

Hockey Violence: A Test of Cultural Spillover Theory

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Cultural spillover theory holds that the more a society tends to legitimate the use of violence to attain ends for which there is widespread social approval, the greater the likelihood of illegitimate violence. This study was a test of cultural spillover theory as it applies to hockey violence. Based on data from a representative sample survey of Toronto hockey players and a comparison group of nonplayers, we tested the proposition that violence in hockey "spills over" into violence in other social settings. The results offer support for a cultural spillover explanation of hockey violence. Older players in highly competitive select-leagues were more likely to approve of violence and to act violently in other social settings than were younger select-league players, house-league players, and nonplayers of all ages.

La théorie du débordement soutient que plus une société tend à légitimer l'usage de la violence pour atteindre certaines fins pour lesquelles il existe une approbation sociale répandue, plus grande sont les chances qu'il existe une violence illégitime. Cette étude est un test de cette théorie appliquée à la violence au hockey. À partir d'une enquête sur un échantillon représentatif des joueurs de hockey de Toronto et d'un groupe de non-joueurs, nous avons testé la proposition suivante la violence au hockey déborde en violence dans d'autres cadres sociaux. Les résultats supportent l'idée d'un débordement culturel de la violence au hockey. Les joueurs plus âgés dans les ligues sélectives hautement compétitives avaient plus de propension à approuver la violence et à agir violemment dans d'autres cadres sociaux, que des joueurs plus jeunes dans des ligues sélectives et que les joueurs dans des ligues maison et les non-joueurs de tous ages.

Many empirical studies on hockey violence have been conducted since research in this area began approximately 2 decades ago (Colburn, 1985, 1986; Faulkner, 1974; McCarthy & Kelly, 1978; Smith, 1975, 1978, 1979a, 1979b; Vaz, 1977, 1979; Weinstein, Smith, & Wiesenthal, 1995; Widmeyer & Birch, 1979; Young, 1990). Surprisingly, however, researchers have paid little or no attention to one of the most frequently asked questions about hockey violence, namely, does it spill over into other social settings?

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After a short illness, Michael D. Smith died while this paper was under review. An internationally respected scholar, Mike was a pioneer in North American sports violence research and a key Canadian figure in domestic violence research. He was a friend, a colleague, and a mentor to many of us and he will be greatly missed. At the time of this study he was with the Exercise and Health Science Department at York University.