

MASCULINITY AND THE NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE:
HOCKEY'S GENDER CONSTRUCTIONS

A Thesis

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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DECEMBER 2017

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled:

MASCULINITY AND THE NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE:

HOCKEY'S GENDER CONSTRUCTIONS

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a candidate for the degree of master of arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking my committee chair, Dr. Cristina Mislán, for her guidance and help throughout this project, and beyond. From the first class I took at Missouri, Mass Media Seminar, to the thesis itself, she encouraged me to see the world through different lenses and inspired a passion for cross-disciplined study. Her assistance was invaluable in completing this project.

Next, I would like to thank my committee members: Dr. Sandy Davidson, Dr. Amanda Hinnant and Dr. Becky Scott. All three members provided insight and feedback into different portions of the project at its early stages and each one made the study stronger. Dr. Davidson's tireless support and enthusiasm was infectious and her suggestion to explore the legal concerns the NHL might have about violence and head injuries led me to explore the commoditization of players. Dr. Hinnant helped me further understand methodology and how to apply theories to research. Her questions about decisions I made throughout the process forced me to examine my ideas more closely and, ultimately, increased my understanding of what I was looking for. Dr. Scott graciously agreed to be my outside member. I am thankful for her insight into sociology — the reading list she suggested was instrumental in rounding out the literature review and the project as a whole and served to connect sociology to critical media studies, which I hope to continue in the future.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends who have supported me throughout graduate school — I'm not sure that I'll ever be able to thank them enough — especially Lise. Her support and love carried me through at times, and now we can look forward to our next adventure.

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MASCULINITY AND THE NHL

Masculinity and the National Hockey League:
Hockey's gender constructions
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ABSTRACT

As a part of gender studies, academics have shone a spotlight on hegemonic masculinity in Western society. One of the places where hegemony is most prevalent is in sports culture. The research in this document seeks to build on existing scholarship concerning hegemonic masculinity in sports culture. Through textual analysis of National Hockey League communications, this study gathered data of how the league distributes messages about gender, how the league wants to be portrayed and if those messages outweigh the hegemonic masculinity of sports. This analysis found that, while the NHL promotes inclusive masculinity, its hegemonic values are the ones more prominent. Despite the league's efforts to become more inclusive, there remains much work ahead for the NHL if it truly desires to foster an inclusive masculinity.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Upon being eliminated from the 2017 National Hockey League (NHL) playoffs, the San Jose Sharks revealed that their captain, Joe Thornton, had been playing with tears in both the anterior cruciate and medial collateral ligaments of his left knee. This announcement was made only five days after Columbus Blue Jackets' defenseman Zach Werenski played the third period of a game with a facial fracture.

One of the myths of masculinity in sports culture is that athletes (particularly male athletes) should view their bodies as instruments (Allain, 2008 and Kimmel, 2010). This socially constructed idea leads to reckless treatment of the physical self by people engaged in sports culture. Furthermore, sport permeates American society. Encountering sports, or sports advertising, is unavoidable. Therefore, it is important to understand sports culture's place in society, and how that culture affects others around it. It is also important to understand the breadth of sports coverage. The vast reach of sports will undoubtedly cross the paths of people of all ages. As a result, sports culture must be examined in order to see the kinds of messages it sends to different groups.

This study seeks to build on existing feminist critique of sports culture by examining the NHL and its public communications. This will be accomplished by examining all forms of media officially released by the league, including its official website, press releases, advertising and social media use.

Academic discussions of masculinities within sports culture stem from feminist studies. As such, a cross-disciplined study between the two is relevant. Sports are not going to disappear, and because of the resistance of professional leagues to openly discuss gender constructions,

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scholars should be the trailblazers for research connecting hegemonic gender ideals to their sports. Currently, there are two major arguments from the academic community concerning masculinity in sports. The first is that sport, as a social structure, needs to be criticized from a feminist perspective (Kimmel, 2010, Messner 1990 and Sabo, 1990). Feminist critique can serve to examine both individual cases and large-scale studies of sports culture. From there, scholars will be able to explore the ways in which sport culture participates in hegemonic masculinity, and the subjugation of peoples. This brings us to the second major argument; one that stems specifically from scholars who study hockey. Most studies of hegemony focus on the oppression of minorities, however, within the hegemony of hockey culture straight, white men also oppress each other in addition to women and people of colour, while expressing homophobic behaviour (Allain, 2008, Gee, 2009 and Tjønnndal, 2016). Therefore, hockey culture presents an interesting opportunity to study hegemonic oppression of opposing masculinities, in addition to oppression of all things not masculine.

The reasons for selecting the NHL are multiple: it is the largest professional hockey league in the world, its main operating language is English, it has a history of advertising and it has a social media presence. The primary focus of this study will be to examine the league's connection to hegemonic masculine ideals (Connell, 1990).

There were several key concepts involved in this study. First of all, when discussing gender, Allain's¹ definition of masculinity was applied. This is of note because it is important to have a clear definition of masculinity, since feminist criticism has argued that there are different constructions within gender studies (Lorber, 1991 and Messner, 1990). The next concept is sports culture, specifically that of the NHL and hockey culture. The final major area to be

¹ From "Real Fast and Tough" by Kristi Allain, 2008

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explored is a subsection of an existing social structure rather than a concept. Sports media will be the focus, although media in general will be explored. In order to complete the study, textual analysis was conducted to review existing data and compile findings. The scope of the study was limited to official communications released by the NHL; including social media and everything published on the league's website. Although it may be interesting to include the views of people employed by the league or league pundits, collecting all of that data is not feasible.

On a more practical level, the research was useful in exploring the messages that the NHL is sending. Whether intentional or subconscious, advertisements can shape discussions about sports and influence popular opinion (Wonseok, 2014). Media have the ability to create and reproduce social myths that become accepted as commonplace (Connell, 1990 and Kellner, 1995). The NHL is certainly involved in the creation and maintenance of gender myths. Furthermore, sports advertisements often reinforce the hegemonic male dominance within sports culture (Whannel, 1999). However, it is interesting to note that the NHL is not guilty of promoting solely male-dominant messages.

This study reveals that while some of the communications from the NHL promote hegemonic masculinity, an increasing number represent more inclusive forms of gender expression, most notably the NHL's relatively new connections to LGBT organizations and promotions of women's hockey. The league is also actively trying to reduce fighting, meaning the most aggressive form of performing masculinity is being marginalized by the league itself. Furthermore, the league's disciplinary branch is (sometimes) suspending or fining players for homophobic and racist behaviour, which further indicates a desire to foster more inclusivity from the NHL. This study also indicates that the league fails in some of its attempts, but the interplay

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between hegemonic masculinity and other, more inclusive forms of masculinity, clearly illustrate that there is competition between different masculinities in the NHL's communications.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conducting a study of gender and media representation requires a cross-disciplinary practice. The overarching theories and concepts are diverse, each requiring their own considerations. For the purpose of this study, the key theories and concepts will be broken into separate sections. The key theories involved will be feminist theory and framing theory, with the emphasis being on feminist critique of masculinity. The key concepts will include sports culture, masculinity, and sports media.

Masculinity in Western Society

At the start of each semester, State University of New York — Stony Brook professor Michael Kimmel asks his students what they think makes a good man. After they have responded, he asks them to define a “real” man. This exercise is a continuation of the research he began with “Guyland” (2008), where he describes the idea that there are multiple forms of masculinity. Other research, stemming from Connell’s 1987 argument, backs that idea and adds that the different masculinities compete for dominance. This competition fosters an ever-changing landscape for the dominant form of masculinity, and thus, the perceptions of how masculinity should be performed. Social institutions shape and create standards for gender expectations. In order to understand how these social values are formed, the institutions themselves must be examined.

Rather than viewing gender as “natural”, Butler (1998) argues that gender roles are social creations. Gender is the way people act, dress, speak, etc. in a “stylized repetition of acts” (1998). These acts are often internalized, not by an individual but rather by a community, to create expectations of gender roles. These creations influence the cultural expectations placed on

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people based upon sex. These expectations and performances then form the basis of what it means to be “masculine” or “feminine” and are thereby tied to the consolidation of what makes a man or woman. Moving on from the construction of masculinity, I looked at hegemonic masculinity and how it interacts with the social structures of American culture. The focus was to explore how masculinity uses social structures to maintain a position of dominance. After examining the social nature of gender and hegemony, the next step was to look at how those roles were created. Therefore, the third major argument that I explored is that media plays a major role in creating gendered identities, focusing primarily on Hoover’s (2011) article. Advertising products using hyper-masculine traits allow for media to directly influence which form of masculinity is viewed as most desirable. The final major theme involved is how masculinity affects children and the ways in which boys turn in to men. Connell (2005) argued that even in youth, boys are exposed to influencers that shape their individual masculinities long before they understand the meaning of gender. Therefore, it is important to examine these messages critically to explore how and why masculine ideals are shaped.

Research surrounding how gender is socially constructed is thorough. Although continuously evolving, a large portion of the existing scholarship agrees that masculinity perpetuates itself, thereby creating a cycle of oppression for those outside the societal position of dominance. There are gaps in the research, including in-depth explorations of anti-feminist groups. However, the existing research acknowledges these gaps and has used its own (overwhelmingly) critical feminist theory to explore how to continue researching in the future.

The goal of this section is to explore how masculinities are formed in American society. There are three subsections divided up by the themes discussed above: The first is the gender as a construct, rather than innate. The second is an exploration of hegemonic masculinity; the final

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will look at how constructions of masculinity affects boys.

Gender as a Social Construct

Although humans have historically assigned gender at birth based on biological sex, the current research argues that gender is socially constructed. Butler (1988) claimed that gender is not simply something that people are born with. She argues, “it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.” This challenges the idea of innate gender. Although Butler was referring to women and the acts of femininity, subsequent research has expanded her ideas to include men and masculinity. Messner (1992) discusses the “social construction of masculinity” as a useful tool for examining the development of young men. Throughout the course of life, social institutions and expectations are constantly shaping gender. Butler continues to argue that this gendered social order is constructed to reinforce itself. When a person performs the act expected of their gender, it validates the social expectation, thus ensuring that the social norm remains such. Lorber (1991) explains that humans “do” gender, furthering the idea that gender is performed rather than innate. Lorber continues to state that gender is built into social institutions such as the economy, law, and state. All of these combine to create a “gendered social order” (Lorber, 1991). This social order permeates American society and encourages people to act according to the created gender role.

One of the major criticisms of the socially constructed gender norms is that the constructions treat gender as a binary rather than existing on a spectrum. Scholars widely agree that expected gender performances ignore variety and reinforce a singular dominant form of masculinity (Connell, 1987, Gardiner, 2005, Kimmel, 2010, Lorber, 1991, Messner, 1992, and Sabo, 1990). Therefore, these gender constructions exclude everything that is not heterosexuality. In addition to the rejection of those outside the social norms, it also creates an

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environment where discrimination and marginalization of people who are not cisgender and straight (Connell, 1987 and 2007, and Sabo, 1990). Connell (1990) argues that this rejection of anything remotely considered feminine by masculine social standards is unhealthy and destructive, especially for young men. That argument is backed by other scholars, who argue that in attempts to prove physical superiority, men are encouraged to undertake violent and dangerous physical trials and activities (Clare, 2000, Kimmel, 2010 and Messner, 1992). These activities are often viewed as acts of masculine performance. Furthermore, Connell (1987) argues that viewing gender as a binary ignores the fact that, even among middleclass, white, heterosexual men, there exists multiple forms of masculinity. She continues to argue that, to different degrees, these competing forms of masculinity are socially accepted. The acceptance of multiple forms of masculinity indicates that society subconsciously acknowledges the fact that gender exists on a spectrum than a binary.

There is pressure on all people to publicly perform in a manner that meets the expectations of society's gendered constructions. Within masculinity, this often means acts that marginalize others or put the individual in dangerous physical situations. Although acceptance of people outside of the created binary is increasing, evidenced by the legality of gay marriage, gendered binaries continue to be major factors in the construction of gender. Therefore, many people continue to conform to society's expectations and perform the acts associated with their biological sex. Not only do these gendered acts reinforce themselves, but also contribute to the idea of hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Now that the idea of gender as a social construct has been established, we can continue on to how those genders interact with each other. Within the construction of these social roles is

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the desire to maintain power, wherein comes the hegemony. Genders themselves are constructed in a hierarchy, where masculine is dominant and feminine is submissive (Connell, 1987 and Gardiner, 2003). This comes from traditional values where the man was the provider and protector of the family. While society has changed to allow women greater independence and roles in the work force, traditional masculinity perseveres (Everitt-Penhale and Ratele, 2015). Many social institutions, including sport and sports culture, overwhelmingly support the hypothesis of masculine dominance (Allain, 2008, Atkinson, 2011, Kimmel, 2010, Kray, 2017 and Messner, 1992). This search for dominance is part of the socially constructed values of masculinity (Connell, 1987 and 1990). Existing social institutions influence the construction of gender and reinforce the gendered order and expectations (Sabo, 1990).

Part of the social order is the dominant position of men. However, it is important to note that masculinity does not only strive for domination over women, but also over other men (Gardiner, 2003 and Kimmel, 2010). It is in this search for power that hegemony thrives. For the purpose of this study, we will rely on Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity. Connell argues that, while there are different forms of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the form of masculinity that is "culturally exalted" (1990). That exaltation leads to construction and maintenance of a dominant social structure, and the oppression of all others within the gender order. Within these narratives, non-dominant persons are marginalized and subordinated (Messner, 1990), usually through the use of hegemonically constructed "heroes" (Connell, 1990). As noted above, there exist multiple forms of socially accepted masculinity. Connell's argument remains valid however, upon examining the subcultures directly: Even within sports culture, different types of masculinity are valued, usually differing by sport (Burstyn, 2001 and Messner, 1992). Each sport creates its own exalted masculinity through the

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use of its own heroes (Whannel, 1999). Although the sports create their own individual form of desired masculinity, the overall themes remain the same. Chief attributes in hegemonic masculinity include strength, aggression, and the physical domination of others (Burstyn, 2001, Connell, 1990 and 2016, Gardiner, 2005, Kimmel, 2010, Messner, 1990, Sabo, 1990 and Whannel, 1999 and 2002). These attributes are often criticised for building a culture in which men view their bodies as instruments (Connell, 1990, Messner, 1992 and Kimmel, 2010). As part of the attempt to perform masculinity, men frequently are put in positions where physical harm is the cost of simply being a man; masculinity does not accept weakness or even admitting to being in pain. For a large portion of the population, ideas constructed in sports culture have become ingrained in what it means to be a man (Messner, 1992). The existence of these multiple masculinities leads to struggles within the hegemonic order itself, creating tension and confusion among men about how to correctly perform masculinity (Connell, 1990 and Kimmel, 2010), furthering Butler's argument about gender as performance.

The discussion of hegemonic masculinity certainly applies to relationships between men, but is most often associated with a patriarchal oppression of women (Everitt-Penhale and Ratele, 2015). It also indicates that masculinities compete directly with each other, while suppressing femininity (Atkinson, 2011, Connell, 1987, Gardiner, 2005, Kimmel, 2010 and Messner, 1988, 1992, 2002, and Sabo, 1990). Since masculinity seeks to oppress other forms of masculinity to remain dominant, it is only natural that the social construction would seek to dominate its opposite, femininity. The multiple types of masculinity also intersect with race and sexuality (Atkinson, 2011, Carrigan, 1985, Katz, 1995, Kellner, 1995, Kimmel, 2010 and Messner, 1990). According to the research, hegemonic masculinity benefits straight, white men. This notion has been thoroughly examined by feminist scholars as well as those interested in masculinities'

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studies. hooks (1992) argues that hegemonic masculinity appears in the othering of black bodies and the sexual pursuit of black women by white men. Within this idea of hegemonic masculinity oppressing people of colour is also a connection between masculine violence and sexual assault. Davis (1978) states that rape is not something inherent to male anatomy, rather that it is social. That argument can easily be linked to ideas of masculine violence and aggression, especially when considering the built-in hegemonic drive for dominance. Violence in all forms, but especially sexual violence, can be regarded as a means for the attacker to take control over another person. Therefore, there are clearly links between hegemonic masculinity and sexual assault.

Furthermore, shifting demographics have shaken the foundations of traditional hegemonic masculinity, as minority and foreign-born populations are on the rise (United States Census Bureau). Therefore, the traditional hegemony, that of straight white men, has become challenged by other forms of masculinity. The backlash against opposing beliefs has been met in various ways and stems from different sources (Kelly, 2017, Kimmel, 2013, and Watts, 2008). The reasons for the renewed push for white male dominance could be for any number of reasons. However, Kimmel (2013) argues that it likely stems from a sense of innate entitlement. White men in American society have become accustomed to the privilege associated with being white and have grown to resent the fact that other people are gaining some of the benefits that white people have always enjoyed. Seeing the advantages of white privilege applied to other races has caused resentment, argues Kimmel, and that resentment leads to an aggrieved sense of entitlement, which in turn causes the entitled to blame 'the other'. One reason for the entitlement is a longing for "the good old days" and the way things used to be (Kelly, 2017 and Watts, 2008). The mythos of a time past, when all Americans were white and those who weren't white

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weren't American, has re-emerged. This is particularly noticeable among the white working class, which faces underemployment and wage stagnation (Kimmel, 2013 and Watts 2008). This group of people were threatened by the election of a black president (Kimmel, 2010 and 2013), and responded by searching for, and creating, a white American identity (Kimmel, 2010 and 2013, and Watts, 2008). While much of this identity relies on history (Watts, 2008), it is not based solely in the past. The alt-right² has emerged from this aggrieved entitlement through mainstream media and social media (Kelly, 2017). This white nationalist movement is conceived largely from nostalgia and fear. Watts describes a Southern teenager whose parents died during his youth. The young man moved in with other family members who regaled him with stories of the old South and its glories; "The stories were not meant to deceive me: but they deceived us all," he remembers (2008, pg. 221). That nostalgia, combined with the fear created by companies in the mainstream media and fringe media (Kelly, 2017) have allowed the white nationalist movement to rise to prominence. One of the cornerstones of this white nationalism is the fear of "white genocide" and the emergence of "feminised men" (Kelly, 2017). The fear of losing the dominant position in society stoked the flames of nationalism and white identity politics.

Hegemonic masculinity exists in an arena of competing masculinities. What is clear is the fact that some masculinities, and all forms of femininity, have been oppressed by the dominant forms of masculinity. The social structures that perpetrate hegemonic masculinity can offer a platform for a challenging type of masculinity, but ultimately oppresses most people. The hegemony maintains its control in several ways, including the repetition of self-fulfilling gender performances. However, there are other aspects involved in the construction of hegemonic masculinity.

² From here referred to as "white nationalist", per AP style

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Becoming a Man

The influences of social institutions begin at a young age (Kimmel, 2010). However, the division between boys and girls, and the construction of masculinity begins in earnest during puberty (Connell, 2005, Kimmel, 2010 and Messner, 1992). Group activities often become segregated by sex, sports are almost exclusively boys or girls and social expectations for the way children act become important (Kimmel, 2008 and Messner 1990). A large reason for this new divide is the perception of adolescent bodies (Connell, 2005). Erroneously or not, the social convention is that puberty begins the shift to where boys' and girls' bodies can no longer co-exist in physically competitive situations.

The culture of high school promotes 'masculinity' among boys. Research indicates that high school is often the most important social institution in a boy's life (Connell, 2005 and Kimmel, 2008). Not only is it during a time of intense physical and mental growth, sexuality and gender are often explored for the first time. When among an all-male group, young men tend to talk about sex to build a social-sexual attitude (Atkinson, 2011). These conversations are often filled with "inchoate sexism as boys boast and joke with each other" (Connell, 2005). In connection with the ideas of cultural exultation, masculine heroes in high school are often those who have had the most sexual encounters (or claim they have) or those who excel at sports (Kimmel, 2008 and 2010, and Messner, 1990). Therefore, a small culture of sexual predation begins in high school, where girls' bodies can be viewed as a step up the hierarchal ladder of masculinity. This is even more noticeable among athletes, who are trying to find ways to position themselves as more masculine than other athletes. Sexual encounters (whether real or imagined) provide another measure by which young men compare themselves (Messner, 1990). Furthermore, the growing understanding of sexuality and gender is extremely malleable during

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high school. Studies show that adolescents become new members of the consumer culture, where it is important to own the correct product (Connell, 2005). Due to the developing nature of adolescent sexuality, media can play a large role in shaping thought. Violent and hyper-sexualised media will influence the way that boys understand society (Katz, 1995, Kimmel, 2008, and Messner 1990). Sexually explicit images have become so commonplace in society that they are not difficult to find, whether it is in advertising, television or pornography.

Recently, a new trend has emerged regarding the consumption of pornography. The ease of which people can access pornographic material has meant that more people in high school are viewing it (Goldsmith, 2017 and Kimmel, 2008). The consensus surrounding pornography is that it is very male-oriented. Therefore, most of the films feature a dominant man and submissive woman (Antevska, 2015, Goldsmith, 2017 and Haste, 2013). This dynamic between the actors can confuse boys and affect their expectations of sex in real life (Kimmel, 2008). To further complicate the issue, many young men do not consider the dynamic between actors, simply accepting that it is the way it is (Antevska, 2015). Due to the existing gender structures, young men have the privilege which allows them to distance themselves or simply accept/ignore the domination aspects of pornography. In fact, many male viewers admitted not noticing when the male actor is dominant, while a dominant female actor gains attention (Antevska, 2015). One reason given for the noticeability of female dominance is because it is assumed that men should have the dominant position when dealing with women; “domination that’s the masculine...thing” (Antevska, 2015 pg. 619). Even if not conscious of it, young men construct their views of gender while watching pornography. Although many claim to understand that pornographic portrayals are not representative of reality (Antevska, 2015 and Haste, 2013), it remains problematic that the same young men do not view male domination of a female actress as sexist. For many young

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men, male domination of females is so expected that it goes without saying. This subconscious construction of gender is so ingrained in society that many people do not recognize it.

Furthermore, the transition from boy to man comes with an expectation of complete change, where the boy is abandoned for a socially dominant persona (Connell, 2005 and Janssen, 2008). When becoming a man, certain actions and traits that were acceptable as a boy become unacceptable. As a result of needing to rid themselves of those undesirable traits (anything that is considered “feminine” among adults), boys going through this phase often adopt an extremely rigid form of hyper-masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, Janssen, 2008, and Kimmel 2008). This phase of hyper-masculinity has been commonly referred to as “adolescent masculinity”, and generally diminishes as the boy matures into a man (Connell, 2005 and Kimmel, 2008). Adolescent masculinity also provides further evidence of Butler’s performative acts of gender, since the boys are in the process of creating their masculinities, rather than expressing what they truly believe. In this adolescent setting, the gender acts most commonly stem from the desire to be viewed as a man, rather than a boy, and fall in line with the hierarchical structure of hegemonic masculinity.

One of the major themes of masculinity is the struggle for dominance over others. Within that struggle comes an obvious subjugation of the others. In addition to oppression of women, men considered to be less masculine are oppressed or marginalized. Traditionally, homosexual people have been placed in the group of ‘less masculine’ (Bucher, 2014, Colgan, 2011, Kehler, 2010, Mazzie, 2014 and Tharinger, 2008). Starting at a young age, boys encounter multiple forms of masculinity. As discussed above, these different forms are competing with each other. When boys encounter a form of masculinity, they either adopt or reject that particular position of masculinity (Connell, 2005 and Kehler, 2010). This process determines the individuals’

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masculinity. This decision-making process is what creates different forms of masculinity, for even the hegemonic masculinity is not perfectly uniform. However, there are enough similarities for one form of masculinity to become the societal dominant form (Kehler, 2010, Kimmel, 2005 and Kimmel, 2010).

Gender among adolescent boys is shaped in a complex manner, but relies heavily on the development of sexual orientation. Those who do not participate in the ritualistic discussions of sex and girls are often marginalized within the masculine structures of high school (Kimmel 2008 and 2010). These discussions and formations of sexuality often come from a lack of knowledge or understanding and are frequently shaped by media. As with other forms of masculinity, heavy emphasis is placed on the male body as an instrument and the female body as something to be claimed by a man.

Masculinity and Media

Media is a major tool used to reinforce hegemony. From news to popular culture, media carry significant weight in perpetuating hegemonic masculinity (Wonseok, 2014 and Whannel, 1999). Not only do media companies make use of Lorber's gendered social order, but they can also directly frame gendered representations. Although media have long been used as a tool in gender construction, discussion of media's influence has only recently begun. Katz (1995) argues that media companies are guilty of "producing, reproducing and legitimating...violence." This can be seen, as the average American 18-year-old will have been exposed to roughly 200,000 acts of violence on television alone (Kivel and Johnson, 2009). This repeated exposure to violent acts has been shown to have negative effects on male body image (Taylor and Fortaleza, 2016 and Hoover and Coates, 2011). Furthermore, media frequently relies on a narrative that male bodies are instruments or tools, rather than part of the person (Kimmel, 2010). When these

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factors are combined, men often resort to micro-aggressions in order to reach a more ideal form of masculinity (Taylor and Fortaleza, 2016). These constructs are other examples of hegemonic masculinity and the dominance of white masculinity in Western society.

Media consumption allows for young men to test out some of these masculinities, primarily through television and video games (Kivel and Johnson, 2009 and Moss, 2011). These tests can be safely conducted at home and with the use of electronic barriers. The fact that the consumer is isolated allows for more freedom of expression without fear of rebuke. In general, media creates portrayals of men that promote dominance, power and control as a means of establishing masculinity (Katz, 1995). Scholars have been critical of media for normalizing violence, arguing that violent acts are often given more focus than the victims or the potential root causes. This is particularly the case when dealing with violence among youths and school violence, specifically school shootings. Katz is condemning of media, claiming that “school shootings reveal... a crisis in masculinity... the issue is not just violence in the media, but the construction of violent masculinity as a cultural norm” (1999, E1). The violent representations of masculinity in news is only part of the problem, however. Depictions of masculinity in television and video games also contribute to various constructions of masculinity, many of which are harmful (Katz, 1995 and Kivel and Johnson, 2009).

Portrayals of masculinities in television series are also worth noting. The scope of audience reached by television is immense, therefore it is fair to say that television affects those viewers (Giaccardi, 2016, Moss, 2011 and Thompson, 2015). Sitcoms in particular can follow a narrative of “heterosexual home-building” (Thompson, 2015 pg. 21). This type of sitcom contains characters who are in periods of transition in life, usually from youth to adult (often focused on the twenty-somethings). The archetypal character is heterosexual, and their role in the

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show is to express the navigations of single life. In most sitcoms like this, the single male is lauded for his sexual conquests, as they prove his virility and, as sexual conquests do, his masculinity (Kimmel, 2008, Messner, 1990 and Thompson, 2015). This is usually contrasted by another male character who is less promiscuous (or less successful in finding partners). The less promiscuous man is frequently viewed as the less masculine between the two characters (at least, from the viewpoint of the characters themselves), and the more sexually active character usually uses his conquests as an example of his own masculinity (Thompson, 2015). We have previously discussed the role of sex in establishing degrees of masculinity, and television is frequently guilty of perpetrating these ideals. Although most shows depict different forms of masculinity, the hyper-masculine single man is almost always present. Although show writers and the programs themselves have begun to critique this hegemonic form of masculinity (Birthisel and Martin, 2013 and Thompson, 2015), the characters themselves still have a tendency to laud sexual prowess of the bachelor. This promotes a continuation of the traditional masculine values and gendered hierarchy discussed above, especially among audience members who do not recognize the subtle criticism intended by the writers (Birthisel and Martin, 2013 and Thompson, 2015).

In addition to masculinity in television, depictions of masculinity in other forms of media continue to influence the construction of gender. Portrayals of men in magazines and other print media continue to build on hegemonic ideals (Ismail, 2014 and Mason, 1992). Men are almost exclusively portrayed as physically strong and heterosexual. Furthermore, the construction of the ideal young man is portrayed as an icon, someone set apart from the masses. These icons exemplify the most socially desirable masculine traits. They are, visibly and presentationally, men that other men should strive to be, and men who can fulfill a woman's dreams (Consalvo,

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2003 and Ismail, 2014). These icons are presented as the type of man that women gravitate towards, thereby reinforcing the idea of male dominance over females, specifically over the female body. They are also frequently presented in a context that stronger, rougher men are more masculine than other men, who might be considered feminine. Magazines largely reinforce hegemonic masculine ideals of male dominance, particularly physically (Consalvo, 2003). There are, however, signs that traditional attributes deemed feminine are becoming more accepted as male/masculine attributes, including consideration of others, emotional openness and thought before action (Giaccardi, 2016 and Ismail, 2014). While this change in ideals could be a sign of more inclusiveness, it could also be an indication that the dominant form of masculinity is changing.

Social media has recently emerged as a popular communication medium. With its emergence comes its own form of communication meaning and gender-creation. Social media has become a place where identities can be formed with little fear of backlash, therefore more extreme ideals can exist (Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016). The social network features allow for people with similar ideas to connect and construct a group identity. The identity of the group is generally more extreme than the views of the individuals (Foote, 2017, Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016 and Kelly 2017). As noted by Foote et al., many of these identities are a form of protest or counter-protest. For example, the homogeneity of NBA coaches was challenged in 2014 when the San Antonio Spurs hired the first full-time, paid, female, assistant coach, Becky Hammon. Many people lauded the Spurs for their decision, however a loud portion of social media users took to their preferred platforms to criticise the Spurs and attack Hammon herself (Sanderson and Gramlich, 2016). As noted above, hegemonic masculinity strives to dominate all other forms of gender. This example demonstrates the resistance to a woman being put in a place

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of authority over men. To the surprise of few, social media has been used by men to attack women, but it has also been used by various forms of masculinities to attack other forms. Among the most commonly attacked forms of masculinity are more equalitarian positions, viewed by some as weak masculine ideals (Foote, 2017 and Nardini, 2016). There is a long history of this type of discourse among Conservative politicians in the United States (Foote, 2017). The idea that a man in a position of authority must act as a strong-man persists and is common in sports culture as well as politics (Connell, 1990, Foote, 2017, Kelly, 2016, and Kimmel, 2010). Social media reinforces hegemonic and traditional masculine values, and allows for those views to be espoused with little fear of social backlash.

One of the major identities battling with hegemonic masculinity on social media platforms is a masculinity that strives for gender equality, which has also been called “profeminism” (Hearn, 2008, McKearney and Hearn, 2014, and Nardini, 2016). The profeminist masculinity acknowledges that hegemonic masculinity has oppressed women and strives to work within hegemonic structures to achieve gender equality (Gardiner, 2005, Hearn, 2008, and Kimmel, 2005). Social media has been used, as it has for hegemonic masculinity, to gather like-minded thinkers to promote profeminism (Nardini, 2016). For reasons discussed above, this type of masculinity is frequently challenged, especially on social media, in order to maintain the traditional gendered status quo. However, social media has provided a platform that didn’t previously exist to promote profeminism and women in sports – a traditionally masculine environment (Sanderson and Gramlich, 2016). However, that this form of masculinity is continually challenged is proof that hegemonic masculinity strives for dominance over all other gender ideals, and that hegemonic masculinity has no room for “weak” or “soft” men (Foote, 2017), nor does it allow for feminist thought.

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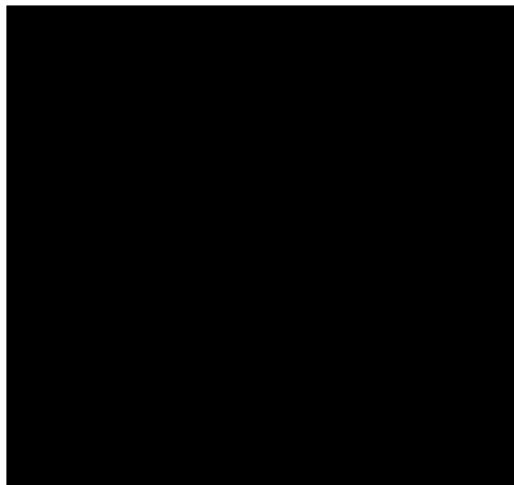
Hegemonic masculine ideals are largely reinforced by media. Portrayals of masculinity within advertising and programming promote a singular dominant form of masculinity. These portrayals also help continue oppression of femininity. Although there has been some challenge from feminist thinkers and new types of masculinity, hegemonic masculine ideals still persist.

Advertising

Even when ignoring the violent representations of masculinity in media, there remain idealized, often unattainable masculine portrayals. Within these idealized representations of masculinity are built in messages of competition between masculinities (Kluch, 2015 and Tan, 2013). In fact, there are instances where the competition is expressed outright, including the Old Spice ad campaign titled, “The Man Your Man Could Smell Like.” Within this ad, targeted at women, is the obvious message that the towel-clad actor is more masculine than the man in her life (Kluch, 2015). While likely designed to be charming, the Old Spice campaign reveals deeper internalizations about the importance of the body for masculinity. When combined with the arguments about masculinity and the male body, it is clear that Old Spice’s version of masculinity promotes the idea that the male body is an instrument. An interesting difference between depictions of male models and female models is the actions or poses that they assume, especially when examined critically from the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975). Masculinity is frequently depicted by the size of the male model, specifically his musculature. Advertising has often focused on a specific part of the male body and combined that focus with a recipe for how to achieve whatever the model possesses. This combination serves the purpose of “deflecting the voyeuristic gaze away from the male subject” (Mason, 1992). It is interesting to consider that the male model provides the standard for masculine beauty, but should not be consumed the way a female model would be.

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Similar representations of masculinity relating to the body can be found in other forms of advertising, including print (Tan, 2013). Academic discussions on the portrayals of women in advertising are commonplace, and discussions of the portrayals of men have come from feminist scholars (Gill, 2007). While the hyper-sexualisation of women in advertising is also well researched, early discussions of the men in those ads are also taking place (Tan, 2013). Images, such as the one below, depict men as sexually aggressive:



It is common to see perfume/cologne ads where a woman is lying in a prone position surrounded by men. In these instances, conversations of the depiction of women as a sexual object occur (Gill, 2007), however the aggressive portrayal of men should not be ignored. Portrayals of masculinity of this type, or the idea that women are prizes/objects, are harmful to masculinity. They perpetrate the idea of sexual violence to establish dominance and reinforce rape culture (Davis, 1978, Kluch, 2015 and Sabo, 1990). Furthermore, advertising frequently depicts total freedom as paramount when constructing masculinity. Real men are free to fight, drink and hang out with friends, while men who choose not to participate are lesser men (Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005). This type of advertising reinforces traditional masculine values, including heterosexuality, strength and rejection of non-dominant forms of masculinity.

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Sometimes this message is more obvious than others, including in the Miller Lite ad where a man approaches the bar and orders a light beer (not the advertised brand) and the female bartender tells him to put down his purse and order a Miller Lite. Advertising for alcoholic beverages has been accused of sexist advertising which promotes domestic violence in the past, and more recent advertising continues to face similar accusations (McCreanor et al., 2005, Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005 and Towns et al., 2012). Advertising in general, and the alcohol industry in particular, is guilty of relying on traditional gender roles, where the male is automatically placed in a position of social dominance.

Another common theme in depictions of masculinity in advertising is the use of accessories, or prizes, to be claimed. The focal point is often a young man surrounded by things that all men should want, usually women. Products can be sold in many different ways, but three of the most common are: buy our product, women will desire you; you need this to be a real man; everyone will adore you (Feasey, 2009, Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005, and Towns et al., 2012). All of these share a common outcome: a real man is one in a position of power or authority, elevated from other people. There are clear messages sent that a real man is successful, powerful and always gets what he wants. This type of message furthers the idea that the type of masculinity depicted in the ad is superior and anything less masculine, including other forms of masculinity, is inferior.

Moving on from how men are portrayed in advertising, *who* they are portrayed as is also important. Men are commonly portrayed as members of a heterosexual group, enjoying post-work activities (Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005 and Towns et al., 2012). The space in which the ad takes place is often a masculinized environment; a bar, a basement with a big screen TV, a sporting event, etc. This sense of space that is created, combined with the fact that women are

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often absent or peripheral, contributes to the construction of masculinity by reinforcing the idea that some things are made for men and some activities are simply for men as well. Men are frequently portrayed as a “bread winner”, while rarely being depicted as more family oriented (Feasey, 2009, Lovdal, 1989, and Messner and Montez de Oca, 2005). The lack of a visible family shows that men are independent and maintain the freedom to do as they please.

Masculinity and Sports Culture

The next section to be examined will be the ideas of masculinity within sport³. At this point, we have established that gender is not an innate attribute; rather it is something that is constructed and evolves with time (Allain, 2008, Messner, 1990, Kimmel, 2010 and Sabo, 1990). The social sphere in which the individual lives will shape them. This sphere will include, but not be limited to, parents, siblings, other family members, friends, schoolmates and teammates. Furthermore, organized activities, including school and sports, seem to have natural gendered separations between boys and girls. Messner (1990) noted that, when children were separated by gender, boys measured their value through multiple series’ of physical competitions or physical skill-based activities. However, when mixed gender groups were put in sports scenarios there was a less of an attempt made by males to gain physical dominance over their opposition. Furthermore, Allain (2008) notes that, specifically in young Canadian hockey players, masculinity is pushed to the extreme, where only the strongest and most aggressive are considered masculine, while all others are considered more feminine. As discussed above, attributes commonly associated with masculinity are aggression, violence, courage and toughness (Connell, 1990, Messner, 2002, Allain, 2008, Gee, 2009 and Tjønnndal, 2016).

³ For the remainder of this study, all mentions of masculinity refer specifically to masculine identity within sports culture. Should a reference need to be made about masculinity outside of sports culture, it will be explicitly stated.

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Therefore, these are the attributes that we will use as a guideline for masculinity and the ideals that those within sports culture aspire to achieve. It also cannot be argued that hegemonic masculinity dominates sports culture. Therefore, it is worth noting that there are varying levels of masculinity within the culture and its subcultures.

As discussed above, advertising plays a major role in shaping public opinion about gender roles (Hoover, 2011, Katz, 1995, Kivel, 2009 and Taylor and Fortaleza, 2016). In fact, Entman and Rojecki (2000) state that advertisements are “leading cultural indicators” that demonstrate gender values and can be used as contemporary guides to cultural values (Kluch, 2015). Furthermore, advertisements use images of idealized gender for their target audience, in our case, idealized masculinity (Tan et al., 2013). Therefore, looking at the NHL’s advertising is an obvious starting point. The league ran a series of ads focusing on the “Warriors” (Gee, 2009) of the hockey world, the fighters. By airing this type of campaign, the NHL was simultaneously romanticising and normalising the ideas of masculinity discussed above. However, the NHL is hardly the sole culprit in terms of maintaining existing ideals of masculinity in sport culture. Other media outlets, those not directly connected to a single league, also perpetrate these masculine ideals.

Despite the fact that there exists multiple masculinities (Consalvo, 2003, Messner, 1988, and Messner, 1990) sports culture seems to, traditionally, have embraced more of a cohesive, singular attitude (Messner, 1992), where sports culture idolizes hyper-masculinity. Media then perpetrates these ideals by creating narratives surrounding sports, teams or even individual athletes (Allain, 2010, and Gee, 2009). By narrowing coverage down to a single player, media have the ability to create a hero by extolling that individual’s masculinity (Connell, 1990). It appears in hockey on several levels. Obviously, fighters are natural players to focus on when

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constructing a narrative of masculine identity. Media have used fighters' violent existence on many occasions to promote the game (Gee, 2009 and Tjønndal, 2016). Media coverage of fighters often promotes their 'manliness' in a realm already teeming with masculinity. Even with fighting declining at the highest levels of the game (NHL), it is still almost a certainty that any fights that do occur will end up part of the highlight package. Furthermore, there are pundits who stress that even the best players need to have the grit and courage to go to the dangerous areas of the ice – the corners and in front of the net (Allain, 2008 and Gee, 2009) – despite the fact that arguably the greatest player of all time, Wayne Gretzky⁴, spent little time in those areas. Players who don't go to those areas are often criticised for being 'soft' (Allain, 2008, 2010). One prominent pundit in particular, CBC's Don Cherry, is vocal in his criticism of players who shy away from those 'tough' areas of the ice.

Other team sports, notably football, share similar beliefs about masculinity. Once again, it is noticeable that media play a role in maintaining the belief that any signs of injury or weakness are less than masculine, therefore, less worthy of admiration. In fact, much of the discourse surrounding football is built on the ideas of self-sacrifice and "playing through the pain" (Anderson, 2012 and Kimmel, 2010). Although the main focus of this study will be hockey, it is important to note that the phenomenon of hyper-masculinity is not contained solely to hockey culture. Football contains many of the similar beliefs and constructions of masculinity (Anderson, 2012). Having said that, due in large part to the increasing knowledge about concussions and long-term effects of injuries, discussions surrounding injuries in sports have begun to shift.

⁴ Gretzky scored 2,857 career points. The current active leader, 45-year-old Jaromir Jagr, has scored 1,914.

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By using Allain's argument as an example, we can find that the subculture can be reduced to a group as small as a single team. Within that team, there will be varying levels of masculinity and hockey promotes the masculine ideals, sometimes literally. The encouragement for physical confrontation begins at an early stage. In 2013, Hockey Canada voted to remove body checking for players in the PeeWee age group, 11- and 12-year-olds, moving the minimum age for body checking up to 13. Prior to the rule change, the idea of physically imposing your will on an opponent was taught to 11-year-olds. Furthermore, Allain argues that it is common for young players to need to endear themselves to teammates by proving their masculinity through physical conflict. In one of the interviews conducted by Allain, a player admitted that there were varying levels of masculinity on his team and the only way to move up was through an act of physical conflict, whether with a teammate or opponent made no difference.

Continuing with the idea of physical confrontations, a strange ritual appears in hockey that does not exist in any other team sports: legal fighting. Although resulting in a major penalty, players who engage in fights in hockey are not ejected from the game, nor will they automatically face supplementary discipline. Furthermore, players and coaches in hockey accept that fighting is part of the game and an effective way for the players to maintain accountability (Allain, 2010, Gee, 2009 and Tjønnedal, 2016). What is even more interesting than the fact that fighting is accepted, is the duality of the fighters themselves. These gladiators, for there is no better description, exist in a different sphere than most other players, similar to goaltenders. As noted above, fighting is a way to prove masculinity so one would assume that a player who fits the role of 'fighter' or 'tough guy' would, more often than not, be the Alpha of the locker room. However, that is not the case in most subsets of hockey culture. The true Alpha players, those who gain Connell's (1990) status of 'hero' must possess the masculine (physical) skills to

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succeed and must also possess the more feminine skills (skating, passing, puck handling) to be able to beat their opponents in a variety of ways (Allain, 2008, Allain 2010 and Gee, 2009).

Therefore, the hegemonic masculinity in sport, specifically hockey, is constructed in a way that rewards hyper-masculinity for some, but not all.

Furthermore, sports culture embraces military-like rank and discipline ideals (Allain, 2008, Gee, 2009 and Kimmel, 2010). The organizational structures of team sports promote the idea that nothing is more important than the team, and that the team has a distinct hierarchy (Allain, 2010, and Te Hiwi and Forsyth, 2017). This hierarchy cultivates the masculine idea of treating the body as an instrument and the willingness to sacrifice the body for the good of the team. The team structure runs from the top to bottom, where the players ranked near the bottom are expected to assume more physical punishment (Allain, 2008, Allain, 2010 and Gee, 2009). This is demonstrated in the value of the “fighter” in hockey, whose only role on the team is to fight. While a member of the team, and the one who plays in the most traditionally masculine role, the fighter is generally a 4th line player (out of 4) who will play less than 10 minutes per game, compared to 25-plus for a star (NHL.com). So, although hegemonic masculine values shape the definition of masculinity in hockey culture, competing constructions of masculinity are valued.

Another interesting note in this vein, is how homophobia is treated in sports. As discussed above, homosexuality doesn't fit within the hegemonic structures of sports culture (Connell, 1990, Kehler, 2010, Kimmel, 2005 and Messner, 1990). However, recent studies suggest that sports cultures are becoming more accepting of homosexuality among males. There is growing acceptance among the fans and the athletes themselves for gay athletes (Anderson, 2015, Cleland, 2015 and Kian, 2015). This acceptance indicates that a more inclusive type of

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masculinity is emerging in sports culture to challenge hegemonic masculinity. However, there are still caveats to this inclusivity. The studies indicate that the acceptance is there so long as the performances match (Cleland, 2015 and Kian, 2015). Fans and players are more open to having gay athletes play professional sports, but only if the athletes perform at a high enough level that their play outweighs the distraction of their sexuality. While this is a move towards inclusiveness in sports culture, it remains a stronghold of traditional masculinity.

The goal of this study will be to answer the following questions: How does masculinity manifest in the NHL's public communications? Do those communications reinforce hegemonic masculinity? How are the traditionally "feminine" traits and attributes presented in NHL communications?

III. METHODOLOGY

Method

In order to complete this study, textual analysis was used to collect and sort data. The analysis was organized by using constant comparative methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Each story ad and release were viewed as an independent unit. Once the data was gathered from the NHL's digital archives and its Youtube channel, the communications were read chronologically, in order to ensure no article would be read multiple times. The reading was conducted by viewing multiple communications in a single session. Although there were many sessions, viewing multiple units at once allows for greater reliability in finding patterns among the communications (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This process also called for note taking while in the reading process to highlight what is interesting in the data as a means to generating themes that were repeated. Once the themes were established, they served as a base point for connecting meaning between the data of how the NHL creates and portrays masculinity.

Textual analysis was selected due to the previous research in the area having been completed through textual analysis. Most of the studies directly related to hockey were completed with textual analysis (Adams, 2015, Allain, 2010, Cusimano, 2016, Gee, 2009, McGannon, 2013, and Tjønndal, 2016). Since sport has become its own culture within society, it makes sense to evaluate the culture through the texts that it has produced, in this case, its public communications. McKee (2003) states that textual analysis is an effective way to understand how members of various cultures "make sense of who they are, and how they fit into the world in which they live." Data exists containing discussions about masculinity in hockey media, so that data must be collected and analysed to discover patterns in those discussions. Textual

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analysis provides an unobtrusive method of analysis, where little previous study has occurred (Cusimano, 2016). Since few studies exist in direct relation to masculinity and the NHL (more about hockey in general than focused specifically on the top league), textual analysis is useful to fill the gaps between the research of others and my own. Therefore, conducting textual analysis of NHL communications provides an insight into how masculinity is constructed for and by people within hockey culture. Furthermore, the league's communications are released in form which are conducive to a textual analysis study. Since the league releases information and communications via text or video, textual analysis allowed me to examine messages from the league without the interpretations of outside sources. Directly examining the materials and communications from the league was necessary for determining the types of messages being sent by the league concerning masculinity. The weakness of textual analysis is that I could not confirm my interpretations with the league itself, but the positives of having complete access to unaltered communications outweighed any negatives. Therefore, textual analysis was a natural choice for studying the NHL's communications.

Sample

For this study, all official forms of communication from the NHL were considered. This included advertising, press releases, articles on its home site and social media activity. In order to keep the scope reasonable, the study focused on releases, articles and social media from the 2016-17 NHL season and 2017 offseason, which ended September 10, 2017. Advertisements are released less frequently, so a longer time frame was required to reach saturation. The league's site posts roughly ten stories per day during the season and five during the offseason. To keep the scope of the study manageable, game recaps were omitted from the study. That was done because game stories from the NHL's site are straightforward recaps. They are mostly play-by-

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play breakdowns of what occurred in any given game that end with injury updates and who the teams play next. Hence, the recaps have minimal value when evaluating how the NHL communicates with its audience. The majority of social media activity include posts that link to game recaps, which we have established hold little value, or to the league's press releases, which are of value. It also bears mentioning that the social media accounts included photos and video clips that were of use for this study. Advertisements since the 2004-05 lockout were selected, giving a sample of over 150 30-second ads and navigating NHL.com's (unwieldy) archives left a sample of over 1000 stories of varying length (anywhere from 100 words to 1000).

Procedure

Constant comparison was selected because it allowed me to organize and synthesize a large amount of information in a controlled manner. Going into the study, I had expectations of what types of messages the NHL would be sending, but no concrete knowledge. Using the constant comparative model allowed me to explore the data without being swayed by my own expectations. It also allowed for me to neatly organize patterns and themes that emerged when examining the data. Additionally, comparing new texts to previously read texts clearly indicated that patterns in NHL communications do exist. For instance, the descriptor term "explosive" appeared next to players on hundreds of occasions, including over 50 on Edmonton Oilers' centre Connor McDavid alone. More patterns emerged when from the early stories once additional data was gathered. One of the first days of the 2016-17 season, a story was published with the line, "watching (Matthews) you have to wonder if to him... it really [sic] easy to dominate" (Oct. 12, 2016). The line itself is fairly nondescript, error aside, but further study revealed a pattern of using "dominate" as a positive descriptor for a winning team or player. Similar to textual analysis, the flaw of constant comparison is the reliance on my interpretations

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of the messages. However, once saturation was reached themes had emerged that I was not expecting. Although I admittedly approached the study with expectations of what I would discover, using the constant comparison method ensured that my bias would not override the results. Using constant comparison when reading each text to find common themes produced results beyond what I expected to find and certainly provided clear examples of the messages being sent by the NHL.

To ensure that nothing was missed, communications were studied on a week-to-week basis. Within any given week, I analysed the communications released by the league in order to find common themes. Once themes for that week were established, I could move on to compare themes on any given month to another. Moving from small scale analysis to larger scale provided an efficient manner to group and compare data. Without exception, the weekly and monthly themes overlapped throughout the season. Once monthly themes were established, it was simply a matter of comparing each month to determine what the major season long themes were. Ultimately, a week in October was fairly similar to a week in February or March. The only time outliers occurred was when the league handed out disciplinary action. Therefore, discipline was treated as its own theme.

The reasons for choosing to study ads, stories and press releases are multiple. First, the NHL has had two collective bargaining lockouts in the past 15 years. The league has been forced to rebrand itself and recapture some of its disenfranchised fan base following years without the NHL (Allain, 2008 and Gee, 2009). Secondly, they promote the hyper-masculine ideals often associated with sports. Since they were produced by the league itself, these ads demonstrate the form of masculinity that the NHL finds desirable. The timeframe was selected because of two major communication events from the NHL. The first day of the study was when the league

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released its ad for the upcoming season “First they play for the world”, and the final day was the NHL Awards ceremony. Examining them through a critical feminist lens will be the most effective way to see how masculinity is at play, and where that masculinity fits in the social construction of sports culture. Therefore, a study using media, feminist and masculinities theories will be the most effective way to answer my research questions and add to the existing academic discussion.

By gathering and comparing definitions of masculinity in sports and advertising, I found several areas of similarities. These similarities are the themes that I looked for in the communications themselves. Preliminary research revealed repeating categories, including: physical strength, emotion (both “masculine” emotions like rage, and “feminine” emotions like joy), and aggression. Upon closer reading, these themes were then grouped into emergent categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). These categories showed coded messaging from the league that can be grouped into two themes: hegemonic masculinity and inclusive masculinity. These two themes show different expectations of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity shows the traditional masculine values, and its categories include strength, discipline, victory and loss. While there may seem to be some contradiction including victory and loss together, loss appears most frequently in terms of injuries and suspensions. Therefore, the hurt/suspended player is considered lost to his team. Inclusive, meanwhile, shows different expectations of masculinity. Instead of promoting physical attributes as ideally masculine, the categories within community focus on more on inclusivity, diversity and connections between individuals and the community that surrounds them.

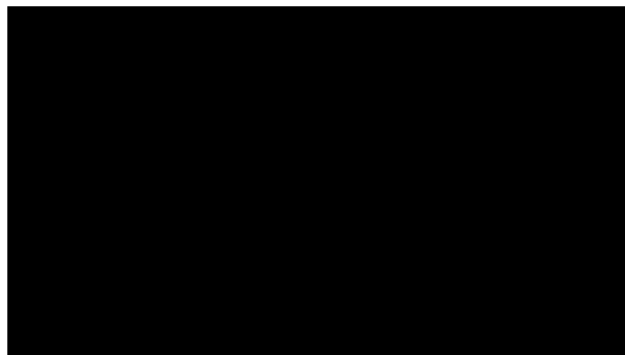
IV. FINDINGS

The differing versions of masculinity display mixed messages about masculinity from the NHL, which indicates that there exist multiple, competing forms of masculinity, even within a single organization. These themes present answers to all of my research questions. As stated above, the NHL presents multiple masculinities, the league does reinforce hegemonic masculinity — despite trying to foster a more inclusive masculinity — and the traditionally “feminine” skills are coded with violent language. Each theme contains multiple categories and codes. What makes these themes so interesting is the dissonance between the two. The messages of traditional masculine values certainly are present in the league’s communications, but, interestingly enough, messages from competing masculinities are almost as common. While the league does still promote physical strength and violence as desirable, it also is actively trying to remove fighting from the game. Similarly, the league is trying to create a more inclusive atmosphere by eliminating homophobia and racism, but has failed to consistently deal with instances of slurs. These are only two examples of paradoxes in the NHL’s discourse relating to masculinity. The results of this study indicate that communications from the NHL contain multiple idealised versions of masculinity, instead of conforming to hegemonic masculine ideals.

After categorizing the data, answers to the research questions began to appear. First of all, as stated above, the NHL rather surprisingly communicates multiple masculinities. Although it is an unexpected discovery, given sports’ historical connection to hegemonic masculine values, communications from the NHL certainly validate academic’s discussions of competing forms of masculinity. Furthermore, the league’s partnership with You Can Play and its own initiative

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“Hockey is for Everyone”⁵, indicates that the NHL is trying to fight inequality in hockey culture, which certainly puts the league at odds with hegemonic masculinity. Once the playoffs arrived (April), the shift in advertising and social media moved from current highlights to reliving past victories and remembering former Stanley Cup champions. This was played up quite a bit in the 2017 playoffs, especially as they progressed and the Pittsburgh Penguins continued to advance. They became the first team to successfully defend their title and win back-to-back championships since the 1997-98 Detroit Red Wings. Much of the league’s media focus for the Penguins centered around the possibility of the repeat and what a rare accomplishment it is, but one young fan took social media by storm:



The League capitalized in the young fan’s reaction to a Penguins goal and released a Pittsburgh-targeted ad about the Penguins success and what another Stanley Cup would mean to the city. This type of community-centric (almost nationalistic) message is common from the NHL to its host cities.

This is not to say that the league minimized coverage other teams received during the playoffs, but as the series’ wore on, the Penguins received more attention. All three of the other semi-finalists had history weaved into their storylines from the NHL, but in a different manner. The Nashville Predators received historical focus because it was the first time in franchise

⁵ <https://www.nhl.com/community/hockey-is-for-everyone>

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history that the team had made the semifinals. However, most of the coverage of Nashville was community-oriented, focusing on the development of the game in what the league calls a “non-traditional hockey market” (NHL.com).



Playoff coverage proved to be a good indicator of the types of coverage and messages that the league wants to send, since fewer teams and games means more focused decisions about what types of messages to send. The playoffs also did not see a major decrease in the amount of communications sent by the league indicating that, unsurprisingly, maintaining the culture of winning is still a goal for the NHL. Winning culture is proven by the first theme: The exaltation of physical excellence and superiority over another athlete is not restricted to hockey, nor is the use of violent language to describe play and players. However, that does not discount the role that the NHL’s communications play in reinforcing hegemonic masculine ideals when it crafts the messages, as found in the first theme.

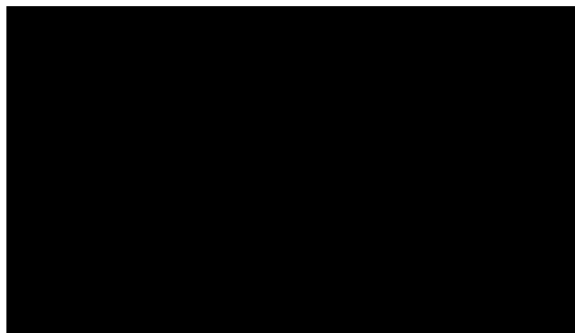
Reinforcing hegemonic masculinity

This theme contains categories and codes within the NHL’s communications that align with traditional masculine ideals. The expressions and glorification of physical violence and strength are coded into normal communication surrounding the game, which is significant because it shows hegemonic masculinity as evolving to remain dominant. The normalisation of violence requires consent from the participants, and the hegemonic culture of hockey receives

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that consent. Dominance, as a category, indicates the league's connection to hegemonic masculine values, and the categories found within the hegemonic theme portray masculinity in terms of physical prowess. The construction of masculinity in this category connects clearly to Messner's (1990) argument that the male body is an instrument, and acts of masculinity are performed with the knowledge from the individual that their body is a tool, rather than part of that individual. There are several major categories within hegemony in the NHL, including strength, discipline, victory and loss. These categories all appear frequently and shared a common subtext of masculinity as controlled violence or aggression.

Strength presented itself across all forms of NHL communications. Within articles on the website, language was frequently used to describe strength, both physically and as a game result. The winning goal scorer often "powered" his team to victory and large margins of victory usually expressed by one team "crushing", "smashing" or "dominating" the other. In addition to teams being discussed in this manner, individuals are often labelled the same way. In the second round of the 2017 playoffs, Edmonton Oilers center Leon Draisaitl, "burned the Ducks Peking crisp" (May 8/17, NHL.com). The weekly "Power Rankings" place the teams in order of who is played the best during that span. Social media and advertising frequently showed video clips of physical battles on the ice, highlighting body checks like the one shown below:



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This type of body check is labelled as one player “levelling”, “destroying” or “devastating” another. Violent language and depictions are frequently used by the NHL to express positive results for a team, or the game being played and the violent imagery is often celebrated.

The physical aspect of the game is frequently highlighted by the league’s communications, specifically through social media. Hard body checks are popular clips for the league on Twitter. Its Facebook page generally compiles highlights, rather than showing one at a time. In that instance, it is hard to find a highlight package that doesn’t contain at least one body check. For the website, powerful checks are often included as notes near the bottom of stories, but, at various points of the season, articles appeared about who was leading the league in body checks at that point. Those articles extol the virtues of the league’s most physically dominant players. The type of body check that knocks one or both players over, appear everywhere in the NHL’s communications and are almost always coded with violent language, including: destroys, levels, demolishes, devastates, crushes, crunches, creams, runs over, etc. Given the physical nature of the game, this type of violent language surrounding the most physical aspect was unsurprising.

More surprising, however, was the use of violent language with the skilled plays. The best skaters in the league are often called powerful, explosive or dynamite. When a player skates away from another, the quicker is frequently described as “shot out of a gun (and/or) cannon”. This is contrasted with less violent language used to describe speed, which also frequently appears. In addition to being powerful, quick players are also called beautiful, smooth and silky. Although the descriptors chosen can vary by player, some players fit into both categories. Less physical defensemen are often coded with less violent terms. For example, Ottawa’s Karlsson and Boston’s Charlie McAvoy both rely more on skating, puck control and positioning to

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complete their defensive responsibilities. The two are most commonly referred to as smooth, rather than powerful or explosive (in Karlsson's case, I cannot recall seeing a single mention of him as powerful, although he became more associated with the term "dynamic" as the season wore on). On the flip side, forwards who rely more on speed and puck skills, like McDavid and Chicago's Patrick Kane are most frequently labelled explosive. Although each team only plays 82 regular season games, there are more than 50 instances where McDavid was described as explosive.

The contradiction in messages that the league uses in describing different types of plays is interesting, because the league codes winning in violent terms. Therefore, it is odd that the league uses more "feminine" style terms to identify skilled players, certainly those who most impact their team's success. Yet, team success is still largely coded violently. This is not limited to hockey, but what makes the NHL's position so interesting is the clash between messages and product. The league has taken strides in the past few years to reduce fighting, checks to the head and stick penalties. The league has tried to make its product faster and more skilled, while emphasizing those changes in advertising. According to the league's advertising, fans should be watching the more feminine parts of the game to be entertained, while the brute force aspect becomes less important. Looking at social media, it's clear that the NHL doesn't want the physical aspect gone from the game, it just wants body checks to be a minor part of the draw, not the driving factor. This is evidenced by the continued presence of hard checks in highlight packages, or as single clips on Twitter. The image on page 38 is an excellent example of celebrating physical play outside of the rules. First of all, it's much easier to diagnose a penalty in freeze frames than live action. Methot's check on Brendan Gallagher was not penalised. However, when examining the photo, it is clear that Methot made contact with Gallagher's head,

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a play the NHL is trying to eliminate. Furthermore, the extension of Methot's arm and hand into Gallagher's face is a clear example of Rule 51.1 in the NHL's rulebook and deserved a minor penalty: "Roughing – Roughing is a punching motion with the hand or fist...normally direct at the head or face of an opponent" (NHL.com). Despite the fact that this contact is literally the textbook definition of a penalty, the NHL still used the play in a highlight package for social media. The use of this check as a highlight indicates that the league is interested in removing headshots from the game, but not at the expense of entertainment.

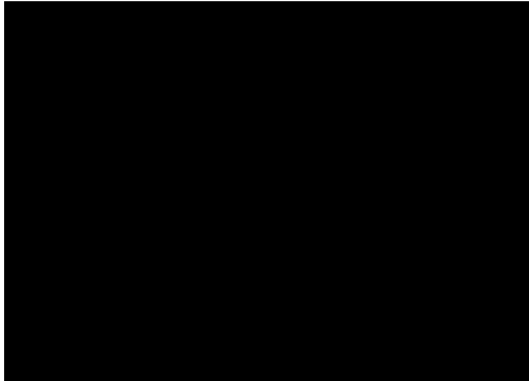
However, that is not to say that the league ignores plays outside of the rules in order to stir up fan interest. Indeed, the second major category in this theme is discipline. Discipline appears most commonly when dealing with the Department of Player Safety, the disciplinary branch of the NHL. The department's job is to enforce the laws of the game through supplemental discipline for players, should it be deemed necessary. When a player violates the rules during a game, he is assessed a penalty (2 minutes for minor infractions, 5 minutes for major infractions and 10 minutes for misconduct). Upon league review, the Department of Player Safety can issue fines and/or suspensions to players. Most instances where the themes in the discipline category are connected to that department, usually its release informing the public of how it reached a decision (including if it chose not to pursue supplemental discipline). Other types of discipline refer to the style of play, usually equating to "reserved", "unwilling to take risks" or "safe". Disciplined play is considered smart, and lauded as such, however it does not make highlight reels (including social media), unlike strong play.

In most cases, this type of discipline is largely ignored, unless one team is disciplined, while the other finds itself in penalty trouble. The league itself only focuses on these "smart" players once the season nears its end and award finalists are named. There is an award for the

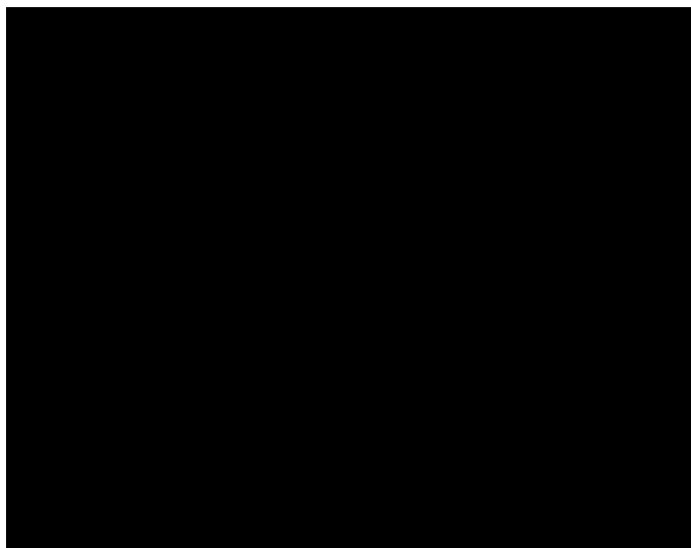
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league's most disciplined player, which is named after (you guessed it) a woman: Lady Byng of Vimy. The Lady Byng trophy is awarded to the "player adjudged to have exhibited the best type of sportsmanship and gentlemanly conduct" (NHL.com). While individual discipline is important to coaches, the league itself gives little recognition to players throughout the season. The second major type of discipline is team discipline. This refers to a style of play where defense is prioritized over offense, even if it comes at the expense of an exciting style of play. Ottawa become synonymous with team discipline during its run to the semifinals of last season's playoffs. The Senators' head coach, Guy Boucher, built his reputation as defensive minded and was called such when hired by the Senators. Teams who play this defensive style are frequently coded as: disciplined, structured, strong and stout.

The final type of discipline to emerge was the most widespread across platforms. The doling out of supplementary discipline from the league's Department of Player Safety. Suspensions and fines are announced via press release and are included on the website. The announcements are not included in advertising, and rarely is social media. The Department of Player Safety is an autonomous branch of the NHL, which shares an office but operates independently. It has its own social media accounts as a result. During the regular season and off season, it was rare to see a fine announcement appear on the main accounts, but it became more common during the playoffs, as each ruling is under closer scrutiny. When a fine or suspension occurs, the Department of Player Safety releases a video to explain its ruling. The video shows the infraction, explains which rule is broken, the severity of the infraction and the players disciplinary history. Screen grabs of the video provide an example of the template followed, first by showing the infraction, then by summarizing the findings:



There are two noticeable outliers when it comes to discipline and reach, both of which occurred during the playoffs. Two events requiring supplemental discipline reached attention levels requiring social media, website and press release coverage from the NHL. The first occurred April 19, 2016, in the first round of the playoffs. Chicago Blackhawks forward Andrew Shaw was suspended for one playoff game and fined \$5,000 (US dollars) for calling an on-ice official a “faggot”. The NHL and the Blackhawks had both already formed partnerships with “You Can Play”, an LGBT organization with the goal of eradicating homophobia in sports. You Can Play released a statement with the support of the league in the aftermath of the Shaw suspension, seen below:



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In addition to his suspension, the Blackhawks told Shaw that he would need to perform community service and was assigned sensitivity training by the league. The NHL's suspension release stated that "the league would not tolerate homophobic behaviour", in any form. The league's response was lauded by You Can Play and OutSports as an appropriate measure to fight homophobia. However, the league came under fire for handling another homophobic slur in a different manner. Anaheim Ducks' captain Ryan Getzlaf was fined \$10,000 for calling another player a "cock sucker" on May 19, during the Western Conference Finals. Unlike Shaw, Getzlaf was not suspended, nor did he receive any further discipline.

The Department of Player Safety, usually transparent in its work, never clarified why Shaw's comment was worthy of a suspension, while Getzlaf's wasn't. There was criticism directed at the league for apparently holding its star players to a different standard of rules than other players. Getzlaf, a four-time All-Star, has scored over 50 points in a season 10 times during his career, while Shaw has never reached the 50-point mark. Among the vocal parties criticizing the league for its handling of Getzlaf was its partner, You Can Play.

The league is, generally, transparent with its discipline process. Although the decision on Getzlaf received the most attention of any of the league's ruling, the manner in which it was handled remains an outlier more than the rule. What makes the Getzlaf scenario so interesting is that, in the spring of 2013, the NHL became the first professional sports league in North America to partner with You Can Play. Major League Soccer is the only other league to have followed the NHL's lead, although several amateur leagues have become partners with You Can Play, and so have people outside of sports, most notably the rapper Macklemore. The league's public battle against homophobia has been both praised and criticised. As discussed above, the different penalties levied against Shaw and Getzlaf earned the league a black eye. Although unfortunate,

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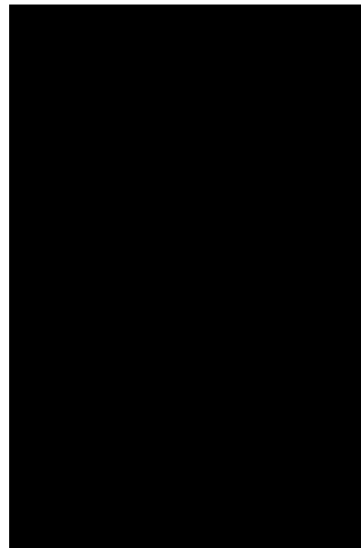
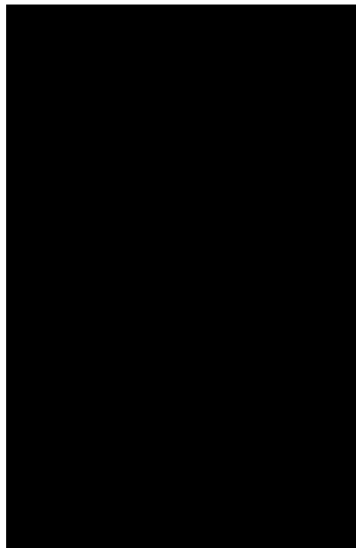
the message from the league was clear: homophobia will not be tolerated, unless you're an All-Star, in which case it's a slap on the wrist for you (Getzlaf's salary of \$9.25 million makes the \$10,000 fine negligible).

Following its lambasting, the league responded by announcing that it would take steps to ensure that homophobia would not be accepted at any level of the game. That promise came to fruition during the 2017 offseason, when Hall of Famer Pat Lafontaine announced the league's new program, Hockey is for Everyone. In partnership with Hockey Canada and USA Hockey, "Hockey is for Everyone uses the game of hockey – and the League's global influence – to drive positive social change and foster more inclusive communities" (NHL.com). The initiative is tasked with stamping out homophobia, racism, sexism and xenophobia from hockey, as well as raising money to provide support for low-income families to make the game more accessible for all. Although Hockey is for Everyone is an excellent initiative, and no homophobic or racially-charged incidents have occurred in the months that have followed its inception, the NHL is left looking inconsistent in its handling of race and sexual orientation. Additionally, the combination of the new program, the money the NHL has spent/raised and its previous attempts to reach out to the LGBTQ community create a strange contrast with its prior actions. The league seems at times to be genuine in its attempts to create an inclusive society in the game, but seems to be trapped in its own masculinity, where homosexuality is lesser than. These differing levels of punishment also indicate hegemonic masculinity's desire to remain respectable. In some cases, it is good for the league to punish players harshly for their transgressions, yet it also allows the league to be more lenient with its stars. Despite the league's effort to create a more inclusive masculinity, its own reactions have created a Trump-like sense of, "When you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything" (NY Times, Oct. 8, 2016). When it comes to inclusive

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masculinity, the league expects most of its players to fall in line with the message the league wants to send; Hockey is for Everyone. The league's stars — or culturally exalted heroes — however, get to play by their own set of rules.

Another aspect of player discipline extends to off the ice. Since its inception in the early 1900s, the NHL, and Stanley Cup committee before the NHL, have held the belief that the players should be gentlemen off the ice and warriors on it. That is still clearly present in the league's presentation of the players, both on and off the ice. In fact, there is coverage on the league's website devoted to some of the best (and worst) dressed players in the league, which serves as an indication of the politics of respectability. In order for hegemonic masculinity to remain acceptable, it must maintain an air of respectability. Therefore, the league's depictions of its players as gentlemanly fits the hegemonic narrative perfectly. The league has an official award for most gentlemanly player, and an unofficial one for best dressed. Last season's most discussed players were Brent Burns, Erik Karlsson and PK Subban (from left to right):



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Dressing in a shirt and tie to arrive to the arena is part of hockey culture at almost all levels (my teams started having dress codes when I was 13), and the NHL clearly tries to capitalize on the way its players dress.

If they are expected to be gentlemen off the ice, it becomes a different story once the game starts. As previously discussed, winning in hockey is coded with violent language. Combined with the way that players are represented off the ice, community-loving, family men who are well dressed (several articles on the league's website are about the best dressed players in the league) and rarely in trouble (since 2010, the NHL has had 11 instances where a player was arrested and/or charged with a crime, seven of which were DUIs⁶ and three of the arrests belong to a single player). While the league doesn't actively point to its arrest record compared to other leagues, it does market the fact that its players are so rarely in trouble. One of the reasons that it maintains that reputation is because of how it has handled off-ice misconduct, once again with the caveat being the skill level of the player. LA defenseman Slava Voynov was suspended indefinitely following his 2013 arrest for domestic violence. After Voynov submitted a no contest plea, the league suspended him for the remaining 76 games of the season without pay and told Voynov that his suspension would continue indefinitely into the next season. He has since returned to his native Russia. On the flip side, All-Star forward Patrick Kane has avoided league discipline despite pleading guilty to assault in 2009, a public drunkenness misdemeanor in 2012 and a rape allegation (no charge or civil suit) in 2015. Just like with Getzlaf, the league has been rightfully criticized for its handling of stars getting in trouble. While strictly enforcing rules on depth players, star players are given a 'boys will be boys' treatment. The varying treatment is another example of the conflicting masculine ideals presented by the NHL. Given the way that it

⁶ Sporting News, April 2016

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handles star players, the league rightfully deserves criticism for its two-faced approach to discipline and community. In the different reactions to similar events, the NHL reveals its own competing masculinities at work.

Obviously, when dealing with a game where one team wins and the other loses, loss will be experienced and written about on a daily basis. As a result, the league doesn't pay much attention to teams who lose one or two games in a row, at least not during the regular season. If a team has a losing streak of four games or more (or any stretch of five games or longer during which the team wins less than 25%), it becomes newsworthy. This focus on losing is rare on social media, but is more prominent on the website. What makes the articles about losing teams so interesting isn't necessarily what the league or its employees write about those teams, rather the quotes that they publish from players and coaches. From official league sources, teams that go on losing streaks are usually termed struggling, cold, unlucky or going through a tough stretch. However, the language from coaches and players is different and those quotes are regularly included in stories on the NHL website. People inside the organization often criticise their team for being undisciplined, scared, soft, timid or weak. According to coaches and players, the way back to winning is usually to simplify their play and ensure that they are hard (meaning physical) on the other team.

The second type of loss to appear frequently in NHL communications is the loss of individual players. The terms associated with loss (lost, gone, missing, without, etc.) of a player appear most in two circumstances: injury and suspension. Suspensions appear to be easier for teams to navigate, perhaps due to the definitive amount of time that players will miss. When a suspension removes a player from the team, they are commonly said to be preparing without him or missing him for X amount of time. These messages appear across articles and social media,

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but don't appear in advertising. As discussed in the discipline section, suspensions also have a presence in press releases and social media through the Department of Player Safety. On the flip side, it is rare for the league, or individual teams, to issue a press release in case of injuries.

Social media and articles are the most common form of spreading injury news. Although not readily available, the NHL does keep injury statistics on its partnered websites. The cost of injuries is often discussed in terms of "man games lost", a counter that increases for each time a player misses a game due to injury. Due to the cumulative nature of the statistic, teams will often have more man games lost than actual games played. For example, there were a total of 87 playoff games and over 250 man games lost during the playoffs. Nashville was a middle of the road team when it came to injuries had 229 man games lost in the 82-game regular season. For comparison, Vancouver, the most-injured team, lost 457 man games. In most cases, the league will report the initial injury to a player, and then provide updates on recovery and timetable for the player to return to play.

Most of the attention from the league focuses on how the team will adjust to missing a player or players. This area is where the commoditization of players is most visible. When spreading messages about injuries, the players are certainly described more as assets to their team than people. Articles frequently contain the line "next man up mentality" when talking about how teams will approach playing without the injured individual. To its credit, the league has gotten better at covering the recovery of its players, but is still guilty of writing about them as commodities. Coverage of an injury differs, depending on the type of injury and its severity. The league is more sensitive to head injuries than it used to be. This is likely due to the twofold reasons of science learning more about the long-term effects of head injuries and criticism levied against the league for its previous handling of concussions. Recently introduced to the league is a

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rule that states an independent doctor must clear all athletes suspected of having a concussion before that player is allowed to return to the ice. While a good rule in theory, the league has still been criticised for not doing enough. The league itself has admitted that players lie to the doctors in order to return to the game, rendering the rule less effective. With a class-action concussion suit against the NHL pending, it would be a safe bet to assume that the league will stick to the statements it released last season claiming to be searching for ways to increase player safety and decrease the potential for brain trauma among players.

Sports culture generally promotes the ideas of playing through pain and viewing the male body as an instrument. The NHL, like other professional sports, is facing criticism and lawsuits due to its past handling of concussions. As a result, the NHL is trying to walk a tightrope when it comes to its players and injuries. Most injuries are still evaluated by team doctors (everything that isn't a head injury) to determine if a player can continue. According to interviews frequently published by the league, players admit to often having the final say in returning to the ice. This fits with the accepted academic view of masculinity: that men shouldn't admit when they are hurt. Furthermore, it is deeply ingrained in masculinity, as Connell's idea of the "Iron Man" (1990) begins to develop in boys, often by the time they become teenagers. Messner (1990) backs this claim, arguing that high school is a time where boys start to view bodies as tools. The mentality of playing through pain is present to an extreme in hockey, especially in the playoffs. While the league itself doesn't give statements or advertising promoting this behaviour, it does republish quotes from players and coaches who praise that toughness, such as this interview with former Vancouver winger Cliff Ronning:

‘...Trevor Linden had cracked ribs and torn rib cartilage for the last four games of the 1994 Stanley Cup Final,’ Ronning said. ‘You can't imagine

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what it's like to hear your captain, in a room down the hall, screaming at the top of his lungs as they injected the needle into his rib cage. Knowing him, he probably thought we couldn't hear... That was inspirational'

That type of praise for a teammate or competitor is pretty common around the NHL. Despite the fact that the league isn't directly responsible for promoting a play through the pain mentality, it certainly romanticises it through clips like this. The promotion of playing through pain as a toughness ideal fits hegemonic masculinity and reinforces the idea of the male body as an instrument. It is important to note that research suggests boys start hearing this ideal as early as puberty, meaning that it is a well-heard refrain by the time boys reach adulthood. Studies of the long-term effects of injuries in sports are only beginning, but early evidence indicates that traumatic brain injuries from sports have massive effects on athletes later in life. The idea of playing through pain can, quite literally, encourage an athlete to make a life-altering decision without actually considering the potential outcomes.

Public awareness of concussions and the long-term damage that can result from them has been growing since before the lawsuit was filed against the NHL. The pressure from fans spurred the NHL to make a rule change, introducing independent doctors to evaluate players who are suspected of sustaining a concussion. This rule, whether established from fear of future lawsuits or backlash from fans, indicated that the league was serious about reducing head injuries in the sport and, at the very least, removing the romanticised ideal of playing through an injury when it comes to head/brain trauma. Of course, the fact that the NHL still uses the playoff clip from 2003 of Paul Kariya being literally knocked unconscious during a game, only to return and score in the next period indicates otherwise.

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Finally, this brings us to the final category within dominance — victory. Just like loss, victory in a single game doesn't get much attention. A winning streak will earn some recognition, but the category of victory is most prominent in the playoffs and for individuals. Heavy focus is placed on individual award races toward the closing stages of the season, as well as the playoff races. Obviously, once the playoffs start, each win becomes a topic of discussion, since 16 are needed to become champions. As discussed above, the league's history and past victories become prominent in advertising and social media around the playoffs. On all platforms, the league promotes past events, like the Red Mile in Calgary and Doug Weight lifting the Cup with a dislocated shoulder:



These historical victories promote the winning culture of sports and highlight how nice it is when your team/city wins. What is interesting about current victories is the language used to express how the victories are won. Most common is the use of violent language discussed above, including “dominate”, “crush” or “destroy.” However, victories are not only coded in violent language, the way that strength is. Victories are also controlled, disciplined and collected, indicating that hegemonic masculinity presents a permanent threat of violence, but can also rely on more cerebral skills than solely relying on physical dominance. What sets victory apart is that victory comes from the summation of hegemonic masculine ideals. In order to win, you need to

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be strong and disciplined. Winning teams are coded in the way that the NHL wants to present its players: strong and tough gentlemen, who will do whatever it takes to win. This coding combines with the league's emphasis on history and the league markets its history via advertising and social media. Naturally, winning is the target of the game, but the league tends to take a longer-term approach to winning than what it means to individuals in the moment. The only single game win that received a large amount of attention was the game when the Penguins clinched the 2017 Stanley Cup. Other than that, winning is presented in a more historical sense that bonds team and community forever.

A more inclusive masculinity

The connections between winning and community building is an interesting bridge between the two themes. The league strives to portray each team as a unit and the city they play in as the extension of an organization. However, there is a distinct difference in the messages that the league sends between these two themes. The hegemonic theme certainly portrays masculinity as physically imposing, while the second theme represents a different type of masculinity, one that is not traditionally hegemonic, but does not exist outside of the hegemony. In the second theme of the study, the league crafts messages of inclusiveness and acceptance, focusing on how important fans are to the teams and vice versa. Despite the fact that this clearly clashes with the ideals of hegemonic masculinity — which the league displays as well — this second theme is as prevalent as the first.

Most teams engaged in community days, during which the players interact with charities based in the city (NHL.com). Some charities involve activities off the ice, some teams chose to invite people to games for free. The league is also quick (rightfully so) to laud athletes who make contributions to their communities outside of organized activities. P.K. Subban, of the Nashville

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Predators, spent the early part of his career in Montreal, where he has donated \$10 million (USD) to the Montreal Children's Hospital. Even though his pledge, and subsequent donation, was made in 2016 there were still multiple articles about Subban's work in Montreal. He was also awarded the Meritorious Service Decoration on March 1, 2017, by the Governor General of Canada for his work in the community of Montreal, which was the NHL's cover story on that day. This sense of community is often featured in the league's advertising as well. Advertising focuses on the bond between a city and its team by playing on the idea that the team is representative of the city or region in which they play.

While P.K. Subban is the top example of this, he is hardly alone. Patrik Laine's visit to a young fan as a birthday surprise resulted in three articles and two weeks of social media posts. Similarly, Connor McDavid had a portrait sold to raise money for YESS, a charity that supports at-risk youth in the city that McDavid plays in, Edmonton.



The league actively tries to foster the idea that the players belong to the city they play in, rather than a team owned by a billionaire. It also works to let its fans know that hockey is a family friendly environment and the players are great with kids. Social media is a driving factor in the second part of the equation, as it is used to frequently show clips of children at games,

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getting high fives or pucks from players. The clips generally stay with the child long enough to show the excitement that follows the contact. Teams have also found ways to include young fans in the games as well. Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Winnipeg and Minnesota are led onto the ice by children carrying the teams' flag.



Most teams bring groups of 6- to 8-year-olds to play a scrimmage during the first intermission to give them the feeling of playing on an NHL ice in front of thousands of fans. These types of actions also serve as a way for the league to create interest in the sport at a grassroots level. In addition to involving community youth in the action, the league's website publishes stories about the personal lives of its players whenever a suitable moment arises. When players get married or have children there is frequently at least a single story on the website, often a brief followed by a full-length story. As a rule, social media does not play a significant role in conveying personal stories to the fan base. As with discipline however, there was one notable outlier. In late October, Ottawa's goalie Craig Anderson took a three-day leave of absence from his team. Following his return, it was announced that his wife, Nicholle, had been diagnosed with throat cancer. At Nicholle's request, Anderson had returned to the team after Nicholle told him they needed him more than she did (Craig Anderson, May 27, 2017). Nicholle blogged about her diagnosis and treatment, and the NHL shared her story on all platforms. Anderson took a second leave from the team starting in December until February. Anderson's

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return led to two of the most shared social media posts of the year from the NHL. The first is Anderson being hugged by Ottawa's captain Erik Karlsson after the game, and the second is a teary-eyed Anderson saluting the opposing crowd after they gave him a standing ovation:



Those two photos would provide defining moments of the league's focus on the personal lives of its players until late in the playoffs. The morning of May 27, the day of Game 7 of the Eastern Conference Finals (the winner of that game would advance to the finals), the Anderson's announced that Nicholle's cancer was in remission. As with the announcement of her diagnosis, the league shared that news across all platforms. The league had already partnered with cancer societies across North America to form a program called "Hockey Fights Cancer". Since its inception in 1998, Hockey Fights Cancer has raised over \$18 million⁷ for cancer research and children's hospitals, not including the money that players themselves have donated. The league used Nicholle Anderson's story to further raise awareness for its work with cancer societies around the continent.

In addition to connecting fans to the personal lives of the players, the NHL also tries to connect the larger groups of teams to cities. The first preseason ad released by the league contained the lines, "the people become your people...together you look to build something as permanent as the city itself" and that the players "play for you". Most teams also have fan

⁷ As of June 1, 2017

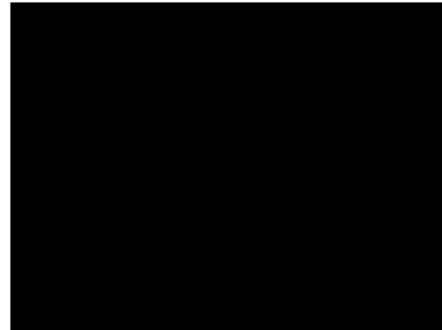
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appreciation events and special fan days throughout the season, sponsored by the league, and the league itself has several programs for community building. Partnered with Kraft, the NHL has created a contest called “Hockeyville”, where small towns across the country submit videos for why they should be considered a great hockey city. If they win, the league schedules a preseason game in that town and various events throughout a full day for Hockeyville, as well as a \$150,000 donation from the NHL for arena upgrades. 2017’s Hockeyville USA was Belle Vernon, Pennsylvania, a former training camp ground for the Penguins. The winners are chosen by fan vote and this year marked the first time that the winner of Hockeyville was unable to host its preseason game. The roof of the arena in Belle Vernon collapsed, meaning the game needed to be played in a different town. In Canada, the NHL hosts an event called “Hockey Day in Canada”, which has run since 2000 and involves live broadcasts from the host city, games played by every Canadian based NHL team and events involving current and former NHL players and coaches. Kenora, Ontario, won the 2017 contest and the right to be the host city. The festivities took place over a 13-hour day and paid tribute to the 1907 Stanley Cup champion Kenora Thistles. Three former NHL players from the city were present and the local brewery created a special edition Scottish (Thistle) ale for the event. The NHL uses events like this to connect to communities that do not have a team, in an effort to grow the game in rural areas and maintain hockey’s culture in those areas.

During its playoff run, Nashville became branded as #Smashville and frequently brought country stars to the games, including Carrie Underwood (married to Nashville’s now retired captain Mike Fisher), Keith Urban, Garth Brooks, Trisha Yearwood and others. The league used social media and articles to show that hockey was growing in a market that few people had given it a chance in, and to show how strong of a fan base the Predators had built in Nashville. A

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common line in the articles was “Nashville loves hockey”. The articles focused largely on fan base and atmosphere inside the arena, as well as the increasing attendance from years past. They also focused on the way that players were interacting in the community, through community service, attending events or meeting with people. Social media was used more to show watch parties and demonstrate how the city was invested in the Predators run.



Nashville is an excellent example of a team trying to establish a connection with its city, but almost all of the teams use social media in a similar fashion. Additionally, as evidenced by the photo above (pg. 38) of the NFL offensive line holding up catfish at a Predators game, there is an unofficial partnership between professional teams in other sports and hockey teams that share that city. This is not contained to Nashville, as the Toronto Maple Leafs have hosted the NBA’s Toronto Raptors, and hip-hop artist Drake is frequently in attendance (Drake holds the position of Toronto Raptors’ Ambassador). Most teams share their city with at least one other professional team and those teams work together to promote each other, and bond with the community. The attempts to create that bond across sports is seen most commonly in social media, but is also expressed in articles. It is not present in press releases nor is the cross-sport portion of community present in advertising. However, as stated above, the league does focus on connecting the team to its community in advertising.

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The league's marketing of branding a team as part of, and belonging to, a city creates a pseudo-nationalism within a team's fan base. The league accomplishes this in two ways: The first is by putting a heavy focus on team play, rather than the individual, while on the ice and the second is by highlighting individual interactions within the community. The league stresses the importance of community service. Not only is it news when a player, coach or other team representative act on their own, but the league also frequently adds mandatory community service to its fines and suspensions, including when Shaw was suspended. By emphasizing the work of its individuals for the community (there is an annual award given to the most charitable player), the NHL establishes a narrative of its players being "good guys", or family men. When looking at the coverage players receive off the ice, most of it is positive. Non-hockey related coverage is almost exclusively weddings, becoming a parent or working with charity. Even with the exceptional coverage of Craig and Nicholle Anderson, the league's coverage focused on building the hockey community, rather than Nicholle herself.

Furthermore, the NHL uses advertising and social media to tie teams to their communities. These actions are commonplace around sports, and are intended to create a sense of connection and pride between team and city. One of the reasons that these messages are so effective for the NHL specifically, is the ways in which players connect to their communities. Some do it through charity work, others simply through random acts of kindness, but there are enough who do something that the league is able to capitalize on its players generosity. The connections then allow the league to further establish that its players are good men and exemplify the league's desired masculinity. On top of that, teams the market themselves are part of the city they play in. During its playoff run, Nashville adopted the mantra "Stand With Us" and included it in all of its advertising: print, digital and audio. Ottawa used a similar narrative,

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adopting the playoff slogan “All In”, before changing it to, “Our Game, Our Cup” when it became the final Canadian-based team in the playoffs. As Kelly (2017) argued, nationalism and masculinity are linked through traditions and nostalgia. The NHL certainly uses both tradition and nostalgia in its advertising, but even its contemporary players are featured in idealized masculine lights. What makes the NHL so interesting, is that players can be simultaneously portrayed as different types of masculine. Erik Karlsson provides a perfect example in the article published the day after his wedding. Obviously, the article contained mostly photos and thoughts about the Karlsson’s big day. However, there were also the coded language of Karlsson’s play throughout the article, describing Karlsson as smooth and cool and included a video of him grimacing on the bench as he played through broken bones in his left foot during the playoffs. That single article captured several types of masculinity promoted by the NHL and Karlsson was somehow all of them. He’s a nice guy, family man off the ice, who doesn’t dominate or destroy his opponents but is still one of the best players in the league and is willing to play through an injury, which shows how tough men are supposed to be.

Another aspect of how masculinity is constructed by the NHL comes in the form of its players’ maturation and the changes in rules that have allowed younger players to thrive. Recently, there has been a shift in the league to younger players. Although some of that is explained by the truly generational talents of Matthews and McDavid, more of it has to do with other factors. During the 2012 lockout, the owners and players agreed that rules would be introduced to reduce obstruction infractions and increase the speed of the game. The results have been as the league hoped, a faster, more skilled brand of hockey. Changing the rules to emphasize speed and skill over size has opened the doors for younger players to excel. In the past, most teenagers weren’t physically prepared to handle the demands of the NHL. The rule

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changes have made those physical demands more flexible. A rookie for Toronto last season, Mitch Marner scored 61 points in 77 games. Much of the discussion about Marner's season focused on his potential development, which is linked to his physical growth. Last season, Marner was listed at 6-foot-1, 165 pounds. Most preseason and early season articles about him focused on his skill, but expressed concern over his ability to stay healthy with such a slender build (by NHL standards). As the season progressed and Marner stayed healthy, the discussion shifted to what Marner will be able to accomplish "when he matures into a man", or "when he fills out more" (NHL.com). This idea of young players still being boys isn't limited to Marner, it is almost universal for teenaged players. For some players, it follows them throughout their career. Vegas' goalie Marc-Andre Fleury was considered underweight as an 18-year-old at 165 pounds. Now 32, and 175 pounds, Fleury is still described as having a "lanky frame". The league, whether intentionally or not, has created an ideal body type for its players. Players who do not meet that expectation are discussed for being different.

Another interesting portion of the youth category is that the idea of youth became almost interchangeable with individual success. The way that young players were covered in social media, advertising and on the website was overwhelmingly positive. Young players making mistakes are not criticised the same way that veterans are, nor are their mistakes as likely to appear in highlight packages. I could not determine if this positive-only coverage of young players was intentional from the league, but it would make for an interesting follow-up study. Similarly, young players are almost exclusively compared to other young players. The exception to this rule is McDavid, who is compared to young players and Sidney Crosby, arguably the best player in the world. Given that McDavid was named league MVP and won the scoring title by 11 points over Crosby (although Crosby played in fewer games), the comparisons are fair. One of

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the reasons the league compares young players to each other is to create a sense of rivalry. The league did the same with Crosby and Alexander Ovechkin. “Alex the Great” was chosen with the first pick in the 2004 draft, while “Sid the Kid” was the first pick in 2005. Both were considered generational talents and became the best players for their respective teams in their early 20s. Now, the league has McDavid and Matthews, who were the top picks in 2015 and 2016, respectively. Building a brand behind those two is part of the larger marketing plan of the league, and they are accomplishing that by featuring both players in advertising, social and online, with emphasis on the impact each has had at a young age. Not only are they superstars, but they will be stars for the next decade. The youth movement in the NHL was a big part of advertising later in the season, and became a focus of the leagues partnership with EA Sports. The release of this year’s edition of the NHL video game features McDavid on the cover and Matthews and Marner as the stars of the release advertisement. The tag line for the game is “The Young Gun edition”, which was likely decided on by EA Canada, but certainly influenced by the NHL. The combination of the focus on the exploits of young players combined with the discussion of them not yet being men is an interesting juxtaposition of messages from the NHL about youth.

Ultimately, we are left with multiple forms of masculinity emphasized by the league’s communications. Although thoroughly coded in violent language, NHL communications depict and glorify more than hegemonic masculinity. Even Allain’s “feminine” attributes are becoming hallmarks of a complete player. The shift away from the tough guy requirements to acceptance of players who never fight, or engage in the contact-heavy areas of the game indicate that the league’s more inclusive masculinity is refusing to fall behind its hegemonic messages.

V. CONCLUSION

The results of this study were, quite frankly, surprising. Although the literature supports that multiple, competing masculinities are at play in society, it also acknowledges that sports culture is more traditionally hegemonic. These arguments play out in the NHL's communications. The league sends messages of hegemonic masculinity, while simultaneously trying to create a sense of inclusiveness. It promotes physical play and uses violent language to code success while showing images and video clips of those types of play. The most viewed social media clips are generally those containing hits or fights, indicating that the fans are most interested in the violent portions of game. Unsurprisingly, there is a direct correlation between fans views and the number of clips of a certain nature that are released. Therefore, it is fair to wonder about the seriousness of the NHL to actually live up to the inclusive masculinity that it promotes. Although the league certainly is taking steps to create more inclusiveness, it still displays its hegemonic values more prominently.

The league's promotion of violence is coded in its communications. The use of violent language to confirm success indicates a strong connection to hegemonic values, especially the idea of physical strength being a hallmark of masculinity. Similar to what Connell calls the "iron man" (1990), the league presents men as strong, aggressive and unwilling to admit injury. It similarly promotes the idea that masculinity requires domination over others. The ties between physical violence and success permeate the league's messages and are clearly represented in its communications. The focus on body checks in highlight packages indicates that the league wants to demonstrate how physically demanding the sport is to everyone — fans and outside observers alike.

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Another interesting aspect in the league's communications is the application of violent coding to play that is not violent. Players skating in a straight line without any contact from another player should not necessarily have any violent connotations. Yet, coded in the language used to describe such a play, violent terms continue to appear. Since those violent terms appear from official league sources and from members of the media, it is reasonable to assume that much of the violent coding exists in the culture of the league. These cultural agreements indicate a structural set of values within the community, in which masculinity is inherently violent. The literature would tend to agree that sports culture is structurally set up to reinforce hegemonic masculinity and those arguments are visible in league communications.

Furthermore, the league focuses a large portion of its communications on the disciplinary branch. The league depicts its multiple masculinities in that branch, as league discipline seems as torn as the general messages from the NHL. On one hand, the league enforces its own rules through the disciplinary branch, which should be obvious. On the other, the rules seem to have different standards based on societal standing. The fact that stars are treated differently from other players provides an interesting insight into the NHL's structure and value system. Much like outside of sports culture, it seems that the more powerful or important a person is deemed, the more leeway they receive when it comes to punishment. Proving masculinity is still a way to move up the ladder of society in hockey culture — in Western society in general according to the literature — and once that ladder is climbed, athletes can become culturally exalted heroes. Those heroes, both inside and outside sports culture, appear to adhere to a different set of standards than most of society, indicated by the way that the NHL handles discipline.

Although there are certainly hegemonic ideals on display in NHL communications, the league is actively trying to foster a more inclusive masculinity. The most noticeable moves by

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the NHL to adopt inclusiveness are partnerships with organizations trying to do exactly that. The league is striving to create communities that limit the marginalization of people who are traditionally targeted by hegemonic masculinity — women, minorities, members of LGBTQ communities, etc. Furthermore, the league is community building by celebrating fans and sending players to complete community service. However, it can be argued that even these types of actions exist in a hegemonic structure: the athletes work for the community and are then turned into culturally exalted heroes, who other men should strive to emulate.

Therein lies one of the issues facing the NHL. While the league is actively trying to promote inclusive masculinity through partnerships and its own initiatives, it is likely that those messages are being overwhelmed by traditionally masculine messages. Journalists and scholars have promoted the league's efforts to eliminate homophobia and racism in the game, but the question of reach does remain. How effective are the messages from the NHL really if most fans see them once, or never bother to learn about them? A partnership with "You Can Play" is a great step for the NHL, but it is reasonable to assume that the average fan does not pay attention to the work that "You Can Play" does. It is also reasonable to assume that most fans see multiple messages that reinforce hegemonic masculinity for each message of inclusivity from the league. Therefore, an obvious question to pose of the NHL is whether the league actually desires inclusive masculinity, or if it is promoting it solely for marketing purposes. If the league truly desires the inclusive form of masculinity that appears in its communications, it would do well to examine the focus it puts on each form of communication to see if its hegemonic messages are being broadcast more prominently than its inclusive messages.

How the league handles the competition between hegemonic masculinity and inclusive masculinity is worth watching. As discussed, the two are not mutually exclusive. Hegemonic

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masculinity strives for respectability and the inclusive types of heterosexual masculinity often fit under the umbrella of hegemonic masculine ideals. The overarching societal structures that reinforce hegemonic masculinity also serve to either oppress or accommodate inclusivity, depending on which is less likely to upset the status quo. The complexity of hegemonic masculinity means that even though the league is striving to promote a more inclusive type of masculinity, it is doing so by operating inside hegemonic structures. Therefore, an interesting and ongoing struggle is in place. On one hand, the NHL certainly reinforces hegemonic masculinity. On the other, it is trying to foster more inclusivity. The problem is that the majority of its acceptable inclusivity exists within hegemonic masculinity, including community building and the family man approach to its players. The league is showing signs of trying to break free from hegemony by partnering with women's hockey organizations and LGBTQ organizations, as well as its efforts to eliminate racism from the game. The developing relationship between the players, the league's partnerships and the NHL itself will prove an interesting look into the shifting dynamics of hegemonic masculinity.

During the course of this study, several questions arose that remain unanswered. Although not fully explored, the relationship between race and coded language descriptors would provide an interesting study, as would nationality. Furthermore, looking at teams individually, or a single team, would provide a different insight into masculinity in hockey. Another area closely related to this study would be examining media coverage of hockey and how pundits discuss gender. Comparing official league messages to those distributed by members of the media could further the understanding of masculinity in hockey culture. Additionally, interviewing players, past and present, coaches, trainers and doctors would open a unique window into the beliefs of those directly involved in the game in a way that this study could not. Looking at international

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hockey and actual nationalism in the game would provide another avenue for research, including if/how advertising from outside companies is directed at hockey fans. Another potential direction for research would be looking more at the business side of the NHL and how injuries, fines, suspensions and lawsuits affect the league financially. Of course, expanding past masculinity and the NHL would allow for studies of women's hockey and sexuality in both the men's and women's games.

Hockey culture is considered to be conservative, even by sports culture standards, so I expected to find almost blanket reinforcement of hegemonic ideals at play in the NHL's communications. However, the league displays multiple forms of masculinity that are obviously competing with each other. Although there are certainly hegemonic ideals at play, especially with the league's glorifying of violent masculinity, there are efforts to create a more inclusive masculinity. Those efforts appear in official league communications and in the articles written by journalists for the league's site. However, despite its efforts, the league is still failing to effectively promote inclusivity. The treatment of star players and romanticising the view of the body as a tool still indicate that the league values traditional hegemonic values. Although it is moving in the right direction, the league has not yet reached the point where it can truthfully say, "Hockey is for Everyone".

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