

## **The sexual abuse of boys in organized male-sport**

### **Introduction**

For some time now, researchers focusing on the context of sport have warned that we should be cautious in approaching sport as an effective tool for tackling social problems and increasing harmony and well-being in our society (see Coakley, 2002). They have also argued that sport is often counter-productive to such goals and is better conceptualized as a bastion of male (white) privilege (Hargreaves, 1994; Theberge, 1985) and a key agency for socialising boys within the framework of a ‘masculinist’ backlash against feminism (Brackenridge, 2002; Messner, 1988). Over the last two decades male (pro-feminist) researchers such as Michael Messner and Don Sabo, have begun to explore the juncture of sport and masculinity (e.g. Messner and Sabo, 1990). Whilst many important issues have been explored, including violence (e.g. Pappas et al., 2004) and sexual violence (e.g. Benedict and Klein, 1997), the specific issue of sexual violence against males, and the male-child specifically, within the practice of sport, have remained, at best, implicit but mostly absent from the analyses of masculinity scholars. In this paper I will specifically address the sexual abuse of boys in organized male-sport.

A brief discussion of key terms may be useful. Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) has been notoriously difficult to define. However, I concur with Brian Corby’s (2000) recommendation of the definition offered by Glaser and Frosh:

Any child below the age of consent may be deemed to have been sexually abused when a sexually mature person has, by design or by neglect of their usual societal or specific responsibilities in relation to the child, engaged or permitted the engagement of that child in any activity of a sexual nature which is intended to lead to the sexual gratification of the sexually mature person. This definition pertains whether or not it involves genital contact or physical contact, and whether or not there is discernible harmful outcome in the short-term (1988: 5).

By ‘organized’ I am specifically referring to sport contexts that cannot properly be described as casual, *ad hoc* or merely playful; organized contexts involve a regular, established grouping that is affiliated to and/or adheres to a governing body’s codes and regulations and is bound by them. In addition, these groupings are often characterised by some form of organizing structure such as an established space for participating and/or an organizing committee. By ‘male-sport’ I am referring to those sport contexts that are designated exclusively (or virtually so) for male children and organized predominantly by men. This does not preclude some female involvement in a participative, voluntary or organizing/leadership capacity, but it excludes those contexts that are specifically designed for and aimed at female participants or where females have a dominant role in organizing those activities at all levels of participation and administration. Whilst sport in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is no longer a social field hermetically sealed from the ‘intrusions’ of females (if it ever was), and despite the advances made through feminist movements, there are many settings within organized sport for which this would still be an accurate description. The crime of sexual abuse against children, male or female, is an overwhelmingly *male*

phenomenon (although certainly not exclusively – see Elliot, 1993). In this context, the characteristics of forms of masculinity identified as dominant within sport by many researchers over recent decades (e.g. Messner and Sabo, 1994; Pronger, 1990) take on new meaning when married to the findings of research from those in the sexual abuse literature (e.g. Etherington, 2000; Mendel, 1995) that conclude that the forces of patriarchy lie at the root of an understanding of sexual abuse (Brackenridge, 2001; Kitzinger, 1997; Seymour, 1998; Struve, 1990). These meanings will be explored here, largely with reference to the sexual abuse of boys by men.

### **Context**

Whilst the sexual abuse of children was recognized in the nineteenth century, even though it was generally referred to in euphemistic terms (Jackson, 2000), it was not until after Henry Kempe described it as ‘another hidden pediatric problem’ (Kempe, 1978; Kempe and Kempe, 1978) that it began to be acknowledged as a significant social problem. This followed the ‘discovery’ of physical abuse some twenty years earlier (Kempe et al., 1962). Research that followed tended towards a ‘reductionist’ approach, ignoring ‘many of the macro-level, fundamental political issues’ (Hunter, 1990: 7) that shape the environment in which childhood sexual abuse (CSA) flourishes. In addition, research has generally been guided by the ‘male perpetrator-female victim paradigm’ (Ellerstein and Canavan, 1980; Mendel, 1995) and social science has generally paid relatively little attention to the experiences of sexually abused *male* children. The largely unregulated, conservative world of children’s sport has, somewhat typically, considered the problem of child abuse rather later than other fields of childhood endeavour.

According to Corby ‘the main developments in the 1990s were largely in relation to the movements of offenders released from prison and to the tightening up of systems of criminal checks for those seeking employment involving contact with children’ (2000: 56). Such a development clearly included organized sport. Thus, for the institution of sport, comprised of a private, public and voluntary sector workforce, the abuse of children is very much a 21<sup>st</sup> century challenge. In the UK, *Sport England* and the *National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children* (NSPCC) have jointly funded a distinct unit with responsibility for the protection of children in sport – the *Child Protection in Sport Unit* (CPSU, see Boocock, 2002). Across many parts of the industrialised world, child protection in sport is increasingly becoming a feature of governing body policy rhetoric, for example, the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) has a wealth of online information on child protection (see [www.ausport.gov.au/ethics/childprotect](http://www.ausport.gov.au/ethics/childprotect)); the *Canadian Strategy for Ethical Conduct in Sport* (2002) contains specific reference to anti-harassment and abuse, and in the USA all adults involved with Little League are required to undergo background checks (reference?). Whilst policy development has gathered pace, research into the problem of child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse, in the context of sport is very limited, with the voices of sexually abused male children largely undisclosed.

My objective here is to build upon work that has begun to question and theorise the role of organized sport in the perpetuation of the abuse of children in contemporary society (e.g. Brackenridge, 1994, 1997, 1998; Donnelly, 1999; Kirby et al., 2000; Leahy et al., 2002). Given the string of criminal convictions secured since the early 1990s against coaches and sports personnel for sexually abusing children in their care (Boocock, 2007), growing media attention (e.g. Downes, 2002; Mackay, 2001;

Mackay, 2005; Nack and Yaeger, 1999) and some early propositions on the sexual exploitation of children within the context of sport (Brackenridge, 2001), I want to consider how we are to begin to articulate more thoroughly the relationship between organized sport and the childhood sexual abuse of boys.

Following a short contextualization of the issue I consider recent theory in the field of childhood studies and suggest how we might utilise developments in this emerging field to consider the issue of CSA in sport. Finally, I draw attention to wider developments in the theorising of the sexually abused male child. In this last instance, Josef Spiegel's (2003) comprehensive review of existing literature, and subsequent model of the phenomenon of the sexual abuse of boys, is utilised to draw out features of organized male-sport that make it an environment conducive to the sexual abuse of boys. I suggest that, through thinking of sport as an element within the 'ecology' of childhood sexual abuse (Jack, 2001), Spiegel's model may provide an analytical framework that can be mapped onto sport to further clarify the distinct process by which boys are sexually abused through sport and those contextual features that may assist this process (work begun in part by others: Brackenridge, 2001; Donnelly, 1999; Kirby et al., 2000; Leahy et al., 2002; Robinson, 1998). To demonstrate the analytical teeth of Spiegel's model I present an application of Spiegel's first stage - *Subjection* - (more commonly known as 'grooming' or, as Gallagher (1999) prefers, 'entrapment'). Celia Brackenridge's work on the 'grooming' of females by men in sport (2001: 35) represents considerable progress in this area. However, I would argue that the role of masculinity is yet to be fully considered and I hope that this and future work on the experiences of sexually abused boys can contribute essential contextual and conceptual detail towards the development of a 'global' theory (Ward and

Hudson, 1998) of sexual offending against children in sport. Empirical data, such as it is, is drawn from non-sport research sources and anecdotal material from within sport studies and the sports media. Particular attention is given to the only widely available, full testimony from a male sexually abused as a child in sport, the recently published ‘Why I Didn’t Say Anything’ by the ex-NHL player Sheldon Kennedy (Kennedy, 2006).

### **Understanding the issue: research, theory and policy development**

In addressing the extent of the sexual abuse of male children it is crucial to note that official statistics on CSA are generally accepted to be unreliable (Corby, 2000; Finkelhor et al., 1986), largely due to the high rate of underreporting, whilst prevalence rates from research ‘vary remarkably depending on the nature of the sample, the method of assessment, the types of questions used and the definition of abuse adopted’ (Lisak, 1994: 525). Whilst Finkelhor and Jones have recently reported on the gradual decline of child victimization in the USA, including sexual abuse, they conclude that ‘by almost any standard, levels of child victimization, even after the declines, are still disturbingly high’ (2006: 710; also Jones and Finkelhor, 2003). Mendel reports: ‘studies of the prevalence of CSA of boys suggest that between one-in-six and one-in-eight boys experience sexual maltreatment’ (1995: 6) whilst in a study where researchers focused on the testimony of *non*-incarcerated perpetrators, it was found that 153 male subjects targeting extra-familial males, had sexually abused 22,981 individuals, an average of 150.2 people per abuser (Abel et al., 1987). It is interesting then to note Sheldon Kennedy’s testimony:

The police estimate that Graham molested 75 to 150 kids who were under his care during his time as a coach, manager and scout. Many of those players were great talents but almost all of them dropped out of minor hockey before they had a chance to be drafted (Kennedy, 2006: 78).

According to Gallagher ‘the sexual abuse of children by persons who work with them – institutional abuse – is a focus of major concern among policy makers, practitioners and the public’ (2000: 795) but knowledge about such abuse is generally ‘thin’. Gallagher found that whilst institutional abuse represents only 3 per cent of overall referrals of CSA, individual cases often involve large numbers of children, especially in community settings, and that over a half of all institutional sexual abuse occurs in ‘community settings’, including sport-related contexts. Elliot et al. interviewed 91 convicted offenders and found that 53% of the sample claimed to have recruited children and their families by offering ‘to play games with the children, or teach them a sport, or how to play a musical instrument’ (1995: 585). Gallagher argues that abusers in community settings ‘are as big a threat to children as those in foster homes and residential establishments’ (Gallagher, 2000: 813). He also found that where perpetrators were held in high-esteem by the local community, children faced additional difficulties in ‘resisting and disclosing the abuse’ (Gallagher, 2000: 810); this is a point of particular significance for sport where high-profile cases of sexual abuse have involved coaches with enviable coaching records who are generally held in high regard. We might then surmise that, for some children, if not many, those ‘difficulties’ might well be insurmountable and they will never disclose their experiences. This is compounded by the fact that, in attempting ‘to protect the reputation of the institution or cover the lack of procedures within the organization,’

staff and managers have failed to act upon disclosures from children (Sullivan and Beech, 2002: 162; see also Corby, 2000). This is supported by evidence and anecdote from sport contexts (Brackenridge, 2001; Kennedy, 2006). Gallagher (2000) also found, in line with other studies, that the proportion of male children sexually abused in institutional settings is much higher than in intrafamilial settings. Thus, according to Sullivan and Beech 'whether public or private, voluntary or statutory, institutions and organizations have provided abusers with almost limitless opportunities for the manipulation and abuse of children' (2002: 153).

It is widely acknowledged within the sociology of sport that the institution of sport is based on a performance-driven value structure (e.g. Morgan, 1994) that prioritises and reproduces patriarchal notions of the dominant, heterosexual male (e.g. Hall, 1985; Hargreaves, 1994). It is, therefore, heavily populated by those men who most closely conform to such ideals (Burstyn, 1999). If abuse is constructed by those who believe that boys should be able to 'look after themselves', that sex with adult females does not constitute abuse, or that only those boys who desire such sexual activity risk being abused (see Etherington, 1995, 2000 and Spiegel, 2003 for discussion of 'abuse mythology') then the prospects for many male children are bleak. In a UK study of institutional abuse funded by the NSPCC, Westcott (1991) suggests that there are four barriers to the reporting of abuse within institutions: 1) Lack of procedures/policies for reporting and investigating a complaint of institutional abuse; 2) Institutional abuse viewed as the problem of the individual member of staff, not the institution; 3) The closed nature of institutions; and 4) The belief system surrounding institutions (in Sullivan and Beech, 2002: 161). Whilst there has been development towards the first



of these in sport, I would argue that these are all salient to understanding why abuse in the international arena of organized sport generally does not get reported.

As those who take an interest in sport will no doubt be well aware, organized sport has not provided an oasis for children in which their safety and well-being is assured, despite assumptions to the contrary. As Donnelly notes, ‘... generally, sport organizations have, until recently, acted as if such things could not possibly occur in the pristine world of sport’ (1999: 108). Early research in this area has demonstrated that a range of exploitative practices and abuses take place in the context of organised sport (Brackenridge, 1994; Coakley, 2003; Curry, 1991; Donnelly, 1997; Jones et al., 2005; Kirby et al., 2000). The work of such esteemed and groundbreaking scholars of sport as Celia Brackenridge and Peter Donnelly has not only highlighted a great deal about the reality of childhood experiences in sport but has also emphasised some important conceptual and political/legal tools with which we can approach this issue. For example, the notion of athlete’s rights (Donnelly, 1997; Brackenridge, 2001) and children’s rights in organized sport (Armstrong, 2004; Brackenridge et al., 2007; David, 2005) provide particularly powerful ideas with which to address the issue of child welfare and abuse in sport.

However, it is only very recently that a more comprehensive theoretical framework, as developed by the new social studies of childhood (e.g. James et al., 1998; James and James, 2004; Jenks, 2005) for considering the nature of childhood and its construction within sport has been considered (Pitchford et al., 2004; Brackenridge et al., 2007). The notion that the child is a legitimate social actor in his or her own right, with his or her own rights and for his or her own sake underpins this perspective.

Theorists in this field have been highly critical of the developmentalist approach that ascribes standardised patterns and timeframes to childhood development, the corollary of which are the inevitable ‘scientific’ labels to indicate normality or otherwise (see Jenks, 2005; Prout, 2005). Such an approach comprises the building blocks of organized sport where performance norms meld with age- and gender-specific expectations, formalized and scientificized through the monitoring and recording of performance and evaluations that are ultimately expressed through ascriptions of normality/abnormality and the discourses of ‘ability’ or ‘talent’. The child’s voice and her or his right to participate in decisions that impact upon them is now, theoretically at least, a legitimate one, enshrined in international legislation (UN, 1989). In the UK, the new children’s agenda *Every Child Matters* arguably attends to this development, as does recent sport policy (see Sport England, 2006). Currently however, ‘the opinions of young people have generally not been taken seriously into account in sport’ (Brackenridge et al., 2007).

Leading on from classic feminist work on sport in the 1980s (e.g. Hall, 1985; Hargreaves, 1986; Lenskyj; 1986), the 1990s saw a number of publications documenting sexual exploitation and CSA in sport (Burton-Nelson, 1994; Ryan, 1995; Benedict 1997; Robinson, 1998). Throughout the 1990s, as academic interest (Brackenridge, 1992; 1994; 1996; Donnelly, 1999; Kirby et al., 2000; Tomlinson and Yorganci, 1997; Volkwein et al., 1997) and media reports (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1993; Donegan, 1995; Nack and Jaeger, 1999, Spencer, 1995) on sexual exploitation in sport grew, pressure mounted on practitioners and policy makers to implement change (see Brackenridge, 2001). The ‘moment of truth’ for UK sport occurred in 1995 when Paul Hickson, a former Olympic swimming coach, was

convicted for rape and sexual assaults against female teenage swimmers previously in his care (Brackenridge, 2001). Similarly, in Canada, a TV documentary told the stories of female international rowers who had been sexually abused by their coach as children (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1993). Further revelations were to come in the late 1990s when it was revealed that Canadian ice hockey youth ‘Coach of the Year’ Graham James had sexually abused two of the boys in his charge (Kennedy, 2006), Brian Shaw, ‘former owner and general manager of the Portland Winter Hawks ... was revealed as a long-term sex abuser’ (Robinson, 1998) and a ‘paedophile ring’ was exposed at the Toronto Maple Leafs ice hockey rink (Donnelly, 1999). The popular view was that such incidents were isolated and perpetrated by sexually and psychologically deviant individuals (Robinson, 1998).

In contrast, academic research was gradually making bolder claims about the widespread and normalised nature of abusive behaviour in sport within a sexually charged environment (Brackenridge, 1994; Curry, 1998; Griffin and Genasci, 1990; Hargreaves, 1994; Kane and Disch, 1993; Lenskyj, 1992; Pronger, 1990; Ryan, 1995). Kirby et al. (2000) found, ‘athletes describe what appears to be a thriving sexist environment in high performance sport not unlike that of the chilly climate of the workplace’ (p.46). The main outcome of this pressure for change in *UK* sport, led by Celia Brackenridge, one of the foremost advocates for recognising and preventing sexual exploitation in sport, was a Child Protection in Sport *Task Force* in 1999: ‘its work led directly to the production of the Child Protection in Sport Action Plan and a framework for a co-ordinated response to child protection’ (Boocock, 2002). Most crucially, the work of this task force established the CPSU in 2001, which, according

to its director, 'can be seen as an effective model for changing attitudes and practice and reducing the risks of abuse'<sup>1</sup>.

Organizing bodies of sport in the UK, which appear to be the most advanced in this regard internationally, are barely past the starting post of attempting to make the environment of sport a safe one for children (Hartill and Prescott, 2007). The recently published, 'Strategy for Safeguarding Children and Young People in Sport, 2006-12' (Sport England/NSPCC, 2006) followed up the previous, 'Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport' (Sport England/NSPCC, 2003) which provides national benchmark standards for governing bodies to work towards and upon which state funding depends. Recently, Brackenridge has acknowledged the 'transformative effect' such policy developments have had on 'ethical reflection in sport', but she questions whether prioritising the category of the child above other subordinated groups will actually have the effect of increasing inequality for those 'othered' groups, 'especially adult women', through diverting resources and political will (Brackenridge, 2004: 334).

Despite developments in policy, the UK still has no sport-based prevalence study on which to base its legislation - the CPSU is seeking to circumvent this problem by replicating Leahy et al.'s study of Australian sport (Leahy et al., 2002). Leahy et al. looked at both club and elite level sport and found that 'results from the total sample (n = 370) revealed that 31% of female and 21% of male athletes reported experiencing sexual abuse at some time in their lives. Of these, 41% of females, and 29% of males had been sexually abused within the sports environment' (2002: 16). They go on to

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<sup>1</sup> The CPSU attends to all forms of abuse, not just sexual abuse.

claim that, 'for people who report being sexually abused, and who are involved in competitive sport at the elite level, the odds are almost even that someone associated with that environment will have abused them' (Leahy et al., 2002: 35). For club level athletes the ratio rises to one in four.

### **Approaching Childhood Sexual Abuse in Organized Male-Sport**

As already noted, the work of researchers and practitioners who argue for the inadequacy of the 'male perpetrator-female victim paradigm' (e.g. Hunter, 1990; Mendel, 1995; Spiegel, 2003) has generally not been taken up by sport-focused researchers (Hartill, 2005). Social science now needs to develop a fuller account of the relationship between male-sport and the childhood sexual abuse of males: such an account must be based upon empirical data. A fundamental assumption here is that there is actually a *relationship* to be accounted for. By positing that a relationship exists, I intend to indicate that there is something more substantial to be said than simply recognising that sport can be a *location* for CSA. This is evident simply by virtue of the mass of children in its midst. Broadly speaking, I fundamentally see sport, particularly organized male-sport, as a social field that plays an active role in the practice and perpetuation of CSA *per se*. More specifically here, I argue that the everyday practice and discourse of male-sport (its cultural norms) provide an environment conducive to the sexual abuse of male children.

Central to this approach is the notion that CSA is culturally and institutionally supported (Kitzinger, 1997).<sup>2</sup> In approaching CSA it is crucial to consider how institutions, in this case the institution of sport, contribute to the construction and maintenance of a social system in which CSA is a widespread and persistent feature. According to Hunter ‘most discussions of CSA focus on ... clinical intervention ... [with] a footnote to acknowledge that this problem occurs within a larger socio-political context’ (1990: 4). Jenks argues that explanations for abuse, ‘should really be sought in the way that we have, over time, come to organize our social relationships’ (2005: 114); the potential for abuse, ‘resides within the differentials of both power and status’ (Jenks, 2005: 93). Such an approach is considerably indebted to David Gil’s early study of the roots of child abuse. Gil’s seminal article, ‘Unraveling Child Abuse’ (1975) originally published in the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* remains one of the most comprehensive and insightful arguments into the problem and is the foundation upon which a number of key theorists have built. According to Gil (1975):

The most fundamental causal level of child abuse consists of a cloister of interacting elements, to wit, a society’s basic social philosophy, its dominant value premises, its concept of humans; the nature of its social, economic, and political institutions, which are shaped by its philosophy and value premises and which in turn reinforce that philosophy and these values; and, finally, the particular quality of human relations prevailing in the society, which derives from its philosophy, values, and institutions (in Donnelly and Oates, 2000: 65).

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<sup>2</sup> This clearly does not necessarily mean that institutions deliberately and consciously exhibit *overtly* supportive attitudes for CSA; rather, this is unlikely.

This early approach made it clear that understanding the abuse of children did not lie primarily within the province of individually oriented, medicalised, psychological-science and clinical based approaches, but within the nature of the prevailing adult-child (boy-man) relation and the structural inequalities built into that relation. However, the former has proved by far the most dominant discourse in the construction of the problem, especially in relation to *sexual* abuse.

In considering the context of sport in relation to CSA, it would, therefore, appear salient to ask, ‘how do the institutions of “childhood” and “sport” fit together’? What is the product of their amalgam? As James and James argue, ‘childhood as a social space is structurally determined by a range of social institutions and mechanisms’ (2004: 213). Clearly children are integral to the practice of organized sport and the child’s participation in such sport is overwhelmingly considered to be a virtue, politically and culturally. Thus, if the institution of childhood is itself integral to the practice of CSA, it is important to consider the role that the closely related institution of sport plays in constructing the child and childhood. As the recent *Change for Children* agenda in the UK has demonstrated, there is often (or always) a role for organized sport where social policy initiatives are introduced to address child welfare: ‘Culture, sport and play organisations have a unique role to play’ (DfES, 2007); Brackenridge recently concluded, ‘youth sport ... may now have assumed the status of the “sixth social service”’ (Brackenridge et al., 2007: 205) where sport is constructed as a ‘purity system’ (Brackenridge, 2006). Therefore, discussion, such as that regularly featured within the social critique of sport, that calls into question the normative practices of (boyhood/childhood) sport (e.g. Burstyn, 1999; Messner and Sabo, 1994; Miedzian, 1991) through and within which the boy/child is constructed,

has been met with considerable resistance from those who govern sport (see Brackenridge, 2001) and rely on its positive popular image both to promote its widespread practice and to finance its growth through commercial sponsorship, not to mention the plethora of commercial organisations that have a more basic motivation for sustaining this ‘healthy’ image. The modest aim here then is to identify some normative contextual features of male-sport (within which male children are located) that might, given findings from the sexual abuse literature, be considered conducive to the practice of sexually abusing boys.

### **The SAM (Sexually Abused Male) Model**

Following a review of nearly five hundred studies, Josef Spiegel (2003) developed the SAM model, based on the observation of 56 dynamics (such as victim/perpetrator characteristics, location of abuse, nature of abuse, etc.) and 44 effects (such as depression, suicide, eating disorders, etc.) of CSA. This is the most comprehensive compilation to date on the sexual abuse of *male* children and represents a considerable piece of inter-disciplinary scholarship. Given the dearth of empirical data and/or theory on the sexual abuse of boys and the sport context, as well as the need to develop gender-distinct (as well as uniform) theoretical models for understanding the experience of CSA, Spiegel’s work presents a ‘grounded’ framework for thinking through the sexual abuse of boys in the context of sport and some of the challenges facing those who seek to prevent it. The aim, then, is both to highlight the ‘unique experiences of male victims’ (Courtois in Spiegel, 2001: viii) as well as to begin to move towards a more empirically grounded, cultural analysis and articulation of the relationship between sport and the sexual abuse of boys.



Spiegel presents CSA as a biopsychosocial problem. Following other theorists in the contemporary study of child abuse (e.g. Belsky, 1993; Jack, 2001) he frames this problem within an, 'ecosystems perspective'. According to Sidebotham (2001) the ecological paradigm incorporates 'psychodynamic and sociological models' and 'sees abuse as being multiply determined by forces at work in the individual, in the family and in the community and culture' (2001: 111). As per Gil (1975) within an ecological model, 'child abuse is understood to be a product of the characteristics of the environments in which it occurs rather than simply being the result of the actions of certain individuals' (Jack, 2001: 185). Through adopting such a perspective Spiegel was able to develop a seven-category model that focuses on, 'precipitating events, abusive episodes, their aftermath, and the sociocultural context in which these events occur' (2003, p.137). Whilst Spiegel gives greater weight to physiological/medical and psychological approaches to child abuse than theorists such as Gil (2000 [1975]), Jack (2001), Kitzinger (1997) and Parton (1985), ultimately he argues:

A conceptual and applied understanding of [the] SAM's greater social context is imperative, including, but not limited to, his relationship with parents, caretakers, siblings, relatives, neighbors, teachers, and ministers, as well as relations with gender, sexual orientation, and racial, ethnic, socio-economic, religious, and cultural reference groups ... Further, *knowledge of the social environment ... is essential as it holds the socially constructed attitudes and beliefs that foster the existence of sexual abuse in the first place* (2003: 318, my emphasis).

Given the emergence of the sexual abuse of boys in sport, it seems reasonable, if not urgent, to extend consideration of the social environment to include the context of organized male-sport. Spiegel's seven-stage model<sup>3</sup> is developed from a considerable array of CSA research studies as well as his own in-depth case studies of seven men with sexual abuse histories, however, as this volume and depth of data is not available within the context of organized male-sport it would be inappropriate to attempt to validate or otherwise this model through reference to the limited and sporadic data that has come to light over recent years, largely through the popular press and one autobiographical text (Kennedy, 2006). Instead, I consider his first category, *Subjection*: 'the process of predisposing a boy to sexual abuse by means of subtle or blatant interactions' (a preferable alternative to the more media-friendly, individualised term, 'grooming') in order to shed some light on the manner in which normative cultural practices in sport might be seen to be conducive to effectively preparing the ground for the sexual abuse of boys. In focusing on the sport context I realise that I am artificially isolating one element of the social environment. However, as already noted, this element has been something of a blind spot for research that considers the sexual abuse of boys, indeed children as a whole.

### **Organized male-sport and the *Subjection* of boys to sexual abuse**

#### *Boys to men: Constructing childhood in male sport*

Spiegel identifies an 'evolutionary process' designed to diffuse and confuse traditional boundaries and roles between adults and boys (Spiegel, 2003: 139). In the context of organized male-sport, the boundary between 'boy' and 'man' is easily and

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<sup>3</sup> The 'SAM model of dynamics and effects' comprises the following seven categories: subjection; sexual abuse; concealment; invalidation; reconciliation; compensation; the cycle continues.

frequently blurred (Brackenridge, 2001). Boys regularly train, play, travel and compete for, with and against adults. To all intents and purposes, organized youth sport is organized (thus controlled) by adults; in a very real sense, youth sport is an adult-oriented practice.

As a hockey player, you are told from a very young age that if you want to get anywhere and advance in the game, you have to impress the scouts. You've heard about these powerful men since you laced up your skates in your first house-league game ... These men, and the coaches and managers they report to, are like gods in the eyes of the young players (Kennedy, 2006: 24).

Thus, children in sport often socialise in the company of adults, particularly men, in and around the sport context. The thirteen-year-old boy whose skill level is equal to or beyond that of most adults, whilst viewed as an exceptional child, good beyond his years, is often included within the activities, practices and rituals of older boys or adults. As social historians of sport have pointed out, organized male-sport for boys (e.g. Physical Education) has always been primarily about 'making men' (Burstyn, 1999; Nauright and Chandler, 1996).

Spiegel found that the psychological literature on perpetrator-type can be encapsulated within two broad categories, the *fixated* and the *regressed*: the 'fixated' perpetrator (relatively rare) relates to the popular construction of the child sex abuser - the 'evil paedophile' - who 'emotionally and sexually prefers children to adults'. For example, in Elliot et al.'s (1995) study, only 16% of their sample of convicted offenders stated that sex with children was more attractive than 'adult sex'; in contrast

the more common ‘regressed’ perpetrator is ‘socially competent’ and leads ‘a more traditional lifestyle,’ (Spiegel, 2003: 140). The latter is well supported by the increasing number of cases of highly qualified, widely respected abusing adults in sport, exemplified by two high profile cases: Mike Drew – UK Swimming; and Graham James – Canadian Ice-Hockey. ‘Psychologically and behaviourally, just as the fixated perpetrator becomes a “child,” the regressed perpetrator perceives and experiences the child as a pseudo-adult’ (Spiegel, 2003: 140). Theory development by Ward and Hudson suggests a rather more complex model where ‘individual offenders may exhibit a range of offending styles depending on their circumstances and overall goals’ (2000: 190). Whether we agree with the somewhat reductive categories Spiegel draws upon, there seems little doubt that offending strategies often involve a process whereby the perpetrator subjectively constructs the child in a fashion that enables him (or her) to commit sexually violent acts against the child.

In organized sport, where boys are perpetually required to prove themselves through an adultist, hetero-patriarchal model of success in a context structurally and socially arranged to value conquest above all else, the adult-child distinction is constantly under negotiation. Despite age-group distinctions, one utilisation of organized sport in (late-) modernity is to fulfil the role of an initiation rite (Burstyn, 1999) where the dominant script for a boy to be successful at being a boy means to be man-like and to adopt ‘manly’ qualities such as bravery, aggression, stoicism and risk-taking (Connell, 1995). Such a standard opens up a considerable amount of ‘grey’ area where boys are often expected to ‘suck-it-up’, ‘shrug-it-off’ and ‘take it like a man’ (amongst others, Burstyn (1999), Messner and Sabo (1994), and Pronger (1990) have drawn attention to the homo-erotic current that runs through much of organized male-

sport). It is not difficult to see how such expressions, generally intended, ostensibly, to encourage resolve in the face of adversity or physical discomfort, can be utilised to coerce many boys into all manner of exploitative practices. Certainly, evidence on sport-related hazing rituals attests to such an analysis (Bryshun and Young, 1999) and, as Sheldon Kennedy puts it: ‘you are in a closed world with its own codes of conduct ... based on demonstrating your physical and emotional toughness’ (2006: 81). The following testimony is from a male coach convicted of the sexual abuse of boys in sport:

I think your attitude towards them as well, is very important because, er I always treated them older than they were, and as such they felt you know that, that little bit, six inches taller, that sort of thing ... it’s very much a person to person thing even adult to child, it gives them more confidence and thinks ‘Oh well somebody’s prepared to listen, and somebody’s prepared to talk to me at sort of my level rather than above my head or below my head’. It’s very intricate (cited in Brackenridge, 2001: 36).

Significantly, this coach adopted a position *ostensibly* in line with a children’s rights perspective! The child is permitted to speak and is heard, the coach treats the child as a peer to develop trust and to (seemingly) reduce the power imbalance – of course the structural position of the child in relation to the adult is so firmly entrenched (Kitzinger, 1997) that this strategic illusion can be reversed in an instant. However, the point is that the effectiveness of this strategy is based upon the discrepancy between this experience and the boy’s usual experience of men in sport, where military-style discipline (Burstyn, 1999) and the ‘discourse of control’ inherent in

dominant constructions of the adult-child relation (Hendrick, 2003), amongst other factors, prohibits them from expressing an opinion - and even if they do it carries little or no weight (Brackenridge et al., 2007). There are few clearer examples of the urgent need to (re)establish children as agents in their own right and childhood for its own sake within the fabric of society and within the culture of organized sport. Currently, however, sport provides ample room to construct boys as *pseudo-men*.

### *Heterosexuality and (hyper-) masculine ideals*

Sport is a key site in contemporary society for the acting out and reaffirming of gender identities (McKay et al., 2000; Hargreaves, 1994). As such, for boys involved in sport, particularly those heavily involved, sport is a primary arena through which a boy establishes his (hyper-/hetero-) sexual status and through which hegemonic masculine identities are forged and reinforced (Light and Kirk, 2000; Renold, 1997; 2007). According to Spiegel:

Gender role confusion is a key strategy for rendering a boy vulnerable to sexual abuse; 'for a boy, regardless of age, gender-discordant labels include "sissy," "faggot," and "Daddy's little girl." ... Five year old Nicholas stated ... the worst hurt was when he kept calling me a 'girl' and makin' me wear my Mama's nightie. That means I'm a big mistake (2003: 145).

The emotional/psychological element of CSA is clearly evident here. Spiegel argues that, 'perpetrators ... often try to impair the worth of a boy's sense of gender identity in order to render him vulnerable ... Other perpetrators ... strive to enhance and amplify his sense of gender identity (2003: 145). According to Sheldon Kennedy, 'I

was totally flattered that this smart worldly man was taking an interest in me' (2006: 31) 'he was always there ... watching me, criticizing me, flattering me' (2006: 71). The hypermasculine, homophobic and misogynist world of male-sport provides a forum where such strategies are commonplace (Pronger, 1990; Rotella and Murray, 1991). Within traditional male sports, particularly team sports (but certainly not exclusive to these) boys are often required to engage with and successfully negotiate a heterosexist discourse that valorizes certain forms of masculinity, and rejects others (Robertson, 2003). Within this environment, heterosexuality is presumed but continually questioned, necessitating continual demonstration and reaffirmation (Curry, 1998) as it is in other homosocial contexts (Bird, 1996; Stoudt, 2006); for those who conform most closely to the ideal, great 'riches' await. Potential membership to this exclusive club, and the 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 2001) it provides access to, is always on offer through male-sport (Connell, 1995, 2000) but has to be continuously earned in a context where failure or 'otherness' can be met with violence (Curry, 1998) or rejection (Stoudt, 2006). Within such an environment, sexuality, and therefore gender identity, is always under the spotlight and has to be regularly performed to the satisfaction of the general criteria of male (heterosexist) sport and specific criteria of particular sports (often hyper-masculinist).

Central to this environment is the derogatory use of gender-/sex-role related terms. With regard to CSA at least, being called 'faggot', 'puff', 'homo', 'queer', etc., etc., will not ring any alarm bells for the sports-child, nor indeed for initiated adults. The incessant questioning, explicit or implicit, and reaffirming of gender identity is, then, a constant and eminent feature of the male-sport environment, particularly traditional team-sports. This has been recognized for some time; however, Spiegel's model

allows us to see how such discourse is not only a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001) against females and those males who do not identify (strongly) with a heterosexist identity, but, perhaps counter-intuitively, may also be a strategy for facilitating sexual activity with those who may have most invested in and, therefore, most closely conform to the (masculinist) identity demands of the male-sport world. According to Sheldon Kennedy (2006), his abusing coach constantly used the threat of revealing him as homosexual as an instrument to ensure his silence (see also Elliott et al., 1995). As Connell (1995) points out, few men may live the hegemonic standard but many men support and construct this standard – for the vast majority of boys in organized sport this standard is most definitely not homosexual. In contemporary society the successful sportsman is almost a blueprint for this ideal. It is not difficult to imagine, then, the power vested in the gatekeepers to a world sought after by many young males: ‘they held the keys to the kingdom we were all dreaming about’ (Kennedy, 2006: 32).

Additional facilitative behaviours, such as ‘the misuse and abuse of drugs and alcohol, and the use of pornographic materials’ can serve to further ‘disinhibit the perpetrator’ (Spiegel, 2003: 141). The extensive and frequent use of alcohol, pornographic material, sexually explicit conversation and sexual violence have been well documented in certain sport environments, particularly those characterised by traditional, male team sports (e.g. Bryshun and Young, 1999; Curry, 1991, 1998; Robinson, 1998; Welch, 1997) but certainly not exclusive to them (Laurendeau, 2004). Hockey player Scott McLeod told how on his sixteenth birthday his senior team-mates used a funnel to force beer down his throat (an instrument common to many sport ‘socials’) at a team party thrown by one of the owners of the Tilbury



Hawks hockey team, following which he and a team-mate were ordered into a garage and sexually abused in front of ‘coaches, owners, managers, trainer and senior players’ (Robinson, 1998: 66). One convicted coach reported that he distributed pornographic material amongst boys to test whether they would keep it within the group (they did) (Brackenridge, 2001). In preparing for the abuse, the perpetrator is able to utilise such ‘disinhibiting’ techniques through drawing upon practices and discourses that are, to varying degrees, a normative feature within many, if not all, male-sport contexts. The chance of such behaviour or practices being widely questioned as ‘inappropriate/abnormal’ is therefore low.

### *Victims*

Spiegel argues that research has identified characteristics that may indicate a child’s vulnerability to sexual abuse including:

Children hungry for acceptance, care, and affection ... and girls and boys who appear to be older, more developed, and therefore, from the perpetrator’s perspective, more inclined to view the sexual interaction as mutual and reciprocal (2003: 141).

Spiegel argues, ‘perpetrators often possess an uncanny penchant for identifying and selecting vulnerable children’ (2003: 141). According to Kennedy:

He looked into a prospective victim’s family situations, looking for boys who didn’t have a very solid home, boys whose fathers were angry and had drinking problems. Kids with single moms were on the top of his list of potential victims

... He wanted to find boys who needed a father figure in their lives, boys who were confused and unsure of their masculinity and needed a man they could trust and confide in (2006: 79).

But what boy is not welcoming of a 'father-figure', whether they already have one or not? What boy is not confused and unsure of their masculinity? What boy does not need a man (or men) they can trust and confide in? The environment of sports provides a context where often intimate knowledge of an athlete (child or adult) is considered part of the coaching process. To be able to develop an athlete, a coach must 'know' his/her athletes *in the round*. It is not sufficient for a coach to simply have knowledge of their athletes' abilities and skill level; an effective coach must be able to sense, almost intuitively, how their 'charge' will react in certain situations, what 'switches' them on, how far they can be 'pushed,' physically and also mentally (see Jones et al., 2004). With the emergence and ever-increasing importance of psychology within competitive sport, particularly at, but not confined to, the elite/professional level, knowledge of athletes' psychological make-up is seen as crucial to success. Similar arguments can be made around nutrition and diet, physiology and training regimes, and biomechanics and training techniques. Clearly, such knowledge can only be gained through lengthy and frequent contact between a coach and the athlete; thus, the need for such knowledge and the requirement for intensive contact is legitimised through appeal to 'scientific' discourse. This discourse now clearly underpins sport performance development, especially where aspiration towards excellence is evident, as well as coach education. Consider the comments of one coach convicted of sexual abuse:

Q: How much dedication do you think someone has to give to coach?

A: Well, if you're going to do it properly 110 per cent. It is very time consuming.

Q: What is so time consuming about it, what does coaching entail ..?

A: It entails a lot of preparation ... plus you have to bear in mind that each individual child has different characteristics as far as their learning capabilities plus their own abilities, so you virtually have to run a programme, an individual programme for each one of them, if they're of competition standard.

Q: And what age group of kids were you teaching?

A: ... it varied very much ... mostly say the twelve to fifteen year olds.

Q: And was this boys and girls?

A: Boys and girls but mostly boys, yeh.

(Brackenridge, 2001: 130).

I would add that it is rare within youth sport generally that some aspiration towards excellence (and certainly 'competition standard') does not exist at some point in a child's sporting endeavour; most boys want to be the next Beckham, Gretzky or Jordan at some point, however briefly. Whilst intense, sustained contact may be a more obvious reality for children who perform at the elite level in sport, the crucial point is that the *discourse* is legitimate – *there is no gain without pain* - and is generally reinforced by parents and can therefore be drawn upon by any coach at whatever level of performance. Few children at the local level may experience such focused 'support' from their (volunteer) coach/manager but, if they do, this is seen as only to their benefit within the performance/achievement, individualised discourse that pervades Western culture (Bauman, 2001; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). This

is perhaps best exemplified in male-sport, and simply provides ‘evidence’ of the adult’s philanthropic commitment to the children. Thus, it would seem those traits that Spiegel identifies as characteristic of children who may be particularly vulnerable would be relatively easy for a perpetrator to spot. Indeed, given the opportunity for and normalization of intimate and prolonged contact, in addition to the shroud of a ‘science’ discourse legitimizing almost any request for the most intimate type of information, the ability of a perpetrator to select a child that may be more vulnerable seems not so much ‘uncanny,’ as unsurprising. However, I would add that the emphasis should be firmly on the way a boy is rendered vulnerable through the discourse of masculinity and childhood that underpins the socialisation of boys generally, rather than through specific psychological traits. The latter approach may well give rise to misguided risk analysis.

The relatively ‘closed’ environment of male-sport where, in addition to the above, various states of undress are normalized (including nakedness), would seem an ideal forum for the selection (and subjection), of children for sexual abuse. Indeed, in reference to *intra*-familial sexual abuse, Spiegel argues, ‘the abusive family culture normalizes unusual sleeping arrangements, nudity, overt sexual behavior, pornography, and other acts and utterances that may unduly stimulate children and, in turn, give “license” for their maltreatment’ (2003: 143). Thus, for the extra-familial abuser, it is evident that the cultural context within many male-sport settings provides a made-to-measure environment.

Spiegel argues, ‘the vast majority of prevention and intervention programs emanate from the ‘male perpetrator-female victim paradigm’, leaving boys more confused, less

understood, and with little or no recourse to prevent further abuse' (2003: 144). Given the dominant constructions of masculinity in male-sport (Messner and Sabo, 1990; McKay et al., 2000), it is not surprising to find that many within sport (as well as beyond sport) do not believe that boys are sexually abused; not *real* (sport-) boys at any rate (Kennedy, 2006).

### *Location*

In her 'work-in-progress,' risk-based 'contingency model of sexual exploitation in sport' Brackenridge argues that a significant risk factor for predicting abuse is that the, 'task demands of the sport allow frequent geographic isolation and/or visits away from home and/or visits to the coach's home' (2001: 139). Attention to the potential for isolating children in a legitimate manner would seem to be crucial; according to Spiegel, the 'predispositional' activity of the perpetrator often:

... takes place in both public and private bathrooms. It might include invasive observation, exhibitionism, bathing ... the administration of enemas for nonmedical reasons, and the use of sexually explicit language with an eye to taunt or entice (2003: 145).

It is not difficult to see that the sport context offers many opportunities for such activities. As noted above, the natural sciences are dominant within sport at all levels, and disciplines such as physiology and biomechanics underpin elite performance. Thus, the appropriation of such (pseudo-) 'scientific' testing/measuring is within easy reach of anyone with the status of 'coach'. Such 'scientific' testing, even though it may include invasive procedures, is often welcomed by parents, who want 'the very

best' for their child, and often goes unchallenged. Further, the changing room/locker room space is a legitimate space for many activities other than simply changing clothes and showering/bathing - team selections, meetings (formal and *ad hoc*), stretching, warm-up, weight training, injury assessment, physiotherapy, rehabilitation and general socialising are all common activities within sports changing rooms. According to one 'survivor', 'he used to make us shower and strip off completely to get weighed. It wasn't necessary and we always did it in the seclusion of the dressing room' (cited in Brackenridge, 2001: 38). The centrality of the 'locker room' space to the male-sport world borders on the sacred where unwritten protocol demands that what is seen and heard goes no further (Young, 2005). One mother went so far as to complain about the physically aggressive manner in which an ice-hockey coach had treated her young son; according to another coach she was told that, '... if she wanted her son to go anywhere, never to mention what goes on in the dressing room' (Robinson, 1998: 85). The phrase, 'what goes on tour, stays on tour' applies to many sport environments as a general rule, not only to away-game trips or social excursions. Thus, aside from the fact that normal changing room activities include many that are appealing or instrumental to the child sex abuser, the changing room environment (indeed the sports club environment) is cloaked in silence and, of course, it is silence that sponsors the actions of a perpetrator and silence that enables him/her to persist (Kirby et al., 2000).

## Conclusion

Child protection policy is a necessary and welcome addition to the world of organised sport. Sport England's recently published six-year safeguarding strategy requires 'sports bodies' to have, 'a commitment to empower children and young people by advising them of their rights and how they should be treated' (Sport England, 2006). The clear articulation of such an ambitious objective within sport is highly desirable and represents a clear response to the spirit and demands of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). However, the socio-cultural analysis of sport over the past thirty years demonstrates well the magnitude of the task of creating the conditions to facilitate such a goal; the distance between the cultural character of organized sport and the child-centred philosophy of the *Convention* are significant, to say the least. In addition, we should not forget that there remains critical discussion about 'man-boy' sexual relations (see debate between Bauserman, Finkelhor and Mrazek in Sandfort et al., 1991) which, for some, are a potential source of healthy, positive experiences for the child (e.g. Sandfort, 1987). Whilst such research offers an important contribution to academic debate it should not detract from the considerable literature that clearly articulates the damaging impact of CSA, and as Finkelhor states, it has little relevance for policy' (1991: 315).

Abuse of children is a problem rooted in the social construction of human relations (the adult-child relation) therefore the centralising of children's rights in policy is a very welcome development. Yet, despite considerable work on risk-factors in sport to

inform policy (Brackenridge, 2001), it is unlikely that child protection/safeguarding policy in sport (where it exists) will make a significant impact on the activity of adults who are determined to engage in sexual activity with children in sport, even when/if policy is fully and rigorously implemented (something which is unlikely in the near future given the sporadic and very recent introduction of such policy within a global sport context that is not generally conducive to its underlying philosophies). Protection policy is ultimately a necessary but blunt tool with which to address the resolve of those for whom children present either a habitual or situational means to achieve sexual gratification. I would posit that this is especially true when such resolve fundamentally originates within the construction of a masculinity based upon domination (Bourdieu, 2001). However, its potential lies in its ability to quietly foster social and cultural change towards an environment where the welfare of the child is prioritised, at all times, above the welfare of sport. Given the increasing commodification of organized sport and athletes within it (Morgan, 1994), not to mention the specific targeting of children for political ends (Giroux, 2000), occasionally as part of terror campaigns (Jenks, 2005a), we may reasonably be sceptical about the will of the global village to seriously attend to this change.

Alongside this emerging rights-based discourse, Hendrick's (2003) notion of a 'discourse of control' (which he opposes with a 'discourse of welfare') is a useful analytical tool for examining the construction of childhood in sport: '... he tells you when and how you play, who you play with, who you can talk to outside of the team' (Kennedy, 2006: 45). Boys in sport are controlled by men to the extent that they are told *how to be*; they are expected to (and do) conform without even the opportunity to question (Pitchford et al., 2004). Not surprisingly, the thesis presented in Michel



Foucault's (1977) 'Discipline and Punish' has been frequently used to draw out the mechanisms and practices inherent with organized sport (see Shogan, 1999). It is well established within the sociology of sport that sport is not a unified, homogenous entity but a deeply politicised, heterogeneous one. According to Brackenridge, 'within that terrain there have been many attempts to transform the masculine and to challenge misogyny': however she concludes 'but even in sports that ostensibly shun hypermasculinity the heterosexual imperative is as strong as ever' (2001: 88). Similarly, the construction of boyhood through a discourse of control is not confined to those sports such as ice-hockey, boxing, rugby, 'grid-iron', and soccer, where the hetero-patriarchal current runs strong and is clearly traceable (Burstyn, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994). The use of punitive measures in the training/coaching of boys is commonplace within many, if not all, sports (see Miedzian, 1991: 177-206) and the absence of children's perspectives in organized children's sport is a universal issue. It may be polemical to suggest that *all* children's sport is based on an instrumental rationality that permits adults to treat children as objects or tools in the pursuit of their own ends and with little regard for the long-term well-being of the child, but anyone who has spent even a little time in male-sport will recognise there is at least a strong kernel of truth in this analysis. The commodification of childhood (Giroux, 2000) is as rampant in organized sport as any other field of social practice and corporate enterprise shows little sign of reducing its interest in sport or those that will shortly fill the resident 'great' one's 'shoes', boots or skates. As Chomsky has cogently argued, the corporation is legally bound to ignore such trivial matters as the welfare of children (Bakan, 2004). Certainly, more needs to be known about individual sports cultures; nevertheless, there appears to be considerable legitimacy in referring to

organized male-sport as a single entity when discussing the treatment of boys and the manner in which the child/boy is constructed in organized male-sport.

Attention to the 'new social studies of childhood' (James et al., 1998) in light of the emergence of the problem of CSA demands that sport examine the manner in which it constructs childhood and child-adult relations; a children's rights agenda directs cultural change far in excess of most child protection policy or initiatives, even though these may be a primary tool for cultural change. Some sport organizations and bodies across the world are now ready to accept that a 'few bad apples' may infiltrate the ranks of sport in order to abuse children but general recognition or acceptance that it is often the very fabric and *milieu* of organised sport (Brackenridge, 2001) that constitutes part of the problem seems some way off. Male-sport, in most if not all of its forms, currently provides a context conducive to the sexual abuse of boys and it is only through radical cultural change that this problem can be addressed. In this paper I have tried to outline the beginnings of an account of the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and male-sport, whilst recognizing that, to do so without greater knowledge of the lived experiences of (and the meanings given to them by) boys sexually abused in sport and of the adults who abuse them, gives always only a partial perspective.

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