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THE CRIMINAL ATHLETE:

A CASE STUDY

By

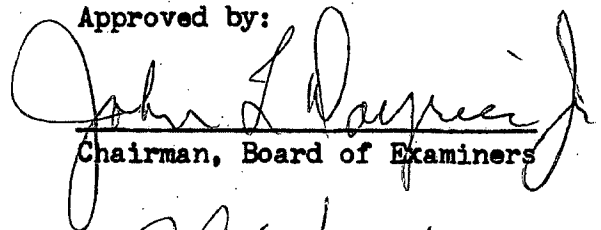
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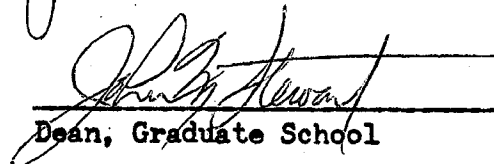
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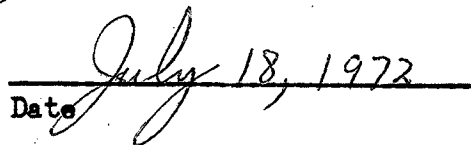
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the degree of
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

"Human society so far has distinguished itself from successful animal communities by its failure or weakness in containing aggressiveness and channelling it in fruitful directions (45:63)." There is little need to validate the fact that aggression exists in the world today. One need only look as far as a newspaper to find accounts of aggression, usually in the form of violence between men, as well as threatened and actual aggression between nations.

Several investigators have attempted to explain the causes of aggression and the findings that they report indicate the aggressive acts are learned, a result of frustration, instinctive or caused physiologically. Berkowitz, having defined aggression as "behaviour aimed at injury of some object (9:1)," further stated: "it is possible to maintain that aggressiveness is a learned habit and is readily elicited by relevant cues (9:203)." It is easy to see that an aggressive act, if it is successful, is reinforced because of its success, and this reinforcement acts to strengthen the response or learned habit to a certain cue. Dollard (1929), one of the first social scientists to deal with aggression, concluded that aggression is caused by frustration. Frustration is "an interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal response at its proper time in the behaviour sequence (9:26)." Dollard also stated that: "the stronger the drive whose satisfaction

is being blocked, the more intense the aggressive reactions and consequently the greater the likelihood that some hostility will be revealed openly (9:38)." The work by Dollard is referred to as the frustration-aggression hypothesis and in most cases it means that frustration often arouses or increases the instigation to aggression. To understand the theory that aggression in man is instinctual or hereditary we must trace man's development through past history. For early man life was an incessant battle against nature, and animals as well as other men. At the dawn of civilization men often formed groups to fight animals and other humans. For centuries warfare was the main social enterprise absorbing all the communities' surplus time, energy and resources. The result of this seems to be that our ancestors have bred pugnacity into the human race. For nearly all of human history then, the aggressive impulse had no trouble in finding an outlet which was socially acceptable, encouraged and rewarded. About one hundred years ago, fighting which was so long encouraged by society suddenly became intolerable. Society shifted from rural to urban, and could no longer put up with random combat, and with this urban shift man gave up his struggle with nature. Today the strenuous life has all but disappeared, but the aggressive nature which may have been hereditary in some people was not able to compromise this docile situation (30). Physiological changes have also been examined with respect to aggressive behavior. Elmadjean (19:68) has studied the physiological background of aggression and reported that the concentration of noradrenalin in the participant's blood increases during sporting events, i.e., hockey and boxing. Noradrenalin is linked with the fight

or flight response, however, whether the noradrenalin is a cause or a result is unknown.

Sport has often been mentioned as one of the most effective ways to channel or dissipate aggression and violence. Lorenz (1963) stated that through sport a person is able to redirect his aggression at a substitute object in a socially acceptable manner. Sport may also provide the opportunity for catharsis to occur, catharsis being the release of pent-up aggressive urges. Lorenz also suggested that sport may educate man to consciously and responsibly control his own fighting behavior. Buss (1961) suggested that violent play decreases aggressive tendencies based on reactive inhibition which simply means wearing the aggressor down so that he is too tired to attack. Smith (1969), commenting on sport as the most socially acceptable outlet for purging one's emotions stated: "Sport is effective as a means of controlling or curbing violence but it is by no means a panacea (53:47)." Several issues stand out at this point, and demand greater clarification. If aggression is a learned response and we promote it through sport perhaps this promotion increases an individual's propensity to aggress. This heightened level of aggression may carry over from sport to life off the field, and this type of behavior is not socially condoned or acceptable. If frustration is a cause of aggression and we attempt to dissipate aggression through sport, then we should attempt to remove the frustrating elements of sport. Aggression may be hereditary, and if so perhaps we should seek out those people who are highly aggressive and attempt to provide them with a means to control this trait. The vio-

lent criminal may tend to participate in violent contact type sports and this participation may further enhance his violent tendencies while the non-violent criminal may not participate in these contact sports.

Purpose of the Study

This study proposes to assess the sports participation background of violent criminals who have a history of participation in sport and who have displayed an ability and willingness to talk about their criminal and sports background. In addition the relationship between sport and crime relative to aggression will be examined. The study is limited to institutionalized criminals in the state of Montana, who because of the local environment may be quite different from criminals in a more populous state. Another limitation is that the interviewer had no way of knowing if he was in fact being told the truth.

For the purpose of this study a violent criminal is one who has been convicted of assault or murder. Assault is any attack on a person which results in physical injury. Murder is any offense which results in the death of a person. Two of the subjects in this study were serving time for assault and two for murder.

CHAPTER II
SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE

Causes of Aggression

The most notable cause of aggression, as stated by Dollard (1929), is frustration. Frustration "is an interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal response at its proper time in the behaviour sequence (18:26)." This frustration supposedly either arouses or increases the individual's instigation to aggression. Dollard (1929) further stated, "the stronger the drive whose satisfaction is being blocked, the more intense the aggressive reaction and consequently the greater the likelihood that some hostility will be revealed openly (18:38)."

Brown and Farber (1951) have defined four frustrating conditions: (1) physical barriers; (2) delays between initiation and completion of the response sequence; (3) omission or reduction of a customary reward; and (4) the eliciting of a response tendency that is incompatible with the ongoing one. Dollard's (1929) work served as a stimulus for many studies of aggression, which have weakened and actually replaced the frustration-aggression hypothesis.

Is aggression an instinct? Storr (1969) says we cannot give a definite answer to this question, however he stated, "in man as in other animals there exists a physiological mechanism which when stimulated gives rise both to subjective feelings of anger and also to physical changes which prepare the body for fighting (56:11)." Lorenz (1967)

basing his theory on the observation of animals contends that aggression is instinctual not only in animals but in man also. Nott (1969) agreed with Lorenz (1967) and Storr (1969) stating that, "aggression is an instinctual or an inherent characteristic of animal nature, including man. Moreover it has clearly served an evolutionary purpose, protecting and preserving species by the selection of stronger and more able strains (45:63)." Nott (1969) makes reference to the frustration hypothesis inferring that frustration of the aggressive instinct may cause the initiation of an aggressive act. Fischer (1970) believed that man has had pugnacity bred in him, because during early times life was an incessant battle against animals, the environment and other men. Later in history men banded together forming societies whose main social enterprise was war. Resulting from this, success in battle became the basic status symbol.

For nearly all of human history, then, the aggressive impulse had no trouble in finding an outlet which was socially acceptable, encouraged and rewarded. Suddenly about one hundred years ago fighting which was so long encouraged by society, became intolerable. As society progressed from rural to urban, the tight packed urban society couldn't put up with random combat and man's struggle with nature also disappeared (23:353).

Unfortunately some people have not been able to reconcile this new situation and the inherited aggressive trait seeks and finds outlets in what is now considered socially unacceptable behavior. Freud (24) writing after the First World War felt that aggression was an instinct, but he had a rather novel and pessimistic approach. He felt that there was constantly driving energy source motivating man to kill himself; but self-destruction is prevented by turning the aggressive impulse outward. Al-

though the instinctual theories of aggression sound relatively stable and through Lorenz' work the less pessimistic view has been substantiated in the animal kingdom, social scientists have not given it much support with respect to its adaptability to man.

Physiological changes in the body are linked to aggressive behavior. Elmadjean (1959) found that active, aggressive emotional displays by forwards in hockey are related to increased exertion of noradrenalin. Boxers were also found to have more noradrenalin in their blood immediately after a fight than before a fight. Ruesch (1966) studying animals found that "aggressive animals have relatively high amounts of noradrenalin while animals whose survival depends primarily on escape have high amounts of adrenalin (49:197)." Ruesch stated, "Anger directed outward is associated with this secretion of noradrenalin (49:197)," but it is not known whether the aggressive act causes the increased level of noradrenalin or if the increased noradrenalin causes the hostile behavior.

Television violence recently has come under criticism as a cause of aggressive violence which we in North America have come to accept as almost normative. Bandura, Ross and Ross (1961) in a study of ninety-six nursery school age children found that, "exposure to the performance of violence by other individuals is highly effective in eliciting similar behaviour in observers (2:373)." Similar studies by Baron and Kepner (1970), Epstein (1966) and Hartman(1969) have been conducted using adults as subjects, and in general the results of these experiments have agreed with those of the studies conducted with children in suggesting that

exposure to the behavior of either live or filmed aggressive models is highly effective in raising the incidence or intensity of aggressive acts (2:374)." Bandura and Walters (1959), and Cloward and Ohlin (1960), in their studies of juvenile delinquency, referred to mimicing as a cause of aggressive delinquency. This theory is similar to that of the television violence studies, in that observation of and or association with an aggressive act may lead to the observer acting in a similar manner.

The particular form which a society takes has also been studied as a cause of aggressive physical behavior. In their work with juvenile delinquents in low class areas, Cohen (1966) and Bandura and Walters (1959) felt that the social disorganization which exists in low class areas contributes greatly to the problem of delinquency. The female centered family is one of the greatest causes of aggressive, violent delinquency. Generally in the female dominated home the male, quasi-leader is ridiculed and degraded by the female contingent. Young boys are urged to grow up to be men, not like their so-called father figure, and this to a young man means to prove himself and in most cases the proof is established through fighting, especially in gangs (3). Storr (1969) felt that large well organized societies and the complex institutions which they contain often tend to bring out previously subdued aggression in the form of hate and hostile action. "When a man is but one small cog in a very large wheel he is deprived of the chance of aggressive self-affirmation, and his sense of ineffectiveness is bound to call up his normal aggression and turn it into hate and resentment (56:115)." Sociologists, especially

those dealing in the area of juvenile aggression, tend to lend support to this theory, but psychologists and many sociologists reject the theory in favour of aggression as a learned response or a habit.

Berkowitz (1962), probably the most prolific writer in the area of aggression, believes that aggressiveness is a learned habit which is readily elicited by relevant cues. As a person is aggressive, he may be rewarded for his action and as this pattern continues the stimulus which caused the aggression and the response, which is the aggression, become programmed into the individual. As this response becomes well learned it is possible that aggression may result with a lesser stimulus. Berkowitz (1962) referred to the

habitually hostile person as someone who has developed a particular attitude toward large segments of the society about him. He has learned to interpret a wide variety of situations and or people as threatening or otherwise frustrating to him. Anger is aroused when these interpretations are made, and the presence of relevant cues then evokes the aggressive behaviour. In many instances the anger seems to become short circuited with the continued repetition of the sequence so that the initial thought responses alone elicit the hostile behaviour (9:259).

Morlan stated, "the expression of aggression often leads not to catharsis but to further aggression. In other words, acting aggressively is one means of strengthening hostile behavior and reducing normal inhibitions (43:384)." He referred to Nazi Germany and the freedom of the Germans to release aggression against the Jews, but this did not drain off anti-Semitism, rather violence and hate increased with the expression of violence and hate.

In contemporary psychology and sociology the current trend is

towards explaining human behavior as a result of learning, mostly in terms of stimulus-response type situations. This is probably why most of the emphasis on the cause of aggression today is around the learning experience.

Expression of Aggression

Washburn (54:115) stated:

the basis for the majority to contemporary sport was the preparation for war, and the purpose of sports was to render the individuals taking part in them physically and psychologically tough, so that they would be capable of and would enjoy the physical destruction of other human beings.

Unfortunately man has let this wartime activity carry over into what is supposed to be a time of peace. This fact is easily verifiable by the amount of physical aggression or violence which exists in the world today. Nott's statement that human society so far has distinguished itself from successful animal communities by its failure or weakness in containing aggressiveness and channeling it in fruitful directions is a sad but true commentary on society today (45).

How does man successfully contain or channel aggression? Lorenz (1967) stated that sport is a means of controlling aggression.

The value of sport is much greater than that of a simple outlet of aggression in its coarser and more individualistic behaviour patterns such as pummeling a punch ball. It educates man to a conscious and responsible control of his own fighting behaviour (38:281).

Fischer (23) listed sport as one of the major substitutes for violence because they "absorb in a relatively harmless way some of our pent-up

aggressions (23:357)." Berkowitz (1962) has also stated that competitive athletic contests provide a necessary release for pent-up aggressive impulses. Storr (1969) is another of the "sports fans" who feel that athletics will diminish hostility. He dealt on the level of nations fighting with each other more than aggression among individuals and states, "the space race is the kind of competition which diminishes the likelihood of war, and rivalry between nations in sport can do nothing but good (56:117)." As has been stated above, aggression is not currently being controlled or released in a manner which is considered socially acceptable. Therefore it seems that sports participation is either of little or no benefit or if sports are beneficial they are just part of a yet undefined but larger group of dissipators. Fischer (1970) although he supported the theory that sport is a substitute for violent aggression, stated, "they are artificial adjuncts to life rather than the core of life itself. We still yearn for a challenge to our manliness through fights, vandalism, robbery and violence which seems real (23:357)."

There are two major conflicting theories regarding the expression of aggression and its outcome.

The cathartic theory of the expression of aggression represents a draining of the reservoir; the more drained, the less that remains in the reservoir. The less that remains in the reservoir, the less pressure is exerted by impulses seeking release. The expression of aggression is called catharsis and the diminution in the tendency to aggress as a consequence of such expression is called the cathartic effect (12:75).

Buss (1961) further stated, "the most important determiner of the

cathartic effect is the presence or absence of anger (12:80)." Without anger there is an increase in the tendency to aggress while in the presence of anger there is a cathartic effect. The theory which is in direct opposition to the catharsis theory is referred to as the circular or cyclic theory. This theory states that an aggressive person is often rewarded for his hostile behavior either through success in a fight or a feeling of accomplishment. This reward, or reinforcement strengthens the impulse or drive to be aggressive and as the pattern continues through time the aggressive response becomes very strong. Buss (1961) has hypothesized that the drop in the level of anger that accompanies a violent act is a source of reinforcement. The release of tension and the onset of relaxation may also be considered a reward. It is possible that an increase in the frequency and or intensity of aggression may be caused by these reinforcements. This theory does not present a great deal of hope for those interested in decreasing the violence that exists today in the form of aggressive acts. In fact it points to an almost ever increasing level of aggressive behavior.

Studies Related to Sport and the Expression of Aggression

As was previously stated, sport is one of the most widely acclaimed outlets of aggression, which is socially acceptable. Many people agree that sport is not only an outlet but that it also provides a cathartic or purging effect. Lorenz stated, "the main function of sport today lies in the cathartic discharge of aggressive urges (38:281)." Sport in

Lorenz' eyes acts as a "healthy safety valve (38:281)."

Johnson and Hutton (1955) used a projective test on varsity wrestlers before and after a match. They found that aggressive feelings decreased below the normal pre-match level, after the match. This suggests that the participants received a cathartic effect, whether they won or not. Gardner and Menninger (1962) stated that, "play brings about a needed release from the tensions created by instinctive, aggressive impulses (26:203)." Menninger further stated that although competitive games provide the best catharsis, activities such as checkers and chess also are beneficial as an outlet for aggressive drives. Stone found that, "football players showed less manifest aggression after a football season than during the season (55:205)," which further supports the catharsis hypothesis. Scott (1968) stated that sports and games are effective in the control of undesirable aggression but most of the games played today are designed to control hostile activity rather than permitting a purge of the emotions. Buss (1961) suggested a hierarchy of cathartic effectiveness may exist, in which the most direct forms of aggression produce the greatest cathartic effect. Smith (1969) felt that in an athletic contest the winner might be the only participant to receive a catharsis. He based this on the tendency, in team sports at least, for fights to break out late in a contest when one team is hopelessly behind in the score. This type of frustrated behavior is often seen during football games when members of a losing team will take a "cheap shot" after the play has been whistled dead or when the official's back is turned. Lemkau (1952) doubts that sport provides a release of aggressive impulses. Like Scott (1968), Lemkau (1952) believes that the controls imposed by the rules of the game make it almost impossible for the competitor

to freely express himself. Beisser (1967) stated that unless an athlete can feel anger towards his opponent, he is unable to be aggressive. Stone (1967) was able to support the catharsis hypothesis with his football study but he was also able to refute it by theorizing that the decreased level of aggression was due to feelings of guilt, when reinforcement of aggression no longer existed. Husman (1955) administered a psychological test to boxers, wrestlers, cross country runners and a control group and like Stone (1967) he interpreted the findings as supporting both the cathartic and circular theories of aggression. Feshbach (1956) studying children undergoing play therapy found no cathartic reduction in aggression. "Other studies on children's play do not seem to support the catharsis hypothesis but it must be remembered that in none of these studies were the children frustrated or angry (35:31)." Layman further stated, "there seems to be little support for the idea that sports provide a cathartic effect and so reduce the instigation to aggression."

The idea that sport is an agent of the circular theory of aggression receives support as stated above from Husman's studies (1955). Buss (1961) also gave credence to this theory.

the sudden drop in anger level that usually accompanies an attack is a source of reinforcement. The release of tension and the production of relaxation may be a powerful reward. These reinforcements should cause an increase in the frequency and or intensity of aggression (12:80).

Berkowitz (1962) implied that the expression of aggression does not lessen the probability of further aggressive acts. In fact he admits "aggressiveness habits may even be reinforced (9:207)."

Obviously, these theories, catharsis and circular, are in direct opposition to each other, and the value of sport to society, lies in the balance. Considering sport as it exists today with the great emphasis on winning, the circular theory would hypothesize that the aggressive tendencies of sports participants would increase because of the rewards received for aggressive displays. These rewards being success, relaxation and a decrease in the level of anger. Often the loser, who is always present in an athletic contest, will not decrease his aggressive tendencies but rather the increased frustration of losing further heightens the tendency to aggress. Sports participation as seen in this context becomes a vicious circle of ever heightening aggressive tendencies. The cathartic theory postulates that through the aggressive displays characteristic of contemporary sport an individual is able to lower the level of aggression in a socially acceptable manner. This dissipation of aggression is likened to the draining of a reservoir, which will not require draining until it has been refilled.

Crime, Sport and the Expression of Aggression

There have been several theories which attempt to explain crime and its cause. Lombroso, Kretschmer, Hooton and Sheldon (1963) have attempted to correlate body type and deviant behavior but these theories have received very little support. Goddard (1963) stated that low intelligence and deviant behavior are directly associated. Sutherland and Zelaney (58) found little difference between the intelligence of criminals and non-criminals. The psychiatric theory of crime states that certain

childhood incidents or family relationships may lead to deviant activity. Psychoanalytic theory of deviant behavior is based on a conflict between the id and the super-ego. The id, being the original instinctive, unadjusted nature of man, overpowers the super-ego and crime results. These theories are relatively old and do not command much support from contemporary social scientists. One current theme which is and has been debated at length is whether crime is caused by heredity or the environment. Goring (1970) stated, "potential criminality is determined by one's heredity and environmental influences are minor stimulants to actual criminal behaviour (28:232)." Abrahamsen (1970) attributes crime to socio-environmental factors and Tarde (61:245) further supports this argument, "crime is a social product and the social environment plays a big part in crime." Taft and England (1964) having grappled with this problem arrived at the following conclusion: "There is no way of separating heredity from environment and proving its exact influence on crime (59:84)."

One well documented cause of crime is alcohol.

Alcohol, even in small amounts often weakens inhibitions. The psychological effects of alcohol include the ultimate destruction of memory, increased suggestibility and the lack of ability to plan and to inhibit impulses. Hostility and a lessened anticipation of punishment were both increased by the use of alcohol (59:329).

In keeping with the contemporary trend of describing human behavior as a result of learning, Sutherland (1960) implied that criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons. The criminal learning process involves the techniques of committing crime, shaping of motives, drives,

rationalizations and attitudes.

Male criminals and non-criminals are motivated by much the same needs and values. They become criminals on the basis of their unique responses to the same drives for prestige, happiness, success and power (10:119).

This theory of crime as a learned reaction fits well with the environmental cause of crime, since the learned response, crime, is a reaction to an environmental stimulus.

What connection is there between sport and crime? Schafer, probably the most knowledgeable researcher in the area of delinquency and athletics feels that there is a social control value found in sports participation and that athletics promotes the normal growth of personality. It is not difficult to observe that sports of all levels occupy a central place with the masses in America today. It is also possible that sports participation may cause deviancy in that through sport an individual learns to express himself in criminal situations, i.e., boxing or that a group of people may have come together initially to participate in athletics and in the end they commit a crime. The heightened level of aggression achieved through sport may also lead to crime. This link between athletics and crime in the context of violence seems rather radical after the benefits that society gains from sport, as defined by Schafer, and supported by most school authorities in North America. However, considering the circular theory of aggression it is possible to theorize that participation in athletics, particularly in violent sports, will lead to a heightened level of aggression. If we remove the sports situation in which the individual is able to aggress, then the only remaining arena

for release of these hostilities is society at large. These aggressive displays are not condoned by society and if caught and convicted the aggressor becomes a criminal who once was an athlete. In light of this theory it seems rather ironic that our prisons have very well organized sports programs for the inmates.

On the other hand, the catharsis theory supports the display of aggression in sport, since it is believed that this hostile behavior decreases the individual's aggressive tendencies and leaves the participant relatively docile. In a situation such as this, prison sports programs are very justifiable as are all athletic contests.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Subjects

The subjects for this study were chosen from the inmate population at the Deer Lodge State Penitentiary, Deer Lodge, Montana. The four subjects were among fourteen violent criminals selected randomly from the violent criminal population. There were also fifteen non-violent criminals who were chosen from the non-violent prison population. These twenty-nine subjects were those out of two groups of sixteen violent and non-violent inmates who consented to participate in the preliminary investigation. These men were interviewed in an attempt to determine if the sports background of violent criminals differed from that of non-violent criminals. The real question here is whether violent criminals participate in more violent sport than their non-violent counterparts. The subjects were questioned about their sports participation background as well as their history of convicted criminal charges. The interviews were recorded on a cassette type recorder and the information was later transcribed onto a data sheet which was kept for each individual. A sample data sheet may be found as Appendix A.

Table I (p. 20) shows the results of this preliminary investigation, and it indicates that there is no relationship between the commission of violent crime and participation in violent sport. The criminals,

violent and non-violent, participated in all organized sports that can be found at the elementary, high school, college and community level.

TABLE I
Violent and Non-Violent Crime and Violent and
Non-Violent Sports Participation

Sport	Crime		Total
	Violent	Non-Violent	
Violent	11	10	21
Non-Violent	3	5	8
TOTAL	14	15	29

$$\chi^2 = .092$$

$$df = 1$$

$$p > .80$$

Table II (p. 21) shows the total number of sports played by all the violent criminals as opposed to the non-violent criminals. The number of sports played by the violent criminals is considerably more than that of the non-violent criminals. This difference in participation is statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence using chi square as the statistical test. The .05 level is the acceptable level of significance in social science research.

TABLE II
Total Number of Sports Participated In By
Violent and Non-Violent Criminals

	Criminals	
	Violent	Non-Violent
Total Number of Sports Played	40	22
N	14	15
\bar{X}	2.86	1.47
S.D.	2.11	1.19

*t = 1.51

*Not significant at the .05 level

The four subjects for the actual study were chosen from the violent group of criminals. These men were selected because they all had an extensive background in sport, they had committed violent crimes and were all willing to admit they had committed them. During the preliminary study these subjects more than any of the other violent inmates displayed a willingness as well as an ability to talk and describe their sports and criminal backgrounds.

Data Collection

Collection of the data for this study was based on qualitative methodology or grounded theory. This method of research assumes that the

study of man's behavior is adequate to produce knowledge about social life. In terms of grounded theory, social behavior can best be understood by observing and participating with the subjects. Insight is thus gained by introspection. This requires the researcher to interpret the real world from the perspective of his subject. Although it is different from the traditional scientific method, qualitative methodology can act in conjunction with the scientific method. The scientific method does not permit the researcher to become involved with the empirical social world. "Sociologists have tended to bend, reshape and distort the empirical social world to fit the model that they use to investigate it (22:3)." This is not to say that the scientific method has no place in social science research, but rather that qualitative methodology can serve a useful purpose, and function in a complementary manner with the scientific method. Following the qualitative methodology approach each subject was interviewed for two to three hours. Additional time was spent with the subjects but the conversation was not recorded.

During the interviews, discussion centered around family background, events in the subjects' childhood and teenage years, their feelings about their own sports participation experience and the participation of others, their emotional state before, during and after participation in an athletic contest, their reactions to certain situations within an athletic contest, and the kind of coaching they received while they were growing up and participating in organized sports. During the interviews some discussion also centered around the concept of aggression or "meanness," as the inmates preferred to call it. This discussion of meanness centered

around the sports participant while he was involved in an athletic contest and also outside the athletic environment.

CHAPTER IV
CASE STUDIES

Subject Number One

Number one started participating in organized sports in the fifth grade. He was uncoordinated and remembers struggling to play as well as his friends. When he got to high school his coordination improved but the struggle continued because it was the big thing to excel in sport. He played football and basketball during high school and was a starter in both, but "sports in high school became an ego thing." In football he liked to play defense because of the contact which he enjoyed, but he played offense because there was more glory, and he liked the publicity that he received. In college his ego trip with sport continued, but presently he realizes that he was just a "dumb jock in a letter jacket." He was striving for recognition and acceptance as well as a good personality. He only played football in college, and by his own admission, was a "pretty dirty player" and was thrown out of more than one game for fighting. During his freshman year in college he really began to fight a lot, and it started after football season. This pattern of fighting continued through college with most of his fights being in the winter and spring. The fights were generally when he was drinking. When he used up his eligibility as an athlete, which was before he was ready to graduate he realized that the coaches didn't really care about him now that he was of no use to them. In

retaliation he would "wear his letter jacket out drinking and fighting and chasing." He wanted to be the toughest guy in town and prove it so he went out and "got drunk and fought every night to try to maintain some kind of image." When he finally finished college he thought a change of residence might get him away from drinking and fighting, but instead he kept on because he needed a reputation and this was the only way he knew how to get it. "Once a guy gets caught up in scrapping it becomes a part of him." He never fought if he was alone, but in a crowd he had to prove himself. He said, "I was always quick to go with a really touchy temper, and once I got going I was obsessed and had to whale." He still has the temper but he can control it now.

In talking about meanness he doesn't think there is anyone who is all mean. He was called mean but inside he wasn't, even though the things he was doing were mean.

Meanness can be put in a guy from what he has been through. You can see hate and hostility in a guy. They would rather pipe you or stick you than look at you, they're just that way from the way they've been brought up and what they've been exposed to.

This subject is serving a natural life sentence for murder. With this subject it is possible to say that sport acted as a catharsis. This is evidenced by the fact that his fighting behavior stopped during the football season and then resumed again when football was over. However, looking at his sport participation in another vain it is possible to say that sport may have played a big part in his life as a criminal. As a young child and into high school the subject struggled to become a superior athlete because that was the accepted way to gain prestige status and

an image. He apparently gained the status that he labored after, "the athlete," and the publicity he received as a college football player reinforced this image. Unfortunately, once the football season was over he no longer had an image booster in sport, but fighting was an equally good method of maintaining the reputation. His rebellion against the coaches and the athletic department in the form of drinking, fighting and chusing are another link between sport and crime and the cause-effect relationship between sport and crime.

It is also possible to support the circular interaction theory of aggression with this subject. He stated that he had been thrown out of football games for fighting, and this seems rather odd if the game was providing a cathartic effect. On the contrary, it would seem that the game of football, which allows a great deal of aggression and hostility to be displayed without breaking the rules, was actually increasing the aggressive urge to the point that fighting broke out. Fighting is perhaps aggressive behavior in its most raw form. The subject further supports this position by stating, "Once you get caught up in scrapping, it becomes a part of you."

Subject Number Two

This subject boxed and played basketball in elementary school and in high school he continued these sports and also played football. Since high school he has boxed, and played basketball and baseball. He enjoys competition and the thrill of winning and his favorite sports are football and boxing. Prior to a boxing match he is keyed up and anxious but he claims nobody can beat him in the ring. After a fight he feels

relaxed and relieved. During a fight he is not mad at his opponent. He claims that sport relieves the tension in his mind and after playing a game he feels a lot better. He has great respect for sport, "Just about everything you see in life you can find in sport. Sport helps build an attitude toward life."

The subject grew up in the poorest part of town and remembers fighting quite often. He claims the fights were ones that his friends were in and he just got involved because his friends were. Rating himself as non-aggressive, he claims it takes a lot to get him mad, but sometimes he just blows up right away. He is from a broken home and his mother said that he was unmanageable at home so he spent his teenage years in a few juvenile homes. He was often punished and finally expelled from high school for fighting. When fighting on the street this subject does admit to trying to hurt his opponent. Dick Butkus, a professional football player is his definition of mean but he doesn't believe that Butkus is mean off the field. "Getting mean is like getting psyched, anyone can do it, but some can get higher than others." He doesn't know what it is that makes one person able to act or become meaner than another.

He is currently serving time on two assault charges and has previously served time for the same type of charge. He had been drinking when he committed these crimes.

This subject states that he gets a cathartic effect from participating in sports in that he feels relaxed and relieved when it is over. The context in which he gets these feelings is related to the

prison which probably tends to increase tensions more than the outside world. It is possible that while he was participating in sport outside of prison he had little or no aggression to dissipate. The subject himself states that he is non-aggressive and this has been verified by the recreation director at the penitentiary who has stated that in the boxing ring this subject does not display any aggressive or hostile behavior, so it may be that he does not receive a cathartic effect because he is not aggressive. This seems to fortify Buss (1961) who says, "the most important determiner of the cathartic effect is the presence or absence of anger (12:80)."

On the other hand, the subject states that when he fights on the street he does try to hurt people. It would seem that if a cathartic effect was to occur it would be in a street fight rather than in a sporting event because of the amount of aggressive behavior that has been displayed. The frequency of the street fighting seems greater than the requirement should be for the reduction of aggression. The subject further states that it takes a lot to get him mad but sometimes he just blows up for no apparent reason. This sounds very much like the "short circuit" that Berkowitz (1962) refers to in his support of aggressive hostility as a learned habit. Berkowitz states,

Man has learned to interpret a wide variety of situations and or people as threatening or otherwise frustrating to him. Anger is aroused when these interpretations are made and the presence of relevant cues then evokes the aggressive behavior. In many instances the anger becomes short circuited with the continued repetition of the sequence so that the initial thought responses alone elicit the hostile behavior (9:259).

Although this a small piece of evidence it does lend some support to the circular theory of aggression.

Subject Number Three

Number three started participating in organized sports in elementary school where he played baseball and basketball, in high school he played football and basketball and he continued to play basketball while in the military service. Since he has been in prison he boxes and plays basketball. He remembers always wanting to be the best in everything and striving for this goal. In high school he liked the contact and the rough part of the sport. He likes to win and does everything possible that is legal to win. Boxing is presently his favorite sport, he hopes to win the Golden Gloves and turn professional after he is released. Prior to a fight he has no hostile feelings towards his opponent but when he is in the ring he has no compassion for his opponent and has no mercy when realizing that he is the superior boxer. He has never worried about hitting someone and causing permanent damage. Even though he has a great desire to win, he does not get upset if he loses because he knows that he will get another bout with his opponent. "To be a good boxer you have to be mean. The main reason you go in the ring is to knock the other guy out and not let him use your face as a punching bag." He says that the tensions that build up inside him get out when he boxes or trains. The meanness he talks about is a result of "how you were brought up when you were little. If your old man beats you it has an effect." Children may learn to be mean when they are in their formative years. "Put boxing gloves on two little kids and let

them fight, and after a while one starts to cry and after that he stays away from fighting but the other one just keeps on fighting." His whole family is quick tempered and he thinks that there might be a mean streak in the family that is inherited. The subject can only remember his father hitting him once. Where he grew up, fighting was a common, everyday experience and he admittedly fought four or five times a week. This subject has served time on several assault charges and he had been drinking during all except one of them. "Give me some liquor and I can't control myself."

This subject states that the tensions that build up within him are released when he boxes and trains. This again is in the context of a prison which probably causes a great deal more frustration and tension than living outside the prison walls. The subject states that he has no compassion in the ring and the main reason he goes in there is to knock his opponent out. When asked how he feels following a boxing match his reply was that he is ready to go again if he has to. This is not the response that one would expect to hear from a person who has just received a cathartic effect through the emotional expression of a boxing match. On the contrary, a statement like this would tend to support the circular interaction theory in so far as the tendency to aggress is still present.

Subject Number Four

This subject didn't play organized sports until high school, but then he boxed, wrestled, and played football and basketball. As a boxer and a wrestler he was never beaten. He always tries to completely dominate

his opponent. In prison he boxes and plays basketball. During his high school athletic days he learned many illegal tactics which he continues to use in prison sports. "Sports are good for your body and give you a sense of accomplishment. It's a prestige thing and a lot of fun too." He says that if you are going to take time out to do something, give it all you have and do whatever you have to do to win. "Sport is good for the mind also." His mother always used to "brag me up" and always attended games in which he participated. "Once I got knocked out of the ring and landed right in front of my mother, my sister and my girl. All my mother could say was 'Get up!'"

Most violent criminals in the penitentiary

were brought up in a violent atmosphere, tough area and anything they got they got themselves. If you hang around in places where a lot of this stuff takes place, guys brawling etc. you learn to be tough. They've just been around this stuff all the time and so they've learned.

In talking about meanness he feels that the way you are brought up has a lot to do with it and you might also be born with it. He refers to a small child who is always hitting other kids and says that these little bullies were too young to learn to be mean.

Good boxers have been around fighting in bars and coming from the bad part of town and they have learned to be mean. Being mean and violent doesn't come and go, you can't turn it on and off, it's there, it doesn't develop overnight. If you're mean you're mean every day.

He admits to being mean and when asked why, he replied,

I just don't like people. There are very few people I like. If I don't like somebody or don't know them I would just as soon break their neck as look at them but if I know a guy and he is my friend it would take an awful good reason for me to fight him. I don't trust too many people because I have been burned too many times and I just decided it's best not to trust or associate with too many people then you don't have to worry about getting burned.

This attitude probably refers to his early childhood which was spent in an orphanage because his mother couldn't afford to keep him and he never knew his father. He says the orphan home was like prison and anything you got there you had to take. As a teenager he shot a man and spent time in the reformatory for that. Since then he has done five years on one assault charge and he is currently doing ten years for another assault. His whole life has been one fight after another and alcohol was often hand in hand with his fighting. "Give me a pint of whiskey and I am a mad dog."

This subject does not lend any credence to the cathartic theory of aggression. He does support the circular interaction theory but in the context of illegal behavior leading to sport rather than in the other direction. He claims that if you hang around in places where a lot of fighting occurs you learn to be tough. "Good boxers have been around fighting in bars and coming from the bad part of town and they have learned to be mean." He also states that if you are mean you are mean every day and if we equate meanness with aggression and hostility this further supports the circular theory of aggression.

Discussion

A significant finding of the preliminary study was that violent criminals participate in sports more than non-violent criminals. Why did they or didn't they participate in organized sport? The violent criminals who did not play any sports, although they were few in number, did not participate because they were required to work and had no time to play, or because of some form of physical disability. Those violent criminals who participated in contact sports expressed an enjoyment of physical contact and a desire to win. Team games and the fellowship found therein were also mentioned as a reason for participation. The violent criminals who played non-contact sport expressed a dislike for physical contact but they also were motivated to win. Among the non-violent criminals who played no sports, one inmate indicated that he was able to control any aggressive tendencies that he has. These inmates also were required to work in their spare time and therefore had no time to play sports. The non-violent criminals who played non-contact sports state that they did not like contact or any game which may cause them injury. They also indicated that they had no pressing desire to win. The reasons most often given for participating were because "their friends were doing it" or because "it was something to do." The non-violent criminals who participated in contact sports did so because they liked the physical contact, but they weren't motivated to win. One particular subject stated that during his high school years, sports participation was very important to being accepted in society. He felt that teachers gave him better grades because he was participating in athletics.

These men also got involved in athletics because their friends were or because, "it was something to do."

A significant finding is that violent criminals who participated in sport, displayed a desire to win while the non-violent criminals did not express this feeling.

The four subjects in the case study were chronic participators, in that they each played four or five different sports and all had a desire to succeed. Two of the inmates stated that playing sports within the prison helps to decrease the tensions which build up within them. This evidence lends support to the cathartic theory. The buildup of tension within the prison however is probably much greater than would be found in the outside world or "on the streets" as the inmates refer to it. This tension release would be much less with participation in sport outside of the institution, because of the lower level of tension found "on the streets" as opposed to inside the institution. This does however provide support for the existence of sports and recreational activities within the prison system.

All of the subjects provide some support for the circular interaction theory of aggression but it is more likely that participation in violent crime and violent sports are the result of another variable. This other variable is probably the desire to win or as it is referred to by sport advocates as the aggressiveness which is "required to succeed in this day and age." The cause of the aggression which the four subjects exhibited is either a result of social demands, or is a result of the observation and association with aggressive acts which the subjects have

witnessed during the greater part of their lives. If these are the causes of aggression, then the only relation between sport and crime is that aggressive displays in both are the result of the previously instilled aggressive tendency. However, with the apparent support for the circular theory of aggression, repeated participation in aggressive sport or aggressive crime will only increase the tendency to aggress in either area.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between participation in sports and the commission of violent aggressive crime. The context in which these variables were studied was in relation to the cathartic and circular interaction theories of aggression.

Four violent criminals from the Deer Lodge State Penitentiary, Deer Lodge, Montana served as subjects in the investigation. A pilot study was initially performed on fourteen violent criminals and fifteen non-violent criminals to compare their sports participation backgrounds relative to their participation in violent and non-violent sports.

These subjects state that they are able to decrease the internal tension which they experience within the prison by participating in sports. Outside of prison this cathartic effect does not seem to occur but rather the tendency to aggress may be enhanced by participation in violent sport. The result is in support of the circular interaction theory of aggression but the relationship between criminal aggressive behavior and sport seems to be spurious.

Alcohol also played a large part in eliciting the aggressive, violent behavior of these subjects.

II. Conclusions

The results of this study indicate the following conclusions:

- A. Violent criminals participate in more organized sports than non-violent criminals.
- B. Violent criminals have a greater desire to win, at least in sports, than non-violent criminals.
- C. There is support for the circular interaction theory of aggression outside of the institution, for these four particular inmates.
- D. Prison games do provide a cathartic effect for these particular inmates and if this is an indication of the effect received by other inmates, it is support for the existence of prison sports programs.
- E. Alcohol did play a big part in the commission of crime for these subjects.

III. Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations for further study are proposed:

- A. Further research should be conducted into the sports participation background of criminals using a greater number of subjects.
- B. Similar research should be conducted in juvenile training schools to see if there is any difference between the schools and adult prisons.

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APPENDIX A

Pilot Study Data Sheet

Interview #

Sports Played

Level

	prison	grade school	high school	college	other
Football					
Basketball					
Wrestling					
Boxing					
Wt. Lifting					
Baseball					
Track					
Other					

*favorite sport

Why he liked a certain sport.

Feeling or observed feeling after sports participation.

Crime

Violent

Non-Violent

Not sure

Personality

Aggressive

Non-aggressive

Not sure

Activity desires for institution.

Other comments?