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NHL Heavyweights: Narratives of Violence and Masculinity in Ice Hockey

Authors' contribution:
A) conception and design of the study
B) acquisition of data
C) analysis and interpretation of data
D) manuscript preparation
E) obtaining funding

Anne Tjønndal

Nord University, Norway

ABSTRACT

Sport is often considered a masculine area of social life, and few sports are more commonly associated with traditional norms of masculinity than ice hockey. Ice hockey is played with a great level of intensity and body contact. This is true for both men and women's hockey. However, men's ice hockey in particular has been subjected to criticism for its excessive violence. Sport has also been analyzed as an arena where boys and men learn masculine values, relations, and rituals, and is often linked to orthodox masculinity in particular. Tolerance for gender diversity and diverse forms of masculinity has generally increased during the last 30 years. However, orthodox masculinity seems to maintain a dominate position in sports, particularly in hyper-masculine sports such as ice hockey. In this article, narratives of masculinity and violence in professional ice hockey are a central focus. Through a narrative analysis of the biographies of two former National Hockey League (NHL) players, Bob Probert and Derek Boogaard, this article explores how narratives of masculinity and violence among hockey players have been described and how these narratives tell stories of the interplay between masculinity and violence in modern sport. The analysis illustrates how the narratives of the lives and careers of these athletes provide insight into the many personal risks and implications athletes in highly masculine sporting environments face. The analysis also illustrates how the common acceptance (and sometimes encouragement) of player violence and 'violence against the self' in ice hockey has led to many broken bodies, lives, and careers among professional male athletes.

KEYWORDS player violence, hockey, sports, masculinity, NHL

Introduction

The topic of this article is masculinity and violence in ice hockey. More specifically, the aim of this paper is to analyze how stories of masculinity and violence are expressed among players in the National Hockey League (NHL). Along with boxing, ice hockey tops ESPN's ranking of the "toughest sports in the world" (Williamson, & Goodman, 2006; ESPN, n.d.). Sports in general are often considered a masculine area of social life, and few sports are more commonly associated with traditional norms of masculinity than ice hockey. Ice hockey is played with a great level of intensity and body contact. This is true for both men and women's hockey. However, men's ice hockey has particularly been subjected to criticism for its excessive violence (Juhn et al., 2002). The number of serious injuries occurring in ice hockey has received a lot of attention in the media. These injuries include, but are not limited to, spinal injuries, concussions, and eye injuries (Benson, & Meeuwisse, 2005; Marchie, & Cusimano, 2003; Stuart, & Smith, 1995). Serious

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injuries of this nature often occur as a result of illegal acts of violence, such as checking from behind or a deliberate high stick.

Violence has historically been a central part of hockey (Whitson, & Gruneau, 2006). As a response to on-ice violence, vigilante justice among players heavily marked the NHL during its early years (Branch, 2014). Owners quickly recognized how the violence of hockey fights stirred up excitement among fans, but realized that on-ice deaths could threaten the future of the sport (Branch, 2014). Ultimately, this resulted in the introduction of Rule 56 in 1922 (Rule 56 Fisticuffs, n.d.; NHL, 2014). Rule 56 stated that "fighting was illegal". However, the only penalty given to players for fighting was five minutes in the penalty box (NHL, 2014). Coaches and players now had to consider whether fighting and overly rough play were worth the threat of being beaten up and taking a five-minute penalty. A century later, the NHL guidelines changed again, this time labeled as Rule 46.14, stating that "A major penalty shall be imposed on any player who fights" (NHL, 2014). A major penalty, compared to a minor penalty, meant extended time in the penalty box. Fighting always involves at least two players, so most of the time both teams would end up losing a player to the penalty box. This left the two opposing teams on equal standing, undermining the threat imposed by the NHL to reduce fighting in hockey (Branch, 2014).

Violence is a part of hockey in a way that is otherwise reserved for boxing and other martial arts. In football, basketball, and most other sports, deliberately punching another player would undoubtedly result in the strictest of penalties, and might even be prosecuted as a criminal offense outside of the playing field. In hockey, however, both players and coaches commonly accept fighting, despite the fact that it is clearly a breach of the official rules of the game. Horrow (1980) described the willingness to accept fighting and the dangers that come with it among hockey players:

> *"No hockey player enters onto the ice of the National Hockey League without consenting to and without knowledge of the possibility that he is going to be hit in one of many ways once he is on the ice… this is an ordinary happening in a hockey game and that players really think nothing of it. If you go behind the net of a defenceman, particularly one who is trying to defend his zone, and you are struck in the face by that player's glove, a penalty might be called against him, but you do not really think anything of it; it is one of the types of risks one assumes"* (Horrow, 1980, p. 186).

A position in ice hockey closely linked to violence and illegal actions on the ice is that of the "enforcers"[1] (Gee, & Leith, 2007). The role of enforcers in the NHL is highly controversial. Although it is not an official position in hockey, it is a well-known title for players whose jobs as fighters overshadow their play on the ice (Coates, Battre, & Deutscher, 2012). Although rule changes have reduced fighting and violence in ice hockey, the unofficial role of the enforcers remains in professional hockey today. Fighting in hockey provides a commercial spectacle for fans and has been claimed to be part of the sport's popularity (Widmeyer, & McGuire, 1997). The former player and enforcer, Chris Nilan, described this phenomenon in the documentary film *The Last Gladiators* (2011):

> *"Probably 18,999 people out of the 19,000 in the stands, at one time or another, wherever they work, probably wanted to punch someone in the mouth. Whether it's their boss, somebody they work with, somebody they're in competition with - but they never get to do it… But they like to see someone else do it"* (Gibney, 2011).

Sport has been analyzed as an arena where boys and men learn masculine values, relations, and rituals, and is linked to the learning of orthodox masculinity in particular (Messner, 1922; Progner, 1990). Modern sport also provide a space for men to connect and interact physically in a way that traditional (orthodox) masculinity provides little room for in other social settings (Elias, 1939; Elias, & Dunning, 1986), such as when hockey players huddle together in displays of affection or hug after a teammate scores a goal.

[1] They are also called "goons", a more derogatory name.

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In this article, I utilize Anderson's terms of "orthodox" and "inclusive" masculinity (Anderson, 2009) as my theoretical framework for understanding masculinities. By using these terms, the aim of this paper is to analyze in what ways and to what extent orthodox masculinity is challenged by other more inclusive forms of masculinity, and, furthermore, how these forms of masculinity are connected to violence and views on violence in hockey.

The analysis is to some extent based on a historical perspective. It includes depictions of North American hockey during the 1980s (Probert, & McLellan Day, 2010), the millennium, and the present day (Branch, 2014). During these decades, sport in general, and ice hockey in particular, have been subjected to a comprehensive modernization process (Guttmann, 2004). One would expect this process to have affected not only the rules and regulations of sports, but also the social norms and practices associated with expressions of masculinity and violence (Young, 2012). An important part of the article is therefore to discuss why orthodox masculinity seems to continue to dominate in sports[2] compared to other social arenas (Connell, 1995; Tjønndal, 2016; Tjønndal, & Hovden, 2016). In general, tolerance for gender diversity and diversities of masculinity and femininity has increased during the last 30 years (Eng, 2002; Hjelseth, & Tjønndal, 2016). The culture of ice hockey, however, appears to have maintained a more traditional masculinity based on a strongly heteronormative culture (Weinstein, Smith, & Wiesenthal, 1995). With this in mind, I will discuss the following research questions in this article:

1. How are narratives of masculinity and violence among hockey enforcers expressed in the selected sample of texts?
2. How do these narratives illustrate the interplay between masculinity and violence in hockey and modern sport?

Violence in sports

Since Michael Smith published his famous work *Violence and Sport* in 1983, sports violence has been studied from a wide spectrum of academic disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and criminology. As a term, however, "sports violence" is difficult to define (Cashmore, 2000; 2005). Coakley and Donnelly have noted some theoretical terms commonly associated with definitions of sports violence: physical, assertive, tough, rough, competitive, intense, intimidating, risky, aggressive, destructive, and violent (Coakley, & Donnelly, 2009, pp. 187-188). There are many theoretical understandings of violence as a general concept (Young, 2012). Among the more contemporary theories are the catharsis theory (Marsh et al., 1978; Atyeo, 1979), reversal theory (Kerr, 2004; Apter, 1989; Kerr, & de Kock, 2002), and the frustration-aggression hypothesis (FAH) (Russell, & Drewry, 1976). While these frameworks are used to understand violence as a more general concept, they have also been applied to empirical studies of violence in sports.

Coakley and Donnelly provide a definition of aggression, describing it as "verbal or physical actions grounded in an intent to dominate, control, or do harm to another person" (Coakley, & Donnelly, 2009, pp. 187-188). The same scholars define violence as "the use of excessive physical force, which causes or has the potential to cause harm or destruction". In other words, violence and aggression in sport can appear in many different forms. Young (2012) distinguishes between player violence, crowd violence, animal abuse, parental abuse, violence against the self, sexual assault, fan-player violence, and sexism/ racism. For the topic of this article, the concepts of player violence and violence against the self are the most relevant.

Player violence

Player violence involves behaviors encompassed both in accordance with and outside the rules of sport (Kerr, 2004). Traditionally, this type of violence has often been condoned in many settings as "part of the game", as is the case for fighting in ice hockey. Several typologies of player violence exist, but the one I find most useful was developed by Smith (1983), who classified player violence into four basic categories: brutal

[2] Particularly in hyper-masculine sports such as ice hockey.

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body contact (relatively legitimate), borderline violence (relatively legitimate), quasi-criminal violence (relatively illegitimate), and criminal violence (relatively illegitimate) (Smith, 1983; Young, 2012). Brutal body contact includes tackles, blocks, body checks, collisions, and hits. These are all acts that can be found within the official rules of ice hockey and many other sports. Many people would also agree that the players consent to these acts of violence when engaging in play (Young, 2012).

Borderline violence (Smith, 1983) involves acts that are prohibited by the official rules of the sport but still routinely occur. These types of acts are also more or less accepted by the players and others connected with the game (Young, 2012). The fist fights that ice hockey enforcers often get into are commonly used by scholars as an example of borderline violence in sports (Coakley, & Pike, 2009). Actions that can be classified as borderline violence all have the potential for causing injury and prompting further conflict between players (Kerr, 2004). Historically, sanctions imposed by sports leagues such as the NHL have been notoriously light, resulting in sports clubs doing all they can to protect their star players (Young, 2012).

Quasi-criminal violence violates the formal rules of sports, the law, and, to some degree, the informal norms of the athletes engaged in the sport. This form of violence usually causes serious injury (Smith, 1983). In ice hockey, quasi-criminal acts of violence might be described as "cheap shots", "sucker punches", or dangerously high stick work, all of which can cause severe injury.

Criminal violence includes acts so serious and obviously outside of the boundaries of what is considered acceptable behavior, both in sports and in a wider societal setting, that they are treated formally by the criminal justice system. Smith (1983) uses the example of a Canadian teenage hockey player who, in 1973, assaulted and killed an opponent in the arena parking lot following a heated game.

Violence against the self

The types of violence that involve harm perpetrated against the self have rarely been studied empirically in sports (Young, 2012). Within the context of sports, violence against the self includes, but is not limited to, sports-related eating disorders and chronic drug use (McEwen, & Young, 2011). Clearly, many popular sports encourage (and, to some extent, require) large body mass and musculature. Sports such as ice hockey, sprinting, and bodybuilding seem to place an ever-increasing emphasis on size and strength, which has led to persistent problems with players using anabolic steroids (Courson, 1991; Atkinson, 2001; Atkinson, & Young, 2008). Possible outcomes of violence against the self include addictions (e.g., painkillers, performance enhancers, and alcohol), body pathologies (anorexia, bulimia, "bigorexia"), mental and psychological disturbances (self-confidence and self-esteem issues), and threats to one's own physical wellbeing (chronic injuries, concussions, suicide, or death) (Young, 2012).

The link between violence against the self and the expectations of sports seems clear (Kerr, 2004). Messner (1990) has argued that the injured athlete (this also includes the self-injured athlete) represents the ultimate paradox of sports: the use of one's body as a weapon against others, or as a means to exceed physical and athletic "frontiers" (Young, 1993), seems inevitably to result in violence against that same body.

Masculinity and sport

Anderson (2009) distinguishes between two archetypes of masculinity in sports, namely orthodox and inclusive masculinity. These two terms are built on the assumption that masculinity is subject to change and that it is conservative in its orthodox form, which is marked by homophobia and the notion that masculinity encompasses the opposite of the "softness" associated with homosexuality (Anderson, 2009). Similarly to Connell's (1995) "hegemonic masculinity", orthodox masculinity is expressed by devaluating women, femininity, and homosexuals (Anderson, 2005). However, Anderson stresses that this type of masculinity is no longer hegemonic, but rather coexists with a more inclusive form of masculinity that is more tolerant of homosexuality and more open to emotional intimacy (2011). Men who identify with inclusive masculinity

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set themselves apart from orthodox masculinity by behaving in a far less homophobic and anti-feminist way (Anderson, 2005).

Inclusive masculinity appears to have gained a stronger foothold in sports during the last couple of decades. The expansion of inclusive masculinity can lead to a greater acceptance of different ways of expressing masculinity among men in sports. A good example of a more open, inclusive masculinity in sports is football player David Beckham (Dahlén, 2003). Beckham has, and continues to have, a great deal of influence on popular culture in football. However, he has also been one of the most criticized players in British football (Whannell, 2002).

The question of which forms of masculinity are generally accepted and rewarded is often a question of social class (Hjelseth, & Tjønndal, 2016). Orthodox masculinity often dominates in sports that involve a high level of body contact and those that are traditionally associated with "working class" participants. Inclusive masculinity is generally more accepted within sporting contexts that are traditionally associated with low levels of body contact, such as tennis or equestrian sports.

Methods: Narrative analysis

Narrative research involves working with narrative material (Bratberg, 2014). Narrative material can be created as part of research, or it can be made up of material that already exists (Squire et al., 2014), which is the case in this article. Narrative material can include the study of video games, novels, films, documents, and other written texts. Conducting a narrative analysis using either produced or existing material involves categorizing and interpreting the material. Narrative analysis always involves analyzing the narrative aspects of stories (Squire et al., 2014).

Narrative analysis can be approached in a wide variety of ways (Andrews, 2007; 2014). For instance, narrative researchers might be concerned with whether stories are true (e.g., their accurate representation of physical realities), their narrative context (e.g., how the narrative works and what it does), or their narrative content (e.g., themes or meanings in stories) (Squire et al., 2014; Freeman, 2003). In all cases, narrative analysis is concerned with stories as resources for research - that is, what stories can tell us about the narrators and their worlds (Squire et al., 2014). This paper takes a narrative content approach to analyzing stories of the lives of professional athletes. This narrative research strategy is fruitful because it allows for the exploration of themes and meanings in the stories of NHL enforcers (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008; Engebretsen, & Heggen, 2012). Even the most personal narratives do not focus solely on the individual, but also touch on social worlds (Andrews, 2002). People's personal stories provide a window into a particular socio-historical moment (Riessman, 2008). In this context, the narrative stories of hockey enforcers do not only tell the personal stories of the lives of the athletes, but also broader stories of masculinity and violence among men in modern sport.

Material: Written narratives of athletes

Narrative material can be found in many different types of media. Spoken narratives are perhaps the most common type of narrative material in social sciences (Squire et al., 2014). Spoken narratives are often obtained via interviews, with their accompanying transcripts and recordings. However, spoken narratives are also available in other forms, such as written biographies.

In this article, I utilize two biographical books of former professional ice hockey enforcers in the NHL. I have chosen these specific books for analysis in this study because they both depict stories of well-known and skilled hockey players. The first book I have chosen to analyze is *Tough Guy: My Life on the Edge* by Bob Probert and Kristie McLellan Day (2010). This book is about the personal life and career of former NHL star Bob Probert. Probert, often called "the great NHL heavyweight champion", was one of the most feared enforcers in the history of the NHL until he retired in 2002. The second book, *Boy on Ice: The Life and Death of Derek Boogaard*, by John Branch (2014), tells the story of the life, career, and death of

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Derek Boogaard. Boogaard is most known for his time playing for the Minnesota Wilds and the New York Rangers. Up until his tragic death in 2011, Boogaard was widely regarded as the toughest man in the NHL.

Even though Probert himself is one of the authors of his biography, both of the books that constitute the data material for this article were written by professional writers. John Branch is a sports reporter for *The New York Times*, and Kirstie McLellan Day is a professional author. These authors act as the main narrators of the material analyzed in this article (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008; Riessman, 1993). However, both books were written in collaboration with the athletes themselves[3] and/ or with the athletes' family, friends, and former hockey colleagues[4]. In other words, these biographies appear to have several narrators (Rustin, 2000). For instance, in Branch's book (2014), Derek Boogaard's father, Len Boogaard, plays a vital role as a narrator, talking about the life and death of his son. On the other hand, Probert's wife, Dani Probert, has an equally central role in the biography of her late husband. In narrative research, narrators and audiences "work together to perform and understand stories in significant ways" (Squire et al., 2014, p. 28). Stories are always a kind of performance constructed between the narrators and the audience that play out through their interaction with the social, cultural, and moral worlds of the story (Smith, & Watson, 2010). The stories of Probert and Boogaard do not simply detail their lives and experiences, but constitute them through the performance of the story. In Probert's biography, Probert himself is often presented as the speaker, sharing his personal experiences with the reader (the audience). In Boogaard's case, the author, Branch, and Boogaard's friends and family alternate as speakers, talking about Boogaard's life and career.

Both of these biographies were also written for a specific purpose removed from the subsequent analysis in this article (Squire et al., 2010). The biographies were likely written with a purpose of a more commercial character. Probert's biography is marked with quotes such as "The late, great NHL heavyweight champion tells his own story in his own words" (Probert, & McLellan Day, 2010). Both books are probably intended and marketed for hockey fans and enthusiasts.

To some extent, the sample of literature chosen for analysis also provides a historical perspective. Bob Probert (1965-2010) started his career during the 1980s; he played for the Detroit Red Wings from 1985 to 1994. He was also an important role model for Derek Boogaard, who is said to have chosen his player number (24) in honor of Probert. Derek Boogaard (1982-2011) started his career in the NHL with the Minnesota Wilds in 2002. The deaths of both Probert and Boogaard have been linked to substance abuse and head injuries. The point of analyzing these two biographies is not that they are particularly representative of ice hockey players in general, or that I view them as being particularly important. Nevertheless, together they span over three and a half decades, a period in which hockey and modern sports in general underwent substantial changes. Additionally, I view them as fruitful texts for analyzing the culture of masculinity and violence in ice hockey.

Procedures

After reading and selecting the sample of biographies, a narrative content analysis (Douglas, & Carless, 2009) was conducted to identify themes, meanings, topics, and categories evident in the data. In this analysis, I followed the process detailed by Lieblich et al. (1998, p. 12), where "the original story is dissected, and sections or single words belonging to a defined category are collected from the entire story". At this point in the analysis, I began to make tentative connections to various theoretical concepts that I identified in the data before analyzing the stories of the athletes in both biographies as a whole. The use of quotations from the biographies will give voice to central topics and themes in the material.

[3] Probert appears to play a central part as a narrator in his biography.

[4] Boogaard had passed by the time his biography was written. However, family, friends, and former teammates are often quoted and cited in both books.

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Survival of the toughest: The NHL, 1980-2000

In order to understand how masculinity and violence were handled and expressed in the highly heteronormative culture of North American ice hockey during the 1980s and 1990s, I will analyze how the former Detroit Red Wings and Chicago Black Hawks player Bob Probert (2010) tells stories of the culture among the players and coaches in the clubs during his career. Probert describes the culture among the players, both on and off the ice, as being strongly characterized by camaraderie and loyalty, a fierce collective brotherhood. These inherently positive qualities were, however, dependent on the players' understanding and adherence to the cultural norms of the team. Players who were unable to adapt to the dominant culture among their teammates had little chance of succeeding in the club. This meant that the culture, at least for the players who managed to internalize the social norms, appeared to be inclusive. The playing field for how masculinity could be expressed (acceptably) and how violence and fighting should be handled on the ice was narrow.

Hazing was a central part of the culture amongst the players in the Detroit Red Wings. It is particularly interesting to read Probert's description of how new players, or "rookies", were welcomed into the brotherhood of the club: "Sometimes, rookies would get stuffed - naked - into the shitter on a bus, or they might have to play tug of war with a skate lace around their dicks, stupid things like that" (Probert, & McLellan Day, 2010, p. 43). Probert, acting as the narrator of this story, describes how his teammate Mark LaForest (nicknamed "Trees") was subjected to hazing during his first weeks on the team:

> *"Some of the guys on the team grabbed him in the shower at Joe Louis Arena. They blindfolded him, stripped him down and tied him spread-eagle to a hotel luggage trolley. Oh yeah, naked, the whole nine yards. The other rookies couldn't do anything about this - they had to just sit there and watch. The guys shaved him head to toe and painted his toes with black paint. Then they kept going all the way up his leg so it looked like a barbershop pole"* (Probert, & McLellan Day, 2010, p. 55).

According to Probert, similar hazing strategies were common among players to correct unwanted behavior in the group. If players were perceived to be arrogant or break the social norms of the team in other ways, they quickly ended up on the receiving end of a prank. This culture of hazing seems to act both as a control mechanism of team members' behavior and as a way of strengthening team spirit. Similar tendencies have been documented in (European) football teams (Hjelseth, 2005; 2006; Hjelseth, & Tjønndal, 2016).

During his career in the NHL, Probert struggled with an addiction to drugs, alcohol, and prescription painkillers. Although his addiction caused problems both for his professional life and his personal life, it was not uncommon for NHL players to struggle with addictions of this nature. Probert describes a culture where players would frequently celebrate a big win with excessive alcohol and drug use:

> *"The first time I ever did cocaine was that night we were celebrating the Calder Cup championship. I had always been scared of it. I'd heard what it could do to your brain, so I had stayed away. But while we were out, one of the players said, 'Come in the bathroom, I want you to try something…' I was buzzed, so I wasn't as scared of it… He handed me a rolled-up bill and I did some lines. It was instant love… And it gave me all this energy. I felt like Superman"* (Probert, & McLellan Day, 2010, p. 62).

By the end of his NHL career, Probert's addiction issues had expanded to prescription painkillers, primarily OxyContin. Years of brutal fights on the ice had taken a toll on Probert's body. Over the course of his professional career, he suffered several concussions and multiple upper and lower body injuries. Consequently, he struggled with severe pain and addiction to painkillers:

> *"Some mornings, it was tough to get out of bed. Seventeen years as the NHL's toughest enforcer will do that to a body. He'd been prescribed three OxyContin a day, but he took eight. He'd dip the pills in cola to dissolve the time-release coating, then chop up what was left into a line. It'd hit him quicker that way, and for a couple of hours his back wouldn't hurt, his hip flexor*

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wouldn't bother him and he could walk without the feeling of knives jabbing at his knees" (Probert, & McLellan Day, 2010, p. 2).

"My life became about the hunt for these pills. I was consumed with where I could find more… I was doing twenty a day. On the road, wherever I was, I'd find a doctor. Most places, they would recognize me. They knew I had pain, and because I had prescription bottles with my name already on them, I'd say 'I just have to take a few more because I injured myself' or 'I fell and I need some more'. Every city. You would be amazed how many doctors give you this stuff" (Probert, & McLellan Day, 2010, p. 247).

The framing of how drug abuse affected Probert's life can be read as an expression of a moral world in the story (Smith, & Watson, 2010). Chronic drug use, in the way Probert's story of addiction to cocaine, alcohol and painkillers is told, is one of many common forms of violence against the self among athletes (McEwen, & Young, 2012). Probert's viciousness on the ice and his use of his body as a weapon against others and as a means to exceed physical and athletic frontiers (Young, 1993), the skills he was both admired and feared for, ultimately resulted in violence against his own body, leaving him as "the injured athlete" at the end of his career (Messner, 1990).

In Probert's case, violence against the self incorporated both physical and metal disturbances. The pressure of playing the role of enforcer often took a toll on him (Probert, & McLellan Day, 2010). The pressure of knowing a certain fight would come up in a game, and the pressure of knowing the consequences - that he might be replaced on the team if he lost one fight too many - was another form of violence against the self that Probert was exposed to during his time in the NHL (Young, 2012):

"The fights I did best in were the ones I was truly mad and upset. I didn't like going out and instigating. I didn't enjoy the idea of having to go out and fight this or that guy tonight because he had a rep. It was a lot of pressure" (Probert, & McLellan Day, 2010, p. 80).

Player violence, particularly brutal body contact, is a central part of hockey (Young, 2012) and is accepted by players, coaches, and referees alike. As Horrow's (1980) quote in the introduction of this article illustrates, everyone who plays in the NHL is aware of and consents to these acts of player violence. Probert's role as the enforcer put him in situations of borderline violence (Smith, 1983) regularly. During his 17 years of playing in the NHL, he fought 302 times on the ice. Probert's on-ice fights with opposing team players were more or less accepted by the players and others connected to the game (Young, 2012). For Probert, it was just a part of playing hockey:

"I took it upon myself to learn how to fight to protect my teammates, and that role just kind of happened to me. I was pretty lucky. I was one of the taller guys in the league, so I had a long reach. I used that to my advantage as I developed my technique. The thing I liked to do was just grab a guy by the sweater or shoulder pads and hold him straight out. Then I'd pull my head back so he couldn't hit me. Next, I'd throw a punch. He couldn't reach me because he was too far away - but I could connect… Scrapping was a part of the game for me. There were lots of guys who could skate better than me, so fighting was one way I could make it to the big leagues - something extra that I could use to get ice time" (Probert, & McLellan Day, 2010, pp. 33-34).

The actions that occurred during these hockey fights all had the potential to cause severe injury (Kerr, 2004), and much of the time they ended in injury for either Probert or his opponent. Sometimes they also promoted further conflict, either between rival teams or between Probert and opposing enforcers on other teams, such as Donald Brashear[5].

[5] Donald Brashear still plays professional hockey in the Swedish Hockey Leauge (SHL), but previously played in the NHL for the Montreal Canadiens, Vancouver Canucks, Philadelphia Flyers, Washington Capitals, and the New York Rangers.

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Beware of the boogeyman: The NHL, 2000-2011

Derek Boogaard grew up in Canada, always big for his age. As a child, other boys viewed him as a "test for toughness" (Branch, 2014, p. 32), and as a young boy he would imitate enforcers in the NHL, such as Bob Probert and Tie Domi, simulating hockey fights with other boys. Because of Boogaard's unusual size and large stature, his father, Len Boogaard, quickly realized that his son's role on the ice would eventually become that of an enforcer. His father even went as far as to have Boogaard take up boxing, so that he could be well prepared for his upcoming fights on the ice.

The peak of fighting in the NHL came during the late 1980s (Branch, 2014). The increasing numbers of fights in hockey games paved the way for "one-trick enforcers" in the league - players who added little value to a team beyond their fighting skills, posing a threat to opposing teams (Branch, 2014). Many viewed Boogaard as a one-trick enforcer:

> *"Aside from the fighting, Derek had little usefulness on the ice. He could build up good speed, but had little agility. He was not a great puck handler. He did not have innate hockey sense, the ability to see plays forming before they happened, to know where the puck needed to go without pausing for consideration. He was clumsy. He often botched drills in practices, interrupting the flow and frustrating coaches"* (Branch, 2014, p. 67).

Bouts between enforcers "combined the brutality of boxing with the showmanship of professional wrestling" (Branch, 2014, p. 62). Coaches ruthlessly and strategically used enforcers to stop the momentum of the opposing team or even to "send a message" for the next time the teams would play (Branch, 2014). The fights were a sideshow of the game, but the punches and injuries that came with them were real:

> *"When the enforcers fought, the game clock stopped. Other players backed away and watched. Fans stood and cheered, often more vigorously than when a goal was scored. Television cameras zoomed in. Play-by-play men took the role of boxing announcers. Punches produced a reflexive chorus of 'ooooohs' from the crowd. The volume ratcheted with the sight of blood, flying equipment, maybe a dislodged tooth. The fight ended only when one of the players fell to the ice"* (Branch, 2014, p.62).

Enforcers came and went regularly in the NHL. Taking on the role of an enforcer meant being subjected to injury and physical and mental strain. Some of the violence against the self (Young, 2012) that Boogaard was exposed to during his career was the pressure to always win fights and to always perform, knowing that he could be replaced at any time:

> *"Derek knew that his roots in the NHL were not deep. Minutes were scarce and chances were few. A couple of losing fights might send him to the minors. An injury might lead to his replacement. A punch might change everything"* (Branch, 2014, p.150).

Like Probert, Boogaard suffered multiple injuries in the course of his years in the NHL. After Boogaard's death, his father expressed the concerns he had had about his son's time as an NHL enforcer:

> *"The thing that worried me wasn't the concussions... it never really was an issue. It was never deemed to be problematic. The only thing that worried me was his hands. He would fight and his knuckles would be pushed back into the wrist. And then he'd have to have it manipulated and have his knuckles put back into place. His hands were a mess"* (Branch, 2014, p.109).

Here, Len Boogaard, acting as the narrator, tells his story of how his son's injuries worried him. The performance of this story can be connected to a moral perspective (moral world) of how sports injuries can lead to serious repercussions for athletes (Smith, & Watson, 2010; Squire et al., 2014).

Boogaard's role as an enforcer represented the pinnacle of toughness in a sport commonly associated with both toughness and traditional orthodox masculinity (Anderson, 2009). Throughout Branch's (2014) narrative of Derek Boogaard's life, masculinity is undoubtedly a central theme, including the importance of being perceived as "tough enough" within the frames of orthodox masculinity (Anderson, 2005; 2011). For hockey enforcers like Boogaard, there was little to no room for other competing and more inclusive

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forms of masculinity (Anderson, 2009). Orthodox masculinity seemed intertwined with violence (both violence against the self and player violence) for Boogaard. A lot of the praise and admiration he received as an enforcer was based on his acts of player violence (Young, 2012), while he was expected to suffer the consequences of violence against the self in silence as part of his expression of orthodox masculinity:

> *"Enforcers never complained about their role, and players rarely admitted to concussions. Enforcers, especially, did not concede to anything that could be construed as weakness or a lost edge. Such an admission raised doubts about an athlete's commitment and toughness, the most important qualities for an enforcer. To admit to concussions was to commit career suicide"* (Branch, 2014, p.143).

The idea that showing weakness or otherwise breaking acceptable social norms of orthodox masculinity (Anderson, 2009) could lead to a broken career created a lot of psychological pressure on Boogaard and many other NHL enforcers. This kind of violence against the self was common among NHL enforcers, and just like Probert and other enforcers before him, Boogaard turned to alcohol and painkillers to cope with the pressure, the injuries; the violence against the self:

> *"Fans never saw enforcers curled up in a ball on the hotel room floor. They didn't see the food left on the plate during the pre-game meal. They didn't know that the enforcer tried to take his mind off of the fight with an afternoon movie or a long walk, and later had no idea what he had seen or where he had been. Don't have the appetite to fight that night? Move aside. There are plenty of others who would love your job. The role, and the pressures associated with it, could propel enforcers into a cycle of personal problems. Even as Derek arrived, the line of NHL enforcers were littered with broken lives. Alcohol and painkillers, especially, became the silent antidotes to the pain and pressure"* (Branch, 2014, p. 155).

> *"Outsiders, teammates and coaches never understood. They underestimated the toll, both physically and mentally. They saw a player who played the fewest minutes on the team and who got into a fight only once every few games. They saw it as a job with few responsibilities, rewarded by lots of admiration. And they saw the enforcers are fearless… If a scorer missed a good shot on goal, it rarely haunted him. But a fighter was keenly aware that every fight could be his last. The opportunity might not come again. A lost fight might mean a trip to the minor leagues. One big punch might end a career"* (Branch, 2014, p.153).

Only 28 years old, Boogaard died from an accidental drug and alcohol overdose while he was recovering from a concussion he had sustained playing hockey: "The Hennepin County medical examiner in Minneapolis determined that Derek died of an accidental overdose, a lethal mix of alcohol and prescription painkillers" (Branch, 2014, p. 314). Probert died at age 45 (Probert, & McLellan Day, 2010). Several NHL enforcers have met an early end, among them Rick Rypin of the Vancouver Canucks, who died at 27, as well as Wade Belak and Steve Montador, who both passed away at the age of 35.

Final discussion

Enforcers and fighting have been, and still are, a source of great controversy in the NHL. Despite the injuries sustained from fighting, violence against the self, and early deaths among enforcers, little seems to be done to stop or further regulate fighting in hockey. Fighting is still accepted as "part of the game" (Horrow, 1980; Smith, 1983). Enforcers are popular among fans, and there are entire websites[6] dedicated to player violence among hockey enforcers. The fights seem to have a certain commercial value to them. As hockey commentator Don Cherry noted, "When Probert was fighting, did you ever see anyone get out of their seat and go for coffee?" (Probert, & McLellan Day, 2010, p. 18).

This unofficial player role has also been romanticized in comedic Hollywood movies, such as *Goon* (2011). However, there are also some documentaries, such as *The Last Gladiators* (2011), which deal with

[6] See, for example, websites such as www.hockeyfights.com and www.dropyourgloves.com.

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the darker sides of fighting in hockey. The analysis of the narratives of hockey enforcers used as material in this article demonstrates a highly masculine sport environment where orthodox masculinity, as described by Anderson (2005; 2009), maintains a dominant position. The narrators tell stories of team settings where there is little room for emotional intimacy and where distancing oneself from anything "feminine" remains important. Furthermore, the analysis shows how hockey enforcers are part of, and subjected to, both player violence and violence against the self (Young, 2012). The themes and meanings in the stories related to personal drug abuse, pain, and injury give important insight into a problematic side of professional hockey. The meanings expressed in these stories are perhaps the article's most important contribution.

The narratives analyzed here tell a number of stories about the interplay between the expression of (orthodox) masculinity and violence. The silent acceptance of the dangers and risks involved in the role of enforcer and the willingness to subject one's body to injury and pain to maintain a tough image are both examples of expressions of masculinity through violence against the self. Of course, the actual fights, involving the use of one's own body to impose domination upon others, are perhaps the clearest expression of orthodox masculinity among enforcers.

Overall, the narratives of the lives of Bob Probert and Derek Boogaard provide insight into some of the personal risks athletes are subjected to in professional sports. The narrators also discuss how the common acceptance of player violence, and, to a lesser degree, violence against the self, in hockey and other sports can lead to athletes' broken lives and broken careers. This narrative analysis does not give any clear answers to how orthodox and inclusive masculinity are expressed among hockey players in their daily lives: in the locker room, traveling to competitions, among teammates in training camps and hotel rooms. However, it does raise some questions that, in light of theoretical terms like sports violence and alternative forms of masculinity, are interesting to study further. First, this could be seen in relation to broader studies of marginalized masculinities, such as in Anderson's (2002) study of openly gay athletes. Second, this empirical perspective could contribute to new knowledge about how sport, and ice hockey in particular, should work to integrate groups with different sexual orientations and other, more inclusive forms of masculinities, that deviate from the norms of most modern sports.

A lot has changed since Bob Probert retired from professional hockey, and players in the NHL and other professional hockey leagues are most likely treated better in terms of injuries and recovery from injuries. The examples and narratives I have provided here do, however, indicate that player violence and violence against the self are still a significant part of professional hockey. Furthermore, this information indicates that the social norms of hockey are dominated by codes and practices that give legitimacy to orthodox masculinity.

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AUTHOR'S ADDRESS:

Anne Tjønndal
Nord University
Faculty of Social Science
Postboks 1490
8049 Bodø, Norway
E-mail: anne.b.tjonndal@nord.no

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