

# Journal of Adolescent Research

<http://jar.sagepub.com/>

---

## **Male Team Sport Hazing Initiations in a Culture of Decreasing Homophobia**

Eric Anderson, Mark McCormack and Harry Lee

*Journal of Adolescent Research* published online 4 July 2011

DOI: 10.1177/0743558411412957

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://jar.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/06/13/0743558411412957>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *Journal of Adolescent Research* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://jar.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://jar.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

---

# Male Team Sport Hazing Initiations in a Culture of Decreasing Homophobia

Journal of Adolescent Research

XX(X) 1–22

© The Author(s) 2011

Reprints and permission:

sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0743558411412957

<http://jar.sagepub.com>



Eric Anderson<sup>1</sup>, Mark McCormack<sup>2</sup>,  
and Harry Lee<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

In this longitudinal ethnographic research, we report on 7 years of hazing rituals on two separate men's sports teams at one university in the United Kingdom. Using 38 in-depth interviews alongside naturalistic observations of the initiation rituals, we demonstrate that hazing activities have changed from being centered around homophobic same-sex activities to focusing on extreme levels of alcohol consumption. We show that whereas same-sex activities once occurred paradoxically to prohibit them, today these initiations open up the possibility of same-sex behaviors for young men in the life stage of emergent adulthood.

## Keywords

sexuality, college issues, gender, peers/friends, risk behavior

A long-held and embedded tradition of hazing initiations exists for new recruits in homogenous masculine institutions (McGlone, 2010; Nuwer, 1999). In order to be accepted into the social matrix of their organizations, individuals are put through ritualistic “tests” that involve physical abuse, psychological

---

<sup>1</sup>University of Winchester, Winchester, UK

<sup>2</sup>Brunel University, London, UK

<sup>3</sup>Independent Scholar, Bath, UK

## Corresponding Author:

Mark McCormack, School of Sport and Education, Brunel University, Uxbridge, UB8 3BH, UK  
Email: [Mark.mccormack@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Mark.mccormack@brunel.ac.uk)

damage, and sexual humiliation (Nuwer, 2000). Important to this understanding is that hazing is almost exclusively related to university-aged adolescent males, where it has traditionally served as a transitional marker between adolescence and adulthood. Here, these cultural practices were normally suffused with homophobic overtones that enshrined the privileged position of heterosexuality within the institution.

Although hazing has occurred as a rite of passage in multiple masculine institutions, there is a particularly rich and descriptive body of literature showing the frequency with which sporting recruits are coerced into high-risk, deviant, degrading, and abusive initiation practices (Bryshun & Young, 1999, 2007; Johnson & Holman, 2004). Although this rite of passage has traditionally been dismissed as mostly harmless (Allan & DeAngelis, 2004), there has been growing public awareness of psychological and physical dangers associated with it (Nuwer, 1999; Young 2008).

Hazing initiations have mostly focused on the ordaining of a particular kind of homophobic and sexist masculinity (Allan & DeAngelis 2004; Nuwer, 2000), the content of which is firmly linked with the processes of the stratification of masculinities and the determination of valued characteristics of men in Anglo-American societies (Connell, 1995). Hazing activities have therefore given insight into the developmental issues of young men as they transition from adolescence into adulthood. However, the literature on hazing has failed to take into account the materialization of emerging adulthood as a developmental life stage between these two (Arnett, 2004), and the consequences this has on the rituals that young men use to bond.

In this article, we examine the initiations rituals of two elite male sports teams at one university in the United Kingdom. Using 38 in-depth interviews alongside naturalistic observations of the hazing of the university rugby and field hockey players, we examine how these acts have changed in both behavior and meaning.<sup>1</sup> By examining the hazing initiations of two masculinized sports, we discuss how these young men navigate their identities in emerging adulthood.

## **Sport, Hazing, and Masculinities**

Dominant expectations of heterosexual masculinity have long dictated that “real men” should be tough, aggressive, courageous, and able to withstand pain (Connell, 1995; Kivel, 1999). These masculine traits are reflected in the norms of sporting culture, where the very definition of “athlete” is typically predicated on these characteristics. Hughes and Coakley (1991) suggest that strict conformity to a masculine sport ethic is idolized in competitive team

sports. Here, athletes are expected to pay the price thought necessary for victory; playing with pain, taking risks, challenging limits; overconforming to rigid and sometimes exploitative team norms; obeying orders; and sacrificing other social and academic endeavors (Anderson, 2010).

Although hazing initiations have various purposes and meanings for team sport players, it is commonly hypothesized that they occur because they mirror—in one event—the sacrifice and subordination that existing team members expect of new members (whom we call “recruits”). Hazing initiations are believed to serve as a test not only of recruits’ masculinity, but also of their readiness to adopt a near agentic-less state determined by the power structures of team leadership (Kirby & Wintrup, 2002). Hazing is thought to be a ritualistic enshrining of leadership positions, where team leaders are granted considerable power whereas recruits are positioned as docile. However, hazing is also thought to serve multiple other social control purposes.

Donnelly and Young (1988) demonstrate that initiations act as a socialization process that shapes the identities of recruits into a form that suits the team’s subculture by bonding team members around a common experience. Kirby and Wintrup (2002) develop this analysis by suggesting that the main purpose of hazing is to “grow the team” with those that are like-minded, recruiting players who are willing to share team norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors.

Others have theorized that the process of initiation rituals presents the opportunity for recruits to prove their commitment to the team, and for veteran members to gauge how successfully recruits have been socialized into adopting the team’s subculture (Bryshun, 1997). Accordingly, the extent to which athletes are accepted on a team is often determined by their adoption of the team’s ethic (Young, 2008). This means that if recruits are able to demonstrate appropriate roles and behaviors, they are more likely to be accepted and welcomed as a worthy member of the team (Donnelly & Young, 1988).

A recruit refusing to be initiated will often be punished through social exclusion, ostracization, or even physical abuse (Robinson, 1998). This humiliation and isolation is usually more intense and its effects more enduring than the experience of the initiation itself (Holman, 2004). Thus, hazing is frequently regarded as the lesser of two evils, creating the perception that recruits freely choose to be initiated. Hazing initiations therefore become an avenue through which this power structure is maintained and perennially reproduced: recruits who have been hazed are less likely to challenge the power structure because they have previously undergone this initiation ritual (Allan & DeAngelis, 2004).

Examining why athletes themselves engage in initiations, the most common rationale is that they are a key means of creating team cohesion (Bryshun, 1997).

Recruits often describe the experience of hazing initiations as a positive bonding experience between friends (Feist, Shenton, & de Souza, 2004). Furthermore, athletes assume that the more extreme a hazing initiation is, the greater the level of commitment and interdependency will be produced. However, recent research suggest that despite these athletes' perspectives, initiations fail to promote group unity (Allan & Madden, 2008); whereas others question whether team cohesion positively impacts on performance (see Hardy, Eys, & Carron, 2005). Thus, the perseverance of the myth of team cohesion resulting from initiations speaks to the importance of these rituals in young men's lives.

## Typologizing Hazing Practices

In order to make sense of the behaviors that commonly occur in hazing activities, and to enable theoretical examination of hazing's intersection with masculinity, we conceptualize four forms of hazing activity that emerged from our literature review: (a) physical acts of violence; (b) antisocial behavior; (c) excessive alcohol consumption; and (d) same-sex sexual activities.<sup>2</sup>

First, serving as a test of the new recruits' masculinity, *physical acts of violence* are particularly common in highly masculinized sports. As previously discussed, these behaviors are designed to test recruits' willingness and ability to tolerate pain and to take bodily risks for the sake of the team (Finkel, 2002). The severity of these acts sometimes escalates to cause hospitalization and occasional fatalities (Nuwer, 2000). For example, several years prior to the commencement of this study, three rugby players were hospitalized as a result of the hazing initiations at Southwest University.

Second, the use of *antisocial behavior* tests recruits' willingness to take risks and to obey those higher in the power hierarchy. For example, Hoover (1999) identifies how many of the NCAA athletes in her study are "forced to commit crimes—destroying property, making prank phone calls and harassing others" (p. 1). This is theorized to be the result of overconformity to team norms (Hughes & Coakley, 1991).

Third, *excessive alcohol consumption* occurs in about half of U.S. hazing incidents (Nuwer, 1999). In one national study of university hazing incidents, 23% of American recruits drank to the point of being sick or passing out (Allan & Madden, 2008). Alcohol acts as a disinhibitor (for both hazers and recruits), permitting an escalation of activities to occur (Robinson, 1998). Furthermore, because excessive alcohol consumption is coded as a masculine endeavor (Gough & Edwards, 1998), recruits who willingly consume and sustain a higher tolerance of alcohol upgrade their masculine capital (Peralta, 2007).

Finally, *same-sex sexual activities* serve the purpose of feminizing and homosexualizing recruits to establish and reaffirm their position at the bottom of the team's heteromale hierarchy (Anderson, 2005). At its most extreme, several episodes of anal rape (usually with objects) have been reported in hazing episodes (Finkel, 2002). Somewhat more frequently, recruits are sometimes required to masturbate and ejaculate on a cracker, with the last member to ejaculate being made to eat it (Anderson, 2005). However, the most frequent types of sexually related hazing practices come through mock sexual behaviors: same-sex kissing, nakedness, and consuming alcohol off of other men's bodies (McGlone, 2010).

## Hazing and Entry into Adulthood

To fully understand the purpose of these sexualized hazing activities, it is necessary to place them within a framework of developmental life course (Brannon, 1976). Among other functions, homoerotic hazing has traditionally served the purpose of closing down future same-sex sexual behaviors (Kaplan, 2005; Pronger, 1990). These degrading and sometimes dangerous homoerotic acts served to dismiss the possibility of same-sex desires (even if they paradoxically acted them out in the process). This form of hazing marked an end of the sexual exploration of adolescence and solidified a form of heterosexual adult masculinity.

However, Arnett (2004) shows that White, heterosexual, American men no longer transition directly from adolescence into adulthood. Rather, they enter a life stage he identifies as "emerging adulthood." This stage is characterized by having more social freedoms and less pressure (and opportunity) for occupational entry or to start a family. Here, youth have the time and space to "explore the possibilities available to them in love and work, and move gradually toward making enduring choices" (Arnett, 2000, p. 3). Although the impact emerging adulthood has on hazing practices has not been examined, research has however documented a significant decrease in homophobia among men in this developmental stage. This decreasing homophobia may result in an expansion or opening up of same-sex behaviors.

## Homophobia and the Cultural Significance of Homophobia

Although a number of social factors are influential in re/shaping cultural constructions of idealized heteromale, homophobia is theorized to be the most significant factor (Plummer, 1999). Anderson (2009) conceptualizes

this through the notion of homophobia—heterosexual men’s fear of being publicly homosexualized by violating rigid boundaries of heteromascularity. Homophobia situates levels of homophobia temporally and spatially, recognizing that cultural homophobia has different affects dependent on the social context. Accordingly, homophobia is a useful theoretical tool for understanding the significance that homophobia maintains within particular cultures.

Anderson (2009) argues that in temporal-cultural moments with high levels of homophobia, masculinity, and homosexuality are viewed as incompatible, meaning that heterosexual men go to great lengths to avoid being perceived as gay. Here, homophobia is used as a weapon to stratify men in deference to a dominant hegemonic force (Connell, 1995). This is particularly effective because anyone can be suspected of being gay (Anderson, 2008). Accordingly, homophobic language is frequently used to stigmatize homosexuality and in doing so, promote one’s own heteromascularity standing.

Important to this research, homophobia also provokes heterosexual men to maintain physical and emotional distance from one another (see Ibson, 2002). In a period of high homophobia, physical and emotional demonstrations of intimacy homosexualize men, meaning that physical touch is generally relegated to playing team sports (Anderson, 2005). Soft tactility, such as holding hands, hugging, and nonsexual kissing, are not permitted. Those who break this mandate are socially homosexualized and consequently stripped of their publicly perceived heteromascularity, and it is within this zeitgeist that homoerotic and homosexualizing behaviors can be utilized as effective tasks to humiliate and feminize recruits in hazing rituals.

However, levels of homophobia can vary, and Anderson argues that as homophobia declines, other forms of masculinity can proliferate. Anderson (2009) describes men who esteem demonstrations of emotional and physical intimacy as maintaining “inclusive masculinities.” He attributes the ability to do this to the loss of stigma that homosexuality has, and the decreased significance homophobia maintains in regulating masculine boundaries. Supporting this, McCormack (2011a) shows that homophobia maintains little significance in three colleges in the south of England, and he documents the increased tactility between heterosexual men that results from this.

A growing body of academic research argues that homophobia maintains little significance in contemporary undergraduate British culture (Anderson, 2009; McCormack, & Anderson, 2010a). Weeks (2007) charts the changing social landscape for gays and lesbians, arguing that although the privileging of heterosexuality persists in multiple forms, a greatly improved social, political, and legal landscape exists for gays and lesbians in 21st-century Britain.

Furthermore, McCormack (2011b) shows that British high schools are now gay friendly and gay students are popular with their heterosexual peers. Anderson (2009) provides further evidence for improved cultural attitudes toward homosexuality by examining data from the past 30 years of British Social Attitudes surveys. In 1987, 64% of people thought that homosexuality was “always wrong,” but this figure had dropped to 24% in 2006. There is also considerable evidence that more progressive attitudes are being esteemed in sport settings, both in the United States and United Kingdom (Adams and Anderson *IN PRESS*; Anderson, 2008; Harris & Clayton, 2007; McCormack and Anderson, 2010b; Price & Parker, 2003).

In addition to decreasing levels of homophobia in the wider culture, research also documents decreasing levels of homophobia at Southwest University in the past 10 years. Multiple studies at this university document that homophobia and homophobia have little significance. Three separate ethnographic articles evidence decreased levels of homophobia among student athletes, including one article on the university football team (Adams, Anderson, & McCormack, 2010), and two articles on the rugby team whose hazing initiations we examine here (Anderson & McGuire, 2010; McCormack, & Anderson, 2010b).

For example, ethnographic research conducted with Southwest University’s elite soccer team documents that no player intellectualized homophobia. In fact, many of the men on this team publicly kissed their teammates and their gay friends (Anderson, Adams, & Rivers, 2010). Research on the elite rugby team also documents substantially decreased cultural homophobia and homophobia (Anderson & McGuire, 2010). Players express progay attitudes, and most maintain friendships with openly gay men. In fact, the year after this research was conducted, an openly bisexual freshman joined the first team. Interviews with him and his teammates showed that his sexuality did not negatively impact on his sporting experience and that he was welcomed into the matrix of his team.

Quantitative research also shows that athletes at this university have disassociated themselves from homophobia over the previous 7 years (Bush, Anderson, & Carr, *in press*). Overt homophobia has become virtually nonexistent among male players at this particular middle class, mostly White university. This longitudinal research (collected annually among first-year athletes each year) highlights increasingly positive attitudes toward homosexuality among young men: between the years 2005 and 2010, response rates on questions such as “Do you think gay men should be able to change in lockers with straight men?” “Should gay coaches be allowed to coach male youth?” and “Would you support an openly gay teammate?” all have acceptance rates at

over 90%. This increased to nearly 100% on many answers in 2010. For example, only one of 69 students surveyed in 2010 maintained that gay men should not be allowed to coach male youth. Accordingly, at both Southwest University and in the wider British culture, it appears that both homophobia and homophobia maintain less significance on the gendered behaviors of young men.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The purpose of this longitudinal research is to examine the types of activities used in male team sport hazing initiations at a British university renowned for its sporting excellence over 7 years. The participants (whose identities remain protected) are male athletes, aged 18 to 25, from the university rugby and field hockey teams who participate in the teams' hazing initiations. Ninety percent of these men are White British, and 95% of interviewees identify as middle class, which is slightly higher (by 10%) than the class make up of the university student population as a whole. All participants self-identify as heterosexual, with the exception of one openly bisexual rugby player.

### *Procedures*

We use a multiple method approach to obtain data of sporting initiations of two teams from 2003 to 2009. Direct observations of the teams' initiation ceremonies are used alongside 38 semistructured interviews divided evenly among the teams. Interviews were conducted with new recruits and initiation organizers (older players). These interviews are used to triangulate data collection and assure we have a comprehensive view of what has occurred during these initiation ceremonies. Interviews are used to gain a deeper understanding of the informants' subjective experiences, to gain rich qualitative data concerning the narratives of the participants themselves, and to understand the rationale for choices of hazing activities. This established methodological approach ensures comprehensive data collection and enables a high degree of validity (Sarantakos, 2005).

Observations are obtained from one author only. The sole hazing event for each team was observed each year (one per year per team), and these occurred at the start of the academic year. The author maintained access to the hockey initiations through his legitimate membership; however, initial access was granted through this author's friendship with two elite players on the rugby

team. In the following years, his presence at hazing initiations was well-established because his presence was endorsed by the older members.

Although the presence of a researcher will always impact on data collected, researcher effect is likely not to have substantially impacted on the findings because of the matching friendship networks of this author and his status as a student athlete and then graduate student (Neuman, 2006). Because of his familiarity and legitimate group membership, this author was immersed in the research setting, enabling him to engage in what Cushion and Jones (2006) term “shop talk.” This is a valuable asset, as it permits the author to gain access to an otherwise closed social space. It is worth highlighting that this author was never part of the organization of initiations, and interviewees were assured of confidentiality, including the issue that the author would not discuss any part of the research with his friends on the team.

Although this was not covert research, all note taking was conducted by recall immediately after observation to minimize researcher effect (Spradley, 1970). We perceive this enabled the participants to quickly forget that we were conducting research, and to proceed with the initiation ceremonies without feeling that they were under the researcher’s gaze. It was not always possible to collect quantitative data on the frequencies of particular actions, and because this is ethnographic research, we do not endeavor to quantify specific behaviors of each member of each team each year. We therefore rely on our phenomenological assessment of frequency of behaviors. For the purpose of results and analysis, the 14 sets of data are referred to according to the year (i.e. hockey initiation 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and rugby initiation 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).

The 38 semistructured, in-depth interviews were divided between authors. Fourteen of these interviews were conducted on social secretaries (student leaders) from the hockey and rugby clubs (one per team per year) and another 24 interviews were conducted on recruits (two per team per year, apart from years 6 and 7, which was one per team per year). The interviews occurred approximately 1 month after the initiation.

Interviews discussed the hazing activities that participants engaged in, their reasons for this, and how they experienced their initiation. The structure of these questions was informed by our typology of hazing. Participants were also interviewed about their attitudes toward homosexuality, masculinity and sport, as well as their perception of their teammates’ attitudes towards these topics. With the initiation organizers, we discussed their rationalizations for conducting initiation rituals, their choice of hazing activities, and how they believe this effects team cohesion and morale.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then coded independently by each researcher using a constant-comparative method of emerging themes

(Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995). Although we developed our codes independently, we used our typology of hazing as a schematic framework to aid the initial coding of results. Our codes were then compared in order to improve the validity of our analysis, with emerging themes developed inductively from the data. From our coding, it emerged that there are distinct time frames that make salient the evolution in hazing behaviors. However, these time frames are different for alcohol consumption (two periods) than they are same-sex behaviors (three periods), and we group the initiations in accordance with these emergent themes.

Finally, this research adheres to British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines, with the identity of all involved protected and the option to opt-out of the research for all participants. Informed consent was achieved through participants signing a consent form before the hazing initiation occurred. This form discussed the themes of the research, the methods employed and the likely publications that would result. Interviewees signed a further consent form for interview, and had the opportunity to read their interview transcript and comment on or delete any section.

## **Hazing at Southwest University**

In this research, we find that while both teams placed same-sex sexual activities as an important part of their hazing practices in early initiations (where these activities were considered degrading), the presence of these activities decreased steadily as the study progressed. In all years, binge drinking maintained most significance, while minor physical acts of violence were occasionally used and no acts of criminality were encouraged. We highlight, however, that the content of hazing initiations varies across institutions, and that the importance with which particular aspects of our typology are held will vary depending on the context of each sporting team (Allan & DeAngelis, 2008).

### *Same-Sex Sexual Activities in Hazing*

Although same-sex sexual activities maintained some salience to hazing initiations at the start of the research process, both the quantity and intensity of same-sex activities decreased throughout the period of study.

### *Initiations 1 and 2*

Observations and interviews showed that in the first 2 years of initiation, same-sex sexual activities were used in hazing initiations. None of the hazing

activities consisted of highly dangerous same-sex sexual activities. Instead, only small acts of same-sex sexual activities occurred. Recruits were often told to kiss each other as a punishment for a failed task, and were frequently threatened with same-sex kissing in the game “gay chicken.” This activity involved two men leaning in to kiss, or kissing until one of them pulled away. In these initiations, gay chicken served as a homophobic strategy of proving masculine courage and sacrifice, because kissing another man was deemed so repulsive that participants avoided it all costs. In these early initiations, no game of gay chicken resulted in a kiss.

Interviews with players and organizers of both rugby and hockey Initiations 1 and 2, showed same-sex sexual hazing activities were used and enjoyed by organizers. Rob, (organizer of rugby initiation 1) said, “We made them all play gay chicken. We did that a lot actually. Some guys wouldn’t even get close!” Jack (organizer of hockey initiation 2) said, “Gay chicken’s great because it puts them in a quandary. Do I kiss that hairy 15 stone guy, or do I drink another pint? They choose the pint every time!”

Other forms of same-sex sexual activity occurred in the early initiations. For example, Rob described how he forced recruits to drink beer poured through the butt cheeks of another player, and Jack said, “One fresher had to put one of the older guy’s dick in his mouth because he spilt his pint over him. It was pretty hilarious for everyone.” Tim said, “We made one guy kiss another guy’s ass, because he was getting a bit lippy.”

In the hockey Initiations 1 and 2, recruits were told to wrestle each other in togas. However, because of the high levels of drunkenness, the togas regularly fell off, and players were wrestling (with little skill) in just their underwear. The other players shouted comments like, “Don’t get fucked” and “Take that pussy down” in ways that homosexualized the activity and marginalized the loser of each bout. Here, the sexualized wrestling bouts were taken as a literal demonstration of superiority: the winners praised for their strength and power whereas the loser is homosexualized. In all the early initiations, the homosexualizing of recruits was a frequent part of the hazing initiations.

### *Initiations 3, 4, and 5*

Although there was a substantial amount of low-level same-sex sexual activity in the first two sets of initiations, this steadily decreased over the next 3 years. In the rugby initiations, some same-sex kissing was ordered for failing tasks, but not as frequently as earlier years, and it only occurred once each in hockey Initiations 4 and 5. Furthermore, although gay chicken continued to be played, the reaction it got from participants and observers became

gradually less intense. Whereas players would not touch lips in the first 2 years, they frequently did in years 3-5. Most often players would touch lips before one of them pulled away, seemingly in response to onlookers chants of "tongue him" or "Stick your tongue down his throat." This corresponds to Anderson et al. (2010) and Anderson's (2008) research, which shows increasing numbers of students participating in forms of same-sex kissing socially deemed compatible with maintaining a heterosexual identity.

In interviews during this period, recruits did not consider gay chicken a central part of their hazing. In hockey initiation 3, Tom said, "Gay chicken was fun, yeah. It's always good to see who'll back out first, and we all have a laugh." In rugby initiation 5, Matt said, "It's a laugh, especially when we're so drunk. But it's not exactly the hardest part of the initiation." In this set of initiations, no recruit was repulsed by the game. Instead, Tim's answer was more in line with recruits' views: "When you've drunk that much, you don't care about kissing a guy, you just want to avoid more alcohol."

Interviews and observations with players from these years indicated fewer same-sex activities in general. A new occurrence, however, was mock intercourse, where an older player would bend a recruit forward and grind against him from behind. Here, the player would shout "take it." Clearly, this is a demonstration of hierarchy, with the recruit symbolically "fucked" by a player higher up the hierarchy. We highlight, however, that this mock intercourse would only last a few seconds and, although it is clearly sexualized, it can also be interpreted as a demonstration of physical (as well as heterosexual) superiority.

The wrestling that occurred in the first two rugby initiations continued in this set of initiations. However, in these initiations, it happened earlier in the evening, before recruits became as inebriated. Accordingly, wrestlers were more clothed and less intoxicated. They therefore displayed greater skills while wrestling, so the event was more about strength and skill than symbolic homosexual contact. Supporting this analysis, whereas the wrestling was accompanied by homosexualizing chants and cheers in rugby initiations 2 and 3, this was near-totally absent by rugby initiation 5. Although recruits could be subordinated by being physically dominated, they were not homosexualized for participation in this activity.

Although there was less formal, preplanned same-sex sexual activity in these hazing initiations, some other forms of symbolic homosexualizing activities still occurred. For example, in hockey initiation 4, recruits were made to drink a mixture of milk and water and a thickening agent (designed to look like ejaculate) out of a condom. Players were told that it was the ejaculate of veteran players. This did not seem to be taken seriously by

players, who were just relieved that it did not contain alcohol. One player exclaimed, "Thank fuck it's not more vodka!" In interviews, organizer John said, "That didn't work too well. They were just happy we laid off the drink." Interestingly, even though the organizers attempted to degrade recruits with symbolic forms of same-sex sexual activity, it maintained little traction in this instance.

### *Initiations 6 and 7*

The decrease in same-sex sexual activity continued in the last 2 years of study. In the final 2 years of hockey initiation (6 and 7), no formal same-sex sexual hazing activities were utilized. Matt (organizer of hockey initiation 6) said that he saw little point in keeping the activity. "Yeah, we thought about that. But I always thought the gay stuff was silly in my initiations. I just didn't want to bore the guys with it." And, when a recruit from hockey initiation 6 was asked how he would feel had he been made to kiss another man during his initiation he said, "Blokes kiss all the time now anyway. It wouldn't have bothered me at all." Tom (hockey 6) agreed, "I wouldn't have minded, especially with a few beers in me. It's all good fun isn't it?"

When asked why same-sex sexual activities are no longer used in the hockey initiations, the year 7 organizer said:

When I was a fresher, the old boys would make us play gay chicken with each other and stuff like that, but we all kiss each other when drunk, and hug and stuff all the time anyway, so we didn't see the point. We just wanted to get the new players wasted, challenge them and make them do stupid stuff.

The organizers of the rugby initiation 6 still tried to have formal same-sex sexual activities in their hazing initiations. However, when a veteran player told two recruits to play a game of gay chicken, he was visibly surprised by the reaction. In this case, the two recruits (Joe and Ali) looked at each other, kissed for approximately 5 seconds and then asked, "So who loses?" The veteran said, "Whoever pulls out first." The men then kissed for another 10 seconds before the veteran said, "Fuck it, that's enough." We code this as the diminished utility of a same-sex kiss, as it no longer degrades the recruits.

It should be recognized, however, that recruits expressed that there were certain same-sex sexual behaviors that they would be uncomfortable engaging in. Ali said, "I'm fairly happy with most stuff, like kissing mates, but touching him up in front of everyone, I'm not too sure about." Similarly, a

recruit from year 7 said, “I hear stories of blokes being made to wank each other off, or drink some other guy’s urine. That I would not want to do! But kissing and stuff is harmless.” However, in line with the university rules, we saw no evidence that organizers were interested in this extreme form of sexual hazing activity.

In the final year of our study, the rugby initiation did not take place. This was because of a widely reported (and disturbing) incident of a rugby team at another university (which consisted of a combination of excessive alcohol consumption and antisocial behavior). The event influenced the administration at Southwest University to ban the rugby team’s hazing activities for that year. Players were told that if any individual was initiated, privately or publicly, the team would lose ten points of play in their season. Interviews with new recruits showed that they were relieved that they could avoid the initiation, even though some of the older players expressed dissatisfaction.

### *Heteromascularity and Binge Drinking*

A commonality across the 7 years of initiation ceremonies was the rapid and excessive consumption of alcohol. Nearly all of the participants in these observations were forced to consume alcohol to the point of vomiting, passing out, or (at a minimum) to extreme inebriation. While the earliest initiations contained the drinking of high quantities of alcohol, alcohol consumption steadily became more central to the hazing rituals.

### *Initiations 1, 2, and 3*

Drinking was frequently used in the first 3 years of hockey and rugby initiations. In hockey Initiations 1, 2, and 3, the amount of alcohol consumed was excessive, but not particularly dangerous; and some activities did not involve alcohol consumption. Recruits could opt out of drinking alcohol, but they were forced to consume vile concoctions of non-alcoholic beverages if they did. For example, in hockey initiation 2, Sam was forced to consume a mixture of Tabasco sauce, curry powder, and olive oil.

The quantities of alcohol consumed in the rugby initiations were excessive even at the first initiation. Data from Initiations 1, 2, and 3 showed that recruits were required to consume three pints of 7.5% cider on the walk into town—just to begin their initiation. The initiation itself involved the consumption of numerous pints of beer or cider through funnels, shots of whisky, and other alcoholic concoctions, such as cold tomato soup and vodka. One participant suggested that he drank 18 pints, not including the shots.

Organizers of these early initiations stressed the importance of getting drunk. Rob (who organized rugby initiation 1) said, "It's not an initiation if you're not drunk. It's part of it, isn't it?" Similarly, Jack (organizer of hockey initiation 2) said, "Its great! Everyone gets twatted and has a real laugh!" Others suggested that the alcohol was used for its ability to reduce the inhibitions of recruits (see Robinson, 1998). Steve (organizer of hockey initiation 1) said, "You get the lads drunk so they'll do all the other shit we've got lined up. They wouldn't do it sober!" Although being drunk was clearly considered to be a fundamental part of initiation ceremonies, in these early hazing events, drinking was not the central purpose of them.

### *Initiations 4, 5, 6, and 7*

The quantity of alcohol that recruits were coerced into consuming increased in the later hazing initiations. In hockey Initiations 4-7 for example recruits revolved around 10 "themed stalls" in 30 minutes. Here, they consumed a variety of alcoholic mixtures and unpalatable foods administered through funnels. All activities were themed around the consumption of alcohol. For example, in hockey initiation 6, completion of the 10 stalls resulted in each recruit having consumed a minimum of 18 units of alcohol in the 30 minutes (a 25ml shot of 40% liquor, or 10fl oz of 3.5% beer contains one unit of alcohol). This equates to the same alcohol consumption as 15 cans of beer. If recruits did not complete a stall, they were punished with further shots of spirits; and if they dissented, they were again punished with shots of spirits. In hockey initiations 6 and 7, the variety and quantity of alcohol, combined with the speed in which it is consumed, caused the majority of recruits to vomit: most did so repeatedly.

In response to the severity of these initiations, the Students Union intervened, ensuring that the rugby initiations occurred on campus, under the observation of Students Union authorities. Thus, in rugby initiation 6, the Students Union provided all the alcohol; limiting each recruit to 10 units (this is still over eight cans of beer). In protest, veteran players held their own initiation immediately prior to the official ceremony. Recruits were blindfolded, gagged and left in a cellar for an hour, before being made to drink vast quantities of alcohol and do calisthenics. Thus, most of the recruits were heavily intoxicated when they arrived at the official initiation for their further 10 units of alcohol. In all these initiations, the consumption of alcohol was mandatory.

The excessive drinking of alcohol is considered synonymous with the demonstration of masculinity (see Peralta, 2007). Evidencing this, on numerous occasions recruits who struggled to consume alcohol were shouted at for

being “soft.” Many were told to “man the fuck up.” Conversely, the ability to down a pint quickly was indicative of masculine accomplishment. After watching one hockey recruit from initiation 4 “down” a pint in approximately 3 seconds, a veteran said, “Fair play, man. That was rapid. Hey fellas, this kid can drink.”

Interviews with initiation organizers supported the association of masculinity with excessive alcohol consumption. When asked why the recruits were made to consume such vast quantities of alcohol, the organizer of hockey initiation 5 said, “Yeah, it sorts the men from the boys! It’s a laugh, too.” Max (organizer of rugby initiation 5) said, “It’s what we had done to us, it’s pretty funny for everyone, and it shows you if a guy has got what it takes.” He added, “It’s a bit like an introduction to our drinking culture. We get to see who can manage what.” And, when the interviewed recruits from this same year were asked if they felt that their social position on the team was affected by their ability to consume alcohol, they responded similarly. One hockey recruit said, “We were made to down quite a few pints in our initiation and [we] still are every Wednesday. Every week I am given shit because I am always the last one to finish my pint . . . even the girls beat me, which I get hammered for.”

## **Discussion**

In this study, we analyzed hazing initiations over 7 years on two separate men’s competitive masculinized sport teams (hockey and rugby) at one university in the United Kingdom. Employing naturalistic observations and in-depth interviews, we found that same-sex sexual acts maintained significance only in the early years of this study. During these years, when the culture was still somewhat homohysterical, hazing youth into homosexual activities served as a mechanism to prove allegiance to a team while simultaneously developing a homophobic culture. Thus, we argue these activities reinforced heterosexuality during rites of passage into masculine arenas.

However, the homoerotic element of these initiations significantly decreased over the duration of this study. By 2009, same-sex sexual hazing activities were no longer utilized in these team’s initiations. In fact, in later years, our participants voluntarily engaged in same-sex kissing without being proscribed to do this by initiation organizers. Thus, while a primary function to these initiations may have once seemed to be preventing a subculture tolerant of homosexuality from existing within sporting spaces (Anderson, 2005), this can no longer serve as a meaningful analysis for the function of initiation rituals for men on these teams.

We argue that instead of hazing closing down the possibility of same-sex sex for men of this age group, these initiations have the opposite effect. Indeed, the high levels of alcohol consumption in today's initiations serve not only as a disinhibitor, but also as a social lubricant for same-sex sexual activity. Today's initiations open up the possibility of same-sex exploration, something supported by recent research documenting frequent same-sex kissing among 18- to 25-year-old men in other social settings (Anderson et al., 2010). Rather than entry into a fixed, heterosexual adulthood, this corresponds with the developmental stage of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004): hazing continues what Arnett calls the "age of identity exploration" while simultaneously solidifying friendships in ways that go beyond the transient relationships of adolescence.

Anderson's (2009) concept of homophobia also helps understand how this change has occurred for men of this age range. Anderson suggests that same-sex sexual activities will maintain little salience in cultures where homosexuality is not highly stigmatized. This is because veterans are unlikely to subordinate recruits because recruits no longer fear of being homosexualized. Accordingly, we argue that the decreasing levels of homoerotic hazing at Southwest University are attributable to the changing forms of esteemed masculinity in this setting.

Providing a review of other research undertaken at this university (Adams et al., 2010; Anderson & McGuire, 2010; McCormack & Anderson, 2010b) we documented a decrease in homophobia that impacts on the esteemed forms of masculinity at this university. Same-sex sexual acts are no longer effective hazing activities because they do not carry the stigma or threat to masculinity that they once did. Thus, we argue that the declining levels of homophobia have permitted men to associate with homosexuality, and that heterosexual men in these sport team's today feel less pressure to represent a heterosexual image. Because homosexuality is no longer stigmatized, many types of same-sex sexual behaviors seem to have lost their homosexualizing significance.

However, the presence of decreased homophobia and the absence of same-sex themed initiation practices do not indicate that these men are all-inclusive in their gendered perspectives. It is important to recognize that some values of orthodox heteromascularity are still reflected in the initiations: alcohol consumption is used in the construction of orthodox masculinities, sexist hazing behaviors are included, and masculinist gender discourse such as "man up" and "stop being a pussy" are regularly used in initiations.

Finally, highlighting a decrease in cultural homophobia is not the same as saying that this is a culture entirely absent of homophobia. It is simply to

say that the public expression of homophobia is very rare, even if certain individuals might maintain personal homophobia. There may even be higher degrees of other forms of less measurable homophobia operating within these team's cultures, but this research is not about the institutionalization of heterosexual privilege.

Interestingly, simultaneous to documenting a dissipation of same-sex sexual activities in the initiations at Southwest University, we documented an excessive and dangerous increase in the consumption of alcohol. Our results show a shift from the use of same-sex sexual activities which have held such prominence in hazing initiations (during cultural periods of high homophobia), toward hazing initiations dominated by even more rapid and excessive consumption of alcohol (Peralta, 2007). Our research therefore indicates that initiation rituals exist for the primary function of having a ritual to mark inclusion into the emergence into a particular subculture, and that initiation for the transmission of cultural ethos is likely a secondary or latent function. This functionalist position is supported by the fact that as homophobia decreased, and same-sex hazing practices were no longer acceptable, the young men simply changed their hazing practices, rather than abandoning them.

We therefore determine that our study maintains three points of significance. First, we believe that these findings of homosocial tactility and an absence of homophobia speak to the changing stratification and estimation of masculinities in wider culture (Anderson, 2009). Consistent with Anderson's inclusive masculinity theory, which suggests that an erosion of homophobia leads to an expansion in the range of acceptable gendered behaviors, we show that these men are less oppressive and more emotionally bonded than in previous research: that a culture of decreasing homophobia provides male youth the time and space to engage in a panoply of new sexual, gendered and emotional sensations and feelings (see also Arnett, 2004).

Our second important finding is that the main purpose (whether intentionally or implicitly) of these initiations is not to reproduce a particular subcultural ethos of homophobic masculinity. Indeed, where same-sex activities were once forced on participants in a homophobic act of denigrating homosexuality, recruits now willingly engage in same-sex kissing as a sign of bonding and acceptance as part of a team. We do not doubt that hazing might reproduce existing power structures (Kirby & Wintrup, 2002), indoctrinate youth into a team sport culture that privileges sacrifice (Donnelly & Young, 1988), present the opportunity for recruits to prove their commitment to the team, and enable veteran members to gauge how successfully recruits have been socialized into adopting the behaviors and attitudes of the team's subculture (Bryshun, 1997). However, we argue that hazing initiations are popular with

these youth because they are used as a right of passage into university culture. Hazing can be used as a way of bonding—much like the young men argue to be the case.

Our final point of significance is to elucidate how Arnett's (2004) concept of emerging adulthood is helpful in understanding the social context that enables hazing practices to serve as a celebratory initiation into university culture and a new life stage. While Anderson provides the theoretical context in which to understand the transition to pro-gay attitudes among male youth, emerging adulthood provides the developmental stage where these more inclusive attitudes can prevail. We argue that the more positive hazing rituals occurring at this university are an artifact of a more inclusive developmental stage.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

### **Notes**

1. It is important to note that although (field) hockey remains a highly feminized sport for men's participation in the United States, in the United Kingdom it is instead a highly masculinized endeavor.
2. We develop this typology to understand all types of hazing practice, although we found the third and fourth types to be predominant in this research.

### **References**

- Adams, A., & Anderson, E. (in press). Homosexuality and sport: Exploring the influence of coming out to the teammates of a small, Midwestern catholic college soccer team. *Sport, Education and Society*.
- Adams, A., Anderson, E., & McCormack, M. (2010). Establishing and challenging masculinity: The influence of gendered discourses in football (soccer). *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 29, 278-300.
- Allan, E. J., & DeAngelis, G. (2004). Hazing, masculinity, and collision sports: (Un) Becoming heroes. In J. Johnson and M. Holman (Eds.), *Making the team: Inside the world of sport initiations and hazing* (pp. 61-82). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Canadian Scholars.
- Allan, E. J., & Madden, M. (2008). *Hazing in view: College students at risk. Initial findings from the national study of student hazing*. Paper presented March 11th,

- College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine, Orono, Maine. Retrieved from [http://www.hazingstudy.org/publications/hazing\\_in\\_view\\_web.pdf](http://www.hazingstudy.org/publications/hazing_in_view_web.pdf)
- Anderson, E. (2005) *In the game: Gay athletes and the cult of masculinity*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Anderson, E. (2008). "Being masculine is not about who you Sleep with . . ." Heterosexual athletes contesting masculinity and the one-time rule of homosexuality. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 58(1-2): 104-115.
- Anderson, E. (2009). *Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Anderson, E. (2010). *Sport, theory and social problems*. London: Routledge.
- Anderson, E., Adams, A., & Rivers, I. (2010). "You wouldn't believe what straight men are doing with each other": Kissing, cuddling and loving. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, Advance online publication, doi:10.1007/s10508-010-9678.
- Anderson, E., & McGuire, R. (2010). Inclusive masculinity and the gendered politics of men's rugby. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 19, 249-261.
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens to the late twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55, 469-480.
- Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from late teens through the twenties*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Brannon, R. (1976). The male sex role—and what it's done for us lately. In R. Brannon & D. David (Eds.), *The forty-nine percent majority*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Bryshun, J. (1997). *Hazing in sport: An exploratory study of veteran/rookie relations*. Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Calgary.
- Bryshun, J., & Young, K. (1999). Sport related hazing: an inquiry into male and female involvement. In P. White and K. Young (Eds.), *Sport and gender in Canada* (pp. 269-293). Don Mills, Ontario, Canada: Oxford University Press.
- Bryshun, J., & Young, K. (2007). Hazing as a form of sport and gender socialization. In K. Young and P. White (Eds.), *Sport and gender in Canada* (2nd ed., pp. 302-327). Don Mills, Ontario, Canada: Oxford University Press.
- Bush, A., Anderson, Eric & Carr, S. (in press). The declining existence of Men's homophobia in British sport. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cushion, C., & Jones, R. L. (2006). Power, discourse and symbolic violence in professional youth soccer: The case of Albion F.C. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 23, 142-161.
- Donnelly, P., & Young, K. (1988). The construction and confirmation of identity in sport subcultures. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5, 223-240.
- Emerson, R. M, Fretz, I. F, & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Feist, D., Shenton, B., & de Souza, T. (2004). *Induction ceremonies in university sport in the UK*. Paper presented on February 2nd, British University Sports Association Conference.
- Finkel, M. A. (2002). Traumatic injuries caused by hazing practices. *American Journal of Emergency Medicine, 20*, 228-233.
- Gough, B., & Edwards, G. (1998). The beer talking: Four lads, a carry out and there production of masculinity. *Sociological Review, 46*, 409-435.
- Hardy, J., Eys, M. A., & Carron, A. V. (2005). Exploring the potential disadvantages of high team cohesion in sports teams. *Small Group Research, 36*, 166-187.
- Harris, J., & Clayton, B. (2007). The first metrosexual rugby star: Rugby union, masculinity, and celebrity in contemporary Wales. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 24*, 145-164.
- Holman, M. (2004). A search for a theoretical understanding of hazing practices in athletics. In J. Johnson and M. Holman (Eds.), *Making the team: Inside the world of sport initiations and hazing* (pp. 50-60). Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Scholars.
- Hoover, N. C. (1999). *National survey: Initiation rites and athletics for NCAA sports teams*. Retrieved from: [www.alfred.edu/news/html/hazing](http://www.alfred.edu/news/html/hazing)
- Hughes, R., & Coakley, J. (1991). Positive deviance among athletes: The implications of overconformity to the sport ethic. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 8*, 307-325.
- Ibson, J. (2002). *Picturing men: A century of male relationships in everyday life*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian.
- Johnson, J., & Holman, M. (Eds.). (2004). *Making the team: Inside the world of sport initiations and hazing*. Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Scholars.
- Kaplan, D. (2005). Public intimacy: Dynamics of seduction in male homosocial interactions. *Symbolic Interaction, 28*, 571-595.
- Kirby, S. L., & Wintrup, G. (2002). Running the gauntlet: An examination of initiation/hazing and sexual abuse in sport. *Journal of sexual aggression, 8*(2), 49-68.
- Kivel, P. (1999). *Boys will be men: Raising our sons for courage, caring, and community*. Gabriola Island, British Columbia, Canada: New Society.
- McCormack, M. (2010). The declining significance of homophobia for male students in three sixth forms in the south of England. *British Educational Research Journal, 37*, 337-353.
- McCormack, M. (2011). *The declining significance of homophobia*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- McCormack, M., & Anderson, E. (2010a). "It's just not acceptable any more": The erosion of homophobia and the softening of masculinity at an English sixth form. *Sociology, 44*, 843-859.
- McCormack, M., & Anderson, E. (2010b). The re-production of homosexually-themed discourse in educationally-based organized sport. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 12*, 913-927.

- McGlone, C. A. (2010). Hazy viewpoints: Administrators' perceptions of hazing. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 7(1-2), 119-131.
- Neuman, W. L. (2006). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (6th ed.). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Pearson.
- Nuwer, H. (1999). *Wrongs of passage: Fraternities, sororities, hazing and binge drinking*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Nuwer, H. (2000). *High school hazing: When rites become wrongs*. New York, NY: Franklin Watts.
- Peralta, R. L. (2007). College alcohol use and the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity among European American men. *Sex Roles*, 56, 741-756.
- Plummer, D. (1999). *One of the boys: Masculinity, homophobia and modern manhood*. New York, NY: Haworth.
- Price, M., & Parker, A. (2003). Sport, sexuality and the gender order: Amateur rugby union, gay men, and social exclusion. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 20(2): 108-126.
- Pronger, B. (1990). *The arena of masculinity: Sports, homosexuality and the meaning of sex*. New York, NY: St Martin's.
- Robinson, L. (1998). *Crossing the line: Violence and sexual assault in Canada's national sport*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: McClelland & Stewart.
- Sarantakos, S. (2005). *Social research* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Spradley, J. P. (1970). *You owe yourself a drunk: An ethnography of urban nomads*. Boston, MA: Little & Brown.
- Weeks, J. (2007). *The world we won*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Young, K. (2008). From violence in sport to sports-related violence. In B. Houlihan (Ed.), *Sport and society* (2nd ed., pp. 174-204). London, UK: SAGE.

## Bios

**Professor Eric Anderson**, University of Winchester, England, is known for his research on sport, masculinities, sexualities and homophobia. He has written eight books, including, *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities* (Routledge, 2009), now available in paperback.

**Dr Mark McCormack** is a Lecturer in Education at Brunel University, London. His research investigates how decreasing levels of homophobia in education and sport impact on heterosexual men's behaviors. His book *The Declining Significance of Homophobia: How Teenage Boys are Redefining Masculinity and Heterosexuality* will be published with Oxford University Press in early 2012.

**Harry Lee earned** his BA and MA in Coaching Education from the University of Bath. Today, he is an assistant sports development manager at a sixth form college, also working with youth in a community sporting league.