

COACHES' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my trusted advisor, best friend and wife Janice. Thanks for your unwavering support and advice over the past two years; I could not have done it without you.

Abstract

This study identifies male high school coaches' perceptions of the connection between organized sports and school violence. The purpose of the study is to document insights of a previously unstudied segment of the community of professional educators on the topic of school violence. Given that coaches have a unique relationship with students, it is important to access their views on the topic of school violence. The study sample is ten male coaches in Central Alberta who coached school level male athletes and are Physical Education teachers. Interviews were the method of data collection. The results of the study indicate that coaches do not perceive any connection between organized sports and school violence.

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Chapter One: Introduction

“Everybody should have a coach, it keeps your feet planted firmly on the ground and aspiring to reach new heights.” This quote from hockey legend Gordie Howe displayed on a billboard in a local sports store eloquently sums up the value of coaches and the potential contributions they can make to individuals in society. Coaches inspire individuals to strive for athletic and personal accomplishments and are often looked to for guidance in a variety of life decisions. Cross and Lyle (1999) discover that coaching involved one or a series of interpersonal relationships in which the coach is looked toward for guidance by the athlete. Examples of such life decisions ranged from what school to attend, how to balance athletics and academics, what to do when competitive sporting life is finished, and how to use athletic talents to help others.

In addition to being motivators and teachers, Jones (1988) reports that coaches are also seen as role models, disciplinarians, psychologists, friends, counsellors, and life management advisors. Gratto (1983) indicates that coaches are often called upon to be expert tacticians and teachers as well as trainers and confirms the belief that coaches fill a variety of roles in their positions. Given the scope of their role in the school and the importance of athletics in promoting school spirit, it becomes obvious coaches comprise a very important segment of the school population. Coaches are the backbone of school athletics as they organize, recruit, and select students for teams. With this role goes the responsibility of molding students into not only successful athletes but successful individuals as well. It has often been my experience that coaches are held in great esteem by most students (athletically inclined or not) within the microcosm of the school. This encourages students to be more open with coaches than they would be with other

authority figures in the school, such as administration, and to look to them for support and advice.

As students are potentially more inclined to look to coaches for support and advice, it is plausible that students would turn to coaches to discuss matters related to violence in schools.

School violence is a problem. Authors such as Day, Golench, MacDougall and Beals-Gonzalez (1995) report that violence within Canadian schools has been an increasingly serious problem. Incidents range from minor discipline problems such as disobedience, teasing, and taunting, to obscene gesturing, verbal and physical threats, aggression, bullying, assault, vandalism, extortion, and gang-related activities. This violence affects the perpetrator and the victim, the entire student body, the staff, and the community as a whole. According to Roher (1993) the results of a survey of 881 responding schools conducted by the Ontario Teachers Federation (OTF) in 1991 revealed a 150% increase in major incidents such as biting, kicking, punching, and the use of weapons, and a 50% increase in minor incidents such as verbal abuse over a three-year period (1987-1990). Roher also reports that a 1992 survey of 177 elementary and 173 secondary separate schools conducted by the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association indicate that, between 1990-91 and 1991-92, the reported number of verbal assaults increased 6.1% and 20.5% in elementary and secondary schools. During the same period Roher reported that the number of physical assaults increased 3.2% and 2.4% in elementary and secondary schools, respectively.

School violence is more prevalent in American high schools when compared with Canadian schools. It should be noted that any statistics on violence in American high

schools must take into consideration the large population difference that exists between the two countries.

The Columbine High School tragedy is perhaps our most glaring contemporary example of the serious problem of school violence. In 1999 in Littleton, Colorado two students walked into Columbine High School and opened fire on the student body. Twelve students, one teacher, and two suspects were killed; twenty-four students were transported to six local hospitals; and one hundred and sixty students were treated at the scene. The responsible boys were actively searching out “jocks” in their violent assault. It has been suggested that at the root of this incident of school violence were acts of violence perpetrated by athletes. Adams and Russakoff (1999) cite incidences of deferential treatment with respect to academic standards, school attendance, conduct within the school, and lax application of criminal laws toward athletes as being one of the primary problems at Columbine High School. If this evaluation proves to be correct, coaches could prove to be a significant segment of the school population in terms of learning more about school violence. Thus, in addition to coaches’ general perceptions of school violence, we can also focus on their view of violence committed by athletes.

Based on my extensive review of the relevant literature it became apparent that the one group that had not been consulted was coaches. Given their position they are afforded the benefit of having a unique perspective of, and influence on, students. The researcher decided it would be of great benefit to explore this serious issue further with coaches. The research literature demonstrates that coaches have a significant influence on their athletes. Several studies [Corran, (1980); Leith, (1991); Luxbacher, (1986); and Lyle & Cross, (1999)] discover that the attitude and behavior of coaches highly correlated

Research Focus

The focus of this study is high school coaches' perceptions of the connection between organized school sports and school violence. Subsequently, this project attempted to explore the following question: What are high school coaches' perceptions on the connection between organized school sports and school violence?

In attempting to answer this question the research focuses on the six following areas: a) the causes of school violence; b) personal experiences coaches have had with school violence; c) the role of the athlete in the causation of school violence; d) the role of the coach in causation of school violence; e) the issue of deferential treatment for students; and f) the possible connection between organized school sports and school violence.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

This chapter will examine the issues of school violence as it applied to high school athletics, athletes, and the general perceptions held by coaches.

Violence in Sport

The most abundant series of articles reviewed dealt with violence in sport. Metcalfe (1975) carries out research in the area of violence in sport with emphasis on the game of lacrosse. He begins by examining the history of lacrosse in Canada from 1840-1889 and the implications its violent nature had on its development. The implications being that the very violent nature lacrosse initially embraced eventually brought about the inaugural lacrosse league's downfall due to increasing incidents of extreme violence among the players. The research begins with the first recorded lacrosse match held in 1843 at Montreal. He then tracks the development of the game up to the formation of the Lacrosse Championship Series League in 1886 and goes on to discuss why it ultimately failed; the athletes became increasingly aggressive. It got so bad that players refused to play for reasons of personal safety. Metcalfe goes on to summarize his findings by stating that the violent behaviors exhibited on the field of play were, in the end, determined by the relative importance each individual lacrosse player placed upon playing for the games sake or playing it to win. If they were concerned with winning they would behave in a cruel aggressive manner that put opponents in danger. This study suggests that if athletes are concerned enough with winning then they will possibly resort to violent behaviors in an attempt to meet with success. The project study will explore coaches' perceptions of organized sports and school violence. This could possibly lead to new insights on the idea that if athletes do behave in a violent manner on the playing field, could the aggressive

behavior be carried over into the school environment with the end result being school violence.

In the area of psychological perspectives on sport violence, Cheren (1981) discussed the roots and effects of violence in sports. He believes that social context has a great deal to do with how violent potential in athletes is expressed in that sports serves as an acceptable outlet for aggression. His basis for this observation is that violence in the media was shown to have a powerful influence on aggressive behavior in children. When children were not exposed to violent behavior in the athletic domain they did not exhibit like behavior when they played sports. In addition, he believes that our culture reinforces and rewards unsavory characters for violent behavior in athletics.

Cheren's research, through the exploration of three psychological approaches to the phenomenon of aggression, shows that violence in athletics was the uninhibited discharge of unsocialized individuals being paraded before the spectators for fun and profit. Further aggravating the situation are significant monetary rewards for such behavior and the fact that it can become a route to success. In his opinion, the aggressor, as social icon, becomes a substitute for culture hero. He concludes his article with the assertion that violent behavior in sports or elsewhere stimulates more violence, rather than serving as the intended outlet. This stimulation, rather than reducing violence, poses a threat to children in their growth and development, to sports fans and members of society, and to non-violent athletes.

Cheren's article has several links to the project research in that athletes are given special societal status and permitted to engage in random acts of violence, within the confines of athletic events and received little in the way of punishment for their

transgressions. Cheren does not, however, seek out the insight of athletes or coaches' before writing the article. Through exploring the perceptions of coaches' on this topic, Cheren could have gained some potentially valuable insight into the how athletes are sanctioned for transgressions on both the athletic field and in society. Instead of making blanket statements that encompassed the conduct of every athlete without reservation, he could have potentially obtained some information that contradicted her statements. Bennett (1998) provides a contradiction to Cheren as the coach she interviewed dealt harshly with athlete transgressions.

Luxbachler (1986) wrote a very interesting article on violence in sport in which he examined three theories of aggression and discussed their implications for sports violence. The first theory he discusses is instinct theory or the belief that human aggression is innate. These theorists (Berkowitz, 1962, 1965; Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mower & Sears, 1939) base their view upon the belief that humans possess an aggressive drive that gradually builds up and must be released. Luxbachler goes on to refute this theory through the use of several studies clearly indicating that aggressive behavior in sport does not result in a catharsis effect, but rather in increased levels of aggression. The next theory Luxbachler examined was frustration-aggression. This theory explains aggression as a drive that originates from the frustration of efforts to achieve a goal. This theory is refuted on the basis that athletes do not always experience aggression in response to an episode of frustration. Embarrassment, anxiety, and dejection are also quite common when an athlete does not accomplish a goal they have set for themselves. The final theory of aggression discussed by Luxbachler was social learning theory that purports aggression is a learned behavior. Luxbachler emphasizes that this theory focused

on behavior patterns that individuals learn while attempting to adjust to their environment. He most agrees with this theory as is quite possible to believe that athletes will respond in aggressive ways when taught to do so or were mentored by aggressive coaches. If Luxbachler is correct, that would imply that the role model is of great importance when teaching athletic behaviors and it discusses this belief in relation to violence in sport.

Kirshenbaum (1989) wrote an article concerned with the increasing incidence of violence and lawlessness among college athletes. In his article he gives numerous examples of college athletes who have run afoul of the law and questions the ethics of coaches who recruit such reprehensible human beings. He basically states that both coaches and schools are so concerned with winning that they will recruit absolutely anybody who can help them win games. Kirshenbaum ends his spirited article by outlining several measures which would dramatically reduce violence and put college sports on the right track: a) Shorten the basketball season and eliminate pre-season football; b) make freshmen ineligible in sports to give them a better academic start; c) reduce the number of athletic scholarships and link the number granted with the school's athlete-graduation rate; d) abolish athletic dorms; e) equally distribute television money among all schools to reduce the pressure to win and claim the majority of the money and f) crack down on steroid use. Kirshenbaum makes some excellent points in his article, but fails to discuss the obvious impact of the coach on the lifestyles of his players [see, for example, Luxbachler, (1987); Curran, (1980); Leith, (1991)] and how they may play a part in athletic violence. In addition his study is based in the US only and may not pertain to other countries and athletic situations.

In her article on “*Jock Violence*,” Burton (1994) argues that athletes are programmed to be violent through sport by coaches and society. This directly contradicts the findings of Kirshenbaum who believes that athletic violence is a creation of hyped-up media exposure. By repeatedly exposing athletes to the brutal violence that can be a part of sports, Kirshenbaum believes they are unknowingly programmed to be violent when playing sports. Burton believes this programming to be violent, by coaches and society, becomes hard to switch off in other facets of their lives such as dealing with non-athletic peers and significant others. In her article she documents numerous high profile athletes who have been both accused and convicted of domestic violence. The article provided some interesting examples of high-profile figures that have been involved with violence against their non-athletic peers. These examples illustrate that unrestrained or encouraged aggression on the athletic playing field may translate into violent behavior in the school community.

Levin and Smith (1995) wrote an interesting article on the subject of violence and high school sports participation. This study sought to examine whether athletes are more violent, delinquent, or both than their non-athletic classmates. Survey data from 2,436 high school students indicated no significant differences for violent or delinquent behavior between athletes and non-athletes. Although Levin and Smith conducted a detailed study, some issues were addressed in a vague manner. Although both groups may be equally violent, the study does not show which group is initiating the climate of violence. The perception of coaches could offer some insight into this issue and offer some more conclusive support for one group or the other.

School Violence in Alberta

Acts of violence are not exclusive to American high schools. Earlier in the project statistics were given on incidents of school violence in Canada, more specifically, Ontario. As this study focused on Alberta schools it was deemed necessary to include some statistics on incidents of school violence from this province.

Wall (1994) conducted a survey with 29 Alberta school principals who were asked to report on incidents of school violence they helped resolve. The survey provided information on relevant incidents in 29 schools for a total of 58 weeks. The sample contained 21 non-catholic schools and 8 catholic schools. There were 8 urban schools in the sample. These did not include Calgary or Edmonton but were in Lethbridge (2 schools), Medicine Hat (2 schools), Red Deer (1 school), Grande Prairie (1 school), and Fort McMurray (2 schools). These 8 schools report 37 relevant incidents and a student population of 2,727. This means there were 1.3 incidents per 100 students in a two-week period. There were 11 rural schools in the sample. These school principals reported 38 incidents and a total population of 2,351 students. The incident rate for rural schools is 1.65 per 100 students. Edmonton (6 schools) and Calgary (4 schools) reported 29 incidents and a population of 6,524 students which represents 0.4 per 100 students. Of the 114 incidents reported, 104 were considered relevant to the survey purposes and criteria. The overall rate of principal reported incidents in this sample of Alberta schools is 0.9 incidents per 100 Alberta students in a two-week period.

The incidents were characterized as violent when they fell into one of the following survey categories:

- a) scuffle – 56 of the incidents involved a scuffle and ended up with the

interactants physically wrestling with each other or trading punches;

b) one-sided physical aggression – 32 of the incidents were reported as being one-sided aggression without apparent and immediate provocation;

c) threats – 17 of the incidents involved threats where one or more individuals felt intimidated and may have had an indication that some undesirable action was possible;

d) harassment – 15 of the incidents involved harassment in the form of swearing at others, disrespectful behavior in class, or name calling;

e) throwing – 7 of the incidents involved a thrown object. (p.29)

Wall concluded his study by suggesting that incident rates in Alberta are low as a whole. The greatest number of incidents occurs at the elementary school level and there appears to be sharp declines through to high school that has the least amount of incidents.

Gomes, Bertrand, Paetsch and Hornick (1999) in collaboration with the Calgary based Canadian Research Institute for Law and Family conducted an extensive survey on the extent of youth victimization, crime and delinquency in Alberta. A total of 2,001 students (54% females and 46% males) from 67 public and catholic junior and senior high schools in towns/rural areas, smaller cities and larger cities in Alberta completed a questionnaire.

The results of the study indicated a number of different patterns with respect to school violence. The prevalence of victimization was higher at school than not at school. Over half (54%) of the respondents indicated they had been victimized at least once

within the past year at school. The patterns of victimization were similar across locations. The most prevalent incidents included being slapped, punched or kicked; having something stolen; being threatened with bodily harm; and having something damaged. Least prevalent incidents were being attacked by a group or gang and being threatened with a weapon. Junior high students were more likely to report being victimized than high school students and being slapped, kicked or punched in anger was far more common in junior high than high school. More than half (56%) of respondents reported that they had engaged in at least one of the delinquent behaviors in the past year at school. On a positive note, most respondents (84%) reported that they have never had a weapon at school; however, 15.6% indicated they had a weapon at school on at least one occasion in the past year. Most students who reported having a weapon at school indicated this happened only one time. The most prevalent weapon was an illegal knife and the least were handguns.

Both studies have links to the project research in that they provide needed research information on school violence in Alberta. The only point of contention in both studies was that they focused more in scope on elementary and junior high schools where the project research concentrated on high schools.

Causes of School Violence

The following paragraphs will discuss the different factors that contribute to the emerging ethos of school violence.

Deferential treatment of athletes. Coleman (1961) highlights reports of deferential treatment of high school athletes in his significant study of school value climates in terms of differences in orientation toward scholarship, peer popularity, and athletic

achievement. Coleman finds that the differences in value climate were strongly associated with the prestige structure of the school and those athletes, who ranked very high in the school climate, were subsequently rewarded with deferential treatment. Coleman then goes on to discuss how school violence can erupt if the non-athletic students in the school become frustrated by this favored treatment and retaliate with violence.

Coleman (1961) also focuses on the existence of a class system in relation to deferential treatment. His concept of a class system gave deferential status to athletes as they occupied the top rung of the social ladder in the school. In a study concerned with the athletic subculture and its relation to support and prestige within the school:

Among the freshmen in each of the four schools studied for leading cliques, the one attribute shared by every boy in every leading clique...was being out for either football or basketball. No other attribute – in background, activities, or attitudes – so sharply distinguished the leading cliques. In the latter years of school, the leading cliques were found to be less uniformly athletic, but, among freshmen, they were found to be totally so. (p.88)

Snyder and Spreitzer (1979) support Coleman's assertions in a later study when they also report that athletes receive special consideration and more lenient treatment when they commit acts that would otherwise be defined as delinquency.

In a related study, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) argued that students who are already alienated from school tend to drift into associations with subcultures already in existence outside the school. This early finding was tragically reinforced by the unfortunate incident at Columbine HS where the shooters were deemed to be outcasts. Adams and Russakoff (1999) report that the shooters at Columbine were dismayed by the failure of school officials to properly discipline athletes for serious infractions of the

rules. They highlight the seriousness of this lenient treatment of athletes at Columbine high school when they report that:

The state-wrestling champ was regularly permitted to park his \$100,000 Hummer all day in a 15-minute space. A football player was allowed to tease a girl about her breasts in class without fear of retribution by his teacher, also the boy's coach. (p. 1)

They suggest that blatant acts of lawlessness such as this had a major role to play in feelings of hostility toward athletes and ultimately contributed to the serious acts of violence that were committed at Columbine High School.

The role of the athlete. Athletes also play a role in the encouragement of school violence when they taunt opponents. School sporting rivalries are commonplace in our society and participating individuals can take them quite seriously. Eveslage and Delaney (1998) report the seriousness of “trash-talking” during athletic competitions in a study they conducted at one American high school. The findings suggest that the practice of insulting opponents now influences the conduct of young players and can lead to retaliatory attacks during the school day.

Class systems. A common theme in the literature on school violence is its relation to class systems within the school environment. Cohen (1955) argued that a delinquent subculture in general, and violence towards school in particular, is a response of frustration of lower socio-economic status class students. He maintained that lower socio-economic status students are alienated from school because they are less equipped with the necessary resources for adjustment to the normative, social and educational demands of the school. As a result of this adaptation problem, these students develop a delinquent subculture that provides them with alternative status and rewards derived from their affiliation with the delinquent group.

In a later study Willis (1977) took the research on class systems within the school environment much further in a study of middle class students from England. Willis believes that students who perceive themselves to be inferior to their peers often band together and create a counter-school culture. This culture is based on an opposition to authority and rejection of conformity. His fieldwork showed that these middle class students consistently dressed differently, broke school rules, and formed an informal group in response to the class culture they were being forced into by the educational system. Willis goes on to theorize that class cultures are created specifically in response to particular oppositions at school. These cultures arise through definite struggles over time with other groups and, as a result, evolve into entities with their own forms of discipline and rituals. This class culture is supported by massive webs of informal groupings and countless overlappings of experience so that rituals have a chance to be recreated in concrete settings growing stronger and made available to more people who find themselves in similar life situations. These findings are significant in that school violence can be a requirement of counter-school cultures. When students feel they have no connection to the higher class of students at school, such as athletes, Willis and Cohen argue that they respond with violence in an attempt to compensate for these feelings for inadequacy.

The media. Throughout the reviewed literature reference was made to the strong influence of the media on the growing phenomenon of school violence. Campbell (1993) reported that by the time children completed elementary school, television viewing had shown them 8,000 murders and over 100,000 acts of violence. Ledingham, Ledingham and Richardson (1993) also presented a strong argument for a potential link between

aggressive behavior in young children and media violence. Throughout the course of the interviews respondents made reference to the fact that they believed the media is partially responsible for school violence. Respondents believed that if students are exposed to violence in the media, the potential to imitate these acts of violence could exist.

Coaching and School Violence

Numerous articles have been written on the subject of coaching [Corran, (1980); Gratto, (1983); Luxbachler, (1986); Leith, (1991); Bennett, (1998); Cross & Lyle, (1999)] as it has many facets to discuss. The subtopics discussed in this section focus on the role of the coach in encouraging aggression, socialization, role modeling and discipline. In addition, the subtopics have been arranged in an order that allows for an effective presentation of the ideas central to the themes discovered in the literature. An overview of the basic criteria one must meet to become a successful coach is outlined by Jones (1988) as being:

Possess reasonable flexibility and receptivity to attitudinal changes in society that affect youth; have an ability to cope with the problems and concerns of athletes; have developed a willingness to communicate; use good judgement in the appropriate use of motivational techniques. (p.3)

In addition, Cross and Lyle (1999) state that a coach must wear a variety of proverbial hats as they are expected to be role models, disciplinarians, and trusted advisors. In addition to the multitude of tasks they are expected to perform, the coaching profession is one of elevated importance and pressure in schools where coaches' are being paid (in some form or another) to do what they have a passion for.

McTeer and White (1989) in a pilot study of the role-modeling effect of high school physical education teachers/coaches reported that the influence of the physical

education teacher was comparable with that of parents. The findings showed a positive correlation between the activity levels of the favorite high school physical education teacher and the students. This study is relevant to the current project in that McTeer and White found that if the teacher models inappropriate behavior then students would be socialized in a negative manner. If the behavior being modeled is aggressive or violent then the student could possibly behave in the same manner with the end result being school violence.

Over the past few decades the image of athletes has changed dramatically. Until recently, it was the expected norm for athletes to be “cool” and sometimes treat their peers with disdain. Bennett (1998) interviewed one coach who was quoted as stating “In the old days I was a jerk” (p.24). A major factor in the changing face of athletic behavior has been the development of a new, enlightened perspective on the part of coaches. This new outlook places an emphasis on how the athletes act off as well as on the field. Bennett also reports that a lot of coaches now pull players out of the game if they are caught putting down their teammates, opposing players, arguing with officials or fighting. In addition coaches also monitor the behavior of their athletes within the community and school. One coach interviewed in Bennett’s study was quoted as saying: “ If I catch them driving too fast out of the parking lot, I make them run laps after practice. If I catch them drinking they sit out two games. If I hear them making sexist remarks or belittling a fellow student I directly confront the student and make them responsible for what they have done” (p.25). Coaches are beginning to take an active role in the discipline of their athletes and this may go a long way in preventing episodes of school violence from occurring.

To be a coach is a position of great responsibility and respect. It has been my experience that athletes hold them in high regard and often place great stock in what they believe from both an athletic and life standpoint.

Luxbacher (1987) argues that the athletic coach occupies the most significant position of influence to socialize players. He documented numerous scenarios of violence in professional sport to make the reader aware of their growing incidence. Luxbacher concluded that social learning is the most viable explanation for much of the violence pervading athletics and since aggressive behavior is learned and often situation specific, there is optimism that aggression in sport can be lessened. Luxbacher feels that if coaches spend more time teaching athletes to be less aggressive then violence in sport could be reduced considerably. This article is of great importance to the current study in that he believes coaches could not underestimate the importance of their role model status on athletes. Luxbacher contended that if players perceive their coach to value violence and aggression as a means of achieving success, then it is probable that the players will exhibit such behavior. Luxbacher's also attempts to determine coaches' perceptions on school violence, but his study differs from the current project in that he was specifically looking at the relationship between coaching styles and aggressive behavior by athletes.

In a closely related article Corran (1980) discussed the role of the coach in violence. Corran based his research on the increasing incidents of violent behavior amongst sports participants and spectators. He studied various theories on the origins of aggression in sport and focused on the role of the coach. Corran contended that those involved in coaching occupy a most influential position in the learning of responses to frustration on the part of athletes under their charge. He believes that much of the

learning of sport participants can be directed effectively by a coach away from the excessive aggression so common today. He concluded that reinforcement of violent behavior influences athletes' learning and subsequent behavior and that coaches have the responsibility to help develop a non-violent approach to sport and competition in young athletes.

Leith (1992) discussed the specific role of the coach in encouraging aggression in athletes. Leith also suggested the possibility of a link between coaching behaviors and school violence. Leith provided the reader with a summary of the research in this area to date with emphasis on Luxbacher. Leith described the detailed body of research on what causes aggressive behavior and narrowed the research down to the following factors: Competition, outcome of the contest, point differential, home versus away game location, physical contact, referees, social attribution, social learning, and coaches. Leith used his own research based on the role of competition, vicarious participation in physical activity, reinforcers, feedback modes, and emotional reactions of participants on aggression in sports to arrive at his conclusions. To summarize Leith's main argument, he believes coaches are the main cause of aggression in sports as they are in an established position of control over the athletes. Based on his research, Leith contended that coaches could exert a strong influence on their players concerning the amount of aggression displayed in the sporting environment. By consciously or subconsciously administering positive and negative reinforcers of aggressive behaviors, they ultimately shape the frequency of overt aggression. Leith's study raised a number of interesting issues that the current study will subsequently pursue by asking coaches if they perceive the violent

behavior of athletes is ultimately the result of coaches turning a blind eye to school transgressions.

Conclusion

The consensus in the literature is that coaches may have either a positive or negative impact on their players in terms of level of aggression exhibited during competition, depending on their method of coaching. Leith and Luxbachler reinforce this in the literature when they discuss the impact of the coach on athletes. They contend that if coaches advocate and encourage an increased level of aggression then athletes will respond in a manner consistent with their coach's expectations. By engaging in a review of the literature on violence in sport it is demonstrated that violence does occur in the sporting environment at various levels from the professional ranks down through college and high school athletics. When sports are a part of high school culture, it is logical to imply that violence may be as well. When athletes are treated in a deferential manner or are rewarded for aggression on the field then an atmosphere of hostility can develop between students and athletes. Students who do not participate in athletics could then potentially resent athletes who are treated deferentially in a school environment and respond toward them in a negative manner. Athletes who are encouraged to display aggressive behavior on the playing field may also not understand the boundaries for appropriate use of aggression and conclude that if it is acceptable during school sporting events then aggression must also be acceptable during the school day as well.

The reviewed literature contained no specific studies regarding what the perceptions of coaches' are on the topic of school violence. This project will attempt to

provide some insight on the perceptions of coaches' from a high school coaching perspective.

Chapter Three: Research Method

This study was exploratory in nature, as when setting out it was not clear if this critical but overlooked population would have new insights to offer.

How The Research Was Conducted

After reviewing the literature related to qualitative research, the researcher chose Strauss & Corbin (1990), Creswell (1998), and Silverman (2000) as the primary sources. They were chosen for the various approaches to gathering data for qualitative studies discussed in their research and the fact that they were very well established in the field. After an extensive survey of the information contained in these works, interviews were chosen as the most acceptable method of data collection and the study was based on a grounded theory approach.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were chosen to ensure participation of respondents. A questionnaire was also considered, but rejected, as respondents would likely not take the necessary time to complete it. Palys (1997) supports this view when he states: “Many of the advantages of questionnaires are handled admirably by the interview. Participation rates among people approached for a face-to-face interview are often around 80 percent or even 90 percent. . .” (p.154). The interview was also chosen as the preferred method of data collection over the questionnaire based on the inherent benefits of contact. Palys (1997) supports this decision when he states: “The interviewer can ensure the appropriate person completes the interview, immediately clarify any confusion about particular questions, and encourage verbally stingy respondents to embellish further” (p.154).

The Population

The respondent group included ten coaches from the sports of basketball, volleyball, and football. These sporting activities were chosen because they were all present at local high schools where the chosen respondents taught and were the most popular in terms of student participation. It was decided that this would provide the study with the most relevant responses from coaches as they had the advantage of working with an appropriate sample of athletes, allowing them to be knowledgeable in the area of questioning. All respondents were from a mid-sized Western Canadian urban community. The rationale for drawing the sample exclusively from a community of this nature was based on ease of access to respondents. Working and teaching in the community the researcher had previously developed a good working knowledge of the sports coached by the chosen respondents and it was not difficult to enlist their participation in the study. In addition, it was felt that the size of the town was large enough to allow similar comparisons to coaching situations in other parts of Canada whose size and educational institutions were similar. The study focussed on sports programs in Central Alberta because it was geographically accessible and had a diverse pool of available coaches.

The ten coaches who participated in the study were chosen based on my personal knowledge of their coaching backgrounds and the fact that they were the only full-time coaches at their schools in these sports. The respondents showed a great deal of interest and were subsequently very eager to help. The only real concern they had was being unknowingly portrayed in a negative manner; they did not want themselves or the schools at which they taught to be perceived as violent based on their responses. To resolve this

concern I emphasized that neither the respondents nor the schools they worked at could be identified by their responses in the study.

Rationale for Population Selection

The sample was deliberately designed to cover three different sports, all of which are taught in high school. Volleyball, basketball and football are the three most prominent team sports in Alberta high schools. The Alberta Schools Athletic Association (ASAA) reports the following statistics in their 2000/2001 provincial championship program guide:

Activity	Participating Schools	Males	Females	Total
Basketball	240	3000	3000	6000
Cheerleading	20	30	320	350
Curling	150	600	600	1200
Football	98	2650	0	2650
Golf	125	800	500	1300
Volleyball	240	3000	3500	6500

Figure 1. ASAA Sport/School/Gender Participation Statistics.

Based on personal experience as an active coach and physical education teacher, the athletes who compete in these sports enjoy elevated levels of prestige within the microcosm of the school. This was of importance to the study, as coaches who have relevant experience working with athletes afforded an elevated social status within the school based on their participation in athletics were needed. By ensuring this situation was present, it allowed the researcher to be confident that each coach would have an opinion on the relevant interview questions.

Basketball, volleyball and football are also the sports given the most media attention within the school and the local community according to a phone conversation with the sports editor of the local newspaper. He indicated that basketball, volleyball, and football gets the most media coverage in the local newspaper. Historically these sports have been the most prominent; with football getting the most coverage of the three. (D.Rode, personal communication, February 14th, 2000) This was a factor as respondents having dealt with athletes who receive a certain amount of notoriety from the school and community for their participation in athletics was necessary.

The sample was representative within the following parameters: All participants were male high school coaches, had Physical Education degrees, coached males, and taught in western Canada. The reason only male respondents who coached males were chosen was due to the fact that no female coaches in the targeted sports at schools in the research area coached male athletes. Before engaging in the research, the necessary steps to determine if it was permissible to conduct research with employees of the school district were carried out. Letters of permission were then sent to the potential respondents explaining the research and asking if they would volunteer 45 minutes of their time to be interviewed. These letters were then personally mailed out to the identified respondents by the researcher. A time period of two days was deemed to be appropriate to contact the individuals in person to confirm receipt of the letters and their participation. After answering any questions they had about the upcoming study, an interview time was arranged that was suitable to both parties and respondents were given a copy of the appointment time on a business card. After discussing what times were appropriate for

the respondents an interview list of times was drawn up and followed over the course of the research.

Permission was always asked to tape the conversation, as it was very important to accurately capture the respondents' direct quotations for the research. Patton (1980) feels that the interactive nature of in-depth interviewing is seriously affected by attempts to take verbatim notes during an interview. He outlines the advantages of taping as: a) The interviewer is able to be more attentive to the respondent; b) the pace of the interview can become decidedly non-conversational and c) you have a recorded history of all information discussed in the interview for transcription and analysis after the interview. Patton (1980) also highlights some negative aspects of taping for the researcher. The first is that tape recorders do break or not record at times. This can result in a loss of valuable data for the researcher. Also when proper precautions are not made to limit background noise data can be rendered unusable. I eventually decided to choose to tape my interviews based on the nature of the data I was attempting to collect. For personal interviews, the focus of the interview is to accurately obtain and report the personal feelings of each respondent on the interview material. If I had chosen not to tape I could not have been assured of reporting their exact comments in my research.

Respondents were told they would not be identified in any way by their participation in the study. It was explained to the respondents that the researcher would not use their names or specific schools of employment and that anyone reading the project would not be able to discern their identity from the information they would provide. We initially talked about a variety of topics to start such as how things were going at school, various professional sporting teams, upcoming travel plans, and our

families. The formal interview process began with the explanation that the answers to the questions provided by the respondents on the tape recorder and note-pad would be recorded for my notes and to assist me in writing the project. At the conclusion of the interview respondents were asked, 'do you have anything further to add?' Once the tape recorder was turned off, the respondent would sometimes add further information. This would sometimes lead to more data or, if the respondent was tired of the questioning process, nothing further.

Overall Research Strategy and Rationale

After consulting the literature, I decided to use a grounded theory approach as the best methodology for an exploratory study. Cresswell (1998) indicates that research projects of an exploratory nature lend themselves to grounded theory format. My topic met the criteria as no research had been conducted in the area to date. Cresswell believes that for forays into uncharted research settings, when the researcher plans to interview respondents in their natural setting, grounded theory is most appropriate. In addition, I did not begin with a theory and set out to prove it to be correct. As I was beginning with an area of study, coaches' perception of school violence, and conducted interviews to let relevant information emerge. This type of data collection is one of the core tenants of grounded theory and has proven to be superior to other methodologies when dealing with human participants. Strauss and Corbin (1990) support this process when they state:

Grounded theory methodology incorporates the assumption, shared with other, but not all, social science positions concerning the status of human actors whom we study. They have perspectives on and interpretations of their own and other actor's actions. As researchers, we are required to learn what we can of their interpretations and perspectives. Beyond that, grounded theory requires...that those interpretations and perspectives be incorporated into our own interpretations." (p.280)

With the intention of keeping the interviews somewhat focused, a semi-structured interview format was decided upon. Key questions for the study were drawn up and placed into categories based on the literature review. The literature pointed to causes of school violence being related to deferential treatment of athletes, subcultures, the media, and coaching. After taking this into consideration, the interview categories and questions were created. Semi-structured interviews work best when conducting interviews on the same topic with multiple respondents by allowing the researcher to obtain data that is systematic and thorough for each interview. I ensured that my focus was not biased in that I did not have different interviews for different people. By reducing the variation in questions posed to the respondents, I was able to keep the same interview focus for all interviews and obtain similar information.

Design and Techniques Utilized

When developing grounded theory, information is initially gathered into a large pool via the interview process and then placed into separate categories based on what information the researcher is studying. The researcher taped the interviews and took notes throughout the process. These notes, in addition to a transcription of pertinent information from the interview tape, were used to gather and categorize the project information. The researcher decided not to transcribe the entire sessions as the information necessary to complete the research was achieved through the reviewing of the interview tapes and selecting what material was applicable to the research. Each interview was reviewed five times to ensure the researcher did not miss any information of importance to the research. The notes were made on a large pad of paper first and later

typed up on a word processing package. Information was then taken and fit into the broad categories of biographical and general perspectives.

The open coding aspect of grounded theory format allows for the preliminary collection of information and the placing of the data into connecting categories of information. Cresswell (1998) states:

Open coding is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data. The second phase of grounded theory methodology, axial coding, provided the design needed to devise a “story” of sorts that connected the information and allowed the study to finish with a discursive set of theoretical propositions or selective coding. (p.12)

Axial coding allows the obtained data from open coding to be put back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories. This category is the phenomenon being studied and in the axial coding phase is geared toward discovering and relating categories. Each category is developed in terms of the causal conditions that give rise to it, the specific dimensional location of this phenomenon in terms of its properties, the context, the action/interactional strategies used to handle, manage, and respond to this phenomenon in light of that context, and the consequences of any action that is taken. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

After analyzing the data obtained from my interviews, I began to implement the selective coding phase of the study whereby the core category emerged. Based on my research, the story that emerged was that coaches do not believe that there is a connection between school violence and school sports. A number of subcategories did emerge however and these involved coaching beliefs/practices and violence, cultural differences between Canada and the United States, and the differences in types of aggression. I then set about relating all my subcategories to the core category or phenomenon.

Interview Questions/Data Studied

The interview questions (Appendix) attempted to gain the following types of data:

a) Biographical data on the respondents' training and experience as coaches; b) their general perceptions on the issue of school violence and its causation; c) personal data on their own experiences with school violence; d) their perceptions on the suggested role of coaches and athletes in school violence causation and e) their perceptions on the suggested existence of a connection between organized school sport and school violence. The interview questions focused on these areas, as they were the ones highlighted in the current literature.

Advantages and Limitations

Information was gained in a scheduled fashion by using the interview as my method of data collection. This allowed for the establishment and meeting of timelines for conducting the study.

Limitations of the study can be attributed to the geographic area utilized. If the study had been conducted in a larger urban setting, a wider range of potential respondents to choose from would have been present.

Chapter Four: Coaches' Views on the Causes of School Violence

This chapter provides a summary of the data analyzed from the interviews with the sample population, coaches, whose comments have been incorporated where appropriate.

Coaches' Perceptions Regarding the Causes of School Violence

All of the ten interviewed coaches had different perceptions of what exactly was the cause of the school violence, but most agreed that school violence was created by an informal "class" system of groups within the school. Eight of the ten coaches interviewed respond that having these different groups within the school created friction and that conflict often ensued.

It [school violence] has to do with fitting in, belonging to groups...then it becomes a power, prestige, status issue.

We have a definite class system in schools...such different groups of people; jocks, scholars, skateboarders...these groups don't find or choose not to find ways to mingle with each other.

School violence can be attributed mainly to the existence of 'cliques' and one group(s) feel they are better than each other and, in an effort to reinforce this belief, conflict occurs.

Two of the interviewed coaches feel that the class system does not exist in smaller schools and, at least from their perspective, could not contribute to school violence.

My school is so small that if we had different 'groups' of kids they would have probably two or three students in each one! This isn't a cause of school violence, at least not in my world.

Three of the interviewed coaches also feel that inflated egos are a main cause of school violence. Individuals within the school environment often have an inflated opinion

of their level of influence/status and, as a result, feel they are above the rules. When these individuals or groups of individuals choose to use physical violence to assert their influence school violence results.

Students do not know how to handle ego type problems...it [school violence] would be decreased if people could learn to drop their ego and pride at certain times.

School violence is often the result of one group thinking they are better than another group.

Two of the interviewed coaches feel that lifestyle, economic and ethnic backgrounds trigger conflict in the form of school violence. It is their belief that the presence of racial and socioeconomic differences among students can also lead to incidents of violence.

The school I attended was quite large and multi-cultural. We had fights all the time and it seemed that the people involved were always from different ethnic backgrounds.

In the community I came from three different groups of people attending the school: natives, French, and Caucasians. This melting pot of cultures resulted in numerous fights at school.

Two of the interviewed coaches also feel that students who are “picked on” or lack people skills, create school violence. It is their perception that students who fall out of the mainstream and cannot get a peer group often perceive other students as being the reason for their “social snubbing” and react in violent ways.

Kids who don’t find a peer group to fit in with and are picked on often lash out to compensate.

Kids who have no people skills and spend too much time playing video games are targets of insults and often react in a harsh manner.

The main violence [at Columbine] was committed by individuals who savored the role of being outsiders.

Two of the interviewed coaches also feel that the media is partially responsible for school violence. They feel that increased coverage of violent events, choice of programming, and glorifications of violence were all contributing factors. It is their perception that continued exposure to violence eventually makes people more accepting of violence and subsequently less averse to perpetrating violence against their peers.

Violent images numb people toward the actual violence and they therefore feel ok to perpetrate.

School violence is an arm of society. Through violent TV shows, video games, and choice media reporting individuals learn that violence is a way to solve problems.

Coaches also feel that the increase in and access to weapons has created a different climate at the school, a climate more conducive to violence.

Before you'd never see weapons at school. Now kids are getting busted for having knives and guns. The really scary thing is they both know how to use them and aren't afraid of using them.

In seven of the ten interviews it is made clear to the researcher that the nature of school violence has changed over the years to become more intense.

The type of violence [in schools] has changed, before two guys who had an issue would go out behind the school and settle the issue, when one guy won the other would stop. Now it is either two gangs going out behind the school with a variety of weapons and if two guys fight now instead of leaving when one guy is beaten

the violence continues with excessive kicks to the head, and often more than one person joins in.

With the increase in weapons and their overall acceptance as part of life has contributed to an upswing in not only violence but also serious injuries and death.

The means by which violence is delivered has changed from hand-to hand to weapons, we have experienced a definite increased accessibility to means and increased brutal violence has ensued.

In addition to the primary causes of school violence reported by coaches a number of other potential causes are reported in less significant numbers. These causes are identified as parents as poor role models and increased brokering of violence by students.

Another significant theme that emerges from the interview data focuses on the inherent difference between coaches in Canada and the United States. Respondents are quick to highlight the fact that significant philosophical differences do exist between the two countries.

In Canada coaching in high school athletics is done on a volunteer basis and individuals should be attempting to develop athletes morally in addition to athletically.

In the United States quite frequently individuals are hired to coach with teaching being a secondary concern.

In summary, the main theme that emerges from this section of the chapter revolves around the issue of a hierarchy or class system in the school. The one point they all agree on is that athletes and athletics play no special role in the instigation of school violence.

Episodes of School Violence Experienced by Coaches

One of the questions posed during the interviews directly asked coaches if they had any personal experiences with school violence. They are very adamant in stating they have never witnessed any violence that would compare with the Columbine tragedy, but all have been involved in breaking up fights on school grounds. In their estimation it is generally perceived and agreed upon by all respondents that it is the responsibility of the coach/PE teacher to intervene when students fight and get them to the office. They also commented that through dealing with the aggressive behavior in a firm and decisive manner they hope to discourage the students from becoming repeat offenders. Three of the interviewed coaches had also experienced fights on the playing field during athletic competitions. These experiences ranged from simple scuffles in PE class when a student becomes mildly agitated to a direct, intended assault on a specifically targeted student with a weapon.

Once during a broomball class another student got very angry so he turned around and gave the kid a two-handed chop across the helmet with his wooden stick.

When I was doing my student teaching at [the school] I came across a student sitting in the PE office and he was covered in blood, his face was a mess, and he had a broken nose. I asked him what happened and he said four guys from the rival school had walked into our school, jumped him at his locker and beat him into a bloody pulp for trash talking on the basketball court. His only comment was 'don't worry they will get theirs.'

I had to break up a fight in the parking lot one time where a student was repeatedly smashing the head of another student into the bumper of a car.

The main theme that emerges from the interviews dealing with violence in physical education/coaching is that this is an area where more violence does occur. This

violence is perceived by the respondents to be the direct result of increased levels of competitiveness between students. Respondents feel that when you are putting out your maximum effort in an athletic event you also experience increased feelings of competitiveness. In some instances athletes, when prevented from achieving their athletic aim, can take these intense feelings too far and commit acts of violence against their peers. Basically they feel that minor scuffles, which all coaches report experiencing, went with the physical education territory and should be expected to occur.

Coaches' Perceptions on the Role of Athletes and School Violence

Coaches were also asked if they thought that athletes were the ultimate cause of school violence through physical bullying and intimidation tactics. All ten coaches in the sample respond with an emphatic “NO” to this question. The coaches feel that due to the high level of recognition athletes get within the school it makes them easy targets for the criticism of others. If anything coaches assert that athletes are, in general, a confident group of mature individuals who possess high levels of self-esteem and numerous other positive character traits.

Athletes are often unfairly targeted in the school environment due to their high profile and other people's jealousy.

Athletes exude confidence and this makes them an easy target.

Athletes are the BMOC [Big Men on Campus] and while some may lord it over other kids they did not deserve to be killed for it.

All ten coaches' also feel that it was unfair to group all athletes under the one category behavior wise. To say that “athletes” in general are responsible for school violence was deemed to be unfair and inaccurate.

At a school like Columbine I'd say 500-600 kids are "athletes"...were they all responsible?

Correct me if I'm wrong but did you see any athletes running around the school that day toting guns? No. You saw two deranged individuals who savored the role of "outsider" shooting children who were athletes, actors, students....

The main theme that emerges from the interview data revolves around the idea of athletes being seen as exceptional individuals within the school. All coaches steadfastly maintain that only good can come of athletic participation and the end result is a more well-rounded, tolerant individual.

Coaches' Perceptions on the Role of Coaches in School Violence

Coaches also have some interesting perceptions concerning what role they may play in school violence. All ten coaches in this sample feel that the concept of coaches inciting school violence was preposterous. . . in Canada. They believe that here coaches are teachers first and coaches second. In the United States coaches are paid and expected to generate a winning record. It is when coaches confuse winning with concepts like fair play and producing quality, caring individuals that the line gets blurry.

I come down hard on my athletes if they get into trouble...I believe they are student-athletes and not athlete-students. Eddy Esso coaching the hockey team might have a different take on things but not me.

Part of the coaching philosophy here is it is a privilege to be on a team and if you're acting in an inappropriate manner then it will be dealt with.

No, coaches are not the problem. I'm harsher on my athletes...if one of my athletes is being an idiot I go off on them.

Coaches have a legal responsibility as teachers to diffuse situations of violence at school.

No, I wouldn't put up with threats of or physical acts of violence by a student just because they were an athlete.

Although the respondents unanimously agree that coaches were not the problem the researcher was told some interesting stories about suspected acts of anger and turning the proverbial blind eye to obvious disregard for the ethics and rules of a sport.

At half-time of an important basketball game in which the home team was losing, the coach of the football team walked across the floor, grabbed the microphone and ordered all his football players who were present in the crowd to immediately leave the gym as he didn't want them watching a bunch of losers.

Some coaches elevate winning and to achieve this end they sometimes let the kids away with stuff.

It happens, I knew of an incident where a player had a razor blade in his arm-wrap and was clipping kids with it, another boy sharpened the buckles on his face-mask, another played two games with his arm wrapped in a cast he was supposed to have been done with. I'm not saying the coaches were entirely responsible, but they could have been more diligent in their checking of equipment.

Coaches' Perceptions on the Issue of Deferential Treatment for Athletes

All the coaches in this study strongly feel that athletes receive deferential treatment within the school. They are quick to highlight the fact that it is not the type of deferential treatment that would negatively affect the students such as allowing for gross violations of school rules, ignoring grades, and condoning absences. The deferential treatment received by student athletes here in Western Canada was the opposite. Coaches felt that athletes were subjected to higher standards of behavioral and moral conduct than the average student due to the fact that they were representing their school and community.

Our athletes are placed on a pedestal above other students and are expected to perform better – we put more pressure on them in this way as opposed to giving them special treatment.

No, if anything athletes are asked to be more. They are discriminated against!

They don't, they receive notoriety but not a lot of deferential treatment. A lot of other students and people perceive them to be treated differently but these are privileges athletic participation affords.

The deferential treatment afforded athletes in schools is restricted to relatively minor things that do not incite them to behave in an inappropriate manner towards their peers. Some examples of deferential treatment perceived by coaches to exist are: a) Special gymnasium and equipment borrowing privileges; b) special athletic only clothing; c) athletes often leave or miss school for sporting events and d) receive extensions on assignments. One coach summed it up the awarding of special privileges when he stated:

These are not huge things when you consider the fact that the student is representing our school and community, 'quid pro quo right?'

Upon review of the interview data, it becomes apparent that coaches do not feel that athletes are treated differently than other non-athletic members of the school. Coaches feel this deferential treatment is relatively insignificant and not enough to incite resentment toward them as a social group.

Organized Sport and School Violence

Coaches in this study are adamant that, for the most part, there is no connection between organized sport and school violence. Nine of the respondents strongly feel that when quality individuals fill the role of coach no connection exists.

No! It is related to societal issues and not sports. Organized sports do not condone or encourage school violence. Other kids become jealous of athletes and choose to lash out against them and find reasons to dislike them.

No! Kids in sports have realized the value of what they are doing...they have ways to constructively express their aggression...sports direct energy.

A coach who is a quality person will preach fair play. If the coach is coaching to make better players and people then no connection can exist.

Only one coach feels that a connection does exist and some of the other coaches highlight the fact that if situation X was present then it could potentially happen.

Yes, because sport is sometimes violent. I don't think in general it goes outside the sporting event but it does happen, people get into fights...generally the two are separate however.

Bad coaches hurt sport. When you see high-school kids 'aping' pro athletes then some connection will exist, when players use cheap shots during games then this can translate into school violence.

A lot of people attend sporting events and because so many people are present in one area then fights ensue, if it was a movie drive-in the same thing would happen.

Instrumental Aggression versus Goal Aggression

The main theme of the organized sports versus school violence section of this chapter is a specific one. Throughout the course of the interviews, six of the coaches make reference to the concept of instrumental aggression versus goal aggression. They argue that no relationship can exist between organized sport and school violence because of the difference in the type of aggression fostered in players. The interviewed coaches are clear in that they feel people's misconceptions in this area are contributing to a negative "rap" for athletes and athletics. People do not understand the difference and they assume that all aggression is bad and incites violence.

Within the context of instrumental aggression a salesman or an athlete can be characterized as aggressive or behaving aggressively without having as a goal doing violence to another human. It is a vigorous, not violent, action toward a goal...the end zone in football for example...goal aggression is actually penalized in football, sanctioned heavily in sport, detrimental and counter-productive to the team effort.

In conclusion, the majority of the coaches interviewed hold very similar views on the issues of school violence in relation to athletics. Coaches all strongly feel that school violence does occur but it is more of an issue in larger urban areas. They attribute this to both larger numbers of people and increased interaction between different societal groups. Coaches also observe that we pale in comparison to our peers from the United States with respect to severity and frequency of violence within the school. Statistics on the prevalence of school-based violence in the United States are astonishing.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study is to identify male high school coaches' perceptions of the connection between organized school sports and school violence. This study obtains its findings through a series of interviews with male coaches from Western Canada. Eight of the coaches in this study feel that school violence was caused by the presence of an informal class system in the school. The friction between these groups results in violent skirmishes. Inflated egos and perceptions of being superior on the part of some students and differences in lifestyle, economic backgrounds and race are also seen as contributing factors.

All ten of the coaches in this study feel that athletes are not the main problem with school violence. The coaches feel that the high level of recognition athletes get within a school makes them easy targets for criticism.

Once again, all ten coaches in this study disagree with this question. They feel coaches are teachers first and, if anything, they personally hold their athletes to higher moral/behavioral standards than other students.

All of the coaches in this study are adamant that there is no connection between organized sport and school violence. They strongly feel that when quality individuals fill the role of coach, no problems occur.

Although the data collected in this study suggest that a majority of coaches generally feel that school violence and athletics are not connected, responses to probing questions provide the study with new perspectives on how much violence actually occurs in school. For example, every interviewed coach had personal experiences with school violence. The experiences ranged from verbal abuse and intimidation to fighting. In addition, the majority of interviewed coaches feel that they had attended high schools where violence in the form of fighting was a common occurrence.

Chapter Five: Implications and Conclusion

Implications

As was indicated in the review of literature, no research existed in the area of coaches' perceptions of school violence. As this was an initial exploratory study there is still much to be learned regarding athletics, coaches, and the issue of school violence.

The findings presented in this study indicate that coaches strongly perceived there to be very little connection between sports and school violence. This finding was consistent with the work of Levin & Smith (1995) who also reported that sports and school violence did not heavily affect each other. One of the interesting implications that came out of the research was the fact that all coaches had personal experiences with school violence. This does not indicate that when violence occurs within the physical education environment it has a direct translation to the school environment. The large majority of interviewed coaches also experience violence in their role as a coach in addition to school fighting, this would seem to indicate that violence does occur within the confines of athletics. This finding is consistent with the work of Cheren (1981) who reported that if an individual is exposed to aggressive behavior in one aspect of their lives it can affect them in other life situations.

After reviewing the respondents' interview data, it becomes apparent that they agree with the earlier research [see, for example, Corran, (1980); Leith, (1991); Luxbachler, (1986); Burton, (1994); and Metcalfe (1975)] conducted on the issue of coaching and violence. The researchers found that athletes will respond in aggressive ways if they have been taught to be aggressive or were mentored by aggressive coaches. This would further tie into the research by Kirshenbamn (1999) and McTeer and White

(1989) who also reported that coaches cannot underestimate their importance and influence as role models for athletes. The data obtained from the study strongly indicated that respondents concurred with the research contained in the review of literature as they also felt that when quality individuals are coaching aggression is not a problem. When unscrupulous individuals who value winning over moral development are at the helm, interviewed coaches felt that problems can easily develop. In addition, coaches felt that the difference between forms of aggression should be considered when discussing organized sports. The respondents' views are consistent with Bailey (1976) who reports that goal aggression is reactive in nature. It occurs after provocation, pain, threat, or frustration. The ultimate aim is to hurt, subjugate, or thwart the person who is the target for aggression.

Contrary to the emotionally charged atmosphere that is required for goal aggression, instrumental aggression need not possess the same nature of anger.

Hetherington (1998) supports this when he states:

Instrumental aggression uses aggressive behavior as a means to an end. Aggression is not the end. Aggressive behavior is simply a way of attaining a goal. The aggressor may be seeking money, status, territory, honor, or the approval of a significant other.” (p.1)

A clear example of instrumental aggression is provided by Bailey (1976) when he states: “ One of the most familiar forms of instrumental aggression is activities inspired by the loyal obedience to a group such as a nation calling a citizen to war in the name of patriotism” (p.14).

Respondents also felt that no class system existed in their schools for athletes that would grant them an elevated status over their non-athletic peers. This data is directly

contradicted by the material presented by Coleman (1961) in his research on class systems in the school and deferential treatment for athletes. Interviewed respondents in this study actually felt that athletes were held to a higher code of behavior within the school and had far less leniency applied to them when the situation occurred. Cultural differences do factor in as his research was conducted in the United States and applied to the high school sporting climate in that particular country in the 1960s. The importance of geographical location was demonstrated throughout the project by the research material of Adams and Russakoff (1999) as well as the interview data of coaches themselves as our sporting climate in Canada is not very similar in terms of pressure, expectations, and popularity.

The final major implication that arose during my analysis of the project findings relates to the research of Cloward and Ohlin (1960) on the issue of subscription to subcultures. The researchers reported that students who experience little success forming relationships within the school environment typically become frustrated and seek out groups outside the school. Interviewed respondents supported this finding when they stated that the majority of school violence is caused by disgruntled, socially snubbed students as was the case in the most recent school shootings. What coaches failed to mention was that most of the school violence leading up to these fatal acts of violence was reported to be carried out by the more popular and athletic students. The socially frustrated students responsible for the shooting were reportedly driven to action as a result of years of abuse.

In summary, this study indicated that coaches perceived the need to have quality coaches running athletic programs and gained support in this perception through the

literature. It was a common trend throughout the research that coaches who coach for the betterment of people and not to win at all costs experience little or no behavior problems with student athletes. This study also emphasized the coaches' perception of the importance of making students realize that aggressive behavior is undesirable and will lead to definite sanctions against the perpetrator. When acts of violence are dealt with swiftly and harshly their incidence is dramatically decreased resulting in a positive relatively violence free school environment.

Chapter Six: Personal Reflections

The following is an analysis of the findings presented in this project from a personal perspective. These views are a synthesis of personal beliefs and opinions developed through the review of literature, past experiences as a coach and athlete, and the knowledge I have gained through writing this project.

School Violence

Over the course of my research on school violence, a number of different opinions have become apparent, the first being school violence is a major concern in modern society. The public perception that school violence is a major issue is reinforced through media coverage of a few high profile incidents such as the Columbine shootings. Students attacking other students, gang violence, violence against teacher and the list goes on. At a “Safe and Caring Schools” conference I recently attended in Calgary, a presenter on youth gangs indicated that over eighty gangs were in existence in the city. Through the nature of this study it was determined that, due to population and cultural issues, coaches perceived that school violence is more of a problem in other locations. School violence quite frequently takes the form of bullying or students purposely intimidating their peers through verbal and/or physical abuse. Based on the perceptions of the interviewed coaches’, athletes are not the primary instigators of school violence. This perception is consistent with the work of Levin and Smith (1995) who concluded that athletics has the potential to influence positive character traits including honesty, integrity, and acceptance of authority. If anything the athletes discussed by coaches in the interviews conducted for this project were held to stricter standards of behavior than their non-athletic peers were.

Most of the coaches interviewed in this study strongly believe that athletes are not the instigators of school violence but what they believe to be accurate and what really happens are two different matters. Throughout the course of this project I have discovered that when the possibility of sanctioning “star” athletes for inappropriate behavior, a proverbial blind eye to transgressions can quickly happen. If this situation is the case then athletes who perpetrate acts of violence against peers would be treated in a more lenient manner and this could contribute to the ethos of school violence. A glaring example of this was the situation at Columbine high school where jocks were deemed to be “untouchable” and normal students accountable for their social failings. Athletes are not the major contributing factor behind school violence but to believe they, and the entire perception of the importance of athletics, does not contribute is erroneous.

Athlete Issues

The Columbine High School tragedy is perhaps our most glaring example of the serious consequences school violence can have. It has been suggested that at the root of that growing problem were acts of violence perpetrated by athletes. Adams and Russakoff (1999) highlight several examples of the violent behavior of athletes at Columbine toward non-athletic peers:

Within a month of school opening in the fall of 1996, Hoffschneider and another football player were teasing Stephen Greene's son Jonathan, who is Jewish. Their favorite gambit was singing about Hitler when he made a basket in gym class, Greene recalls. The gym teacher, Craig Place, who was also Hoffschneider's wrestling coach, did nothing, Greene said. "They pinned him on the ground and did 'body twisters,' " Greene said. "He got bruises all over his body. Then the threats began -- about setting him on fire and burning him." (p.1)

Throughout the course of my interviews it was repeatedly stated that athletes were not the problem in terms of school violence. When one reads accounts of blatant abuse

such as what occurred at Columbine high school, certain beliefs can suddenly be revisited. Over the years a lot of athletic assaults and incidents were chalked up to athletic spirit, rights of initiation, or harmless fun. The reality is many students are not impressed by these acts of indignity and are growing increasingly weary of their condoning and existence in general. To state that this behavior on the part of athletes is the root of school violence is premature. This behavior is part of a number of contributing factors. The majority of respondents also felt that due to the elevated status afforded athletes, as representatives of the school, they were easy targets for criticism. The fact that athletes are quite often in the spotlight and subsequently under the microscope is not true. Based on my experience as an educator, coach, and traveler, I strongly believe that athletics, even high school athletics, is big news for a very large percentage of communities in North America. Given this elevated status of course it would be easier to highlight indiscretions on the part of athletes. The question that remains to be answered is, why is nothing is done about these transgressions? In situations where inappropriate behavior is not dealt with by coaches, teachers, administration and parents you frequently have episodes of violence. In sum, coaches felt that if athletes were disciplined appropriately then feelings of hostility or shame would be non-existent and never have the opportunity to develop into incidences of bullying/school violence toward peers.

Coaching Styles

When a coach displays aggressive coaching behavior under which athletes are subjected to ridicule and physical punishment they may be unknowingly contributing to the emerging ethos of school violence. If athletes are being disparaged in athletic situations it is my contention that their anger/shame has to be released somewhere, if in

fact they feel anger or shame at all. Michner (1976) highlights this finding when he recounts the treatment of twenty-eight football players at Florida State University during off or non-playing winter season:

The class, presumably voluntary but actually obligatory, if anyone wanted to keep his scholarship, met five times a week for six week, in a bare room in which a chicken-wire false ceiling has been suspended four feet from the floor. Under this, pairs of would be football players were shoved to engage in what amounted to almost mortal combat, which was continued until emerged as the clear victor. Then the loser had to face a fresh combatant, and stay under the wire clutching and clawing and spitting blood until he finally defeated someone...the final loser, who had not been able to conquer no one, was forced to rise at dawn next morning and race up and down the steep stadium steps ten or twenty times. (p.51)

This type of treatment has great potential to encourage feelings of anger; if these emotions are not properly vented then violence may ensue. Conversely, if athletes are treated in an equitable manner where positive behavior is appropriately reinforced incidents of violence will be dramatically decreased. Over the course of my research for this project I came across a nice poem addressed to coaches and parents on the topic of children in sport. It reads:

If a child is encouraged to injure or cheat,
They will be cautioned and sin-binned and paid with defeat.

If a child is taught to hate for the opposite side,
They will gloat when they win and cringe when they slide

If a child is taught winning is the only thing,
They will miss all the fun of having a fling.

If a child is praised for just taking part,
They will find self-fulfillment in the simplest art.

If a child is encouraged for the good skills they show,
Their faults will recede and vanish, we know.

If a child is taught the team comes before them,
They will shine to the rest like a shimmering gem.

If a child is given kindness, respect and an ear,
They will love the game truly, for that we give cheer.

A recurring theme of the interviews was that an individual coaching style must be flexible enough to handle negative behavior in an appropriate manner that discourages further expressions of aggression. When coaches coach to win and not to develop the whole person problems can result. The end result of this philosophy is athletes who believe they are above the law of the school and feel that they are too important to be disciplined. When coaches care about the athletes under their tutelage the end result is caring, dedicated individuals who can express themselves in a confident socially appropriate manner. Luxbacher (1986) sums up the importance of the coach modeling the appropriate behavior when he states:

Furthermore, we must not underestimate the importance of the coach as a role model. Athletes tend to trust and respect their coach. If a coach creates – through words or other actions – a climate that fosters violence and aggression, frequent occurrences of such behavior can be expected. The old adage ‘actions speak louder than words’ may be particularly important to.... the coach/player relationship. (p.17)

Impact of Culture

Throughout the course of my research, the participants themselves and the literature have pointed toward a strong difference in coaching perceptions between the US and Canada. Vince Lombardi, famous coach of the Green Bay Packers, sums up this attitude difference in his famous winning versus losing speech:

There is no room for second place. I have finished second twice in my time at Green Bay and I don't ever want to finish second again. There is a second-place bowl game, but it's a game for losers, played by losers. It is and always has been an American zeal to be first in anything we do, and to win and to win and to win.

Coaching and teaching are also two different things in the US. In the US the win at all costs motto is exemplified and coaches are paid to coach, not teach, first. Bissinger (1990) quotes an American high school football coach as stating: “ You don’t keep your job on how many good guys you turn out. In the state, in this community, the bottom line is how many games you win” (p. 237).

This attitude can potentially create an atmosphere of elitism among athletes and the feeling that they are above the normal rules. In Canada, athletes are students first and the coach treats them as such. They experience relatively few material benefits from their participation in school sports and are expected to adhere to higher standards of behavior than other students if they want to continue playing.

Conclusion

School violence is a growing concern in our North American schools. As I write this conclusion, another tragic school shooting has occurred at Santana High School in Santee, California. Fifteen-year-old Andy Williams has been charged with two counts of murder after he went on a shooting spree in retaliation for being bullied. Williams fired at least thirty shots from a black .22-cal. revolver that he had smuggled into the school of nineteen hundred in his backpack. In just under six minutes he allegedly killed two students - Randy Gordon, seventeen, and Bryan Zuckor, fourteen - and wounded eleven more plus two adults. (Smolowe, 2001) Through the results of this study it became uncomfortably apparent that school children are much more violent than before in both nature and method. The alarming growth of incidents of school violence is truly shocking. (Day, 1995 & Rohr, 1993) The coaches who participated in this study were not bad role models, did not encourage aggressive behavior toward non-athletic students, nor

did they condone the use of violence. Throughout the course of the interviews they were able to provide the study with much needed insight into the profession of coaching and allowed this study to draw its own conclusions from the presented material.

Their perceptions of school violence were quite varied but one common theme could be drawn from the research; if coaches coach to win without regard for the moral development of the athletes, problems occur. Among these problems are increased feelings of superiority and the perception that they are not subject to the same rules and regulations as their peers. Does this cause school violence? No. It may incite feelings of frustration and apathy in non-athletic peers but it does not mean that athletes are using this freedom to physically assault their peers. Coaches possess valuable insight into the microcosm of the school and their perceptions are very valuable, especially in the issue of school violence.

Areas for Future Research

This study focused on the perceptions of coaches' regarding school violence. Further comparative studies on the perceptions of athletes, community coaches, and parents through a similar interview process could be conducted.

This study dealt exclusively with male athletes and male coaches. Further studies could focus on female coaches dealing with male athletes and/or female coaches dealing with female athletes.

An interesting area for future research could potentially be the difference between the perceptions of American and Canadian high school coaches regarding school violence. In addition to the perceptions of coaches in the US and Canada it would also be interesting to study the perceptions of paid versus volunteer high school coaches.

As this study focused on coaches in Western Canada, another potentially interesting project could study the perceptions of high school coaches in other parts of Canada.

This study also concentrated on the perceptions of high school coaches dealing with older adolescent athletes. Further studies could be conducted with focus on the perceptions of junior high school coaches to see if schools could identify and treat problems in the middle school years.

The final area for future research could focus on the difference in perceptions between coaches who have attained higher levels of coaching expertise within a given sport versus untrained individuals. The level of coaching expertise could be measured in terms of the level achieved within the National Coaching Certification program (NCCP) here in Canada. Untrained coaches would be those who have previously played or know

a lot about a specific sport but have not taken any of the NCCP courses. To further elaborate on this, one could also study the difference in perceptions of coaches who obtain different levels (Level One to Four) within the NCCP program.

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Appendix A
Interview Questions

BIOGRAPHICAL

Tell me about your coaching background

Potential Probes

What is your level of training with respect to coaching?

Did you take specialized coaching courses during your degree program?

GENERAL PERCEPTIONS

As you know I am conducting a study of school violence. As an experienced coach, what do you see as the causes of school violence?

Potential Probes

Do you think school violence is more of an issue now then in the past? Why?

Do you think school violence is a more of an issue here or elsewhere? Why?

Do you think school violence is affecting the current atmosphere/ethos of schools today?

How?

Have you had any personal experiences with school violence? Could you describe your experience?

Potential Probe

How did you handle the situation?

In your experience, what are the causes of school violence?

Potential Probe

A) Which of these reasons is most important? Why?

After the Columbine tragedy, some critics suggested that athletes were the main instigators of school violence. How would you respond to that criticism?

Some people also suggested that coaches might be responsible for the behavior of their athletes by turning a blind eye to school transgressions, how would you respond to this statement?

7) In your experience, do athletes receive deferential treatment within the school?

8) Do you believe there is a connection between organized sport and school violence?