The 1970s, Hyper-Masculinity, and the Dark Ages of Hockey

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Abstract: *Professional hockey in the decade of the 1970s was hyper-masculine to its institutional core. Pro hockey in the past was certainly tied closely to traditional notions of normative masculinity, but professional hockey in the 1970s, with its heavy and hyper emphasis on violence and intimidation was new and concerning. Among the traditional institutional values found in the hockey culture of the 1970s were stereotypically masculine qualities such as physical strength, stoicism, loyalty, and, of course, obedience to a male hierarchy. But new core hyper-masculine values emerged in the ethos including a commitment to hyper-violence and intimidation as key tactics. In this paper, I engage in an historical analysis that demonstrates professional hockey in the 1970s was hyper masculinized, where hyper-masculinity was the new dominating cultural ethos guiding the gender performances of the players.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Professional hockey in the decade of the 1970s was hyper-masculine to its institutional core. Pro hockey in the past was certainly tied closely to traditional notions of normative masculinity, but professional hockey in the 1970s, with its heavy and hyper emphasis on violence and intimidation was new and concerning, at least that was the view of sociologist Michael D. Smith, in a 1971 paper presented at the Third International Symposium of Sociology of Sport in Waterloo, Canada.[1] Among the traditional institutional values found in the hockey culture of the 1970s were stereotypically masculine qualities such as physical strength, stoicism, loyalty, and, of course, obedience to a male hierarchy. But new core hyper-masculine values emerged in the ethos including a commitment to hyper-violence and intimidation as key tactics. Hyper-masculinity was so deeply valued within 1970s hockey culture that it likely represented the most important and key central concept in a player's entire hockey world. In this paper, then, the historical analysis demonstrates that professional hockey in the 1970s was hyper masculinized, where hyper-masculinity was the new dominating cultural ethos guiding the gender performances of the players.

The institutional hyper-masculine ethos was comprised of, and promoted notions of a 'real' man, based on external features of gender performance on the rink including physical size, increased willingness, and ability to fight, to intimidate others, and power and dominance over other men. To be sure, much more than in the past, a 1970s hockey masculinity was most effectively produced and reproduced through the exercise of hyper-violence, or via the threat of hyper-violence and a deep sense of retaliatory violence. Seen in historical perspective, the hyper-masculine ideology that underpinned the cultural fabric of hockey in the 1970s was evident in the attitudes and behaviours of the players and coaches. Values of the institution of hockey and those of some of the players and coaches combined to create a pervasive hyper-masculine atmosphere which functioned to produce a hyperviolent game, sometimes at the players' own expense. As such hyper-masculinity existed to shape the prevailing ethos and was key in structuring the experience of what constituted a 'real' hockey player in the professional ranks during the 1970s and ushered in the 'dark ages' of hockey. In this paper we explore some of the ideas embedded in Cassel's and Dryden's epigraphs.

Hockey as a sport cannot be truly understood unless it is placed within its proper socio-political and historical context. In the following section, we briefly locate elite and professional hockey in the social, political, and historical context of the 1970s.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE 1970S

When historians describe the 1970s, they usually describe the period as one of decline and despair. Certainly, by the beginning of the 1970s, post war prosperity was coming to an end as the Golden Age of North American capitalism started its economic decline. Sustained inflation was punishing families economically, wages were stagnant, unemployment rates were increasing. Many North American manufacturers faced foreign competition and were increasingly demanding reductions in the benefits they had agreed to provide to workers. Unions were losing membership. Family life was changing too and the marriage oriented 1950s were beginning to recede. Age at marriage was rising, sex outside of marriage was increasing, cohabitation was becoming common, birthrates dropped to the lowest levels ever, and divorce rates were soaring. At the same time, other political and social change was reshaping the historical landscape of the 1970s. An increasingly powerful and visible civil rights movement, second wave feminism, an emerging gay and lesbian movement, the Indigenous Red Power movement were together reshaping the social, cultural, and political context. No doubt, 1970s men, in particular white cis-gender men had to navigate a new cultural terrain that presented a challenge to white heterosexual hegemony and disrupted traditional gender roles, producing white male despair and resentment. The sources of an older masculine identity such as being the primary breadwinner, the masculine prerogative in public life and patriarchal authority in the home were slowly eroding. Men who came from the ranks of the lower middle class, office workers, salaried salesman, and from the working class, the factory worker or the skilled worker saw their access to power and privilege in decline.

While Helen Reddy's hit song "I Am Woman" became the feminist anthem of the 1970s behind the lyrics "I am woman/ Hear me roar," John Lennon (*Working Class Hero,* 1970), Loretta Lynn (*Coal Miner's Daughter,* 1970), Bruce Springsteen (*Born to Run*, 1975) and Johnny Paycheck (*Take This Job and Shove It*, 1977) sang songs of working-class defiance and despair. But it was the popular 1970s sitcom, *All in The Family*, that may have been one of the more important cultural representations of working-class realities. First airing in January 1971, the show reflected the 1970s as a time of diminished expectations for white men, in particular middle and working-class men. In each show, Archie Bunker would criticize and castigate women, feminists, or a racialized minority group as they seemed to be challenging his way of life. Bunker, as the theme song announced, yearned for a time when "girls were girls and men were men" and when guys like him "had it made." In contrast, the 1950s and 1960s were clearly time periods where white male heterosexual privilege embodied in the character Archie Bunker was simply taken for granted. The white men from these generations were entitled socially, politically, and economically in ways that white men from the 1970s were not. Men from the 1950s and 1960s expected and operated from the unquestioned assumption that they would inherit positions of cultural, social, and economic power, find themselves with a good paying factory job, or find themselves in engineering, business, medical or law school, sitting comfortably in corporate or political corner offices. The men from previous generations had largely unquestioned access to women's bodies and adopted the taken for granted assumption that all positions of power, wealth, and influence in society were reserved for them. Due to economic, political, and social change brought on, in part, by the rise of second wave feminism, the emergence of gay liberation movement, and the ongoing civil rights movement, the 1970s marked the beginning, to some limited measure, of the slow erosion of white-middle - and working-class masculine privilege and power.

During the decade of the 1970s, there was a loosening of gender roles in light of second wave feminism, women's increased movement into the waged labour market and the emergence of a 'men's liberation' movement and its challenge to the traditional male sex role; yet there was also a concern there existed a 'decline in manliness' among men and boys. Although less well remembered today, scholars and media pundits in the 1970s pondered what they saw as a 'crisis' in masculinity. Karl Bednarik, in his 1970 book *The Male in Crisis,* argued that men were "castrated in the modern world."[2] For Bednarik the increasingly feminized modern world had eliminated traditional pathways for men to secure their manhood. An article published in the September 25, 1970, edition of *Life* signalled the challenge to traditional "he-man" masculinity. Titled "Male Plumage" the article suggested that a "Peacock Revolution" was beginning, changing the way men dressed and presented themselves as men. Out with traditional male clothing and accessories, and in with a look that mirrored traditional femininity: "men's boutiques now do a brisk trade in necklaces, purses and earrings. Health spas find the demand among business and professional men for mudpacks, hair tinting and skin creams – all once the exclusive

province of women."[3] Other articles from a variety of periodicals reflected similar themes. "Are Men Really Men Anymore?" questioned a writer in an article from the August 1972 issue of *Reader's Digest*, while the October 1975 issue of *Ms.* was a "Special Issue" devoted entirely to exploring the changing, but increasingly alleged feminized state of manhood. Three years later *Newsweek's* January 1975 issue cover story told the story of "How Men Are Changing," and showed readers how, by featuring on its cover an illustration of a white middle-aged man cooking dinner, dressed in an apron, men were becoming 'feminized.'[4] In an early interview from November 1976 with the *New York Times,* filmmaker Sylvester Stallone, known best for his 1977 Oscar winning film *Rocky*, expressed concern that traditional masculinity was in decline:

I don't think that even women's lib wants all men to become limp-wristed librarians. I don't know what is happening to men these days. There's a trend toward a sleek, subdued sophistication and a lack of participation in sports. In discos, men and women look almost alike, and if you were a little bleary-eyed, you'd get them mixed up. I think it's wrong, and I think women are unhappy about it. There doesn't seem to be enough real men to go around.[5]

Capturing the on-going theme of men's emasculation, three years later, in 1979, Bill Hayward, manager of the Cooper Hockey School in Northern Ontario warned over 300 parents, hockey players and others gathered at an awards banquet that, "Young hockey players have none of the 'masculine toughness' they used to have." The hockey coach went on to claim that the loss of "masculine toughness" among hockey players was "because they [men and boys] live in a very soft, very advanced society."[6] The emergence of a hyper-masculine ethos during the decade of the 1970s in professional hockey, which was historically rooted in a white working-class masculinity, was established, and needs to be situated within these significant historical currents.

3. HYPER-MASCULINITY AND THE DARK AGES OF HOCKEY

The 1970s ushered in what former National Hockey League (NHL) player Barry Melrose called the "Dark Ages" of hockey. And by dark ages, Melrose, who played professionally from 1974 to 1987, meant that hockey in the 1970s deteriorated in a way that it became much more violent, much more aggressive, and much more about physical and psychological intimidation than in the past. Looking back on that era, Melrose had this to say about hockey in the 1970s from his 2012 memoir, *Dropping the Gloves*: *Inside the Fiercely Combative World of Professional Hockey*:

Those years were the Dark Ages. There were many fights every game, and line brawls every night. A line brawl is when all five guys on the ice are fighting at one time-sometimes even the goalies got involved. Bench clearing brawls were also common. There'd be more guys in the penalty box then on the bench. Hockey in those years was crazy. It started changing back to more of a skill game in the 80s, but the 1970s were a dark decade for the NHL, and for all of hockey.[7]

Melrose's comment speaks directly to the way hyper-masculinity, best understood as an intensification of hegemonic understandings of what constitutes a 'real man', took hold in professional hockey in the 1970s. Here's the historical truth of it, in the 1970s brawn, brutality, and thuggery had taken over speed, skill, and finesse as central in the ethos of hockey.

The rise of hyper-masculinity as the prevailing hockey ethos in the 1970s, and its emphasis on violence was fuelled by a number of complex and overlapping historical factors including the NHL expansion in 1967 when the Original Six teams became 12; the lengthening of the NHL season from 70 to 78 games; and the emergence in late 1971 of a rival league, the World Hockey Association (WHA). These changes, in part, created a new demand for labour within professional hockey, a key factor in the emergence of a hyper-masculine ethos in professional hockey. Players that were dismissed in earlier years as not good enough, too old or too small or too soft to play, or "college guys," had to be given another look to see if they could fill an NHL roster. Former NHLer Ken Dryden, who played throughout the 1970s with the Montreal Canadians, noted that general managers, particularly those from the expansion teams now had to find players who were good enough for the NHL, but were never good enough before. Here is Dryden explaining in his 2019 book, *Scotty: A Hockey Life Like No Other*, "So, [Glenn] Hall, [Jacque] Plante, [Doug] Harvey, and Al Arbour, who had been to old were now no longer too old, and Frank St. Marseille, at 27 and having never played higher than the international hockey league (IHL), were entering the league."[8] Expressing a similar thought, Bill Gutman, in his 1973 book *The Hockey Explosion,* explained to readers that, "suddenly, more than four times as many players are

professionals, and all of them can't be as good as the small group that operated in the old NHL," suggesting that talent in the 1970s was spread thin.[9]

The recruitment of older and less talented players in the 1970s created a sizeable skills gap between players, all of which help lead to the deterioration of the league and, as once academic of the time put it, the "dilution in the quality of play."[10] This was Dryden's point:

[I]n the late 1960s and 1970s, after the NHL expanded from six teams to twelve- where half the league, overnight, being made up of minor leaguers, the sizable gap between the skilled players and the rest required a more simplified game.[11]

The simplified game that Dryden described became a more violent game. It was at this time that teams really began to understand that recruiting players of lesser talent and skill levels who played first and foremost to intimidate opponents could help win them games, and, as the Philadelphia Flyers found out in the 1973-1974, 1974-1975 seasons, even win the Stanley Cup. Statistical compilations indicated that the levels of violence in hockey were becoming alarmingly high during the early to mid 1970s. The individual record for most penalty minutes amassed by a professional hockey player in a single season increased from 153 minutes in the 1967-1968 season to 472 minutes in the 1974-1975 season.[12] NHL officials assessed 22, 329 minutes in penalties during the 1974-1975 season, an increase of 25% over the previous year. The NHL commissioner of the time, Clarence Campbell (1946-1977), who reported hearing at least ten discipline cases a week in 1975, and ten cases a season in which civil authorities might think a crime had been committed called 1975 "our worst year ever for violence on the ice."[13] The following season, 1976, was even worse.[14] Free-lance writer, Clive Cocking, writing in the January 24, 1976, edition of the *Globe and Mail,* had this to say about the rise of hockey violence in more everyday terms, "I don't have any statistical proof for this, but I suspect you would be less likely these days to have violence done to your person in a back alley than on a hockey rink." [15] For Cocking, hockey has always had a violence problem, but only in a limited way. Hockey violence by the mid 1970s, Cocking concluded, had escalated in the 1970s in such a way that it had been "honed to a fine art."[16]

Skills still mattered, of course, but in the 1970s skills seemed to matter less, at least compared to brawn and brutality. This was William McMurtry's point, when he was interviewed in 1974 on CBC's radio program, *4 to 6.* McMurtry, a well-known Toronto lawyer who had been commissioned by the Government of Ontario to investigate violence in amateur hockey in Ontario, had this to say about which type of player was increasingly being valued by NHL management: "General managers quite openly stated a preference for tough guys. Fast, skillful players like Yvon Cournoyer were not drafting high."[17] In the same interview McMurtry, commenting on the implications of valuing brawn over skill claimed that "Hockey is sick … I believe the situation is getting worse." In his final report, published in August of 1974 and titled, "*Investigation and Inquiry into Violence in Amateur Hockey,"* McMurtry went on to outline what he believed to be the key reasons of increased violence in hockey, first among them was, "its emphasis on winning and use of violence as a tactical instrument to achieve that goal."[18] The use of hyperviolence as a key tactical strategy for winning games was epitomized by Bobby Clarke in the 1972 Summit Series which saw Team Canada play eight games against the Soviet national team for world hockey supremacy. In game six of the series, with Team Canada down in the series 3 games to 1 (game 3 was a tie), Bobby Clarke took his stick and slashed Russian great Valeri Kharlamov on his ankle, breaking it. For some commentators, Clarke's thuggery changed the course of the series in Canada's favour. For others such as hockey referee, Clarke's action had much bigger implications that went well beyond the Canada-USSR series: "Hockey changed when Clarke broke the Russian's ankle ... It stopped being hockey and started being something else, something more like ... war."[19]

Clarke's rough and physical play in the 1972 Summit Series against the Russians was the kind of hockey that would be embraced and encouraged by his NHL coach, Fred Shero. Embracing the hyper-masculine tough guy ethos as central to his team's identity, Fred Shero (1971-1979) understood clearly what type of player he wanted for his team: "There are guys who rush into corners determined to come out with the puck. On the other hand, there are guys who always make sure they're late arriving in the corners. We don't have any of that second kind."[20] Shero, in an article published in the November 1974 issue of *Maclean's,* made clear his reliance on intimidation as a key tactical strategy in a discussion with Canadian journalist and sportswriter Trent Frayne:

Intimidation is a big part of the game. A lot of guys would be better off if they fight but they're afraid. If there's skating room, they look just great and they score a lot of goals against the easy teams. But in tight, in tough games, they freeze. [21]

Shero's use of violence and intimidation as key tactical strategies and finding the right players to implement the strategy functioned together to produce their first of two consecutive championships in 1974. Here is Barry Melrose explaining how Shero's strategy of full-on violence and thuggery was the deciding factor in securing Philadelphia the Stanley Cup:

At the direction of Flyers management, Fred [Shero] also took the game to a new level of violence. All of a sudden, instead of trying to win games with lots of talented players, Philly would fight you. They intimidated teams; they really did. Then, in 1974, they won the Cup.[22]

Intimidation by one player was an attempt to humiliate another. And for players, humiliation meant emasculation. Humiliate a player and you took away his manhood. The gender equation was simple for hockey players in the 1970s, humiliation had to be avenged, or you ceased to be a man, and by extension ceased to be a player. Humiliation was so injurious to a player's psyche, so threatening to the identity of themselves as 'real men' and as 'real hockey players' it had to be healed. It was this fear of being humiliated in front of teammates and other men, coaches, and fans, that some men feared most. Dave Forbes, a player for the Boston Bruins, was tried in a criminal court in the summer of 1975 for aggravated assault. The criminal charge against Forbes was laid after butt-ending Minnesota North Stars player Henry Boucha's eye socket. The trial received much public attention, as it was highly unusual at that time for an athlete to face criminal charges for actions taken during competition. The trial ended with the jury unable to reach a decision and the charges dropped. Yet, the incident clearly had an impact on Forbes:

What would make me do such a thing? I don't have an answer for that. I do know I was a little punchy, a little lost that night. Then, when Boucha punched me early in the first, I remember thinking, 'What's this? Things aren't bad enough but now I have to catch it from this guy?' I was probably a little embarrassed, humiliated. I'd been put down, made to look like a fool, and I felt that I had to prove myself so that coach would think better of me. So, I kept pumping myself. I could feel my stomach going … and then it happened.[23]

Forbes' testimony revealed the way in which the humiliation of one player by another player in front of coaches, teammates, and fans, was a key factor in fuelling violent confrontations between players.

Or consider the testimony of popular 1970s pro-hockey player Derek Sanderson who explained in his 2012 autobiography *Crossing the Line: The Outrageous Story of a Hockey Original*, the fear he felt at being humiliated, embarrassed by another player in front of others:

I started playing hockey when I was eight, and that was one of the first things my dad had me thinking about: conditioning myself to ignore pain and never allowing it to intimidate me. And it never did. Getting beat up? That didn't bother me. Cut, bleeding, broken bones? That didn't bother me. Fear of embarrassment and fear of rejection – that bothered me. Losing a fight in front of all those people, whether it was in junior or the NHL, was my greatest fear in hockey.[24]

The great shame that a player felt after being beaten by another man on the hockey rink was captured by Canadian sociologist, Michael D. Smith in his 1979 paper titled, "Hockey Violence: A Test of the Violent Subculture Hypothesis" and published in the journal, *Social Problems.* In his research, Smith found that, "In professional hockey, testing and being tested by means of naked physical force seems one of the games constants, failure-public cowardice-the quintessential mortification."[25] Players in the 1970s expressed themselves not so much as engaged in an inner competitive struggle for achievement, although that was certainly a part of it, but more through a collective toughness, a masculine performance recognized and approved by their teammates. The ongoing fear of humiliation, appearing weak and less masculine in front of others, of being dominated by another player, of been rejected by other men, pushed players into action that sometimes bordered on criminal behaviour.

Given the changing hockey ethos with its emphasis on brute force over finesse, players of the 1970s were much more attuned to the constant threat of violence on the ice, and much more physically tested in a way that they had to prove their manhood than those in the past decades. Describing his experiences as a player in the 1970s, Barry Melrose put the matter this way,

Everyone was tested, all the time. You had to stand up for yourself. As I said, you had to prove to the guys on your own team that you were tough enough to go into New Westminster or Birmingham or Philadelphia or Boston and play, and not be scared. Testing was a big thing in that era. Number one, you have to prove to your own team that you had enough guts to play, but also you had to prove to the rest of the league that you weren't a coward, that you were able to play that rough style of hockey. It was much more of a physically testing league then than it is today.[26]

If a player's worth rested primarily on their willingness to fight and be successful; it was no surprise that some players and professional teams hired boxing coaches. Chicago Blackhawks player Keith Magnuson took boxing lessons, [27] while semi-pro teams such as the Cincinnati Swords of the Eastern Hockey League hired boxing coaches and installed punching bags in the dressing room.

The Swords and Voyageurs staged a two-game show at the Halifax forum that ranks among the all-time great spectacles on the East Coast, complete with a Crozier news conference, the introduction of a punching bag into the Cincinnati dressing room and the appointment of US Olympic boxing coach Rollie Schwartz to instruct the Swords on the manly art of self defense, not necessary as outlined by the Marquis of Queensberry.[28]

Some sociologists of the time described violence on the rink between players as "character contests." In a 1974 paper published in *Sociology of Work and Occupations,* researcher Robert R. Faulkner argued that violent encounters in hockey are used to understand another player's "essential character," and to find out "what they're made of."[29] In his research which included interviews with 38 players on two teams in the American Hockey League (AHL), a player must, under no circumstances back away from a violent confrontation. To do so would open himself up to allegations of cowardice, and essentially undermine his career as a hockey player. In the hockey ethos of the 1970s, cowardice in the face of a confrontation now became the most serious of sins. The social organization of violence in professional hockey according to Faulkner, centered on masculinity contests that were based on violence, but also took into consideration "honor, revenge, and retaliation." [30]

Some players began to speak out against the intensification of hockey violence and thuggery. Bobby Hull, just six weeks into the 1975 season, sat out a game in protest against the increase in the "brutality" and the ongoing "malicious attacks on teammates." [31] Hull, frustrated went on to warn, "if something isn't done soon it will ruin the game for all of us. I've never seen so much vicious stuff going on."[32] For Hull, not only was the violence unprecedented, but it had the possibility of undermining the game of hockey altogether. Here is Hull in a 1975 interview: "if something isn't done soon it will ruin the game for all of us. I've never seen so much vicious stuff going on."[33] In an article published one year later, in the April 24, 1976, edition of the *Globe and Mail,* Hull remarked that the violence in the game has "gotten worse" and "wherever you look it's the same. The junior leagues, the minors, the kid's hockey teams … are all doing the same thing, destroying hockey with brutality and savagery."[34] One year later, in a January 1977 article published in the *Hockey Digest*, Hull went even further on his views about those players who are primarily concerned about inflicting violence on the ice. Here is Hull: "Guys like that can't skate or shoot and they're out there for only one reason. They ought to be kicked out or put in a league of their own where they can kill each other." Other players, while recognizing the ramping up of brutality on the rinks, resigned themselves to the fact that violence sells tickets. Instead of watching skilled and gifted players work, fans were forced to watch "muggings," opined Bobby Clarke in a 1975 interview with *Sports Illustrated*. Clarke explained to readers that the rise in hockey violence, not only sold more tickets, but was also simply a reflection of the broader societal changes of the 1970s: "If they cut down the violence, people won't come out and watch. Let's face it, more people come out to see Dave Shultz than Bobby Orr. It's a reflection of our society. People want to see violence."[35]

The trend toward recruiting players who were fully committed to aggression and violence did not go without some public dissent. Well-known hockey writer Stan Fischler put the matter this way in a 1974 *New York Times* article: "gore threatens to score heavily in the months to come." Fischler noted that, "Nobody suggests that legal hitting be eliminated from a robust body contact sport such as hockey. What is terribly disturbing, however, is that violence and fighting have become strategic techniques in winning, techniques glorified above and beyond reason."[36] Prominent Toronto lawyer and Conservative member of Parliament from 1975-1979 Arthur Maloney complained in a 1974 *New York Times* article that, "Canadian hockey isn't breeding men of character and future leaders, it's breeding a stable of animals. It's an outrage."[37] Maloney's concern reflected the shift in sensibility when it came to 1970s

hockey masculinities, from a hockey culture that accepted, nurtured, and promoted a version of an 'acceptable' masculinity that employed violence in a controlled, planned, deliberate, and measured way, to a culture that was increasingly accepting and nurturing a hyper-masculinity that engaged in unplanned, hasty, and impulsive violence. For Maloney, the underlying concern was that hockey was failing as a middle-class character-building exercise for men and boys. Instead, 1970s men and boys were being taught to embody an excessive, hyper-masculinity, one that was too violent, too out of control.

Other writers viewed the rise of a hyper-masculine ethos with its emphasis on violence, thuggery, and intimidation in a much more cynical way. Bill Smiley, writing in the May 12, 1977, edition of the *Stouffville Times* questioned, "Why should I worry about the managers and coaches encouraging blood brutality? Those people are mere stooges for the owners. They have to fill rinks and win games. Or "So Long, Charlie."[38] Smiley went on to explain his feelings on the matter, Should I feel sympathy for the players, forced into fraudulent ferocity by owners, coaches, fans? No way. I pity them for the punishment they take, but the same time pity them for being patsies for everybody else. Well paid. If they want to be actors, let them thesp out. If you want to be thespians, nothing fast, through the missing front teeth. If they want to begin, let them going away, as long as they get in on each other, and not on me … should I feel content for the fans, the screen for blood, who cursed colorfully the opposition when it is winning, blasphemy bitterly their own team white is losing? No. I feel no more contempt for them that I do for the Roman mob, suckered by the Caesars into going to the games. [39]

The emergence of a hyper-masculinity ethos found in the pro ranks was having a broad influence on those involved in hockey at the younger ages. Through exemplars of hyper-masculinity 'real men' were constructed within specific gender regimes within the context of 1970s professional hockey. These hockey players became symbols when taken up as exemplars of masculinity for boys. This was Bill McMurtry's point, but also his fear. For McMurtry, these players displayed models of admired masculine conduct circulated by shows such as *Hockey Night in Canada* and other the popular media, along with being exalted by the popular periodicals such as the *Hockey News* and *Hockey Illustrated* that encouraged young boys to be violent on the rink. Here is McMurtry again speaking to CBC radio in 1974: "Violence is increasing among amateurs because kids imitate the hockey hoodlums they see on television." In the interview, McMurtry went to on to suggest that "Hockey has adopted the football philosophy of the late Vince Lombardi. Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing. Sportsmanship is trampled to justify that end." The interviewer then went on to ask McMurtry, "Would you call the Lombardi philosophy fascist?" McMurtry responded, "It's sicker than that, there's something wrong with the sport that glorifies a player like Dave Schultz of Philadelphia. His play is hockey by intimidation, not skill[40] For McMurtry, professional hockey hoodlums' adoption of a hyper-masculine style of play and the violence that it brought seemed too much. It was okay, he seemed to be saying, to have violence if it was limited and contained, but a problem when it went spinning wildly out of control.

According to Michael D. Smith, a Canadian sociologist writing in the late 1970s, the relationship between fighting and male hockey players took hold in a much deeper way around the age of 12. Prior to this age, researchers suggested, violence was of little concern for minor hockey players. In fact, according to Smith most boys at this age looked "askance" even upon rough play. However, he noted that, by age 12 size and toughness seemed to increasingly become important in the player selection process when it came to the competitive, travel hockey world. Players and coaches alike, started to assess and evaluate players on their so called 'gameness.' Gameness was a way for players to forge a manly reputation in the hockey world. By age 14, most boys were schooled already in the informal norms that regulate the use of violence. In this sense, violence was normalized. So called deviants, 'Chickens' suffered varying degrees of abuse and denigration, depending on how well they compensated for lack of courage with other attributes. According to some researchers of the time tough talk, and tough and rough action became the key standard, and coolness *de rigueur*.[41]

An article published in the March 22, 1975, edition of the *Globe and Mail* highlighted how hockey violence in the minor leagues was forcing referees to quit. Journalist Alan Christie noted that referees in the Greater Winnipeg Minor Hockey Association were used to verbal abuse, but it has taken a vicious turn by the mid 1970s. Christie noted, "At least 37 officials have quit, and some describe this year as the worst for violence, on and off the ice."[42] Christie goes on the supply an anecdote to capture the growing mood among hockey fans: "Early in the season a group of frenzied young fans, upset perhaps at the team losing 'because the referee blew it' tried to run down an official as he walked through the

parking lot after a game." Citing the rise in bench clearing brawls, fans yelling at the referees, the irrational behaviour of parents, and the over emphasis on winning, "nine officials, including two who quit because of the abuse, talked about the tragedy that had befallen minor hockey in Winnipeg." Frank McKinnon, president of the Manitoba Amateur Hockey League, stated that violence in minor hockey is "just a tragedy." Bud Sherman, PC Fort Garry, raised the matter of violence and abuse in the provincial legislature, where he suggested telling the presidents of the National Hockey League and World Hockey Association "that they are setting a bad example for young players, because they condone and sometimes encourage fighting." Research from sociologists in the early to mid 1970s, found that minor hockey players who aspired to secure work, through gaining attention from their coaches new that one's capacity to fight was key. "In the minor professional game players see fighting ability and other wars of skills as highly important in impressing coaches and management."[43]The strong association between the dominant model of hyper-masculinity and physical violence turned some young boys off hockey in the 1970s. Some boys found it difficult to enjoy the sport considering its close association with violence and violent bullies. Reflecting on his childhood years growing up in the 1970s, journalist and CBC radio host Grant Lawrence recalled in his 2013 autobiography, *The Lonely End of the Rink*: *Confessions of a Reluctant Goalie,* "All the kids that beat on me, mentally and physically, were wearing hockey jackets." Because of this, Lawrence notes that as a boy he "associated violence and intimidation and fear with hockey. I didn't want anything to do with it."[44] Lawrence tells readers that hockey in 1970s was a very "violent game," that attracted "bloodthirsty bullies." For Lawrence, in the context of the early 1970s, "bullies and hockey seem to go hand in hand."[45] Musician and writer Dave Bidini also wrote about hockey and violence in a similar way. In his 2013 elegy to 1970s Toronto Maple Leaf player Dave Keon, *Keon and Me,* Bidini wrote how as a boy he was "appalled at how the Flyers cheated and bent the rules in order to win, which they did a lot, winning the cup."[46] Bidini recalls that a writer called Philadelphia the 'Broad Street Bullies,' and "pretty soon everyone called them that because that's what they were: bullies. They turned hockey into a crazy violent circus."[47] For Bidini, who as a boy growing up in Toronto was the target of homophobic bullying in the mid 1970s, the violence he was experiencing in his own life at the hands of neighbourhood bullies seemed to have been influenced by what was happening on the professional hockey rinks.

4. HOCKEY, HYPER-MASCULINITY, AND HOLLYWOOD

Given the public concern and attention over hockey violence, it is no surprise that it was a rich subject for Hollywood filmmakers. *The Deadliest Season,* a 1977 film made for television starring Meryl Streep and Michael Moriarty and intended to be a commentary on violence in hockey, featured a skilled professional player, Gerry Miller, who is sent down to the minors for not being violent enough on the rink. "What are you, Dorothy Hamill? …We don't need any figure skaters," Miller is told.[48] Miller rescues his fading career by adopting a model of hyper-masculinity, becoming violent, playing dirty and much more physically aggressive than in the past. By committing to becoming excessively violent, he regains his stature in the hockey community until he goes too far and kills an opposing player. He is charged with manslaughter and a court case ensues, all of which reflected the concerns and preoccupations of hyper-masculinity, violence, and hockey in the 1970s. The critique of hockey violence expressed in *The Deadliest Season* ran alongside the hugely popular 1977 Hollywood film *Slap Shot. Slap Shot* brought together white heterosexual male working class identities with semi-professional ice hockey. The film, which tells the story of a small-town semi-professional hockey team, the Charlestown Chiefs, is set in the fictional small New England factory town of Charlestown. Deindustrialization has impacted Charlestown with the local mill closing, forcing 10,000 workers out of their job. The town is clearly in bad economic shape, a shell of its former thriving self. Gutted economically, its full demise seems inevitable. *Slap Shot* needs to be understood then, as situated within the historical, political, and socioeconomic context in which deindustrialization, economic restructuring, and growing inequalities served to re-work the relationship between social class identities, white masculinities in the 1970s.

Laced with homophobic and misogynistic language, *Slap Shot* features character Reggie Dunlop, played by actor Paul Newman, an aging player and coach of the Chiefs. The plot is centered on Dunlop finding a way to save the failing hockey club from moving out of town due to financial concerns. Reflecting the economic concerns that profoundly shaped 1970s white working-class communities, Dunlop wants to keep the club from being sold to save the players' jobs. Like many working-class people from the 1970s, the hockey players wanted some job security and benefits, and better pay more than they wanted

to win a trophy or a championship. In the context of a declining factory town such as Charlestown, a community with little hope, teetering on the brink of despair, the Chiefs provided fans with a distraction, but may be also some hope. So how does Dunlop attempt to save the team, and by extension the community?

In attempt to save the languishing hockey club, Dunlop promotes the use of verbal and physical violence, and of course relies heavily on intimidation as a tactical strategy. For Dunlop, the math is simple: the more violent and bloody the Charlestown Chiefs become, the more people come to watch. The more people come to watch, the more money the team makes. So, fights before games, during games, and after games. Bloody violence becomes the key selling point for the Chiefs. Fans became enthusiastic and bloodthirsty, encouraging the Chiefs at every hockey game to commit violent mayhem. The Chiefs win hockey games, not by skill and finesse, but by intimidating and physically beating up opposition teams and referees. Featuring the well-known goons, the 'Hanson Brothers,' three white working-class brothers who were simply fighters and brawlers on skates, the Chiefs became symbolic of white male working-class anxieties, if not a form of masculine working class anti-heroes. Clearly, the narrow version of hyper-masculinity as displayed by the Hanson's was to be understood as the expression of the individual player's performance, but also that excessive hyper-masculinity turned into a parody as they engaged in countless fights and other acts of masculine violence. For those men who longed for a venue in which to express their desire for traditional masculinity, a bare-knuckled brawl on the rink, complete with all the traditional masculine values such as punishing aggressors, defending teammates and upholding manly honour, viewing *Slap Shot,* like pro hockey itself, must have been a welcome release.

5. CONCLUSION

By the end of the decade a hyper-masculinity ethos was still present in professional hockey but starting to fade. Hockey writers such as George Vas felt a mix of "moral condemnation, threat of jail, [and] new rules laying down codes for more genteel behavior," were helping to end the dark and violent decade of hockey. Certainly, the threat of criminal charges put a damper on fighting, which ran alongside increasing public outrage over overt acts of thuggery and violence, and its influence on boys playing minor hockey. The fact that Ontario's Ministry of Culture and Recreation and Ontario Hockey Council published a lengthy joint report in 1980 on how to create a positive learning environment in youth minor hockey provides some evidence that those in power were ready to act at the policy level to end hockey violence.[49] A change in rules also played a role. In the summer of 1979, for example, the NHL introduced a helmet rule making helmets mandatory for all new players entering the league and optional for established players. With the arrival of plastic helmets, fighting became more dangerous, with players risking injuring their hands on another player's helmet. In addition, the successful cup winning Montreal Canadiens teams of the late 1970s helped in that they were able to show how superior skill triumphed over brutality. While skills took a back seat to intimidation and violence throughout the decade of the 1970s, and a violence first strategy adopted by teams like the Flyers which sent the league into its darkest days, produced a few Stanley cups, the highly skilled, fast skating Montreal Canadiens out skilled those teams that relied on brutality and brawn and ushered in an era where skills were once again most valued. There were still doubters, of course. Goalie Glenn Resch, for example, summed up the state of hockey in a January 1979 interview with Barry Wilner of the *Hockey Digest*, "Except for Montreal, the best teams don't win anymore… Intimidation, gooning it up, being as vicious as you can, that's how playoff games are won these days."[50]

During the 1970s the kind of work that many blue-collar men engaged in and produced not only bitterness, and resentment but also alienation. The work became much less about skills, knowledges, and expertise and much more about simple repetition especially with the development and expansion of the mass production line. Many blue-collar workers situated across factory floors simply did not engage in work that was meaningful or work that provided a sense of autonomy. They had little access to personal power in their workplaces. The spectators that filled the stands in hockey rinks sought fulfillment of the same desires being enacted in the rink. The rink on which players enacted a hyper-masculinity put them in a position of power that the spectators envied. But the spectators themselves were vicarious participants in the hockey brawls and fights, encouraging their teams in acts of violence and reacting to and with the punches until the fight was over. Therefore, the hockey brawls and fights, as a demonstration of masculine strength, belonged to the spectators as much as the fighters, who were, to some degree, the actors on the stage. The gendered power issues at stake were self-generating,

overpowering the opponent was the understood goal, physical strength was rewarded, weakness punished. The struggle of men engaged in physical violence and on display for public consumption magnified the tensions and private desires of some men at a time when masculinity was thought to be in crisis. In this sense, the hockey violence so prevalent in elite hockey in the 1970s functioned in a way as an agent for maintaining and reinforcing an ideology of the dominant, virile white masculinity at a time when it was considered under threat.

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