CRUSHED UNDER THEIR SKATES: RAPE AND SILENCE IN BEARTOWN BY FREDRIK BACKMAN

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Abstract

When people are good at feeling shame and become experts at practicing silence, one should know that they have started it early (Backman, 2016). Rape culture does not emerge in isolation; rather, it proliferates within communities that normalize aggression and masculinist hierarchies. This study interrogates the mechanisms of rape culture through the dual lenses of Cultural Spillover Theory (Baron & Straus, 1987), which posits that societal tolerance of violence legitimizes sexual aggression, and the Sociobiological Theory of Male Competitiveness (Wilson & Daly, 1985), which frames sexual coercion as an adaptive strategy in hyper-competitive environments. Focusing on Fredrik Backman's _Beartown_ (2016)—a novel that exposes the intersection of sports, tribalism, and gendered violence—this article advances a tripartite argument. First, it examines how collective social behaviors, particularly in insular communities, reinforce rape-myth acceptance. Second, it demonstrates a direct correlation between institutionalized violence (e.g., in sports) and the escalation of sexual aggression. Third, it analyzes how competitive male homo-sociality coerces women into complicity under the guise of communal solidarity. Ultimately, the article contends that _Beartown_ subverts rape culture's hegemonic scripts by centering a female protagonist who rejects victimhood, reclaims agency, and disrupts the community's oppressive consensus. Through this literary case study, the paper underscores resistance as a counterforce to structural violence.

Keywords: Cultural Spillover Theory, Rape Culture, Silence, Sociobiological Theory of Male Competitiveness, Violence.

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Introduction

Historically, rape has been a pervasive yet systematically silenced phenomenon—acknowledged in oblique terms but rarely confronted directly. This avoidance stems from its destabilizing potential: to interrogate rape is to implicate not only individual perpetrators but also the broader sociocultural structures that enable sexual violence. Deliberate evasion, whether through purposeful omission or passive neglect, functions as a mechanism to shield perpetrators from accountability while perpetuating a culture of impunity. Not those known for what they did-those imprisoned or at least announced- but for those who are afraid to exercise it if the circumstances allow to. Even in the academia, rape has been intentionally secluded. As Susan Brownmiller (1975) affirms, neither Krafft Ebing nor his disciples, including the fathers of psychoanalysis, Freud, Adler, and Jung, mattered to set foundations of how rape happens and why despite their indulgence with studies of fear, violence, and trauma, they could not settle a theory that unveils rape and rapists. Their inability to systematically theorize rape stems from four interrelated factors: (1) the pathologization of sexuality divorced from structural power, (2) the androcentric framing of desire, (3) the normalization of gendered violence under patriarchal science, and (4) the clinical erasure of survivor testimony in favor of perpetrator narratives.

From one part, Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis (1886) catalogued sexual "deviations" but treated rape as an individual psychopathology rather than a sociocultural phenomenon (Oosterhuis, 2000). His taxonomy of "sadism" and "lust murder" isolated rape from systems of power, reducing it to a medical aberration rather than a manifestation of patriarchal domination (Brownmiller, 1975). Similarly, Freud's early seduction theory (1896) initially recognized sexual violence as traumatic but later retracted this under pressure from medical peers, reframing survivors' accounts as "fantasies" (Masson, 1984). This pivot exemplifies how early sexology prioritized intrapsychic explanations over structural critique. Moreover, psychoanalytic theories centered male sexuality as the default, constructing rape as either an excess of instinct (Freud's Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, 1905) or a failure of sublimation (Jung's Symbols of Transformation, 1912). Moreover, Freud's Totem and Taboo (1913) mythologized male sexual aggression as an evolutionary inevitability,

while Jung's archetypes (e.g., the "anima") essentialized gendered power dynamics. Such frameworks naturalized rape as an immutable byproduct of male biology, neglecting its cultural contingency (MacKinnon, 1989). As Catharine MacKinnon argues, "Under patriarchy, rape is not an aberration but a permitted expression of male dominance" (Toward a Feminist Theory of the State, 1989, pp. 172). Early psychoanalysis, embedded in Victorian androcentrism, lacked the tools to interrogate this permission. Thence, Krafft-Ebing and Freud relied heavily on case studies of perpetrators (e.g., Freud's "Dora" case) while marginalizing survivors' voices. This epistemic injustice, as Miranda Fricker (2007) terms it, allowed rape myths to flourish unchecked. Where Freud dismissed trauma as "hysteria," feminist theorists like Diana Russell (The Politics of Rape, 1975) later demonstrated how silencing survivors perpetuates impunity.

Similarly, Adler's theory of "masculine protest" (1910) approached aggression as compensatory but ignored rape's gendered asymmetry. These models universalized male subjectivity, rendering female victimhood incidental—a bias critiqued by later feminist scholars like Susan Brownmiller (Against Our Will, 1975) and Judith Herman (Trauma and Recovery, 1992). This intentional ignorance helped in the emergence and persistence of rape culture, at the individual and collective levels, encompassing multiple rape attitudes comprising gender roles, practice and acceptance of violence, as well as hostility towards women.

Beartown (2016) by Fredrik Backman is a novel that exemplifies how European modern society, despite of its call for gender equality and its constant urge to eradicate victimization of the other sex, is still fragile and open to rape criticism. The novel chronicles a sequence of events that lay bare the paradoxical nature of modernity, revealing the extent to which humanity has ostensibly advanced while remaining ensnared in regressive social practices. Among its many narrative threads, Maya's story exposes the ways in which rape culture is embedded within the sport male world. Furthermore, through the characters of Kevin and Amat, Backman systematically exposes the mechanisms by which rape culture perpetuates itself, revealing how patriarchal structures mask its brutality beneath narratives of athletic triumph and communal solidarity.

This study interrogates the systemic issue of sexual violence against women, with particular attention to the vulnerabilities of young women

within institutionalized sports cultures. Focusing on the sports arena as a microcosm of gendered power structures, it examines how hypermasculine environments legitimize rape culture by privileging athletic success over ethical accountability (Burstyn, 1999; Messner, 1992). The research argues that the neoliberal imperative to "win at all costs"—coupled with the glorification of male competitiveness—not only enables sexual violence but actively constructs impunity for perpetrators (Young, 2012). Through an analysis of sports narratives and institutional complicity, this work demonstrates how rape myths are weaponized to silence victims while preserving team reputations (Benedict, 1997). Ultimately, the study positions sports institutions as ideological apparatuses that naturalize rape as an inevitable byproduct of masculine competition, demanding urgent structural intervention.

By examining the novel through the lenses of Cultural Spillover Theory; which suggests that whenever a society becomes sustaining violence more rape happens, and the Sociobiological Theory of Male Competitiveness; which relates male competitiveness with pressure and behavioral attitudes, this study contributes at an understanding of how both young males and females become entrenched into the trap of rape culture. The analysis of the novel will illustrate how young males and females are often compelled to accept rape culture for the sake of collective well-being, compromising individual autonomy.

The main objective of this article is three-fold. First, it discusses the association of collective social behavior and the endorsement of rape culture. It, then, delves into a reading of how the more a society normalizes violence, the more rape occurs. Finally, the article discusses how competitiveness in the sports realm pushes young males into perpetuating rape culture behavior and subsequently young females into an acceptance of such behavior for the sake of collective well-being. Finally, it argues that through Beartown (2016), Backman challenges the shared codes of rape culture by giving Maya the agency to resist and assert her own voice against the rest

This article will be organized into the following sections: it will indulge into the act of rape explaining how, after being an individual act and if silenced long enough, it becomes a culture of a given community. Second, it is important for the study of rape to understand its nature and evolvement.

For that purpose, one chooses Cultural Spillover Theory to exemplify how an atmosphere of violence sustains rape. Among the spheres where violence is at the core of the practice, the norm, rape becomes a tool of survival to escape pressure of the sports life. Even more dangerous is the aspect of competitiveness among sports men because while being competitive is a scheduled matter in normal people's lives, (during exams, job interviews, or relationships), for the sports field competitiveness is an everyday exercise. When young competitors compete for both a game and love, the results are catastrophic. The final section will bring an analysis of rape in Beartown by Fredrick Backman showcasing how the above-mentioned characteristics interfere in the silencing of a young girl who has to choose whether to expose rape and take the blame for it or live with rape as normal practice.

Theoretical Framework

Rape Culture

Rape occurs when a man believes he has the right to control a woman's's body, to impose his will upon it to satisfy his urges, and To manipulate it according to his desires. Rape functions as an assertion of patriarchal entitlement, where perpetrators operate under the belief that female bodies exist for male consumption (Brownmiller, 1975; MacKinnon, 1989). This ownership mentality—cultivated through cultural narratives that privilege male desire (Gavey, 2005)—reduces women to objects enslaved to male 'urges' (Dworkin, 1987), with violence serving as both punishment and pleasure (Bourke, 2007). Rape, however, has evolved into a social construct that is not openly challenged, through a series of myths perpetuated across generations as societal responses to rape (Schmidt 2004).

The study of sexual violence has generated multiple theoretical frameworks across disciplines seeking to explain rape's etiology and social reproduction. Feminist scholarship conceptualizes rape as a systemic instrument of patriarchal control, arguing it functions primarily to maintain gendered hierarchies through institutionalized terror and cultural normalization (Brownmiller, 1975; MacKinnon, 1989). This structural analysis contrasts sharply with behaviorist approaches like Social Learning Theory (Akers, 2009; Bandura, 1973), which situates rape as the product of conditioned behaviors acquired through environmental reinforcement, imitation of modeled aggression, and the internalization of rape-supportive

scripts. Where feminist theory emphasizes macro-level power structures as rape's foundational context, social learning models focus on micro-level processes of behavioral acquisition. This epistemological tension reflects broader debates in violence research between structural determinism and socialized agency, though contemporary intersectional scholarship increasingly bridges these paradigms by examining how institutional power shapes the very environments where violent behaviors are learned (Crenshaw, 1991; Bourke, 2007).

As a social animal, a human being is in need of interaction, whether with the same or the opposite sex. Throughout this process, individuals develop certain gender roles first within the family sphere. A male member, usually a father or a caretaker, plays roles of providing, instructing and protecting. A female figure in a family, a mother or a female caretaker, undertakes an integrative expressive role providing emotional support to the family members. Being the nuclear force of society, this pattern evolves to become a social tapestry to how a community should behave. If violence becomes an acceptable pattern to a number of families in a given area, so becomes the whole society.

If rape is an accepted behavior within a certain social atmosphere, then rape is synonymous to sexual integrity. It becomes a norm; if anyone opposes its existence, his/her opposition is read as opposition to the whole social system. This argument aligns with MacKinnon (1989) who demonstrates that rape operates as a constitutive institution under patriarchy, not an aberration. When systemic (e.g., in sports cultures), it becomes inseparable from the group's identity and survival myths. It also aligns with Lonsway & Fitzgerald's (1994) RMA scale which proves that myths ("She wanted it," "Men can't control themselves") flourish where rape is normalized. Hence, when rape is structural (e.g., wartime or fraternities), its myths become cultural scripts (Gavey, 2005)—stories societies tell to justify violence as "the way things are." Opposition then triggers backlash (Faludi, 1991), as seen in victim-blaming or whistleblower retaliation. This is how rape myths evolve and where rape culture unfolds.

Rape myths are those collectively held beliefs that emerge through time, state of acceptance and acceptance, forming approved stereotypes that accordingly influence individual behavior establishing sexual acts and violence towards women as the norm. Rape myths, hence, are culturally

entrenched, false beliefs that justify, minimize, or normalizing sexual violence against women (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). These myths—such as "women provoke rape through clothing" or "real rape involves physical resistance"—shift blame to victims while exonerating perpetrators, reinforcing gendered power imbalances. They operate as ideological tools to sustain patriarchal structures by pathologizing survivors ("she lied for attention") and naturalizing male aggression ("boys will be boys") (Bohner et al., 2009). Empirical studies link rape myth acceptance (RMA) to lower conviction rates, victim-blaming, and perpetrator impunity (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). The accumulation of these practices becomes what we know as culture. A culture that is not guided by laws but by social agreement, a culture similar to what Cialdini and Trost (1998) define as, "rules and standards that are understood by members of a group, and that guide or constrain social behavior without the force of law" (pp.152). No only their definition positions culture as a regulatory mechanism operating through informal sanctions (e.g., ostracism, ridicule) rather than legal penalties but also emphasizes how rape culture persists because perpetrators see violence as group-approved, not just personally justified (just as how athletes mimic coaches who dismiss assault (Benedict, 1997); and how soldiers follow commanders who condone wartime rape (Enloe, 2000).

Rape culture is a term that appeared after the modernist activism, mainly the feminist strife to eradicate sexual abuse practices. Feminist activists coined the term in 1970s where it has been used to refer to the activity of male aggressive sexual behavior towards a female without her approval. The definition includes social behavior where society in this term claims rape as an acceptable behavior (Herman 1978). Over time, it has become highly acknowledged through time that a definition of sexuality involves two-fold relation criteria: the dominance of a male and the submission of a female. Consequently, it becomes the norm, as Christine Carter argues, "if we have a culture with norms that support rape, we will have a culture with men who rape" (1995, pp.09).

Studies evolved from the time rape culture started to circulate to understand the causes of rape. Among many, researchers found society blames women for provocative actions leading to rape (Munson 1990). Factors include women vulnerability leading to sexual aggression, risk tacking actions; like late night bars and consumption of alcohol, lower self-

esteem Lower self-esteem leading to self-exposure seen as sexual eagerness, misconception and misperception of the sex before rape experience (Koss & Dinero, 1988; Malamuth, 1986; Malamuth, Sockloslue, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991; Rapaport & Burkhart, 1984; Haselton and Buss, 2000).

Other theories expand the reasons to include both sexes. From sociobiological point of view, men do not rape on moral basis of what is right and what is wrong. Rather, rape is a behavioral adaptation, a reproductive attitude that is merely sexually motivated (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000). From a post-colonial point of view, rape happens as means of double colonization. After colonizing the land, colonizers need to further and colonize the body as both a tool of submission and silencing, especially towards women. Both Said and Fanon bring rape as a metaphor of subjugation and allegory of colonial discourse. In Orientalism (1978), Said demonstrates how the colonizer constructs the colonized as passive, penetrable, and feminized—a discursive rape that precedes and justifies material violence. The Orient is rendered as a body to be mastered; just as rape asserts control over a victim's autonomy, Orientalist discourse frames the East as an "exotic" space awaiting Western possession. Moreover, it is silenced and eroticized, the harem fantasy reduces colonized women (and by extension, their cultures) to objects of conquest, reinforcing the colonizer's "right" to dominate (Yegenoğlu, 1998). From his part, Fanon's A Dying Colonialism (1959) and The Wretched of the Earth (1961) analyze rape as both material practice (e.g., French soldiers assaulting Algerian women) and symbolic logic, first by unveiling how the French obsession with forcibly removing Algerian women's veils mirrors rape in its assertion of visual and bodily control (Fanon, 1959) and how the colonial trope of the Black man as a sexual predator—a projection of Europe's own violent desires, used to justify lynching and repression.

In International Relations field, rape has been recognized as both war crime and war weapon throughout which rape is not a deviant behavior but an amplification of sexual violence that has already been a factual tool of power, control, and subjugation (Rosie Walters, 2023). Despite different argumentations, rape as a social construct lies at the heart of its causes and effects. One theory relevant to the study of Beartown by Backman is the Cultural Spillover Theory Which provides a compelling explanation of how and why rape happens.

Cultural Spillover Theory

Theorists searching for causes of rape delve into different areas that surround the perpetrator's world. Whatever social or cultural arguments they provide for an understanding of the rape situation, there is always a space where the psychological state of the rapist must always be identified. The childhood background and the social atmosphere of what contributes to someone becoming a rapist are important factors in the correlation. From a Cultural Spillover Theory point of view, violent behavior is the product of learned beliefs and attitudes that legitimize violence in the first place. As Barron, Straus and Jaffee suggest (1988):

> The central proposition of this theory is the more society tends to endorse the use of physical force to attain socially approves ends -such as order in the schools, crime control, and military dominance- the greater the likelihood that this legitimation of force will generalize to other spheres of life, such as the family and relations between the sexes, where force is less approved socially. (pp. 80)

This conclusion applies to different life spheres. In religious confined societies, where punishment is used to achieve greater purposes, human beings are more likely to exhibit punishment attitudes in future stages of their lives (Lambert, Triandis, and Wolf 1959). This punishment may exceed its purpose to become a behavior in normal life situations (for example relations between men and women). In tribal societies, Sanday's cross-cultural study (1981) found a strong correlation between cultural behavior and violence where she acclaims that, "where interpersonal violence is a way of life, violence achieves sexual expression" (pp. 18). Other cultural variables include high violence rates in disadvantaged minority societies, areas where poverty prevails, and rural areas crowded with youths (Baron et al. 1988).

As far as youths are concerned, many studies started to concentrate on the impact of cultural beliefs and violence among young generations indulged in the sports realm. The next section will examine the correlation between the two which will conclude with an analysis of Backman's youthful characters who find themselves approving violence and extending it to sexual practices.

Males, Violence, and the Aspect of Competitiveness in the Sports

There has been raised rumors about the connection that relates males in the sports world and the aspect of violence. Wilson and Daly's (1985) Sociobiological Theory of Male Competitiveness posits that male aggression and risk-taking behaviors are evolutionarily adaptive strategies aimed at increasing reproductive success. Rooted in evolutionary psychology, the theory suggests that males compete for status and dominance because these traits historically enhanced access to mates. This competitiveness manifests not only in direct physical aggression but also through symbolic displays of strength, territorial control, and hierarchical positioning—especially in environments where male prestige is socially rewarded. The theory highlights how male-male rivalry is intensified in contexts where social validation is tied to dominance, reinforcing behaviors that may marginalize or endanger others, particularly women.

In literary texts that center on rape and the sports world—such as *Beartown*—this theory offers a valuable framework for understanding how a culture of hypermasculinity and dominance can legitimize violence and suppress accountability. The competitive, status-driven environment of elite sports creates conditions in which aggression is not only normalized but valorized, making the violation of boundaries—sexual or otherwise—a logical extension of the dominant ethos. When male athletes are positioned as community heroes, their actions are often shielded by institutional power and collective denial. Sociobiological insights help readers interpret such environments not merely as personal moral failings but as deeply embedded social structures that reward conquest and silence the vulnerable. The theory thus opens critical space to analyze how biology and culture intersect in the reproduction of gendered violence and the social complicity surrounding it.

Further studies support this claim. Messner (1990) "When bodies are weapons: Masculinity and violence in Sport" examines how sports socialize men into using their bodies as instruments of dominance, which can extend to off-field violence. From his part, Curry (1991) "Fraternal bonding in the locker room: A profeminist analysis of talk about competition and women" discusses how male athletes, particularly in team sports, may engage in violent or misogynistic behavior as part of group bonding. In their article, Crosset et al. (1995) "Male student-athletes reported for sexual assault: A

survey of campus police departments and judicial affairs offices" found that male college athletes were overrepresented in sexual assault reports compared to non-athletes.

In the real-life situations, and according to media reports, the sports world is full with famous sportsmen who were reported of committing violence, particularly against women. Although acts of violence do not apply only to the sportsmen in particular, for reports from the world of politics and cinema are as famous as in the sports field, yet, the aspect of competitiveness in the sports portrays a strong stimulating factor.

The correlation between men, violence, and sports is not a byproduct of the modern age. Males has always demonstrated a will to dominate, even in the animal world. For example, Sipes (1973) "War, sports and aggression: An empirical test of two rival theories" examines ancient societies and finds that cultures with combative sports (e.g., gladiators, wrestling) also had higher rates of warfare and suggests that male violence in sports is an extension of primal dominance behaviors. In their "Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence", Wrangham & Peterson (1996) compares male chimpanzee violence (territorial wars, dominance displays) to human male aggression in sports and warfare and proposes that male competitive violence is biologically ingrained, not just cultural. Later, Lombardo (2012) "On the evolution of sport Argues that sports mimic male-male competition seen in the animal kingdom (e.g., physical contests for dominance) links aggression in sports to evolutionary traits favoring physical dominance in males. In the human world, society and thence culture foster domination even if achieved via violence. Traits of masculinity need to be demonstrated among men; otherwise, they will be undervalued in the masculine sphere. In the sports, violence has to be exposed and exercised to keep the masculine figure (Bryson, 1987; Messner, 1990).

What makes the situation worsen is the nurturing of violence behavior from legitimate to non-legitimate spheres. As the Legitimation of violence theory researchers found, accepted aggressive behavior during wartime spills over to become an accepted behavior even after the wartime. This applies to the sports world. Hockey is famous among sportsmen as one of the most violent sports compared to football and handball. Smith (1983) "Violence and Sport" compares violence across sports and identifies hockey as having

higher levels of sanctioned aggression compared to football and handball. Weinstein (1995) "Masculinity and hockey violence" finds that hockey players associate aggression with masculinity, leading to higher acceptance of violent conduct compared to other sports. In his "The Code: The Unwritten Rules of Fighting and Retaliation in the NHL", Bernstein (2006) explores how fighting is institutionalized in hockey, unlike in football or handball.

Hockey players endure to a lot of pressure during the sport time a fact that has been noticed to be carried on within their social life, specifically by younger generations. In their study assessing the spillover theory to hockey players and violence, Bloom and Smith (1996) conclude that:

Select-league hockey players were more likely to approve of violence and to act violently in other sport settings than were house-league players and non-players. When age was introduced into the analyses, older, select league players were more likely to approve of violence and to act violently in other sports, but not in the family, compared to younger, select-league players, house leaguers, and non-players of all ages. The age effect was most pronounced in the highest age category, 18-21-year-olds. (pp.74)

Young players, under stress of competition and self-approval circumstances, can react violently even outside the sports arenas. *Beartown* is a novel of young hockey players who project such categorization in different life spheres.

Analysis: *Beartown*; A Novel that Talks about Bears

When people (like myself) who have experience of Fredrick Backman's style and twisted stories read *Beartown* for the first time, they imagine the story will be about how complicated emotions are (*Anxious People* (2021) and *A Man Called Ova* (2012) are great examples). *Beartown* is more like about how frustrating emotions are. The novel tells of a town that "isn't close to anything. Even on a map the place looks unnatural," (pp.6). Small towns like Beartown need fresh starts if they want to keep existing. But Beartown people are not those who wait for destiny to change their fate, they are the Bears and whatever is going to happen; it has to be under control. Their fate will be put on the shoulders of younger generation who make the hockey player team. Everyone put their hopes on them, "everyone hopes that when the team's fortunes improve again, the rest of the town

will get pulled up with it" (pp.7). This responsibility puts pressure on the young boys who in other areas are called kids.

In *Beartown*, Fredrik Backman charts the unraveling of a hockey-obsessed town after its star player, Kevin, is accused of raping a young girl, Maya, the daughter of the team's assistant coach. The town, already gripped by economic decline, invests its hope and identity in the junior hockey team's success, making the accusation not just a personal crisis but a communal reckoning. As the narrative unfolds, alliances form and fracture, exposing latent misogyny, class tensions, and the destructive power of silence. Maya's decision to speak disrupts the town's unified front, revealing how institutions protect abusers to preserve prestige. Characters like Peter and Kira Andersson, Amat, Benji, and David are forced to confront moral choices that define their integrity. Hockey, once a symbol of unity, becomes a site of ethical rupture. The novel moves from collective pride to disillusionment, asking whether communities can be rebuilt through truth. Backman weaves multiple perspectives to capture the emotional and moral complexity of small-town life. *Beartown* becomes both a sports novel and a powerful social critique on loyalty, trauma, and justice.

The setting of the novel itself is an anxiety generator for the club players; all people commit themselves in what comes first, 'the team before anything'. Parents, club manager, club president, players, and Beartown people are aware that, "the good of the club comes before anything else… The team will become the heart of the town's plans for the future…Hockey is becoming more that hockey, it's becoming tourism, a trademark, capital. Survival" (pp.13-20). The people who are responsible for club are not considered as normal people, for the town people they are "an army [where] the soldiers need to fall in whenever they're summoned, their families standing proudly in the doorways, waving them off" (pp.22). Bearing such huge responsibility explains where the word 'bear' comes from, they bear like bears.

Hockey gives opportunities for the young players, each according to their circumstances (a female player is not a part of hockey team, she must not dream of becoming one). Hockey is Amat's way to dream of success and save his mother from back pain at work , "a way into society…he is planning to make it the way out as well" (pp.25). For Benji, an A team player whose father committed suicide without explanation, hockey is an escape

from reality. For Kevin, the boy whose family's only interest is success at all cost, "perfection isn't a goal in the Erdahl family, it's the norm" (pp.31), hockey is where anger and pride are mingled.

In *Beartown*, Backman frames hockey as a crucible where toxic masculinity transforms raw emotion into collective identity. This aligns with Michael Messner's (1992) theory of sports as 'gendered institutions,' where aggression is ritualized into socially acceptable dominance. The novel illustrates this through the team's culture: their loyalty bonds are forged not just through skill, but through shared rage—against opponents, outsiders, and their own vulnerabilities. As Backman writes, 'A hockey team is a strange thing; it takes the fury of one boy and the bitterness of another and turns it into power' (p. 89). This dynamic mirrors sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' (1990), wherein hockey's norms condition players to channel personal grievances into performative violence, masking deeper systemic failures in the community.

The young players are projected in the novel as investments rather than fifteen- and seventeen-year-old kids playing a game. "Even when the board and parents keep going on about 'letting the players lose' and trying to play 'more enjoyable hockey' David [the coach] doesn't even know what 'enjoyable hockey' is, he only knows one sort of hockey that isn't enjoyable—the one where the opposing team scores more points" (pp.28). Benji, Kevin's best friend and the next best player, knows that his role is not only playing. Although everyone thinks his aggressive way of playing makes him look like he is fighting, all he knows is that, "he isn't fighting. He is protecting the most important investment the town has ever seen" (pp.29,). He is aware that Kevin is the "Jewelry," and he is the "insurance policy" (pp. 30). For the investors, the young players are "significant investment," the pressure put on their shoulders is what makes them a fortune, "Do you know what happens to coal if you apply pressure on it? … It turns into diamonds," the president declares (pp. 42). The vocabulary depicts how commodified the boys are in the eyes of their community. It also pictures how the young players will become the product of the culture they are nurtured within.

Sune, the old club manager, is being fired not because he has become old for hockey but because his teaching methods are. Although he is the one who brought Peter, Maya's father and the general manager, from Canada

to make it work and he is the one who made David the new coach; his old teachings about 'culture, values, and community' are now seen as outdated. It was Sune who nurtured the two talented players Beartown has ever seen, the first is Peter; Maya's father, the second is Kevin, Maya's rapist. For him, "it takes more than hormones to turn boys into men. Senior hockey requires maturity just as much as it does talent" (pp.27), for the others, "Hockey hurts, it demands inhumane sacrifices physically and mentally and emotionally" (pp.25). Sune becomes unaware of what 'culture, values and community' mean anymore because, "all organizations like to boost that they are building a culture, but when it comes down to it everyone really only cares about one sort; the culture of winning" (pp30). Winning at all costs means winning while neglecting morals and values. This creates boys who practice violence over other boys with less physical or economic traits. Just like their parents, these young players will learn that crashing other boys is what will make them strong, "…there are no winners without losers, no stars are born without others in the collective being sacrificed" (pp.65). As Sune later declares, "culture is as much about what we encourage as what we permit" (pp.45).

Kevin and Maya's story of rape starts a night before the final game. Kevin tries to survive the pressure the game and people of Beartown put on him next to his loneliness on such a big day of his life, "On the biggest day of his life he is the loneliest boy on earth…and loneliness is an invisible ailment" (pp.77-90). Maya on the other hand is a girl who hates hockey but loves her father. Being the general manager makes him the man of the town, everybody expects from him to win, it is her role as his daughter to make him survive that. Maya learned to survive competitiveness from both sides of her parents, a general manager as a father and a lawyer as a mother. Kevin from the other hand is someone who was born to become competitive, "there are dads who ask 'did you win?' but Kevin's dad asks how many did you win by?" (pp.76). The boy's loneliness makes him think he is in love with Maya, his competitiveness, on the other hand, makes him think he deserves her, "There is a thin line between living and surviving, but there is one positive side effect of being both romantic and very competitive: you never give up" (pp.80). Learning that Amat, the younger new star boy who will enter the A team game, is in love with Maya makes Maya look like an object to win at all costs. Pride, from the other hand, makes his wanting to win her even more, "humanity has many

shortcomings but none is stronger than pride" (pp. 116).

Kevin rapes Maya on the night before the game thinking both that she is the one who came to him and because he has the right to do that. His prideful manner of taking what he wants because he can makes feel the cause not the victim, "she's not thinking like someone who's been the victim of a crime, she's thinking like someone who committed one: all she can think is that no one must ever know, that she must get rid of evidence" (pp. 121). Maya's reaction stems from two things, her shame and her awareness that she lives in a town that fosters shame, "So she bowed her head and devoted herself to Beartown's real traditional sports: shame and silence" (pp. 146). Silence plays an important role not as action or individual behavior but as a culture. Kira, Maya's mother has always warned her husband of the dangers of keeping silent, she "once told him that the club had an unpleasant culture of silence, the sort of thing you find among soldiers and criminals," but for a club manager that is what takes to win, "a culture of silence to foster a culture of winning" (pp.143). Winning is institutionalized under hidden complicities like these. It is until their daughter is raped and silenced that he has become aware that silence in hockey applies to all life angles. Kevin and Maya, though think they are young and free, their actions are shaped by their community expectations. The objectification of power and masculinity are rules.

Maya decides to break silence the day of the game. The day of the game is significant to breaking the silence. In another day nobody would take her voice in consideration. Time and place play an important role in the evolution of both the plot and the character's personality. The change in attitude challenges directly not Kevin but the whole social structure and Beartown's values. It is a matter of choice, either to live in darkness or to break the darkness, "For the perpetuator, rape lasts just a matter of minutes. For the victim, it never stops" (pp. 115). There are many ways to talk about rape but there are not many ways explain it. The first thing people will take from Maya is her "name". Her name will become a challenge to the club's significance for the town (her father is the manager and her mother is protector of law) and a

When night comes and the truths spread, no one types 'Maya' on their cell phone or computer, they type 'M' Or 'the young woman' or 'the slut.' No one talks about the 'rape', they all talk about 'the allegation' Or 'the lie'. It

starts with nothing happened' moves on to 'and if anything happened, it was voluntary',' escalates to 'and if it wasn't voluntary, she only has herself to blame (pp.177). Caught between their unwavering loyalty to their team and their emotional devotion to the institution they revere, the people of Beartown are further constrained by the gendered societal norms that compel them to willfully overlook the severity of sexual violence. At this stage, public discourse shifts from a critical examination of the truth— whether rape occurred—to a polarized debate over allegiance. The central question is no longer about acknowledging the crime but rather about prioritizing the perceived collective interests of the fanbase, the club, and the broader community.

There are many ways a culture of rape can expose itself in a community that confirms to its rules. However, for a girl of sixteen, it is hard to become nameless in a triumph of world that instead of confronting reality chooses to avoid conflict, silence it:

So the first thing happens in a conflict is that we choose a side, because that's easier than trying to hold two thoughts in our heads at the same time. The second thing that happens is that we seek out facts that confirm what we want to believe—comforting facts, ones that permit life to go on as normal. The third is that we dehumanize our enemy. There are many ways of doing that, but none is easier than taking her name away from her. (pp.177)

Violence unveils itself in a community that wants to win at all coast. Amat, the boy from the poor districts, the one who could join the A team before being seventeen, and the boy who witnessed rape, is chased in the town for telling the truth about that night, about a girl who has been raped. Maya is hated by everyone because she uncovered the shame and silence, not of herself, but of a town disguised in streams of fault maxims that say "Culture, Values, Community" (pp. 30). Maya takes a gun, does into the wood where Kevin stays at night perfecting his skills in hockey each night, and Bang, "she realized [that] the only way to stop being afraid of the darkness out there is to find a darkness inside yourself that's bigger. She's never going to get any justice from this town, so there's only one solution: either Kevin must die, or Maya must" (pp. 215).

Maya does not kill Kevin in the end but she kills the fear, the shame, and silence a culture of rape in allowed to exist and perpetuate. Maya's transformation does not occur as a theoretical concept but as a bodily,

subjective revolution—one of firm action and psychic break. When she takes the gun and enters the woods where Kevin is, the body of her action announces the change within her: she is no longer prey in a world of predatory male privilege, but an agent equipped with the very darkness she feared. The fire "Bang" of the gunshot solidifies her realization—that survival means finding an inner ferocity to match the dangers outside. Her realization that "the only way to stop being afraid of the darkness out there is to find a darkness inside yourself that's bigger" is not metaphor, but survival mandate, forged in the crucible of confrontation. Although she does eventually spare Kevin, this holdback is not weakness but regaining power—she kills not the boy, but the terror, shame, and silence rape culture unleashes on its survivors. Through it, Maya's transformation is personal and political: by denying the victim vs. killer dichotomy, she deconstructs the system that demanded her destruction. Her transformation from fear to empowerment is written on the body (the gun, the forest, the withheld trigger) and in the mind (the murder of internalized oppression), making her growth impossible to deny, impossible to reverse, and profoundly material.

Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to uncover how a culture of rape still maintains even within the so-called civilized world. Rape causes have been repeatedly projected in modern literature to an extent that brings questions in the mind of the researcher: what makes rape perpetuate? How does a culture of rape spillover? How does rape find ready-made explanations in the sports world? Why is the well-being of a society more important than that of a sixteen-year-old girl? And how to stop constructing beliefs about rape that blame the victim more than the rapist? This study concludes that rape happens in different angles of our social life, in different fields. Instead of studying rape as social construct that applies to all domains, for the same reasons, and has the same consequences; it is better to examine the causes of rape within their contexts. Rape that occurs in the sports world, among younger generations, has its own nature and characteristics; hence, it is better to eliminate the psychological, social, cultural, and political features that drive its occurrence to limit its spread. Like a virus, rape has to be examined, contained, and prevented before it becomes ingrained as a culture. For better understanding of the nature of rape culture, this study

recommends further research within the domains where rape persists, for example for example, among politicians and within health domains, especially rape practices against people with disabilities. Another aspect that helps uncover the truth about rape and rape culture is the extensive reading and analysis of of literature from different cultures.

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