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Not Just a (Morally) Dumb Jock: What Athletes Can Teach Us about the Complexity of Decision-Making about Aggression

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By

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Professor Elliot Turiel, Chair
Professor Erin Murphy-Graham
Professor Dacher Keltner

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Abstract

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Sport provides a unique context for the inquiry of moral decision-making about aggression as, in many ways, it is a space of sanctioned violence (e.g., tackling someone to the ground in American football), and its highly physical and highly competitive activities require that one thinks about the use of physical force on others and on oneself. Sport's position as a bounded, largely voluntary activity also makes it ideal for studying the ways in which rules and authority, personal choice and consent, and the goals, purposes, expectations, and consequences of an activity factor into an individual's reasoning about aggression and harm.

Over the last four decades, there have been a small but growing number of studies that have looked at moral reasoning in the context of sport. Using frameworks such as social learning theory (Bandura, 1973, 1991) or Kohlberg's stage theory of moral development (Kohlberg, 1969), these studies regularly concluded that athletes, particularly those playing contact sports, used less mature forms of moral reasoning and were more approving of aggression than their non-athlete peers, and that the context of sport itself encouraged cheating and other harmful behavior in an effort to win. Two prominent explanations for this degradation in apparent moral aptitude in sport are moral disengagement (the use of rationalizations to separate oneself from the types of self-sanctions that typically dissuade individuals from immoral behavior; Bandura, 1999; Stanger et al., 2013) and bracketed morality (an alternative moral code that prioritizes self-oriented goals over the welfare and rights of others; Bredemeier & Shields, 1995). While this research has pointed to the idea that there is something different about the ways people reason about aggression in the context of sport, the overall conclusions that these researchers make about the moral reasoning of athletes oversimplifies the reasoning processes of individuals and the realities of learning and development in the context of sport, creating a deficit lens that contributes to harmful stereotypes particularly about the athletes of color who make up many high-contact sports.

Using the alternative model of moral decision-making set forth by social domain theory (Turiel, 1983), this study re-examined the claims of previous researchers in an effort to survey the ways people make decisions about morally salient events like aggression, in highly physical contexts like sport. Social domain theory posits that people consider moral issues such as rights, fairness, and the welfare of others as important, prescriptive matters while also recognizing that when making decisions about the social environment, sometimes these concerns must be coordinated with other domains such as social and personal concerns. The first aim of the present

study is to illustrate and get clarity on this process of making decisions about aggression as it plays out in the context of sport and understand the role context itself plays in moral decision-making. A second aim is to highlight the ways people first make meaning of their social environments and how such processes may transform even interpretations of what one considers harmful in a given context. A third aim is to compare reasoning across demographic groups, including sport experience, to see the ways prior experience impacts reasoning about physical aggression, both in and out of sport contexts.

To do this, the present research used semi-structured interviews of 109 participants between the ages of 18 and 25 (M = 20.7 years; 52% female) of varying degrees of prior sport experience (33% non-athletes; 37% moderate athletes, and 29% elite, contact-sport athletes) to gather participants' sense-making, evaluations, and justifications about acts of physical aggression (pain-causing hard pushes) that take place in social situations across sport and non-sport contexts.

Results showed that while more participants approved of aggression in the sport context more than in the non-sport context in the abstract, when participants were given details that specified the intention and rationale behind the hard push, differences between contexts largely collapsed, with the majority of participants disapproving of the act of hard pushing across the situations in both sport and non-sport settings. Contrary to the findings of previous studies, there were no significant differences in the approval of hard pushing across the sport experience groups, though there existed some evidence that the contact-sport elite athletes interpreted the situations in the sport context differently than the other participant groups and that this had to do with the knowledge they have gained from playing sports at a high level for many years. Findings also showed that participants, including athletes, considered and often prioritized the integrity of the game, the importance of fairness, and the welfare of others, refuting previous conclusions about bracketed morality and moral disengagement. Lastly, the study showed ways that context and previous experience can transform the meaning of certain acts, rendering something like a hard push morally benign, given certain parameters. These findings have implications for the field of moral development, the understanding of decision-making about aggression, and the treatment of athletes.

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Acknowledgements

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The seeds of this research were planted as a master's student under the tutelage of Dr. Peter Bartu, whose continued support and regular "faculty meetings" on the terrace have been priceless. Also, a big thank you to Dr. Michelle Wilkerson for making the writing process more human and less scary. I am struggling to find the words to express the profound gratitude I have for Drs. Elliot Turiel, Erin Murphy-Graham, and Dacher Keltner. Their fingerprints are all over this dissertation and, more importantly, all over my heart – Having a PhD is nice but having been touched by these three individuals is far more valuable to me. To Elliot, in particular, I wouldn't trade these years for (almost) anything. I look forward to that 1-on-1 rematch.

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Dedication

To my mom, dad, Simon, and Kat – I know getting me through this was a lot like herding cats. Thank you for sticking with me.

Preface

In the summer of 2007, I found myself in Cambodia doing field work for my master's thesis, which examined organizations using sport as a medium for peace and development. In Cambodia, I shadowed an organization (then) called the Cambodian National Volleyball League, Disabled (CNVLD) whose mission was to recruit youth who lost limbs from the landmines and disease that ravaged the country, thanks to the decades-long civil war that marked the end of the 20th century. Youth who saw themselves as "disabled" and who lived on the fringes of society became able community leaders through their participation on CNVLD's nationally competitive volleyball and wheelchair racing teams. Additionally, their system of teams throughout Cambodia ensured that former Khmer Rouge loyalists would play on teams with relatives of the very people their regime tried to exterminate, necessarily prompting reconciliation efforts amongst athletes whose teams had to find a way to work together if they were going to succeed. When I returned to the States, I met with a program leader of an organization using basketball to build peace in Northern Ireland and the Middle East. Later, I spoke with the director of a soccer school in South Africa, working to heal racial tensions and keep kids away from the risky behaviors that had allowed South Africa to become a world leader in HIV/AIDS infections.

The anecdotes of success stories from these organizations were powerful and prolific. Aside from "getting kids from all sides to play together" and "working toward common goals", though, there was not a whole lot organization leaders could tell me about *why* their programs were successful, and despite the benefits they had for individuals, it was not clear that the programs themselves actually impacted long-term peace. My questions regarding theories of development and the necessary program features helping kids process trauma and make different choices about violence were met with silence. I do not say this to mean that these program leaders were incompetent or that their programs were poorly designed – far from it on both accounts. Rather, it pointed to large gaps in understanding in the field about the drivers of individual participation in violence and the kinds of social, emotional, and cognitive development that takes place in the context of sport, particularly as it relates to big questions around justice, violence, and the concept of self and other.

In other words, I was asking, "Why sport?". What is it about sport that lends itself to the types of lessons and skill-building we think are implicated in the development of peaceful, resilient humans? What do we even know about the ways people think about justice, the welfare of others, and collective healing, especially when simultaneously faced with desires for revenge?

Walking away with a master's thesis that had more questions than answers – that exposed gaps rather than filled them – prompted me to return for a Ph.D. in Human Development a few years later. It is these questions that started me on the path to this dissertation. Though the specific research questions of the dissertation might look different than what is described above, they are what I see as necessary first steps in understanding sport as a context of learning and development and understanding human processes as they relate to the willingness and resistance to cause harm to others. More so, though, this doctoral dissertation turns my master's work on its head. It delves into sport to get at the heart of human decision-making about violence. As a

former NCAA Division I student-athlete and USA Track and Field Level II certified coach, it is hard for me to ignore the tensions imbued in sport competition that make it seemingly antithetical to peace-building, but it also is hard for me to ignore the often overlooked intelligence and care of athletes who have a great capacity to be catalysts of change.

Can sport bring peace? Maybe. Can sport tell us something about the nature of human decision-making as it relates to conflict and violence? Definitely. My dissertation, therefore, begins here with this latter question. If we do not understand the fundamentals of how people make choices about harm to others, how can we design programs that will effectively speak to that process and strengthen young people's capacity to navigate their complex, conflict-ridden environments? The field of Psychology has spent a lot of time developing theories and programs that aim to teach people how to be less violent and "more moral", but perhaps we have gotten the equation backwards. Rather than assuming athletes as (*morally*) dumb jocks who need to be taught how to be peaceful, empathetic human beings, perhaps our first step needs to consider what athletes can teach us about the complex ways humans reason about harm and aggression in high-conflict environments and capitalize on the strengths that they already display in this process.

To the athletes in Cambodia, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, and South Africa, thanks for not giving me answers but questions instead. May there be a day when there are no more sport-for-peace programs, just sport, because the horrors of war, hatred, and violence have disappeared.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2013, the United Nations (UN) declared April 6th, the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace. The purpose of its celebration each year is to give recognition to the ways sport can positively impact human rights and social development and unite people around a common cause. This was not a new concept, however. Indeed, over a century prior, the reinstatement of the modern Olympic Games in 1896 was done under a similar premise, to increase understanding among nations, promote the good of humanity, and set an example of universal fundamental ethical principles (Coubertin, 2000). Despite these global efforts, there are many who would argue for a different view of sport, one that likens sport to war and a breeding ground for corruption. This view, perhaps, is best summarized by the famous quote from George Orwell:

> Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting (Orwell, 1945).

Even for those who think Orwell's words are too strong, it is hard to deny the history of violent acts (e.g., hooliganism, The 100 Hour War, hockey fights) and unsavory behavior (e.g., trash talking, cheap shots, hard pushes) present within and around the sport arena.

Does throwing a ball on a field promote peace? Can competition be a catalyst for war? The present research does not intend to settle this debate, but it draws these contrasting views to highlight the point that sport seems to be a unique setting to examine certain, salient elements of human development, such as the nature of moral reasoning and the kinds of experiences that impact one's likelihood toward aggressive behavior.

Why might sport prove such an interesting study when thinking about moral development particularly around aggressive behavior? While, on the one hand, sports are "just games" often played for fun, contact-sports like boxing, football, and basketball do share features with human experiences like war and corporal punishment, which involve moral gray zones. Like war and corporal punishment, contact-sport is a space of sanctioned physical harm – things that would be morally reprehensible in other settings, such as knocking someone to the ground, are approved, if not encouraged, in contact-sport settings. The tensions naturally imbued in such a setting can highlight the flexibility with which humans apply moral values, the complex coordination processes involved in moral decision-making, and the ways in which the meaning of certain acts can be transformed. Furthermore, sport is highly regulated, largely voluntary, limited in focus, and controlled by governing bodies, making it an interesting case study for understanding the ways in which rules and authority, personal choice and consent, and the goals, purposes, expectations, and consequences of an activity factor into an individual's reasoning about aggression and harm. Such rich data relevant to the psychological inquiry of moral decision-making around physical aggression is useful in its own right and may also provide insights into other violent phenomena such as gun violence, school bullying, and war. Additionally, the National Council of Youth Sports estimates that there are 60 million participants between the ages of 6-17 years enrolled in organized youth sports in the United States annually (DiFiori et al., 2014). For these youth, it is important to be clear about what sorts of social development may or may not be happening when they step onto the playing field.

The aims of this study, thus, are threefold: 1.) to map out the processes of decision-making about aggression as it relates to sport and understand the way context itself impacts moral reasoning in general, 2.) to highlight the ways people make meaning of their social environments and how such meaning-making may transform even what one considers harmful in certain situations, and 3.) to compare reasoning across demographic groups, including sport experience, to see the ways prior experience impacts reasoning about physical aggression, both in and out of sport contexts.

Background: Psychological Approaches to Moral Reasoning in and out of Sport

The present research is not the first to look at moral development and reasoning in the context of sport. In fact, the last four decades have seen a small but growing body of work attempting to explain the psychological dynamics between sport participation and social development. Though this body of work approaches the topic from different theoretical perspectives, there is a shared conclusion that contact-sport athletes reason about issues related to morality in ways that are both quantitatively and qualitatively different, if not deficient, from that of non-athletes. This research examining the role of sport in moral development and aggression is based on several assumptions about the psychological processes involved in moral development, as well as the nature of social reasoning with respect to sport participation, based on each researcher's theoretical lens. The following section outlines the key assumptions and findings from two of the most popular approaches within the field – namely, social learning and cognitive-structural theories – and concludes with a refutation of this previous research and offers social domain theory as a more adequate lens for describing the ways individuals make decisions about moral issues, such as physical harm. This dissertation then extends social domain theory to the context of sport.

Social learning theory. Research from a socialization or social learning perspective measures moral development through observable actions, and it is the consequences of actions that largely determine their moral nature or value (see Bandura, 1973). Though social learning theory later pushed for the inclusion of cognition when evaluating social reasoning and action (Bandura, 1991, 1992), observable actions, reinforcement patterns, and the modeling of others are considered the primary correlates to moral development from this perspective.

When applied to sport, morality is narrowly defined as prosocial activities (e.g., sharing equipment or congratulating an opponent) or refraining from antisocial behaviors (e.g., cheating or knocking down an opponent). Because, according to the social learning perspective, social and moral behavioral patterns are developed and maintained through the influence of models and differential reinforcement, the role of the coach plays a particularly powerful role in the morality of her athletes. It is believed, therefore, that athletes internalize the moral values and behaviors of the sport culture and that this is conveyed through the modeling and explicit lessons of coaches, famous players, and other athletic staff (Duquin & Schroeder-Braun, 1996; Kavussanu & Spray, 2006). Overall, the competitive nature of sport and the big-money structure of many professional (and, increasingly, amateur) sports, for these researchers, both rewards and sets the tone for cheating, dishonesty, over-aggression, and a complete lack of concern for others, thus corrupting moral aptitude and replacing it with elitist, win-at-all-cost ideals (Eitzen, 2009; Messner, 1992; Sage, 1998). This tone is known as the "moral atmosphere" (Guivernau & Duda, 2002; Miller, Roberts, & Ommundsen, 2005). It is suggested that a focus on performance creates a moral

atmosphere that promotes aggression and increases more acceptance toward antisocial behaviors (Miller, Roberts, & Ommundsen, 2005).

Coaching styles, like parenting styles (Hoffman, 1963; Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967; Maccoby, 1992), have thus been scrutinized for their overall impact on the moral atmosphere of sport and the moral reasoning of athletes. For instance, a moral atmosphere set by the coach that condones cheating and aggressive behavior is associated with low levels of moral functioning in athletes (Kavussanu & Spray, 2006) and that males in particular are more susceptible to aggressive behavior when empathy is lacking (Stanger, Kavussanu, & Ring, 2016). Similar research has looked at empathy in coaches, as empathy is believed to play a key role in the socialization of moral values in children (Hoffman, 1987, 2000). Duquin and Schroder-Braun (1996) found that low-empathy cultures (characterized by physical aggression, shaming, unequal treatment of athletes, and demands that ignored the welfare of athletes, like being forced to play while injured) were associated with a decreased ability to recognize the moral nature of the actions of coaches and teammates. They advised that coaches enact a high-empathy culture, in order to promote moral actions in their athletes. Otherwise, it is hypothesized that athletes will "disengage" from their moral responsibilities (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2011).

Moral disengagement. Bandura's (1991) Social Cognitive Theory of Moral Thought and Action outlined this process termed "moral disengagement", which is a set of psychosocial mechanisms that work to inhibit moral standards and self-sanction from preventing actions that otherwise would be considered morally reprehensible (e.g., cheating). Moral disengagement is treated as both a process that is context-specific (e.g., in sport) and an individual difference that is more or less stable across time and settings (Moore, 2015). There are a few features of sport that researchers point to as potentially accommodating of the psychosocial mechanisms of moral disengagement, such as *distortion of consequences* (e.g., "It's just a game; it isn't serious if I cheat."), *displacement of responsibility* (e.g., "The coaches, refs, and rules say what is right or wrong; I don't think about it."), *advantageous comparison* (e.g., "Everyone dopes, so I'm just evening my chances by doping too."), *attribution of blame* (e.g., "The other team came out playing dirty first. They deserve what they get.") and *dehumanization* (e.g., "This team is our archrival and it's either kill or be killed.").

Using a more dispositional understanding of moral disengagement, Stanger et al. (2013) showed that moral disengagement facilitated antisocial behavior in sport and that this relationship was partly mediated by anticipated guilt (i.e., athletes who scored higher on moral disengagement measures anticipated feeling less guilty about performing antisocial acts). Using a more context-based understanding of moral disengagement, Shields, Funk, and Bredemeier (2015) found that low moral attentiveness was associated with higher moral disengagement and that athletes tended to be less morally attentive in sport than in non-sport settings. [An interesting side note here is that the previous citation is an example of researchers from a cognitive-structural perspective utilizing a concept – moral disengagement – that comes from a social learning perspective and, in the following section, notice that Kavussanu and colleagues who come from a social learning perspective utilize a concept – bracketed morality – that comes from the cognitive-structural researchers just cited. This implies that, within the field, there has been a merging of ideas, and thus conclusions, from the two separate theoretical camps.]

Cognitive-structural theory. In contrast, research from a cognitive-structural approach posits that children construct a sense of morality through reciprocal interactions with the environment (as opposed to unquestioningly internalizing the dictates of authority and the norms of the surrounding culture) and that reasoning (the ability to perceive, analyze, and utilize information to structure understanding and draw conclusions) and reflections upon one's beliefs, emotions, and cultural practices play a central role in the development of moral thinking (Piaget, (1932/1965); Turiel, 2002). Researchers from this perspective thus measure morality by how people reason about moral situations (often gathered through interviews or paper and pencil assessments; see Kohlberg, 1969 and Rest, 1979) and not just through observable actions. From this perspective, differences in moral reasoning between individuals or between groups (say, athletes and non-athletes) have often been explained as differences in moral maturity (typically described as levels or stages of increasing sophistication; this is discussed in more detail below), suggesting a continuum of moral development that places individuals as having more or less advanced moral reasoning capacities. Two of the most common methods of mapping moral reasoning onto this continuum are Kohlberg's (1969) stage theory of moral development and Haan's interactional model of moral reasoning (Haan, 1985).

Kohlberg (1963, 1969, 1976) proposed a stepwise, invariant sequence of six stages categorized by gradual shifts in reasoning that likened justice-oriented thinking to the highest level of moral thought and considered concerns oriented toward personal preference (say, avoiding punishment) as the least developed type of moral reasoning. According to Kohlberg, one moves from one stage to the next based on an increasing ability to differentiate morality from material value, punishment, prudence, conformity to social norms and authority, etc., until she is able to understand that constructs like justice and rights are different from conventional concerns (Kohlberg, 1971). Through interactions with the environment, especially with those who think at a stage one step above the individual, the individual develops more adequate understandings of social relationships and moral thought, which initiates movement to the next stage of moral development. Movement through these stages loosely follows children's development through adolescence and into adulthood, however, Kohlberg's (1976) research indicated that many people, particularly those of lower economic status, never make it beyond stage four and, thus, do not reach true, differentiated moral thought.

Using Kohlberg's theoretical approach, Bredemeier and Shields (1984) – the seminal work in the field of sport and moral development – found that collegiate basketball players had lower scores of moral maturity (i.e., their reasoning reflected a lower stage in Kohlberg's model) than the reported norms for their non-athlete peers, when given a questionnaire asking them to evaluate immoral acts on the playing field (e.g., not explaining the rules to an opponent) and off (e.g., a boss having an affair with his secretary). Moreover, Stoll et al., (1995) found that both Division I and Division III athletes scored lower on moral reasoning tasks than their non-athlete peers, suggesting that it is not the money and prestige of Division I sports that is to blame but sport participation in general that adversely affects moral reasoning, presumably by promoting more self-centered thinking. Findings from additional studies using a Kohlbergian framework echoed the overall conclusion that the longer athletes participate in sport, the less able they are to reason maturely about moral matters, particularly on the sport field but, overtime, in everyday life, as well (Beller, Stoll, & Sumanik, 1992' Beller & Stoll, 1992; Penny & Priest, 1990; Hahm, 1989). According to Shields, Funk, & Bredemeier (2018), "less mature" moral reasoning in collegiate athletes was correlated with antisocial behavior, as was decreased moral identity and a

"war orientation" toward competition. About this later point, Shields and Bredemeier, (2011) and Shields, Funk, and Bredemeier (2016) contested that environments that prime athletes to think about competition as a proxy for war, as opposed to the striving together for excellence, increased the frequency with which athletes accepted antisocial behaviors in sport scenarios and interpreted characters' moods in sport stories as negative. The assumption here is that these responses to sport scenarios in the study after being primed to think about sport as war would translate to the acceptance of antisocial acts in real life if the environment provided similar priming (Shields, Funk, & Bredemeier, 2016).

Though Brenda Bredemeier and David Shields continued to use Kohlberg's model in their research of moral development in athletes, they also used Haan's theory of interactual morality in much of their work. Haan's theory of interactual morality argued that moral reasoning and maturity was better understood by examining how individuals interact and negotiate with others to achieve moral balance. Haan (1985) described this way of viewing morality "not as judgmental competence, but as a social, emotional dialectic of practical reasoning among people" (p. 996). Development, according to this model, is framed as a gradual increase in the social skills and basic understandings of reciprocity that allow moral conflicts to be resolved "more sensitively" (Haan, 1985, p. 997). Much like Kohlberg's approach, development here is categorized into stages. For Haan's interactional model, concern for external consequences and self-interest characterize the negotiation styles of moral conflict for those at lower stages of maturity whereas styles that consider the "moral balance" or optimize the interests of more parties are seen as more mature and, thus, characterize the latter stages, of which there are five in total (Haan, 1977).

Using this model, Bredemeier and Shields (1986a, 1986b) compared the responses of male and female collegiate basketball players, swimmers, and non-athletes to hypothetical and real moral dilemmas set in both sport and non-sport contexts. They concluded that athletes exhibited less mature moral reasoning (here, more egocentric reasoning) than their non-athlete peers, with basketball players showing the least mature level out of all the groups. A follow-up study (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986b) showed that both high school-aged and collegiate basketball players showed more egocentric reasoning around instances of aggression than their non-athlete peers. This means athletes were more likely to consider potentially injurious acts as acceptable on the playing field than non-athletes, because, as the theory assumes, athletes were negotiating moral conflict in favor of their own goals and were not considering the needs of others in this space. Moreover, on average, all participants used less mature moral reasoning (again, more egocentric reasoning) when discussing moral dilemmas in the sport context than they did for dilemmas in the daily life contexts. A study of younger athletes, grades four through seven, also showed that the more one participated in high contact sports (like basketball and football) the less mature their moral reasoning tended to be and the more likely they were to exhibit aggressive acts – this was true for both males and females (Bredemeier, et al., 1986). Similarly, Bredemeier et al. (1987) found that children who had less mature moral reasoning were more likely to approve of aggression.

Bracketed morality. Bredemeier and Shields (1995) hypothesized that the reason athletes exhibit less mature moral reasoning is because of the limited options for dialogue in sport, within which players may resort to physical retribution to communicate their disapproval of acts and to restore moral balance. They further concluded that sport itself motivates egocentric pursuits,

which causes a "moral transformation" that shifts the moral balance to favor the individual, as opposed to the interests of everyone. Shields and Bredemeier (1985) referred to this as "bracketed morality" (or a subset of everyday morality) and contended that this is what happens in sport because athletes "are not morally required or expected to give equal consideration to competitor's desires", and it is the job of coaches and referees to dictate what is right and wrong (Shields & Bredemeier, 1986b, p. 262). Bredemeier and Shields (1995) considered bracketed morality a second-order change in thinking, or "an alteration in the underlying pattern of decision-making or justificatory reasoning" used to make moral decisions (p. 22). Game reasoning (i.e., reasoning that reflects this use of bracketed morality), therefore, according to this research, is like a regression in moral reasoning abilities as it resembles the criteria for less mature moral reasoning (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986b). According to Branta et al. (1996), bracketed morality is potentially dangerous because it encourages the depersonalization of others, which may lead to a breakdown in young people's ability to decipher right from wrong and, furthermore, may spill over into non-sport areas of life. Similar to the moral disengagement argument, others have warned that bracketed morality may lead to a complete disregard for one's moral responsibilities in sport (Corrion et al., 2009). Kavussanu et al. (2013) extended the concept of bracketed morality to include antisocial behavior and found that athletes who scored higher on indicators of bracketed morality were more likely to show antisocial behavior to opponents and that people tended to show more antisocial behavior toward sport opponents than to peers in a class.

Theoretical Orientation: Social Domain Theory

Departures from previous literature. Collectively, the conclusions of this corpus of research suggest that the sport arena itself encourages egocentrism at the cost of fair play and concerns for others' welfare, which overtime erodes participants' moral sensibilities, thus leaving athletes with "less mature" moral reasoning abilities than their non-athlete peers (Bredemeier & Shields, 1984; Stoll & Beller, 1994; Shields & Bredemeier, 2001) and a greater willingness to "disengage" (Bandura, 1991) from their moral responsibilities on the playing field and, overtime, in everyday life (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2010; Kavussanu et al., 2013). This research on social development within sport and the assumptions contained within it effectively create a deficit lens through which to view athletes and the sport field as a context of learning and development. Athletes, from this view, have been relegated to not just "dumb jocks" but *morally* dumb jocks, a view that has particularly profound social consequences when considering that the types of high contact sports seen as having the most detrimental impact on moral development (e.g., football and basketball) tend to be played predominantly by black and brown bodies. The topic of racism in sport requires its own paper, but it would be irresponsible to not at least point out the many ways players of color have been surveilled, segregated, exploited, and controlled in collegiate athletics (Comeaux, 2018) and how such conclusions about the moral ineptitude of these athletes fuels both unconscious biases and explicit, racially motivated stereotypes that such people cannot be trusted (Carey, 2012). Therefore, this manusrcipt argues that it is critical to do research that combats the conclusions of these previous researchers by using a different approach that is sensitive to the systemic cycles of racism plaguing the United States and beyond and that gives voice and a listening ear to the words these athletes use when expressing their reasoning about moral issues.

This dissertation cautions that the assumptions and ways of measuring morality used by previous researchers are not sufficient for understanding the decision-making process people - including athletes - engage in when faced with moral dilemmas, as they fail to acknowledge the complexity with which individuals make sense of and reason about events in the social milieu, as well as consider the ways the social context itself transforms the meanings of certain acts. Though these previous methods have been employed to measure the morality of other sectors of the population as well, it is possible that, due to stereotypes about athletes (e.g., "dumb jocks") and about race (e.g., "black and brown men are aggressive"), the field has not done an adequate job of truly appreciating the complexity with which athletes make sense of their social environment and make decisions about physical harm. Poignantly, in comparison, academic conversations around decisions of aggression by other populations, like the decision to take militarized action by political leaders – people who predominantly are old, white, educated men – imply a highly complex decision-making process that weighs and balances multiple competing concerns and, typically, do not call into question the political leader's moral aptitude (Blattman, 2022; Reyes, 2011). As philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2001) points out, human beings' natural and unique capacity for reasoning and moral choice is one feature that imbues all humans with equal dignity and value. By labeling certain populations as less able to engage with that process of reasoning and moral choice, academics strip them of the respect and value they are owed. Therefore, this study questions the current deficit approach, re-examines the nature of moral reasoning vis-à-vis sport, and re-evaluates differences in moral decision-making between athletes and non-athletes and between sport and non-sport contexts.

Arguably, it is misleading to label people as more or less morally "mature", as proposed by Kohlberg and Haan, or more or less morally "engaged", as proposed by Bandura. Using a short questionnaire, observation, or interview about how one, for instance, behaves in one setting or thinks about a handful of hypothetical situations is hardly thorough enough for making broad generalizations about an individual's overall level of moral development or engagement. Moreover, even if a study were able to track all the thoughts and behaviors of an individual overtime and tally how many times that individual responded in a way that aligned with moral values and then compared that number to the numbers of other people, such a study would still miss the point about the ways humans navigate the tough moral dilemmas of everyday life. People do not prioritize moral tenets at all costs in all circumstances. That is not the way humans make decisions, so painting individuals as "good" (morally mature) or "not good" (morally disengaged) is neither helpful nor accurate. "Good" people can still choose violence and "bad" people can still go out of their way to help others.

Additionally, if we were to actually take into account all the moral vs. non-moral actions of an individual and compare them across all other people to determine moral maturity/engagement, such a measure would still not account for circumstance. Psychology can learn from the legal field in this regard. Written into the legal process that determines the guilt or sentencing of an individual is the idea of "extenuating circumstances" (Legal, 2021). Extenuating circumstances appreciate the complexity of life and acknowledge that to understand the culpability of a person for committing a moral infraction, one needs to understand the context within which it took place and that certain circumstances reduce the degree to which a person is deemed morally reprehensible. For instance, the legal field shows more leniency toward a woman who attacked her partner after years of abuse or to a man stealing food to feed his family, when social structures make it clear that their options for alternative action were limited.

Accepting what the legal field has acknowledged for centuries as an important part of decision-making about morally salient situations is key in building better paradigms about the nature of moral reasoning and development.

Lastly, and specifically with regard to the notions of moral disengagement or moral bracketing, this study hypothesizes that including the voices and reasoning of athletes in research will show that they do care very much about fairness and the welfare of others, while simultaneously considering other features of the environment, as well as their own personal goals. If this hypothesis is true, it would suggest that their capacities for moral reasoning stay intact and engaged regardless of context or prior sport experience, and that the previous interpretations of the field have been far too simplistic, if not derogatory.

Social Domain Theory. To reframe the discussion, this study proposes a different perspective on the nature of moral reasoning and development. A substantial body of empirical research based on alternative theories indicates that reasoning is central to moral decision-making – that is, decision-making about the welfare of others, justice, rights, and fairness – (Killen & Smetana, 2015; Smetana, 2013; Turiel, 1983, 2008; Turiel & Killen, 2010) and that this holds true for individual's moral decision-making (including actions) about violence (Astor, 1994; Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983; Dodge & Crick, 1990; Helwig, Hildebrandt, & Turiel, 1995). This approach – referred to as *social domain theory* – proposes that, through reciprocal interactions with the environment (social and otherwise), children and adults form moral judgments based on welfare, justice, and rights that are distinct from their concepts of non-moral social rules and conventions (e.g. classroom rules, dress codes, game rules) and from judgments about personal choices (e.g. choice of friends, hobbies, hairstyle) and that differentiated reasoning about these domains is necessary for understanding people's social decisions (Turiel, 1983).

Morality, from this perspective, has to do with judgments that are not contingent on rules or authority and that are applied across settings and peoples. For instance, when children are asked why hitting is wrong, they may first allude to rules against hitting or the desire to avoid punishment. However, when asked if hitting would then be alright if a rule allowed it or a teacher said it was ok, children – across the world – are quick to acknowledge that rules or other people do not determine the "alright-ness" of the act and that larger constructs of welfare and fairness are more important (Turiel, 1983). This process of providing criterion judgments – or opportunities for individuals to show what a judgment is or is not contingent on – is unique to social domain theory and provides the basis for different configurations of judgments (e.g., domains) and the features associated with each type. Social domain theory's understanding of the development of these domains, including intrinsic moral concepts, has been influenced by the structural-developmental theories of Piaget (1932, 1947) with the belief that, through reflection, people are constructing understandings of the world and, thus, neither decision-making nor development is a product of environmental or biological determination (Turiel, 1983). When applied to notions around hitting or causing physical harm, the developmental process might be described as regular reflections on one's experiences being hit and hitting others, feeling hurt and causing harm, and witnessing the consequences of such actions, which help the individual define boundaries around acceptable treatment of others (and self), as well as notions of the intrinsic necessity of avoiding harm to others (Turiel & Gingo, 2017). This process is further expressed by Aresenio's (2014) research showing that as children develop, they make connections between

situations and strong emotions (such as feeling hurt after being hit by a friend or feeling strong guilt after hitting a friend and watching them cry) and tend to remember these emotion-event links when making future decisions. Anticipating how oneself or another person will feel based on this previous experience influences subsequent behavioral decisions. Similarly, these links may also help explain why feeling a specific emotion can influence one's interpretations, judgments, and decisions about a situation in specific ways, as proposed by appraisal-tendency models of emotion (Lerner & Keltner, 2000).

While social domain theory does assess how and when people consider and/or prioritize the moral domain in their decision-making, it does not qualify people as more or less moral, as the assumption is that humans in general prioritize moral concerns sometimes and in some situations but not in others and this typically has more to do with meaning-making about the situation and not a stable "moral-ness" trait of the individual. What can improve with development, however, is one's ability to coordinate competing concerns in increasingly complex social dynamics (Nucci & Turiel, 2009; Nucci, Turiel, & Roded, 2017). These processes of coordinating – or weighing and balancing – multiple facets of social situations and differentiating judgments based on domain and situation are central components of social domain theory and its assumptions about the ways people make decisions.

Differentiated reasoning and coordination. Some evidence that differentiated reasoning does occur in the process of making decisions about harm is that people's decisions and actions are responsive to changes in information or the environment (Dahl et al., in press). For instance, as mentioned previously, the majority of children, adolescents, and adults evaluate straightforward acts of harm (e.g., hitting a stranger who has not provoked you) as wrong and base their reasoning on a need to avoid hurting others (Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983; Helwig, Hildebrandt, & Turiel, 1995; Smetana, 2013). However, when changes occur making the situation more complex (e.g., hitting a stranger to prevent him from taking advantage of a defenseless child), individuals must coordinate or weigh these fundamental moral beliefs (e.g., violence is wrong) in new ways (e.g., violence against a person with bad intentions may be a necessary means of preventing greater harm). One's informational assumptions about the effectiveness of the action (e.g., hitting *is* an effective way to solve this problem versus hitting *is not* an effective way to solve this problem) also play a role in one's differentiated reasoning, for instance, as exemplified in Wainryb's (1991) study on spanking. Often, measures of aggressive and antisocial behavior in research count the approval of, say, hitting as "less moral" without understanding the justifications, informational assumptions, and differentiated reasoning behind it.

Such ideas are supported by research that spans across four decades and numerous cultures and that has shown that when people are presented with multifaceted situations, they go through a process of coordinating (weighing and balancing) and prioritizing competing moral and non-moral considerations (Kohlberg, 1963; Turiel, 2008; Turiel & Nucci, 2017; Smetana, 1981; Wainryb, 1991). As proposed by Turiel (2022) and Turiel and Banas (2020), when considering circumstances that may involve harm to others, humans typically do not blindly follow the dictates of authority or think solely of their own needs, rather, they weigh and balance the various facets of the situation, including concern over the potential for pain and harm to others. Depending on the situation, there can be a great deal of internal conflict and emotional distress involved for the individual, even if they appear to make decisions that align with more

egocentric goals. Turiel (2022) argues that if we reexamined Stanley Milgram's famous study about obedience to authority, we would notice that the majority of participants who continued to "shock" the confederates in the experiment, despite the perception that the shocks were harmful, exhibited emotional distress and frequently asked the experimenters to reconsider preceding with the experiment. These pleas and emotional reactions, which were not included in Milgram's analysis, indicate the presence of coordination, as the participants were juggling the welfare of the confederates, the purposes and importance of the scientific endeavor, and the expert knowledge of the experimenters in their decisions to carry on with the experimental procedures. In other research detailing coordination, adolescents justified lying to parents but not peers in some circumstances and to peers but not parents in others based on the content of the lie, beliefs around personal autonomy, convictions about right and wrong, and the unique roles of peers and parents (Perkins & Turiel, 2007). Overall, adolescents upheld the value of honesty, particularly when the purpose of the lie was to cover-up a wrong-doing or hide a potentially imprudent action, but that sometimes honesty was subordinated to moral and personal concerns particularly when there existed a power imbalance in the relationship (like in a parent-child dyad) and there was no obvious harm done by the lie.

This information is important to capture not only because it complicates Milgram's conclusions that participants were willing to blindly follow the dictates of authority in causing harm to others or because it puts into new perspective the perennial trope of teens deceiving parents, but also because it more accurately illustrates the lived experience of making decisions in a complex social world. Furthermore, it illustrates that even for those who make choices that may cause harm to others, the decision often is not easy, which implies a deep concern for the welfare of others that remains intact despite variation in decisions. This is one reason focusing on the decision alone is an inaccurate litmus test for an individual's capacity for moral reasoning. Moreover, studies that aim to understand moral decision-making miss crucial parts of the process if they only collect the observed or stated decisional outcome of the moral dilemma and fail to account for the individual's justifications (i.e., rationales and feelings), which contain important information about how people coordinate moral tenets with the other competing details of the social environment. One contribution social domain theory lends to the study of moral decision-making is this methodology of taking seriously individuals' sense-making, feelings, attitudes, and rationales. Most, if not all, of the research about moral reasoning in sport previously listed in the background of this introduction looked only at participants' evaluations of a situation (i.e., was the character in the scenario right or wrong), while neglecting their thoughts about the situation itself. Therefore, the use of social domain theory and the associated methodologies is one way the present research improves on the research previously done on the topic of moral reasoning and development in sport.

Research within social domain theory is able to collect data on individuals' differentiated reasoning, coordinations, criterion judgments, informational assumptions, and other facets of reasoning through the use of the clinical interview method (Damon, 1977; Piaget, 1929/1971). Clinical interviews have been shown to produce more robust data than surveys and on-line metrics, which is a necessary affordance when trying to capture the complex reasoning of individuals (Dahl et al., 2018). The format of these semi-structured interviews includes both general assessments (i.e., questions that are not associated with any specific situation) and questions pertaining to specific situations, so the researcher can see if and how participants coordinate and account for aspects of the situation to arrive at their conclusions. Participants are

frequently asked to evaluate a social interaction involving a moral infraction and share their justifications and reasoning behind their evaluations. Participants' thinking is then further provoked through a series of criterion judgments, which aim to tease out deeper frameworks of thought that go beyond their surface level evaluations and justifications.

Importance of context. Context also is an element that is important when understanding someone's meaning-making and decisions. For instance, Posada and Wainryb (2008) found that youth growing up in the context of armed conflict in Colombia evaluated unprovoked acts of violence as wrong for reasons of welfare (similar to the findings mentioned above), but when asked to respond to situations that took place within the conflict zone, concerns for others' welfare were coordinated with social expectations, fear of punishment or scarcity, and the desire for revenge, which led to a more differentiated application of the moral principle of welfare in their evaluations of violence (i.e., welfare was less prioritized, for example, when judging aggressive actions against a stranger in the community, due to the assumption that he was a threat). Because of this process of coordination and the consideration of differential information in the environment, people's social judgments, including moral judgments, are associated with – and thus can vary based on – the social context (Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987).

This variation in meaning-making particularly is true for game contexts, in which the rules of the game have been shown to differentially interact with judgments about psychological and physical harm. For example, calling someone "stupid" in the context of a Duck-Duck-Goose-like game called "Smart-Smart-Stupid" is accepted whereas calling someone "stupid" for reasons outside of the game's purpose is not (Helwig, Hildebrandt, & Turiel, 1995; Killen, 1990). Here, the rules and purposes of the game transform the meaning and use of the word "stupid" into something deemed harmless. Such a transformation was hinted at by Piaget (1932). Though the idea was not expanded on in his work, he skillfully captures this phenomenon in a game setting:

> In the same way, the word "glaine" legitimatizes piracy in certain well-defined conditions. When one of the players has succeeded, either by luck or by skill, in winning all the partners' marbles, it is a point of honour similar to that which sociologists designate with the term "potlatch" that he should offer to play a fresh set and should himself place in the square the necessary marbles, so as to give his less fortunate playmates the chance of recovering a portion of their possessions. If he refuses, of course no law can force him to do this; he has won and there is the end of it. If, however, one of the players pronounces the word "glaine" then the whole gang falls upon the miser, throws him down, empties his pockets and shares the booty. This act of piracy which in normal times is profoundly contrary to morality (since the marbles collected by the winner constitute his lawfully acquired possession) is thus changed into a legitimate act and even into an act of retributive justice approved by the general conscience when the word "glaine" has been pronounced (19).

In this example, what would be considered offensive outside of this game becomes an acceptable (harmless) act to set right an imbalance. Supporting this notion about the power of context to imbue or transform meaning even in non-game settings, Asch (1952), in his treatise on social psychology, declared, "An action or assertion can have entirely different meanings, depending on the circumstances of which it is apart" (p. 418). This might suggest that moralities are not

"disengaged" or "bracketed" in different contexts like sport, but that the meaning of the acts themselves take on different and, at times, less harmful connotations. Though, such a notion has yet to be explored with athletes or within a sport context.

Furthermore, Astor (1994) found that individuals not only coordinate multiple considerations about context, but also interpret social situations through larger cognitive frameworks that they have developed through previous interactions with similar social environments and experiences. Astor (1994) used this framework to show how children who were identified as "aggressive" were different from non-aggressive children in that they had learned to interpret certain benign social situations as hostile and thus were more likely to respond with violence for the sake of reciprocity and justice. Referring back to the above example taken from child soldiers in Colombia where a stranger in the community is interpreted as a threat, here the children have learned to see strangers as "trouble", and thus deserving of harm, due to their long history of previous experiences with warring groups. Again, this harm is doled out for purposes of preventing harm to their own community or, as they see it, justice for previous harms done. Both these concerns have moral salience and, therefore, should not be interpreted as regressions in moral reasoning capacities. Since these ideas have yet to be applied to the sport world, it might be important, then, to ask whether or not certain acts take on new meanings (and thus new interpretations) on the playing field and if those who have much experience in the sport world have different cognitive frameworks when viewing such experiences than those with less experience. Perhaps this could at least partially explain why athletes and non-athletes appear to make different decisions about certain acts in the sport context.

Placing Social Domain Theory in context. One of the biggest criticisms of cognitive approaches to moral decision-making (e.g., ones that look at reasoning) is the idea that people often behave in ways that do not match their moral tenets and, thus, reasoning is often viewed as not consistent with moral action. This is known as the belief-behavior gap (also known as the value-action gap; Blake, 1999). Using a previous example, Person X believed hitting people is wrong, but they still hit somebody who was about to hurt a defenseless child. Therefore, there is a gap between their belief and behavior. Social domain theory, however, accounts for this gap by pointing out that the specific contexts are different here and that matters. Person X may believe hitting in general is wrong, but if we asked if hitting someone to prevent them from taking advantage of a defenseless child is wrong, they likely would say, "no". When the question about hitting specifies contextual factors, there is no gap between belief and action. People can revere moral tenets and at the same time choose to do otherwise (e.g., German citizens who lied to Nazis to hide Jews and doctors who falsified insurance claims so patients could get necessary treatments covered; see Oliner, 1992; Werner et al., 2003), and such situations may not indicate less moral maturity.

The variations in decisions about harm should not be taken to mean that moral judgments are relative. Indeed, from the social domain perspective, moral prescriptions are universal, are not legitimated by agreement or law, and are impartial to one's preferences (Turiel, 1983). They involve a complex cognitive process that accounts for multiple social facets and expectations, and such considerations may, in some situations, lead individuals to reinterpret certain acts or give priority to social-conventional or personal concerns over moral concerns. In other words, what is morally salient does not change (e.g., avoiding intentional serious harm to someone is

generally upheld as a moral value across cultures), but the meaning of an act that is meant to cause harm in one setting (e.g., knocking someone to the ground) may change its meaning and thus moral valence in another setting (e.g., a football player knocking someone to the ground within the rules of the game and not with the intention of causing harm). Furthermore, as noted in the previous paragraph, people may strongly believe in the moral tenet preventing harm to others and still choose to do it, due to other legitimate forces or concerns (e.g., the Colombian child soldiers who know that harm to others is wrong but who will attack a stranger in the community to minimize threat and show the stranger he is not welcome). The focus on reasoning and universal principles also is not to say that emotions play no role in such decision-making processes. Emotions and cognitions are inextricably linked and surely inform and influence one another (Lerner & Keltner, 2010; Nussbaum, 2003), and, thus, it is important to not promote one at the detriment of the other (Turiel & Killen, 2010). Emotions often focus one's attention on certain aspects of the environment and make one ignore others, impacting cognitive calculations in the moment.

Accounting for non-cognitive factors. Though the field is not in agreement about how, there is some evidence that biological, emotional, and psychological factors also influence decision-making. These, however, will not be addressed in this study. As children develop, they construct minds that reflect the experiences in their environment. A child who is growing up in a safe, peaceful environment is going to have different thoughts, emotions, stress levels, and associations with rewarding/punishing experiences than a child who is living in a more chaotic, harsh environment. Not only is the child, through these experiences, building particular organizations of thought about the world (Piaget, 1926/1971; Piaget, 1967/1971), research shows the influence thoughts, emotions, stress, etc., can have on actual brain chemistry and circuitry, through the release of hormones, neurotransmitters, and the co-activation of brain regions (e.g., neurons that fire together, wire together; see Hebb, 1949/2002). One straightforward example of this is the evidence that simply thinking about things one is grateful for releases dopamine in the brain (Fox et al., 2015) and that, overtime, gratitude practices may alter neural activity (Kini et al., 2016), making it easier to notice things one is grateful for in the future. Other examples show how the content of regular thought patterns produce changes to the size and structure of certain brain regions, be it through mindfulness meditation or "the knowledge" acquired by London cab drivers (Davidson et al., 2003; Maguire et al, 2000). Lastly, the quality of our thoughts may even change our perception of stimuli and speed our ability to recover from dysfunction, as exhibited in both pain and placebo research (Keltner et al., 2006; Kong et al., 2008; Price et al., 2008).

The more we activate these brain patterns the stronger these pathways become and this (in addition to our experiences) plays a role in epigenetic changes (McGowan & Roth, 2015). The influence of these internal maps is bidirectional in the sense that the individual is constructing these new patterns based on thoughts and experience, and these cognitive and physiological structures impact how the child later interprets and responds to stimuli in the environment and what the child learns to expect from the environment. For many children, these modes of interpretation and expectation stick as they become adolescents and adults (Lupien, et al., 2000; Gunnar & Fisher, 2006). They take these brains and organizations of thought into every interaction and context they move in and out of. Importantly, emotional states and changes in physiology do not deterministically usurp control of decision-making or override basic moral beliefs. Though, we cannot deny that they do play a role in the ways people attend to, make meaning of, and make decisions about their social environments, including decisions to respond

aggressively. Even for the small percentage of the population that has both the genetic and environmental risk factors that are associated with aggressive behavior (Tuvblad & Baker, 2011), 60% of that population never go on to exhibit aggressive tendencies (Cloninger et al., 1982) and even those that do are not aggressive in every opportunity, which indicates that this process is influenced but certainly not determined by non-cognitive factors. The complexity of this process is immense, and it is nearly impossible to predict how the cognitive and non-cognitive elements interact with one another, let alone correlate to specific decisions and behaviors at a specific point in time. This study's intent is to look at cognitive and contextual factors involved in people's decisions about aggression, fully acknowledging that this is one piece of the puzzle. While this study draws differences between groups and contexts and looks for associations between variables, the predominant purpose of this project is not to predict who will or will not be aggressive but to illuminate and, then, describe the processes that appear to be involved in decision-making about harm.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Despite its critiques, the existing body of literature on sport and moral development has highlighted some important findings: people often do reason differently about acts of aggression in the sport context than they do about similar acts in non-sport contexts; in some situations, athletes do seem to provide different evaluations of certain physical acts than their non-athlete peers; and sport environments often embody social goals and expectations that may not be prevalent in other non-sport or non-competitive realms. A hypothesis of this study, however, is that the content of reasoning of athletes and non-athletes as they make decisions about harm across contexts will provide evidence not of moral disengagement or deprived moral atmospheres but of athletes who do *engage* with their moral sensibilities and of sport contexts that are ripe training grounds for complex moral reasoning, particularly about physical aggression.

This hypothesis is in direct conflict with theories that argue that an athlete's willingness to accept certain types of harm is evidence that he or she or they lacks moral aptitude. It is important to understand the context and the ways individuals interpret these contexts to truly get a sense of the ways athletes and non-athletes make decisions about morally relevant events. Using and extending the processes described by social domain theory, a prediction of this study is that athletes coordinate (weigh and balance) multiple competing forces in their social environment when making decisions about aggression and harm while on the playing field. For instance, they weigh the rules of the sport (conventional domain), the consent of the participants (personal domain), and the safety precautions taken (moral domain), as well as informational assumptions about what is considered harmful (e.g., tackling may or may not cause long-term damage; we enjoy this) in addition to fundamental moral beliefs (e.g., hitting/hurting someone is wrong). When watching a game, we do not judge the football player guilty of moral infractions when he knocks a player to the ground, largely because the context (as noted by the above considerations) begs us to reinterpret the act of hitting as done within the bounds of an agreed-upon game, between consenting parties, and without the intention of causing long-term harm. It is likely, however, that the player would be judged guilty of a moral infraction if he hit the opponent with the intention of causing harm. Therefore, another hypothesis of this study is that people (both athletes and non-athletes, but athletes in particular) will be more accepting of physical harm in sport contexts than in non-sport contexts because of this transformation of the

meaning of physical contact in sport, but that such differences will collapse across settings if it is clear the perpetrator's intention was to cause harm.

To explore these hypotheses, this study uses semi-structured interviews such as those discussed above, which assess the evaluations and reasoning for hypothetical acts of physical harm that take place across sport and non-sport settings. Additionally, these interviews draw out participants' justifications, interpretations of context, and criterion judgments based on aspects frequently found in sport settings, such as rules, the dictates of authority, league norms, personal desire, and the severity of consequences. The content of justifications and frequency of evaluation types are analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively to be able to compare across participant groups of varying athletic backgrounds, as well as understand the ways individuals are making sense of the environment and the act of aggression within that environment. The research questions guiding this inquiry are as follows:

1a.) Do people evaluate physically aggressive acts differently if they happen in a sport context versus a non-sport context? Such a question can help establish the existence of a "bracketed morality" or an alternative explanation for why the sport context may differ from everyday life with regard to reasoning about physical aggression.

1b.) Does making explicit the intention of the act of physical aggression collapse differences between contexts? If it were true that sport provokes a diminished morality that encourages athletes to be egocentric, then we would presume intention would not make a difference.

2.) Do individuals with different sport histories (e.g., non-athletes and NCAA student-athletes) evaluate acts of aggression differently? If previous research is correct, there should be evidence that the groups actually hold different moralities when making decisions about aggression. If, however, the hypothesis of this research is correct, there should be no differences in morality across groups, but there might be differences in how certain actions are interpreted.

2b.) If "bracketed morality" or "moral disengagement" exist, we should expect to see athletes leaning on the dictates of authority and the rules to determine right from wrong and to rate personal goals like winning as the most important factor in determining the right course of action. Do we see evidence of these patterns, especially for athletes and especially in the sport context, when participants are confronted with rules, norms, authority dictates, and personal goals that encourage harm to others?

Research into these considerations may provide a new window into the nature of reasoning about aggression, as well as reframe labels like "less moral" or "less morally mature" that typically have been used to describe athletes.

Chapter 2: Methods

The study used mixed-methods research methodologies, consisting of semi-structured interviews that were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Such combination of methods has been used previously in social domain research to successfully delineate trends in social reasoning, as well as provide units of comparison across groups, settings, and/or other study constructs. Together, the methods allow for broad, quantifiable data and rich understandings of human thinking about a subject.

Participants and Settings

The participants were 109 males and females (52% female) between the ages of 18 and 25 (average age = 20.7). All participants were undergraduate students at a university or college in the San Francisco Bay Area. A total of 35 participants were dropped from the final analysis because they did not meet the age range criteria (n = 2), the researcher could not be certain of their ability to comprehend English (n = 19), or the quality of the interview was poor and included too many missing data points (n = 14). After this process, 109 participants remained.

IRB approval was first obtained for the study before participant recruitment. Students and student-athletes were given the opportunity to participate in the study through a university research participant pool (RPP) system, distributed flyers, or in-person workshops that introduced the study. Prior to participation, participants received written assent forms describing the procedures of the study and potential risks of participation. As per IRB regulations, strict measures were followed to maintain anonymity of the participant, minimize the risk of data breach, and ensure participants felt safe during participation and had the freedom to leave the study at any point. Students who were associated with an RPP system received units toward course requirements for their participation. Those who were not eligible to receive RPP units instead received a ten-dollar Amazon gift card for their time.

Participants were categorized into three groups depending on their experiences with sport. The groups are described as “Non-Athletes”, “Moderate Athletes”, and “Elite Athletes”, depending on responses to questions regarding one’s current and previous sport participation history, as well as knowledge of contact sports, like basketball. Participants in the Non-Athlete group have had little to no experience with organized sport throughout their lives. Participants in the Moderate Athlete group have had some experience playing sport at lower levels of competition (e.g., junior high or high school) or have focused predominantly on sports that are considered “non-contact” (e.g., a collegiate cross-country runner). Participants in the Elite Athlete group are NCAA Division I athletes who play contact-sports. Contact-sports are defined as sports that include direct body contact with other players during normal play of the competition. In this study, these sports include basketball (n = 18; 44% female), lacrosse (n = 4; 100% female), football (n = 3; 100% male), soccer (n = 3; 33% female), rugby (n = 2; 100% male), and water polo (n = 2; 100% female). Each of the participant groups is composed of roughly half female and half male participants, thus making six groups in total. See Tables 1, 2 and 3 below for further participant demographic breakdowns.

Table 1

The Number of Participants by Sex in Each Sport Experience Group

Category	Non-Athletes	Moderate Athletes	Elite Athletes
Male	16	19	17
Female	20	22	15
Total	36	41	32

Table 2

The Number of Participants (%) by Racial Category in Each Sport Experience Group

Category	Non-Athletes	Moderate Athletes	Elite Athletes	**Totals**
Caucasian	10 (27.7%)	12 (29.2%)	17 (53.1%)	**39 (35.8%)**
African-American	6 (16.7%)	12 (29.2%)	10 (31.3%)	**28 (25.7%)**
Asian	18 (50%)	10 (24.3%)	4 (12.5%)	**32 (29.4%)**
Other	2 (5%)	7 (17%)	1 (3.1%)	**10 (9.2%)**
Totals	**36**	**41**	**32**	**109**

Table 3

The Number of Participants (%) by Socio-Economic Category in Each Sport Experience Group

Category	Non-Athletes	Moderate Athletes	Elite Athletes	**Totals**
Lower Class	7 (19.4%)	7 (17%)	1 (3.1%)	**15 (13.8%)**
Middle Class	22 (61.1%)	17 (41.4%)	18 (56.3%)	**57 (52.3%)**

Upper Class	7 (19.4%)	16 (39%)	12 (37.5%)	**35 (32.1%)**
Decline	0 (0%)	1 (2.4%)	1 (3.1%)	**2 (1.8%)**
Totals	**36**	**41**	**32**	**109**

Procedures

Each participant met with the researcher once for a session that lasted between thirty minutes and one hour. During this time, participants read and signed the assent form, were given the opportunity to ask questions, completed the research interview, filled out a demographic survey, and were debriefed once the study portion was finished.

The research interview itself followed a semi-structured or "clinical" interview format. Semi-structured interviews have been used effectively and reliably in psychological research on the moral and social reasoning of individuals (Damon, 1977; Killen, et al., 2013; Piaget, 1929/1971; Turiel, 1983). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews have been shown to produce more thorough data than surveys or on-line metrics, which is useful when attempting to accurately capture people's complex decision-making on certain issues (Dahl et al., 2018). Chapter 3 presents in more detail rationales for the use of the clinical method, as well as the bases for the assessments used in the present research.

The interview consisted of three sections: general assessments, contextualized assessments based in non-sport settings, and contextualized assessments based in sport settings. The general assessments included six questions designed to assess the participant's overall understandings of aggression and harm to others. The two sets of contextualized assessments contained depictions of three situations involving physical force and follow-up questions associated with those situations. Details about the assessments are presented in the following section. The general assessment always preceded the contextualized assessments in the presentation order, but the order of the contextualized assessments was counterbalanced (some participants received the sport stories and questions first, and others received the non-sport stories and questions first), in case the context of the situations impacted reasoning for subsequent questions. Furthermore, the gender of the main character in the situations was matched with the gender identity of the participant. All participants identified themselves as either male or female, although they had the option of choosing other descriptors.

For both the general assessment and the contextualized assessments, participants were asked to provide a judgment about a particular act of physical aggression that has occurred (*Is this alright or not alright?*) and then provide a justification for their response (*Why or why not?*). These responses were transcribed and later coded using a coding scheme which is detailed below. These data make up the qualitative material that is also represented numerically and analyzed using quantitative statistical methods.

Materials

General assessments. As mentioned above, during the clinical interview, participants were first presented with a set of six questions that make up what is referred to as the general assessment. These questions ask participants to make judgments about straightforward acts of unprovoked aggression and then provide justifications for their answers. Three of these questions relate to general, everyday life settings and the other three relate to the sport context. The questions were presented as follows,

1. *Is it alright or not alright to hit and cause someone pain when unprovoked? Why or why not?*
2. *Would it be alright or not alright to cause somebody physical harm if there were no rules prohibiting it? Why or why not?*
3. *Suppose that in another country, they decided that it was alright to cause someone physical harm in their country. Would it be alright or not alright to cause someone physical harm in that country? Why or why not?*
4. *When playing a sport, like basketball or baseball, is it alright or not alright to hit and cause someone pain when unprovoked? Why or why not?*
5. *Suppose there was a rule in a sport like basketball or baseball that did not prohibit harming someone. Would it be alright or not alright to cause someone physical harm in that sport? Why or why not?*
6. *Suppose that in another country, they decided that in sports like basketball and baseball it would be alright to cause someone physical harm. Would it be alright or not alright to cause someone physical harm in that country? Why or why not?*

Again, the purpose of these assessments is to assess an individual's general, underlying concepts with regard to physical aggression and harm and determine whether or not such concepts involve moral concerns (such as rights, justice, welfare) or are contingent on rules or cultural expectations.

Contextualized assessments. The general assessments were followed by two sets of contextualized assessments, one pertaining to the sport context and one pertaining to everyday life settings. Each assessment block contained three social situations involving harm caused by physical aggression to which participants were asked to respond. These situations are considered "contextualized" because they provide details about the social environment leading up to the action that caused another person pain. The pain causing act in each situation was a hard push that knocked a person to the ground. That person was in pain and had to rest for a while, but then was able to get up and continue what they were doing. The first situation in each assessment block depicted harm that was unprovoked (e.g., knocking down an individual who has done nothing to warrant it), the second depicted harm that was provoked (e.g., knocking down someone who is saying provoking things), and the third depicted harm that was motivated by good intentions and the belief that it will set-up someone for later success (e.g., knocking down someone for the purpose of making them stronger). These situations were designed to capture the spectrum of conditions commonly experienced in both sport and non-sport settings that might elicit different orientations toward the use of physical force against someone else. The situations were pilot tested for clarity and salience with student-athletes and then were edited to their final form based on this feedback. Below are the details of the unprovoked stories and their

contingency questions for both the non-sport and sport contexts. The rationale for the evaluations and contingency questions is explained after the presentation of the situations and list of questions. The rest of the stories can be found in the Appendix.

Unprovoked, Non-Sport Story. *Georgia is part of an academic group at her college. The group has an important meeting later in the day, in which Georgia's academic group will compete against another group of students to be hired by a local company to work on a project. Georgia's group is better prepared and will most likely win the competition. During the competition, Georgia sees the key presenter of the opposing team. Georgia decides to push this person with the intention of causing physical harm. This person falls to the ground, in a lot of pain, and has to rest for a while until the pain goes away, but later she is able to participate in the competition. Is it alright or not alright that Georgia pushed this person? Why or why not?*

- *What if the rules of the academic competition allowed this type of hard push? Would it be alright or not alright for Georgia to push this person? Why or why not?*
- *Do you think this would be a good rule – to allow for hard pushing – to have in an academic competition? Why or why not?*
- *What if it were not in the rules, but in this school hard pushing was generally accepted? Let's say it's a rough school and students often push each other around. Would it be alright or not alright for Georgia to push this other presenter? Why or why not?*
- *What if Georgia's academic advisor told Georgia to push the presenter of the other group? Would it be alright or not alright for Georgia to listen and do so? Why or why not?*
- *What if Georgia's group was not well prepared and pushing this other presenter would help Georgia's group win and get to work for this company? Would it be alright or not alright for Georgia to push this other presenter? Why or why not?*
- *What if Georgia pushed this other presenter in a way that was hard enough to cause serious injury to the presenter? Would it be alright or not alright for Georgia to push this presenter? Why or why not?*

Unprovoked, Sport Story. *Michelle is a player on a college basketball team. It is toward the end of the game and her team is up by 15 points and clearly will win. Michelle decides to give a hard push to a player on the opposing team with the intention of physically harming her. The other player falls to the floor, is in a lot of pain, and has to sit out of the game for a while until the pain goes away, but later she is able to return to the game. Is it alright or not alright that Michelle pushed this other player? Why or why not?*

- *What if the rules in this game allowed this type of hard push? Would it be alright or not alright for Michelle to push this other player? Why or why not?*
- *Do you think this would be a good rule – to allow for hard pushing – in a game like basketball? Why or why not?*
- *What if it were not in the rules, but in this league hard pushing was generally accepted? Let's say it's a rough league and players were pretty physical with each other. Would it be alright or not alright for Michelle to push this other player? Why or why not?*
- *What if Michelle's coach told Michelle to push the other player? Would it be alright or not alright for Michelle to listen and do so? Why or why not?*

- *What if Michelle's team was actually down by 5 points and it was an important game and pushing this opponent would help Michelle's team win? Would it be alright or not alright for Michelle to push this player? Why or why not?*
- *What if Michelle pushed this other player in a way that was hard enough to cause serious injury to the other player? Would it be alright or not alright for Michelle to push this other player? Why or why not?*

A hard push that knocks someone to the ground was chosen as the act of physical aggression in each situation, because a hard push is common, if not sanctioned, in some sports, yet it would be considered "physical assault" in most situations outside of the sport field. Such a contrast brings to the surface ways that context itself might influence and be incorporated into one's interpretations, judgments, and decisions within social situations, particularly with regard to types of physical acts considered morally inappropriate or harmful to others.

As noted in the introduction, the present study highlights the importance of one's interpretation of the social situation, and how context might play a role in that interpretation, and thus, the assessments are structured in a way that tests whether or not subtle changes in context affect the way participants form evaluations and judgements about the act of aggression in the situation.

Furthermore, regarding the creation process of the contextualized assessments, the wording used to explain each of the hypothetical situations is based on past psychological research about harm, grounded in social domain theory (Astor, 1994; Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983; Helwig, Hildebrandt, & Turiel, 1995). These techniques have been shown to be reliable and the results replicable across time, ages, and cultures (Turiel, 1983). According to this technique, after the participant has read the description of the situation involving harm to another, the participant is first asked to evaluate the act (*Was it alright or not alright?*) and then to give a justification for that evaluation (*Why or why not?*). This is the baseline measure for each situation, and it captures the participant's initial interpretation of the described social environment and reasoning about the use of physical force when there is either no provocation, a provocation, or a possible benefit to the person receiving the push.

Situations in the non-sport assessment. As outlined above, the progression of the situations involves unprovoked harm, provoked harm, and harm done with good intentions. In the unprovoked situation for the non-sport assessment, a college-aged participant in an academic competition decides to push down a non-hostile opponent with the intention of causing harm. In the provoked situation, a person trying to find a parking spot gets out of her car to push down another driver who purposely steals her parking spot and assails her with insults and taunts in the process. Again, this push is intended to cause harm. In the final non-sport situation, a hard push is given with the good intention of trying to "toughen up" a sibling who must prepare for a rough school environment. Table 6 provides brief descriptions of each situation, which are presented in full in the interview protocol in the Appendix.

Situations in the sport assessment. The progression of the situations in the sport assessment parallels that of the non-sport assessment. In the unprovoked situation for the sport assessment, a collegiate basketball player pushes down a non-hostile opponent with the intention of causing harm. In the provoked situation, a collegiate basketball player pushes down – with the

intent to cause harm – an opponent who is trash talking the player and forcing him to play poorly. In the final situation of the sport assessment, a teammate gives a hard push to a fellow teammate in basketball practice because the purpose of the practice is to help the players "toughen up" for upcoming basketball games.

Table 4
Matrix of Contextualized Situations by Context

Non-Sport Context	**Sport Context**
Unprovoked physical force *During an academic competition, a competitor who is ahead decides to give a hard push to another competitor.*	Unprovoked physical force *During a basketball game, a player who is ahead decides to give a hard push to another player.*
Provoked physical force *While looking for parking, another driver steals the parking spot of the main character and shouts taunts while doing so. The main character gives a hard push to this driver.*	Provoked physical force *During a basketball game, an opponent repeatedly steals the ball and shouts taunts at the main character. The main character gives a hard push to this opponent.*
Unprovoked physical force for training purposes *A sibling gives hard pushes to another sibling in order to "toughen up" this sibling and prepare him for a rough school environment.*	Unprovoked physical force for training purposes *A teammate gives a hard push to a new recruit in order to "toughen up" this teammate and prepare him for rough games ahead.*

***Evaluation and contingency questions*.** For each situation participants are first asked to give a baseline evaluation and justification of the hard push depicted in the situation, which is either unprovoked, provoked, or done with the intention of training somebody, as noted earlier. Then follow-up contingency questions are posed for each of the situations. The contingency questions are designed to assess whether or not one's decision-making about the initial act of hard pushing is contingent on rules or punishment (e.g., *What if the rules allowed for this type of hard push?*), the dictates of authority or cultural norms (e.g., *What if a coach told her to push the other player? Or what if it was a rough league and hard pushing was common?*), the degree of consequences (e.g., *What if the hard push caused serious injury to the other person?*), or the desire for personal gain (e.g., *What if pushing this other player would help ensure a win for the team of the player who pushed?)*. These questions are designed to reveal the specific details of a person's reasoning to gain a more precise idea of the underlying features of their decision-making about physical harm in that context. They also supply us with information as to how particular changes in the social context might affect one's decision-making about the use of physical force. The questions in full for each situation are listed on the interview protocol in the Appendix.

These specific contingency questions were chosen for multiple reasons. The first reason is that they are a common feature in research grounded in social domain theory (Turiel, 1983) and have been used widely and effectively to draw out the features of moral decision-making. From the domain perspective, asking follow-up questions about rules, norms, authority, and personal gain helps to identify which domain of reasoning (moral, personal, or conventional) one is prioritizing in their response. The second reason is that they directly speak to previous research done on moral reasoning and sport. This research concluded that athletes disengage from their moral responsibilities and allow rules, norms, or authority figures like coaches or referees determine what was right or wrong (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2011); that athletes are egocentric and prioritize winning above all (Eitzen, 2009); and that athletes are not concerned with the welfare of others (Miller, Roberts, Ommundsen, 2005). The contingency questions selected for this study test these conclusions. If the past research is correct, then the majority of the athletes in the participant pool, when confronted with contingency questions about rules, coach dictates, winning, etc., should evaluate the hard push as "alright", citing conventional or personal concerns as justifications for why.

Coding

Participant responses were audio recorded and then transcribed. The researcher, along with a team of research assistants, transcribed all of the interviews. Each transcript was then hand coded by the researcher using a detailed coding system based on coding schemes validated in past research (Astor, 1994; Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983). Modifications were made of previously validated coding schemes to fit the content matter specific to this study. For instance, organizing the codes under domain super-headings like "moral", "conventional", or "personal" is consistent with previous research in social domain theory. However, codes like s*portsmanship* and *spirit of the game* were added to the codebook due to the sport-related nature of the situations as well as through an emic process that took into consideration the words and framings participants used to talk about their understanding of the situations. A good illustration of this emic process is the code *unnecessary*. Participants commonly used the term, which was characterized by the logic that sometimes it is necessary to use physical force to achieve something or prevent something from happening, but if those circumstances are not met, the use of physical force is *unnecessary*. While it is possible that something like the desire to avoid causing pain to others might be the foundation of what makes something "unnecessary" in these circumstances, probing participants to explain what makes the act unnecessary led to circular reasoning in almost every attempt and, therefore, the *unnecessary* code was created as a separate code. Furthermore, although there might be concerns of welfare ultimately underlying the idea that an act of physical force is unnecessary, the use of the term seemed to convey a process of weighing and balancing environmental factors that, logically speaking, the idea or code *welfare* does not convey, so the code *unnecessary* seemed more accurate in capturing reasoning from the participant's point of view.

Originally, there were fifteen sub-domain codes that were used to code the justification portion of participant responses. Due to power needs for statistical analysis, these fifteen sub-domain codes were grouped under five domain level codes. These domain level codes were used in the final statistical analysis. A list of the domain level codes and sub-domain codes and their descriptions is provided in Table 5.

Table 5
List of Domain and Sub-domain Codes

Domain-Level Code	Sub-Domain Code	Description
Moral	Categorically Wrong	Responses that assert that an act is morally wrong without additional justification
	Welfare	Responses that indicate that concerns for another person's physical/psychological wellbeing are being considered; this also includes statements that focus on the intent behind the act (e.g., malicious vs. good)
	Fairness	When an act is evaluated based on conceptions of fairness in treatment, reciprocity, and/or having equal opportunity to get a desired outcome; tit-for-tat reasoning also is included here
	Rights	Appeals to rights, justice, or freedoms; this may include references to human rights or entitlements to one's body and integrity
Conventional	Rules	The existence or absence of a rule determines the acceptableness of an action
	Norms	Actions are justified by their agreed upon or prevalent nature within a group or society and/or their importance in maintaining social order, expectations, or group functioning
	Authority	When an action is deemed acceptable based solely on the dictates of authority
	Spirit of the Game	Appeals to the purpose or the integrity of the game/competition and the ways it is played or should be played in its ideal form
	Sportspersonship	References to sportspersonship but only insofar as it refers to a conventional manner of understanding (i.e., this is how an athlete is supposed to behave). Note: participants might reference sportspersonship in their response, but if it is clear they are talking about the importance of fairness or the integrity of the game, another code (e.g., welfare, spirit of game) is used.
Personal	Self-Oriented Concerns/Self-Gain	Self-motivated reasoning such as personal gain, showing one's dominance, communicating one's desire for respect, or releasing unwanted emotions like frustration as the main rationale for the acceptance/avoidance of an act

	Personal Choice	Responses that focus on upholding the individual's agency in making and being responsible for certain choices; this includes appeals to consent
	Punishment	An act is evaluated based on the desire to avoid punishment or some form of harm that could befall the individual in response to their action or inaction.
Pragmatic	Pragmatic	Responses that are oriented around the logic of the act or the effectiveness of the act in bringing about some desired end or its utility (or lack thereof) in solving a problem
	Unnecessary	Allusions to a weighing and balancing process that indicates the act is alright or not alright based on factors that deem it either necessary or unnecessary, but with no other reference to moral, conventional, or personal concerns.
Unelaborated	Unelaborated	Instances where the participant's response was uncodeable due to insufficient information

As previously done in social domain theory research, both the evaluations (i.e., responses to *is this alright or not alright?*) and the justifications (i.e., responses to *why or why not?*) given by participants were coded. Evaluations were coded as: *positive*, *negative*, or *mixed*. *Positive* evaluation codes were used for participants who evaluated the act of hard pushing as "alright", *negative* codes were used for "not alright" evaluations, and *mixed* codes were used for participants who believed it was both alright and not alright and, therefore, could not give weight to just one. These codes were later given numerical values for quantitative analysis. The evaluation codes *not alright*, *mixed*, and *alright* were assigned 0, 1, 2 respectively.

Justifications were coded using the coding scheme detailed in Table 5. Each justification response was given one code. At times, participants gave multiple, equally-weighted reasons they believed the hard push was either alright or not alright. In this case, the researcher did their best to decipher a primary rationale and use one code with the best fit. This rarely occurred, however. For participants who evaluated the situation as *mixed* (i.e., both alright and not alright), a code was assigned to the justification associated with their positive evaluation and a code was assigned to the justification associated with their negative evaluation.

Reliability. To establish inter-coder reliability, 22 interviews (20%) were randomly selected and coded by a second coder. This second coder was trained in the research design, theoretical perspectives, and the coding categories and had some experience coding mixed-methods data. The codes from the second rater were then compared to the codes given by the original researcher, and the degree to which they matched was calculated. Using Cohen's kappa, inter-rater agreement for the evaluations of harm and criterion judgments was high with a result of $\kappa = .85$. Reliability for the justification codes was moderate with agreements of $\kappa = .60$ at the domain level and $\kappa = .59$ at the subdomain level.

At times, participants gave multiple justifications for why they thought the hard push was alright or not alright. When this happened, raters were to select the justification that was the primary justification – sometimes this was obvious, other times this was not. This is partially why there was less agreement between the raters for the justifications than the evaluations and why the justification codes were not analyzed statistically the same way the evaluations were.

Data Analysis

As mixed-methods research, the study takes advantage of the affordances that both qualitative and quantitative methods have to offer. Qualitative research provides highly descriptive or "thick" details about a phenomenon, while quantitative research provides counts for the occurrences of separate phenomena and assesses the size of association between entities (Geertz, 1973). To understand both the processes of decision-making about harm as well as differences in decision-making styles across groups and between contexts, the present study requires both the thick, descriptive data of qualitative methods and the ability to look at associations between entities given by quantitative methods.

The qualitative form of analysis is done through the coding system of justifications described in the previous section of this chapter. These themes help categorize the data (the words the participants' give in their responses) into domains (information about the types of justifications people lean on when approving or disapproving of the use of physical force toward someone else) and provide details about the ways individuals interpret, make sense of, coordinate, and prioritize features of the social environment.

These codes are then quantified, along with the evaluations (*alright*, *not alright*, or *mixed*) given for each question, and used to draw associations between prior sport experience, the presence of certain contingencies, and elements of sport/non-sport contexts and the likelihood that an individual will agree with the use of pain-causing physical force in a given situation. Item Response Theory (IRT) and ANOVA were then used to compare these quantities and test for significance.

It should be noted that IRT has not been used previously (to the author's knowledge) in social domain theory research. It is the author's belief that IRT is well-suited for the mixed-methods research favored by the domain approach and can efficiently organize data in ways that allow for meaningful comparisons across individuals, groups, contexts, and interview items.

Item Response Theory. Item Response Theory (IRT) and has been widely used in the social sciences and proven as effective and appropriate tools for analyzing data from psychosocial measures (Wilson, Allen, & Li, 2006). IRT is the term given to latent trait analyses in educational testing and psychological research. It is used primarily for the analysis of dichotomous or ordered-categorical data, such as the responses of people to items on an assessment, which fits with the data of the present study.

IRT provides a theory that relates the unobserved (latent) constructs to the observed variables being measured, which is useful in capturing characteristics like beliefs, traits, and behaviors, behind larger psychological constructs (Bond & Fox, 2007). The Rasch model, a type of IRT modeling used in this study, provides a mathematical framework to quantify these

unobservable human conditions, such as one's decision-making tendencies about aggression, and allow ordinal item responses to be expressed through linear measures (Rasch, 1980). Item response models allow for analysis at both the item level and full assessment level (i.e., the results of the entire test, survey, interview, etc.), whereas other models only focus on the total score of the instrument. Item response models, like the Rasch model, also focus on the probability of observed responses rather than the responses themselves and calculate the probability as a function of qualities of both the respondent and the item. The Rasch model offers a formalized probability model built on the premise that the probability of endorsing an item is a function of the difference between the difficulty or "endorseability" of an item (known as the item estimate) and the ability or degree of "agreeableness" of a person (known as the person estimate) and that this relationship is the most effective predictor of a trait (Wilson, Allen, & Li, 2006).

The main assumption is that people are more likely to "correctly" answer or endorse easier items and are less likely to "correctly" answer or endorse more difficult items, and that people who have higher abilities or a greater agreeableness toward the construct will be more likely to answer more items "correctly" or endorse more items. For instance, using an example from behavioral sciences, if a person's attitude (i.e., agreeableness) about the topic is strong (e.g., "exercise is very good") and the item is easily endorsed (e.g., "exercise can help me be healthier"), then they have a high probability of strongly endorsing the item (Wilson, Allen, & Li, 2006).

The present study used a Rasch-based IRT to determine the likelihood that individuals would agree to the act of harm depicted in the stories and questions presented in the interview, as well as determine the "agreeableness" of each individual (or the overall pattern with which each individual responds to each interview item by either approving of or not approving of the hard push). For the present study, person estimates refer to the amount a person endorses acts of hard pushing during the interview and the item estimates are the amount of approval of hard pushing a person would need to have in order to endorse the hard push in that particular item (question). Items that have high estimates are more difficult to agree with in general (i.e., people are less likely to approve of the hard push in that question). Items with low estimates are easier to agree with in general. Persons with high estimates are more likely to agree with items in general. Persons with low estimates are less likely to agree with items in general. If a person estimate appears at the same level as an item estimate, that person has a 50% chance of agreeing with that item. Items that have 100% agreement or 100% disagreement cannot be analyzed with the model and, therefore, must be dropped from the analysis. This occurred only for one item: 100% of participants said it was "not alright" (disagreed) to the prompt "*Is it alright or not alright to hit and cause someone pain when unprovoked?"*.

Because evidence gathered about a single item and/or a single participant's response is not enough to draw conclusions about an individual's or group's tendency to accept aggression or the elements of context that make the acceptance of aggression more likely, all of the item and person scores are associated with a logit on a construct map and then visually represented on a Wright Map (Wilson, 2005) to show meaningful patterns across items and people. Construct modeling within Rasch-based IRT allows for associations between items and constructs through this translation of variables to logits. Logits are the natural log of an odds ratio and allow for raw scores to be translated into one single scale, so items and participants can be understood using

units of equal intervals. Items located a half-logit or more away from each other represent meaningful differences.

Wright Maps are highly useful tools for analyzing mixed-methods data, as they compute person estimates and item estimates using the same scale, which streamlines the interpretation of individual response patterns vis a vis the construct. The construct of interest in this research is one's decision-making about aggressive acts. More specifically, as it pertains to this model, the construct is the ease with which an item elicits an "alright" or an "in-between" response about an act of physical aggression (a hard push that knocks someone to the ground) by participants with different sport histories. The graphical representation of this model in a Wright Map assists in checking the theoretical assumptions about the ways item levels (the "endorseability" of questions) relate to each other, as well as allows for a comparison of trends across the pool of participants.

Average item and person estimates were then computed and analyzed with a series of ANOVAs and/or two-way T-tests to determine if significant differences exist. Due to the specialized nature of IRT analyses, social science statistical consultants Dr. Karen Draney and Doria Xiao performed the analysis on the data. Before, they were briefed on the study goals and methods to assure accuracy and model fit.

To recap, mixed methods research has been used successfully in social domain research for a number of decades to provide rich descriptions of people's decision-making processes, as well as compare evaluations and justifications across groups and settings. The aim of this study is to understand the ways people think about physical aggression toward others and compare these responses across groups and contexts, which the methods are well-suited to accomplish. Though changing aspects of the context in the situations is akin to changing independent variables in experimental designs, there is much that cannot be controlled, so this method of research does not allow the researcher to make statements about causality. Using IRT for the quantitative portion of the data analysis enables participants and assessment items to be understood on the same scale. Because IRT has not been used previously in social domain research, its use is one way this study extends methodology within the field of social domain research. Other rationales, strengths, and weaknesses of the study design will be fleshed out in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methods – Interview Protocol Design

The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions… At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.… At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth (Seidman, 2013, p. 9).

Introduction to the Clinical Interview Method

An outcome of the research done for this dissertation was the design of an interview protocol to measure the construct or moral decision-making about aggression, particularly as it pertains to contexts in which the norms and purposes of the context allow for a certain degree of physical aggression, such as the context of sport. The following section will detail the influences, inspirations, and decision-making that led to the finalized interview protocol for this study.

As partially described in the Methods section, this study uses a version of the semi-structured, clinical interview method as the main form of data collection. The interview protocol was designed specifically for this study, using both etic (e.g., drawing on theory and examples used in previous research) and emic (e.g., using pilot studies to gather the perspectives of current athletes) approaches to construct its make-up (Pike, 1967). The following section will summarize previous uses of the semi-structured clinical interview, particularly in social domain theory research; describe the process used to design the protocol in the present study; and discuss ways the interview protocol can be used as a tool by others in the field.

The clinical interview method was first formally used in psychological research about decision-making and reasoning by Jean Piaget (1927/1960). While many procedures are concerned primarily with the products or conclusions of people's decision-making, clinical interviews are designed to assess outcomes of thought, as well as describe the organization of thought and illuminate the psychological processes that lead individuals to those outcomes (Kohlberg, 1969; Langer, 1969; Piaget, 1929/1971; Turiel, 1969). The general components of the clinical interview consist of a set of cognitive (and/or behavioral) tasks related to a specific domain (e.g., morality, number, causation) and an associated interview with predetermined questions and probes, tailored to the domain and to specific hypotheses about the processes of reasoning in that domain (Turiel, 1983). In research related to social cognition, the tasks typically involve social problems presented in the form of stories, shared verbally. Participants are asked to solve these problems as well as answer follow-up questions and probes designed to assess elements of reasoning. Clinical interviews are considered semi-structured because, during the course of the interview, the interviewer generally follows a set pattern of questions in a previously decided upon order but has the freedom to choose which follow-up probing questions to ask, based on the participant's responses. Some probes are determined in advance and are asked contingent on certain types of respondent answers, whereas other probes are created in the moment to elicit further clarifying information from the respondent. These probes are ways researchers can control for possible misunderstandings, as well as prevent participants from developing alternative interpretations of the stimuli that do not align with the study.

One of the concerns aimed at semi-structured interviews is the assumed lack of standardization and objectivity. While standardization and objectivity look different in clinical interviews than they do in psychometric tests and other forms of surveys, clinical interviews do

meet standardization and objectivity requirements. This is evidenced in their ability to show test-retest consistency over short periods of time (Damon, 1980) and through the replicability of findings across cultures, subjects, and time (Cowan, 1978). High inter-rater reliability scores also contribute to the objectivity of clinical interviews (Damon, 1980). Furthermore, there often is a bias in favor of experimental research in the psychological sciences. Piaget (1929) argued, however, "The clinical method is experimental in the sense that the practitioner sets himself a problem, makes hypotheses, adapts the conditions to them and finally controls each hypothesis by testing it against the reactions he stimulates in conversation" (p.8). In many ways, the different situations presented to participants during a clinical interview represent different conditions under which the construct is being tested, which is similar to the objectives and design of experimental research.

In addition to the robust, reliable, and valid nature of clinical interviews, the clinical interview method was chosen for this study because of its ability to better capture reasoning about aggression and violence. Westwood and colleagues (2022a, 2022b) found that 1.) surveys are ineffective measures of attitudes about aggression and violence because of the biases produced by disengaged participants – a common problem encountered in survey research – and 2.) constructs like aggression and violence have multiple manifestations such that researchers cannot be sure of participants' interpretations of survey stimuli unless capturing details about their thinking or asking very specific questions. When asking questions, Westwood and colleagues (2022b) recommend using narrowly defined acts of violence in specific contexts to get data that is more accurate and able to be compared across participants. These recommendations align with the use of contextualized stories and probes in the type of clinical interviews used in social domain theory research and, moreover, support such methods for the present study about thinking around aggression and violence.

Lastly, when designing research in the social sciences, there often is a desire to produce something that has practical application value. For topics like aggression and sport, application value might look like information that can guide future interventions aimed at reducing aggression or creating sport environments that enhance positive youth development. Murphy-Graham & Leal (2015) maintain that a lack of understanding about the decision-making process of the target population (in regards to the construct of interest) frequently leads to poor intervention design and an inability to reach desired outcomes and, thus, in-depth qualitative work is recommended to enhance the field's understanding of relevant decision-making processes both in general and in an effort to create better interventions and more successful outcomes. This might be one reason youth anti-violence interventions (e.g., school anti-bullying initiatives, sport-for-peace programs, and community non-violence campaigns), while well-meaning and certainly positive in many regards, struggle to produce the types of long-term, non-violent changes hoped for (Cantone, 2015; Ciocanel, 2017; Whitley, 2017); they have not yet understood and thus not yet addressed the actual ways humans make decisions about aggression in complex, real-life situations. All of these arguments combined informed the use of the clinical interview as the primary data collection source for this study.

The Clinical Interview Method in Social Domain Theory Research

In social domain theory research, clinical interviews are structured to explore the nature of moral reasoning about a specific construct. Though the interview protocols may vary from study to study depending on the topic, most of them contain the same prototypical elements. These are a set of general (non-contextualized) questions that ask participants about a moral tenet in the abstract, followed by a set of stories that ask about the same moral construct embedded in various contextualized situations; contingency questions which interrogate the core basis of a person's judgment; prompts to capture participants' evaluations and justifications of each morally salient situation in the interview; and a coding scheme that is organized by the domains delineated in social domain theory (e.g., moral, conventional, personal, prudential, etc.).

The format of providing general assessments prior to contextualized assessments is a standard strategy in the clinical interviews used in social domain theory research (Gingo, Roded, & Turiel, 2017; Turiel, 1982). General questions assess moral judgments (in the case of the present study, judgments about physical harm) in the abstract, whereas the contextualized assessments examine how those judgments are employed in complex social situations. While people may hold moral judgments as obligatory, there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between the judgment in general and how it is applied in specific, contextual settings. This does not imply a gap between judgment and action, as noted earlier, but rather it highlights the ways that moral judgments are coordinated with other considerations and goals in the social environment. Comparing and contrasting participants' responses to the general assessments and their responses to the contextualized assessments helps us better understand this process of coordination, the features that define elements to the moral domain, and the subtle elements of social environments that make the prioritization or deprioritization of moral tenets more likely. This comparison also gives data that can speak to theories that suggest individuals who approve of moral infractions do not think about or do not care about moral tenets, since, most often, the comparison shows that while individuals may allow for some moral infractions in specific situations, they do still regard the importance of moral action in the general assessments.

Another feature of clinical interviews unique to social domain research is the use of contingency questions and criterion judgments. In the development of social domain theory, contingency questions were used to assess which features different types of social reasoning were contingent on and which they were not. This helped differentiate one domain from another. For instance, early studies examined whether judgments about moral issues were contingent on rules (Nucci & Turiel, 1978), personal preference (Smetana, 1981), authority (Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983), or were generalizable to other people and places (i.e., contingent on norms; Nucci, 1981), which helped the theory isolate understandings of morality from understandings of convention and personal concerns. This is a feature that continues in social domain research, as it continues to illuminate decision-making processes and the ways people coordinate across domains.

Because social domain research deals with people's reasoning about constructs such as rights, justice, welfare, and the value of life, a feature of the research model is that it asks people to evaluate hypothetical or real situations in which an act of moral salience took place. The evaluation prompt generally takes the form of "Was it alright or not alright that…" (Turiel, 1983). As noted earlier, because social domain theory is not just interested in the outcome of

people's reasoning (i.e., their evaluation), interviews almost always follow-up prompts for evaluation with prompts for justification, which ask the subject to explain their reasoning about the situation and how they came to their evaluation. This gives the researcher details about the processes involved in that individual's decision making as well as how they are interpreting the situation. Participant responses to the prompts to provide evaluations and justifications comprise the primary data and are then coded for themes, based on the domains, as well as constructs unique to that specific study.

Protocol Design for the Present Study

Each of the elements standard to social domain research were included in the protocol design of the present study. Many elements of the interview protocol in the present study are also unique to the present study. Castillo-Montoya (2016) outlines the general phases involved in interview protocol design. They include 1.) Tailor interview questions to align with research questions and aims, 2.) Construct questions to nurture conversational flow and create an inviting interview environment, 3.) Seek feedback on protocol from other researchers, and 4.) Pilot interview to desired demographic. The following section will describe the features of my protocol design as they relate to each of these phases, including the ways they were developed and tested before reaching their final format.

The influence of design elements from previous research. The interview protocol for this study was adapted from the protocol in Davidson, Turiel, and Black (1983), which was designed to assess for criterion judgments, justification categories, and context familiarity. General protocol themes also took inspiration from Astor (1994) regarding the comparison of endorsement of aggression between groups and Posada and Wainryb (2008) for their exploration of attitudes about violence in different contexts. Furthermore, the three just-mentioned studies were able to identify ways that people's prior experiences had an impact on the formation of judgments about a subject, which was an important inquiry of the current study and, thus, this study included similar design elements in the processes of participant selection, context and content creation, and the identification of codes used to organize interview data and develop justification categories. Additional inspiration came from Helwig, Hildebrandt, & Turiel (1995), which featured stories where the rules of a game setting differentially affected children's moral judgements about psychological harm. This served as an important influence in the development of the protocol for the current study, particularly with regard to story content in which rules and contexts interact to transform the meaning of otherwise hurtful actions. Lastly, existing quantitative measures from previous studies on sport and moral reasoning, such as The Moral Disengagement in Sport Scale (MDSS; Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007) and Prosocial and Antisocial Behavior in Sport Scale (PABSS; Kavussanu, Stanger, & Boardley, 2013) were consulted for themes to include in the interview questions, so this research could speak to the existing literature. This was a strategy used by Taylor and colleagues (2017) in their research on intimate partner violence.

It should be mentioned that previous non-academic work also greatly informed the content of the clinical interview for the present study. This work is the author's own experience as an NCAA Division I student-athlete, a USA Track and Field Level II certified coach, an academic mentor to NCAA Division I student-athletes at the University of California, Berkeley.

Phase 1: Aligning interview questions with research aims. One of the first research aims was to explore the claims of previous studies that people reason differently about aggression (i.e., they approve of aggression more) in the sport context than in a non-sport context. Therefore, an interview protocol that allowed for the comparison of the two contexts was important to the present study's research goals. A key facet of experimental design is to hold all other variables constant in order to examine the construct of interest. Therefore, to examine the effects of context on people's reasoning, the interview protocol had to be designed in such a way that the elements relating to non-sport situations mirrored the elements relating to sport situations as closely as possible. This required a great deal of thought, as some of the aspects of sport training and competition – elements pertinent to decision-making about physical aggression – do not translate easily into non-sport settings.

Parallel design. The parallel design was accomplished on multiple levels. For the general, non-contextualized questions at the start of the interview, participants were asked three questions about their agreeableness to hitting someone and causing pain when unprovoked, if the rules allowed it, and if country norms dictated that such acts were ok and common. These were followed by three general, non-contextualized sport-related questions that were the same as the above except for the addition of the phrase "in a sport like basketball or baseball" to indicate the different context (e.g., "Is it alright or not alright to hit and cause someone pain when unprovoked?" vs. "Is it alright or not alright to hit and cause someone pain when unprovoked, when playing a sport like basketball or baseball?"). This parallel design allowed for a clean comparison of people's initial ways of reasoning about harm purely based on general knowledge and assumptions about the two different contexts.

For the six contextualized stories that come after the general questions, three take place in non-sport settings and three take place in sport settings. In following the parallel design model to continue assessing the impact of context, the first story in each set described an unprovoked act of physical aggression in a competition setting, the second story in each set involved a provoked act of physical aggression during a competition, and the third story in each set involved an act of physical force given by people who care about the wellbeing of the receiver and do it with the intention of training the receiver for the future. This parallel design of the contextualized stories is depicted in Table 4. These stories are described in more detail in the Methods section, so they will not be fully described here, but the decisions leading to the content of the stories will be discussed in this chapter.

Table 4
Parallel Structure of Sport and Non-Sport Stories

Non-Sport Context	**Sport Context**
Unprovoked physical force *During an academic competition, a competitor who is ahead decides to give a hard push to another competitor.*	Unprovoked physical force *During a basketball game, a player who is ahead decides to give a hard push to another player.*

Provoked physical force *While looking for parking, another driver steals the parking spot of the main character and shouts taunts while doing so. The main character gives a hard push to this driver.*	Provoked physical force *During a basketball game, an opponent repeatedly steals the ball and shouts taunts at the main character. The main character gives a hard push to this opponent.*
Unprovoked physical force for training purposes *A sibling gives hard pushes to another sibling in order to "toughen up" this sibling and prepare him for a rough school environment.*	Unprovoked physical force for training purposes *A teammate gives a hard push to a new recruit in order to "toughen up" this teammate and prepare him for rough games ahead.*

The parallel design also was included in the treatment of the contingency questions. As mentioned in the Methods, there were a set of contingency questions administered after each story to see if the presence of rules, norms, the dictates of authority, personal goals, or the severity of the injury changed the way the individual reasoned about the act of aggression in that situation. The same contingency questions were presented in the same order for every story in both the sport and non-sport contexts, as a way of assessing if the presence of rules or authority dictates, etc., are considered differently depending on the context.

Story content decisions. There were a number of decisions about the content of each of the stories that were chosen in the service of research aims. Some of these content decisions regarded the motivation behind the act of physical force, the type of physical force employed, the intention of the act, the severity of the harm caused by the act, the sport chosen for the stories in the sport context, the topics addressed in the contingency questions, as well as the elements of the non-sport stories selected to best match the essence of the elements in the sport stories. Regarding the last item, the sport stories were created first in order to make sure the interview protocol was able to test the author's hunches about reasoning in the sport environment and how this might look different than what previous research suggests.

Motivation. As noted above, the three sport stories and the three non-sport stories had three motivational backgrounds. The act of aggression in the first story of each set was unprovoked, the act of aggression in the second story of each set was provoked, and the use of physical force in the third story was motivated by a desire to help someone be better prepared for rough encounters in the future. Non-provocation, provocation, and training scenarios were chosen as they were 1.) situations an individual would encounter in a sport setting and 2.) represented the spectrum of motivational environments that might elicit a hard push (i.e., the act of aggression/physical force used in the stories) in a sport context. The stories were presented in the order listed, as a hypothesis was that this order had participants move from the hardest to easiest situations for people to agree with. In other words, it was expected that few people would agree with an unprovoked hard push that was done with the intent to harm, some people would agree with a provoked hard push that was done with the intent to harm, and more people would agree with a hard push done without the intention of harm, in order to train someone for an upcoming situation.

Intention. The surveys, questionnaires, and interviews used in previous research on moral reasoning in sport do not appear to make clear the intention of pain-causing acts, thus making it difficult to accurately interpret the data, since there are many instances in sport where players may cause someone else pain/harm simply by playing the game. The possibility of injury is a fact that many players accept when they sign up to play the sport, especially at elite levels, where players expect each other to play hard. For this reason, this research includes stories to make clear the actor's intention when committing a hard push. In two of the stories (the unprovoked and provoked stories) of each sets, the actor's intention is to cause harm. In one story (the training story) in each of the sets, the actor's intention is not to cause harm but to "toughen up" another person in order to prepare them for future events. In the general, non-contextual questions, the intention behind the action is purposely ambiguous. This was left ambiguous in order to see how people interpret an action in the sport context as opposed to an ambiguous, pain-causing action in a non-sport context. The hope was that responses to this ambiguity might shed some light on the way people initially make meaning of the social environment of sport and broadly conceptualize the concept. The hypothesis was that if it was made clear that a hard push was given with the intention of causing harm, both athletes and non-athletes would say that that was not alright (thus collapsing the differences found in previous studies). In the questions where the intentions were positive or ambiguous, however, it is possible there would be more agreement with the act in general, as well as differences in the approval of the act across groups, as elite athletes might be more used to experiencing physicality in the service of training to be a better athlete and might be more familiar with injuries that occur when athletes are just playing hard, and therefore be more likely to approve of it.

A Hard push. Throughout the stories, the pain-causing act was kept consistent to minimize confounds and to be able to compare the responses across all the stories. This act of physical force was a hard push that knocks the participant to the ground. Why a hard push that knocks someone to the ground? This is something that is common, or at least not unimaginable, in some sports but typically is considered uncommon in daily-life settings, though everyone has likely seen it happen at one point. In other words, it is believable in both contexts and may even be accepted in some settings. What is beneficial about a hard push, in particular, vis a vis the game of basketball (which was the setting of the sport stories in the interview) is that a hard push that knocks someone to the ground is just beyond what is considered a normal part of the game but is not an outrageous event, meaning that it happens fairly frequently, given the pushing and hard body contact that is a regular part of the game, especially at more elite levels. This means that a hard push that knocks someone to the ground in the basketball context had the ability to be intentional, unintentional, and ambiguous, which was important to the study's aims mentioned in the paragraph above.

The consequence of the hard push. The outcome of the hard push was kept the same throughout all the stories in both contexts as well. The person receiving the push falls to the ground, is in pain, and has to sit out for a while before returning to the activity. This level of outcome was chosen because it fell on the border between acceptable and unacceptable and therefore might illuminate differences in how the situation is interpreted between those who know the sport context intimately and those who do not. "Acceptable" here means that for individuals who play contact sports and who are used to a very physical level of play, getting

knocked to the ground and having to sit out for a while in pain before returning to the activity may be considered a normal consequence of playing the sport and is not deemed too severe or too harmful. For people who do not play sports, however, this might be a very atypical experience and thus interpreted as more severe. Again, exploiting this difference was an attempt to draw out the various ways people may interpret an act based on prior experience. It also helps bring to the surface different understandings of pain versus harm. What some people interpret as harmful, others might just see as a painful but non-harmful aspect of playing a sport at a high level. Athletes regularly walk away with bruises, scrapes, and twisted ankles and not because they are trying to hurt each other. One assumption of this study was that elite athletes would have a much higher threshold for painful events, such as being knocked to the ground and being in pain for a while, and would have experiences of these events happening amidst enjoying activities with positive intentions, while non-athletes would have a lower tolerance and higher disapproval for such events due to experiencing them less frequently and more often in contexts that were negative or motivated by poor intentions. These different experiences could then influence different readings of a situation where one is knocked to the ground and, thus, the evaluations and decisions about the event.

Despite this assumption about different experiences, it was a hypothesis of this study that athletes and non-athletes alike would consider something harmful as too severe and unacceptable in the sport context, if it was done with the intention of causing harm. To further interrogate these different thresholds of what is considered harmful, contingency questions were used to increase the severity of the harm if a person originally answered that the hard push was alright if it just resulted in someone having to sit out in pain for a while. This question asked, "What if the hard push caused a serious injury and the person could not return to what they were doing? Would it be alright or not alright for XX to push that person?" A secondary goal here was to show that it is hard to interpret people's acceptance of aggressive-seeming acts as immoral (as previous research has done), if we do not understand how that person is interpreting the act, particularly whether or not the act is even considered harmful. If people say the hard push is alright if it results in someone sitting out in pain for a while but it is not alright if it is clear the hard push caused serious pain, then this means that we cannot interpret their original acceptance of the hard push as evidence that they do not care about others' welfare (since it is clear they care when it is clear harm is being done).

Basketball. Basketball was chosen as the sport setting for the stories in the sport context. It was chosen for multiple reasons. Basketball is a contact sport, which, according to previous research, often produces athletes with the "lowest" or most "disengaged" levels of moral reasoning, as noted in the Introduction. As a contact sport, basketball allows for some level of physical aggression as part of regular play, particularly at elite levels, and thus it would prove a good contrast to non-sport settings where such actions would be less expected or accepted. Also, basketball players comprised many of the athlete population samples in previous research. For the present research to speak to this previous research, it was important that it included the people and contexts that were often found as most affected by the supposed moral degradation of sport participation. In practical terms as well, most Americans would have some familiarity with basketball even if they have never formally played the game, which is important, as non-athletes and athletes who play other sports would be part of the population sample for this study, so they needed to be able to, at a basic level, understand what is happening in the three stories in the

sport context (note: participant's had the opportunity to ask questions when they did not know something about the basketball setting and the semi-structured interview also allowed for corrections of participants' understanding if it was clear they had an idea about basketball that was not true). In the protocol design process, changing the sport represented in the sport context based on whatever the participant was most familiar with was considered. This brought in too many confounds, however, and the scenarios depicted in basketball did not always easily translate to another sport. As a good example, pushing someone to the ground in cross country or field hockey probably has a very different meaning, in terms of how severe and unexpected it would be perceived, than it does in basketball. For this reason, basketball was chosen as the sport for all three stories relating to the sport context and it stayed consistent across all participants. While this approach did risk losing some of the nuances in reasoning of elite athletes who participate in contact sports other than basketball, it was anticipated that these participants would be able to use their general knowledge about sport and translate the ways they make meaning on the field into the basketball scenarios given in the interview. Overall, this seemed to be a natural thing that these athletes did when interpreting the stories in the interview.

Contingency questions. As explained earlier in this chapter, contingency questions are a typical part of social domain research. Their purpose is to draw out the underlying features of decision-making about a specific topic to see what facets of the social environment one's reasoning is and is not contingent on. The contingency questions used in this interview related to rules, social norms, the dictates of authority, personal gain, and the severity of injury. The choice of these specific contingency questions served two purposes. The first purpose, related to social domain theory, is that it quickly helped narrow in on the domain an individual prioritized in their evaluations of the hard push depicted in the story. For instance, someone may originally say, "The hard push isn't alright because the rules of basketball don't allow it," which would indicate that they make their decisions about what is right or wrong based on the rules of the game. However, if the interview then follows with a contingency question about rules, such as "What if the rules allowed for this type of hard push, would it be alright or not alright for XX to push the player (with the intent to cause harm)?" and the participant responds, "Actually, the rules do not make it right. This person should not be trying to hurt another player even if the rules allowed the push," that provides a much better understanding of what is at the root of this participant's decision-making about the hard push in this context. After the contingency is asked, it is clear the person is alluding to the moral domain – reasons of welfare and a desire not to cause harm to others – (and it would be coded as such) as the justification for why the act is not alright and not simply the rules or conventions.

The second reason these specific contingency questions were used is that the theories of moral disengagement and bracketed morality both propose that decisions by athletes, especially in the sport context, are motivated by desires for personal gain, which causes them to prioritize their egocentric needs over a desire for fairness or the welfare of others and lean on the officials, rules, coaches, and norms of the environment to dictate what is right and wrong. If this were the case, we should see participants – particularly contact sport athletes – easily agreeing with the hard push depicted in the story when the contingency questions say that the rules, norms, authority, and personal goals align with it. If, on the other hand, participants still consider fairness, the welfare of others, etc., in their reasoning about the hard push and disagree with the act despite the contingency question suggesting an environment that is more permissive of the

act, then it would call into question the accuracy of theories like moral disengagement and bracketed morality.

These were some of the main decision-points that came out of the first phase of the interview protocol design. Making sure the content of the stories and the questions aligned with the goals of the research was the primary consideration during this phase. As Smith and Dunworth (2003) note, a potential asset of qualitative methods in the psychological sciences is their ability to capture the meanings individuals give to particular phenomena. The interview protocol for this study was built with this in mind, to create a space for individuals to share the ways they make meaning of their contexts and understand morally salient events. Table 6 breaks down some of the general protocol components and shows how they map onto overall research goals.

Table 6
Interview Protocol Matrix (Interview protocol components and the corresponding research question that they try to address)

	Test differences in reasoning about aggression across contexts	Test differences in reasoning about aggression across participant groups	Test other researchers' hypotheses about rules, personal gain, disengagement etc., as motivators for allowing aggression	Understand the process of decision-making about aggression + capture voice of student-athletes
Context (sport vs non-sport)	x		x	x
Level of contextualization (general Q vs contextualized story)	x			x
Story content	x	x	x	x
Contingency questions			x	x
Prompt for participant evaluation of harm	x	x		
Prompt for participant justification of evaluation			x	x

Phase 2: Nurturing conversational flow. There were a few considerations that were made at the beginning of the interview design to enhance conversationality and the flow of the interview. Some of these considerations took into account the cognitive load of the participants. For this reason, stories were presented alongside the other stories set in the same context (i.e., all the sport stories were given at the same time as the other sport stories and the non-sport stories were given at the same time as the non-sport stories), so as to prevent participants from getting

mixed up by having to jump back and forth between contexts. Furthermore, the stories themselves were as condensed as possible to give as much background as needed but prevent the participant from having to hold much in their memory while responding to questions. For a similar reason, stories were chosen to both resonate with people and be events that were easy to imagine (and may already be experiences they could relate to).

The interview itself can be quite tiring, so contingency questions about severity were only given to participants who had agreed with the hard push at some point within the interview, rather than asking the question every time. (If a participant disagreed with the hard push in the story, it was assumed their decision would not change if the injury from the hard push was made more severe, so the question was dropped in those situations to ease fatigue.) The contingency questions typically were asked in the same order for each story, but they were written in such a way that they could be asked in a different order if a different contingency question more naturally flowed next after a participant's response. Lastly, recognizing that the fairly systematic format in which participants received the same questions for each story could become tedious and result in participant disengagement, the interview structure was designed with a few interjections of non-standard questions to break up the monotomy. Examples of this were a question about the "goodness" of a rule that allowed for hard pushing following the two unprovoked stories, a question about an escalation to physical provocation in the sport-provocation story, and a question about one's ability to know how to hit someone in a way to minimize the chances of injury that was presented at a point during the interview when it seemed to most naturally fit the conversation.

In reality, most of Phase 2 also involved the other remaining phases, as it was more of an iterative process that included piloting the interview, recognizing interview questions that were not eliciting the anticipated quality of responses, and then revising the delivery of the interview and testing it again. One of the biggest changes that was made during this process was elaborations to the way contingency questions were expressed. In order to truly understand people's social reasoning within a context, it is helpful if the participant is really engaged in the moment, able to imagine what it might feel like to be in the experience depicted in the story. To make the situation come alive for the participant, the language was adapted to better portray how it might be discussed or experienced in the natural setting. For instance, for the contingency question, "What if social norms allowed for this type of hard push, would it be alright or not alright for XX to push the person?", a phrase was added to connect participants with situations they might find similar. This looked like, "What if the social norms allowed for this type of hard push – like, it's a rough league/community, people often pushed each other to deal with their issues and they didn't get in trouble for it – would it be alright or not alright for XX to push the person?" Adding the phrase "rough league" or "rough community" increased the way participants were able to enter into the situation, which led to richer responses. The outcome of this revision is that many participants responded to that question by saying, "Oh yeah, I know exactly what you are talking about."

Another example of language used to increase the experiential understanding of the situation is illustrative language tacked onto my probes in the two stories that dealt with a provocation. For instance, at the end of each contingency question, I would add, "...is it alright or not alright for XX to push this person who was mocking him, calling him names, getting under

his skin?" Participants often referenced how frustrating the situation was and how, on some level, they understood why the character in the story was tempted to push the person, which is an indication that the added language helped participants understand what the situation might feel like for the characters. As noted earlier in this section, when participants can engage with the interview questions in ways that help them enter into the moments being described, this could lead to richer responses and, thus, the possibility of having more accurate understandings of the ways people reason about multifaceted social situations, with emotion as part of the equation.

Phase 3: Seek feedback from other researchers. To finalize the draft of the interview protocol before piloting, the interview protocol was presented at a roundtable research discussion with colleagues and reviewed by Elliot Turiel – the Psychologist who created social domain theory, as well as the other dissertation committee members. Feedback was then incorporated into a revised version of the interview protocol.

Phase 4: Pilot the interview protocol. Lastly, the interview protocol was piloted with ten student-athletes, revised, and then piloted with five more students (three non-athletes, two athletes) before being administered in its final form in the research study. In addition to answering the questions in the interview, pilot participants were welcome to provide feedback on their experience of the interview questions themselves and the accuracy with which the stories captured real-life situations and their process of making decisions about acts of physical harm.

Conclusions

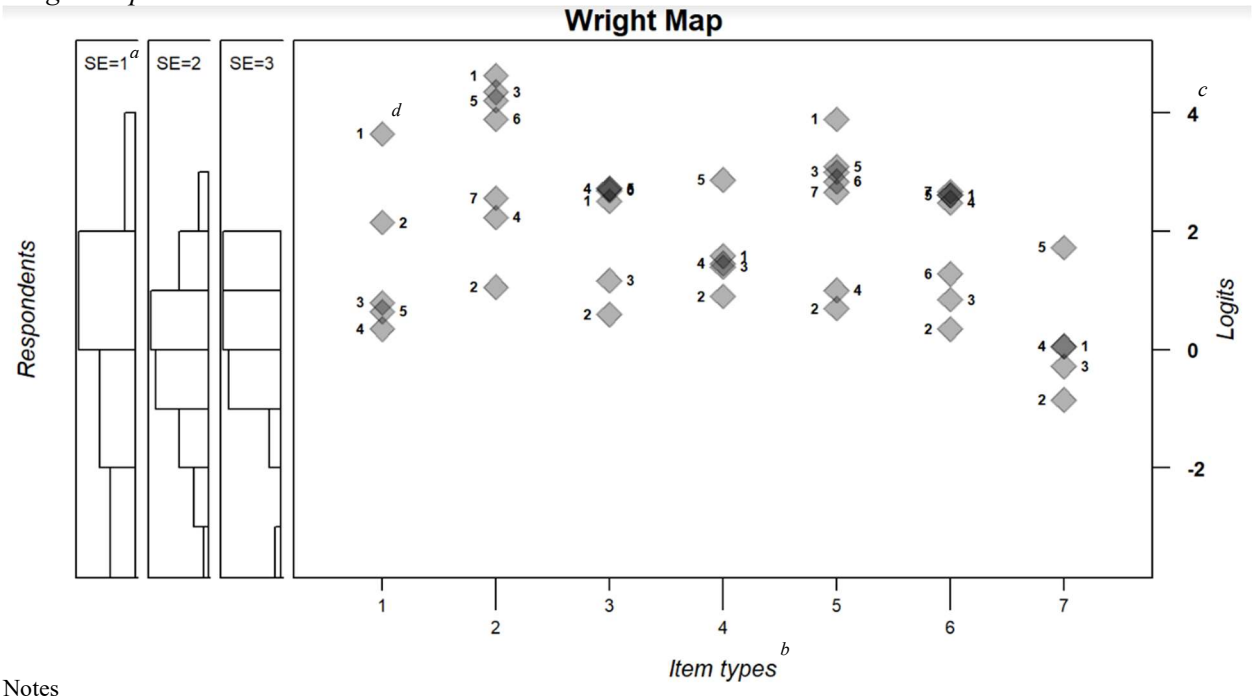
To close in support of using clinical interviews as a form of data collection for psychological phenomena, after the interview, many participants commented on how much they enjoyed the experience. Many participants were enrolled in the department's Research Participant Pool (RPP) and, thus, had participated in multiple studies prior to sitting for the study interview. An alarming number of them spoke about the ways they typically disengaged from survey-based or computer-based studies and put little thought into their choices, as the options rarely satisfied the way they think/feel/act regarding the construct of interest. Such disengagement with survey/questionnaire data collection methods has been documented in the field (see Kalmoe & Mason, 2022), so this is not new knowledge, but what is surprising is the honesty and awareness the students had about their own mediocre participation. In contrast, many participants in this study expressed gratitude for the ways its design made them feel as though what they had to say was important, and it honored the ways in which they actually think and feel about phenomena in the world. This highlights the ways individuals really do want to contribute to the scientific endeavor in meaningful ways and the barriers that we as researchers can put in their way in the form of data collection methods that do not bring to life the constructs we want to study or do not leave space for the voice of participants. This is not to say that surveys and questionnaires do not have much utility; they certainly do. As a field, however, it might benefit researchers to use the spirit of the interview method to enhance the ways participants experience other forms of data collection, like surveys and questionnaires.

Chapter 4: Results – Quantitative Analysis

To test the study's hypotheses and examine differences between contexts and across participant groups, dichotomous Rasch-based Item Response Theory (IRT) models were used to calculate item and person estimates and create a Wright Map of the data (Figure 1). Items in the Wright Map are ordered using logits. Logits are log odds units related to quantile functions from the standard logistic distribution and are ways the model transforms raw scores into one common scale (Ludlow & Haley, 1995). Logits standardize the raw scores and allow for comparison across items and participants. High logits indicate items that are difficult to evaluate positively, and participants who frequently approve of the hard push across items. In contrast, low logits indicate items that are easy to evaluate positively, and participants who less frequently approve of the hard push across items.

ANOVA and two-way T-tests were then used to analyze participant evaluations, or the frequency with which individuals approved of or disapproved of the hard push. Participant justifications, or the reasons participants gave for their evaluations, were first coded and then the codes were analyzed using percentages to provide information about the types of reasoning used. Before moving into these results, the next section will provide descriptive statistics to give an overview of the breakdown of the data.

Figure 1
Wright Map



Notes
[a] SE=1, SE=2, SE=3 are the participant groups "non-athletes", "moderate athletes", and "elite athletes", respectively. This left portion of the map depicts the spread of the person estimates for each participant group. The thickness of the squares represents the quantity of individuals in that logit range. Participants at higher logits were more likely to approve of the hard pushing across questions in the interview. Participants at lower logits were less likely to approve of the hard pushing across questions in the interview.
[b] Item types: Each item type references a question or situation type from the interview. Item Type 1 consists of the questions in the abstract assessment. These include general questions about people's orientation to harm in both the sport and non-sport contexts. Item Types 2-4 are the non-sport situations from the contextualized assessment, with 2 as the non-provoked situation, 3

as the provoked situation, and 4 as the training situation. Item Types 5-7 are the sport situations from the contextualized assessment, with 5 as the non-provoked situation, 6 as the provoked situation, and 7 as the training situation.

[c] Logits: Higher logits indicate items where the hard pushing is more difficult to evaluate positively and participants that more frequently give positive evaluations to the hard pushing across items. Lower logits indicate items where the hard pushing is easier to evaluate positively and participants that less frequently give positive evaluations to the hard pushing across items.

[d] ◇ s: each diamond represents a baseline or contingency question from the interview protocol. The order of questions for each item type is as follows:

Item Type 1 (abstract): 1 = non-sport rules, 2 = non-sport norms, 3 = sport baseline, 4 = sport rules, 5 = sport norms.

Item Type 2 (non-sport unprovoked): 1 = baseline, 2 = rules, 3 = good rule, 4 = norms, 5 = authority, 6 = personal gain, 7 = severity.

Item Type 3 (non-sport provoked): 1 = baseline, 2 = rules, 3 = norms, 4 = authority, 5 = personal gain, 6 = severity

Item Type 4 (non-sport training): 1 = baseline, 2 = rules, 3 = norms, 4 = authority, 5 = severity

Item Type 5 (sport unprovoked): 1 = baseline, 2 = rules, 3 = good rule, 4 = norms, 5 = authority, 6 = personal gain, 7 = severity

Item Type 6 (sport provoked): 1 = baseline, 2 = rules, 3 = norms, 4 = authority, 5 = personal gain, 6 = physical provocation, 7 = severity

Item Type 7 (sport training): 1 = baseline 2 = rules, 3 = norms, 4 = authority, 5 = severity

Research Question 1: Do People Approve of Pain-Causing Acts Differently Based on Context (Sport vs Non-Sport)?

Descriptive statistics. For a broad comparison of the sport and non-sport contexts, Table 7 provides the total counts of all *alright*, *not alright* and *mixed* responses by context, including the contingency questions, the six contextualized stories, and the six abstract questions. Overall, results show that while the participants disapproved of the use of physically aggressive actions the majority of the time – no matter what context – participants approved of the use of physically aggressive actions twice as much in the sport context than they did in the non-sport context.

Table 7
Distribution of Evaluations across All Questions by Context

Context	Approval of Hard Pushing Total n (%)	Mixed Total n (%)	Disapproval of Hard Pushing Total n (%)
Non-Sport	279 (15)	29 (1.6)	1545 (83.4)
Sport	658 (31.9)	91 (4.4)	1314 (63.7)

Social domain theory, however, posits that people might think differently about some moral situations when they are presented in the abstract than when they exist amidst information that places the situation in context (Turiel, 1983). Therefore, the response patterns are looked at separately for the *abstract* (general questions about harm given with no contextual information) and *contextualized* (questions embedded in situations that provide information about the circumstances and motives surrounding the hard push) portions of the interview. Table 8 lists how each participant group responded to a pain-causing hard push in the sport and non-sport abstract assessment questions and Table 9 represents the distribution of evaluations for the baseline questions (i.e., without contingency questions) for matched pairs of sport and non-sport contextualized stories.

To restate, Sport Experience Group 1 has little to no experience with organized sports and are referred to as “non-athletes”, Sport Experience Group 2 has moderate to substantial experience particularly with non-contact sports and are referred to as “moderate athletes”, and

Sport Experience Group 3 has extensive experience with elite level contact sports and are referred to as "elite athletes".

Table 8
Percentage of Negative Evaluations (Not Alright) of Acts of Physical Harm in the Abstract Assessment, Comparisons between Context and across Sport Experience Groups

Is it alright or not alright to hit and cause pain…	Non-Athletes N = 36		Moderate Athletes N = 41		Elite Athletes N = 32	
	Non-Sport	Sport	Non-Sport	Sport	Non-Sport	Sport
…When unprovoked?	100	63.9	100	61.0	100	68.7
…If rules allow it?	91.7	55.6	95.1	58.5	100	53.1
…If country norms allow it?	77.8	55.6	95.1	63.4	100	65.6

Table 9
Participant Evaluation of Acts of Physical Harm by Situation Type in the Contextualized Assessments (No Contingencies)

Evaluation	Non-Provoked		Provoked		Training	
	Non-Sport	Sport	Non-Sport	Sport	Non-Sport	Sport
Alright	2	4	12	10	20	50
(%)	(*1.8*)	(*3.7*)	(*11*)	(*9.2*)	(*18.3*)	(*45.9*)
Mixed	0	0	1	2	5	4
(%)	(*0*)	(*0*)	(*0.9*)	(*1.8*)	(*4.6*)	(*3.7*)
Not Alright	107	105	96	97	84	55
(%)	(*98.2*)	(*96.3*)	(*88.1*)	(*89*)	(*77.1*)	(*50.5*)

Preliminary trends in the descriptive statistics showed a potential difference in participants' acceptance of the pain-causing act between the sport and non-sport contexts when questions were posed in the abstract, with people more accepting of the act in sport contexts than in non-sport contexts (see Table 8). These broad contextual differences do not appear to translate to the contextualized situations, however – at least when looking at the baseline responses to the act of hard pushing in each situation (see Table 9). This is why looking at contextual differences only at the broadest level can be misleading. A potentially critical difference between the abstract assessment and the contextualized assessment is that purpose and intention behind the hard push was ambiguous in the abstract questions, whereas the intention and purpose was provided for the contextualized questions, which may account for some of the reason context appears to play a bigger role in the responses to the abstract questions than it does in the contextualized questions. There also were differences across situation types (i.e., non-provoked, provoked, and training) that may imply an interaction of context and situation type within the contextualized assessment (see Table 9, particularly the training situations). This is explored further in the results of the IRT analyses.

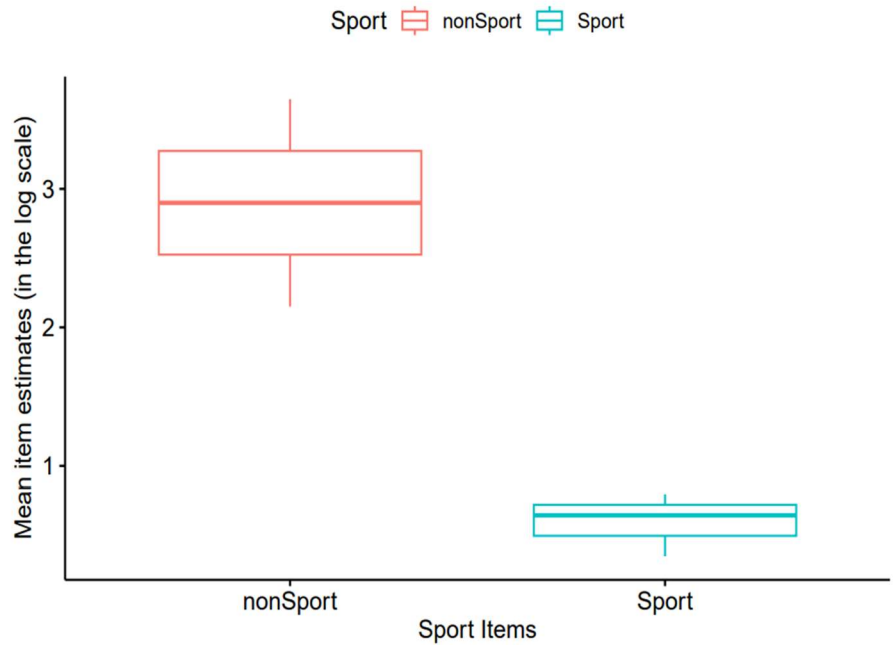
Results from item response theory modeling. In order to examine the first research question about differences in the approval of "aggressive acts" between sport and non-sport contexts, a dichotomous Rasch model was used to analyze the data to determine the item estimates in both contexts. The means of these estimates were then analyzed using ANOVA to test for significance.

Context matters, but only in the abstract. The mean item estimate for the non-sport questions in the abstract assessment was 2.90, whereas the mean item estimate for the sport questions in the abstract assessment was 0.59. This suggests the items in the non-sport questions of the abstract portion of the interview were much harder to agree with (e.g., less likely to elicit an "alright" response from participants) than the sport-related questions in the abstract section. Results from the ANOVA showed that this difference was significant ($F(1, 3) = 15.61$, $p = .02$). The items in the abstract assessment asked participants if it was alright or not alright to hit and cause someone pain in sport or non-sport settings in general, as well as if rules or country norms allowed it. The intention of the hit was ambiguous in all of the abstract questions. Therefore, the results suggest that when people think about hitting someone else in broad contexts and when the intention of this act is ambiguous (i.e., it is not clear if the intention of the act was to cause harm or not), people are more willing to accept a pain-causing act in sport than in non-sport contexts.

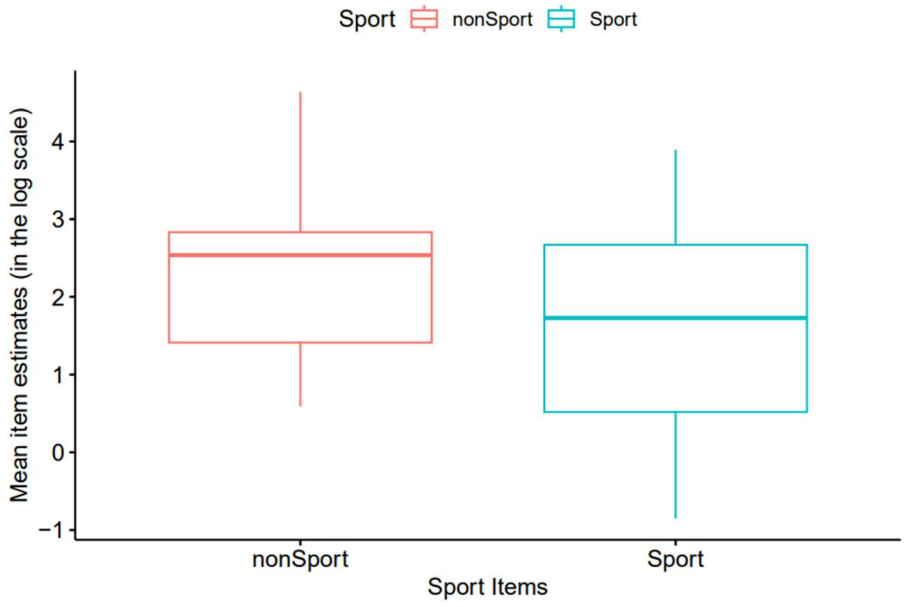
In contrast, the mean item estimate for all questions associated with non-sport contextualized situations was 2.42, and the mean item estimate for sport-related questions in the same section was 1.62, showing a smaller difference between the two contexts that was not significant ($F(1, 35) = 3.45$, $p = .07$). Although the sport questions did elicit more "alright" or "mixed" responses from participants, this difference could just be due to chance, though more research is needed to confirm that given the *p* value's proximity to .05, with alpha set at 5%. Figure 2 illustrates a side-by-side comparison of the degree of difference between the sport and non-sport contexts for the abstract (a) and contextualized (b) assessments. Together, these findings suggest that context (i.e., sport or non-sport) makes a difference in the way people think about and evaluate a pain-causing act when the situation does not specify much other than in what context the action takes place, but once details about the situation and the intention behind the act are given, these differences collapse and people evaluate pain-causing acts similarly across the two contexts. These findings are talked about further in the discussion.

Figure 2
Box Plots of the Mean Item Estimates between Contexts in Each Assessment

(a) Abstract Assessment Comparison



(b) Contextualized Assessment Comparison



Situation details matter: Sport training elicits a different response pattern than other situations in either context. Because the situations in the contextualized assessment were created as matched pairs intended to elicit different motivations for the hard push, analyses were able to

examine if situation type, as well as context, impacted the ways in which participants evaluated the hard push. As stated in the Methods, the first situation in the sport and non-sport sections dealt with an unprovoked push, the second situation dealt with a provoked push, and the third situation dealt with a push that was done for the purpose of training someone. The situations are represented on the Wright Map (Figure 1) as "Item Types", and the number-labeled diamonds above each Item Type are the contingency questions associated with that specific situation (see Figure 1 Notes for a key for identifying specific questions on the Wright Map). Item Types 2, 3, and 4 depict the non-sport contextualized situations and Item Types 5, 6, and 7 depict the sport contextualized situations. The matched pairs on the Wright Map, therefore, are as follows: Item Types 2 and 5 are the situations in which the push was unprovoked, Item Types 3 and 6 are the situations involving a provocation prior to the push, and Item Types 4 and 7 are the situations that depict the push as done for the purpose of training an individual. It also should be noted that the non-provoked and provoked situations involved a hard push done with the intention to cause harm, whereas the training situations involved a hard push done with the intention of trying to train someone to be more prepared for future events.

An ANOVA was performed to assess the effect of situation type on the "agreeable-ness" of the items (i.e., the likelihood that the story would elicit "alright" responses from participants for its associated questions). Results revealed a significant difference in mean item estimate by Item Type (i.e., by story) across all stories ($F(5, 31) = 5.48$, $p < .001$). Item Types 2 and 7 were identified as having significantly different mean item estimates than the remaining stories. Item Type 2 was the unprovoked, non-sport story and Item Type 7 was the training, sport story. More specifically, a test for Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) showed that Item Type 7 was significantly different from Item Types 2 ($M_{diff} = -3.136$, $p < 0.001$) and 5 ($M_{diff} = -2.315$, $p = 0.009$), meaning that the sport training story elicited a significantly different pattern of responses than the unprovoked stories from both sport and non-sport contexts. Participants found it easiest to approve of the hard pushing that occurred in the sport training situation, whereas participants found it hardest to approve of the hard pushing that occurred in the unprovoked situations in either context. Thus, the ways individuals thought about and evaluated the hard push was significantly different, at least for these two situation types (the sport training and unprovoked situation types). This likely is due to the fact that the intention behind the push in the sport training situation was done with the intention to help a teammate improve, whereas the intention of the hard push behind the two unprovoked situations was to cause harm. Potential reasons for these differences are further expanded upon in the discussion.

The Wright Map illustrated that Item Type 2 (unprovoked, non-sport story) was associated with a higher value on the logit scale, indicating that its questions were more difficult to agree with (i.e., more likely to elicit a "not alright" response). In contrast, Item Type 7 (training, sport situation) had a lower value on the logit scale, suggesting that its questions were easier to agree with (i.e., more likely to elicit an "alright" or "mixed" response compared to the other situations). The remaining situations fall within a common range of logits on the Wright Map, indicating that they elicited similar response patterns to one another, as suggested by the non-significant results of the ANOVA comparing the sport contextualized situations with the non-sport contextualized situations. A full breakdown of the pattern of responses can be found in Table 10.

Table 10
Percentage of Not Alright Evaluations by Situation Type in Sport and Non-Sport Contexts (Participant groups collapsed)

Contingency	Non-Provoked		Provoked		Training	
	Non-Sport	Sport	Non-Sport	Sport	Non-Sport	Sport
Baseline	98.2	96.3	88.1	89.0	77.1	50.5
Rules	65.9	62.4	60.6	56.0	66.1	34.0
Norms	85.3	67.9	70.7	65.1	74.3	44.0
Authority	97.2	92.7	89.0	88.1	75.2	50.5
Personal Gain	96.3	90.8	89.9	89.0	N/A	N/A
Severity	82.6	85.7	95.4	93.6	85.2	73.6

Note: Contingency questions explore what participant's evaluations of harm are and are not contingent on. For example, does the presence of a rule allowing for the pain-causing hard push make the hard push alright.

Tukey's HSD post-hoc test for multiple comparisons was run to account for any differences within the matched pairs. Within the unprovoked hit matched pair, Item Types 2 and 5 were not statistically significant (M_{diff} = -0.821, p = 0.7); within the provoked hit matched pair, Item Types 3 and 6 were not statistically significant (M_{diff} = -0.230, p = 0.9); and within the training situation matched pair, Item Types 4 and 7 were not statistically significant (M_{diff} = -1.499, p = 0.2).

Contingency questions. Attempts to assess significant differences at the question level (i.e., the contingency question) in relation to the Item Type (i.e., the specific situation) resulted in insignificance, though this likely is due to a high number of categories (df = 23 for the interaction term) and sample size that is too small to account for that many categories. Another difficulty in comparing across contingency questions is that not all contingencies were used in each situation, depending on their relevance to the situation. For instance, the contingency question about personal gain was not asked in either training situation. Despite the difficulties in testing for significance, the Wright Map does provide a cursory understanding of the pattern with which participants responded to the contingency questions across all situations. Specifically, contingency question two corresponds to the question asking participants if the act of hard pushing would be alright if the rules allowed for it. The Wright Map positions this question lowest on the logit scale for each of the stories. This means that participants found it easier to agree with the contingency question about rules (i.e., participants were more likely to give "alright" or "mixed" responses if the hard push was allowed in the rules) as compared to the other types of contingency questions.

Research question 1 summary. In summary, analyses looking at context and whether people think differently about a pain-causing act such as a hard push if it occurs in a sport context versus a non-sport context revealed that in the abstract, people evaluate a hard push as potentially alright more often in the sport context than in the non-sport context but that when details such as the intention behind the push are specified, evaluations of the hard push look similar across contexts. A second finding was that when looking at the more narrow context of the situation type (unprovoked, provoked, or training), most situations elicited similar response

patterns (in general, the majority of people disapproved of the hard push across the situations in either context) but that participants found it significantly easier to approve of the hard push in the sport training situation than they did in the two unprovoked situations. Given the differences between context in the abstract assessment and the greater approval of pushing in the sport training situation, at first it might appear to confirm theories like moral disengagement and bracketed morality that argue for a separate form of moral reasoning in the sport context, but the overall findings refute this general argument by showing that while context is taken into consideration, social features such as the intention behind the push also are factored into one's evaluation of the act. Using qualitative data, the following chapter further explores the role of context in moral decision-making about a hard push by showing how participants made sense of the contexts and situations throughout the study.

Research Question 2: Are There Differences in the Approval of Hard Pushing Based on People's Previous Sport Experience?

Descriptive statistics. Tables 11, 12, and 13 provide the breakdown of how each participant group responded to each matched pair of situations in the contextualized assessment. The participant groups are listed as sport experience groups, as participants were categorized by their previous sport experience.

Table 11
Percentage of Not Alright Evaluations for the Non-Provoked Situation and Contingencies in Both Contexts, by Sport Experience Group

Contingency	Non-Sport			Sport		
	Non-Ath (N=36)	Mod Ath (N=41)	Elite Ath (N=32)	Non-Ath (N=36)	Mod Ath (N=41)	Elite Ath (N=32)
Baseline	97.2	97.6	100	94.5	95.1	100
Rules	63.9	70.7	71.9	63.9	51.2	75.0
Norms	72.2	90.2	93.7	66.7	73.2	62.5
Authority	97.2	97.6	96.9	94.5	87.8	96.9
Personal Gain	97.2	92.7	100	88.9	87.8	96.9

Table 12 *Percentage of Not Alright Evaluations for the Provoked Situation and Contingencies in Both Contexts, by Sport Experience Group*

Contingency	Non-Sport			Sport		
	Non-Ath (N=36)	Mod Ath (N=41)	Elite Ath (N=32)	Non-Ath (N=36)	Mod Ath (N=41)	Elite Ath (N=32)
Baseline	97.2	87.8	78.1	88.9	87.7	87.5
Rules	58.3	68.3	53.1	52.5	53.7	62.5
Norms	72.2	68.3	71.9	66.7	61.0	68.7
Authority	88.9	92.7	87.5	91.7	87.8	87.5
Personal Gain	97.2	83.0	90.6	83.3	90.2	84.4
Physical Provoke	N/A	N/A	N/A	80.6	75.6	65.6

Table 13 *Percent of Not Alright Evaluations for the Training Situation and Contingencies in Both Contexts by Sport Experience Group*

Contingency	Non-Sport			Sport		
	Non-Ath (N=36)	Mod Ath (N=41)	Elite Ath (N=32)	Non-Ath (N=36)	Mod Ath (N=41)	Elite Ath (N=32)
Baseline	75.0	85.4	68.7	63.9	56.1	28.1
Rules	72.2	70.7	53.1	36.1	51.2	9.9
Norms	77.8	78.0	65.6	55.6	53.7	21.9
Authority	80.6	75.6	68.7	58.3	65.9	21.9
Severity	60.0[a]	84.6[a]	100[a]	57.3[a]	68.7[a]	84.0[a]

[a] N for the severity questions was different, as the question only was asked to those participants who indicated that the hard push was alright previously in the story. The n for the severity question in the non-sport context for SE Grp 1 was 5, for SE Grp 2 it was 13, and for SE Grp 3 it was 9. The n for the severity question in the sport context for SE Grp 1 was 12, for SE Grp 2 it was 16, and for SE Grp 3 it was 25.

For the most part, the responses across the three groups were similar to one another, though there were a few places (e.g., Elite Athletes in the training situations in Table 13; Non-Athletes in the baseline provoked situation in Table 12) where one group responded with substantially more or less approval of the hard push than the other groups. There was not a consistent pattern of differences in evaluations across groups however, except for the sport training scenario where the Elite Athletes agreed to the act of hard pushing (i.e., gives a "mixed" or "alright" response) almost twice as much as the two other groups for each of the questions associated with that story. An IRT analysis was used to examine the statistical significance of these trends across the three sport experience groups and other demographic characteristics.

Results from the item response modeling analysis. IRT was used to produce mean person estimates that could then be analyzed to determine if there were significant differences across groups in the ways that participants responded to the questions throughout the interview. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, persons with high estimates were more likely to agree with items in general and persons with low estimates were less likely to agree with items in general. An ANOVA run on the mean person estimates indicated that there were no significant differences across the three sport experience groups ($F(2, 106) = 1.194$, $p = .31$). This suggests that the level of sport experience does not make someone more or less likely to approve of the hard pushing depicted in the interview. Figures 3 and 4 provide illustrations of the spread of mean person estimates within and across groups.

Figure 3
Box Plot of the Mean Person Estimates across Sport Experience Groups

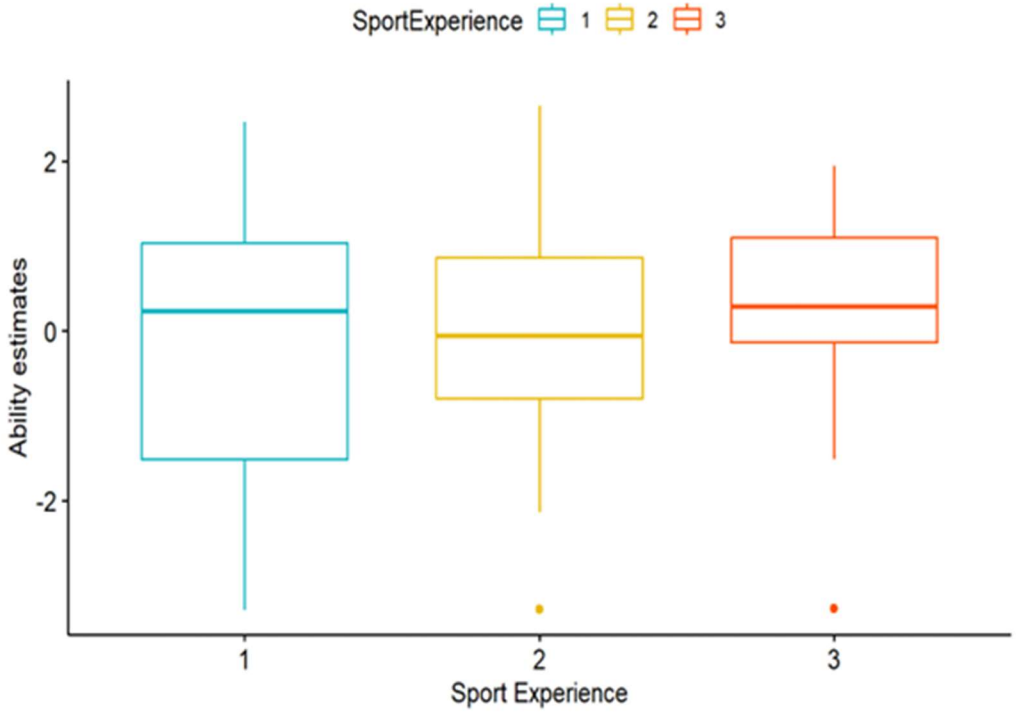
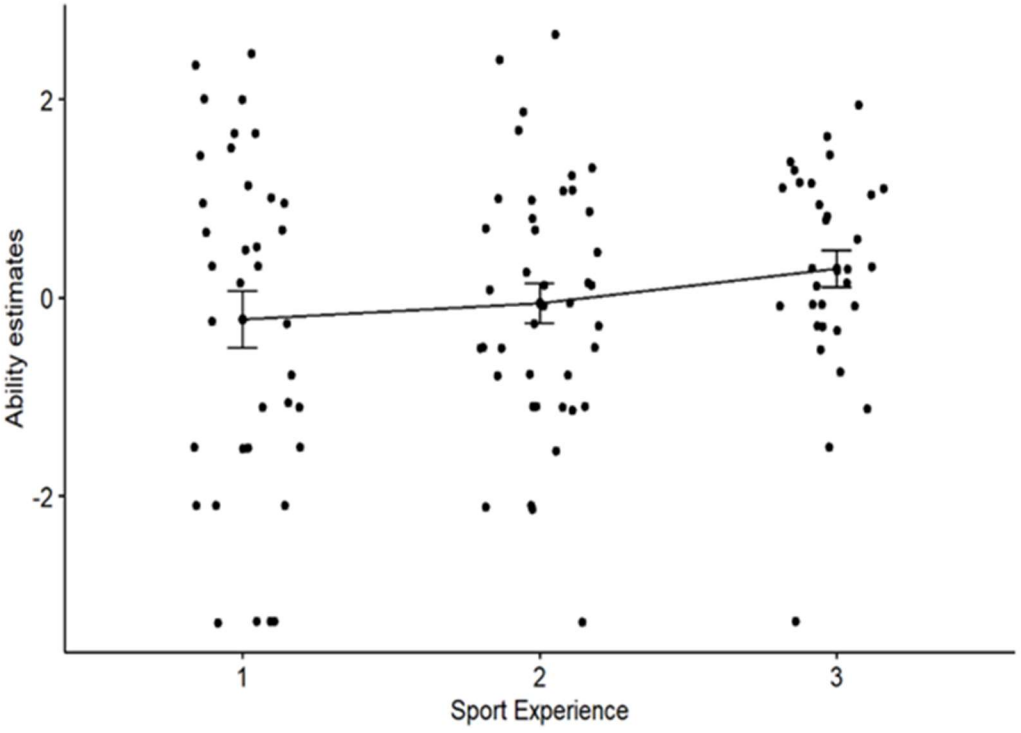


Figure 4
Scatter Plot of the Mean Person Estimates across Sport Experience Groups

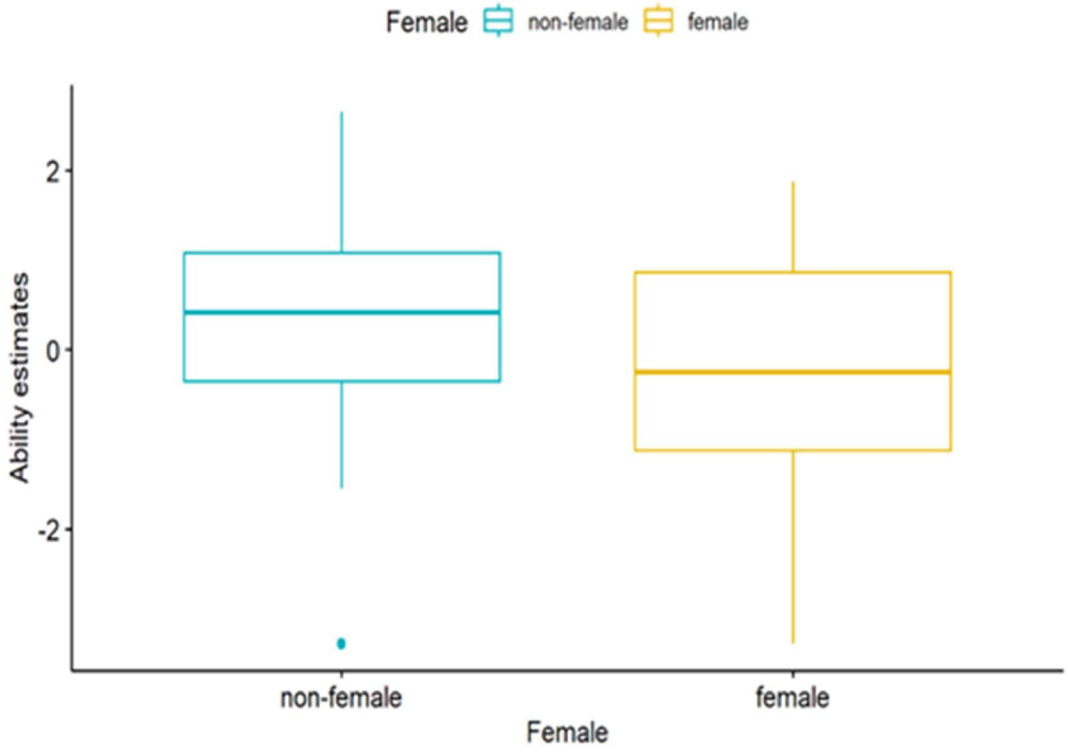


Although there were not overall significant differences across the groups, what is noticeable from the above figures is the decreasing amount of spread within groups from one group to the next, with Sport Experience Group 1 (Non-Athletes) having the largest amount of spread and Sport Experience Group 3 (Elite Athletes) having the least amount of spread. Analyses that looked at interactions between participant group and story type on response patterns resulted in non-significant interaction terms, due to the large number of categories and the multilevel nature of the questions. However, as shown in Table 13, there was a clear trend in the descriptive data that showed Sport Experience Group 3 (Elite Athletes) as more likely to agree with the hard push in the sport training story, with as many as 90% of the Elite Athletes giving an "alright" or "mixed" response to the rules contingency question within that story, as compared to 63% and 48% for Non-Athletes and Moderate Athletes, respectively. Therefore, although IRT showed no significant difference overall across the three participant groups, there does appear to be a potentially meaningful difference in the way Elite Athletes thought about and evaluated the sport training situation, as compared to the other two groups with less experience with contact sports. This difference may have to do with different interpretations of actions within the sport context that are due to prior sport experience. Therefore, a potential reason behind this difference for the sport training question is fleshed out using qualitative data and then further discussed in the Discussion.

Demographic characteristics: some unexpected findings regarding sex. Particularly since the results of previous research have had implications for people of different demographic groups, such as males and participants of color, this study analyzed differences in response patterns by sex, race, and class. Additionally, looking at these demographic categories is useful in determining if factors other than previous sport experience impact one's orientation to hard pushing. The assumption was that these characteristics would matter much less, while simultaneously acknowledging that people from different demographic groups may have different ways of experiencing the world.

Sex. Collapsing the three sport experience groups and using a two sample t-test to look at participants by sex revealed significant differences in the mean person estimates between males and females ($t(107) = 2.578$, $p = .005$). The mean person estimate for females was -0.326 and the mean person estimate for males was 0.339. Males have a higher estimate indicating that they were more likely to agree to acts of hard pushing than females. Figure 5 displays the spread of mean participant estimates by sex.

Figure 5
Box Plot of the Mean Participant Estimate Distributions by Sex



A two-way ANOVA was run to look at the effect of sex and sport experience group on mean person estimates. Results identified a statistically significant interaction between the effects of sex and sport experience group, ($F(2, 103) = 7.47$, $p = 0.01$). Tukey's HSD was performed to determine where the significant differences existed across the subgroups. Two groups met criteria for statistically significant differences. Females in the Non-Athlete group (Sport Experience Group 1) were significantly different than males in the Non-Athlete group ($M_{diff} = -1.675$, $p = 0.003$) with males having a higher mean person estimate, meaning they were more likely to approve of the acts of pushing than the females. Females in the Non-Athlete group (Sport Experience Group 1) also were significantly different than females in the Elite Athlete group (Sport Experience Group 3; $M_{diff} = 1.358$, $p = 0.03$), with females in the Elite Athlete group having a higher mean person estimate, meaning they were more likely to approve of the acts of pushing than the females in the Non-Athlete group. Figures 6 and 7 provide two illustrations of the spread of mean person estimates by sex and sport participant group.

Figure 6
Box Plot of Mean Participant Estimates by Sex and Sport Experience Group

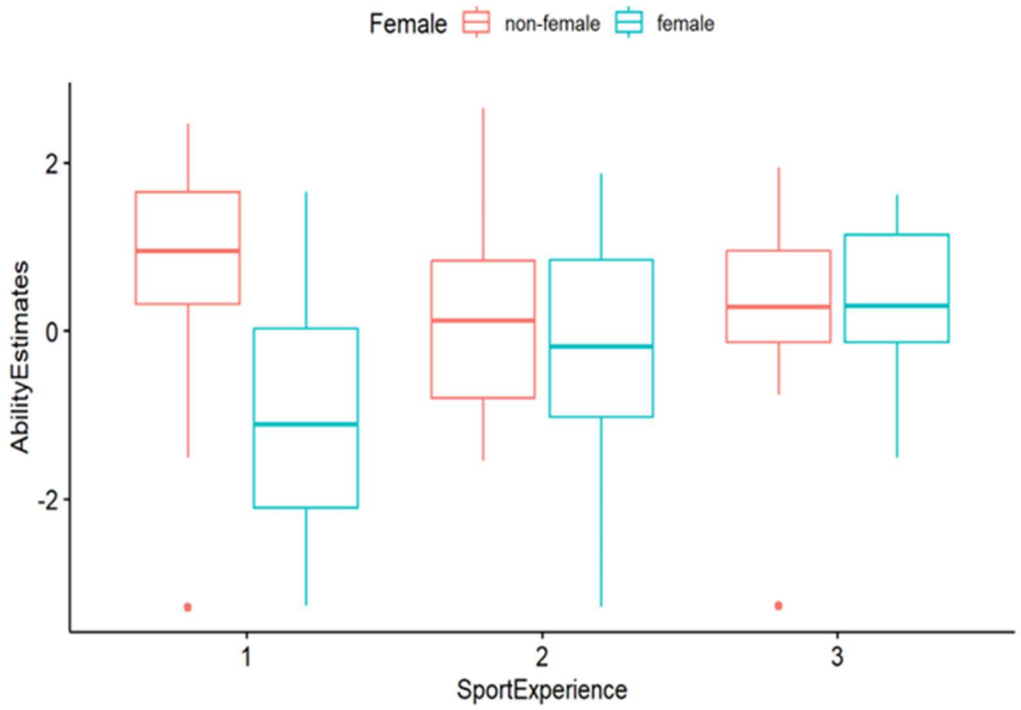
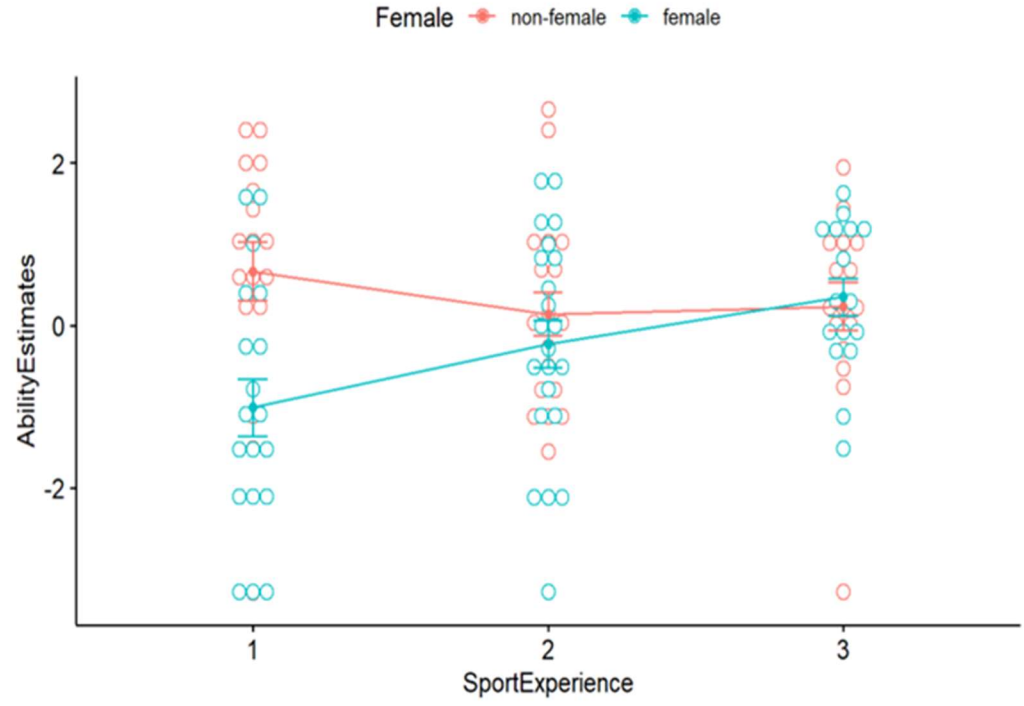


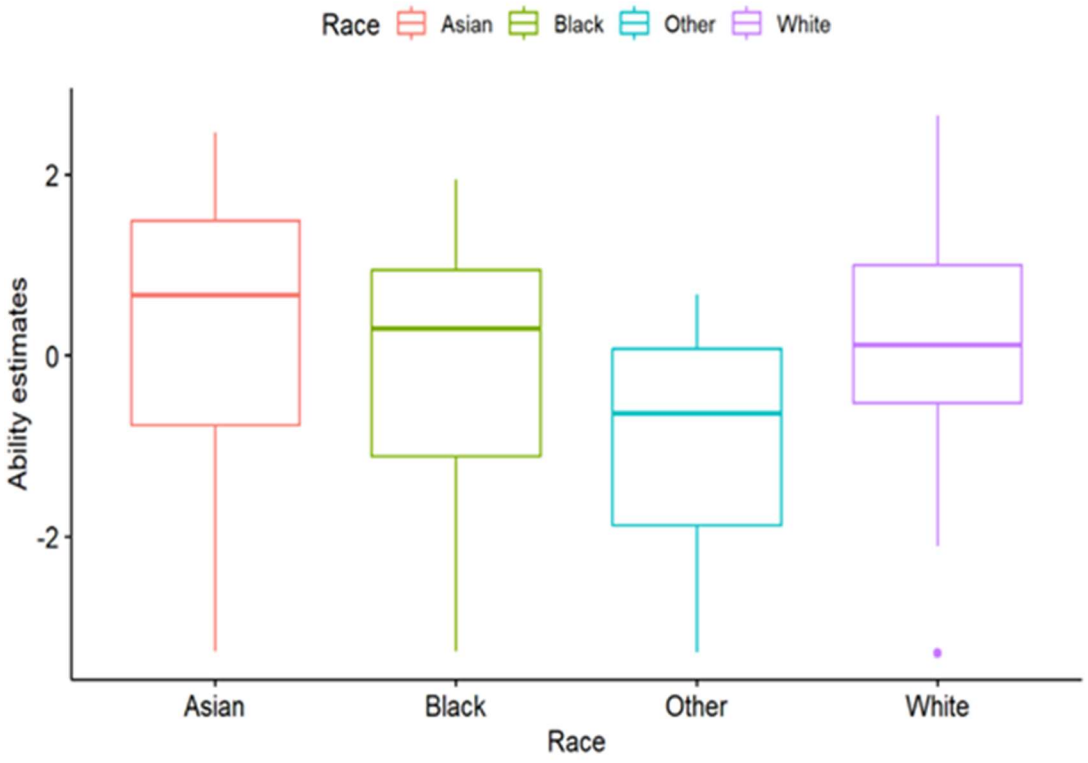
Figure 7
Scatter Plot of Mean Person Estimates by Sex and Sport Experience Group



As depicted in Figure 7, participant estimates for males and females gradually converge as the sport experience groups increase in level of experience. This was an unexpected finding.

Racial groups. The effect of race on mean participant estimates was analyzed using ANOVA. Participants were divided into four groups by their self-identified race: Black, White, Asian, and Other. Results showed that significant differences exist across racial groups, ($F(3, 105) = 2.77$, $p = .04$). Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons of means revealed significance for only one pair of groups. The mean participant estimate for Asian participants was significantly different from the mean participant estimate for Other participants, ($M_{diff} = -1.371$, $p = .02$), with Asian participants exhibiting a higher mean participant estimate (i.e., they were more likely to approve of the hard push across the items) than Other participants. It should be noted that the "Other" group had the smallest n, making up only 9.2% of the participants, whereas the three other demographic groups each had roughly 30% of the participants and this difference could impact the significance of these findings, so take the finding with caution. Figure 8 provides a visual of the distribution of mean participant estimates for race.

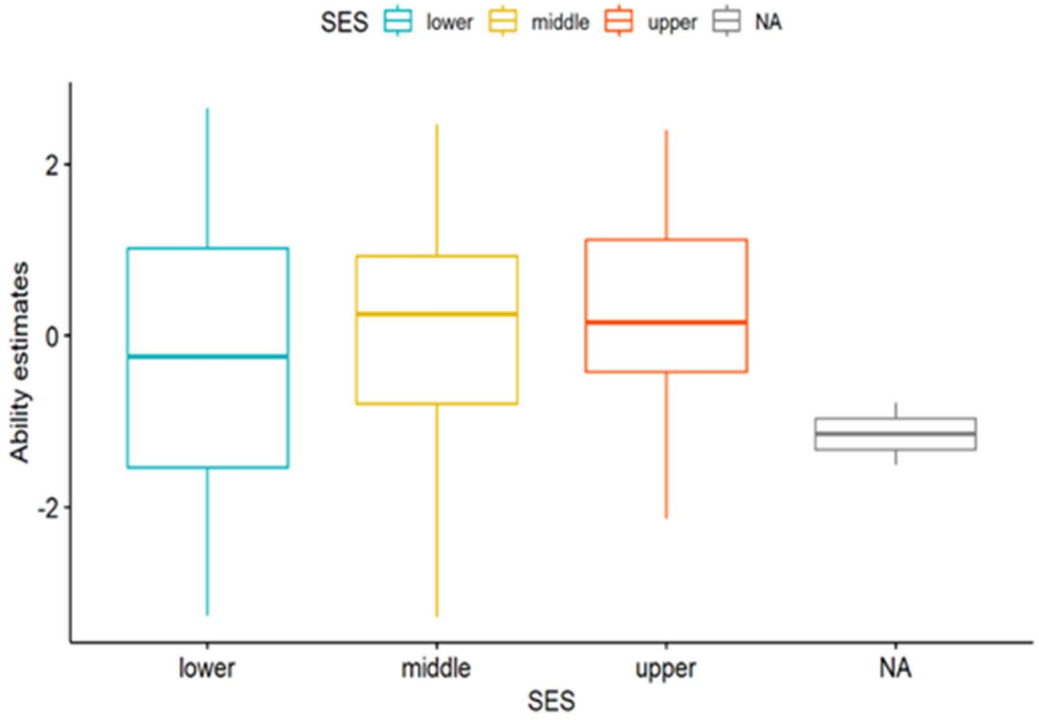
Figure 8
Mean Participant Estimates by Race



Socioeconomic status. The effect of socioeconomic status on mean participant estimates was analyzed using ANOVAs. Participants were categorized into low, middle, or upper status based on which class they self-identified as. Results from the ANOVA and Tukey's post-hoc analyses revealed no significant differences based on socioeconomic status, ($F(2, 104) = 1.27$, p

= .28). Figure 9 shows the box plot of the mean participant estimates across socioeconomic groups.

Figure 9
Box Plot of Mean Participant Estimates Based on Socioeconomic Status



Justifications

Justifications, or the reasons participants gave for their approval or disapproval of the act of hard pushing, were analyzed as well, as they give further information into ways individuals make decisions about aggression. Unlike previous studies that only captured the frequencies of approval or disapproval, the present study examined the reasoning behind these evaluations. Because this dissertation proposes that it is necessary to understand the meaning-making of individuals in order to accurately interpret what each "alright" or "not alright" means in terms of the larger constructs of moral decision-making and development, justifications are seen as an essential component to the analysis and, thus, are listed below using descriptive statistics. In this type of research, it is not uncommon to have several justification types used frequently for one set of questions (e.g., the provocation stories) but used sparingly or not at all during other sets of questions (e.g., the non-sport stories). This makes statistical comparisons of justifications across items challenging, and, thus, only descriptive statistics are shown here. While significant differences cannot be drawn from this method, the descriptive statistics efficiently illustrate differences and similarities in the proportional use of justifications.

Prior to tallying frequencies, justifications were coded at the domain (moral, conventional, personal, etc.) and subdomain levels for each of the baseline questions in the general and contextualized assessments (using the coding system described in Table 5 of the

Methods). Coding procedures limited each participant to one justification per evaluation, unless a participant gave a mixed evaluation, in which case the participant was allowed one justification for their "alright" sentiment and one justification for their "not alright" sentiment. When this happened, the total N was increased in determining the frequency to account for the extra number of justifications. There were occasions when participants spontaneously gave multiple reasons for their "not alright" or "alright" evaluation of the hard push. In these instances, the researcher used probing questions to determine which justification was the primary line of reasoning.

Notably, justifications for the contingency questions were not included in the analysis in this phase of the research project, as the contingency questions were seen as second-layer items used to clarify the core of an individual's approval or disapproval of the act of pushing and elicit different features of the social environment that might motivate changes in the approval or disapproval of the act. For the purposes of this study, participant evaluations (without justifications) of the contingency questions were sufficient to address the research questions, though these justifications may be explored in a subsequent study.

Justifications for the baseline abstract questions. As stated in the Methods, the two abstract baseline questions asked participants, "Is it alright to hit and cause somebody pain when unprovoked?" and "When playing a sport like basketball or baseball, is it alright to hit and cause somebody pain when unprovoked?". It will be recalled that 100% of participants responded that it was "not alright" for the first question, whereas only 64% of participants responded similarly for the second, often choosing a "mixed" response instead. For the first abstract question with 100% disapproval, participants leaned heavily (82.6% frequency) on justifications in the moral domain, particularly appeals to concerns over the welfare of others. This trend was consistent across three participant groups. These data can be found in Table 14.

For the sport-related abstract baseline question, participants split their reasoning between the moral and conventional domains (39.2% and 57.1%, respectively). This makes sense when understood in the context of participant rationales. For many participants, the welfare of other players in sports was an important concern (hence the use of justifications in the moral domain) so it was not alright to intentionally cause someone harm in sports. At the same time, however, participants understood that the activities of sport often involved physical contact where injury was sometimes incidental and that this was a natural – "alright" – part of the game (hence the use of the "spirit of the game" subdomain justification). Because the intention of the pain-causing act was ambiguous in this abstract question, participants often gave a "mixed" evaluation (30.3%), giving a moral justification to support ways it was not alright and giving a conventional justification to support ways it was alright.

It should be noted that the frequencies in the tables do not specify which evaluation each justification type is associated with, as each justification type could be used in support of an "alright" or "not alright" response. Thus, for the purposes of this study, it was more important to focus on what the individual was prioritizing in their decision-making, regardless of their evaluation. This is mentioned in order to appropriately interpret the frequencies. While 57.1% of participants relied on conventional justifications for their evaluation of the above question and those with mixed responses often used a conventional justification to discuss the natural play of

some games, there were other participants who used conventional justifications to disapprove of the hard pushing. For instance, some argued that sports like basketball are about putting a ball in a basket and not about pushing into people, and, thus, such pushing does not belong there. This type of response would also have been coded as "spirit of the game" under the conventional domain.

Like the non-sport abstract question, all three participant groups followed similar justification trends. The difference in the justification types between the sport and non-sport baseline abstract questions points to potential ways context itself changes the interpretation of a so-called "aggressive" act and, therefore, the ways individuals reason and make decisions about it.

Table 14
Percentages of Justifications Used in the Baseline Question across the General Assessment

	Non-Sport				Sport			
Justification	Non-Ath	Mod	Elite	*Total*	Non-Ath	Mod	Elite	*Total*
Moral (Domain)	*83.3*	*82.9*	*81.3*	*82.6*	*45.2*	*32.1*	*45.0*	*39.2*
Cat wrong	11.1	17.1	25.0	*17.3*	6.4	5.7	10.0	*7.1*
Welfare	58.3	24.4	28.1	*36.7*	27.7	18.9	30.0	*25.0*
Fair	13.9	31.7	15.6	*21.1*	8.5	5.7	2.5	*5.7*
Rights	0	9.8	12.5	*7.3*	0	1.9	2.5	*1.4*
Conventional	*8.3*	*9.8*	*12.5*	*10.1*	*55.4*	*62.3*	*50.0*	*57.1*
Rules	8.3	7.3	3.1	*6.4*	4.3	9.4	2.5	*5.7*
Norms	0	2.4	9.4	*3.7*	6.4	0	0	*2.1*
Authority	0	0	0	*0*	0	0	0	*0*
Spirit of Game	0	0	0	*0*	44.7	52.8	47.5	*48.6*
Personal	*2.8*	*0*	*0*	*1.0*	*0*	*1.9*	*0*	*1.0*
Choice	0	0	0	*0*	0	0	0	*0*
Self-Orient	2.8	0	0	*1.0*	0	1.9	0	*1.0*
Pragmatic	*5.5*	*4.9*	*6.2*	*5.5*	*2.1*	*1.9*	*2.5*	*2.1*
Pragmatic	0	0	3.1	*1.0*	0	1.9	2.5	*1.4*
Unnecessary	5.5	4.9	3.1	*4.5*	2.1	0	0	*1.0*
Unelaborated	*0*	*2.4*	*0*	*1.0*	*0*	*1.9*	*0*	*1.0*
Unelaborated	0	2.4	0	*1.0*	0	1.9	0	*1.0*

Justifications for the baseline contextualized questions. Because no significant differences were found between the three sport experience groups in their overall evaluation styles of the hard pushing depicted in the interview (as shown in the previous analyses), justifications for the contextualized stories were not examined at the group level. Table 15 lists the frequency of justifications for all participants across the baseline questions of the six contextualized stories.

The first thing to notice is that justification patterns varied based on the story type and context. For instance, justifications in the moral domain were used frequently in the provoked situations (72.7% in the non-sport context and 69.4% in the sport context), but much less frequently in the training situations (22.8% and 14.0%, respectively). Similarly, the personal domain and appeals to personal choice were used heavily in the two training situations (53.5% in non-sport and 46.8% in sport) but hardly used at all in responses to the other situations. This is in-line with the hypothesis that people take into consideration multiple aspects of their social environment when making moral decisions and, thus, they are likely to alter the aspects they prioritize in their reasoning when these aspects change.

Table 15
Percentages of Justifications Used in the Baseline Question across Contextualized Stories

	Non-Sport				Sport			
Justification	Unprovoked	Provoked	Training	*Total*	Unprovoked	Provoked	Training	*Total*
Moral (Domain)	*65.1*	*72.7*	*22.8*	*53.5*	*50.5*	*69.4*	*14.0*	*44.6*
Cat. wrong	15.6	18.2	2.6	*12.1*	11.9	18.9	0	*10.3*
Welfare	28.4	23.6	17.5	*23.2*	26.6	28.9	11.5	*22.3*
Fair	18.3	26.4	1.8	*15.5*	11.0	21.6	1.8	*11.5*
Rights	2.8	5.5	1.0	*3.1*	1.8	0	1.0	*0.9*
Conventional	*27.5*	*4.5*	*7.1*	*39.1*	*28.4*	*18.9*	*25.0*	*24.1*
Rules	1.8	2.7	1.8	*2.1*	6.4	8.1	1.8	*5.4*
Norms	1.8	1.8	5.3	*3.0*	0	0	18.8	*6.3*
Authority	0	0	0	*0*	0	0	0	*0*
Spirit of Game	23.9	0	0	*0*	21.1	10.8	4.4	*5.8*
Personal	*3.7*	*10.0*	*53.5*	*22.4*	*6.4*	*2.7*	*46.8*	*18.6*
Choice	1.0	0	53.5	*18.2*	0	0	46.0	*15.3*
Self-Orient	2.8	10.0	0	*4.3*	6.4	2.7	1.0	*3.4*
Pragmatic	*3.7*	*10.0*	*16.6*	*10.1*	*12.8*	*9.0*	*14.1*	*12.0*
Pragmatic	1.0	8.2	14.0	*7.7*	1.8	9.0	14.1	*8.3*
Unnecessary	2.8	1.8	2.6	*2.4*	11.0	0	0	*3.6*
Unelaborated	*0*	*2.7*	*0*	*0.9*	*1.8*	*0*	*0*	*0.6*
Unelaborated	0	2.7	0	0.9	1.8	0	0	*0.6*

The unprovoked situations. The unprovoked situations in both contexts yielded similar patterns of justifications. The majority of participants prioritized moral reasons – such as fairness, welfare, or rights – in their judgments for or against the act of pushing, roughly a quarter of participants prioritized conventional aspects such as the spirit of the game (i.e., "an academic competition has nothing to do with physicality" or "pushing is part of the nature of the sport"), and the rest offered personal or pragmatic reasons. The largest difference in justifications appeared in the use of pragmatic reasons, with participants pointing to pragmatic concerns 12.8% of the time in the sport context and only 3.7% in the non-sport context. This makes sense, however, when listening to participant rationales. The unprovoked condition in the non-sport situation involved an academic competition. Participants were quick to note that pushing

someone had nothing to do with the goals of the academic competition, so rather than thinking about the effectiveness of pushing in this instance, their reasoning focused on other aspects that were more salient, such as the potential for harm. Whereas, in the sport context, the situation involved a basketball game, which inherently involves physicality. Participants, therefore, were more likely to consider ways pushing may or may not be effective to achieve one's goals in that context, given that it conceivably could benefit the person doing the pushing.

The provoked situations. Context seemed to make a difference in the types of reasoning used in response to the provoked stories. While the majority of participants based their decisions on moral reasons across the two contexts (72.7% in non-sport and 69.4% in sport), participants appeared to prioritize personal and conventional matters differently between the sport and non-sport iterations of the situation. As a reminder, the provoked stories involved a person on the street or in a basketball game who was heckling the main character and blocking them from achieving a desired goal. The character pushed this person to the ground with the intention of causing harm. In the non-sport context, 10% of the participants pointed to justifications in the personal domain and 4.5% in the conventional domain. In the sport context, however, the relationship was switched with 18.9% of participants choosing reasons in the conventional domain and only 2.7% choosing reasons in the personal domain. Again, participants' interpretations of the two situations, including the consideration of context, helps explain why this difference might exist. In the sport context, people tended to focus on the aims and purposes of the game and identified the feud going on between the two players as outside the bounds of the game, thus relying on features like rules and the spirit of the game in their reasoning. Furthermore, for individuals who have played sports before, there was knowledge about "sportspersonship" and the ability to maintain composure in the face of frustration and trash-taking, as a means of proving oneself as a better athlete, in-line with the integrity of the game. Similar boundaries or notions of behavioral norms like "sportspersonship" did not come up as much for participants when they thought about the non-sport context (a city neighborhood), and thus they reflected more on personal aims and prioritized less conventional concerns. This goes against conclusions of previous researchers who maintained that sport as a context motivates greater egocentrism and concerns for personal gain, as the data here showed that participants prioritized personal aims less in the sport context than in the non-sport context.

Although this study did not fully analyze the contingency questions, there is an important side-note regarding the use of the personal domain in the provocation stories that is worth mentioning, as it provides details about the ways elite athletes in particular interpret and make-meaning around certain instances of hard pushing that are not about a desire to cause serious harm to another person. In the physical provocation contingency question in the sport context (i.e., if the player gave the character a hard push first in a previous play, would it be alright or not alright for the character to give this player a hard push during the next play?), the Elite Athlete group approved of a hard push in this condition more so than the other two groups (34.4% versus 19.4% and 24.4%). In this instance, there was a different type of appeal to personal concerns, in the sense that elite athletes often spoke of the importance of not appearing as though you can be "punked" or walked over in a game. This reasoning, while ultimately personal, also contained elements of pragmatic reasoning (if people think they can walk over you in the game, they will target you, which will make the game harder for you), as well as conventional concerns (the game needs to be played with integrity, and if other players think they can walk over you, the

game negatively changes). Therefore, the reasoning goes: a player knocks you down, you show the player that you are not willing to be walked over so you knock that player down, and then the playing field is reset to even, and the game can go on being played as the game should be. A more detailed analysis of participant explanations can be found in the Discussion chapter.

The training situations. Justifications for the training situations did not follow the same justification patterns as the other two story types. Whereas the previous story types saw moral justifications as the primary line of reasoning, the training situations showed more use of the personal domain (53.5% in non-sport and 46.8% in sport) and much less use of the moral domain (22.8% in non-sport and 14% in sport). In the training situations, participants also pointed to pragmatic rationales more so (16% in non-sport and 14.1% in sport) than in any other situation, as well as the norms of the social environment (5.3% in non-sport and 18.8% in sport). These differences likely were due to two important features: 1.) In the training situations, the hard push was done with the intention of "toughening up" an individual to prepare them for future experiences in a rough environment, as opposed to the intention of harm as in the unprovoked and provoked situations (this appeared to move participants' attention away from moral concerns since the intention of the pusher was good and toward conventional reasons, as they considered the rough nature of the character's environment), and 2.) The individual receiving the pushes in the training situations said they did not want to be pushed even though they might benefit from it, which was not the case in the unprovoked and provoked situations (this appeared to be a salient feature, shifting participants' foci to personal concerns, such as the importance of having personal choice in matters over one's own body). What is interesting about this last point, is that participants were not necessarily saying the act of pushing was wrong in this situation. Rather, they were saying that an individual should have a say in whether or not they participate in events that affect their body and, thus, because the individuals in the situations did not want to be pushed, they should not have been pushed.

According to the IRT analyses, the three sport experience groups did not show significant differences from each other in terms of mean person estimates, or the number of total times people in each group disapproved of the act of hard pushing across the interview items. As noted in an earlier section, however, descriptive statistics did suggest that Elite Athletes approved of the act of hard pushing when it was done in a sport training situation with the intention of preparing a teammate a noticeable amount more than the two other groups. For instance, 90.1% of the Elite Athlete group determined that the hard push in the sport training situation was alright, particularly if hard pushing was allowed in the rules, whereas only 63.9% of the Non-Athletes and 48.8% of the moderate, non-contact sport athletes said it was alright. This is an interesting difference to explore, since looking at the types of justifications that Elite Athletes gave in their responses to the sport training situation and contrasting it to that of the other two groups may provide explanations for their differences in approval for this type of hard push. Additionally, different patterns of justifications across groups may also indicate differences in the ways each of the groups makes sense of the situation, potentially suggesting that there might be something about extensive sport experience in similar environments that allow elite athletes to interpret the actions of the story differently than those who do not know the context as intimately. Table 16 breaks down the frequency and types of justifications used by each sport experience group for the Baseline and the Rules contingency questions for the sport training story.

Table 16
Percentages of Justifications by Domain and Subdomain Used in the Sport Training Situation for the Baseline and Rules Contingency Questions

	Baseline				Rules Contingency			
Justification	Non-Ath	Mod	Elite	*Total*	Non-Ath	Mod	Elite	*Total*
Moral (Domain)	8.1	15.9	18.8	*14.0*	13.2	17.1	3.1	*11.7*
Cat. wrong	0	0	0	*0*	2.6	0	0	*1.0*
Welfare	8.1	11.4	15.6	*11.5*	10.5	14.6	3.1	*9.9*
Fair	0	4.5	0	*1.8*	0	2.4	0	*1.0*
Rights	0	0	3.1	*1.0*	0	0	0	*0*
Conventional	16.2	34.1	21.9	*25.0*	26.3	17.1	37.5	*26.1*
Rules	5.4	0	0	*1.8*	7.9	9.8	15.6	*10.8*
Norms	10.8	27.3	12.5	*18.8*	7.9	2.4	3.1	*4.5*
Authority	0	0	0	*0*	0	0	0	*0*
Spirit of Game	0	6.8	6.3	*4.4*	10.5	4.9	18.8	*10.8*
Personal	64.9	45.5	28.1	*46.8*	44.7	43.4	21.9	*37.8*
Choice	64.9	45.5	25.0	*46.0*	44.7	43.4	21.9	*37.8*
Self-Orient	0	0	3.1	*1.0*	0	0	0	*0*
Pragmatic	10.8	4.5	31.3	*14.1*	15.8	19.5	37.5	*23.4*
Pragmatic	10.8	4.5	31.3	*14.1*	15.8	19.5	37.5	*23.4*
Unnecessary	0	0	0	*0*	0	0	0	*0*
Unelaborated	0	0	0	*0*	0	2.4	0	*1.0*
Unelaborated	0	0	0	*0*	0	2.4	0	*1.0*

While the non-athletes and the moderate non-contact-sport athletes tended to prioritize personal choice (i.e., “the player said they did not like it and did not want to be pushed”) in their justifications, the elite athletes focused more on conventional and pragmatic reasons, such as “if that is the way the game is played, the player has to prepare for it and be able to take it”. Once again, the data contrasts with the conclusions of previous studies that suggest athletes prioritize personal concerns in their decision-making. Here, the elite athlete group gave less priority to personal preferences in favor of larger group functioning and pragmatic needs. As will be illustrated further in the following section, many elite athletes joked about the many unpleasant activities they have to do in practice in order to improve as athletes. There appeared to be a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgment by elite athletes that the road to success in sports is hard, so instances like the one depicted in this training situation brushed off them as just a normal part of being an elite athlete, whereas those with less sport experience were less accepting of the idea that one might have to do things they do not like in the course of training. This is not to say elite athletes do not value personal choice, however. Many elite athletes gave clear nods to personal agency, while also balancing this personal agency with the need to abide by the norms and aims of the sport environment. In their responses, elite athletes often pointed to the fact that the character chose to play that sport and chose to play on that team and, thus, should know what to

expect in terms of the physical nature of the training. For these athletes, remaining on the court meant agreeing to the terms of the game. If the player did not like the pushing, it was the player's duty to quit, not the team's duty to bend their practices to the whims of the player.

Summary of Findings

Contextual elements. Overall Non-Athletes, Moderate Athletes, and Elite Athletes alike disapproved of hard pushing, particularly when it was clear that the hard push was done with the intention to cause harm to someone else. Central findings of the quantitative analysis of the evaluations revealed that both the broad context (sport or non-sport) and situation type (unprovoked, provoked, or training) were taken into consideration in participants' evaluations of the hard push. The sport context was associated with an increase in approval of the hard push but only in the abstract assessment and when the hard push was done for the purpose of training someone. Otherwise, the statistics showed no significant differences related to context when details like the intention behind the hard push were given for the situation. For this reason, there can be no general conclusion that the sport context in and of itself motivates people to approve of potentially aggressive acts like a hard push, which is contrary to the claims of researchers like Eitzen (2009), Messner, (1992), and Shields, Funk, and Bredemeier (2016) mentioned in the Introduction chapter.

Though there were times when the sport context did elicit more approval of hard pushing than the non-sport context (such as in the training situation), this appeared to be due to factors such as pragmatic and conventional concerns related to sport that make the intention of the pushing more benign, as opposed to a willingness to harm others. This was illustrated by the analysis of the justifications. The majority of participants the majority of the time referenced moral concerns for the welfare of others as justification for their disapproval of hard pushing in either context, giving evidence that athletes (and others) continue to stay engaged with their moral sensibilities within the sport context. The occasions when there was more approval of hard pushing in the sport context than the non-sport context (e.g., in the abstract assessment and in the sport training situation), participant justifications focused more on conventional concerns such as the rules and spirit of the game that make pushing under certain circumstances an agreed-upon part of the activity. Again, this occurred only when there was a possibility that the push was done without the intention of harm. How participants made sense of context is further unpacked in the following chapter providing a qualitative analysis of the data.

The sport training situation was the situation where participants showed the most approval of hard pushing. On the contingency level, the rules contingency question that asked if the push was alright if pushing was allowed in the rules was the contingency that drew the most approval out of all the other contingency question types, according to the descriptive statistics and the Wright Map. If moral disengagement or bracketed morality were correct, the results should show increased approval of pushing across all of the contingencies and situation types in the sport context. Instead, the results showed increased approval only when the intention of the push was for the purpose of training an individual, the consequences of the push were not severe, and the push was written into the rules of the activity, implying that participants knew what they were signing up for before they participated. This is shown in the switch to justification types

that focus on personal choice and the pragmatic benefits of abiding by the rules and norms of the activity.

Person elements. In terms of participant groups, the quantitative results showed no overall significant differences in the approval of hard pushing across the three groups. This is contrary to previous findings that have found that athletes approve of things like aggression more so than their non-athlete peers. There was one instance, however, when Elite Athletes approved of hard pushing more so than the other two groups and that was in the sport training situation, where 90% of Elite Athletes approved of hard pushing for the purpose of training, particularly if pushing was allowed in the rules. Interestingly, justifications in the personal domain, such as egocentric concerns for one's own goals, were used less frequently by Elite Athletes than the other sport experience groups, in the sport training situation – the situation in which Elite Athletes approved of hard pushing more than the other groups. These results contradict the conclusions of previous studies that suggest athletes are more likely to approve of aggressive acts in sport due to a focus on egocentric concerns (Bredemeier & Shields, 1995).

There was a significant difference in response patterns between males and females, with males approving of hard pushing more than females. There also was an interaction between sex and sport experience, resulting in a significant difference in response patterns between females in the Non-Athlete group and females in the Elite Athlete group, with females in the Elite Athlete group approving of hard pushing more than those in the Non-Athlete group. Another interesting finding related to sex and sport experience was that there was decreasing spread in the differences in response patterns between males and females as sport experience increased. This could be due to the ways sport experience gives people similar ways of interpreting actions in the sport context and is discussed further in the Discussion chapter. There were no significant differences across socio-economic groups and, for the most part, there were no significant differences in the response patterns across racial groups, except one between those who identify as Asian and those who identify as Other, though more research is needed here. The general lack of difference between racial groups increases the argument in this dissertation that many athletes of color have been wrongfully labeled as aggressive and less morally mature in previous research because of their association with high-contact sports.

Analyzing the justifications helps make sense of the quantitative findings, as they provide insights into the types of reasoning participants were using when making decisions about the acts of physical force in the research interview. This largely still only gives a surface level understanding of the ways people make sense of context. Therefore, this dissertation does not stop the analysis here and continues in the following chapter with a qualitative analysis of the words of athletes to get a better understanding of the ways sport experience impacts one's interpretation of the social environment, particularly in sport, and how this then relates to one's perception of and decisions about aggression and the use of physical force.

Chapter 5: Results – Qualitative Analysis

The results of the study so far hint at a rich and complex process of reasoning about aggression, especially within the context of sport. The quantitative data, even with the use of justifications, however, is limited in what it can say about the ways individuals make sense of their environments and the ways that environments themselves may transform the meaning of certain actions. By using the words and thoughts of elite contact-sport athletes, the following section expands on the quantitative data presented in the previous chapter to paint a more detailed picture of this complex reasoning process, to better locate the findings in context, and to provide a more accurate interpretation of the ways athletes make sense of both context and aggression.

Guided by the research questions, this section is organized to first examine how athletes consider features of context -- including consent, intention, and safety – in their decision-making about heavy physical contact. It then looks at athletes' reflections on their own sport histories and how these experiences do and do not influence their interpretations of actions within sport, including what it means to push someone. The words analyzed in this chapter are the responses participants gave to the questions listed in the interview protocol. Though these questions never asked participants to talk about their own personal experiences, many participants spontaneously shared their experiences in an effort to describe their understanding of the situations in the interview and provide a background for the rationales behind their evaluations of those situations. Intuitively, athletes seemed to know that certain acts of physical force and the approval or disapproval of those acts could not be accurately understood in a vacuum and, thus, they provided often deep explanations of the context as well as histories of play in order to situate their responses. As a researcher, it is important to listen to this wisdom. Therefore, this research includes the voices and explanations of athletes in order to best capture what it means when an athlete approves or disapproves of an act of heavy physical contact.

How do differences between the sport and non-sport contexts factor into moral decision-making about harm?

While the quantitative data showed more allowances for "aggressive" acts, such as a hard push that knocks someone to the ground, in the sport context than in the non-sport context, the numbers do not confirm the conclusions of previous researchers that suggest, as a whole, the sport arena motivates a lack of concern for other people's welfare. The largest difference in positive judgments of a hard push between the two contexts occurred in the abstract portion of the assessment, where the intention of the act was ambiguous. Ambiguity around the intention of the pain-causing act naturally has less of an impact on everyday life settings, as it is harder to imagine a situation in which someone would hit or push someone else for a reason other than to cause harm. For the sport context, however, not knowing the intention of the hit or push had a bigger impact, in the sense that many individuals could imagine instances in a sport competition when pushing someone to the ground was an appropriate part of the game. Therefore, the increase in positive judgments of the hard push in the sport setting in the general assessment had less to do with a desire to cause pain or risk other people's welfare to achieve one's goals and more to do with individuals following the norms and rules of a sport that everyone willingly signed up to play. While it is possible to take a cynical stance and suggest that what was happening here was that individuals were relying on the norms of the environment to dictate

what was right and wrong in a way that subverted moral aptitude (in line with moral disengagement or bracketed morality), listening to the actual words of athletes as they described their reasoning about experiences of pain and harm in the sport context painted a very different picture – one that illustrated a fully intact, unchanged ability to think about moral issues while coordinating other salient features of the social environment.

To begin, athletes – particularly elite ones – contrasted the physical purposes of sport with that of the non-physical nature of most other life activities, which makes sport unique in its expectations for the potential of pain and injury. For instance, a male lacrosse player reflected on the morally benign nature of painful – sometimes harmful – experiences in sport:

> If it were accidental, I mean like, it's sports, you know – I've sprained my ankle, I've gotten shoved, I've gotten elbowed, you know? I mean, I get it. I'm a lacrosse goalie, like, I get hit with lacrosse balls every single day and that causes me pain, but I know it's not intentional, and I think, it's just the nature of the game and any sport you play; you're gonna get hurt. You're gonna get bumps, bruises, so I don't know if that's okay or not? But, it's accidental, so…

The importance of intention. An important aspect of this lacrosse player's reasoning is the identification of intentionality as a determining factor in the moral acceptability of an act. There is the implication here that it is alright if a person hurls a lacrosse ball at this goalie's head, potentially risking injury to the goalie, if they are trying to score a goal, but it certainly would not be alright to hurl the same lacrosse ball at this goalie's head if the intention was to harm the goalie. The importance of intentionality is echoed by many athletes, including this elite female lacrosse player as she contemplated why it may sometimes be alright to hit and cause someone pain in a sporting match. She said, "Because there's another motive, I guess. Like, the motive isn't to harm someone; the motive is you're in a sport setting and that is the goal of the game, and sometimes that's just what happens." An elite male soccer player explained the impact of intention on the evaluation of a push another way. He said, "If he's going after him not to go after the ball or something but out of anger because he is insulted and made fun of, then that is wrong. If it is done in the run of the play and it's just a strong push, then that isn't wrong."

Such sentiments are in line with the moral development process Piaget proposes in *The Moral Judgment of the Child*. Piaget (1932/1965) maintains that as children develop, they first use a consequence-based approach to morality (e.g., if Timmy stole a cookie from the plate before dinner even though his mom said not to and Johnny accidentally broke the plate of cookies while carrying it to his mom, young children often judge Johnny's actions as more "wrong", since the consequence of the broken plate is more severe) and then move to an intention-based approach to morality (e.g., Johnny did not mean to break the plate, so his actions are alright, whereas Timmy did mean to break the rules, so his actions are not alright). This intention-based approach to judging moral behavior stays with us through adulthood, according to Piaget, as it is a more adequate way of understanding the spirit of morality and ideal relationships between humans and their social environment.

If it were true that sport provokes a diminished morality in the terms laid out by either bracketed morality or moral disengagement, then intention should not make a difference to athletes in their reasoning about the hard push. In fact, moral disengagement and bracketed morality imply that athletes are intentional in causing other people harm, so we should expect to

see participants approving of the hard push in the situations when the push was done to intentionally cause harm as much as in the situations when the intention of the push was ambiguous or was intended to help someone train for the future. The results of this study did not meet those expectations, however. As shown in the quantitative analysis, participants were far less willing to approve of the push if it was done with the intention of causing harm, even if the rules, norms, a coach's command, or a personal desire to win supported it. The qualitative data – such as the quotes above – solidify the idea that elite athletes do indeed care about the intention behind acts and point to intention as a necessary feature keeping an already physical space under control.

The importance of consent. A further point, which is critical to fully understanding the greater acceptance of physical pain and harm to others in sport, is the notion of informed consent. Participants were more likely to evaluate a hard push as alright in the contextualized situations if it were allowed in the rules (keeping in mind, if the intention was to cause harm, the majority of participants still disapproved of the hard push). The type of justification participants used revealed why, in these contexts, people might be more accepting of physical actions that cause harm when the rules allow it. Rather than leaning on rules to define what is right or wrong, as moral disengagement suggests, participants maintained that if it were in the rules, it was a component of what defined the competition and, therefore, everyone knew about it, expected it, and "signed up" for it. Their reasoning, thus, focused more on personal freedom and the importance of choice. For instance, although participants acknowledged it was "weird" to have a physical component in an academic competition (a non-sport context), they still were more willing to allow the hard push because it was in the official rules, more so than any other contingency question in that situation.

Searle (1969) reflected on this nature of rules when he wrote about constitutive rules, or rules that do not "merely regulate" but "create and define" new sets of behaviors (p. 33). Searle (1969) went on to describe constitutive rules by using the example of football. The rules of football, he wrote, "create the very possibility of playing such [a game]", because the activity of football is "constituted by acting in accordance with (at least a large subset of) the appropriate rules" (p. 34). In other words, the rules make the game. Therefore, if the rules allow some level of hard pushing, hard pushing is woven into the very purposes of the game that make the game the game. The following response from an elite male football player mirrored such sentiments and showed how the constitutive nature of rules go together with personal choice:

> Yea, boxing, or you know football, rugby – hitting is the main objective of the game. Like what I said before, when you step into that space, you kinda sign this waiver; once you step in, you are assuming that risk and are fully knowledgeable about that risk, and the counter of that is that you are also trying to do the same thing to the other person, so I think boxing is a perfect example. There's kind of a mutual assumption of risk and a mutual respect for when you actually do that… Now we can debate the morality of that all day, and you know people do that all the time – whether wrestling and boxing is morally right. The bottom line is that the people that are doing the boxing, are doing it; they are willing. And then the people who are watching are obviously enjoying it, and you kind of assume that risk when you step into it.

Athletes recognized sport as imbued with a level of personal agency and choice that other areas of life did not have. Across these interviews, participants from all groups frequently prioritized

personal choice, suggesting that one's ability to choose to be a part of or not be a part of an activity that impacts their own bodies and desired experiences is important to humans. This is in accordance with Nucci's (1981) identification of the personal domain as a fundamental aspect to psychosocial life and social reasoning. The personal domain, as described by Nucci (1981), is distinct from societal regulations or moral concerns and has to do with social actions "whose import and effects are perceived to be primarily upon the actor rather than other individuals or the societal structure" (p. 114). Examples in the personal domain include one's preferences and goals (for instance, choosing to become a ballet dancer over a soccer player), and autonomy in these areas has been proven necessary to healthy development and wellbeing (Hasebe, Nucci, & Nucci, 2004; Nucci, Hasebe, & Lins-Dyer, 2005), as well as critical for the construction of moral understandings, like rights (Nucci, 1996). One way athletes expressed their recognition of personal choice was in noting differences between the sport and non-sport training situations in the interview. For instance, about the situation involving hard pushing amongst siblings in a family setting, an elite, male rugby player pointed out,

> They can't force someone to join in on that, you know. Like, obviously, this is different from the team [in the sport situation] because Dennis [in the non-sport situation] can't just walk away from his family and find an alternate family. In the team, it's like "Oh, you don't wanna play this sport – fine, go find an alternative sport that caters to you." But he can't find an alternative family that caters to him, right.

This shows a level of tolerance for greater physicality in sport that does not exist for, say, a family context, due to one's ability to choose to be a part of that sport setting. Hard pushing to toughen someone up in sport is alright – as long as it is not out of hand – because everyone there willingly signed up to be there. Individuals do not get to choose their families, however, so it is far less acceptable for, say, siblings to force their younger sibling to toughen up, as the younger sibling had no choice in being put in that situation. The same is true for communities, schools, or countries because people are more bound to these contexts. As such, people may be less approving of rules or circumstances that encourage harm in these settings, and instead prefer measures that protect the welfare of people and society.

As noted above, researchers supporting the theory of moral disengagement in sport have said that athletes have an overreliance on rules to tell them what is right or wrong. Given the data here and the words of the athletes, it is possible that what looked to be a reliance on the rules on the surface was really a deeper understanding of what the rules mean, namely that if a player was playing within the rules and caused harm to another player, it is likely that the player did not intend to cause harm. The rules also do not preclude incidental harm and incidental harm, while unfortunate, is a risk athletes assume when agreeing to play the game. The data from the present study, then, does not support moral disengagement. Rather, it suggests the harm-causing act is transformed into something that no longer has moral salience, because it does not include an intent to harm and the individuals playing chose to play a sport in which such risks exist.

Returning to Searle's (1969) description of constitutive rules, when athletes reference the rules of the game, they often do so with reverence, not because they rely on the rules for their moral compass, but because there is a certain sacredness to the rules for their inherent beauty in creating the game they love. It almost is as if there is an additional layer of morality that is embedded in the sport culture, as players not only consider the welfare of each other but the

welfare of the game, as well. As an example, an elite male basketball player remarked, "You should just play the game. The game is beautiful when it's played in the right way. [Pushing the player down because he is upset] makes the game not as beautiful. The game wasn't meant to be played ugly." Another athlete echoed,

> [Harming someone to win] kinda just ruins the moral integrity of the sport, and to be put in a situation like that isn't fair to either party. I mean, whether or not the player is a crucial part of the other team, I feel like if you are going to win, you want to win on your own accord, not because you had to do something dirty to win.

An elite football player also acknowledged the way the rules upheld the community of athletes who trained hard to play the sport at such a high level. When explaining why he did not think it was alright to hurt someone to win or mete out a personal vendetta in sport, he said, "I'm not gonna try to hurt him. [The other player] worked just as hard as I did to get where he was, so, you know, let's play. If I'm going to beat you, I'll beat you on the court." Many athletes shared a desire to uphold the integrity of the game and the spirit of sportsmanship, as the rules of the game make the sport "beautiful" and as much a collective endeavor as a personal one.

Welfare and choice matter more than rules. To further test the assumption that athletes withhold moral considerations and rely on rules to dictate right action, twice in the interview, participants were asked, "Would this be a good rule, to allow for hard pushing?" Ninety five percent of participants responded that allowing hard pushing that knocks someone to the ground would not be a good rule (these questions were depicted on the Wright Map, but their statistics were not mentioned in the tables of the results section). This was true even for participants who said it was alright for people to engage in the hard pushing if the rules allowed it. In other words, participants were weighing and balancing the constitutive nature of rules (conventional domain), the belief in one's ability to have freedom to choose what sorts of competitions one engages in (personal domain), and the desire to minimize the risk of harm (moral domain). In doing so, most people prioritized welfare and rejected the hard push outright. However, a portion prioritized personal choice, arguing that if they wanted to engage in an activity that involved a greater risk for harm, that was their prerogative, even if the participant felt that the activity itself was not a good idea.

Again, this illustrates that previous studies that stop at the surface level response "it's ok because it is in the rules" may come to the erroneous conclusion that athletes detach from moral concerns and let external factors like rules determine what is morally right and wrong. Whereas, listening to athletes unpack their rationale behind these decisions shows a more complex understanding of the social environment of sport with regular attempts to weigh and balance competing concerns, including moral considerations. As noted previously, this process of weighing and balancing aspects of the social environment when making decisions is called "coordination" (Turiel, 1983). This study hypothesized that participants, including athletes, would show evidence of coordination in their decision-making about potentially harmful acts and would use context to interpret the situation and decide which features of the environment to prioritize. Interestingly, Bredemeier and Shields (1986b) observed, "The complexity of balancing the desire to win, concern for others' welfare, and expectations of peers and coaches was often manifest in their [the athletes'] responses" (p. 263). They too found evidence of

domain coordination in their participants, but their ultimate conclusions did not reflect these complexities.

To further show that athletes are thinking about moral concerns even amidst physical play, notice how two quotes in the last few paragraphs referenced some doubts about the moral nature of sport – or some sports – themselves. The lacrosse goalie pondered, "I don't know if that is ok or not," when talking about getting and giving bumps and bruises in sport, and the football player explicitly mentioned debates about the moral appropriateness of sports like boxing. This is evidence that athletes are critical even about sports they love and participate in. There appears to be a dilemma in sports that can be described as "it is morally alright to choose to participate in a sport like boxing where I might get hurt, but is it morally alright for me to hurt my opponent in that same sport, since now my actions do not just affect my body, they affect someone else's too?" These are not moral failings of athletes, these are dilemmas that society itself has yet to resolve. Indicative of the fact that athletes do indeed think about the welfare of individuals and attempt to solve this dilemma of injury while situated in high contact sports, some of the elite athletes pointed to the ways numerous sports have changed over the years to become safer. The lacrosse goalie from above concluded, "I mean, like for lacrosse, what I know is they keep changing our rules every year to make it safer, so, I think…that should be universal for everyone." Similarly, a male elite basketball player remarked,

> Protecting the athletes is probably one of my biggest concerns. We are seeing more and more rules with football and concussions, more prevented actions for every sport. And, ya know, people say basketball is moving toward a weaker play style because they are trying to do that, but I mean if you can protect the athletes and still uphold the integrity of the game, I think it is good. You don't need to allow more chances for harm, I guess.

The importance of safety and body control. It also is important to make clear that when athletes refer to safety, they are not solely relying on governing bodies to do that for them. Part of the role of an athlete is to engage safely in the game. To this end, when they deliver high levels of physical contact, they do so within boundaries, or, as a few athletes called it, within "the excessive force rule". Contact-sport athletes who have been involved in their sports for many years have an understanding of their bodies and how to wield them in space. As an example, this female elite lacrosse player spoke of the fact that part of one's development as an athlete is to learn the difference between playing hard and playing recklessly. When contemplating the hard push in the situation, she explained, "I would say that is not alright because then she is escalating physicality to a way that is harmful to her and other players. So, that's learning. You have to learn how to control yourself. There is a difference between controlling your physicality and then excessive force." Later, this same athlete described a few aspects that go into this learning process. She continued,

> In lacrosse, when I'm playing defense on someone, you get to know people. And you know your own strength from lifting and playing the game. I know how hard I can go if I am hitting someone – if I am going to knock them over or just stop them from getting past me. So, if you know your own body and your own strength, then you are able to control it.

Other athletes referenced the physics involved during collisions and knowledge of certain circumstances that make it safe or unsafe to hit somebody. In one example, a male elite

basketball player described, “Of course, if the person is in the air and you push this person at full strength, you know that the person is more likely to get hurt and fall some awkward way.” Another male elite basketball player shared similar advice about the location of the hit on the opponent’s body, as well as the crucial difference between athletes and someone walking down the street in their ability to safely manage hits – athletes train for many hours in order to handle rough physical contact; individuals on the street do not. He observed,

> Like, in basketball, you should never do anything around anyone’s knees because if you do something near someone’s knees, you should know that can cause different kinds of injuries…you can’t do that because that actually has huge consequences for people’s careers and stuff. So that’s one thing in basketball, never go for someone’s knees. I think it’s the same thing in football, you never go for someone’s helmet, like above the neck. You never go for that because that’s when guys get crushed; guys die on the field. I think in certain sports you just know what you can and you can’t do. Like if a guy is coming through and I just have my form like this and I just jam him right in his chest, in basketball this isn’t a big deal because it’s big strong guys…Sure if I just went up to someone on the street and jam them in their chest like that, that's just not okay, you know what I’m saying. But in basketball…it’s still okay because it’s just something that the game allows you to do within the boundaries, but going for knees or going for above the shoulders is never okay because that can actually have long term consequences.

As researchers, it is impossible to do justice to the interpretations of athletes’ acceptance of physically hard play, if we do not first understand how they are making sense of the sport context in which that play takes place. When hard pushing is understood in the context of the spirit of the game, the intentions of individuals, the consent of individuals to participate, and the overarching concerns for safety, they take on very different meanings than the deficit-based conclusions previous research has drawn.

To reiterate, the results of the current study did show a higher tendency to approve of a pain-causing act in sport versus non-sport contexts when the intention of the act was ambiguous. The above quotes, however, illustrate that these allowances for potentially harmful actions were not due to a context that begs participants to disengage from their moral centers but were due instead to a recognition that sports are physical, that some sports require more physical contact than others, that efforts are made to play these physical sports as safely as possible, that people willingly choose to play these sports and enjoy them, and that some potentially harmful physical contact is unavoidable and may be deemed appropriate if it makes sense within the rules and procedures of the game and, importantly, is done without the intention of hurting another person. Under these circumstances, a hard push that knocks someone to the ground loses its regular associations to aggression and no longer is interpreted as a moral violation, at least for athletes who know the context well and understand all of these layers embedded in the context. When these circumstances are not met, the push is seen as outside the bounds of a pure sporting endeavor, preventing the transformation of meaning from occurring, and, thus, the push remains interpreted as it would in everyday life settings – an aggressive, immoral act. This explains why the difference in approval of hard pushing between contexts collapses when it is clear that the intention of the hard push is to cause harm or is done out of frustration.

How do different sport histories lend themselves to moral decision-making about harm?

Because there were no significant differences in overall acceptance rates of hard pushing across the three participant groups, it can be concluded that elite, contact-sport athletes were as disapproving of hard pushes done with the intention to cause harm as much as non-athletes. This implies that the moral reasoning of elite contact-sport athletes, at least in the population in this study, was no different than that of participants in groups who have had much less sport experience. There was one place, however, as noted in the descriptive statistics, where elite athletes approved of a hard push more than any other group. This occurred in the sport training situation. It is athletes' responses to this situation that highlight ways that an intimate understanding of the sport environment due to years of experience seems to impact the interpretation and, thus, approval of the hard push in the situation. As a reminder, the sport training scenario involved a team that used hard pushing in practice to help the players prepare for competition. A new player said he/she did not like the hard pushing in practice and asked not to be pushed, but his/her teammate pushed him/her in practice anyway, with the intention of helping him/her train for competition. For some of the questions related to the story, elite athletes gave a 90% approval rate of the act of hard pushing, as compared to 64% and 49% approval rates from the non-athlete and moderate athlete groups, respectively. Again, from the numbers, it might look like athletes are more accepting of aggressive and harmful behavior. However, their reasoning shows the ways their thinking process about the act takes into account moral and other social and personal considerations that change the interpretation of the act.

For instance, to evaluate the hard push in the sport training situation, athletes referenced their own experiences and reflected on how normal it is for training to be hard and involve tough physical contact. An elite female basketball player explained, "This girl is just in the preparation for playing the sport. You are going to do things you don't want to do but that are with the intention of bettering you and so in this case, I think it is alright, because the idea is to better her as a member of the team." Similarly, an elite female lacrosse player detailed the reality of intense physical play when one moves to higher levels of a sport. She describes, "It's a natural thing in any sport. It's like going from high school to college. We hit harder. And we make contact harder. And you have to learn to handle it and live with the physicalness." Another basketball player recalled the necessity of training for such things by sharing, "I've definitely played in leagues like that in NCAA tournaments. The east coast plays a lot rougher and gets away with a lot more stuff. I think my teammates learned that pretty quickly and there was some shoving going on that was not called, so yeah by any means if that's how they play, then you gotta learn to play like that back."

There is a logic to this increased level of physicality in training that makes it easier to accept: it is designed to help, not hurt. Coaches and athletes care a lot about the performance of the team, so it is unlikely that training would involve activities that are actually harmful. Because of this understanding, participants in the Elite Athlete group were more able to promote the tough nature of the practice described in the sport training situation in the interview. It should be noted, though, that they often did so while simultaneously expressing a need to minimize physical contact that was "out of hand". For instance, one male basketball player commented,

> These pushes are intended to help toughen people up. I think that means it's gonna try to help them during the season…obviously if it's out of control that's one

> thing. It's in the course of the team culture…and it's just trying to help people get better, which is how I've done it, so I can understand that. I've been in college basketball programs for 5 years now…I don't think the whole team would be on board with something that was hurting everyone. You know what I'm saying? If you have 14 guys that are on board with it, then it's working...I would also have to trust the leadership because if the leadership is allowing it to happen, then they must think that it has some sort of benefit.

Another male elite athlete reiterated this line between tough physicality that is helpful and physicality that has gone too far. He expressed,

> We need to be in our best form, so we can go and meet these other teams and, obviously, if it goes too far, then it has gone too far. But if you don't fit into that system then maybe you need to find a new system or something, but if everybody else in the program is 'this is helping me and we need to do this to get better' and we all agreed on it and one person comes and says 'no, we can't do that' then they are undermining the integrity of the system that has already been in place.

Lastly, and importantly, athletes lean on the outcomes of similar experiences they have had to judge the hard pushing in this training situation. Underneath the reasoning behind many of the above comments is an allusion to the fact that going through these hard training experiences and extra physicality made them better players. A few noted this explicitly in their responses, like this elite male basketball player. He recounted, "In practice, I get pushed. I'm like a big guy. I'm in the middle of the floor, which I get pushed all the time, and it's taught me to be stronger." In sum, part of the journey to elite athletics involves doing hard things and, in turn, gaining knowledge about ways potentially painful experiences can lead to positive outcomes.

Together, these paragraphs suggest that previous sport experiences in similar settings informed underlying assumptions that athletes held when evaluating the hard push in the sport training situation: 1.) Elite athletes assumed teams were not going to practice in a way that was out of hand, so the level of hard pushing was probably within reason, 2.) Elite athletes understood that training involved doing things one did not want to do, but it was a necessary process to go through, in order to adequately prepare for competition. (Indeed, who wants to run stadiums? Who wants to lift after a three-hour scrimmage? Athletes still have to do it, despite the pain it causes. In fact, some athletes laughed at the character's attempt to get out of the pushing in practice and said, "either find a new sport or suck it up", knowing that sitting out of the hard parts of training is not an option in the elite sport world!), and 3.) Athletes had prior experience with growth coming out of hard physical training and leaned on this when responding to the situation, suggesting that the character in the situation needs to experience the hard pushing to improve as an athlete. This idea that prior experience influences one's future thoughts, feelings, and decisions about similar events is supported by findings by Lagattuta et al. (2018).

In comparison, the majority of participants in the other two participant groups disapproved of the hard push in the sport training situation and gave a justification in the personal domain to support their evaluation, stating that an individual should have a choice in what happens at practice, so others should listen to the character who says he/she does not want to be pushed. This implies a vastly different interpretation of the situation as well as different underlying assumptions about the nature and reality of training, particularly at elite levels. For a concrete illustration, compare these two statements, one from a non-athlete and one from an elite

athlete. The non-athlete argued that if a player does not want to participate in the pushing "now the dynamics of the team are going to have to change", suggesting that the team's style of training should cater to this athlete's wishes. The elite athlete, on the other hand, somewhat flippantly remarked, "It doesn't matter what you like, you're on a team now," suggesting a very different understanding of the realities of team practice where individual preferences typically are not taken into consideration. The differences in reasoning between the groups due to prior sport experience is pretty clear. What is not clear, however, is that this difference is due to different or deficient moralities. As noted above, many of the athletes qualified their statements above to say that if the pushing was too much or was injurious, then that did not belong in training, giving clear evidence that they continue to be concerned about the welfare of others while endorsing tough physical contact.

Overall, these findings about the similarities and differences across participant groups do not implicate sport as having deleterious effects on moral reasoning and, thus, refute the conclusions of previous studies that found athletes to have less mature moral reasoning capabilities than non-athletes. Many of the quotes presented in this discussion highlight the ways that athletes give much attention and priority to moral concerns, such as welfare, when playing their sports, even in situations when there might be strong motivations to do otherwise. Saying that there is no evidence that athletes have different or more deficient moral reasoning capabilities than their non-athlete peers is not the same as saying athletes and non-athletes interpret the sport environment in the same way, however. The qualitative data suggests that there are some ways that different sport histories might be associated with different perspectives on certain aspects of sport, such as physical contact.

Making sense of the pushing itself. When athletes push, what does that push mean to them? By watching games and talking to athletes, it is obvious, that athletes do a lot of pushing, particularly at elite levels. The vast majority of this pushing is not "excessive", as a few athletes pointed out in quotes above in the discussion, but it can be quite hard sometimes, so as to get the attention of another player. Many would consider such moves a form of "aggression" – a word that connotes ill-will and moral delinquency. Given that the results of this study showed that athletes largely disapproved of actions intended to cause harm for reasons related to the welfare of other players and the integrity of the game, it would be interesting to understand how they conceived of these harder-than-normal-but-not-too-hard pushes that others assume are aggressive.

To begin, athletes alluded to this sort of push as a form of communication, used to express a need for respect, establish friendly-but-tough competition with the opponent, or to send a message to another player about the way the game should be played. Athletes touch each other frequently, sometimes gently, sometimes not – always communicating something.

For the most part, these pushes are just ways players engage other players and state their presence. Just watch Steph Curry push away an opponent to create space for a jump shot or Alex Morgan push into a defender while her teammate sets up for a corner kick. These pushes often say, "Hey – I'm not going to make this game easy for you. Let's play!" A female elite basketball player described what this looks like for post players jockeying for position in the paint. She detailed, "Physically, I'm shorter but I'm stronger, and I have to physically move people sometimes, and so it happens that people get bloody noses from an elbow that comes across the

face now and then." She makes sure to include, though, "but you don't turn around and fight them," implying that players know how to interpret the tussling – a way to say, "I'm not going to make this easy!" and not an intentional wish for harm. Does this strong contact cause pain to someone? Probably. It is playful, though, or at least intended to be read in the context of play. This is a game, after all.

This type of communication between players, this negotiation of space, this dance is part of what it means to play a sport at a high level. A male elite soccer player mentioned getting "accidentally tripped" or "accidentally leaned on in the wrong way" as part of this dance. "It's all fine", he concluded. Similarly, a female elite basketball player added, "I push people all the time in my sport. Probably 80% of the time it doesn't even phase them." Getting tripped, pushing people, accidentally giving a bloody nose – in any other setting, these would be reprehensible occurrences. The athletes in this study, however, "aren't phased" and brush off such occurrences as unintentional, unfortunate occurrences that come as part of a beloved dance, or as Gay and Davis (2020) put it, "it's just players working out how to touch one another so that beauty might flourish" (1).

These emotional attributions (e.g., "it doesn't even phase them") in response to hard physical contact may be a key mechanism in the way athletes reason about acts of physical force in the context of sport. Referring back to Arsenio's (2014) work on emotion-event associations, part of the motivation to act in a way that does not harm others is anticipation of the hurt physical and emotional sensations of the other and the resulting strong negative emotions (like guilt) one feels in causing those negative sensations, as well as attachment-based emotional reciprocity, which helps individuals care about the feelings of others, in general. Violating the sanctity of others through the perpetration of harm is what makes aggression a moral transgression, and individuals learn they have broken such boundaries through witnessing the negative responses of the victim. Indeed, Smetana and Ball (2019) found that what makes physical force like hitting or pushing punishable as wrong for children are factors such as poor intention, harm, and the causation of negative emotions for the victim. Similarly, Dahl and Freda (2017) proposed that seeing a connection between hitting and the visible distress of others is a necessary building-block in children's understanding of hitting as wrong.

A very different feedback loop appears to exist in sport, however. More often than not, in sport, it seems athletes are not "phased" by the hard pushing or occasional elbow to the nose, so this connection between an event (a hard push) and witnessing the displeasure of the receiver of the hard push is broken. It is possible, therefore, that this disconnect allows the pusher to interpret the event as non-harmful and, thus, not a moral infraction, so negative emotions like guilt do not surface in response to their action. When this happens time after time in the sport context, there is a shift in the emotional attributions athletes make in response to tough physical contact in that they learn to anticipate more positive or neutral outcomes to tough physical contact, particularly if there was no intention to cause harm in the first place (e.g., they are not "phased", "it's all fine"). It does not appear that these are just convenient post-hoc interpretations that allow athletes to rationalize their aggressive behavior, since they were willing to accept the rough physical contact from opponents as well. The fact that athletes in the study did make the connections between harm and hard pushing and guilt when it was clearer that the intention or consequence of the act was actually harmful adds evidence to this hypothesis about the mechanisms underlying decision-making in sport.

A constant practice at working it out. If a shove in the back while getting positioned for a rebound and a nudge with a shoulder while competing for a soccer ball are not "aggression", what are they? What if, rather unintuitively, these actions are ways of showing respect for the game and the opponent? Author and occasional basketball player, Ross Gay (2020) in his essay, "Have I Even Told You Yet about the Courts I've Loved?" refers to the regular physical contact between players as a "constant practice at working it out". About the basketball court, he writes,

> I started understanding a court as a site of care, ball as a practice of care, a kind of constant practice at working it out—(which a ref *always* fucks up; as does, so often, a coach)—which is the point of the game, you know, working it out. You know, together. That's the flight. That's the beauty…Two bruisers in the key who keep touching each other, leaning on each other, holding each other, while there's a looooooonnnnnnng dispute over a call…A good court—maybe this is the definition of a good court—helps you witness the catalog, the encyclopedia, of tendernesses it is (Gay, 2020).

We so often focus on the playing field, the court, as a space of aggression and competition but fail to notice the so many ways that it is a site of care and tenderness. These are not just anecdotal observations captured by an eloquent writer, but ones that are supported by scientific evidence. Kraus, Huan, & Keltner (2010) examined the level of touch between teammates in the National Basketball Association (NBA) and found that teams that exhibited higher levels of physical contact with one another had better overall performances at the end of the season. This relationship was mediated by increases in cooperative behavior amongst teammates, suggesting that touch played a role in teammates' abilities to tune into one another and work together. While this study was looking at within-team dynamics, its results are still relevant here. Touch, even between opponents, functions as an important communicative tool, transmitting emotion and forming the base for a process of "constantly working it out" between players, as they negotiate a way to play the game, such that everyone competes at their highest level.

To send a message. On occasion, the physical contact – the push – is intended to give a certain message about respect. An elite male basketball player alluded to this "message" as he described his own experience negotiating the court with an opponent. He said, "I might be playing, and you might be trying to get positioned up on me, and I might hit you just to send you a message that this game is gonna be physical. Ya know? That's just how it goes." He went on to make clear, however, that this "dialogue" between players was never intended to cause harm. He continued, "Basketball is a contact sport, so you are gonna get hit…[but the hit] is not necessarily meaning harm. You might cause pain, but it doesn't necessarily mean harm." Interestingly, the differentiation between pain and harm is one that athletes made regularly throughout the study. Though the study was not designed to capture this difference systematically, one hypothesis is that athletes may have a different understanding of, or a higher threshold for, what constitutes harm, as well as a greater tolerance for pain. More research should be done to explore this, though.

About this idea of using physical contact to "send a message", one female basketball player described the types of messages she often sends to her opponents in the below quote. Note how she is quick to distinguish pain from an intentional attempt to hurt someone:

> There's going to be some kind of way to cause [the opponent] pain one time just to send a message that you're not going to be pushed over or messed with…if you get the message across first, then it's a one and done thing and you can just play the game…So were you asking if it's okay? I think it's okay, because that's just how I play, but I'm never going out to intentionally hurt somebody or injure them, because I think that's the saddest thing to see. Even playing against someone that's really good, once you see them go down it's not like 'yes, she's out' it's like 'dang, she's out, she's not playing'. So I don't think it's to intentionally hurt anybody, it's just to send a message.

To respond to an opponent's undesired behavior. Like in the above quote, many athletes referred to the importance of not being "pushed over" or "messed with". As such, one type of message that hard physical contact might convey is a desire to establish boundaries, assert one's presence, and stop the problematic behavior of an opponent. For example, in response to the situation that included a physical and verbal provocation in the sport context, a male elite basketball player described his approval of a retaliatory hard push by explaining,

> It's alright because, if he's being dirty and he's being physical with you, I think you have the right to be just as physical back. Because, at that point, he's trying to punk you and you gotta…on the court you gotta protect yourself; you gotta like defend yourself. You can't let somebody be out there and be physical and not do anything back cuz that's how you get the reputation of being soft.

A female counterpart echoed, "Obviously, there is a point where you go too far, but, in this situation, I know I have found myself subject to it, where if I feel I'm being challenged by another player beyond the confines of the game, I might do something to say, 'you're not gonna punk me anymore.'" There is a fine balance between pushing to assert presence and pushing to harm, but that balance is an important one. Exhibiting an awareness of the moral implications when that balance is off, an elite male basketball player clarified, "When a player is provoked or if someone physically attacked you, you have the right to respond. But, morally, I wouldn't say that pushing to hurt him is ok, because you don't want to start a fight or something."

The idea of needing to have a tough demeanor or, as one of the above athletes put it, a need to avoid being seen as "soft" is reminiscent of work by sociologist Nikki Jones. In her book *Between Good and Ghetto: African American Girls and Inner-city Violence*, Jones (2010) talks about the hard decisions inner-city youth must make as they navigate what often is a harsh physical environment. Jones points out that, for many, if you backed down from personal affronts and did not fight, you would get picked on more, so there was a need to present a tough front for one's own wellbeing and ease of movement in the neighborhood, as a tough front discouraged future challenges. Referring to the code of the street, Jones' (2010) writes, "A fundamental element of the code is the development of a credible reputation for vengeance that works to deter aggression and disrespect, which are sources of great anxiety on the inner-city street" (p. 6). For athletes in very physical environments where the potential for injury is high, the need to keep opponents in-check and deter any escalation in contact by exhibits of force (within certain limits) makes sense. This point leads into the final type of legitimate hard pushing that athletes in the study discussed: the enforcer.

An entire study should be devoted to understanding the existence of the enforcer in college and professional contact-sports, as it is rich with moral tension. The enforcer is a player

on a team who, by some process of explicit and implicit selection, is chosen to correct an injustice committed by the other team (for instance, a dirty play or a dangerous move) by playing extra rough against the perpetrating player in a subsequent play such that that player will think twice about ever doing what they did again. Each team tends to have one or two players who are their designated enforcers. On one level, the purpose of the enforcer serves moral ends in that their job essentially is to re-establish an even playing field and correct wrongdoings that go uncalled by the referees, so the game, in the long-run, is played cleanly. Of course, some find the methods used by the enforcer questionable, but, again, when listening to the voices of some athletes, the rationale is clear – the purpose of the enforcer is not to cause harm, just to send a message and reset the game. One elite, male basketball player described, "I'm all for, say, if somebody on the other team hurts one of your players and let's say you are the enforcer on your team, and you go back in and hit one of their players. That's acceptable for the sport. But, nothing that's intentional or like you're going out of your way to hurt somebody just because you feel like you need to let some anger out" (24).

In sports that sometimes get heated and in an arena where there is no time to stop and discuss events that are happening on the court with the other team, some sports have developed the norm of "the enforcer", such that when the role is used, players understand how to interpret the action and use that information to adjust play and continue the game. Interestingly, Bredemeier and Shields (1995) hypothesized that the reason athletes exhibit less mature moral reasoning is because of the limited options for dialogue in sport, within which players may resort to physical retribution to communicate their disapproval of acts and to restore moral balance. While similar observations are made here, this study draws very different conclusions about the moral aptitude of athletes *vis a vis* a push used to communicate disapproval to opponents.

Jones' (2010) work speaks to the phenomenon of the enforcer, as well. Citing Anderson (1999), Jones (2010) reflects on the "code of the street" as a "system of accountability" that takes over when formal institutions designed to protect people break down. Part of this code is a "personal responsibility for one's safety". When police and other establishments fail to protect communities, people turn to violence and aggression as ways to "intervene in the power dynamics that oppress them, and try to make things right on their own" (p. 84). In a highly physical environment like many contact-sports, there sometimes is a necessity to respond in-kind to ensure a level of respect and deter any escalation of physical contact, especially if officials do not catch dangerous or provocative acts. This is not an explanation condoning violence or a theoretical conversation about what "ought" to be, this is merely a description of what "is" and the logic behind it. (Noting, again, that the majority of participants did not approve of hard pushing as a way to effectively solve problems.)

A very important distinction to make is that athletes, according to the participants in this study, are not intentionally trying to harm each other, even at the level of the enforcer, so mentioning Jones' work is not intended to equate the types of hard physical contact that happens on the playing field with that of street violence. Violence, by its very definition, is done with the intention to cause harm. Therefore, what typically is happening within the sport arena is not violence. Though, there are always exceptions (e.g., hockey fights). Sports like hockey and boxing would be worth examining in future studies, as one can argue they do involve intentional harm.

While scuffles, cheap shots, and heated tempers certainly do happen between athletes (as they do between non-athletes in everyday life settings), the goodwill between players as they are strong-arming each other cannot be overstated. An elite male basketball player summed up this sentiment when he reflected on a time in the NBA when the style of play was a lot rougher. He said,

> The NBA used to be like that. In the 90's, harder fouls were much more common, because there wasn't as many rules prohibiting people from doing it or consequences. Now they have flagrant fouls, which you get consequences for like fines and suspensions…which I think is preventing people from doing it…I don't think those players in the 90's did it to just hurt someone. I just think that's what the physical nature of the game allowed you to do. Players who were on opposite ends of those physical interactions are great friends now and there's no personal vendetta between them. That speaks to the fact that the game just allowed this physical nature of play. And while there's not the same physicality now…I don't think that players now are better people than they were then…that's just how the game was played.

In many ways, this last quote gets at the heart of this discussion: sometimes rough physical contact happens in sport, but it is not a sign of questionable moral character. If the physical contact meant malicious intent and players disengaged from their moral responsibilities toward each other, would players who played during the league's roughest years be friends with each other after being so physical with each other? Probably not. This points to the idea that the meaning of those physical acts gets transformed into non-malicious activities. The findings support Asch's (1952) proposal that "different and apparently opposed practices and values are frequently not the consequence of diversity in ethical principles but of differences in the comprehension of a situation – differences in situational meaning" (p. 377).

There is a final point captured in the responses of participants that is not fully addressed in this study but is important to mention. An underlying current in many of the responses is the presence of emotion in sport and the ways it may contribute to people's choices to sometimes hit or push someone harder than they know best. When this happens, what conclusions can be drawn about the moral reasoning of the perpetrators? A number of athletes in the study admitted to being guilty of letting things get out of hand sometimes or, at least, finding it understandable how that could easily happen. For instance, some said things like, "I still don't think it is alright that she pushed her but, if I am honest, I would've reacted the same way in that situation," or "Out of frustration it happens on the court, like someone's trying to get the best of you and you're trying to compete. In the middle of competition, you just can't control it sometimes." A male rugby player specifically pointed to emotions saying,

> I still don't think [pushing someone hard to the ground] is alright. His intent was still to hurt him. But, I mean, within sports, it has to be acknowledged that sometimes emotions do come into play and [that provocation] is something that would make me angry and make me feel like I just want to shove this kid. Like, it would drive me nuts! But, I still don't think it's okay…but I'm not saying it's something that wouldn't happen.

While these athletes were retelling their own lived or imagined experiences reacting to frustration on the field, it is crucial to note what also was being said about their moral judgment of that reaction. For instance, about overreacting physically on the court, a male basketball

player recounted, “It’s embarrassing, people are watching, sometimes your emotions take over and you just make a play and hurt someone. But, I don’t think anyone means to intentionally hurt somebody.” About a rough hit to stop the annoying opponent, the male rugby player similarly added, “it’s kind of a dirty or scummy move”, alluding to the fact that while he would be very tempted to throttle the opponent in that situation, he still evaluates the act as not alright. Lastly, a female lacrosse player explained,

> Honestly it happens when we get really frustrated in a game and the other opposing team player is kind of just like really up in your grill in a way, so, honestly, this is a tough question to answer because I’ve been in this situation multiple times, and I have obviously played more aggressive – not with the intent of hurting someone, but just to show them that you’re not getting the ball away from me this time, so… obviously [knocking her down] is not okay, but I understand why she would want to do that.

These players were able to reflect on their own actions and share what was morally wrong about them. This is contrary to the assumptions of moral disengagement and bracketed morality that suggest athletes detach themselves from this ability to self-sanction, as it interferes with their egocentric pursuit. In instances where athletes did react in aggressive ways, we could say that they chose to prioritize something other than the welfare of the opponent in that moment, but even this statement is not entirely fair as the majority of them specified a clear desire not to cause harm. More research is needed to get a clearer understanding of the ways emotion factors into decision-making, particularly in heated instances like the ones described by the above athletes. Alongside decision-making and particularly relevant to physical force and aggression, there also is something about emotion that seems to affect the energy one gives to an action. This is perhaps similar to the way that one’s ability to know and control the proper force needed to put a free-throw in the basket is much changed under stress. These conjectures are beyond the bounds of this study, but they are fruitful areas for future research. One thing that is clear from the participants’ statements is that their occasional acceptance of hard pushing (or actual hard push) does not mean that the individual is “less moral” for doing so or has a weakened capacity for thinking about and applying moral virtues in the world.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

While some of the quantitative data, on the surface, appeared to confirm some of the conclusions of existing research, analyzing the voices of elite athletes helped re-interpret those findings in ways that challenge the deficit-oriented frameworks that emerged in previous literature. The findings of this dissertation, thus, propose that elite athletes engage in a complex system of coordination that includes concerns for the welfare of others and the sport arena as a space offering as many opportunities to learn about fair, safe, well-intentioned behavior as it does for learning the opposite. A part of this complex reasoning process and sport’s unique contribution to understanding how people think about aggression is the way the sport context itself is imbued with features that transform the meaning of certain acts, such as hard pushing, into morally benign actions. Sport is unique in that embedded in it are ambiguities about intent, underlying assumptions about consent, positive experiences of pain, and formal and informal measures of safety and means of player communication, which affect the meaning of an act like a hard push. Participant responses from this study made clear that, due to experience, athletes think about these features in ways that are different than non-athletes, which may explain why, in

certain circumstances, elite athletes appear to be more approving of physically strong contact like a hard push. This difference, though, does not imply differences in moralities between the groups, as many of the quotes illustrated how athletes regularly think about the safety and welfare of the players and the sport at large. These results refute the (morally) dumb jock stereotype of athletes and point instead to individuals who have thought a lot about the boundaries between pain and harm as they relate to right and wrong.

To put these findings in direct conversation with the theories of bracketed morality and moral disengagement, the qualitative analysis did show that the sport environment and previous sport experience influenced the ways people reasoned about acts of physical harm, but not in the ways that the previous research suggested. Bracketed morality (Bredemeier & Shields, 1995) emphasizes egocentric concerns like winning as a root for less moral action in sport, and moral disengagement outlines psychological rationales individuals use to minimize care for others in order to accept cheating and physical harm in the pursuit of individual and team goals. The present study, on the other hand, found that the sport arena changed the way people think about acts of harm by transforming the meaning of the act itself, not by subverting the importance of moral tenets.

Chapter 6: Discussion

For decades, if not centuries, humans have been trying to solve the problems of aggression and violence, as their consequences are costly at both the individual and societal level. A natural question in this process is what causes someone to become aggressive, situationally or as a disposition. Many have looked at the environment in which one moves and develops as a key contributor to aggressive tendencies (Barber & Schluterman, 2008). Thus, due to its inherent physicality, some researchers have examined sport as a context that impacts moral development and reasoning about the rights and welfare of others. Despite the colloquial claims that "sport builds character", when researchers compared decision-making about moral issues, like harm to others, in sport versus non-sport settings or between people who have spent a lot of time in sport settings versus those who have not, they generally concluded that sport itself bred a more egocentric, less mature form of morality (see "bracketed morality"; Bredemeier & Shields, 1995) and that participants in sporting events were more likely to "disengage" from their moral responsibilities (see "moral disengagement", Bandura, 1991; Boardley & Kavussanu, 2011) and rely on the rules, officials, and norms of play to dictate right from wrong.

This dissertation took a second look at these conclusions with three goals in mind: 1.) to understand the nature of moral reasoning about aggression through a different theoretical lens, social domain theory 2.) to test the ways context and one's prior experience in that context (such as sport) get incorporated into the moral reasoning process, and 3.) to challenge the deficit language used by previous researchers to describe learning and development in the context of sport and of the athletes who spend much of their time there. This last focus is especially salient, as language referring to contact-sport athletes as less mature morally contributes to the "aggressive", "dangerous", and "morally defunct" stereotypes that historically have been placed on black and brown bodies – bodies that make up many contact-sport teams.

Toward these ends, this research compared evaluations of acts of physical harm between sport and non-sport settings and across groups of people with varying degrees of sport experience to search for significant differences, similar to previous research. What was different about this study was that it included contingency questions (sometimes referred to as criterion judgments) that assessed the core of people's reasoning and specifically examined the roles of rules, norms, authority, and personal gain in their decision-making, as these constructs were key components of both bracketed morality and moral disengagement. This study also was different from previous research in the field in its assumptions about the nature of moral development. Rather than positioning moral development as features of the environment that one internalizes, this study began from the premise that individuals may factor features of the environment into their moral reasoning, but their moral development involves reflection on previous experiences and feelings, which helps them construct personal understandings of rights, welfare, fairness, and other morally salient principles. Additionally, rather than qualifying people as more or less morally "mature" or morally "engaged" as previous research has done, this study sees people as constantly engaging in a process of coordination, which weighs and balances moral concerns with other types of goals and concerns embedded in the social environment in coming to decisions about appropriate actions. In other words, moral*ness* is not something that one "is", as a trait, but more so is something that one "does", acknowledging that, as humans, there always is some fluctuation in the way we apply moral tenets, and it is very hard to count all these instances and compare them across people to systematically determine who is better or worse than others.

Lastly, in order to capture this process of coordination, the present study also included the voices of participants. Participants were asked to give their reasoning for their responses to acts of harm, so that evaluations could be situated within the meaning-making of each individual, allowing for richer information about the process of moral reasoning, as well as more accurate understandings of participants' evaluations. This feature in particular helped highlight the ways the meaning of an act can be transformed when understood in certain contexts.

Differences across Contexts and Demographic Features

In terms of the two overarching research questions about the impact of context and previous athletic experience on decision-making about aggression, findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed that context and experience influenced the ways people reasoned about acts of physical harm, but not in the ways that the previous research suggested. People were more willing to condone the use of hard pushing in sport over non-sport settings when the intention for the act was ambiguous or there was a perceived benefit to the individual receiving the pushing, but they were not more likely to approve of hard pushing in sport if it meant intentional harm or the push was outside the realm of fair play. Drawing from the qualitative analysis, it was clear, however, that context did influence how individuals interpreted the hard pushing. This finding put a new light on previous conclusions that argued that sport encouraged egocentric, aggressive orientations by suggesting increases in allowances for rough physical contact had less to do with egocentric goals and more to do with features of the context like consent, intention, and safety that make pushing in sport psychologically and morally different than pushing in other contexts.

Sport experience. Similarly, comparisons across groups of people with different sporting backgrounds revealed no significant differences in their approval of aggression, which is contrary to the findings of previous studies that said athletes were less morally mature and more approving of aggression than their non-athlete peers. Again, this likely is due to the design of previous studies, which did not make clear the intentions behind the acts in question. The qualitative data did show, however, ways that individuals with extensive sport experience interpreted certain events and actions differently than those with much less experience and, on occasion, these differences resulted in different response patterns, for instance in the sport training situation.

The quantitative results indicated that the range of mean person estimates (the likelihood that an individual would approve of the hard push throughout the research interview) for each sport experience group decreased in spread as participants gained sport experience. Meaning that those who were elite athletes answered more similarly to each other and had fewer participants on the tails whereas the group with little sport experience had much more variance and larger spread in the tails. More research is needed to confidently interpret these findings. One hypothesis is that those with prior sport experience had similar ways of understanding the sport experience and thus their responses to the sport-related questions were more in line with each other. The same process happened for the group with moderate sport experience, but to a lesser extent. And it happened much less with those who had very little contact-sport experience. The field of semiotics may also provide some insights here. Barthes (1967) notes that those who share the same cultural code will interpret signs in roughly the same ways. If we think about the

sport community as a type of culture with shared words, images, objects, and actions – all of which function as signifiers in the production of meaning – it makes sense that they might interpret acts in the sport context roughly the same way, whereas those outside of the culture will have varying ways of interpreting acts within that context. This would support the idea that prior experience does impact reasoning and decision-making, in terms of informational assumptions about the context and ways of interpreting the meaning of acts (and not through different moralities).

Sex. There was a significant interaction between gender and sport experience. Similar to the decreasing spread across groups, the difference between responses from males and females decreased across sport experience groups. There was a wide gap in the mean person estimate between males and females in the non-athlete group. A smaller gap existed between males and females in the moderate sport group and there was no gap between males and females in the elite athlete group. Again, more research is needed to understand this phenomenon. My hypothesis is similar to the above hypothesis in that males and females who have studied their sport for many years, are privy to the same experiences and transformations in meaning and, thus, learn to interpret the sport context in equal ways. Whereas the other two groups do not converge because males and females have not had the same extent of overlap in experiences.

Race and class. There were no significant differences across socio-economic statuses, implying that class does not have an impact on the ways individuals interpret and make decisions about acts of harm in sport and non-sport contexts. For the most part, there were few differences across racial identity groups. However, the results showed a significant difference in mean person estimate between those who identified as Asian and those who identified as Other, with those in the Asian category more likely to approve of the hard pushing across the interview. As pointed out in the Results, the Other category was the smallest racial group, making up only 9% of the population, whereas the other groups made up roughly 30% each. This difference in sizes may have impacted the significance of the difference. Either way, for the most part, there were few differences in reasoning across racial categories. This may add more counterevidence to stereotypical interpretations of black male athletes in particular, and black and brown individuals in general, as aggressive or morally defunct individuals who require more supervision and control. Evidence from this study showed that their responses fall in line with most other humans in that they largely reject aggressive acts done with the intention of causing harm, uphold fairness and the integrity of certain social structures, and care about the welfare of others.

Conclusion

This dissertation pulled together the quantitative results with the words of athletes to illustrate the ways participants made sense of context and used elements of context in their evaluations and justifications of acts of physical harm. This method showed how context (at times) changed people's interpretation of a pain-causing hard push and, thus, their reasoning about its moral salience. Whereas some might interpret the fact that the same act is morally reprehensible in one setting and morally acceptable in another as an indication of moral relativism, the finding may actually suggest the opposite. It could be argued that a hard push that is interpreted as harmful and done with the intent to harm (such as on the street) is psychologically different than a hard push – the same hard push – that is interpreted as not

harmful or not done with the intent to harm (such as in sport). Therefore, harm (and the intent to harm) is still upheld across contexts (i.e., universal) as morally wrong. It is the meaning of the hard pushes in question, on the other hand, that changes (i.e., morally salient vs. morally benign) and, thus, produces differences in moral judgment between contexts. From participants' responses, it was clear in the present study that people's moral tenets themselves did not change – they still upheld the importance of constructs such as the welfare of others, personal rights, and fairness. Thus, as predicted, the data did not agree with Bredemeier and Shields' (1995) proposal that athletes embody a type of "bracketed morality", or an egocentric form of moral reasoning that individuals switch to in the sport setting.

These findings echo Piaget's (1932/1965) observations about the word "glaine" in the game of marbles that was discussed in the Introduction and are further supported by findings by Helwig, Hildebrandt, and Turiel (1995) who stated, "The meaning of certain gestures, (e.g. as a greeting, as an insult) may vary in accordance with the conventional meaning system in which the acts are embedded" and that in game contexts "the moral status of an act may be transformed through being embedded in a particular social organizational context" (p. 1681). People who have spent a significant amount of time in the relevant context (such as contact-sport) are privy to these transformations in meaning, because their extensive experience has allowed them to construct these new understandings. Piaget (1970) and Turiel (1983) both propose that an individual's interactions with the environment are based on existing organizations of thought, constructed through prior experiences and reflections on those experiences as one develops and moves throughout the world. Thus, athletes who have had a wealth of experiences in which they have acted upon the sport environment and have had the sport environment act upon them, as well as a catalog of reflections on those experiences, are likely to have different ways of understanding the sport context – and the use of physical force – than people who have limited interactions in that space.

The present study similarly rejected notions of moral disengagement in sport (Bandura, 1991; Stanger et al., 2013). A general empathic concern for the wellbeing of others motivates a desire to avoid causing harm to others (Dahl & Freda, 2017; Hoffman, 2000). It is true that while most people hold this desire, it may not always be applied consistently – as seen in the acceptance of slavery and genocide by many people, for example. Moral disengagement suggests that in cases like slavery, people of color are considered "less than human", which diminishes empathy and enables racist individuals to commit acts of harm or even murder, while keeping a clean psyche. Researchers proposing that a similar process of moral disengagement takes place in sport thus suggest that athletes view their opponents in ways that make the infliction of harm convenient, if not desirable. The present research, however, contends that this is not the process that happens on the athletic field, as athletes do maintain a concern for the welfare of others, even their opponents, and that what is happening instead is a transformation in the act of pushing (or other similar acts of physical force) as a non-transgressive act, in addition to an understanding of pain as not equating harm.

Early childhood studies in the field of moral development, like that of Dahl and Freda (2017), identify three components that aid in the development of the aversion to harm: 1.) "an understanding that the abrupt application of force causes pain," 2.) "a concern with avoiding pain

in others" (motivated by empathy), and 3.) "a negative evaluation of acts that purposefully cause pain to others" (p. 154). From this description, it is pain that makes something harmful and, thus, wrong. In most circumstances, this is correct. A clear message that came out of the athletes in the present study, however, is the distinction between pain and harm. Physical pain, especially for elite athletes, is an everyday occurrence in the natural processes of training and competition, yet they still participate in and enjoy their sport, thus removing pain from some of its typical associations with harmful consequences. Furthermore, as we heard from a few of the athletes, they also have associations with experiences of pain, particularly in training, as catalysts for growth as athletes. This means that, for athletes, the first component – "the abrupt application of force causes pain" – might hold true, but the desire to avoid pain or avoid actions that purposely cause pain (e.g., pushing someone) does not hold, as pain has been removed from its association with harm, at least when it is administered in controlled ways in the sport context. This is, perhaps, one way that athletes are able to receive pain from other athletes and not get offended by it, as well as give pain to other athletes and not see it as a moral transgression (again, with the condition that the physical force is within reasonable limits). This is a very different process from moral disengagement and the willingness to cause harm to others, so much so that we should be cautious in even labeling such acts as "aggressive" as they are not intended to cause harm.

The words of Gay and Davis (2020) are fitting here as they poetically illustrate the transformation of meaning that often takes place in sports by describing how the multitude of contact in basketball – "touching, pushing, scratching, hugging, diving, screaming, sprinting, laughing, ass-smacking, shoving, hurting, cheering, and sometimes bleeding" (1) – comes to fall under the umbrella of "affection". He writes, "When you dunked on me the other day, it was affection. When I drop my shoulder into your sternum to make a little room for myself, it's affection. When it heats up and we're not laughing and an orbital bone might bust or a tooth loosen, it is, and always will be, affection" (1). The tone of these prose fits the spirit of what many athletes in this study expressed: hard physical contact, more often than not, is done for the love of the game, with the welfare of others in mind, and with a healthy sense of competition.

Final thoughts. I began this work pondering the utility of sport as a peacebuilding agent, wondering not only about the types of sport activities that can bridge divides, but also about the kinds of development people experience within sport in terms of their relationships to others and decision-making about harm. Athletes, just like non-athletes, can purposefully cause harm to others with malicious intent. Sport, just like non-sport contexts, can create heated environments that make regrettable behavior more likely. Sport is neither instigator nor pacifier, and the people who participate in it are neither angels nor demons. Like in all contexts, humans must take into account the multitude of facts in a situation to interpret the meaning of social and non-social events and use such information to make decisions, including decisions about harm. The results of this study indicate that athletes are no different than non-athletes in their desire to avoid harm to others and uphold the integrity of the environment, though athletes who have had extensive experience playing contact-sports at elite levels do have different ways of interpreting certain acts of physicality and hold a more nuanced view of pain as an incidental and instrumental part of the path to success as an athlete.

As noted in the Introduction, some researchers have called for sport programs that teach empathy, reduce competition, and focus on effort (Duquin & Schroder-Braun,1996; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Kavussanu, 2019; Stanger et al., 2012) as ways of reducing the potential for aggression. These approaches might be misguided, however, as the results of this study indicate that athletes do not lack empathy or think the desire to win or a coach's sadistic urgings are justifiable reasons to harm somebody. This is supported by other studies whose findings show no difference in empathy between athletes and non-athletes (Tülin, 2017). An alternative suggestion for managing concerns for aggression based on the results of this study would be to appeal to the natural decision-making processes of athletes by helping them better coordinate complex social environments. This might look like providing explicit information about what sorts of actions may lead to more consequential harm, creating non-physical alternatives to "the enforcer" as a means of righting perceived wrongs, or helping athletes recognize when emotion may be narrowing their perspective of a situation, say when things get heated in the last five minutes of a game. The fact that most American football players no longer intentionally hit each other in the head now that they are aware of the serious dangers posed by traumatic brain injury is one piece of evidence showing how linking certain acts with harm can be an effective strategy in minimizing harm and aggression in sport. (Of course, the entire sport of American football needs to be re-examined due to its heavy association with traumatic brain injury, but that is a very different paper.) Furthermore, the results of this study may have implications for managing aggression and violence in other contexts. While hard pushing in sport is different than violence and the motivations surrounding other instances of aggression will inevitably vary from circumstance to circumstance, applying the process of decision-making about the welfare of others as described here may be fruitful in other contexts. For interventions, such as those aimed at reducing conflict or bullying, to be successful, one likely needs to understand how individuals are making sense of their environment; how they are coordinating moral concerns with other pressing features of the social sphere; how the context itself may transform expectations, norms, and the meaning of certain acts; what assumptions they have about the utility of harm in achieving important goals, and how intention, motivation, and desired outcomes can influence the ways physical acts are evaluated and practiced. Similar research should expand into these spaces to test these hypotheses, since, if they are right, they could have powerful implications for the field's ability to address pressing challenges related to various forms of aggression.

As Foucault (1980) points out, discourse – the ways of speaking about and treating subjects – constructs knowledge of those subjects and what we think we "know" about those subjects. What we know about a particular subject impacts how we think about, regulate, and manage that subject. Power is inextricably linked to these processes as, historically, certain people have had more power to speak about certain subjects than others and, thus, more power to influence the discourse and social knowledge about those subjects. Though there have been multiple voices contributing to the discourse about athletes, it is important to point out the power academics have had in supporting tropes of athletes as morally immature, aggressive, and egocentric. The development of such social knowledge about athletes, particularly athletes who identify as people of color, has not been without consequence, as Comeaux (2018) details the ways contact-sport athletes have been and still are controlled, surveilled, and regulated on college campuses, by national sport governing bodies, and by society at large. It is only fair that

we change this discourse by letting the subjects speak for themselves and by appreciating the complexity with which athletes reason about the social milieu and juggle their care for each other amidst the rigors of a physical environment.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol

In this interview I will be asking you some questions to see how you think about certain social interactions. I also will read you some stories and ask some questions about them. There are no right or wrong answers; I am interested in how you think about each question. Nobody - accept myself and one or two other people working on this project - will see your name and your name will not be associated with the data from this interview; code names will be used instead. Lastly, although it is helpful to me if you respond to all of the questions in this interview, you are free to stop the interview at any point.

I will first ask you some general questions.

General Assessment

1. Is it alright or not alright to hit and cause somebody pain when unprovoked? Why or why not?

2. Would it be alright or not alright to cause somebody physical harm if there were no rules prohibiting it? Why or why not?

3. Suppose that in another country, they decided that it was alright to cause someone physical harm in their country. Would that be alright or not alright? Why or why not?

4. When playing a sport like basketball or baseball, is it alright or not alright to hit and cause somebody pain when unprovoked? Why or why not?

5. Suppose there was a rule in a sport like basketball or baseball that did not prohibit harming someone. Would it be alright or not alright to cause someone physical harm in that sport? Why or why not?

6. Suppose that in another country, they decided that in sports like basketball and baseball it would be alright to cause someone physical harm. Would that be alright or not alright? Why or why not?

Contextualized Assessment: Sport

1. Michael is a player on a college basketball team. It is toward the end of the game and his team is up by 15 points and clearly will win. Michael decides to give a hard push to a player on the opposing team with the intention of physically harming him. The other player falls to the floor, is in a lot of pain, and has to sit out of the game for awhile until the pain goes away, but later he is able to return to the game. Is it alright or not alright that Michael pushed the other player? Why or why not?

-- What if the rules in this game allowed this type of hard push? Would it be alright or not alright for Michael to push this other player? Why or why not?

-- Do you think that would be a good rule to have for basketball, to allow hard pushing? Why or why not?

-- What if it were not in the rules, but in this league hard pushing was generally accepted? Let's say it is a rough league and players get away with it. Would it be alright or not alright for Michael to push this player? Why or why not?

-- What if Michael's coach told Michael to push the other player? Would it be alright or not alright for Michael to listen and do so? Why or why not?

-- What if Michael's team was actually down by 5 points and it was an important game and this would help them win? Would it be alright or not alright for Michael to push this player? Why or why not?

-- What if Michael pushed the other player in a way that was hard enough to cause serious injury to the player? Would it be alright or not alright? Why or why not?

2. Caleb also is a player on a college basketball team. Caleb is in the middle of a game and the player that has been guarding him has stolen the ball from him multiple times and keeps calling Caleb a "loser" and saying other things to insult him. Caleb decides to give a hard push to the opposing player with the intention of physically harming him,. The other player falls to the floor, is in a lot of pain, and has to sit out of the game for awhile until the pain goes away, but later he is able to return to the game. Is it alright or not alright that Caleb pushed the other player? Why or why not?

-- What if the rules in this game allowed this type of hard push? Would it be alright or not alright for Caleb to push this player? Why or why not?

-- What if it were not in the rules, but in this league hard pushing was generally accepted? Let's say it's a rough league and players get away with it. Would it be alright or not alright for Caleb to push this player? Why or why not?

-- What if Caleb's coach told Caleb to push the other player? Would it be alright or not alright for Caleb to listen and do so? Why or why not?

-- What if Caleb's team was actually down by 5 points and it was an important game and this would help them win? Would it be alright or not alright for Caleb to push this player? Why or why not?

— What if the provocation was not just verbal and this other player gave Caleb a hard push in a previous play? Would it be alright or not alright for Caleb to give a hard push to this player? Why or why not?

— What if Caleb pushed the other player in a way that was hard enough to cause serious injury to the player? Would it be alright or not alright? Why or why not?

3. Alejandro is on a college basketball team. Everyone on the team has agreed that it is ok to give each other hard pushes in practice because it helps "toughen up" the players, even though there is a risk that someone will get hurt. Brian is a new recruit and has just joined the team. Brian says that he does not like the hard pushing and asks everyone to stop. In the next practice, Alejandro gives Brian a hard push. Brian falls to the floor, is in a lot of pain, and has to sit out of practice for awhile until the pain goes away, but later he is able to return to practice. Is it alright or not alright that Alejandro pushed Brian? Why or why not?

— What if the rules of the sport - and not just the agreement of this team - allowed this type of hard push? Would it be alright or not alright for Alejandro to push Brian in this practice? Why or why not?

— What if it were not in the rules, but the league this team is in is a rough league and this type of hard push generally is accepted. Would it be alright or not alright for Alejandro to push Brian in this practice? Why or why not?

— What if Alejandro's coach told Alejandro to give Brian a hard push? Would it be alright or not alright for Alejandro to listen and push Brian? Why or why not?

— What if Alejandro pushed Brian in a way that was hard enough to cause serious injury to Brian? Would it be alright or not alright? Why or why not?

In this next part of the interview, I will read some stories that describe non-sport situations and decisions that people make about how to act toward other people. Again, there are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in what you think.

Contextualized Assessment: Non-Sport

1. George is part of an academic group at his college. The group has an important meeting later in the day, in which George's academic group will compete against another group of students to be hired by a local company to work on a project. George's group is better prepared and will most likely win the competition. Prior to the competition, George sees the key presenter of the opposing team. George decides to push this other person with the intention of causing physical harm. The other person falls to the ground, is in a lot of pain, and has to rest for awhile until the pain goes away, but later he is able to participate in the competition. Is it alright or not alright that George pushed this person? Why or why not?

-- What if the rules of the academic competition allowed this type of hard push? Would it be alright or not alright for George to push this person? Why or why not?

-- Do you think it would be a good rule to have for this academic competition, to allow for hard pushing? Why or why not?

-- What if it were not in the rules, but let's say this is a rough school and hard pushing was generally accepted and students got away with it? Would it be alright or not alright for George to push this person? Why or why not?

-- What if George's academic advisor told George to push the presenter of the other group? Would it be alright or not alright for George to listen and then do so? Why or why not?

-- What if George's group was not well prepared, but pushing this other presenter would help George's group win? Would it be alright or not alright for George to push this other presenter? Why or why not?

-- What if George pushed the other presenter in a way that was hard enough to cause serious injury to the other person? Would it be alright or not alright? Why or why not?

2. Paul is driving around trying to find a parking spot. Paul sees a spot up ahead, but a car coming the other direction quickly does a u-turn and cuts off Paul to take the spot. The driver of the other car laughs out loud and calls Paul "a loser" as he

drives by. Paul decides to get out of the car and give the driver a hard push with the intention of harming him. The driver falls to the ground, is in a lot of pain, and has to rest for awhile until the pain goes away, but later he is able to get up and carry on with his day. Is it alright or not alright that Paul pushed this driver? Why or why not?

-- What if the rules in this community allowed for this type of hard push? Would it be alright or not alright for Paul to push this driver? Why or why not?

-- What if the rules did not allow this, but let's say this is a rough community and this type of hard push was generally accepted and people got away with it? Would it be alright or not alright for Paul to push this driver? Why or why not?

-- What if Paul's father also is in the car and tells Paul to push the other driver? Would it be alright or not alright for Paul to listen and do so? Why or why not?

-- What if pushing the driver to the ground would convince the driver to move his car and Paul would get back the parking spot? Would it be alright or not alright for Paul to push this driver? Why or why not?

-- What if Paul pushed the driver in a way that was hard enough to cause serious injury to the driver? Would it be alright or not alright? Why or why not?

3. Dennis just started high school. He is a freshman and has three older brothers. The older brothers have all agreed that high school is a difficult place and that they need to "toughen up" in order to get through it, so they give each other hard pushes when they are at home. Now that Dennis is in high school, they have decided to give Dennis hard pushes as well. Dennis says he does not like the hard pushing and asks everyone to stop. The next day, Dennis's eldest brother gives Dennis a hard push. Dennis falls to the floor, is in a lot of pain, and has to rest for awhile until the pain goes away, but later he is able to return to what he was doing. Is it alright or not alright that this brother pushed Dennis? Why or why not?

— What if the rules in the high school allowed this type of hard push? Would it be alright or not alright for the brother to push Dennis at home? Why or why not?

— What if it were not in the rules, but the school community was a rough community and this type of hard push generally was accepted and people got away with it. Would it be alright or not alright for the brother to push Dennis? Why or why not?

— What if the brothers' dad told the eldest brother to give Dennis a hard push? Would it be alright or not alright for the brother to listen and push Dennis?

--What if the brother pushed Dennis in a way that was hard enough to cause serious injury to Dennis? Would it be alright or not alright? Why or why not?