

## The Perceived Legality of Rule Violations in Sports

Jitendrakumar Dhirjibhai Damor<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Some sport scientists have proposed that different rule infractions (including violent player behaviour) are normative behaviours seen by participants to be "legitimate violations" (e.g., Silva, 1981; Vaz, 1979). 203 male and female players and nonathletes were shown a series of eight slides in an attempt to assess if sport socialisation effects the degree of perceived legitimacy of rule infringing sport activity. Seven of these slides clearly portrayed rule-breaking conduct. On a scale of 1 to 4, the subjects judged the unacceptability and acceptability of the behaviour depicted on each slide (totally unacceptable-totally acceptable). Respondents were divided into four groups based on their gender, quantity of physical contact, highest level of organised sport activity, and years of engagement. Male respondents evaluated rule infringing behaviour substantially more acceptable than females, according to regression and polynomial regressions. Further categorical variable trend analyses revealed support for an in-sport indoctrination process that legitimises rule-breaking behaviour. At all levels of analysis, males' perceived legitimacy was much higher than females'.

**Keywords:** *Behaviour, Violations, Sport*

Strategy is a crucial component of any sporting competition. In athletics, devising and carrying out plans that increase one's chances of success is both a science and an art. To properly deploy strategies, one needs be well familiar with the constitutive or formal rule structure of a sport in order to decide what strategic acts are permissible and what are infractions. In practise, however, strategy is not so easily defined. Strategy has also come to be operationally described as "following the rules" or knowing how to break the rules while gaining a tactical advantage. This latter form of "strategy" has become so significant that in order to be recognised, participants in many sports must study not just the legal rules, but also the unwritten or normative rules of their activity.

Normative rules, despite frequently violating formal rules, have a strong influence on player conduct. McMurtry (1974) discovered that persons who failed to follow normative criteria governing aggressive behaviour in ice hockey were frequently negatively labelled and, in some cases, socially rejected by team members. McIntosh (1979) adds to the body of research supporting the significance of normative rule breaking behaviour among professional and amateur soccer players. When asked if a male player in position to score

<sup>1</sup> Physical training instructor, Arts and commerce College, Mahemdavad, India

\*Responding Author

**Received: December 08, 2018; Revision Received: December 29, 2018; Accepted: December 31, 2018**

## The Perceived Legality of Rule Violations in Sports

should be dragged down mercilessly, 70% of professional athletes and 54% of amateur athletes agreed. Other sorts of rule-violating compliance, such as toughness, deception, dishonesty, and the display of tactical rage, were tolerated and accepted by the respondents. Silva (1979) conducted a field experiment to assess the level of affective guilt experienced following violent action in a sport context (basketball) against a nonsport setting. Those in the sport situation experienced much less emotional guilt than subjects in a nonsport setting, according to the findings. It was expected that participants participating in organised sports would be able to unlearn internal restrictions against rule-breaking behaviour (of which aggression is only one type) through a process of socialised legitimacy. Because both rules and rule violations are learned, it was proposed that the longer one obtains social learning in organised sport, the more prominent the idea that normative rule violations are legitimate behaviours.

There appears to be some evidence from the sport of ice hockey to support the claim that the degree of organised play influences a social learning process that develops normative rule breaching behaviour. According to Smith (1974; 1975), young ice hockey players style their performance after that of their professional heroes, who frequently engage in violent behaviour during game play. As young participants "ascend the competitive ladder," they are encouraged to mimic the actions of their role models. Smith (1975) also observed that when the competitive level of organised play improves, approval for fighting, a rule breaking conduct in ice hockey, increases from sources such as parents, coaches, and teammates. McIntosh's (1979) study of soccer players and Webb's (1969) study of over 1200 people from grades 3, 6, 8, 10, and 12 discovered that participants' opinions towards fairness in competition were negatively affected as the time of participation in organised sport rose. These two studies indicated that as participants' involvement in organised play lengthened, they became less concerned with procedure (fairness) and more focused with outcome (winning).

Although involvement in organised sports for a longer period of time may influence the legitimization of rule-breaking conduct, there is some evidence that the nature of the activity may also play a role in the social learning process. Widmeyer and Birch (1979) and Vaz (1979) discovered that rule-breaking aggressive behaviour in the collision sport of ice hockey is frequently associated with improved performance by coaches and participants. Aggression is encouraged and nurtured in this sport since it is "useful" (Silva, 1981). As the level of physical contact/ collision inherent in the sport rises, more rule-breaking acts may gain normative or legal status. For example, in the collision sport of ice hockey, fighting (an extreme act of rule breaching aggressiveness) has normative value, but not in the contact sport of basketball. It would not be surprising to find participants' perceptions of "legitimate behaviour" varying as a function of the amount of physical contact/collision implicit in their sport, given that noncontact, contact, and collision sport forms have different rule and rule reinforcement structures governing the nature of acceptable play.

According to Gilligan (1977), disparities in male and female socialisation contribute to differing moral beliefs regarding justice, sensitivity for the rights of others, and detachment or impersonalization in decision-making. To this day, male moral theory is less concerned with fairness and empathy, and more distant and impersonal. In the competitive setting of organised sport, males may more easily socialise other males to accept rule infringing behaviour as coolly calculated, expected behaviour. The purpose of this study was to determine if rule violating behaviour depicted in a series of action slides was perceived to be legitimate sport behaviour using the results from related literature and a social learning

## The Perceived Legality of Rule Violations in Sports

perspective that assumes generalised expectancies for behaviour to influence actual behavioural output (Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972). Differences in the perceived legitimacy of rule-breaking sport behaviour were also investigated as a function of subject gender, the amount of physical contact/collision characteristic of the sport played, the highest competitive level of organised sport played, and the number of years the respondent had participated in organised sport. Four key hypotheses were developed for testing: (a) females' social learning towards legitimising rule breaking behaviour will be considerably different from males'. Females, in particular, will perceive fewer rule violating behaviours as acceptable or legitimate when compared to male respondents; (b) as the amount of physical contact/collision characteristic of the sport played by a respondent increases (none, noncontact, contact, collision, combination), perceptions of legitimacy for rule violating behaviour will also increase; (c) as the level of participation in organised sport increases (none, youth, high school, college), perceptions of legitimacy for rule violating behaviour will increase; All of the hypotheses b–d predict a positive linear trend for both male and female respondents. The expected connections for the data reveal that, while females have lower overall ratings of perceived legitimacy for rule breaching sport activity than males, both genders' ratings are heavily influenced by the nature and length of their participation in organised sport.

### **GENDER ANALYSIS**

A regression analysis revealed that the gender component had a significant negative linear trend,  $F(1,162) = 184.66$ ,  $p.001$ . Men respondents ( $n = 89$ ;  $M = 21.4$ ) obviously thought the activities represented on the slides were more respectable than female respondents ( $n = 78$ ;  $M = 15.2$ ). The overall mean of the 167-person sample was 18.5, with a standard deviation of 4.1. The gender component alone was responsible for 57.1% of the variation in perceived legitimacy rating scores.

### **AMOUNT OF PHYSICAL CONTACT**

Polynomial regression on the quantity of physical contact in the sport(s) played revealed a substantial positive linear trend in male replies. Males participating in specific sports raised their perceived legitimacy ratings (see Figure 1). This positive linear trend generated a significant  $F(1,84) = 59.23$ ,  $p < .001$ . Female data analysis revealed a significant quadratic trend  $F(1,73) = 3.99$ ,  $p.04$ . An examination of the trend revealed that ladies who had not participated in organised sport and females who had participated in collision or a combination of sports had slightly higher ratings. Ladies in noncontact and contact sports, on the other hand, had slightly lower mean ratings of perceived legitimacy. Because the number of girls participating in contact sports or a combination of sports is so low, this development should be considered with caution. Females' mean scores at all locations on the graph imply lower perceived legitimacy than males'. Aside from lower perceived legitimacy scores, female mean scores generally reflect ratings of unacceptability, but male mean scores in the contact through combination categories clearly indicate ratings of acceptance for the rule breaching behaviour depicted.

### **DISCUSSION**

The primary goal of this study was to see if a respondent's gender, the amount of physical contact characteristic in the sport(s) played, the number of years of participation in organised sport, or the highest level of participation in organised sport systematically influenced the perceived legitimacy of rule violating sport behaviour. The findings revealed that an individual's gender had a substantial influence on views of legitimacy. Ladies not only evaluated the projected rule breaching actions as unacceptable, but also had lower ratings

## The Perceived Legality of Rule Violations in Sports

than males on all of the category characteristics assessed at every sampling point. This gender difference appears to show that female socialisation towards potentially risky rule-breaking athletic conduct does not justify this type of behaviour to the same extent that male socialisation does. The nature of the patterns for each gender produced disparate results as well. Male trends were clearly linear and favourable. The more "physical" the participation, the longer one had been involved in sport, or the higher the competitive level of participation, the more justifiable rule breaching behaviour was considered.

Girls, on the other hand, had lower perceived legitimacy ratings as a function of whether they participated in noncontact or contact sports, for 1-5 or 6-10 years, or just at the youth or high school levels. As a result, it appears that some forms of sport engagement may actually serve to reduce the legitimacy of rule-breaking conduct among female athletes. A "common culture" perspective may explain the somewhat higher mean score for girls who have never participated in sports. That is, because they have never experienced "in-sport socialisation," they may be more inclined to identify with the orientation of significant guys who may or may not participate in sports. In the absence of any direct socialisation in organised sport, this vicarious connection could explain the climb in the female nonparticipants mean towards the mean for male nonparticipants. Females who participate in collision sports or a combination of sports, as well as females who have participated for 11 years or more or at the college level, show a modest increase in perceived legitimacy ratings. This could indicate a rise in the socialisation towards legitimacy for rule-breaking behaviour at higher levels of female athletic competition. However, the post-hoc analysis revealed that these differences within the female groups were not statistically significant. Consequently, the judgement that rule-breaking sports activity is unacceptable is consistent among female respondents and is unaffected by the category variables tested.

Male athletes (especially in contact and crash sports) may need to learn and obey expectancies for normative rule breaching behaviour, according to an examination of their results. This is essentially what McMurtry (1979), Smith (1975), and Vaz (1979) have all reported in their ice hockey study. This view is supported by the current study, which used a more diversified sample of athletic populations. Also, the significant linear trends in the male data for years of engagement and highest level of organised competition are particularly crucial to observe. Gamers learn the rules and also how to break them. Men who have engaged at higher levels of competition or for longer periods of time, regardless of the type of their sport, consider rule violations as more legitimate. If these people are "survivors" of the sport socialisation process, one may legitimately question the nature and quality of the athletic experience they endured. If, as stated, enhanced sport socialisation facilitates the perceived legitimacy of rule breaching activities, there appears to be a requirement for male participants to distinguish between acceptable and inappropriate player behaviour. Beyond the level of philosophical discourse, the responsibility for equal play and the development of "character" should be a factor that is translated in one's teaching and coaching approaches. However, until various sports modify their rule structures in such a way that rule violating behaviour is viewed as dysfunctional rather than functional, coaches and players will be forced to choose between appropriate behaviours that result in tactical disadvantages and inappropriate behaviours that result in tactical advantages.

## REFERENCES

1. Gilligan, C. In a different voice: Women's conceptions of self and morality. *Harvard Education Review*, 1977, 47, 481-517.

## The Perceived Legality of Rule Violations in Sports

2. Kerlinger, F.N., & Pedhazur, E.J. Multiple regression in behavioral research. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973.
3. Kleiber, D., & Roberts, G. The effects of sport experience in the development of social character: An exploratory investigation. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 1981, 3, 1 14-122.
4. McIntosh, P. Fair play: The players' view. In P. McIntosh (Ed.), *Fair play*. London: Heinemann, 1979.
5. Silva, J.M. Normative compliance and rule violating behavior in sport. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 1981, 12, 10-18.
6. Smith, M.D. Significant others' influence on the assaultive behavior of young hockey players. *International Review of Sport Sociology*, 1974, 9, 45-56.
7. Smith, M.D. The legitimation of violence: Hockey players' perceptions of their reference groups' sanctions for assault. *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 1975, 12, 72-80.
8. Vaz, E.W. Institutionalized rule violation and control in organized minor league hockey. *Canadian Journal of Applied Sport Sciences*, 1979, 4, 83-90.
9. Webb, H. Professionalization of attitudes toward play among adolescents. In G.S. Kenyon (Ed.), *Aspects of contemporary sport sociology*. Chicago: The Athletic Institute, 1969.
10. Widmeyer, W.N., & Birch, J.S. The relationship between aggression and performance outcome in ice hockey. *Canadian Journal of Applied Sport Sciences*, 1979, 4, 91-94

### **Acknowledgments**

The author(s) profoundly appreciate all the people who have successfully contributed in ensuring this paper in place. Their contributions are acknowledged however their names cannot be mentioned.

**Conflict of Interest :** There is no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** Damor J.D (2018). The Perceived Legality of Rule Violations in Sports. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 6(4), 86-90. DIP:18.01.131/20180604, DOI:10.25215/0604.131