

THROUGH THE LIMINAL: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITAS AND RITES OF PASSAGE IN SPORT HAZING AND INITIATIONS

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Abstract. Hazing rituals and ceremonies have been described in traditional, historical world cultures, junior and high school, the military, private schools, paramilitary organizations, fraternities and sororities, as well as sport (Allan and Madden 2008; Bryshun and Young 1999; Campo, Poulos, and Sipple 2005; Fields, Collins, and Comstock 2010; Johnson 2000, 2009; Linhares de Albuquerque and Paes-Machado 2004; Nuwer 1999; Winslow 1999; Zacharda 2009). Student athletes often endure hazing practices with 80% of NCAA athletes reporting some form of initiation (Hoover 1999) in exchange for membership affiliation. This qualitative study compared the similarities and deviations between contemporary initiations and historical traditions defining both the importance of cultures to establish “Rites of Passage” membership gateways and metamorphoses from nonmember to group. Results indicated that despite often abusive hazing ceremonies in sport, marked by hierarchies, power imbalances, and, at times, criminal behaviour, there still exists a demand for an entry ritual by the rookie contingency to mark their membership and identity within the team structure. Hazing traditions continue in the belief in what Turner (1986) describes as *Communitas*, despite indications from participants that hazing fractured relationships on the team — a marked contradiction of *Communitas*.

Key Words: sport, hazing, *communitas*, rites of passage, abuse, cohesion.

Résumé. Les rituels et les cérémonies de bizutage ont été décrits dans les cultures traditionnelles et historiques à travers le monde, dans les écoles secondaires, l’armée, les écoles privées, les organisations paramilitaires, les fraternités, les associations étudiantes, ainsi que dans les sports (Allan et Madden 2008; Bryshun et Young 1999; Campo Poulos et Sipple 2005; Fields Collins et Comstock 2010; Johnson 2000, 2009; Linhares de Albuquerque et Paes-Machado 2004; Nuwer 1999; Winslow 1999; Zacharda 2009). Les athlètes étudiants endurent souvent des pratiques de bizutage, 80% des athlètes de la NCAA ont signalé avoir été initié d’une certaine façon (Hoover 1999) en échange d’une adhésion à un

groupe. Cette étude qualitative a comparé les ressemblances et les déviations entre les initiations contemporaines et les traditions historiques qui définissent l'importance des cultures pour établir les « Rites de Passages » lors de l'adhésion à un groupe et les métamorphoses du non-membre au groupe. Les résultats indiquent que malgré les fréquentes cérémonies de bizutage abusives dans les sports, marquées par des hiérarchies, des déséquilibres du pouvoir, et parfois par des comportements criminels, il existe toujours une demande de rituel d'entrée chez les nouvelles recrues afin de marquer leur admission et leur identité au sein de l'équipe. Les traditions de bizutage continuent grâce à la conviction de ce que Turner (1986) décrit comme *Communitas*, pourtant malgré cette raison mentionnée pour continuer à initier les nouveaux membres, les participants ont indiqué que le bizutage brise les relations dans les équipes, une contre-indication marquée de l'expression des *Communitas*.

Mots clés : sports, bizutage, *communitas*, rites de passage, abus, cohésion.

Canadian and US athletic hazing has recently received high profile media, public, and institutional attention. Culturally over the last decade we have witnessed a paradigmatic shift of meaning, purpose, scrutiny, and criminalization relating to hazing in general and more specifically in sports. As defined by Hoover (1999:8), hazing is “any activity expected of someone joining a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses or endangers, regardless of the person’s willingness to participate.” Examples of typical hazing practices include: personal servitude; sleep deprivation and restrictions on personal hygiene; yelling, swearing, and insulting new members/rookies; being forced to wear embarrassing or humiliating attire in public; consumption of vile substances or smearing of such on one’s skin; brandings; physical beatings; binge drinking and drinking games; sexual simulation; sexual assault or death (Crow and Rosner 2002; Hoover 1999; Srabstein 2008).

Several universities, including Vermont and McGill, have cancelled their men’s hockey and football seasons respectively in light of hazing incidents. Many institutions have implemented antihazing policies and most states criminalize hazing. Previously many acts of hazing were not prosecuted; it has only been in the last 10 years that more convictions for sexual assaults, assaults, forcible confinement, and manslaughter have resulted from hazing cases (Crow and MacIntosh 2009). Recent examples include: Anthony Clarke, a wide receiver for the Boise State football team and four others who were charged (December 2010) with forcible sexual penetration, battery, and false imprisonment of fellow athletes in Blackfoot, Idaho. Three former Carmel Indiana senior basketball players pled guilty in early January 2011 to assaulting two freshman players on a school bus as a part of their team hazing while returning from an away game (Nuwer, n.d.).

Cultural rites of passage have been examined globally and socio-anthropologically. Examinations of contemporary sport underline the propensity for teams to confer membership on newcomers (also known as “rookies,” first years, initiates, recruits, pledges, neophytes, or novitiates) defined as uninitiated members in their first year on the team, through mandatory, formalized rite of passages, generally called initiations or hazing. While sport initiations differ in some ways from historical or cultural rites, a shared characteristic of such rites is the “perceived” development of *communitas*. Victor Turner (1986:44) defines *communitas* as relationships among people, “jointly undergoing ritual transition” through which they can experience an intense sense of intimacy and equality which can be spontaneous, immediate, and concrete.

Many rationales exist for communities to maintain and construct entry rituals including the formation of *communitas*, identity, cohesion, status, and belonging, yet it is the articulated desire for membership that is *the* paramount tenet for both teams and traditional cultures (Cohen 1964; Johnson 2000). However, “membership” also represents the chasm, which divides the basic structure of both of cultural and sporting communities. For example, consider Australian Aborigines or the Ndembu where negotiating the rite of passage confers a permanent change of status from that of boy to man in contrast to the more transient membership of sport initiations where an athlete’s career may span multiple sport teams or “communities.”

This paper examines the function and practice of ritual sports hazing described by participants interviewed. Analytically I employ the three phases of transitional rites of passage as detailed by Van Gennep (1960) comparing the initiation rites of traditional, (primarily) all-male subcultures and sport initiation ceremonies. I argue that varsity sport initiation ceremonies and the initiation rituals of other, more ancient cultures are constructed and function in similar ways and articulate the goal of *communitas* as defined by Turner. However, sport initiations that rely upon practices of personal humiliation, degradation, and sexual acts actually prevent the expression of true *communitas*. I conclude by discussing the benefits of positive initiation ceremonies and the possibilities for reclaiming these in sports through orientations, or alternatives such as outdoor adventures to traditional hazing practices.

THE LANDSCAPE OF HAZING IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, forty-four states have enacted antihazing laws that vary widely in scope and consequence but are typically restricted

to behaviour occurring in educational arenas (Crow and Rosner 2002). Although some universities have specific Student Athlete Codes of Conduct policy outlining hazing infractions, the CIS (Canadian Intrauniversity Sport) and some Canadian institutions do not have extensive hazing laws or policies, tending instead to defer to the Criminal Code, or in the case of university infractions, utilizing the umbrella Student Code of Conduct on an individual case basis. One point of importance not yet described in the research is the difference between Canadian and American varsity athletic programs and the role that hazing plays in the lives of athletes. The Canadian varsity system defines the participants as student athletes. This differs from the American system which, at some universities, offers *full* athletic scholarships including tuition, room, and board in addition to a stipend. It is quite possible that an athlete's ability, desire, and/or abuse could be mitigated by the fact that they are being initiated in these differing athletic/economic systems.

The first issue in need of research in this relatively new area of study is an analysis of gender and hazing; sociologists have only begun to examine the landscapes of meaning and significance of hazing ritual for girls and women in sport. To date the minimal research, national news accounts, and anecdotal evidence of hazing indicate some gender differences in hazing activities (Allan 2003; Johnson 2000). In general, a common conclusion drawn is that hazing among men is more likely to be violent in nature and hazing among women is more likely to be psychological/emotional in nature, although this demographic is in flux as illustrated by recent high profile abusive hazing cases involving girls and women (Allan and Madden 2008; Johnson 2000; Nuwer 1999). Such perspectives align with and reinforce predominant understandings of differences between the genders (Lenskyj 2004). However, it would appear that, over the last decade, greater participation by girls and women in more traditionally "male sporting domains" such as hockey, wrestling, and rugby, has also increased court cases and media reports suggesting that the masculinity of the hazing culture is now coursing rapidly and uncritically into the world of organized women's sport (Nuwer n.d.).

In 2004, Dr. Margery Holman and Dr. Jay Johnson coedited a book titled *Making the Team: Inside the World of Sport Initiations and Hazing*. This collection of chapters showcased some of the leading hazing researchers in North America discussing a multitude of areas of contemporary hazing practices, both in and out of sport. Their research and observations illustrated that many of the initiation practices are configured to introduce new members into the power-based, hierarchical structure of the team and to the masculine model which the initiation ceremony reinforces (Holman 2004). The continuation of potentially harmful, trad-

itional initiations is contingent on a matrix of factors including the use of alcohol, secrecy, attire, hierarchy, confinement, gender, tradition, heterosexism, homoeroticism, misogyny, power, masculinity, cohesion, symbolism, ritual, and the cycle of status from initiated to initiator (Lenskyj 2004; Nuwer 2004; Robinson 2004).

Initiation ceremonies are cycled and recycled from year to year in the belief that they will serve to forge strong cohesive bonds among the members, united in common goals and drives (Johnson 2000). The hazing ceremony offers few opportunities for new members to opt out or question the often abusive nature of the rites of passage.

Initiations are pervasive in our society, and are inherently abusive practices which can traumatize and discourage students and rookies. However, many victims of hazing try to make light of their experience in an effort to put it behind them (Crow and Rosner, 2002). Further, initiations in sports seem to operate above the law and beyond reproach, although this is slowly changing.

Initiations are, in effect, rites of passage used to educate newcomers as to their place in the hierarchical structure of the group and to establish and reinforce notions of masculinity (Holman 2004; Johnson 2000, 2002). In sport, rookies are made aware that the senior players hold the balance of power (Holman, 2004). Hazing, particularly men's, often contains an element of misogyny and homoeroticism to demonize homosexuals in an attempt to ensure the initiates are heterosexuals or at least propagate a well defined heterosexual identity (Johnson, 2000, 2007).

rites of passage

Transformative rites of passage accompanying the transformation are found in many societies. Many of these rituals include ceremonies, which in everyday life would be considered barbaric and abusive. The transformative function of the ceremonies, trials and traumatic sufferings is to key full social membership (Rakoff 1993; Turner 1969).

Arnold Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* (1960) is arguably the most classic and cited work on initiation rituals; though powerful it has limits notably the Eurocentric male perspective. The three-phase model blended with Victor Turner's (1969) work provide a useful framework for understanding the structure of many modern day rites of passage, including those used in sport and other predominantly male socializing institutions (Allan and Madden 2008; Beccaria and Sande 2003; Bryshun and Young 1999; Campo et al. 2005; Fields et al. 2010; Johnson 2000; Linhares de Albuquerque and Paes-Machado 2004; Nuwer 1999; Winslow 1999; Zacharda 2009).

The Structural Similarities of the Ritual Process

The central theme of most initiation rites, according to Van Gennep, is the subject's change in identity. Van Gennep focused on the transformative adolescent rite of passage among Australian aborigines in the 1960s where the adult identity is achieved when the immature child identity is "destroyed." Cosmologically in this destruction/creation cycle: "the novice is considered dead, and remains dead for the duration of the rite of passage." Following the rite, "he is resurrected and taught how to live, but differently than in childhood" (1960:75).

According to Van Gennep, the death of one identity and the rebirth of another occur in three phases: *separation*, *transition (liminality)*, and *incorporation*.

Phase 1 — Separation (Preinitiation Anxiety) Phase

During the **separation** (or, **pre-anxiety**) phase, past ties are severed; in the strictest sense this refers to a physical separation. In the figurative, it signifies a disconnection from one's previous identity and the potential ascription of a new identity. Another mark of distinction accompanying the initiation rite is the changing of a person's name. An individual's name is equivalent to his true existence as a "being" (Cohen 1964:87). Since a change in name therefore constitutes a change in identity, a new name is often bestowed upon a youth during his rite of passage. This new name is commonly regarded as sacred (especially in fraternities, the military, and sport) and uninitiated persons are often not allowed to use it (Cohen 1964; Johnson 2000; Linhares and Paes-Machado 2004; Nuwer 1999). The name changes from "civilian" to "recruit" in the example of the military police in Brazil, (Linhares and Paes-Machado 2004), from "pledge" to "brother/sister" in fraternities/sororities (Nuwer 1999), and from "tryout" to "rookie" in the context of sport (Johnson 2000). During the **pre-initiation phase**, "rookies" are separated from the veterans and stories are often conveyed of what might happen to them during the initiation phase. Designed to fill the novitiate with a sense of anxiety at the upcoming trials, the descriptions are often aggrandized to elicit fear.

Phase 2 — The Liminal/Transition (Hazing) Phase

The **liminal/transition** (or, **hazing**) phase is marked by the symbolic death of the initiate. The former identity is shed, and the initiate enters a "liminal" or "in-between" phase between the now dead "self" and the future, postinitiation identity. During this time of transition, the athlete/initiate must undergo the hazing and tests of fortitude that character-

ize initiation rituals. At this point, novitiates are often lumped together as a homogenized group to suppress individuality and emphasize their liminal status (Winslow 1999:430). This is a crucial element of the initiation, as the homogenization of the group facilitates a sense of shared experience amongst the neophytes. They become invested in each other as allies, while at the same time they are invested with knowledge about the culture they are entering. This stage is overseen in traditional, cultural rites by “elders,” who represent the pinnacle of the social/cultural hierarchy to which the neophytes are being admitted.

Several academic studies of sport initiation ceremonies have found that coaches and alumni have been present and active participants in the rite of passage (Bryshun 1997; Hoover 1999; Johnson 2009). Some administrators and coaches are also complicit in their silent acceptance of hazing their choice not to promote a culture of change (Johnson and Donnelly 2004).

Phase 3 — Integration/Incorporation (Membership) Phase

Once the initiation is successfully endured/performed by the neophyte, the community prepares to welcome the “new” member into the social group through an **integration/incorporation (membership) phase**. During this phase, all of the cultural elements that accompany the newly acquired identity are transferred to the successful initiate. Hazing, tests of fortitude, scarification, genital mutilation, circumcision, the changing of names, and/or violence against or by the initiate all signal the values, behaviours, and hierarchy of the society. The incorporation of these cultural elements by the initiates during the transition phase redefines the physical, social, and spiritual existence of the participants (Goffman 1967; Turner 1969; Van Der Meer 2003; Van Gennep 1960). When the designated period of transition is over, they are ready to be welcomed formally into their society as adults (Van Gennep 1960). It is a time of celebration; often marked by new clothes, fancy ornamentation, and a spirit of celebration.

THE THREE PHASES OF CULTURAL (AND SPORT) RITES

This triphase model has been useful to contemporary research into initiations. Linhares and Paes-Machado (2004) outlined a three-phase process of initiation in their examination of recruit hazing practices of the Brazilian Military Police Academy. Their model builds upon similar findings outlined by Van Maanen in his 1978 study of police recruits in the Netherlands. Although the terms differed slightly, the three phases aligned

in meaning with those of Van Gennep. Other researchers have reported similar three-phase processes in the initiation rituals of the Canadian Airborne Regiment (Winslow 1999); Italian and Norwegian youth subcultures (Beccaria and Sande 2003); urban youth gangs in the United States (Pinnock 1997); and varsity athletic culture in Canada (Bryshun 1997; Johnson 2000, 2007). In a sport context, the three phases can be thought of as preinitiation anxiety, initiation/hazing experience, and (temporary) membership (Johnson 2000).

Pain and Violent Rites of Passage

Some initiates submit to physical ordeals, such as circumcision or other form of genital mutilation or scarification (Van Gennep 1960) to mark their rite of passage. While there has been no specific documented case in modern sport where the neophyte has had to endure circumcision or subincision, incidences of scarification (such as tattooing, branding, and physical beatings), enduring tests of fortitude (such as tolerating pain), and abuse of both a sexual and physical nature have been used by sports teams (Bryshun and Young 1999; Lenskyj 2004; Robinson 2004; Waldron and Kowalski 2009), fraternities, and the military (Nuwer 1999). Genital shaving, sexualized games, and sodomy are other common hazing practices invoked by teams as dramatic displays that mark the movement of initiates from the status of nonmember to member (Campo et al. 2005).

Circumcision and subincision often constitute an important part of a cultural rite of passage because they cause lasting and visible results that function as diplomas, or marks of distinction, proving that they have gone through the required ordeal (Eliade 1975). Any form of scarification — tattoos, the raising of permanent welts, and the cutting of ear lobes — likewise functions as a diploma, and is frequently used in both contemporary and historical rites (Eliade 1975; Nuwer 1999; Winslow 1999).

Some form of pain and/or violence usually accompanies initiation rituals and has a robust but poorly understood effect of creating a sense of belonging among initiates who experience it together (Baumeister and Leary 1995). In many initiations utilized by the military, sport, police, and fraternal orders, the participants report the use of pain, violence, and degradation to create deeper, closer, and cohesive bonds of membership (Johnson 2000; Linhares de Albuquerque and Paes-Machado 2004; Nuwer 1999; Waldron and Kowalski 2009; Winslow 1999). This belief is predicated upon a strict hierarchical structure, exemplified by the military, paramilitary, and sport. The genital modifications, hazings, and

other forms of abuse to which youths in various contexts are commonly subjected, create a sense of vulnerability and a consequent dependence upon the larger group for support and comfort after the trauma of the event. The initiation rite can therefore be seen as a crucial stage in the process of socialization into the group as a whole (Van Gennep 1960). In this view, the suppression of individual freedom during the rituals is critical to ensure that new members are dependent upon the group and learn to pay full respect to tradition.

RITUAL AND BELONGING IN SPORT-IDENTITY

Durkheim was one of the first sociologists to develop a theoretical model to explain the importance of ritual in our social structures. According to Durkheim, rituals mainly function to foster a sense of belonging among participants:

The role of rituals in the creation of belonging is suggested by the fact that social integration and a sense of unity are among the most noted outcomes and functions of ritual. (Durkheim [1912] 1995) as cited in Marshall 2002:360)

Indeed, athletes often describe their “need” to have an initiation ceremony as a team bonding experience that marks the group as a “team” and its members as “teammates” for the first time. Sports initiation rituals can therefore function as the transition experience that symbolizes this membership change. In order for this transition to be successful, however,

[i]t is essential that one’s subjective sense of belonging change with objective membership. Old bonds and identities must be relaxed and new ones forged. That is exactly what initiation ceremonies accomplish. (Marshall 2002:360)

Of course, a sense of belonging is not guaranteed to accompany an initiation ritual; there must also be an invested interest on behalf of the athletes to pursue membership and to have that identity validated.

The new collection of initiates, most of whom have been waiting anxiously for their team’s hazing ritual, are also in a state of flux between identities, which the successful fulfillment of the ritual will help to resolve. The initiation operates in a second way for returning team members. As they shift into their “veteran” identity, with its associated power and status over rookies, the initiation can facilitate the expression of grudges from their own hazing and/or feelings of sadism and cruelty.

Initiations, while primarily a ritual to facilitate membership changes, can also serve a cathartic and/or sadistic purpose for veteran members. The danger — a very real danger as we can see from repeated instances of sport hazings — is that the cycle of violence or abuse becomes attached to the ritual of belonging and membership, making hazing appear necessary for team membership.

One connecting filament of practice and belief in both historical and contemporary rituals, essential to their effectiveness, is the understanding that the profane and the sacred remain separate in both space and time (Marshall 2002). If it is understood that the profane represents anything that is “work” related, sporting games or practices are the profane in the sports context. Ergo, the typically described sport initiation ceremony, which takes place outside of this time and space criteria, idealizes the model for optimal ritual effectiveness.

Differences between Sport and Cultural Definitions of “Membership”

In the context of varsity or university sport, rites of passage are generally performed at the beginning of the school year, which for most rookies, coincides with one’s first year of university. The initiation is therefore perfectly placed to also function as a transition experience from high school to university. The sport initiation can symbolize the move from outsider to insider in both a sporting and academic sense.

On sport teams, however, bonds of membership are much more transient than transitions between childhood and adulthood or singlehood to marriage. An athlete on a varsity squad at a university might play for one year, or up to five years. Further, there is a built-in lifespan for the identities of varsity athletes, teams, and programs as the team context is reconstituted with turnovers of players, coaches, and administrators from year to year (Johnson and Donnelly 2004). A member may leave a sports team, become a member of a different team, or have their membership revoked by being cut from the team. Even the most skilled players will eventually have to retire, first from their team and second from their sport. Other group memberships that involve initiation are generally not that flexible (the transition from childhood to adulthood, for example, can never be reversed) (Turner 1986).

More importantly, team membership is technically granted *before* initiations take place, as the selection process for members occurs through try-outs and is decided by coaches and/or senior team members. The initiations associated with traditional cultural rites generally have very little space within which a participant may choose whether or not to participate or the identity they wish to transition into. This is simply not the

case with athletes, sport, and their teams. While the initiation is used to auspiciously welcome new members, it is erroneous to equate it with its traditional counterpart. Official membership on a sports team is decided outside of (and most often before) the initiation ceremony.

COMMUNITAS AND SPORT

The initiation ceremony is both identity forming and destroying, particularly in sports. The interdependence between the individual and the group that results from the transitional experience is crucial. Victor Turner's discussion of community defines two models of human interaction. The first is a hierarchal structure, in which some humans are "more" and some are "less" useful or valuable to the community's political-legal-economic well-being (Turner 1972:396). The second is that of the "communitas," an essentially unstructured community of individuals who submit together to the general authority of elders, typically found in the space of rituals (Turner 1972:396).

Communitas breaks through structure, it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency, which 'levels' and 'strips' the neophyte. (Turner 1972:402)

Results from one of the only studies to date on hazing and perceived group cohesion indicated that the more appropriate team building behaviours that athletes were involved in, the more socially cohesive they perceived their team to be, an expected outcome. This is contrasted by the larger spectrum of teams for whom the more hazing activities they reported doing or seeing, the less cohesive they perceived their team to be in sport-related tasks. This suggests that the argument that hazing builds team cohesion is flawed. Hazing is associated with less, not more, team cohesion (Van Raalte et al. 2007:491).

METHOD

This research employs qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Patton 1990) whose forté is depth when thick descriptions are artfully and systematically rendered. This provides sufficient details for the reader to grasp the idiosyncrasies and a broader based knowledge of the situation derived from the participants' experience. The result is a naturalistic and holistic sense of phenomena, relationships, and bonds.

Participants for the study were selected from among the teams that had previously initiated their first-year players and had been invited to a two-day orientation at the site team alternative orientations. The orientations were designed to introduce teams to nontraditional team building activities such as rock climbing and outdoor adventure. On the final day of the orientations, athletes and coaches were identified for potential interviews using a technique described by McMillan and Schumacher (2005) as mixed purposeful sampling. I used a nonrandom sampling called purposive sampling which allows the researcher to specify the characteristics of the population of interest and individuals who match those characteristics. For this study, participants were selected from varsity student-athletes or coaches who had taken part in the weekend orientation and had previous hazing experience. My selection criteria also ensured a balance of men and women and a representation from various teams. This methodology also included convenience sampling (Gall et al. 1996) as the athletes and coaches were asked just after the completion of the orientation event.

Sixteen Canadian varsity athletes participated in the study. In particular, eight male and eight female athletes participated, as well as four male and two female coaches. All participants took part in a weekend orientation in northern Ontario, Canada. The group consisted of women's ice hockey, men's ice hockey, co-ed badminton, men's basketball, and women's volleyball teams. The athletes ranged in age from 19–26, the coaches from 34–53. Thirteen of the participants were at the undergraduate level and three were at the graduate level. Most participants described themselves as “white” with four identifying as “asian” (2), “black” or “another ethnicity.” All of the participants were at least in their second year with their respective teams. This ensured that they had experienced being a rookie and veteran and had prior experience with hazing.

Once approval was obtained from the Human Subjects and Institutional Review Board, data was collected qualitatively using one-on-one interviews conducted by the researcher. Following Corbin and Strauss (2008), in-depth semistructured interviews were conducted using an interview guide approach. The interview guide allowed the researcher to elicit systematic and comprehensive information from the research participants, and the freedom to explore and probe topics addressed by the participant (Corbin and Strauss 2008:13). After receiving informed and written consent from the research participants, the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed before the next interview. The data was tagged, coded, and assimilated into the analysis, then compared to previous interviews for similarities and differences to identify similar themes.

The coding process was threefold, utilizing open, axial, and selective coding, as described by Corbin and Strauss (1990). In the open coding stage the events described in the interviews were compared for similarities and differences and the events given conceptual labels or tags. The conceptually similar events were then assembled into categories and subcategories. Finally, the data were selectively coded (Corbin and Strauss 2008) by clustering all categories around a central category. Using a method termed “hurricane thinking,” categories were placed around the question and compared, cross-referenced, and analyzed for their proximity and relationship to the central theme (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). This allowed the construction of major themes with subsections related to that theme.

Data was analyzed with multiple coding, which involved another researcher analyzing the same data set and then comparing and discussing findings. “This diminishes investigator bias and can be seen as a qualitative form of inter reliability” (Mays and Pope 1995:110). Two experts in qualitative research were used to insure reliability, validity, triangulation, and consistency.

RESULTS

Need for Hazing Ritual Expectations

The importance of ritual or initiation is voiced by all of the participants. In its absence, there is often dissent and a sense of disjointedness and disconnect from the fabric of a unified body. Some of the responses differ on the purpose of the initiation, yet it is the belief in the necessity of the ritual which can have the unifying potential the players search for.

Rites of passage aren't always pretty and beautiful. Quite the opposite, often they are quite stupid. But they are really important; it is something that you need to get through as a new member. You need to be able to come together and say that we are united around this experience. It is what makes us unique from everyone else. You have to differentiate your team. (Manny)

Manny sees past the potential ugliness of the ritual itself to describe how the core of the rite of passage itself is the key for the team to differentiate and define itself, through an identified common ritual that all members must endure.

I think that humbling experiences for rookies is necessary but I think that they can be done in different ways. It is important to humble the rookies out of respect for players that have been there for a long time. (Dimitri)

Dimitri feels the initiation places the rookie within the culture of the team hierarchy and power-based structure which can deflate egos and the sense of self that first year players can bring with them. Stella sees the ceremony as an opportunity for a new beginning in the team's potential and growth. Quite often, first year players come into the team community with an aggrandized sense of their worth and place within the team, an attitude that can rankle the senior players.

It is necessary, it provides a kick start for the team and the team dynamic, otherwise it is difficult to achieve. It can be done, you can blend the year together slowly in little bits, but you don't really have much time. You have to start performing well within a month of having met each other. That is a brief period of time in the big scheme of things, especially when half of that time you are not really together because you are doing other things. It dips you into it, everyone comes together, they are the same and then they scatter and deal with the things that they need to, their individuality. (Stella)

As Paul, a varsity coach, observes, the ritual is one that is recognized, reinforced, and supported by the larger sporting community. It is not solely the players on the team who share this transformative belief in the function of hazing; it permeates varsity culture on all levels.

There are senior players who came into this expecting to be initiated. The education transcends levels, from the person coming in, to the initiators, to the coaching staff, to the administration. (Paul, coach 2)

The absence of any form of entry ceremony can equally define or set the tone for team dynamics and interactions as illustrated by Matthew's statement.

I didn't feel like I belonged, we did nothing in terms of a welcoming ceremony, it definitely would have helped, even as simple as learning their names. I only knew the names of the people that I played and this is on a team of 15. There was no formal introduction. (Matthew)

There was no time that was dedicated to team interaction, something even as straightforward as learning names.

There shouldn't necessarily be that automatic respect because I am older but they [the rookies], have to be held accountable for what they do. Because they are a first year player that doesn't entitle them to slack off and do nothing. I still have to pick up equipment or clean the bus but there are guys that never do it. There were a couple of guys in my first year like that who were torn apart for not doing their duties and they were put in their place and told that this kind of behaviour is not acceptable on our team. If

you continue acting that way, we are going to continue to abuse you until the behaviour changes. There are guys on our team right now to whom we can say you have to clean the bus, but there is no way to carry through with the threat. (Ted)

Ted felt that the balance in the power structure had evaporated with the discontinuation of their team's hazing ritual. For him, there exists a real necessity to recapture that opportunity so that rookie and veteran status could be redefined, effectively re-establishing the power order. His position as a senior player was threatened in the absence of the entry ritual.

Lastly, Sara felt that without an initiation her team lacked any sense of congruency, breaking down into smaller sub units within the larger group.

It was very cliquey. We all had our own friends. We came together to play but we didn't hang out. There was no sense of team. It was pretty disjointed at practices. (Sara)

All of these athletes were interviewed knowing that it was no longer acceptable to initiate their first year players openly. Some were informed to "tone it down" or to do nothing and they acknowledged that this created a void, followed by a sense of disjointedness and subdivisions in the group. There was no longer space for a common experience to confirm the team, something they truly believed was necessary to develop what Turner (1972) describes as *communitas*. Most athletes recognized the problematic, "unhealthy" risks and dangers, which accompanied most traditional forms of hazing.

Initiation ceremonies are viewed as the mechanisms for maintaining consensus in the established social/cultural order in particular communities (Holman 2004). If a potential novice avoided initiation, this order would be compromised. Threats of personal humiliation or ostracism ensure that the rituals used to reinforce the cultural order will not be challenged or publicly exposed. The threat of being ostracized by the initiation community through humiliation and degradation has been historically used to maintain both group compliance in initiation practices and order within the everyday operation of the community.

Similar Structures and Function of Hazing Ceremonies

The desire of the novice to continue with the process and acquiesce to the veterans' demands is difficult to understand, since some of the demands can be brutal, dangerous, and sometimes illegal. Ostensibly, there is always the option to refuse brutal, dangerous, or illegal treatment or

behaviours. Force and coercion are overtly and covertly applied to ensure that novitiates comply. This compliance assists in creating solidarity within the community and can silence dissent from other novitiates; since others are “taking it,” a “momentum” or “snow ball effect” occurs. The wide variety of physical and psychological ordeals that the initiate must undergo during the liminal (hazing) stage has been described as the “sadistic side of the human imagination” (Turner 1986:78). All of these various “liminal” experiences have been utilized in sport hazing events.

There are things that were done, that I didn't have to do, that I never would have done, looking back now. They put a cross on one guy's back and made him walk in his underwear through the high school hallway, that was bullshit, it would have been embarrassing and offensive to someone, I couldn't believe that they did that. One time, they put 2 guys in a chair sitting in a 69 position and duct taped them together in the school. That was bad, exercising their dictatorial empowerment, abusing that power. That was scary. (Manny)

In retrospect, Manny is horrified and disgusted with not only the brutality and the exercise of power and authority by his veterans during his rookie initiation, but also with his acquiescence to their desires. Time and time again, this “reliving” and retelling of the hazing is qualified by an insistence by the interviewee that were they required to do it again, there is no way that they could be forced to do so.

In the context of sport initiations, the initiates learned that they are separate from (and inferior to) the veterans. Fear is quite often used as a “hazing” tool prior to the actual initiation. The hyperactivation or exaggerated accounts of potential events described by senior members to the incoming recruits is often used to emphasize the possible brutality of the event. This can provide a sense of relief for novitiates who go through their initiation and find that the ceremony was not as traumatic as the “hype” had suggested.

In the end, the fear or preinitiation anxiety brought on by the knowledge of hazing ceremonies from other team members, the media, and folkloric tales of past practices were not enough of a “deterrent” to prevent any of these athletes from taking part.

The fear wasn't enough to keep me from the sport, I love the sport. The stuff that they talked about didn't sound that bad. Dressing up and having yourself painted, that was minor. I wasn't in the mood to streak, so I was hoping that it wouldn't be anything like that. I got lucky. (John)

As well, as Kelly in the following narrative says, the anxiety and hype seemed bigger than the actual initiation process itself, described as

culturally similar by Van Genneep, as a tool to lessen the impact of their practices by hyping the outlandish and abusive potentialities that may arise, and are often fodder for rich media accounts (Bryshun and Young 1999).

I was totally expecting more of an initiation and was very surprised that there wasn't any. I expected it because it was university and from the stories that I had heard, even in one of my high school classes we saw a study about hazing, mostly hockey in the US, I was totally expecting one big party where we were forced into something. (Kelly)

Avoiding the ritual is usually not an option in traditional, cultural initiations, but in the sporting context, for some, the threats and preinitiation folklore are enough to dissuade them from participating altogether. Life on the team for the initiate who opts out of the initiation can be isolating and traumatic; members who see their refusal as noncommitment marginalize them. The initiation ceremonies also serve as an overt example for those rookies who choose to defy the wishes of the group and not participate according to the prescribed veteran rules. Team reaction to compliance and rookie capitulation seems to be directly correlated to skill level. A highly skilled first year athlete who decides to opt out of the initiation will, in all likelihood, encounter fewer complications with the team than a less skilled athlete (Johnson 2007).

You have to establish your superiority, but not in a way that is demeaning towards the other first year players. They have to respect you because you have been here for four or five years and you do have a different level of status, it is set by example, you lead and they follow. Through that comes respect but you have to acculturate them, pouring beer on the head, that was an example of making light of the situation, we are going to have some fun, we like you. (Sara)

Predictably, this hierarchy creates resentment between the rookies (who are invested in each other as survivors of a traumatic event) and the veterans (who are invested in the subordination of the rookies).

Initiations into gangs have a trial you have to go through in order to become a full member. That attitude is perpetuated through senior players and coaching staffs as they will look the other way and pretend it isn't happening or go along with it, thinking that it is serving to better the team by planning and condoning it. (Raymond, coach 4)

The connection to the greater cultural family which supports the traditional types of hazing new members is pervasive and runs deep within athletic communities. It encompasses athletes, coaches, fans, par-

ents, administrators, and athletic directors. Looking at these relations as a family supportive of the status quo, one begins to understand how a system is allowed to persist without real challenges (Caperchione and Holman 2004; Van Der Meer 2003). There is an investment of all of the actors in the cyclical process of cultural transferral that allows, in most instances, the perpetuity of the hazing rituals, unchecked, unsanctioned, and unrecognized as problematic behaviours.

HAZING AND COMMUNITAS

Communitas, the creation of community spirit, equality, and togetherness for new members (Meyer 2000), captures the best of the possibilities offered by initiations. This is the goal of the vast majority of groups that initiate new members. Yet, a prevailing trend of modern initiations (hazing) seems contradictory to this notion, using practices and events centred around hierarchy, power imbalances, and various forms of abuse, while claiming these practices and events lead to communitas.

The whole purpose is to try and break a person down to the point that they are essentially groundless so that you are able to now build them up. The veterans will break down the rookie so that the rookie realizes that he has no ground at this point and that enables the veterans to mould that rookie into what they want. To establish our hierarchy, to show them their place and to break them, physically and mentally. (John)

Despite previous studies claiming that severe initiations facilitated closer bonds and ties, specifically in the military context (Aronson and Mills 1959; Ingraham 1984), more current research suggests that such rituals (hazing) can and will develop a certain mistrust of the leadership (Goffman 1967; Johnson 2009; Linhares de Albuquerque and Paes-Machado 2004; Zacharda 2009). This mistrust is thought to occur through an inversion of social beliefs. In contemporary Western society, the values of democracy, respect, and equality are expounded and expected. If the new values are not fully and immediately incorporated by the rookies, this inversion can plant the seeds of mistrust and resentment between initiates and initiators. This rift could upset the strict hierarchy established by the initiation ritual, and so strategies are enacted to maintain compliance within the subcultural order.

I think traditional forms of hazing don't establish that relationship of trust, because you feel the hostility and the grudges that build with being forced to do something. The humiliation is pretty individual and some guys would have problems dealing with the traditional forms. (Manny)

The concept of *communitas* is often given as a rationale for sport initiation ceremonies/hazing. Yet, for athletes to fully enjoy their varsity experience, they must rely on their teammates' support and acceptance within that structure. Without that acceptance, the player can never be completely immersed in the community of the team. *Communitas*, equality, and coadunation or unity for new members does not develop when individuals feel violated, harassed, or disparate to other members of the group. For an initiation to be successful in achieving its purpose, it must allow the education of new members while having them experience commonality and develop connections as members of the same organization. Only then will an orientation achieve its ultimate purpose of producing a unified group, free from abuse and harassment.

ORIENTATION AS A REPLACEMENT FOR TRADITIONAL HAZING

The previous hierarchical structures and labels must also be eradicated so that all members feel that they are accepted without having to negotiate a maze of expectations connected to a power matrix which dictates status and exploits those with the least amount of authoritative currency.

One of the available activities at the sport orientation retreat, from which we drew our participants, was rock climbing, an apparently successful endeavour which made possible many of the interactions described.

The rock climbing involved everybody. Everyone had to support each other. Some guys couldn't make it, but at the same time, the guys that did make it may be veteran, may be rookie, they were still helping you go up. Were it a more traditional type of initiation setting, you might not have had the veteran urging the rookie to completion. In fact they may have been hoping that the rookie would fall down or something like that. It was more of an equalizer. (John)

It was the event itself and the players' and coaches' inclusive approach to it which differentiated the experience from its hazing predecessor.

When the respondents were asked to comment on the similarities and differences between traditional forms of hazing and the orientation ceremony, most chose to focus on three points: effectiveness of the orientation as a more welcoming, inclusive space to bond; where the ceremonies diverge; and where the orientation ceremony fails to replace the chain of tradition.

I think that orientation can be more effective because you are not walking away with those negative feelings and you are not walking away from

some sort of initiation hating a veteran player. I hated some players that hazed me because they made me do things that I didn't want to do, I didn't like what they stood for, whereas at [the Orientation Camp] there are no negative connotations for what the team went through, and it worked in terms of bringing us together. Most of the stuff that goes on is pretty innocent. (Dimitri)

Here Dimitri identifies the superiority of the orientation for welcoming newer members into a positive environment where there was an absence of coercion.

There are tons of similarities in the way relationships develop under the two systems, but [Orientation Camp], not to call it more wholesome, but I think that it is less threatening, you don't come away from that weekend with any negative effects. Young kids might come away from a traditional type of initiation with some pretty negative feelings and some animosity that can be tucked away, and as a second year player, that might be the chance they get to vent it, which can sometimes be dangerous. (Andrew)

There are also many similarities between entry rituals in terms of structure and function. The first is the bonds which are established. The initiation creates a stronger bond amongst the first year players, who are forced to go through an experience as an assembly. However the traditional forms of hazing can create an environment rife with tension and resentment between veterans and rookies (Allan 2003; Johnson 2009; Linhares de Albuquerque and Paes-Machado, 2004; Van Raalte et al. 2007). A schism can develop on teams where the first year players have forged a stronger bond with each other after having been mistreated by the senior group.

One of the fundamentals of an initiation is that there is some task that you have [rookies] and you are making them get close together, which is good in a way it establishes a rookie bond, but it is also causing a separation or division between the vets on the team. Whereas the orientation establishes bonds between the entire group which is way more important. Everyone was on a level footing going through it together. (Stella)

The orientation provided a fundamental cultural shift away from the historical basis of most hazing-based entry rituals. These rites of passage have their roots in degradation, humiliation, disempowerment, and mistrust (Allan and Madden 2008; Bryshun 1997; Hoover and Pollard 2000; Johnson 2000; Nuwer 1999). Although there is some value perceived by the athletes in going through with these types of ceremonies, there is acknowledgement that an alternative orientation can replace and in fact surpass the potential of the initiation. One of the strengths of this is the

neutralizing effect it has on future possibilities for having the first year players go through the more brutal enduring forms of gaining membership.

It would be strange and difficult I would assume since we did go through the orientation. We are friends now, you know, our friendship founded in respect and admiration, not degradation and pain, so maybe the vets could organize a rookie party. I really don't see them being able to do anything mean or cruel to us, it would probably be fun and silly. The cycle had been broken with the second years, so I think that it would be difficult for them to start something up again. (Amy)

One of the main differences between the two methods of establishing a rite of passage for team membership is the basis for which demands are placed upon the novitiates. In the more time-honoured sense, acquiescence through coercion is the means for rookie capitulation, a method which plants the seeds of distrust and scepticism. In contrast, the orientation can offer a more liberating platform of trust and support, which most athletes and researchers argue creates stronger bonds and liaisons to membership (Johnson 2009; Van Raalte et al. 2007; Waldron and Kowalski 2009).

I think traditional forms of hazing don't establish that relationship of trust, because you feel the hostility and the grudges that build with being forced to do something. The humiliation is pretty individual and some guys would have problems dealing with the traditional forms. (Manny)

If you look at the team as a template, removing or replacing the negative aspects of the hazing ritual may not gain anything for the team; however, a severe initiation can have detrimental effects to the integrity of the team, which needs to be surrounded by an aura of respect.

I think that you can remove the humiliation and replace it with more welcoming traditions, but I don't think that you lose anything or gain anything from doing so. From the severe initiation you can only lose team structure and integrity, it can be neutral, but you won't gain the respect of people. (Andrew)

Hazing celebrates a dysfunctional, violent, and traumatizing set of practices which disassociate new from old, in members from out. It is anything but cohesive and welcoming. The orientation by contrast personalizes everyone and showcases both individual performance and the social valuing of both new and established team mates thereby helping to integrate a chronology transfer of membership and confirming the team membership as a cherished institution shared by members.

CONCLUSION

All organizations need new members to continue, and new members need a sense of belonging. Initiation can serve this function, while also reassuring senior members that the new people value membership in the group (Nuwer 1999:34). These new affiliates are more likely than noninitiated members to maintain the organization much like the senior members left it; they feel intricately bound and enmeshed in the social fabric of the organization which went to great lengths to educate them about their crucial link to the historical roots of the group (Fields et al. 2010; Linhares de Albuquerque and Paes-Machado 2004; Nuwer 1999; Winslow 1999; Zacharda 2009).

Culturally, while the form of the rites of passage differs from society to society, Van Gennep's three-phase model is useful in pointing out similarities within the structure of the membership ceremonies. Although the initiation serves many functions, the primary purpose of most initiations is a ritualized transitional experience where the rookie's neophyte status within the culture metamorphoses into that of full membership. This is a movement into the culture, a transition in status from nonmember to member, a symbolic shedding of their "Rookie" skin.

The rites of passage between contemporary and cultural initiations differ in the purpose and the meaning of the ceremonies. Cultural initiations use the rite of passage to mark a movement from adolescence to adulthood, as do modern ceremonies that confer status and membership. Over time, modern rites have adopted and incorporated humiliation and degradation as staples of their welcoming ceremonies that subvert some of the cohesive potential of the ritual.

The examples of hazing rituals provided in this paper highlight the excessive physical and mental demands imposed on aspiring members to the subculture, ostensibly to achieve unity. These rites are quite successful at breeding conformity, subservience, and discipline that, while defeating the "community" intent of initiation, perpetuate the myth of cohesion. Further, excessive physical or mental demands on a new member cause fractured units within the larger group and sabotage the development of a truly unified membership.

The initiation ceremony in the sporting context is often recognized as a site for rookie identity formation and self-described community bond forming (Johnson 2000). Still, identity formation also occurs for established junior and senior team members. Where the junior players were previously the novitiates, and therefore the centre of the initiation activity, they are later charged with the responsibility of constructing and implementing the rite of passage for the rookies. This responsibility

represents a transformative opportunity for established team members to forge a new identity as veteran and team leader. More senior members may also use the initiation as a way to confirm their veteran status among junior members and to teach the new members where they (the veterans) are in the team hierarchy.

The process of initiation involves activities specifically designed to achieve a purpose beyond group cohesion, such as punishment and torture. For example, in sport hazing, a team may require beatings, public nudity, sexual abuse, or kidnapping and forced confinement (Bryshun and Young 1999; Campo et al. 2005; Johnson 2000; Nuwer n.d.). But in order for an organization to work effectively as a team, initiation must develop unity. Some of those who haze feel that it is a way for these groups to develop a sense of cohesiveness and oneness within a group. Initiating gives the participants a type of commonality, because they have gone through an experience together and survived. In this process, however, hazing is highly abusive behavior that one often has no choice but to endure in order to get to the next level. This endurance can come at a longer term cost. Teams that use violent and/or painful hazing rituals to foster team cohesion and team success rely heavily upon coercion, threat, exclusion, humiliation, or abuse and risk alienating new members, creating rifts among teammates, and eroding respect and trust from team relationships. *Communitas*, defined as a group united in a common purpose, is the articulated goal of both modern and cultural initiations. Yet some contemporary rites of passage continue to adopt and use more abusive, humiliating, and degrading traditions that prevent the true development and expression of *communitas*, even though most participants and teams feel *communitas* is the purpose of the hazing ritual. Over time, modern rituals have deviated from previously described rites of passage by actively employing degradation as an integral component of their hazing and initiation practices. This is in contrast to the traditional use of degradation and humiliation as a potential consequence of noncompliance, such as being ostracized from the team or being subjected to a “chilly climate” (Johnson 2000; Waldron and Kowalski 2009). The adoption of degrading, humiliating sport hazing practices has the potential to create division among group members, despite the commonly shared belief that hazing functions to inevitably bring constituents together, regardless of the circumstances. Degrading hazing activities do produce compliance and maintain the cultural order by creating a disincentive to share humiliating experiences. The shame and degradation make participants vulnerable to peer condemnation and public ridicule deterring reporting and assuring ritual order and lack of public scrutiny.

Modern initiations utilizing humiliation, degradation and abuse create resentment, division and mistrust. Through *separation*, initiates are removed from familiar territory and their abilities to act, think, and decide for themselves are severely restricted. They are then given information (implicitly — through actions and example — and explicitly — through demands and forced behaviour) in closed, secretive ceremonies that establish them as subordinate, provisional members of a group (Kirby and Wintrup 2002). Hazing, therefore, reveals itself as closed (exclusive), inequitable, destabilizing, and abusive events. This contrasts significantly with the definition of *communitas*.

The new collection of initiates, most of whom have been waiting anxiously for their team's hazing ritual, are also in a state of flux between identities, which the successful fulfillment of the ritual will help to resolve. The initiation ceremony in the sporting context is often recognized as a site for rookie identity formation and community bond forming. However, identity formation also occurs for established junior and senior team members. Where the junior players were previously the novitiates, and therefore the centre of the initiation activity, they are later charged with the responsibility of constructing and implementing the rite of passage for the rookies. This responsibility represents a transformative opportunity for established team members to forge a new identity as veteran and team leader. In addition, as returning team members shift into their veteran identity, with its associated power and status over rookies, the initiation can facilitate the expression of grudges from their own hazings and/or feelings of sadism and cruelty. More senior members may also use the initiation as a way to confirm their veteran status among junior members and to teach the new members where they (the veterans) are in the team hierarchy.

Similar to the findings of Van Raalte et al. (2007), cohesion and *communitas* can be achieved through the alternative orientations undertaken and described by the participants in this study. Some teams did admit to continuing to have "rookie parties," although the nature of the event has changed. They took place after their orientation experience, which affected the way in which they conducted rookie parties. There was no pressure, degradation, or humiliation required of the initiates. During the interviews the athletes described how they could no longer force the first year players to do degrading initiations because they knew them as people, not solely as rookies. They described the activities as nothing more than a team party. This would seem to suggest that the orientation was an effective site for fostering inclusion and true *communitas*, a movement more in line with the cultural definitions and descriptions of rites of passage by Turner and Van Gennep and away from the inverted

practices of contemporary sport team initiations which tend to centralize humiliation and degradation in lieu of inclusion.

The unifying principle of the ceremony is a contestable notion as the “bonding” occurs among the hazers abusing the hazees, and provides the promise of fulfillment with the knowledge and instruction that the subsequent year will provide them with the opportunity to recapture their masculine identity, ascend the power hierarchy, and achieve the status of initiator. For an initiation to be successful in achieving its purpose, it must allow new members to be educated while experiencing commonality and developing connections as members of the same organization. Only then will an initiation achieve its ultimate purpose of producing a unified group. A group can develop unity through acceptable forms of initiations like preseason training, keeping a specific grade point average, dressing for team functions, attending a team roast or skit night, doing community service, going on a picnic, or completing a ropes course.

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