

On Thin Ice: Toward A Modified Male Peer Support Theory of Professional Hockey Players' Violence Against Women

Walter S. DeKeseredy,¹ Stu Cowan,² and Martin D. Schwartz³

¹Department of Sociology and Anthropology, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV, USA; ²Sports Columnist, Montreal Gazette, Montreal, QC, Canada;

³Department of Sociology, George Washington University, Cincinnati, OH, USA

There was a burst of creative social scientific investigation into hypermasculine male athletes' violence against women in the 1980s and 1990s, but this interest has seemed to have dried up. Furthermore, the extant literature on this problem is for the most part atheoretical and devoid of sociological ways of knowing. Thus, the main goal of this paper is to highlight the value of applying a modified male peer support theory of male-to-female violence to explain the linkage between playing professional hockey and online and offline variants of woman abuse.

There was a vibrant surge in the 1980s and 1990s of scientific investigation into hypermasculine male athletes, and their abuse of women (e.g., Benedict, 1997, 1998). However, this wave receded over the past two decades and began to disappear. For example, none of the 54 chapters covering close to 900 pages are allotted to violence against women in Mansfield et al.'s (2018) *The Palgrave Handbook of Feminism and Sport, Leisure and Physical Education*. The same is true in Giulianotti's (2018) *Routledge Handbook of the Sociology of Sport*. Explaining why this is the case is not one of the objectives of this article, but it should be emphasized that, as Spaaij (2018) points out:

Scholars in the disciplines of sociology, psychology, criminology have investigated diverse forms of sports violence. However, they typically fail to recognize the full diversity of sports violence and limit their inquiries to . . . violence among fans and violence among athletes . . . As a consequence their perspectives and explanations are at best partial. (p. 324)

Buttressing this claim is the fact that until the publication of Moore and Shah's (2021) *Game Misconduct: Hockey's Toxic Culture and How to Fix It*, male professional hockey players' abuse of women did not garner much media and scholarly scrutiny. This is particularly true when compared with the attention given to gendered violent acts committed by both professional and collegiate football and basketball players. For example, two recent articles on male athletes' violence against women in the widely read and cited journal *Violence Against Women* do not mention hockey players' abusive conduct (Sailofsky, 2022a; Sutton, 2022).

The coverage tide started to turn not only because of the publication of Moore and Shah's book, but also because of the case of Logan Mailloux in the summer of 2021. There was extensive media coverage of the first-round draft pick of the Montreal Canadiens National Hockey League (NHL) franchise. The attention was not because it was a first-round draft pick, or because of his on-ice talents. While on loan in December 2020 due to the COVID pandemic from the prestigious amateur Ontario Hockey League (OHL) team the London Knights to SK Lejon, a Swedish amateur club, Mailloux photographed a woman without her

consent while performing a consensual sexual act. He then, in an action that many hockey fans deemed a forgivable mistake, shared this image and her name with his Swedish teammates.

Though it has its limitations (see Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019), the #MeToo movement has resulted in some instances of tangible action taken against male athlete perpetrators like Mailloux (Abrams & Bartlett, 2018; Gregory, 2017). Professional athletes are often able to avoid extensive punishment because of the resources and structural power advantage they have over their victims (Sailofsky, 2022a). However, in the "climate of #MeToo," Toronto Blue Jays pitcher Robert Osuna, who was arrested for assaulting a woman in May 2018, was suspended in late June 2018 for 75 games, which is the third-longest domestic violence suspension in baseball history (Griffin, 2018; Leitch, 2018). Still, it is surprising that Mailloux was charged with, and convicted of, defamation and offensive photography and fined US\$1,650 by a Swedish court in December 2020. Most image-based sexual abuse offenders never endure serious legal consequences (Zauner, 2021); their female targets are the ones who suffer. Many, if not most of these survivors experience one or more of the following outcomes: victim-blaming; ridicule; lost employment opportunities; and alienation from family members, friends, and community members (Henry et al., 2021).

Mailloux's crime, like comparable and more heinous ones committed by athletes in a wide variety of sports, is not an isolated incident or the act of a lone deviant man (Sutton, 2022). Mounting empirical evidence provided by Moore and Shah (2021), Pappas (2012), the Angus Reid Institute (2021), and others (particularly hockey journalists) support this claim made by Rachel Doerrie (2021), contributor to *Rinkside* and OHL scout:

Quite clearly, hockey culture is in a terrible place . . . It's in a place where it's fine to draft players guilty of sex crimes or racial bullying and/or to hire those accused of domestic violence in front office jobs . . . This is the culture that has been accepted in the game. As long as you can skate, shoot, hit, and contribute on ice, you can be a deplorable human off of it. (p. 1)

Hockey is not completely outside the purview of academic inquiry, but, as revealed by MacDonald and Edwards (2021), the bulk of the scholarly contributions made to date come from historians and literary scholars "whose interests focus on the lost or misunderstood meanings of signal past events in the sport

... . The field of hockey studies would benefit from getting closer to the game ...” (Stevens & Holman, 2013, pp. 251–252). This field would also gain from the application of social scientific theories, even if they are speculative. Indeed, “speculation is the social of the social sciences” (Lave & March, 1993, p. 2).

Many theories lay out the factors that best predict male violence against women but close to 40 years of rigorous international research shows that one of the most robust determinants of who beats, rapes, or otherwise victimizes women is whether the offender receives *male peer support* (MPS; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013; Schwartz, 2021). This concept refers to attachments to male peers and the resources that these men provide that encourage and legitimate woman abuse (DeKeseredy, 1988a). Men (and women) are exposed to a wide variety of messages that support and oppose various behaviors, something that is at the core of much criminological theorizing (see Lilly et al., 2019). In the context of a social world that provides extensive messages offering excuses and justifications for the exploitation and victimization of women, many men (and women) are concerned and confused by their relations with the opposite sex (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2015). MPS theory suggests that when some men seek the advice of their male peers, they are given both encouragement and advice on how to abuse women who “talk back” or do not provide them with sex on demand.

Since DeKeseredy (1988a) introduced the original MPS theory, he and his colleagues have developed seven modified variants

of this perspective (see DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013), none of which focused specifically on male professional hockey players. Building on previous MPS theories, then, the main objective of this article is to highlight the value of using a modified MPS perspective to explain the linkage between participating in this hegemonically masculine sport and women abuse.

Figure 1, like Sutton’s (2022) framework for understanding athlete multiple perpetrator rape, has not yet been subjected to a complex empirical test of the entire model. Given its complexity, it may very well be that, like Sutton’s offering, it has more value as a multilevel heuristic or teaching model than as a predictive one. This is also true about DeKeseredy and Schwartz’s (1993) modified MPS model, which heavily informs Figure 1. In other words, its greatest value lies in summarizing the complex literature (a teaching model), rather than to isolate and predict which specific professional hockey players are most likely to abuse women (a predictive model; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). However, hypotheses derived from DeKeseredy and Schwartz’s (1993) theory have been tested using a national representative sample of college students (some of whom are elite athletes) and have received empirical support, as have tests of other hypotheses from these models on regional samples (see DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998, 2013). Furthermore, in the tradition of developing sound speculative theories, following Swedberg (2021), Figure 1 is “constructed in such a way that it is testable in principle” and “it is stated clearly that ... it is the result of speculation” (p. 70).

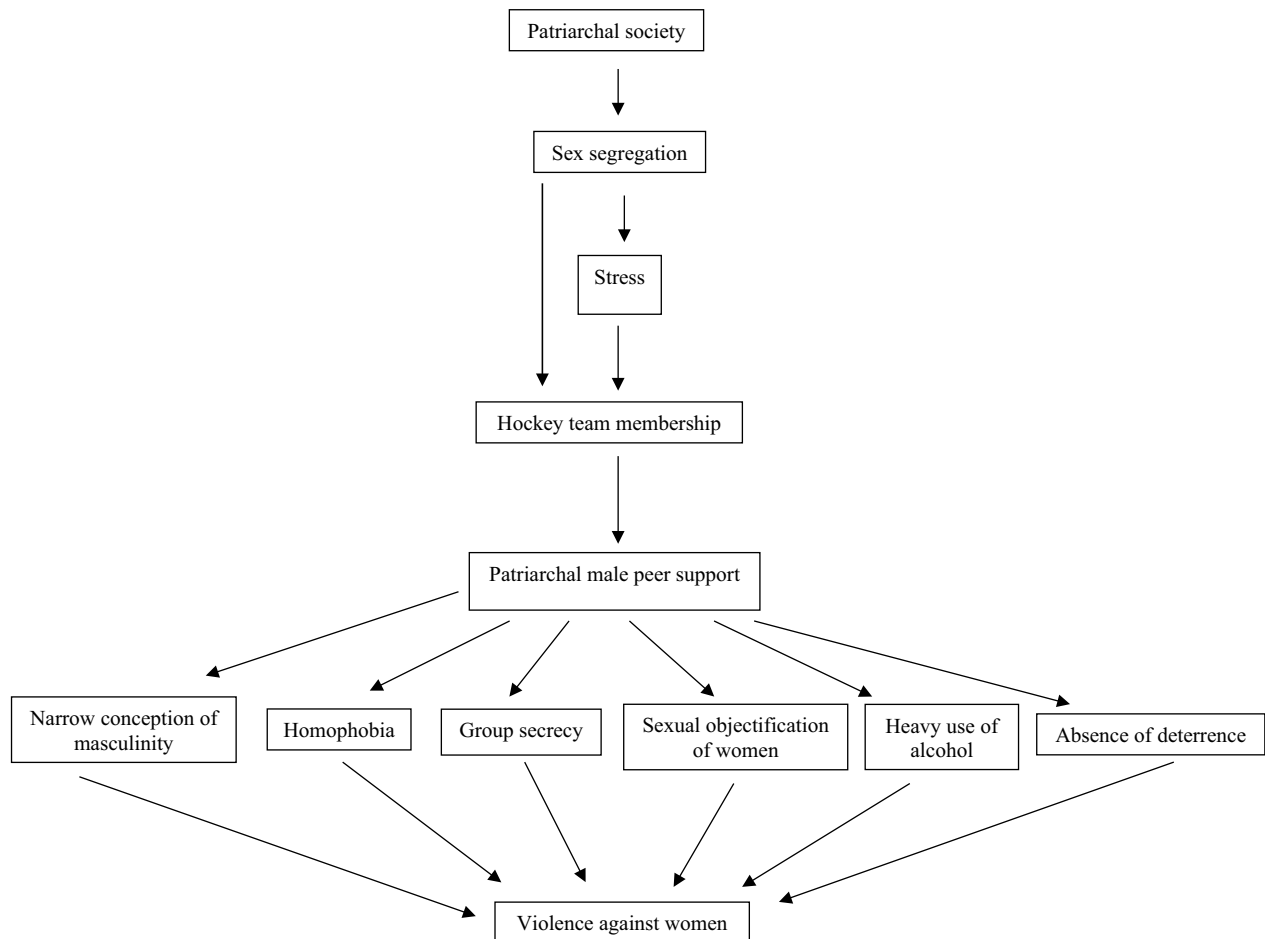


Figure 1 — A modified male peer support theory of professional hockey players’ violence against women.

In what follows, we use our modified MPS model as an outline to discuss the most important factors that influence elite hockey players to abuse women. First, though, it is necessary to provide a brief rationale for devoting in-depth theoretical attention to hockey's misogynistic culture and its injurious effects on women.

The Importance of Studying Hockey

Why focus primarily on hockey, especially the role its professional variant plays in violence against women? In addition to what was stated above, there are several other key reasons for pursuing more rigorous social scientific understandings of the “dark side of ice men.” First, hockey, like some other professional all-male sports, has a culture of toxic masculinity that rewards men for their violent behavior on and off the ice (Alsarve, 2021a; Burstyn, 1999; Pappas, 2012; Young, 2019). Yet, there are features that are absolutely central to hockey culture, such as:

It thinks of itself as a sport that imparts positive values and creates better people, especially in making “boys into men.” It champions respect, teamwork, niceness, and coachability. While these values are good, they are often twisted into something more sinister. These “values” are converted into actions that control and shape how players think, feel, and act.

Hockey exists in its own bubble, literally and figuratively. It's composed mostly of boys and men who are White, cishet, straight, and upper-class. And those who play often become coaches and teach the same values to the next generation. (Moore & Shah, 2021, p. 1)

Second, and more importantly, professional male athletes, including hockey players, from “the more hegemonically masculine, high-revenue sports” have higher rates of woman abuse compared with athletes in noncombative sports (Sutton, 2022, p. 4). What is more, there is a widespread rape culture in hockey, especially in Canadian men's junior hockey leagues like the OHL (CHL Independent Review Panel, 2022; Robinson, 2015; Todd, 2022; Westhead, 2022), which are prime breeding grounds for the NHL and the gendered violent acts committed by the players and coaches affiliated with it (Angus Reid Institute, 2021; Robinson, 1998). Explaining why hockey players abuse women motivated the construction of Figure 1, which we turn to next. Centering attention on elements of our theory also provides additional compelling reasons for focusing on the connection between professional hockey and woman abuse.

Broader Social Forces: The Influence of Patriarchy

The modified MPS theory offered here begins with the empirically grounded claim that male hockey players, like all men, learn a substantial number of actions, values, and beliefs from growing up and being part of a larger culture. Most professional hockey players are based in North America and the values and beliefs they express are microsocioal expressions of broader social forces, which in this continent, are too often patriarchal forces. Patriarchy is certainly threaded throughout hockey. The definition of patriarchy is passionately debated within feminist circles, but it is still widely used because, as stated by Hunnicutt (2009), it keeps the focus “directed toward social contexts rather than toward individual men who are motivated to dominate” (p. 554). As well, contemporary feminist scholars identify varieties of patriarchy (DeKeseredy, 2022; Ozaki & Otis, 2017). Following Renzetti (2013), patriarchy is

conceptualized here as a “gender structure in which men dominate women, and what is considered masculine is more highly valued than what is considered feminine” (p. 8). All the same, feminists recognize that not all men benefit equally in patriarchal societies and that some women have more privilege than others (DeKeseredy et al., 2021; Renzetti, 2018).

As some close followers of hockey observe, patriarchy is evident in this sport:

through the presence of ice girls or through the comments of the sports broadcasters. For example, broadcaster Mike Milbury in the context of the NHL's playoff bubble during COVID-19 restrictions in 2020, called women a distraction for hockey players. Women and nonbinary people are judged by their clothes, how they speak, when they look like, how they act. Women in hockey are often harassed online in their direct messages and are often the recipients of sexist insults, questions about their hockey knowledge, or inappropriate comments. Those who are not cisgender men do not fit into this community. (Moore & Shah, 2021, p. 15)

There is a small, but growing literature that features many more examples of how women are devalued in hockey and other male-dominated sports (e.g., Anderson & White, 2018) but it is beyond the scope of this article to review it. One of the most important points to consider here, though, is that as a patriarchal institution, hockey, like other hypermasculine sports, culturally separates men from women and heterosexual men from gay, bisexual, and other males who have sex with men. One of the most powerful means of doing so is “its offering of ideal types and behaviors for men” (Burstyn, 1999, p. 27), which starts at an early age. Moreover, hockey players' violence against women is both *patriarchy-enhancing* and *patriarchy-facilitated*. Following Appin et al. (2022), hockey players' abuse of women is patriarchy-enhancing “when it is patterned and when it maintains or strengthens the patriarchal gender order” of elite hockey culture (p. 7). Patriarchy-facilitated violence “results from cultural attitudes, norms, practices, laws, and institutional arrangements tied to patriarchies” in the world of elite hockey that “produce, encourage, legitimate, normalize, and/or justify violent practices” (pp. 10–11).

Sex Segregation, Stress, and Hockey Team Membership

A central feature of our MPS theory is that adolescent and teenage boys suffer from stress and angst brought on by the pressure of developing interpersonal relationships, particularly with girls, combined with the pressures of puberty-driven hormonal and physical changes (DeKeseredy, 1988b). MPS theory asserts that such young men in stress would turn to their male peers for advice, mainly in group settings. As well, many adolescent boys looking to cope with the various pressure involved in interpersonal relationships turn to sports as their main coping mechanism (Schwartz, 2021). The coping lesson that they often learn from teachers and peers are that they should develop a strong variety of sports aggression to be successful on the playing fields (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993). MPS theory includes an element suggesting that one central aspect of an ideal masculinity is athletic success. The sports aggression fostered by most male youth sports teams is often produced by the promotion of antifemale, homophobic culture. By high school, male athletes may start to recognize the role that sport plays in this generation of hegemonic masculinity, but

they still support a specifically antifemale, homophobic culture (Dempster, 2009).

Professional hockey players' adoption of a masculinity based on misogyny and homophobia is facilitated by sex segregation that begins at the level of minor hockey. This separation into all-male groups cultivates in male team sports the tapping into a dominant cultural discourse that promotes sexist, misogynist, and antifeminine attitudes. Their segregation limits male social contact with females, which makes it easier to adopt an oppositional masculinity that incorporates views supporting violence against women. Anderson (2008) found that these attitudes do not develop or disappear when men are involved in sex integrated team sports such as cheerleading, track, and golf. However, they are widespread in physical contact sports like hockey and football.

Sex segregation within the world of hockey, as Robinson (2012) discovered, creates team subcultures that, to a large extent, have their own norms and schedules that function independently from the larger culture. More than other sports, hockey promotes structures where young men are isolated from family and friends, to limit strong influences on teammates and coaches. Drawing from Goffman (1961), Robinson defines all-encompassing hockey subcultures that perpetuate and legitimate sexual assault and other forms of woman abuse as *total institutions*. Robinson, as well as sports sociologist Steven Ortiz (1997), directs us to the fact that everything Goffman describes is found in professional male sports teams. They both define them as *mobile institutions*. As Robinson (2012) puts it, "What matters most to sports teams is not location, but rather the presence of the coach, a team that obeys the 'rules' and the psychological and physical power the team and coach command over any space they occupy" (p. 73).

Professional and other types of elite hockey teams resemble total institutions, but it is difficult to imagine their continued sexist and homophobic influence unless they were actively, or at least tacitly, supported by society at large or powerful elements of it. To again quote Robinson (2012), "It is difficult to write about hockey as a total institution in Canada because there is such a pro-hockey bias in the media and among many Canadians" (p. 74). Similarly, although referring to hate crimes, Levin and Nolan (2017) identify a variety of supporters such as hate-mongers, dabblers, and sympathizers, and show that while a small group of offenders commit these crimes, the enabling support of ordinary and powerful members of mainstream society is necessary for it to continue.

Alcohol Consumption

Included in our MPS theory is the fact that alcohol is a common feature of many young men's social networks, such as U.S. college fraternities (Spencer et al., 2022) and is, as well, often involved in sexual assaults committed by male athletic groups (Steele et al., 2020). Once labeled by Pierre McGuire (2007), former Ottawa Senators' senior vice president of hockey operations, as hockey's "dirty little secret," alcohol consumption is also strongly associated with hockey players' physical and sexual assaults on women (Alsarve, 2021a; Mendes et al., 2022; Pappas et al., 2004). Men have a strong expectation of alcohol's effects. Following these expectations fuels misperceptions of women's sexual intentions and may serve as a justification for men's sexual violence (e.g., "she really wanted it").

The relationship may not be causal, but alcohol abuse is definitely strongly related to male assaults on women (DeKeseredy, 2021;

Miller-Perrin et al., 2018). Sociologists who specialize in MPS theory (e.g., DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013), for instance, find that alcohol abuse plays a major role in peer group processes related to violence against women. Alcohol, in fact, is often used in all-male social contexts that support patriarchal conversations about women's sexuality and how to control it. Some men, including those who are professional hockey players, gather at bars or pubs to drink, have fun, and to avoid women. Women are not allowed to join them because female exclusion serves to validate and sustain masculine superiority, solidarity, and dominance (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013).

Men often use bar events, especially "nights out with the boys," to prove to each other that they are not "under their wives or girlfriends' thumbs." Nevertheless, women remain focal points of conversation. What is more, drinking with male peers helps some men explain away, rationalize, and excuse embarrassing, unsightly, and even criminal conduct, such as aggressive and violent behavior toward women (Vander Ven, 2011). Group discussions in bars, too, often emphasize violence as a means of maintaining control and may even encourage some men to be sexually aggressive toward specific women (DeKeseredy, 2019a).

Some sports bars are off-ice "safe havens" in numerous communities where hockey players are treated like gods. They are privileged, allowed to drink "on the house," and given permission to abuse and engage in conversations that objectify women in these places (Pappas, 2012). For example, one of the five former college/professional hockey players interviewed by Pappas et al. (2004) said:

I think that date rape is prevalent among the jock culture. There are things that are not violent, but they just seem kind of wrong that guys do in terms of how they relate to women—off the ice. They treat women like objects—sexual objects. They talk about them as if they aren't there, as if the [the athletes] were in the locker room talking . . . and don't care what they say at all because they think they're still going to have sex or whatever. Things like machismo group mentality, that locker room mentality, comes out in off-ice behavior . . . treating women really bad . . . like one-nighters or short-term girlfriends or someone they didn't care very much, just as object or sex partners. (p. 306)

In sum, one cannot understand hockey players' violence against women without factoring the role of alcohol. Its use and abuse among these athletes according to Pappas et al. is, "nearly universal" and hockey is a "culture that is defined, in part, by the use of alcohol in leisure" (p. 309). Perhaps this is best described by *Yahoo!Sports* reporter Justin Bourne (2011):

The culture of the game carries with it a few things that aren't a ton of fun to talk about (you know, rampant homophobia, casual misogyny, etc.), but it also proudly unites those who like to have a good time, a pursuit in which The Sauce plays a fairly significant role. It's simply woven into the fabric of our game—hell, the NHL is sponsored by Molson. We're in this together, beer.

From recreation leagues to the show, drinking is just part of the lifestyle I'm just explaining—it's part of our game at every level including junior. (p. 1)

It is vital to examine how alcohol contributes to hockey players' abuse of women, but our MPS theory is informed by

data showing that a richer understanding is obtained by examining the off-ice all-male group contexts in which players consume it. Many years of research show over and over again, that men who admit to physically and sexually assaulting women are among the heaviest drinkers and they have heavy drinking peers who perpetuate and legitimate their misogynistic behaviors (DeKeseredy et al., 2013).

A Narrow Conception of Masculinity and Homophobia

The sexual, physical, economic, and psychological abuse of women is a brutal outcome of *hegemonic masculinity*, which is the dominant form of masculinity in North America, Australia, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere (Connell, 1995; DeKeseredy, 2022). Its basic components are as follows: (a) avoid all things feminine, (b) restrict emotions severely, (c) show toughness and aggression, (d) exhibit self-reliance, (e) strive for achievement and status, (f) exhibit nonrelational attitudes toward sexuality, and (g) actively engage in homophobia (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997).

Every sport rooted in competitive masculinity produces some problematic men, from sailing to skiing to tennis to video gaming or esports. Nonetheless, professional hockey seems to produce more than its share of violent, racist, homophobic, and misogynist men (Moore & Shah, 2021). Hockey teams use a variety of procedures to ensure that players adhere to their standards and expectations of masculinity (Alsarve, 2021b). The initiation ritual is one of the most successful methods of ensuring conformity to gender-appropriate norms. It is also a bonding mechanism that attempts to ensure long-term loyalty to the team (Anderson & White, 2018).

For example, a class-action lawsuit filed in 2020 against the Canadian Hockey League and the Western Hockey League, the OHL, and the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League alleges that players were forced to masturbate in front of teammates, consume saliva, urine, and feces of other players, and to sexually abuse animals. The suit also alleges that players had heavy objects tied to their genitals had their genitals dipped in noxious substances, and objects like hockey sticks were forced into their anuses (Campbell, 2020).

Gang rapes, too, are means of ensuring that players adhere to their team's narrow conceptions of masculinity. As Robinson (1998) uncovered in her study of sexual assault in junior hockey:

A player who engages in group sex, who long ago shut down the voice inside him that questions if the woman has really consented, does so because he needs to meet his own standards of masculinity and gain the approval of his teammates, who will judge him not as a compassionate human being, but as a hockey player. His actions have nothing to do with providing sexual pleasure and respect for a woman and everything with being seen as a man in his world. He does this because being a "team player" is good for his game, his bank account, and his future worth in hockey. (p. 118)

It becomes more important to be part of the team than it is to do the right thing. This is why, many argue, so many essentially "good" kids take part in a gang rape or stand by and watch a woman being held down and raped in a basement while she screams, or just brush off hearing about such an event the next day without even considering taking any action against it (Jozkowski & Wiersma-Moseley, 2017).

Some may contend that Robinson's observation is dated and that the atrocities she exposed are less likely to occur in the current era of #MeToo. Nothing, however, can be further from the truth. As Shah (2021) reminds us:

Nothing changed. In some ways, it's gotten worse Hockey is still operating now the way it did twenty years ago Organized hockey is too often a safe haven for predators. This isn't new. But now it feels worse than before. Now it feels like gloating in the faces of survivors. (p. 1)

Empirical support for Shah's claim is found in a May 2022 legal case. A young woman was gang raped by eight Canadian World Junior Hockey Team members in April 2018 in London, Ontario. She had been drinking with some players at a bar and then went to a hotel room with one of them. After they had sex, he invited seven of his teammates into the room and then they slapped her, spat on her, and repeatedly sexually assaulted her. She recently agreed to drop a \$3.55 million lawsuit in exchange for a settlement reached with Hockey Canada. Most of the offenders are now affiliated with NHL teams. The NHL defined the survivor's allegations as "both abhorrent and reprehensible" and promised to see if further action is necessary (Todd, 2022). The survivor, who is now 24, claimed that Hockey Canada was told about the assaults and neglected to investigate or punish the perpetrators (Westhead, 2022), which lends more support to claims made in the section of this article that focuses on the absence of deterrence.

Informed by Anderson's (2009) *inclusive masculinity theory* (see also Anderson & McCormack, 2018; Anderson & White, 2018), some scholars argue that homophobia has decreased over time in male team sports. There has been some progress in hockey, but research shows that attitudes toward sexual orientation in this sport are split (MacDonald, 2018). Most experts in the field agree that North American hockey and other male team sports still "lean toward the model of hegemonic masculinity" (Allain, 2008; MacDonald & McGillis, 2021, p. 223; Stick, 2021). Furthermore, there is evidence that homophobia and heteronormativity are still rampant in professional hockey (Moore & Shah, 2021).

While the NHL is the lone professional sports league in the world in which every franchise hosts a Pride Night, only one openly gay player (Luke Prokop) is currently under contract to an NHL team (Nashville Predators). He has not yet played in the NHL. No openly gay men are currently playing because "shame and fear" are used "on a broad scale to keep gay NHL players invisible to the public eye" (LeBlanc, 2021, p. 203). Not surprisingly, other hockey leagues, too, are homophobic. A study of semiprofessional male hockey players in Australia (none of whom identified as gay or bisexual), for example, found that 68% reported teammates using homophobic slurs in the previous 2 weeks and 60% reported using such slurs themselves. The players surveyed are from 11 different countries, including 25.3% from Canada and the United States (Denison, 2019).

Group Secrecy

On top of adopting a heavy drinking lifestyle, a narrow type of masculinity, and homophobic attitudes and beliefs, men are taught other negative things in sexually segregated *mobile total institutions* like professional hockey teams (Ortiz, 1997). One of the notable ones, according to our MPS theory and the data that support

it, is *group secrecy*. It keeps them from revealing their teammates' deviant behavior to "outsiders." It also tells violent men that their actions are not wrong. Group secrecy is an integral part of patriarchal male athletes' *culture of protection* (Young, 2019). It operates in ways that are hard to detect.

Protecting their livelihood and the financial interests of the teams they work for are obviously two of the most important motives for the group secrecy of hockey players and other male athletes. Bonds of brotherhood created through hazing and other social interactions encourage players to protect their teammates from public stigmatization and punishment, even if they must lie to investigators to achieve this end. According to the United States College Hockey Organization (2004):

Hazing in athletics happens mostly as a form of initiation or a rite of passage onto a team. Student athletes frequently give in to hazing because they are willing "to do anything" to gain acceptance. Hazing is believed to act as a bonding or unifying experience for athletes, particularly, when it is practiced as a form of initiation to welcome, for example, new freshmen to the team. (p. 1)

Major examples of hazing in high profile, revenue-generating male athletics, including hockey, are readily available in both academic and journalistic sources (e.g., Champion et al., 2020; Pappas, 2012), but it is beyond the scope of this article to provide them here. The most important point to make is that the group solidarity that hazing and other initiation rituals promote makes men remain publicly silent about their peers' transgressions. Likewise, they know that their teammates will always "have their backs" and not cooperate with investigations into their own deviant behavior that may be conducted by the police and senior NHL officials. What is also so important in all this discussion is that group secrecy tells all violent hockey players that their actions are not wrong. It is a lesson that many have learned very well and put into action.

Senior NHL team executives, too, contribute to group secrecy. Though not a case of violence against women, the atrocities committed against Kyle Beach by the Chicago Blackhawks organization should be briefly addressed here because they are related to not only group secrecy, but also to issues like the protection of financial profit in sport, the toxic masculine culture in sport, and homophobia in men's sports. In 2010, Beach was one of two players who revealed to Blackhawks front-office officials that he was sexually assaulted by then-video coach Brad Aldrich and these men in leadership positions chose not to report their employees' traumatic experiences to the police. It may be unclear exactly why, but in the section below on lack of deterrence, the adherence to corporate goals of maximizing profits is tied to silence and a lack of punishment for serious crimes. Admitting that your staff is engaging in homosexual assaults on its own members could cut into team profits (Hebert, 2021).

In October 2021, an independent investigation commissioned by the team and conducted by the Jenner and Block law firm (see Schar, 2021) confirmed the allegations and this resulted in the Blackhawks being fined US\$2 million by the NHL due to "the organization's inadequate internal procedures and insufficient and untimely response" to the complaints (cited in Federico-O'Murchu, 2021). As well, Stan Bowman, Chicago's general manager (GM) and president of hockey operations resigned from his job and his position as GM of Team USA's 2022 Olympic hockey team. Al MacIsaac, vice president of hockey operations, also resigned.

Sexual Objectification of Women

In addition to learning to hide their peers' deviant activities, hockey players are taught to sexually objectify women. Pornography is closely connected to both this problem and players' violence against women. In fact, male bonding through drinking while viewing porn is a common practice and it is "gateway to sexual deviancy" as uncovered by Pappas' (2012) study of collegiate hockey players. One told him:

Two-thirds of his team would show up late night to participate in a competitive drinking event that involved pornography, team bonding, camaraderie, and perhaps some peer pressure as well. Furthermore, it is apparent that these activities were normalized within this team's culture because the players knew exactly how much time they had to finish their "30 pack" since they were all too familiar with the pornography and its accompanying binge drinking (p. 60)

Two players told Pappas they were convinced that porn caused violent sexual behaviors since viewing demeaning acts made them "more acceptable" and they provided "a lot of ideas." One of them said:

I don't want to be a porn star you know, but . . . when you see something on a porn video, maybe I'm going to try that tomorrow or tonight when I bring a girl home. I think a lot of ideas come, where we get these ideas, comes from that. They're not natural, some of the things we tried to do. Like the two-on-ones, the three-on-ones, whatever. I think it has a big influence on sexual deviancy I think it's the stuff you've heard about, stuff you've seen—the porno stuff, or guys' older brothers have done and told them about it. (p. 60)

What men and boys watch (often in groups) online are not simply "dirty pictures that have little impact on anyone." Rather, the images typically endorse "women as second-class citizens" and "require that women be seen as second-class citizens" (Funk, 2006, p. 120). Also challenging the assertion that "pornography is just fantasy" are studies done around the world showing that degrading sexual images featured on the internet and elsewhere are strongly associated with violence against women (DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2016; Foubert, 2022). Of major importance to this article is this fact uncovered by Pappas (2012): athletes' (including hockey players) pornography consumption "can be rampant" and serve "as a 'how to guide' for sexual deviancy/aggression" (p. 13).

Nonetheless, it is problematic to argue or to assume that there is a direct causal relationship between porn consumption and violence against women. It is still unclear whether porn of any sort directly causes woman abuse. A long-term and expensive longitudinal research design is required to determine whether such a relationship exists. In addition, some unknown but presumably large numbers of porn users, regardless of whether they are hockey players, do not abuse women (DeKeseredy, 2020). Furthermore, the same factors that cause a man to abuse women may well also cause him to watch porn.

Absence of Deterrence

It is not only connections and interactions with teammates that encourage and justify the criminal actions of hockey players like Logan Mailloux. Broader organizational forces, such as the NHL's insatiable hunger for profits, grants players permission to abuse women because they help achieve corporate goals. The lack of

meaningful punishments or negative sanctions are powerful institutional mechanisms that facilitate players' offline and online abuse of women (Sutton, 2022).

For example, in 2018, Nashville Predators player Austin Watson was arrested and charged with domestic assault, and he was supposed to be suspended for 27 games after a league investigation. NHL commissioner Gary Bettman announced, "Today's ruling, while tailored to the specific facts of this case and the individuals involved, is necessary and consistent with the NHL's strongly held view that it cannot and will not tolerate this and similar types of conduct" (cited in Moore & Shah, 2021, pp. 129–130). The NHL may claim that it has a "strongly-held policy," but it does not have any written policy or explicit rules on sexual assault or domestic violence. Rather, it relies on Section 18-A.5 in its collective bargaining agreement covering any criminal investigation:

The league may suspend the Player pending the League's formal review and disposition of the matter where the failure to suspend the Player during this period would create a substantial risk of material harm to the legitimate interests and/or reputation of the league.

The NHL reviews violence against women incidents on a case-by-case basis. This allows Bettman to hand out punishments that can easily be struck down by an arbitrator who disputes his decision. Note that the NHL Players' Association appealed Watson's suspension and an arbitrator reduced it to 18 games (Munschauer, 2022). It also allows the commissioner to individually craft punishments to match the importance of the player to the league.

Many times, the culture of protection, which prioritizes both the absence of deterrence and group secrecy, enables some perpetrators to "bounce back without serious ramification" shortly after they are convicted of some type of assault or sexual harassment (Young, 2019, p. 247). Slava Voynov exemplifies such a life course trajectory, though he did not bounce back to the NHL. After he was arrested for brutally beating his wife in 2014, the NHL, citing Section 18-A.5, suspended him indefinitely and the Los Angeles Kings terminated his 6-year, US\$25 million contract shortly after that. He also spent 2 months in jail and decided to return to Russia instead of facing deportation proceedings. He eventually "landed on his feet" and at the time of writing this article, played for the KHL team Dynamo Moskva, and he played for the 2018 Russian Olympic hockey team.

Not surprisingly, broader organizational forces, such as maximizing profits, grants players permission to abuse women and continue playing because they help achieve corporate goals (Sutton, 2022). This send a strong message that players' on-ice performance is more important than the plight of the women they harm outside the rink (Moore & Shah, 2021).

There is evidence that formal sanctions can have some effect on behavior. The problem is that the NHL's approach is inconsistent and ineffective. There is a consistent pattern of players punished by the criminal justice system for their assaults on women and then being warmly welcomed back on the ice. Logan Mailloux, as mentioned above, is a recent example and there are other cases well before his. The decision to let an abusive player return to the ice is often publicly announced as one that "is not taken lightly." After exoneration, teams frequently claim that the players are on the "road to recovery" (Moore & Shah, 2021). These two narratives, "second chance" justifications offered by team officials, and the lack of clear-cut violence against women policies partially

explain why there are so many male athletes in both the upper- and lower ranks of combative sports like hockey who are pro-abuse and who engage in numerous pro-abuse activities like gang rape (Abrams, 2022).

The quest for profit is not the only reason for the failure to sanction hockey players who abuse women. Another factor that comes into play is that the bulk of NHL teams' executive departments are dominated by male decision makers, many, if not most, of whom lack a sensitivity to women's concerns (Moore & Shah, 2021). For example, ESPN reporter Emily Kaplan (2018) asked former Florida Panthers General Manager Dale Tallon if he believed the NHL should adopt a specific domestic violence policy. He answered: "It's something I never even thought of . . ." (p. 1). Some top executives in both the NHL and the teams are either uncomfortable with, or are uninterested in, formulating policies designed to reduce the number of women who are victimized by players, coaches, and other personnel off the ice. Some teams, like the Montreal Canadiens, assert that they now take complaints of woman abuse seriously, but there is still ample evidence offered by a cadre of sports journalists that professional hockey teams and the NHL's head office still provide institutional support for the male peer group dynamics that perpetuate and legitimate female victimization and for the abusive behaviors of individual and group perpetrators.

Professional hockey life is where "connections" are made on the way to career achievements that not only involve scoring goals, getting assists, or stopping pucks (Dryden, 2019). Lessons learned from one's teammates can spill over into an executive board room in the future. Most NHL GMs and a sizeable portion of higher-level executives, for instance, are former players, with Marc Bergevin the former Montreal Canadiens GM who drafted Logan Mailloux being a prime example. In the context of the theory put forth in this article, however, what is most important is that the attitudes men develop and learn through playing hockey can result in some men, under strong peer influence, attacking women physically, sexually, and electronically. Those who rigorously study the "dark side" of hockey (e.g., Moore & Shah, 2021; Robinson, 2012) reveal that senior team and league officials are fully aware that these assaults are taking place. We contend that their silence and other insensitive responses must be considered when developing sound theories or explanations for why athletes who participate in hyper-masculine, highrevenue generating sports like hockey and football have higher rates of violence than do other male athletes like professional bicycle racers.

It is not only teammates and team officials who perpetuate and legitimate hockey players' abuse of women. Hockey fans spread throughout the *manosphere*, too, constitute a strong influence. Situated in this electronic realm are groups of patriarchal men deeply committed to silencing feminist voices and to protect patriarchy-enhancing and patriarchy-facilitated violence (Gotell & Dutton, 2016; Tranchese & Sugiura, 2021). Consider, as documented by Sailofsky (2022b), the response to Instagram user @Angelszee 2020's May 6, 2020. posting of multiple photos of a private conversation. The discussion included Washington Capitals player Brendan Leipsic, his brother Jeremy, and several other hockey players. They made, as Sailofsky notes, "vulgar, misogynistic comments about women and about other hockey players' wives and girlfriends" (p. 734). Two days after the leaked conversation went public, the Capitals released Brendan (Oland, 2020) and his brother was kicked off the University of Manitoba Hockey team (Teague, 2020), resulting in a variety of Twitter responses. Sailofsky analyzed nearly 1,000 of them, and found that most

respondents supported the sanctions. However, a sizeable minority deemed them unfair. In the words of Sailofsky (2022b), “The narrative that the behavior . . . was acceptable or at least not worthy of punishment, combined with the framing of the . . . punishments as a case of ‘out of control cancel culture’, helps protect future misogynistic behavior and reifies Canadian hockey masculinity’s hegemony” (p. 749).

Sailofsky also observes that narratives supporting this type of masculinity “preserve White male power” (p. 749). So do those supplied by some TV studio analysts, such as Don Cherry. Sportsnet fired him in 2019 for his on-air claim that recent immigrants to Canada ignore Remembrance Day. This was an especially important historic event because since 1982, he constantly used his role on the TV program *Hockey Night in Canada* to, as Allain (2015) frames it: “valorize the experiences of White working-class men—men that he . . . feels are at risk from new social forces (for example feminism, immigration, and the movement away from physical labor) that look to devalue their cultural positions” (pp. 109–110). Research shows that popular celebrities like Cherry can also contribute to sexist, racist, and homophobic male peer group dynamics like those described in this article by publicly legitimating them for the world to see and hear (DeKeseredy, 2019b).

Summary and Conclusion

MPS reflects, amplifies, and buttresses patriarchal attitudes and values, making it an integral part of today’s modern and expanded rape-supportive culture that contributes to various types of woman abuse (DeKeseredy, 2019a). Nonetheless, few attempts have been made to theorize how membership in elite male hockey teams and the functions they provide motivate men to victimize women. Although much of the information in this article references the NHL, this is not to excuse other North American elite hockey teams. As shown throughout this paper, the problem just might be worse in junior hockey (Moore & Shah, 2021; Robinson, 1998). While there has been only limited study of college and university hockey teams, there is some reason to believe that the problem is rampant there also (Anderson & White, 2018; Pappas, 2012).

Of the limited work done so far, the model depicted in Figure 1 seems the most promising and is grounded in a small body of research showing that hockey players’ victimization of women is behavior that is socially learned in interaction with specifiable or reference others. Michael D. Smith (1983), one of the world’s leading experts on hockey violence, defines reference others as “persons or groups who provide some sort of orientation for the individual in the development of a course of action or attitude” (p. 75). Yet, it is highly likely that other factors missing from Figure 1 also influence hockey players and other male athletes to abuse women, but this remains unclear until more research is conducted.

To advance the theoretical work described here, the next logical step, then, is to test hypotheses derived from Figure 1 using original data, as has been done with other MPS models. There are studies showing that professional athletes have higher rates of violence against women compared to male members of the general population (see Schwartz, 2021), but recent large-scale systematic research on the extent, distribution, sources, and consequences of hockey players’ abuse of women is in very short supply. No one, to the best of our knowledge, has thus far conducted a representative sample survey of potential offenders affiliated with the NHL. Similarly, there are no surveys of women’s victimization experiences in the professional hockey world, and there are no studies

currently available that determine whether North American professional male hockey players abuse women more than those in other parts of the world (e.g., Europe and the Nordic countries). Most of the current data on professional hockey players’ deviant and criminal conduct, in fact, comes from North American sports journalists and legal experts (Gotberg & Wiersma-Mosley, 2022). This is not to say that these professionals have not made important contributions to raising awareness and to efforts aimed at preventing violence against women in the NHL and junior hockey leagues. They certainly have, which is why this piece is co-authored by two sociologists and a highly seasoned sports journalist. Nevertheless, it is now time for more social scientists to jump into the fray and hopefully this article will stimulate some sitting on the sidelines to do so.

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