Lisa Timpf

72 Oak St.

Simcoe, Ontario

N3Y 3J8

email: lisa.timpf@gmail.com

Word count: Approx. 950

Moore, Evan F. and Jashvina Shah. *Game Misconduct: Hockey’s Toxic Culture and How to Fix It.* Triumph Books, 2021. 256 pp. $28.00.

Reviewed by Lisa Timpf

*Game Misconduct: Hockey’s Toxic Culture and How to Fix It* by Evan Moore and Jashvina Shah takes a broad-ranging look at the sport of hockey as it intersects with a number of parameters, including racism, sexism, and homophobia. Though the authors are critical of many aspects of hockey’s culture, the book is written with constructive intent. As Moore notes in the Epilogue, “I love hockey. And when I love something, I want to make it better.” (p. 233) At the same time, he acknowledges that “hockey culture needs an intervention—therapy, at least.” (p. 233)

The book is smoothly written, and the authors’ passion for the game shines through. The book’s readability should be no surprise, given the fact that both authors are experienced journalists. Moore has covered culture and entertainment for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and has written for *Rolling Stone, Huffington Post,* and *Ebony.* Jashvina Shah is a multimedia reporter who covers college hockey and social issues in sports. Her writing has been published in *The Globe and Mail, The Athletic,* and *College Hockey News*, among other venues.

The book begins with chapters on hockey culture and the structure of hockey, focussing mainly on the United States and Canada. Once this groundwork has been set, individual chapters then delve into the various themes covered by the book: racism; sexism and sexual violence; bullying, hazing, and abuse; women’s hockey; ableism; and homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. A chapter titled “Why It Happens and How to Fix It” provides examples of actions that can be taken to make hockey more inviting and inclusive for players at all levels.

The authors blend input from a variety of sources to make their case, including interviews with current and former players and other relevant individuals as well as their own personal experience. Reference to studies, books, and news events provide deeper background.

Though the book provides some historic context for how we got here, it is also up to date on the issues. Relatively recent situations like Akim Aliu speaking out about his experiences with racism and the hazing lawsuit brought forward by Daniel Carcillo and Garrett Taylor are discussed in the book, as are other occurrences.

Not all of the issues discussed are unique to hockey, and the authors acknowledge that, commenting on other sports, like football and basketball, where appropriate. However, Moore and Shah make a case that some of the issues are more severe in hockey than in other sports and offer some views as to why this might be so. The insular nature of the hockey development model, where promising players with elite talent are pulled away from their families and sent to live in other cities with billet families, is one contributing factor. Separated from home and their friends, elite players’ primary influences become their billet families, coaches, and teammates, and this both reinforces the status quo and also makes them more vulnerable to issues like hazing and abuse. The primarily white, cishet nature of the majority of high-level coaches and power brokers, the emphasis on toxic masculinity, the expectation of conformity, the code of silence, and the tendency for hero worship also play a role in shaping and reinforcing hockey’s current culture, as do other factors.

*Game Misconduct* provides a refreshingly candid look at the sport. There will no doubt be some who bristle at the book’s assertions. But as a gay woman who has played house league hockey, a former sportswriter who has covered university women’s hockey, and a long-time hockey fan, I can attest that the book rings true in those areas where it intersects with my own identities and experiences.

As though to underscore *Game Misconduct’s* message, while I was reading the book, a news story broke about an incident at a hockey tournament in Prince Edward Island in which players from an opposing team in the stands directed racial slurs at a Black goalie—further evidence, if anyone needed it, that racism continues to be an issue for the sport.

Can things change? Moore and Shah note that “hockey, historically, has dragged its feet at every turn when it comes to social justice.” (p. 72) As well, the “rising costs of hockey are also a barrier to cultivating a diverse player base.” (p. 205) Hockey’s organizational structure perpetuates the status quo: “Hockey exists in its own bubble. . . . It’s composed mostly of boys and men who are white, cishet, straight, and upper-class. And those who play often become coaches and teach the same values to the next generation.” (p. 1) In addition, the emphasis on conformity within the sport contributes to “a culture of silence—anyone who is different is afraid to speak out.” (p. 2) It won’t be easy making revolutionary change, even if there becomes a widespread will to do so. But all is not lost.

While the authors acknowledge that changing hockey’s culture is a complex undertaking, and diagnosing the problems requires “a deep dive into how we got here,” (p. 229), they also provide examples of programs that are making a positive impact, even now—programs like Coaching Boys Into Men, SCORE Boston Hockey, and Snider Hockey.

*Game Misconduct* leaves the reader with plenty to think about, even though some of the chapters are simply scratching the surface. As the authors note, the section on women’s hockey could merit a book unto itself. Still, you need to start somewhere, and as an overview of the issues, *Game Misconduct* is a good resource. In the Epilogue, Moore notes that his intention in co-writing the book was to “kick-start a long-overdue conversation.” (p. 234) *Game Misconduct: Hockey’s Toxic Culture and How to Fix It* has the potential to do just that.

-END-