creates a greater understanding for why players choose to play the sport and what brings them back. With this knowledge, coaches not only gain a better understanding of the mindsets of their players, but also learn how to better manage practices during the season.

Throughout the observation process, I found that the “physical drills...are effective with players in that they get to be a bit more aggressive and experience more of what it is like to be in a game-type situation.” From any number of interactions with players throughout the observation period, I engaged in conversations about the physicality of the sport and when the players would be able to get more physical with one another. These conversations were started by players, particularly the less-experienced who may have been sold on playing the sport for the physical

aspect involved. While on the one hand, this is a great sign that guys are locked in and eager to engage with the sport, it also opens the dangerous possibility of players becoming overaggressive and cause injuries to their teammates. This is perhaps the greatest fear of any coach, as injuries in practice situations should be avoided at all costs. But, at the same time, the only way to get better at the physical side of the sport is to practice it without any restrictions. This makes for an interesting situation that requires a lot of control on the part of the coach and personal control and discipline on the part of the players.

Responsibility of the Coach

The responsibility of a coach was consistent theme throughout the observation process. In a practice setting, the coach is the individual who is most responsible for the safety of his players as they engage in different aspects of contact that exists in the sport. As a coach, I value player safety above all else. This sentiment stems from the connection shared with my players, as I want to do what I can to keep them safe and avoid injuries that could impact their playing careers and lives off the field. As noted in my observations, “it is important to be vigilant about player safety in such a high-contact sport” to protect the well-beings of our players.

Keeping players safe in the fast-paced, contact sport of lacrosse is a challenge, but one that must be faced by coaches of the sport. While the responsibility is on the players to wear the proper protective equipment, coaches must be vigilant in making sure that this equipment is fitted appropriately and all players are wearing it in order to avoid injury. With the amount of physical acts that are legal in the sport, it is crucial that player safety is emphasized in both practice and games so that injuries are minimized. In the practice observations, there were multiple scenarios where coach intervention was necessary in order to enforce some sort of

safety rule. Players tend to display an attitude of machismo and bravado by refusing to sport the necessary protective equipment needed to participate in the physical aspects of the sport, but it is this type of attitude that leads to unnecessary injuries. “In my experience as a coach, these physical drills must be managed to avoid injuries,” especially as they take place in a practice setting where there are no stakes and risks injuries to one’s own teammates. In a typical lacrosse practice, there are any number of contact drills that can cause injury if not managed properly. Ground ball drills are something that are used to instill competitive energy into practice. While contact is important on ground balls, this means that players tend to start relying on their bodies a bit more and going for big hits. One physical mismatch or one illegal hit and a player could end up seriously injured. As much as the physicality of the sport should be used as a motivational tool, it is also something that must be governed by coaches to protect their players and prepare players to use that physicality in game situations.

Regulation

The theme of regulation was also one that was constructed throughout the interviews conducted for this study. The participants spoke on how regulation on the part of lacrosse officials is a major way that the aggressive and violent aspects of the sport are kept under control. While much of this responsibility lies on coaches during game situation, the officials are the main individuals on the field who have the power to regulate these acts and set a standard for how much physicality will be tolerated in any given game.

Discussion on the need for regulation in the sport of lacrosse centered on keeping physical acts from building up into bigger, more violent, issues later in the game, with one participant noting that “With refereeing, not letting little things build up into bigger issues later

in the game.” This point reveals that officials possess the important responsibility of keeping the action taking place on the field under control and not letting small penalties build up into something greater. Because of the physical nature of the sport, players are going to take chances trying to make plays and will run the risk of being assessed penalties for their actions. While against the rules, these acts are understood to be a working part of the sport and not something out of the ordinary. However, it is when these accepted things continue to build upon one another that there are issues with overaggressive and violent acts. With contact sports, sometimes players can get heated and act solely off of their feelings about what happened earlier in the game rather than thinking logically about what the outcome of their actions will be. This is something that officials can control by limiting repeat instances of a particular incident or incidents between two players.

There is also a point where the regulation of officials can become too overbearing. As one participant phrased it, “I don’t necessarily want to see them get too picky with it, because you have pads and have accepted the risk of taking the stick to the arm. You have the option to cover your arm up all the way or not.” While this may be a common mindset for players to have, and players do in fact possess the choice of level of protection, but it is one that opens up the possibility for even more violent acts and injuries among participants. It is difficult to determine what is truly the “right” stance on this, or how involved officials really should be in the flow of the game, but it is clear that their enforcement of the rules is a key factor in controlling the violent and overaggressive acts taking place on the field.

Legal Aspects of the Sport

Another theme from the interview process was the definition of the legal aspects of the sport that are considered to be physical acts. Being a contact sport, there is going to be a certain level of physicality that is understood to be a legal part of the game. However, it's when the contact goes beyond this understood standard that players enter the potential for violent actions to take place. In this sense, the legal physicality of the sport is something that players embrace, often cited in the interview process as a feature that make the sport enjoyable. One participant noted that "it's fun to be involved in aggressive contact sports. I think it just adds to the experience." This may be a common notion and is something that continues to attract players to pick up a stick and learn to play the sport. Though, it is important to draw the line between what is overaggressive and against the regulations of the sport and what is allowed within the rules.

The physicality allowed within the rules of lacrosse allows players to engage in a contact sport while not overstepping the limit. One interview participant pointed out that "We're physical, don't get me wrong, but nobody that line into what could be considered the 'violent' side." This ability and commitment to drawing the line between being physical and being violent is something that is likely more common than many people would initially believe, as it is easy to simply put lacrosse players in a category of being violent individuals because of the nature of the sport they have chosen to play. This self-awareness that is displayed in understanding the boundaries between what is accepted and what goes beyond is something that should not go unnoticed. However, the perceptions of people on the outside are shaped by the few incidents that may take place with players losing control over this self-awareness and overstepping the boundary. This is damaging to the overall brand of the sport, often hindering the ability to attract new players.

One reason that players will go beyond what is considered legal in the sport is the normalization of the physical nature of the sport in the eyes of the athletes. After participating in the sport for a certain period of time, one begins to take the physical aspects for granted and perceive them as just another part of the game. One participant, speaking on this topic of the normalization of the physical aspects of the sport, noted that “More or less it’s something that is part of the game.” Another participant highlighted how this topic relates to the perceptions of the athlete, noting that “Once you strap the helmet on it changes the mindset of the actions going on the field.” This relates to how an athlete, due to the normalization of lacrosse’s physicality, may feel that it is necessary or appropriate to take a chance and go beyond what is considered legal in order to make a play. While this will often result in consequence for the player, it begs the question of whether or not this normalization is a reasonable or positive trend for both the sport and its participants. There may be positives to this stance, but there is certainly a potential for trouble should it continue to go unchecked.

Participation Benefits

As briefly discussed in the section above, the benefits of participating in the sport of lacrosse are what ultimately drive players to continue playing the sport. Whether it is the sense of unity or identity associated with being a team, the structure that it may add to one’s personal life, or simply the motivation to continue to improve in their abilities, sport possesses the ability to offer benefit to its athletes, should they choose to utilize them. From the interview process that was conducted for this study, there were a few commonalities in responses that made this theme so prevalent. Of the reasons presented in throughout the interview process, the recurring topics were that of the relationships that are created through the sport and the relief that it provides for its athletes.

The relationship-building opportunities presented in the sport of lacrosse are something that interview participants noted time and time again. Playing lacrosse gives athletes the opportunity to build deep, personal connections with fellow members of one's team. One interview participant noted that "A lot of my best friends have come from lacrosse," while another stated that "A lot of my friends on the lacrosse team are kind of like my family here." While this deep connection that the participants share with their teammates is something that is not unique to just the sport of lacrosse, as participants in all types of team sports may likely share in these sentiments to a certain degree, it is interesting that a sport that often pits teammates against each other in physical drills during practice has brought out such genuine responses in these participants. Perhaps the physicality is something that has the potential to draw players together and build these relationships over time. While there is no definite answer at the time, it is certainly something to consider.

Participants also pointed out how participating in the sport of lacrosse gives them a sense of relief at the end of a given day. The following was noted by one of our interview participants on this topic:

It gives me a kind of release at the end of the day when I go to practice. If I'm stressing over a tests or relationships or anything like that it doesn't matter when I'm out there. It gives me something to look forward to every day where nothing else matters.

In this sense, lacrosse is an outlet of sorts, allowing athletes to step away from the stressors of their day-to-day routines and simply focus on playing a sport. This is something that can be a major benefit in the lives of lacrosse athletes, as the sport provides an opportunity to let go of

anything that may be bothering them and enjoy the benefits that the sport can provide. However, it opens up dangerous possibilities, as the athlete could bring their stress onto the field and commit an overaggressive or violent act that could injure another player. With this idea of relief, athletes must have a very strong commitment to leaving their stressors off the field and solely focus on participating in the sport they love.

Division Between On-Field and Off-Field Behavior

A final theme constructed from the interview process was that of the potential division between on-field and off-field behavior. Learning more about this topic is the goal of the study and will provide significant details on how lacrosse athletes manage their actions and behaviors. Overwhelmingly, interview participants reported a stark division between their behaviors on the field and off of it. One participant stated that, because of participating in lacrosse and having the opportunity to experience the relief on the field, “there’s less of a need for aggression or anything like that off of the field.” This sense of division ties into the previously mentioned topic of lacrosse participation being a relief, something that allows players to leave their off-field stresses behind and solely focus on participating in the sport. With this concept in mind, the ideal situation would include the reversal of this concept: athletes being able to take what happens on the field and leave it there, not allowing it to shape their behaviors in their everyday lives.

As mentioned before, it is clear that interview participants have not noticed carryover with their on-field and off-field behaviors. They each appeared to have a grasp on the division between the two and were adamant that they didn’t see any sort of translation of aggression in their day-to-day routines. One participant summed it up well with the following statement:

I can't really think of any connection on that side, other than the inverse relationship of being able to go out there on the field and play the physical sport with the intensity and everything and relieving the aggression on the field.

This is a very effective summation of the feelings expressed by interview participants. They each communicated a feeling of division between the two sets of behaviors and vehemently denied any connection in their own lives. Perhaps this was simply because they did not want to be perceived as being violent or aggressive individuals and wanted to give the "right" answer, but the fact remains that, at this time, there is no real evidence connecting on-field and off-field behaviors in lacrosse athletes.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore any existing themes between the on-field violence associated with participation in men's lacrosse and the presence of violent off-field behavior in athletes. Through the research conducted in conjunction with this project, it is clear that a number of prevalent themes exist, but no definitive evidence of a causal relationship between on-field and off-field behaviors was discovered. This reveals the importance of future research into this topic in order to provide a better understanding of how to properly educate and protect athletes from any negative effects that may exist.

Before moving into an examination of the findings of this study, it is important to return our definition of violence in sport and clarify the differences between violence and physicality. As stated previously in this paper, Coakley (2015) defines violence as "the use of excessive physical force, which causes or has obvious potential to cause harm or destruction" (p. 148). This definition serves as a reference point for this discussion, and differs from the physicality that is

associated with contact sports in that physical acts are simply part of the sport and something that is accepted within the rules. Per Coakley's definition, violent acts go a step further in the force that is used and perhaps even the intent behind the action. Physical acts could be performed simply as a way to make a play and play within the rules of the sport. On the other hand, the excessive nature of violent acts reveals a sense of purpose behind the action and opens up the possibility of malicious intent. As we go through this section, it is important to keep these distinctions in mind and be sure to identify situations where it may not be as easy to determine which category a given action may fall into. With this in mind, the remainder of this section will address the themes that were constructed with their implications and areas for future research to be conducted.

The importance of creating a positive environment in the practice setting was one of the many themes constructed from the observation and journaling portion of the data collection process. Having such an environment is intended on making players feel welcome and comfortable so that they can enjoy their participation in the sport and reap the benefits that lacrosse has to offer. Creating such an environment also creates the possibility for less violent acts to occur. If players are in an environment in which they feel comfortable and surrounded by people they enjoy being around, they may be less inclined to commit acts of violence during practices. In hostile environments, such as game situations against opposing teams, the possibility for tensions to flare up should be much more likely than in a controlled practice setting where one is surrounded by their teammates and coaches in a comfortable environment. However, the onus of maintaining this environment is on the coach, as they act as the authority figure in this environment. Failing to identify issues that may be brewing between players on the roster could lead to the increased likelihood of violent acts taking place in practice. However,

neither the literature nor the data collection process yielded any concrete evidence of this concept taking place. In order to better explore how a positive practice environment shapes the behaviors of athletes, future research should be dedicated to observing the practice setting and how the atmosphere evolves and adapts itself over the course of a season.

The motivations of men's lacrosse athletes and the benefits they receive from their participation provides another opportunity to explore the existence of any relationships between on-field and off-field behaviors. What drives players to compete in the sport and keeps them interested in playing year after year is something that tends to differ from person-to-person. From the observations that were carried out as part of the data collection process, it was noted that physical drills may have an impact on the motivation of players in the practice setting. Being able to engage in contact drills may provide athletes with a sense of enjoyment and make them want to engage further with the physical aspects of the sport. However, athletes derive their motivation for participation from a number of aspects beyond the physicality, and it would be unjust to determine that because they enjoy these aspects that they are violent individuals. Without further exploration of the literature and research, it is unclear as to how much these on-field motivations shape the off-field behaviors of athletes. However, interviews with participants also highlighted benefits that athletes may find in lacrosse participation. From the interview process, participants noted that their participation in the sport offers benefits like the relationships that are shared with teammates, a sense of relief from their off-field stresses, an added sense of structure to their routines, and even a sense of unity that is built up as being a member of a team. While these only represent a small portion of the possible benefits of participation, it is important to note that none of the participants acknowledged the physicality or potential for violence as a benefit. Perhaps this is related to the concept of the sport ethic, a

collection of norms that govern sport participation, with particular focus on the norm of “accepting risks and playing through pain” (Coakley, 2015, p. 115-116). This norm seems to communicate a sense of aggression in that athletes understand the risks associated with their participation and doing what it takes to win in competition. Perhaps athletes are less inclined to cite engaging in the physical side of the sport as a benefit of participation because it is simply a norm that they accept as part of being an athlete in a contact sport. Without future research efforts in this area, we will never have a true understanding of how the benefits of lacrosse participation shape athlete’s lives and behaviors, as well as the perceptions that athletes may have towards physicality and violence as a benefit of participation.

The theme of regulation presented itself as a means of control and protection of lacrosse athletes. Without regulation, player safety would ultimately be disregarded and violent behavior would be allowed to proliferate. This would be an irresponsible approach by those in positions of power, and reveals that this theme of regulation is two-fold, as both coaches and officials hold this responsibility for player safety. In the practice setting, coaches must keep the best interests of their players in mind when setting up and running drills. Coaches should avoid putting athletes in a position where their well-being is compromised and should be vigilant in their observation of practice drills to be sure that players are safely engaging in the proper techniques of contact within the sport. Likewise, officials hold this responsibility during game situations, making sure that athletes are safe and competing in a manner that is in line with the rules of the sport. Should the physicality on the field get out of hand, officials have the ability to take control of the situation and administer the appropriate punishments. How far this control goes is a point of interest, as the importance of player safety would suggest that this control is an important aspect of lacrosse participation. However, it was noted in the participant interviews that players may be

more inclined to have less regulation and more freedom to play the game they want to play. It is difficult to determine which option is correct, but it is important to note how, even with this regulation, making widespread change on the on-field physicality and actions of lacrosse athletes is a challenge for both coaches and officials due to how ingrained it has become in the culture surrounding the sport. It is noted in the literature that “controlling such institutionalized violence is difficult because it requires changing the culture and structure of particular sports,” which could potentially be met with some animosity on the part of those involved in the sport who are happy with the way things are (Coakley, 2015, p. 156). Making these broad changes, even when in the best interest of the athletes involved, may lead to resentment on the part of participants, making it even harder to institute said changes while also promoting the continued growth of the sport. It is a bit of a dilemma, one which requires further research in order to gain a better understanding of any existing relationships between regulation in the sport and the behaviors of its athletes. With better knowledge of this relationship, perhaps it would ease the process of implementing new regulation procedures that also benefit the athletes competing in the sport.

On a similar note, the theme of the legal aspects of the sport of lacrosse was prevalent throughout the data collection process, particularly in regards to the level of physicality involved in the sport. As previously discussed, it is a difficult line to draw between what is considered to be legal contact and what isn't. As noted previously in the literature, the NCAA dictates that physical contact takes place from the “front or side above the waist and below the neck” area, while legal contact with the stick is only acceptable when an opponent “has possession of the ball...is within 5 yards of a loose ball or when the ball in flight is within 5 yards of the player” (NCAA Men's Lacrosse, 2015, p. 40). While these definitions for the legality of contact do seem to set a standard for what is accepted in the sport, it may also be dependent on the perceptions of

a given official what is considered legal and what is not. Individual interpretations of acts that take place on the field may ultimately govern how the sport is regulated. This inconsistency may lead to a lack of understanding on the part of both athletes and coaches, creating the potential for violent acts to occur due to the lack of knowledge on what is considered acceptable for any given official. However, what is clear is that the contact that occurs between players, if not properly controlled, has the potential to be the primary source of violent actions and lead to injuries in the sport. It is noted by Lincoln, Caswell, Almquicst, Dunn, and Hinton (2015) concussions that occurred in the sport of lacrosse resulted from “‘player-to-player’ contact, as opposed to ‘stick or ball’” forms of contact (p. 758). This reveals the potential of violent hits using the player’s body, those which go far beyond what is allowed within the rules of the sport, to cause major injury to an opponent. While this notion may not necessarily reveal a relationship between these types of actions and off-field behaviors, it creates opportunities for further research into the issue to mitigate any possible effects.

Finally, the theme of the division between on-field and off-field behaviors was one of the highlights of the research process. It has been noted in previous literature that athletes often have a difficulty in drawing the line between their behaviors on the field and those off it. One such example can be found in comments made by a former NFL athlete, saying that “During the game, we want to kill each other. Then we’re told to shake hands and drive home safely. Then a week later we try to kill each other again” (Coakley, 2015, p. 162). This hints that there may be a lack of behavior between the two sets of behaviors, as being conditioned act a certain way on the field may ultimately bleed over into one’s off-field behaviors. This may be a reasonable assumption however, all of the participants in the interview process of data collection communicated an interesting sentiment: they each felt that there was no relationship between

their on-field and off-field behaviors. This is a positive, as it seems that the relationship between on-field and off-field behaviors may actually be a minimal factor in the experiences of lacrosse athletes. However, we cannot justify making this assumption on the basis of just these interviews. The dissonance between the evidence presented in the literature and the data collection further highlights the need for further research on this topic to better understand any relationships that may exist. Gaining a better understanding of these relationships will allow for better education of athletes and ideally will minimize the negative means in which these relationships shape the behaviors of athletes.

As previously stated, it is clear these existing themes determined through this research project are only a small reflection of those themes that shape the relationship between on-field and off-field behavior in men's lacrosse athletes. This leaves much room for future research into this relationship. It is crucial that future research is conducted to explore this relationship even further and gain a better understanding of what can be done to protect the next generation of men's lacrosse players. Without this, any relationships that may exist will only be able to proliferate and potentially expand into other areas of athletes' lives.

Limitations

There were a number of limiting factors that hindered the carrying out of this study. While these limitations are a natural part of the research process, reducing the number of limitations would have a positive impact on the overall quality and thoroughness of the study as a whole. As such, this limitations section serves as a notice for ways in which research on this topic can be improved in future iterations.

For one, this study only examined men's lacrosse and its athletes, not including women's lacrosse athletes in the study. Including both genders in the study would give a more widespread look at how this issue of violence in sport shapes the behaviors of athletes in both sports. It would also bring in

the difference in style of play as a research factor, as men's and women's lacrosse play entirely different styles of the sport, with the men's game being much more physical than the women's. On this point, it's also important to note that this study not only solely examined men's lacrosse athletes, but also was solely focused on one geographic region. The students athletes interviewed in this research study were each members of the men's club lacrosse program at a major Mid-Atlantic university, while the lacrosse program that was observed for the purpose of this research study was also located in the same Mid-Atlantic region. This limited scope of research simply narrows the range of possible opinions to be gleaned from participants in either research function. By expanding into other regions, even better data can be found.

A second limitation of this particular research study was the overall lack of interviews that were conducted. The interview process was relatively short, with only three participants from the men's club lacrosse program volunteering to participate. This certainly limits the range of opinions and insights that can be drawn from a typical semi-structured interview process for qualitative research. By expanding the interview process to include more participants, higher quality data would be collected and improve the overall quality of the findings of this particular research study. Even increasing the range of interviews conducted by expanding to the men's club lacrosse programs at other major universities would likely improve the quality of the findings of this research study.

Another potential limitation of the data collection process is that participants may not have answered truthfully in their responses to the interview questions. Participants may have given the answer that they thought the interviewer wanted to hear or shaped their answer in a way that makes them seem to give the "right" answers and be viewed positively in the eyes of the interviewer. This phenomenon is known as social desirability bias, defined by Fisher as "the fact that in self-reports, people will often report inaccurately on sensitive topics in order to present themselves in the best possible light" (as cited in Social Desirability Bias, n.d.). This is a hindrance to qualitative research as it inevitably provides inaccurate data that shapes the way that the final themes are constructed from the data collection

process. This reveals the importance of creating an environment in the interview that makes the participant comfortable with sharing their true perceptions on a particular issue.

Beyond the interview process of this research study, the observation process was carried out over a relatively short amount of time, decreasing the total amount of data that was collected. A longer observation process would certainly provide any number of new or expanded data points that could have a major impact on the findings of this research study. Being able to expand the data collection process to allow for more observations would have a significant impact on the quality of data collected and the overall findings found from this research study. On a similar note, the lack of time devoted to the observation process and schedule did not allow for game observations to take place. Game situations in the sport of lacrosse are perhaps the best opportunity to observe the true actions of lacrosse players as they are not operating under the constraints of the practice setting. Carrying out observations during game situations would likely have provided a very accurate look into the connections between the physical aspect of the sport and the violent aspects that show themselves under the proper circumstances. Without this, the quality of the research study is ultimately hindered, and creates the opportunity for further research to be conducted on this topic including such game observations to further expand on the findings discovered in this study.

Conclusion

Violence has been associated with men's lacrosse since its creation, and the sport continues to be recognized as one of the more violent sports played in the United States today. From the days of Native American tribes playing to honor their ancestors and settle disputes, to the modern game being played at all age levels, violence and men's lacrosse have essentially been synonymous. Why is this? In a society that has become hypersensitive to sport-related head injuries, it seems a bit ironic that such a brutal sport has continued to grow at its rapid pace. Yet, the sport continues to grow at an exponential rate, working to break into the

mainstream of popular sports in our society despite its potential to breed violence in those that choose to participate.

Perhaps one reason why men's lacrosse has continued to be connected to such violence is the exotic nature that is still widely associated with the sport in society. While the sport is continuing to grow, it remains more of a niche sport in our society. Despite a very strong, albeit small, following of passionate fans, the majority of society is still becoming aware of how the sport works, and it continues to battle popular sports like football and basketball for more widespread media recognition. We can see this phenomenon dating as far back to the first encounter of European settlers with the sport, becoming attracted to the sport due to the strange nature of both the sport itself and its athletes. Perhaps such attraction, both then and now, can partially be credited to the violent nature of lacrosse, and the way that violence is incorporated into the actions and rules of the sport. Our society is one which is dominated by contact sports that are fast-paced and can keep the attention of the casual sports fan, so perhaps the violence incorporated into lacrosse is its key to hanging on to its growing popularity in our society. This could also be said of its popularity with people continuing to want to play the sport.

In a society dominated by gender stereotypes, masculinity in sports is often associated with being able to hit hard and being willing to take a physical beating for the sake of your team. In this context, lacrosse provides young men with the opportunity to not only learn to play a new sport, but also to show off their masculinity by engaging in violent physical contact with other athletes. This may lead to athletes desiring to prove their worth by being overly aggressive on the field, showing other athletes that they are the strongest of them all. Such hypercompetitiveness ultimately breeds the progression of violence, as athletes may feel the need to one up each other and prove that they are the most dominant on the field. This may lead to the incorporation of

more drastic levels of violence beyond the brutal body contact and borderline violence that is generally accepted within the culture of most contact sports. Thus, lacrosse can be seen as a microcosm of violence. From this perspective, the sport forces athletes to embrace violence in order to be successful, making it crucial to engage in potentially harmful violent actions. This notion of continual violence poses threats to the current and future generations of the sports' athletes. If this violent progression is left unchecked, who knows how far it could spread, risking the safety of the sport's athletes. Such a progression can also fuel the transition of the typical lacrosse player into being perceived as someone who embraces violence, even relishes in it: a description which could be the precursor to increased off-field violent tendencies in male lacrosse players.

While current research on the tendencies of male lacrosse players to commit violent acts outside of the playing field is lacking, it can be presumed that such tendencies may in fact be lying in wait, free from societal scrutiny due the relatively low awareness of the sport by the greater population. With this, we have to consider what it is about lacrosse, beyond the mere presence of violence, that could foster such violent actions. Perhaps it is the incidence of head trauma, comparable to that found in football, that can be credited to promoting violent tendencies off the field. We have seen numerous examples of the ill effects that concussions have had on elite level football players, so what is to say that the same could not occur in lacrosse? It could also be speculated that the stereotype that is associated with the sport and its athletes could also foster violent personality traits. Beyond its previously discussed exotic and Native heritage, the sport has become primarily associated with upper class white males, who have access to resources that allow them to play the game at the highest level that money can buy. While this is clearly not an absolute definition of what it means to be a lacrosse player, such stereotypes can

create various degrees of in-group mentalities, causing athletes to resent those not deemed worthy enough, in status or ability, to be associated with the sport's more affluent athletes. In such cases, athletes in the sport of lacrosse could see themselves as dominant over other athletes or individuals simply due to status and being involved the sport, and when such notions are challenged, they could resort to what they know best thanks to their participation in the sport: using violence to show just how dominant they are.

Whatever the case may be, it is crucial that measures are taken to get ahead of the issue, and attack it before it has the opportunity to manifest itself in full force. If such initiatives are held off until the presence of violence has escalated, it is ultimately too late. The sport will follow a similar trajectory as that of football in our society, where drastic changes are needed to rein in the rampant amounts of violence, met by disapproval due to the culture surrounding the sport and the sense of sport ethic associated with it. For the sport of lacrosse to truly flourish in the mainstream of popular sports, it is crucial that the causes of violent tendencies in athletes are diagnosed and attacked immediately, before they have the opportunity to take hold, and become more and more prevalent across all levels of the sport.

The research conducted in conjunction with this project revealed a number of existing themes related to participation in the sport of lacrosse. The themes explored a number of areas of the athlete experience with physicality and violence in the sport of lacrosse and highlighted topics of interest for further research. Yet, these themes were ultimately unsuccessful in identifying specifically how on-field and off-field behaviors are related in regards to men's lacrosse athletes. This creates a need for further research on the topic to further explore these themes to construct a better understanding of the experiences of athletes participating in lacrosse and how their off-field behavior is shaped by their behaviors on the field.

It is clear that relationships between violence and the sport of men's lacrosse exist; however, a lack of research on the matter makes it difficult to diagnose the nature of such relationships and how they shape the sports' athletes. This result reveals a drastic need for future research on the issue. With the increasing popularity of the sport in the United States, as well as all over the world, such correlations must be brought to light in order to protect future athletes from potentially harmful effects of the sport, as well as providing aid to current athletes who may be dealing with issues caused by their participation. With the amount of focus that our society has placed on diagnosing the impact of contact sports, primarily football, on athletes, we cannot neglect the importance of including men's lacrosse in such initiatives in order to provide athletes with a safer sports experience.

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