

**The Media Discourses of Concussions
in the National Hockey League**

by

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Abstract

The North American ice hockey world has come to realise that concussions are a major problem and a threat to the sport and to the National Hockey League (NHL). The media coverage of the concussions suffered by several NHL stars and of the scientific advancements in the detection and long-term effects of concussions has intensified over the last 20 years. A discourse analysis of Canadian newspaper coverage of concussions in the NHL in 1997-1999 and 2010-2012 focusing on the production of discursive objects and subjects reveals two important discourses. On the one hand, emerging objects of the discourses of blame and responsibility for the concussions in the NHL gained prominence in the later timeframe, especially blame on the NHL, the rulebook and hockey's violent and risk-taking culture. On the other hand, a shift in reporting saw the emergence of a new subject position for the concussed hockey player, that of a frail and vulnerable subject. More NHL players are covered as 'suffering' subjects concerned with both physical pain and the mental health problems associated to concussions, rather than merely as athletes. Indeed, the impact of concussions on the personal lives of players is now an object of discourses that also produce the NHL player as a family member. Finally, former hockey players' stories who have suffered serious concussions are recounted as a cautionary tale, opposing early retirement as a result of health issues to persistence in playing despite such health concerns.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

Canada invented ice hockey and has regularly produced many of the best players in the world, entrenching the sport's national status and Canadians' sense that hockey is "their" sport (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Hockey's importance in Canadian culture has also been established and reproduced through considerable media coverage, especially of hockey's premier professional league, the National Hockey League (NHL). Since hockey is a physical and violent sport that leads to many injuries, the intense media coverage of hockey in Canada has meant that Canadians have been exposed to many discourses of violence and injuries. In particular, this study looked at the media discourses of concussions in hockey in Canada, comparing the discourses from two different eras to gain a better understanding of the shifting meanings the media produced on concussions and violence in hockey.

Concussions are a common occurrence in hockey, but for a long time, they were seen as just another injury that a player had to manage. Players routinely had "their bell rung", but just as with other injuries, players were eager to get back onto the playing field, often returning before it was safe to do so. It was only in the last decade or two that the public slowly began to take notice of the dangers of concussions. In the U.S.A., the concussion dialogue started in the early 2000s, when a deceased former National Football League (NFL) football player was found to have chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a degenerative brain disease which is the result of repeated head trauma or concussions (Laskas, 2015). This disease's symptoms start with such problems as headaches, dizziness, disorientation and memory loss and gradually lead into early on-set dementia and depression, amongst other serious symptoms (Laskas, 2015). The mid 2000s saw the doctor that originally found CTE in the deceased football player, Dr. Bennet Omalu, publish a paper making the link between CTE and NFL players (Omalu, Dekosky, Minster, Kamboh, Hamilton, & Wecht, 2006). Twelve more deceased NFL players between 2008 and

2010 were found to have signs of CTE. This was the start of the “Concussion Era” in the NFL, which resulted in rule changes at the professional and youth levels, and led many parents to question placing their children into youth football.

North of the American border, the news of the NFL’s concussion problems made headlines, with regards mainly to the Canadian Football League. However, until similar discoveries would be made related to hockey, it was not going to elicit as much panic. Certainly, the hockey community was already aware of the potential threat of concussions when the injury forced the retirement of high profile hockey players such as Lafontaine (retired in 1998), Stevens (2004), Primeau (2006) and Lindros (2007). Despite these notable cases, the concussion panic did not arguably gain momentum until December 2009, when the *Globe and Mail* reported that recently deceased former enforcer (a player in hockey whose primary role is to fight and intimidate opponents) Reggie Fleming was found to have CTE (Maki, 2009). Commentators had marked that moment as the beginning of hockey’s “Concussion Era”, as Fleming was the first professional hockey player to have been found with CTE. Since then, CTE was found in other deceased players. As concussions sidelined many prominent NHL players, head injuries in hockey and the NHL received heavy media attention, especially after Sidney Crosby’s concussion in 2011. The media coverage of concussions suffered by star NHL players offered a germane empirical context of analysis to attain a better understanding of concussion discourses circulating in Canada and shaping views and ideas about head injuries in hockey.

An important aspect of today’s professional media sport landscape is the focus on star athletes and their celebrity status, generating fascination from large audiences (Boyle & Haynes, 2000; Smart, 2005). In his book entitled *Media Sports Stars: Masculinities and Moralities*, author Gary Whannel (2002) gave a comprehensive look at the rise in intensity of the media

coverage of sport, and how the sporting star had become a central figure in the media sport industry. The increasing coverage of elite and professional sports and their star athletes influenced how we think of sports participants, sport practices and sport cultures overall. Many scholars have focused their research on the media coverage of elite and professional sports and their stars because of how sport media was an important source of varying information that shape people's experiences (Ford, 1997; Hansen & Hansen, 1988; Hargreaves, 1986; Lee, 1992). Scholars have used the media coverage of elite and professional sports to examine many social issues and problems to further understand the discourses being circulated in society, and how they impacted action and practice. Popular topics studied in the domain of media and sports include sport and gender (see Pirenen, 1997; Billings & Eastman, 2002; Wensing & Bruce, 2003), sport and sexuality (see Wright & Clarke, 1999; Harris & Clayton, 2002; 2004), sport and racism (see Wilson, 1997; Billings, 2004; Denham, Billings & Halone, 2004; Bruce, 2004), and sport and nationalism (see Jackson, 1994; Jackson, 1998; Ramos & Gosine, 2001). Hockey was an important site for the study of sport heroes and nationalism in Canada. In his media analysis of Canadian hockey star Wayne Gretzky's marriage to an American woman and his trade from a Canadian team to an American team in 1988, Jackson (1994) found the media constructed this unfolding of events, in the context of other political and economic events at the time, as a crisis of Canadian identity linked to the perceived threat of "Americanization" in Canada. Ramos and Gosine (2001) explored the cultural divide between Quebec and the rest of Canada through an analysis of the media reports across Canada of the death of French Canadian hockey star Maurice Richard in 2000. They found that French Canadian media reasserted Richard as a symbol of francophone identity and nationalism in the wake of his death, whereas English Canadian media were willing to surrender him to Quebec. The media representations of these

two Canadian hockey stars demonstrated the importance of studying the media coverage of star NHL players to understand discourses circulating in Canada.

Media coverage of sport stars was also analysed because media audience's perceptions of such characteristics as gender, ethnicity or concussions were shaped by the media's selection, narration and description of different events (Brummett and Duncan, 1990; Halbert and Latimer, 1994; MacNeill, 1996). Focusing on important events, or "key" media incidents, was a method used by scholars to investigate the media representations of athletes (see Birrell & McDonald, 2000; Trujillo, 1991; Whannel, 2002). Through the analysis of a key media incident, such as Crosby's concussion in 2011 or Lindros's concussion in 1998, we can see how the concussed hockey player is constructed, how concussions in hockey are generally discussed, and how the sport coverage has changed or not over the past few years (Anderson & Kian, 2012; McGannon, Cunningham & Schinke, 2013).

The way sports stars are socially and culturally constructed is largely influenced by media coverage, which impacts the audience and what they know about and how they identify with different sports stars (Lines, 2001). Scholars such as Billings and Eastman (2002), Billings (2004) and Denham, Billings & Halone (2002) believe that sports media telecasts are founded on agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which suggests that while the media do not tell its consumers what to think, they tell them what to think about. The hockey media in Canada do not tell consumers what or how to think about concussions. Yet the power they exert can bring consumers to think about concussions and their place in hockey. How sport media are repeatedly able to reach many different people at once gives them great power in confirming or reconstructing images in line with the dominant discourses about social group relations, or in this study's case, concussions in hockey (Hargreaves, 1986). However, these dominant discourses are

constantly being challenged by alternate discourses, rendering sport media as a site of struggle between discourses (van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004).

Through several key media incidents, such as Crosby's concussion in 2011 or Lindros's concussion in 1998, the media circulated discourses of concussions in many directions. These media discourses created and shaped meanings for how Canadians perceived concussions and violence in hockey. Therefore, this study focused on the Canadian media coverage of concussions in the NHL in the late 1990s and early 2010s as an entry point to study the shifting discourses about concussions in hockey and their meanings. In following Foucault's conception of power (2003), the media exercised power through the circulation of different discursive fragments regarding concussions in hockey and the NHL, producing "truths" about the concussions, which media consumers drew on to form opinions and elicit action to manage concussions in hockey. In addition, Foucault's discourse theory (1971, 1972, 2003) and his concepts of objects and subjects were central to answering the following questions: How have the discourses of concussions changed from the late 1990s to the early 2010s? How have the discourses of blame and responsibility for the incidence of concussions changed between both timeframes? How has the subject position of the concussed NHL athlete changed between both timeframes? By comparing the Canadian newspaper coverage of the early 1990s when concussions to star Canadian players were being increasingly discussed, to the start of the "Concussion Era" in hockey in the early 2010s, I sought to reveal the similar and different emerging discursive fragments of the blame discourse for concussions in the NHL, as well as the shifting subject positions of concussed NHL players. This way, a better understanding on the "truths" the media circulated about concussions and violence and the impact these "truths" may have can be reached.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review

In the literature review, I outlined two specific fields I believed to be essential to understand the discourses about concussions in hockey. The two fields were media representations of violence and injury in sport, and risk and injury in sport. To understand how the media discourses of concussions in the NHL circulated and shifted over time, it was important to have an understanding of how the media represented violence and injury in sport, as it was often violent acts in hockey that led to concussions. It was equally important to understand how scholars have made sense of risk and injury in sport, as the literature may give insight into why hockey players engaged in risky behaviour that may have led to injuries such as concussions to both themselves and to opponents, or why they may have put themselves at risk by playing with a concussion.

Media representations of violence and injury in sport

An early study on hockey broadcast commentary found that sportscasters seemed to dramatically embellish plays to make them seem rougher and more violent than they actually were (Comisky, Bryant & Zillmann, 1977). Such examples as replays showing a violent hit in slow motion, or zooming onto the face of an injured player writhing in pain were just some of the ways the media conveyed the idea that “violence is acceptable, even desirable, behaviour and that violence-doers are to be admired” (Smith, 1983, p. 118). Other studies have even demonstrated that, not only have the cameras showed these replays of violence and injury, but commentators and media personalities used discourses of approval and rationalisation for the violence (Gillett, White & Young, 2006; Young, 2004; Young, 1991). I expected to find such discourses of approval and rationalisation in my research. For example, I anticipated finding instances of journalists, players and NHL front-office members dismissing concussions in

hockey as just “a part of the game” or an inevitable occurrence in contact sports. These visual and verbal messages the media sent to audiences articulate how pain was marginalised, and how pain and injury were simply a part of the routine of sport (Nixon, 1993; Young, 1990; Young, 1991; Young, 2004). However, Weis (1986) argued that, despite the normalisation of violence, pain and injury in sports, the media also accentuated these dramatic aspects of sport, through profit increasing captions and articles that would attract consumers. This tied into Coakley’s (2009) argument that the media enhanced violence in sport to make it more of a spectacle, and thus to sell the sport and increase profit. Indeed, in a study of New Zealand’s newspaper sports coverage, Holt (2000) not only found that sport was being increasingly commercialised and marketed as a spectacle, sport was also seen as mere entertainment in the larger scope of show business. The NHL, for example, has yet to eliminate fighting from the game. I expected to find in my research that one of the reasons circulated for keeping fighting in the game was that removing it would diminish the violence that attracted fans. In addition to enhancing the violence, sport media also metaphorically constructed hockey as militaristic. Scherer and Koch (2010) analysed the nationally-televised Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s (CBC) broadcast of an NHL game which was used for a campaign to honor and support the Canadian military. In the midst of the war in Afghanistan, the authors argued that hockey was used by political powers as a site to promote their military agenda and regulate the public’s debate over Canada’s involvement in the war. One of the ways in which this was done was how the CBC’s broadcast articulated a narrative which associated hockey with war through sport-war analogies (for example, viewing athletes as warriors) to deflect attention away from the potential consequences of serving in the war (Scherer & Koch, 2010).

In examining the media coverage of the large brawl between the Canadian and Soviet teams of the 1987 World Junior Hockey Championship, Theberge (1989) argued that although the Canadian players crossed the line between gritty and violent, they were not criticised or held accountable in the media for their role in this incident. Instead, the blame was placed on hockey and its values that promote violence as an accepted behaviour, the referees for losing control of the game, the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) for assigning subpar referees, and the coaches for allowing their players to lose control of their emotions (Theberge, 1989). Gibbs and Dallaire's (2013) analysis of the media coverage of the Patrice Cormier incident differed slightly from Theberge's (1989) results. Cormier was a major junior hockey player who elbowed an opponent (knocking him unconscious) during a game. The analysis of the media reports revealed that in this case, players were being blamed for violent play, and not the violent nature of the game (Gibbs & Dallaire, 2013). While the player whom Cormier elbowed was depicted as free from any blame in the incident, he was generally ignored in the coverage. In ignoring him, the media failed to reflect on the health risks from violence in hockey. However, Anderson and Kian (2012) argued that the media was increasingly articulating ideas about the health of athletes. Through their media analysis of the reporting of a prominent National Football League's player who pulled himself out of a game after hitting his head, Anderson and Kian (2012) argued that sport media's altering their reporting of the health of athletes was in part due to the increasing cultural awareness of the impacts of concussions, combined with a "softening of American masculinity" (p. 152) which had allowed players to distance themselves from the hyper-masculine sporting culture of self-sacrifice for the sake of winning. The findings presented here presented interesting questions for my study. Would hockey and its values be blamed for the incidence of violent behaviour that led to concussions? How much blame will the perpetrator

generate in the media in such a circumstance? Or, as Theberge (1989) found, will coaches or the governing body, the NHL, be blamed for the concussions crisis? Finally, did the media reflect on the health risks of concussions when reporting on a violent act that led to a player suffering from a concussion?

Two studies on the media coverage of concussions in hockey provided great insight for my research. In particular, Cusimano, Sharma, Lawrence, Ilie, Silverberg & Jones (2013) provided a strong data collection influence for my research, which is discussed in Chapter 3. Cusimano et al. (2013) studied the newspaper coverage of concussion in hockey. To do so, they conducted a content analysis of North American newspapers between 1985 and 2011, and compared the themes that emerged around concussions in hockey. Five main themes with sub-themes were identified: aggression (sub-themes: aggression as cause of injury, contributors to aggression, attitudes on aggression), perceptions of brain injury (sub-themes: risk perceptions, impact of injury), equipment, rules and regulations and youth hockey (Cusimano et al., 2013). The authors found that the media portrayed violence and aggression that led to concussion and head trauma as both integral to hockey and as a part of the game that was unavoidable. While the media reported violence as a part of the game, they still condemned the violence in the sport, while recognising the damage incurred by concussions and head trauma. In relation to youth hockey, the authors found that recent trends favoured rule changes to protect young players from concussions. I expected to find all of these findings in my research. However, other than blaming the violence, the authors did not analyse the various objects of the discourse of blame used by the media to explain why concussions are increasingly prevalent in hockey.

The second study examining the media coverage of concussions in hockey was McGannon, Cunningham & Schinke's (2013) analysis of the North American media reports of

Sidney Crosby's concussion. The authors found that Crosby's concussion was constructed in the media through a central narrative: a culture of risk. This culture of risk, which will be further discussed in the following section of the literature review, was the overarching narrative of concussions in McGannon et al.'s (2013) study. Three sub-themes emerged from this risk narrative: Crosby's concussion as a cautionary tale, as a political platform, and as ambiguous. Crosby's concussion as a cautionary tale was a narrative that highlighted what was wrong with hockey's culture in relation to risk and injury. Crosby's concussion as a political platform was a narrative which referred to the media's use of Crosby's concussion to discuss concussions on a wider scale, questioning rules and the protection of athletes. His concussion as ambiguous referred to the emerging science of concussions that has yet to reach its fruition, as there was still a lot to be learned about them. As Crosby's concussion was central to my later timeframe, many of the findings in McGannon et al.'s (2013) study emerged in my research. However, my research adopted a more macro approach, as I studied the media coverage of concussions in the NHL in general, over a larger timeframe. This gave me a better grasp of the discourses of concussions as a whole, as I believed it to be important to see how Crosby's concussion impacted how the media discussed concussions to other NHL players. Also, this larger scope allowed me to contextualise Crosby's concussion within the large discussion of concussions in hockey.

Risk and injury in sport

In a physical and elite sport like NHL hockey, athletes adhered to codes that subjected them to risk their health, through pain and injury, to achieve the highest goal in sport (see Nixon, 1992; Messner, 1992; Nixon, 1993; Nixon, 1994; Young, White & McTeer, 1994; Walk, 1997;

Roderick, 1998; Roderick, Waddington & Parker, 2000). Since concussions are an invisible injury, meaning symptoms can easily be hidden from others, players could easily put their health at risk without anybody knowing to pursue their playing goals. As McGannon et al. (2013) found in their analysis of Crosby's concussion in the previous section, a culture of risk was the central narrative revolving around Crosby's concussion. The following section looked at the literature on risk and injury in sport, and namely, the culture of risk.

One of the first sociocultural articles to raise the topic, Hughes & Coakley's (1991) seminal paper argued that overconformity to sports' norms and values were mostly to blame for deviant acts from athletes, such as violence. Positive norms, such as making sacrifices to achieve success, striving for distinction and challenging limits were all highly regarded in the realm of sport. However, overconforming to these norms could have led to deviance such as taking performance enhancing drugs (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). The type of positive deviance that relates to this research would be a hockey player using excessive violence to intimidate an opponent, which could lead to a concussion suffered by the opponent, or a player hiding concussion symptoms so that he or she can keep playing.

Other researchers have analysed how an athlete's different networks of relationships (coaches, teammates, etc.) could have pressured the athlete to play through pain and injury (see Nixon, 1992; Nixon, 1993; Nixon, 1994; Walk, 1997; Roderick, 1998; Roderick, Waddington & Parker, 2000). Nixon (1992) called this social network of sports relationships "sportsnets". He argued that athletes risked pain and injuries because of the structural features of sportsnets (such as team management replacing an athlete who did not play through pain and injury), the individual relationships within the sportsnet (a coach encouraging a player to play through pain), and what researchers have identified as *a culture of risk* (see Donnelly, 2004; Nixon, 1992), a

deeply entrenched subculture of sport where athletes placed their athletic performances above all else, namely their own safety and health, and were encouraged to do so and sometimes rewarded for doing so (Nixon, 1992; Sabo, 2004; Safai, 2003; Young, 1993, 2004). In high level sports such as the NHL, this culture of risk was even more widespread, as “beliefs about structural constraints, structural inducements, and processes of institutional rationalization and socialization” had athletes believing that playing through pain and injury was accepted by all as a part of sport (Nixon, 1992, p. 128). In fact, in their visual study of photographs of a college wrestling team and their injuries, Curry and Strauss (1994) found that this acceptance starts from a young age, when young athletes experienced a “process of defining even serious injuries in sport as routine and uneventful” (p. 195) that normalised injuries and their incidence (Curry & Jiobu, 1984).

In his study of sports magazine articles about athletes playing with injuries, Nixon (1993) was interested in the discourses these articles circulated about risks of pain and injury in sports. A large portion of the articles studied by Nixon (1993) covered such contact sports as football, hockey and boxing. Nixon (1993) identified six prevailing themes for understanding why athletes engaged in the culture of risks: Structural role constraints (athlete expectations, demands and obligations), structural inducements and support (rewards athletes receive), cultural values in sport (good character, pain tolerance), institutional rationalisation (organisational reasons), socialisation of athletes. These six factors were important in understanding why athletes engaged in the culture of risk, and how the culture of risk was not only circulated through an athlete’s network of relationships, but was also circulated through the media. Nixon (1994) subsequently surveyed coaches to examine to which degree they subscribed to the set of beliefs instilled in the culture of risk in sport. He found that the majority of coaches surveyed supported many of the

values attached to the culture of risk and the sport ethic identified by Hughes and Coakley (1991).

Many sports, especially contact sports, are deeply grounded in notions of masculinity. Messner (1992) and Young et al. (1994) argued that the culture of risk, specifically the normalisation of pain and injury in sport, was in part due to athletes' adherence to masculinity. Young et al.'s (1994) study on Canadian male athletes found that the rewards of hegemonic masculinity consistently led athletes in physical sports to sacrifice their health by putting their bodies at risk and playing through injuries. Through interviews with Canadian male athletes, Young et al. (1994) also found that athletes were stigmatized by others as not fully masculine if they pulled themselves from play due to pain. In my research, I expected notions of masculinity to be prevalent when discussions of playing through concussions arose in the coverage of concussions in the NHL.

The above academic literature provided a strong understanding of the media representations of violence and injury in sport, and risk and injury in sport. However, I found a lack of research on the media representations of the injured victim of violent acts. Often, the research focused on the media representation of the incident itself, such as Theberge's (1989) study on the brawl between the Canadian and Soviet hockey teams, or on the athletes inflicting the violence, such as Gibbs and Dallaire's (2013) study on the Patrice Cormier incident. Kian and Anderson's (2012) study on an NFL quarterback's concussions and McGannon et al.'s (2012) study on Crosby's concussion came close, but their focus was still more on the coverage of the athlete's concussion rather than on the athlete who has a concussion. I attempted to fill this gap in Chapter 5.

The literature review was important for designing the research on the discourses of blame for concussions in Chapter 4. The literature on risk and injury in sport, namely the culture of risk, was crucial in analysing hockey culture as an object of the blame and responsibility discourse of concussions. Meanwhile, the studies from Cusimano et al. (2013), McGannon et al. (2012), Theberge (1989) and Gibbs and Dallaire (2013) provided a guide for the design and analysis of this research, especially for Chapter 4, as the discourses of blame and responsibility for violence and injuries in sports from these scholars were all central to my research.

Chapter 3:

The Study

Theoretical Framework

In this section, I reviewed some of the important theoretical concepts that guided the research. Given that the study's main objective was to uncover the shifting discourses of concussions in hockey over time and to understand the meanings and "truths" the media reproduce about concussions and violence in hockey, Michel Foucault's concepts of discourse, power/knowledge and subjectivity framed the analytical process.

Discourse and Power

Michel Foucault's work on discourse and power has been useful to sociologists interested in understanding the ways in which individuals and groups of individuals know what they know, how this information was produced, by whom and under which circumstances, and whose interests it served (Mills, 2003). Foucault defined discourse in many different ways throughout his work (Mills, 2003). In *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault inferred that discourse was "the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualized group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements" (Foucault, 1972, p. 80). By "general domain of all statements", Foucault meant that discourse can be used to refer to statements which have some sort of effect on individuals (Mills, 2003). In simpler terms, discourse was a "regulated set of statements which combine with others in predictable ways" (Mills, 2003, p. 54). Foucault thought of discourse as bodies of knowledge (McHoul & Grace, 1993). He noted that discourse did not refer to simply just language and interaction, but also to general social knowledge (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Discourse was a system which structured the way in which we understood reality (Mills, 2003). This reality, or social reality, was thus produced and made real through discourses (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Without reference to the

discourses that gave this reality their meaning, we could never fully understand this social reality (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Therefore, to understand the social reality of concussions in sports, we must look at the discourses of concussions which structure the way we think about them.

Foucault stressed in his work that discourse was associated with power and relations of power (Mills, 2003). He said that “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, 1978, p. 100-101). Foucault argued here that discourse was on the one hand, the means of oppressing, and the other hand, the means of resistance (Mills, 2003). Foucault referred to “discursive formations” as the grouping of certain types of statements, which were often connected with certain institutions, such as media or government, and which exuded power through how they affected individuals and their way of thinking (Mills, 2003). According to Foucault, an important element of these discursive formations was the objects of which discursive statements spoke of (Gutting, 1989). These objects of discourse consisted of different, even opposing discursive statements (Gutting, 1989).

These discursive formations were subject to constant change (Mills, 2003). In this study, there were many discursive formations of concussions in hockey, and these formations had effects on individuals and how they thought about concussions, violence and hockey. As I attempted to show in comparing the discourse of concussions in two distinct timeframes, these discursive formations were also subject to change. They always contained conflicting sets of statements, which was why Foucault wanted to analyse under which conditions some of these statements emerged as more important than others (Mills, 2003). It was the discourse that structured which statements were more prominent than others, and under what conditions certain statements were considered as “truths” (Mills, 2003).

Power/Knowledge

Foucault believed that power circulated through discourse. He argued that power was not something that could be possessed by individuals or groups of individuals to control others. Foucault thought power only presented itself in the context of a relationship of two individuals, where one was attempting to manipulate the behaviour and/or the actions of the other (Smith Maguire, 2002). Power and freedom were not mutually exclusive; you could have both power and freedom at once (Smith Maguire, 2002). Power and knowledge, according to Foucault, were inseparable. He said that “it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, and it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power” (Foucault, 1980, p.52). Knowledge was seen by Foucault as an exercise of non-coercive power, or as he called it, positive power (Smith Maguire, 2002). Foucault was interested in the ways in which some statements were established as facts or truths, while other statements were discredited and ignored (Mills, 2003). More precisely, he was interested in the “abstract institutional processes at work which establish something as fact or knowledge” (Mills, 2003, p. 67). Rather than interested in *what* was established as truths or facts at any one time, Foucault was more focused on *how* certain truths or facts came to be known as so rather than others, and what were the “mechanisms by which knowledge comes into being and is produced” (Mills, 2003, p. 68). Foucault described knowledge as a coming together of power relations and information-seeking which he called “power/knowledge” (Foucault, 1980; Mills, 2003). Therefore, power/knowledge determined what will be known, and in producing knowledge, one was also making a claim for power (Mills, 2003). Knowledge was produced and maintained through the work of different institutions and practices through a variety of ways that supported and affirmed certain knowledge as truths, and excluded other statements (Mills, 2003). For example, I argued that knowledge about

concussions was produced and maintained through media. The media supported certain ideas about concussions as truths, while minimising others. By drawing on knowledge and discourses, some actions were framed as more acceptable than others by institutions, thus indirectly denying or constraining other actions (Smith Maguire, 2002). We see here, how truth, power and knowledge were all interconnected in how power worked in producing knowledge (Mills, 2003). In relating this to discourse, Foucault said power/knowledge produced dominant discourses that shape and constitute subjects (Foucault, 1972).

Subjects and Subjectivity

Foucault was also interested in the effects of discourse and power relations in how particular kinds of subjects were produced, and the ways in which an individual turned into a subject (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Foucault indicated that there were two meanings to “subject”: to be subject to another individual through control or dependence, or subject to your own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge (Foucault, 1982). Discourse produced subject positions. For example, a concussed NHL player may have just been viewed as another injured player in the past, but following the rise in public awareness of the short and long term adverse health consequences of concussions, the concussed player was positioned as an individual whose debilitating injury had affected his family and those closest to him. There could not be subjectivity unless one was aware of the discourses one was subjected to. Individuals positioned themselves according to the dominant discourses. This positioning meant engaging with the social world through the use of discursive practices (Foucault, 1982). An example of this with regards to discourses about concussions was that when a player sustained a concussion in the 1990s, discursive formations produced meanings about concussions that were not what they were

when Sidney Crosby sustained his in 2011. Since the devastating impacts of concussions on one's health were not as widely known and circulated in the 1990s, the violent nature of hockey was perhaps not questioned in the coverage of concussions. However, with the emergence of scientific research showing the harmful effects of concussions, combined with the concussions of high-caliber stars such as Sidney Crosby, the discourse of violence in hockey had surely shifted. Journalists wrote about hockey and concussions, citing and quoting scientists and scholars (or in Foucauldian terms, "specialists"), to produce knowledge about concussions and violence in hockey, which was then taken as "truths" by readers. These readers then used this knowledge on concussions and hockey to inform their actions, such as keeping their children out of youth hockey. They were thus subject to the constant flow of discourses of concussions and violence in hockey, because their opinions on hockey were shaped by the competing media discourses. Foucault identified this subjection of individuals as one of the three types of struggles people faced (along with the struggles against forms of domination, and struggles against forms of exploitation) (Foucault, 1982).

Methods

Data Collection

This research was based on the data collection techniques used by Cusimano, Sharma, Lawrence, Ilie, Silverberg & Jones's (2013) study on the shifting discussions of concussion in hockey in North American newspapers. Like Cusimano et al. (2013), the media medium I chose to analyse was daily newspapers. One of the reasons I chose newspapers for the analysis was their accessibility. There were numerous online databases, such as Factiva or ProQuest, that contained many of the largest Canadian newspapers and allowed the user to search for key terms

in specific date ranges to find all relevant articles. Because all articles are archived, it allowed a quick search of key terms, such as “concussion”, which was why an analysis of, for example, news broadcasts on television would have presented many more obstacles. Despite the increasing popularity of web-only sources of news, newspapers remained an important source of news to Canadians. According to the Newspaper Audience Databank Inc. (2012), over 50% of Canadians in 2012 read newspaper content every day, and almost 80% read a daily newspaper every week. Daily newspapers often had an entire section devoted to sports. This section represents, after news coverage, the second most likely part of the newspaper Canadian adults aged 18 to 49 read (Newspaper Audience Databank Inc., 2012). For reasons of accessibility and continued popularity, research into the content of newspapers provided valuable insight into the changing discourses circulated in sports media.

Where Cusimano et al. (2013) analysed North American newspapers, this study was strictly interested in Canadian content. The content analysed was from Canada’s highest circulating paid national newspaper, and the three most circulated English language paid newspapers from Canada’s three largest cities, which, according to Statistics Canada, in 2015 were Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver (Population of census metropolitan areas, 2016). According to the 2015 Daily Newspaper Circulation Data of Newspapers Canada (Daily newspaper circulation data, 2016), these four newspapers were, respectively, *The Globe & Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *The Gazette* and *The Vancouver Sun*. Originally, I wanted to analyse the largest paid circulating newspaper from each of the three cities, regardless of the language. For Montreal, the most circulated paid newspaper was French language newspaper *Le Journal de Montréal*. However, the University of Ottawa’s newspaper databases offered to students did not have access to *Le Journal de Montréal* articles before 2011, and the *Journal de Montréal* only

began digitally archiving their articles in 2003. The cost of retrieving those articles before 2003 was too high. The next highest circulating newspaper in Montreal was *La Presse*, but I encountered many of the same accessibility barriers to retrieve their articles. Therefore, the next highest circulating paid newspaper in Montreal was *The Gazette*.

The next step was to choose the dates from which I would extract the articles to be analysed from the four newspapers. I chose the dates August 1st, 1997 to July 31st, 1999 and August 1st, 2010 to July 31st, 2012. The NHL pre-season games start in September, so I chose August 1st as the start date because I thought the discussion of the upcoming season would start a month prior to the pre-season. I thus chose July 31st as the end date for both so that the timeframes would each be exactly two years long. It was important that one of the two timeframes was in the late 1990s, when the issue of concussions in hockey was emerging, and the other timeframe be closer to the present date. Additionally, at least one prominent NHL player had to have suffered a concussion within the timeframe because sports stars have become central figures in the media sport industry, meaning they will be heavily covered by the media (Whannel, 2002). During the 1997-1998 season, two star Canadian players, Eric Lindros and Paul Kariya, and suffered concussions which would sideline them both for a long period of time. During the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 seasons, Canada's biggest star player, Sidney Crosby, suffered two concussions which forced him to miss the majority of games over the two seasons. These concussions to prominent Canadian players were heavily discussed in the media in their respective timeframes.

The following step was to have the correct search terms for the database search, to ensure all articles covering concussion in the NHL were found. Borrowing from Cusimano et al. (2013), the search terms I used for concussions were “concuss* OR head trauma* OR head injur* OR

brain trauma* OR brain injur* OR postconcuss* OR post-concuss*". In addition to these terms, the articles had to mention "NHL". This differed from Cusimano et al. (2013), who searched for articles using the concussion terms and "hockey". The discrepancy in the search terms was due to the effectiveness of using media coverage of elite and professional sports as an important source of varying topics, such as concussions, that shape people's experiences and perceptions of them (Ford, 1997; Hansen & Hansen, 1988; Hargreaves, 1986; Lee, 1992).

With the newspapers, date ranges and search terms selected, the ProQuest database yielded 613 articles for the 1997-1999 timeframe, and 1878 for the 2010-2012 timeframe. These figures alone showed the difference in how much concussions in the NHL were discussed in both timeframes. Nevertheless, not every article was retained for the analysis. Many articles only sparingly mentioned concussions. For example, an article on the previous night's game might have mentioned in one sentence that a certain player had missed a second consecutive game due to postconcussion symptoms, only to never discuss concussions again in the article. This type of article was discarded. Those retained for my analysis had discussed concussions for at least 50% of the article while mentioning the NHL at least once. Conversely, Cusimano et al. (2013) analysed all articles that mentioned at least one of their search terms a minimum of three times within the body and/or headline of the article. As a result, my analysis did not include as many as their study. On the other hand, my study provided a more in-depth analysis of the articles that focused primarily on concussions in the NHL. After reading all the articles yielded through the database search, 69 articles out of the original 613 from the 1997-1999 period were retained for analysis, whereas 313 out of the 1878 articles were kept for analysis from the 2010-2012 timeframe.

Discourse Analysis

To explore the changing media discourses of concussions in hockey and more particularly the NHL, a media discourse analysis of the Canadian newspapers was employed to capture the shifting discourses. Similar to the dual quantitative and qualitative research approach taken by Rock (2005) and MacKay & Dallaire (2009), this study's main methodological tool was qualitative in nature with some basic quantitative work to compare the frequencies of different themes. Quantitative tabulating of different themes found in the newspaper coverage, as well as a qualitative analysis of the themes framed Rocks's (2005) study of diabetes coverage in newspapers. Similarly, MacKay & Dallaire (2009) used descriptive statistics and a media discourse analysis to analyse the coverage of women's and men's varsity sports in two university student newspapers. In this study, a simple analysis of the frequencies of different themes was done as part of the study, but the large majority of the analysis was guided by discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis focuses on the naturally occurring text and talk (Barker & Galasiński, 2001). Naturally occurring text and talk can be "studied in ways that come as close as is possible to their actually occurring forms in their 'customary' contexts", meaning that newspaper articles covering sports adhered to conventional newspaper practices that warranted analysis (Barker & Galasiński, 2001, p. 63). Discourse analysis examines how these texts are made meaningful through how they connect with other texts, the different discourses on which they draw, and how they are produced, disseminated and consumed (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). If we are to understand discourses and their effects, they need to be studied and analysed within their global and local context, because discourses are never found in their entirety (Barker & Galasiński, 2001; Phillips & Hardy, 2002). This connection between discourses and context, and thus discourses and the

social reality that they constitute, make discourse analysis a strong and important tool for studying social phenomena (Phillips & Hardy, 2002), such as concussions in hockey.

Discourse analysis typically falls into one of two epistemological stances. It can be from a critical stance, where the studies focus more on the power dynamics and the knowledge circulating in the discourse. Analysing the power dynamics through identifying which discourses are emphasised and which are rendered invisible is an important part of the critical approach of discourse analysis. It can also be from a constructivist approach, which is more interested in the social construction of a social reality. A major contribution of discourse analysis is that it examines how texts or talk constructs phenomena, which shows discourse analysis's strong constructivist view (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Within the critical approach and the constructivist approach, discourse analysis can be more of a micro-based approach focusing on the text (while still taking into account the context) or a more macro-based approach focusing more on the context (Phillips & Ravasi, 1998). In looking at the data gathered from the media discourse analysis of concussions in the NHL, I analysed the change in the discursive fragments about concussions over the two timeframes. I then made some comments on the broader context that framed the changing media reports about concussions in hockey.

Doing a discourse analysis

Equipped with a total of 382 newspaper articles for analysis, I was ready to begin the discourse analysis of these articles to uncover the discourses of concussions. Discourse analysis typically does not follow a step-by-step checklist for how to properly employ it (Graham, 2005). I wanted to go into the discourse analysis with an inductive approach, to allow themes to emerge from the data. This was important because I did not want to go into the discourse analysis with

any pre-conceived objects of the discourse. However, as I began the analysis, I found it difficult to identify objects of the discourse without having examples. Therefore, I restarted my analysis with five objects of the discourse of concussions, which were in fact all five themes borrowed from Cusimano et al. (2013). These five themes were “aggression”, “perceptions of brain injury”, “equipment”, “rules and regulations” and “youth hockey”. Cusimano et al. (2013) identified these five themes as the key emerging themes in the print media’s discussion of hockey related traumatic brain injuries that were highly recurrent between 1985 and 2011. “Aggression” referred to discursive fragments that either blamed aggression as the cause of concussion, discussed what made players engage in aggressive play, or the attitude, whether for or against, on aggression as a part of hockey (Cusimano et al., 2013). “Perception of brain injury” referred to the perceived impact concussions could have on the player, on a personal or professional level, or the team (Cusimano et al., 2013). The “equipment” theme was for all discursive fragments that spoke about the overall attitudes and effectiveness of equipment in preventing brain injuries (Cusimano et al. 2013). The “rules and regulations” object was for the discussion of on-ice rules to protect players from concussions, as well as various regulations, such as rink size and concussion protocols (Cusimano et al., 2013). The “youth hockey” object was for all references to youth hockey made in articles about concussions in the NHL, such as the importance of keeping young player safe (Cusimano et al., 2013).

With these five objects of discourse, I had a base to begin the discourse analysis. Before restarting the analysis of each article, I created an Excel sheet for the data entry. I exclusively coded all of the data, which meant there being no potential problem of intercoder reliability. On the other hand, being the sole coder introduced the potential for bias. In the Excel table, I placed article number, source, date, author, and the main focus of the article as columns. I then added 10

more columns: five for the five objects from Cusimano et al. (2013), and one column for each object to enter the discursive fragment. Additional columns were left for the new objects of discourse that would emerge from the data, and their discursive fragments.

Keeping my mixed deductive/inductive stance, I restarted the analysis of the articles. As the analysis progressed, I noticed that the media sought to place the blame of the concussions they reported on, or concussions in hockey in general, on someone or something. Five objects of the discourse of blame and responsibility emerged: “hockey and its values”, “nobody (part of the game)”, “players and/or the NHL players’ union”, “coaches” and “NHL”. The “hockey and its values” object was for discursive fragments that pinned the blame of concussions on the macho culture of hockey. The “nobody (part of the game)” object referred to discursive fragments that hypothesized that concussions were always going to be a part of hockey, so there was nobody to blame. Blaming concussions on the players or their union was for when concussions were being blamed on the players’ aggressive play, or on their union that failed to properly protect them. Coaches were sometimes blamed for either putting their concussed player back on the ice, or protecting their aggressive players who were responsible for inducing a concussion to an opponent. Finally, the “NHL” object of the blame discourse was for when the NHL and its front office members, such as NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, were being blamed for the prevalence of concussions, or for their lack of action to protect the players.

The seven remaining objects of the concussion discourse that emerged as the analysis progressed were “health risks”, “reasons for playing or not playing with a concussion”, “masculinity”, “increasing awareness/educating on concussions”, “medical uncertainty of concussions”, “culture change”, and “NHL team doctors”. Any medical discussion of concussions fell into the “health risks” object of the discourse. Discursive fragments that referred

to the reasons players played or did not play with a concussion, such as the willingness to “show their stripes”, were placed within this object. The “masculinity” object was for any discursive fragment that referenced masculinity as part of the hockey culture that dictated how players dealt with concussions or how player violence lead to concussions. Any mention of, for example, a former player increasing awareness of concussions through youth programs, or articles quoting neurologists to educate readers on concussions was filtered into the “increasing awareness/educating on concussions” object of the discourse. For the “medical uncertainty of concussions” object, any discursive fragment discussing how there was still a lot of unknowns regarding the nature of concussions was placed in this category. Whenever the debate of a culture change for hockey was discussed as a means to reduce concussions, these discursive fragments were placed in the “culture change” object. Finally, the “NHL team doctors” object of the concussions discourse was for when any member of the NHL teams’ medical staff was criticised or applauded for their management of a player’s concussion.

Upon placing all 4910 discursive statements into the non-mutually exclusive objects, and reading through them numerous times to attain a grasp of the entire context of concussions in the NHL in both timeframes, the discourse of blame for the concussions in the NHL and the objects that made up this discourse was a topic that warranted further analysis. This discourse of blame would be the first part of the analysis. The second part of the analysis would be to investigate how the media looked at the vulnerability and frailty of concussed NHL players on a personal level.

Discourse of blame

The objects of the discourse of blame for concussions in the NHL were “equipment”, “rules and regulations”, “hockey and its values”, “nobody (part of the game)”, “players and/or the NHL players’ union”, “coaches”, “NHL”, “reasons for playing or not playing with a concussion”, “masculinity” and “culture change”. I then proceeded to analyse every discursive statement from each of these objects, and created categories within each object to make better sense of the data. Within the “equipment” object, the categories were helmets and other. In “rules and regulations”, there was fighting, headshot rule (rule 48), youth hockey rules, concussion protocol and rink regulations. For the “hockey and its values” object of the discourse, there were no distinct categories. However, the “masculinity” and “culture change” objects were analysed within the “hockey and its values” object. Within the “nobody (part of the game)” object, the categories found were that the game was faster and players stronger, that there was an assumed risk when playing hockey and the notion that accidents happened in hockey. The “players and/or the NHL players’ union” object included categories for players not being responsible, players not respecting each other, the union not taking action and blaming the player who suffered the concussion. Within the “coaches” object of discourse, there were two categories. The first was coaches sending out concussed players back on the ice too soon, and coaches protecting players engaging in violent behaviour that caused concussions. Many categories that overlapped into other objects were found within the “NHL” object of the blame discourse. The categories were stiffer suspensions for players engaging in violent acts, criticism of the rules and regulations, equipment and the front-office, as well as the NHL marketing violence, and the NHL failing to recognize scientific research on concussions. Finally, for “reasons for playing or not playing with a concussion”, the categories regarding the reasons for playing were included in the “hockey and

its values” object because they were related to themes of hockey culture. The reasons for not playing were that some players were worried about the effects of concussions.

With many discursive flows in every direction, having each object of the blame discourse divided into different categories allowed for an easier analysis of the discourse. In combination with Foucault’s discourse theory and his concept of objects, discourse analysis made sense of how the discourse of blame for concussions in the NHL shaped opinions and instigated or failed to instigate changes to protect players from concussions.

Frailty and vulnerability of players

In analysing the “perceptions of brain injury” object, I noticed that journalists in the later timeframe were increasingly interviewing players who were suffering concussions about how the concussions were affecting their everyday lives, away from the hockey rink. As I delved deeper, I discovered emerging objects of the concussion discourse. The objects identified were physical pain, mental health, family and retirement. The physical pain object referred to the physical, day-to-day pain that players have to manage after sustaining a concussion, such as dealing with migraine headaches when walking their dog. The mental health object of the discourse was for the increasing links being suggested between players suffering from concussions and various mental health issues, such as depression. The family object was in reference to mentions of the difficulties concussed players face in fulfilling their familial roles, such as playing with their children, or when family members of concussed players were interviewed to give their opinions on concussions and hockey. Finally, the retirement object was for discursive statements where players contemplated retirement due to their concussion, or when journalists interviewed retired players for their insights on how concussions during their hockey career have affected them in

their everyday lives. These four emerging objects of the concussion discourse in the later timeframe gave a new subject position to the NHL players, that of a frail and vulnerable subject.

Along with the use of Foucault's discourse theory and his concepts of objects and subjects, discourse analysis provided a further understanding of the changing discourses of concussions, as well as the larger public discussions of concussions. The discourse analysis led to Chapter 4, where I delved into the discourses of blame and responsibility for concussions in the NHL, and the effects the emerging objects of the discourse between 2010 and 2012 had on rule changes and the overall discussion of hockey's violent culture. Shifting to a more micro approach, the discourse analysis in Chapter 5 demonstrated how the media increasingly reported between 2010 and 2012 on the short and long-term effects concussions had on the personal lives of past and present players, subjectifying the injured hockey as vulnerable and frail. This new subject position of concussed hockey players shaped how the public perceived violence in hockey.

Table 1. Summary of analytical themes

	Objects of the concussion discourse	
Discourse of blame and responsibility (Chapter 4 / Article 1)	<i>Hockey and its values</i>	}
	<i>Nobody (part of the game)</i>	
	<i>Players and/or NHLPA</i>	
	<i>Coaches</i>	
	<i>NHL</i>	
	<i>Reasons for playing or not playing with a concussion</i>	
	<i>Masculinity</i>	
	<i>Culture change</i>	
	<i>Equipment</i>	
	<i>Rules and regulations</i>	
Frailty and vulnerability of players (Chapter 5 / Article 2)	<i>Perceptions of brain injury</i>	} Objects from Cusimano et al. (2013)
Other	<i>Aggression</i>	}
	<i>Youth hockey</i>	
	<i>Health risks of concussions</i>	
	<i>Reasons for playing or not playing with a concussion</i>	
	<i>Medical uncertainty of concussions</i>	
	<i>NHL team doctors</i>	
		} Objects found inductively

Chapter 4 / Article 1:

Who or what is to blame for concussions in the NHL?

A Canadian print media analysis

Prepared for submission to the *International Journal of Sport Communication*

Injuries have long been an accepted part of ice hockey. More specifically, concussions are a regular occurrence on hockey rinks, but it is only in the last decade or two that concussions have been viewed by many in the hockey world as a serious problem and threat to the sport and its professional leagues, notably North America's top professional league, the National Hockey League. The public began to take notice of concussions in hockey when several high profile players, such as Pat Lafontaine and Eric Lindros, retired due to the injury in the 1990s and 2000s. However, the concussion debate has been reported to having been sparked in December 2009, when *The Globe and Mail* reported that the brain of deceased enforcer (a player who's main role is to fight and intimidate opponents) Reggie Fleming was found to have CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy), a degenerative brain disease which is the result of frequent concussions or head trauma (Maki, 2009). Commentators have marked that moment as the start of the "Concussion Era" in the NHL and North American hockey (Starkman, 2011). Contributing to the start of this particular period of concussion debates was the recent scientific advancements showing that concussions had detrimental long-term effects, especially in the case of repeated concussions and other traumatic brain injuries (Wetjen, Pichelmann & Atkinson, 2010; Lord-Maes & Obrzut, 1996). Where concussions are commonly found in most contact sports such as American football, hockey is one of the sports where athletes are most susceptible to them (Wennberg & Tator, 2008; Donaldson, Asbridge & Cusimano, 2013).

To curb the prevalence of concussions in hockey, rule changes were made at various hockey levels to protect the players, with different results. In minor hockey, the elimination of hitting in the younger age groups saw concussions decrease (Macpherson, Rothman & Howard, 2006). Hockey Canada made important changes to minor hockey across the country, starting in 2011, with the new head contact rule penalizing all contact (voluntary or accidental) to the head

of an opponent (Hockey Canada, 2011), and in 2013 with the elimination of body-checking for all hockey players 12 years of age and younger (Hockey Canada, 2013). In the NHL, however, the results of rule changes were not as successful. The introduction of a new rule rendering most hits to the heads of opponents illegal in 2010, and its modification in 2011, failed to decrease the number of concussions, as there were 84 reported concussions and another 36 suspected concussions in the 2011-2012 NHL season, compared to 65 concussions and 42 suspected concussions in the 2010-2011 season, and 44 concussions and 24 suspected concussions in the 2009-2010 season (Donaldson et. al., 2013). Eradicating all body-checking is out of the question for the NHL, because the physicality attracts fans, and decreasing physicality and violence in hockey could be seen as a threat to hockey's traditions (Paul, 2003; Adams, Mason & Robidoux, 2015; Cormack & Cosgrove, 2013; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Robidoux & Trudel, 2006).

In addition to these rule changes, the NHL and minor hockey associations across Canada have tinkered with equipment regulations, rink standards, and concussion protocols in the hopes of decreasing concussions, to varying results. The continuing scientific advancements made in the understanding of concussions, coupled with the media reports of several prominent NHL players' concussions (such as Sidney Crosby's) have played a major role in the emergence of the "Concussion Era" in North American hockey. The public began to take notice of this "new" era in hockey because, in part, of the increased media interest on the issue.

In Canada, where hockey is ingrained in the national culture (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993), the media coverage of the prominent NHL players' concussions was intense, especially for Sidney Crosby's head injuries. The coverage of elite and professional sports, and their star athletes, has risen immensely over the past few decades, as the star athlete has become a central figure to sport media coverage (Whannel, 2002). The media coverage of elite and professional

sports and their star athletes have been used by scholars (especially on topics of race (see Wilson, 1997; Billings, 2004; Denham, Billings & Halone, 2004; Bruce, 2004), gender (see Pirenen, 1997; Billings & Eastman, 2002; Wensing & Bruce, 2003), sexuality, (see Wright & Clarke, 1999; Harris & Clayton, 2002; 2004) and nationalism (see Jackson, 1994; Jackson, 1998; Ramos & Gosine, 2001) to examine social issues and problems, and the discourses being circulated concerning these issues and problems. In particular, hockey stars have been the subjects of important sport media studies of nationalism in Canada. Jackson (1994) found that the media constructed Canadian hockey star Wayne Gretzky's wedding to an American woman and trade to an American team as a crisis of Canadian identity, while Ramos and Gosine (2001) explored the prevailing cultural divide between Quebec and the rest of Canada in how the media reported on the death of French Canadian hockey star Maurice Richard. These two studies demonstrated how the media analysis of hockey stars was used to gain a better understanding of the meanings produced about certain topics (such as concussions) and hockey in discourses circulating in Canadian media.

As hockey entered its "Concussion Era", concussions were defined as a legitimate problem in hockey. Media consumers' perceptions of such issues and problems were shaped by how the media covered them, and how much they covered them (Brummett and Duncan, 1990; Halbert and Latimer, 1994; MacNeill, 1996). The media's coverage of concussions in the NHL presented many avenues of blame for the prevalence of concussions, as hockey media reporting sought to understand: Why are there concussions in hockey? How can they be decreased? The media discourses of blame and responsibility for concussions in the NHL circulated in many directions. The blame was placed on equipment, gameplay rules, rink regulations, hockey culture and its values, the players, the coaches, the NHL, or on nobody (where concussions were

accepted as “part of the game”). The way in which the media covers concussions in the NHL creates and shapes meanings for how society perceives concussions in hockey and in the NHL, as well as violence in hockey. Therefore, the media coverage of NHL concussions in the late 1990s, when the coverage of concussions in the NHL was emerging due to star players suffering concussions, and early 2010s served as an entry point for this study on the shifting discourses about concussions in hockey. Following Foucault’s conception of power (2003), the media exercise power through the flow of different discursive fragments circulated in the reporting of concussions in hockey and in the NHL. This array of discursive statements produce “truths” about concussions, which in turn media consumers draw on to gain knowledge and form opinions about these head injuries and their occurrence in hockey.

How have the discourses of blame and responsibility for the prevalence of concussions in the NHL changed from the late 1990s to the early 2010s? What were the solutions being presented to curb the incidence of concussions? By drawing on Foucault’s discourse theory (1971, 1972, 2003), and his concept of objects, this study explored those questions. By comparing the Canadian newspaper coverage of the period when concussions to star NHL players were being increasingly discussed in the late 1990s to the start of the “Concussion Era” in the early 2010s, I sought to reveal the similar and different emerging discursive fragments about whom or what was responsible for the occurrence of concussions in hockey. In doing so, a better understanding can be reached on the meanings the media circulate about concussions and violence in hockey.

Literature Review

Sport media are often guilty of emphasizing violent actions in sports, such as showing slow-motion replays of thunderous body-checks, or zooming onto the face of an injured skater as he is helped to his feet by trainers. Highlighting violence in such ways suggests to the audience that not only is violence in sport an accepted and desired code of conduct, but that those engaging in the violence should be admired (Smith, 1983). In fact, a study as early as 1977 on hockey broadcast commentary found that broadcasters were inclined to considerably exaggerate plays to make them appear more intense and violent than they really were (Comisky, Bryant & Zillmann, 1977). Just like the cameras focusing on the violence in sports, commentators and media personalities also transmit their approval and rationalisation for the violence on-air (Gillett, White & Young, 2006; Young, 2004; Young, 1991). This occurs for instance in coverage related to concussions in hockey when reporters described a violent body-check which resulted in a concussion for the victim, as a “hard, hockey hit” and then dismiss the injury using expressions such as “just part of the game” and that “sometimes, it happens”. In both visually and verbally transmitting these messages of violence to the audience, sport media marginalise pain and injury, routinising it as part of the sport (Nixon, 1993; Young, 1990; Young, 1991; Young, 2004). The normalisation of violence, pain and injury on the part of the sport media through the over-dramatising of violent acts has also been argued by Weis (1986) as a way for print media to increase sales of newspapers, through captions and articles that attract consumers. Indeed, the media highlights violence in sport to sell it as a spectacle, as they have found that violence increases interest, and thus increases profit (Coakley, 2009). Professional sport sold as a spectacle provides an entertainment value in the larger context of show business (Holt, 2009).

The 1987 World Junior Hockey Championship drew a lot of media coverage for the large brawl between the Canadian and Soviet teams. In analysing the discourses of blame in the Canadian media coverage of the incident, Theberge (1989) found the bulk of the liability was placed on the values of hockey, the referees, the International Ice Hockey Federation and the coaches, amongst others (Theberge, 1989). However, the Canadian players were not held accountable or criticised in the media for the role their violent actions held in the incident, whereas the Soviets were. Another Canadian media analysis of a violent hockey incident found slightly different results. Patrice Cormier was a prominent Canadian major junior player when he knocked an opposing player unconscious with an elbow to the player's head. Gibbs and Dallaire's (2013) media analysis of the incident found that, as opposed to Theberge's (1989) study, the values and violent nature of hockey were not blamed, instead the perpetrator, Cormier, was blamed for the violence. The victim of the incident was portrayed as free of any responsibility in the incident, and was for the most part ignored altogether in the Canadian media (Gibbs & Dallaire, 2013). Conversely, in an analysis of the media coverage of a famous National Football League player removing himself from a game after suspecting he had suffered a concussion, Anderson and Kian (2012) argued that the American media was increasingly expressing compassion about athletes' health and well-being. They explained that this shift in coverage was due to an increasing cultural awareness of concussions and a "softening of American masculinity" (Anderson & Kian, 2012, p. 152) which allowed athletes to move away from the self-sacrificial and macho cultural demands of competitive sports.

Moving on to studies on the coverage of concussions in hockey, Cusimano, Sharma, Lawrence, Ilie, Silverberg & Jones (2013) conducted a content analysis of Canadian and American newspapers between 1985 and 2011. Five themes were identified by the authors as

highly recurrent across all newspapers and time periods: aggression, perceptions of brain injury, equipment, rules and regulations and youth hockey (Cusimano et al., 2013). Within the aggression theme, three sub-themes emerged: aggression as a cause of injury, contributors to aggression and attitudes on aggression. The coverage about perceptions of brain injury also included sub-themes: risk perceptions and impact of injury. Similar to these two sub-themes, McGannon, Cunningham & Schinke's (2013) content analysis of the media coverage of Sidney Crosby's concussion in 2011 revealed a central narrative revolving around Crosby's concussion: that of a culture of risk and its impact on athletes. Sidney Crosby was a Canadian hockey star whose highly mediatised concussions in 2011 and 2012 were also a part of the present analysis. McGannon et al. (2013) argued that the media's coverage of Crosby's concussion shaped concussions as medically ambiguous, while using the incident as a cautionary tale and a political platform to lobby for rule changes. Cusimano et al. (2013) also found that Crosby's concussion was used as a platform for rule changes to protect players from concussion-inducing violence. As important as McGannon et al.'s (2013) study was to the present research, its media analysis of Crosby's concussion spanned from January 1st, 2011, when Crosby suffered his first documented concussion in the NHL, to around the end of that season, June 30th, 2011. The present study's analysis continued until July 31st 2011, which was crucial to understand concussion discourses, because Crosby had made his return to play in November 2011 (Arthur, 2011), then was again sidelined with another concussion in December 2011 (Gross, 2011). His lengthy absence from the ice kept concussions in hockey as a popular topic of discussions in the media. Also, the authors' micro approach to the concussion, in focusing only on Crosby's concussion failed to grasp the larger picture of concussions in the NHL or hockey.

In highly physical and elite sports, athletes adhere to codes that dictated that they should play through pain and injury, and risk their health to win at all costs (see Nixon, 1992; Messner, 1992; Nixon, 1993; Nixon, 1994; Young, White & McTeer, 1994; Walk, 1997; Roderick, 1998; Roderick, Waddington & Parker, 2000). This is especially the case in men's professional hockey. Concussions, being an invisible injury, are an easy injury to hide from others, leading players to risk their own health to continue playing. The following section of the literature review focuses on this culture of risk that is so prevalent in professional hockey to attempt to understand why players potentially engage in violent behaviour that can cause concussions to others, and why players may hide concussion symptoms to pursue playing. Although some of this literature predates the timeframes analysed in my research, the studies remain significant today, as many of their results endure, thus become relevant to draw comparisons with the present study's findings.

Hughes & Coakley (1991) argued that most of the deviance from athletes derived from an overconformity to the norms and values of the sport's culture. Making sacrifices, striving for distinction, taking risks and challenging limits were all positive norms, but overconforming to these norms lead to deviance such as taking performance enhancing drugs (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). In hockey, these values could be exhibited through excessive violence in a sport where physical intimidation is valued. This excessive violence could result in concussions through vicious hits or fighting. It can also be exhibited by hiding concussions symptoms to continue playing, because playing at all costs is ingrained in hockey's DNA. Other researchers were interested in how different networks of relationships related to sports (such as coaches, teammates), especially in elite level sports, generated pressure on athletes to play through pain and injury (see Nixon, 1992; Nixon, 1993; Nixon, 1994; Walk, 1997; Roderick, 1998; Roderick,

Waddington & Parker, 2000). Researchers have identified a *culture of risk* (see Donnelly, 2004; Nixon, 1992), where athletes are encouraged and/or rewarded to put their athletic performances ahead of their own safety and health, and to keep playing through pain and injury (Nixon, 1992; Sabo, 2004; Safai, 2003; Young, 1993, 2004). This culture of risk was especially prevalent in high level sport, where “beliefs about structural constraints, structural inducements, and processes of institutional rationalization and socialization” lead athletes to believe that playing through injury and pain was an accepted part of the game (Nixon, 1992, p. 128). This normalisation of injuries in sport started from a young age, when young athletes experience “a process of defining even serious injuries in sport as routine and uneventful” (Curry & Strauss, 1994, p. 195).

Nixon (1993) was interested in the discourses about risks of pain and injury in sports by looking at what different people in sports (athletes, coaches, team owners, journalists, etc.) had to say in sports magazine articles about athletes playing with injuries. The majority of the articles analysed by Nixon (1993) covered contact sports, such as football, boxing and hockey. Structural role constraints (athlete expectations, demands and obligations), structural inducements and support (rewards athletes receive), cultural values in sport (good character, pain tolerance), institutional rationalisation (organisational reasons), socialisation of athletes and accepting the risk and pain were the six major themes for understanding why athletes accepted the risks of pain and injuries in sports (Nixon, 1993). These themes informed the present analysis, especially in cases where the media discussed various athletes returning to play too soon after sustaining a concussion.

Other researchers, such as Messner (1992) and Young et al. (1994), have argued that the normalisation of pain and injury in sport was in part due to a strong adherence to notions of

masculinity that are prevalent in sport, especially in contact sports. In interviews with Canadian male athletes, Young et al. (1994) found that the rewards of hegemonic masculinity led male athletes in physical sports to constantly put their bodies at risk and play through injuries. Removing yourself from play because of an injury can lead to the athlete being stigmatized by others as not fully masculine (Young et. al, 1994).

Methodology

Foucault's discourse and discursive objects

This study on the media discourse of concussions in the NHL was framed by Michel Foucault's concepts of discourse and objects. Foucault's work on discourse has been useful to sociologists interested in understanding how general social knowledge is produced, by whom it is produced and under which circumstances, and whose interests it serves (Mills, 2003). Discourse refers to how we, as a society, think about different people or things. Discourse theory is a valuable tool for the study of media because they represent one of the institutions that circulate discourses that inform public opinions on a variety of topics. In particular, many sociologists studying sport media have employed Foucault's discourse theory (1971, 1972, 2003) to provide valuable insight on the competing discourses being circulated by the media about certain topics (for recent examples, see Corrigan et al., 2010; Fink et al. 2011; McGannon & Spence, 2012; Cox, 2012; Bridel, 2015). Foucault has defined discourse as "the general domain of all statements, sometimes as in individualized group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements" (Foucault, 1972, p. 80). Discourse can be used to refer to all these statements (Mills, 2003). Foucault saw discourse as bodies of knowledge, which are not only defined by language and interactions, but also by general social

knowledge (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Foucault also saw discourse as a system which structured the way we, as a society, understand reality (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Consequently, this social reality is produced through discourses (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). In other words, we can never fully understand this social reality without referring back to the discourses that gave the reality its meaning (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). It is thus important to analyse the discourses of concussions which structure the way we comprehend them to fully understand their social reality.

Foucault referred to “discursive formations” as the collections of certain types of statements distributed by institutions, such as the media, that have an effect on people’s way of thinking (Mills, 2003). These discursive formations are subject to change, and always have opposing sets of statements, which is why Foucault was interested in understanding why and how certain statements become more prominent than others and are taken as “truths” by individuals (Mills, 2003). For certain statements to be accepted as “truths” while other statements are discredited, there needs to be an exercise of power. Foucault thought that power circulated through discourse, and that power and knowledge were inseparable because power could not be exercised without knowledge, and knowledge always gives rise to power (Foucault, 1980). Foucault called “power/knowledge” the combination of power relations and information-seeking (Foucault, 1980; Mills, 2003). In producing knowledge, one is both determining what will be known and making a claim for power (Mills, 2003). It is this combination of power and knowledge that allows discourses to have an influence on individuals and shape public opinion on certain topics.

As previously noted, Foucault’s concept of objects was also integral to framing the research. One of the basic elements of discursive formations is the objects that its discursive

statements are about (Gutting, 1989). However, a discursive formation is not composed by a single set of objects (Gutting, 1989). It is the diverse formations of different and conflicting objects that define a given discourse (Foucault, 1972). Within the media discourse of concussions in the NHL, the discursive formations of concussions about whom and/or what is to blame for them in the NHL was defined by various objects. For example, an object of the discourse of blame for the concussions in the NHL was the NHL's commissioner for failing to make the necessary changes to protect the players in the later timeframe. Within the same timeframe, pinning the blame on nobody, because it was believed that concussions were always going to be a part of hockey, was also an object of the discourse of blame for the concussions.

Data collection and analysis

The data collection strategy employed for this research was largely based on Cusimano, Sharma, Lawrence, Ilie, Silverberg & Jones's (2013) study on the changing discussion of concussions in hockey in North American newspapers. However, this research offers significant modifications to provide a more thorough discussion of the nuances of how blame is discussed in print media coverage of concussions in the NHL. Firstly, where Cusimano et al. (2013) included both Canadian and American newspaper content, I focused solely on Canadian content, analysing articles from the three largest English-language newspapers from Canada's three largest cities (*Montreal Gazette*, *Toronto Star* and *Vancouver Sun*) and from Canada's largest national newspaper (*The Globe and Mail*). Secondly, using the ProQuest database, I searched for articles in these four newspapers using the search terms "NHL AND (concuss* OR head trauma* OR head injur* OR brain trauma* OR brain injur* OR postconcuss* OR post-concuss*)". These different search terms used for concussions were taken directly from Cusimano et al.'s (2013)

article. However, I narrowed my search to media coverage of the NHL - the articles I searched for had to refer to the NHL at least once, whereas Cusimano et al. (2013) analysed articles pertaining to hockey in general. Thirdly, for their content and thematic analyses of specific trends over time, Cusimano et al. (2013) analysed two timeframes; from 1998 to 2000 and 2009 to 2011. I also focused on two similar but separate timeframes: August 1st, 1997 to July 31st, 1999, and August 1st, 2010 to July 31st, 2012. I chose these dates for two reasons. First, I needed one timeframe in the 1990s, when concussions were just beginning to be covered in the media as an important issue in the NHL, and one timeframe closer to the time the research was conducted during the “Concussion Era”. Second, in each timeframe, there needed to be at least one prominent NHL star who had suffered a concussion that sidelined him for an extended amount of time to ensure that there would be sufficient media coverage of concussions in the NHL. Near the end of the 1997-1998 NHL season, two star Canadian NHL players, Eric Lindros and Paul Kariya, suffered concussions which would sideline them for a significant amount of time. In 2011 and 2012, Sidney Crosby, one of Canada’s biggest NHL stars, was forced to miss many games due to concussions.

Using the ProQuest database, the 1997-1999 timeframe yielded 613 articles, and the 2010-2012 timeframe found 1878 articles. These figures alone showed the increasing discussion of concussions in the media coverage of the NHL. However, only a fraction of these articles were kept for analysis. Some articles only mentioned a concussion once. For example, many articles which covered the result of a game the prior night would have one sentence mentioning that a specific player missed the game due to a concussion. The rest of the article would never discuss concussions. Articles such as these were discarded from the analysis. The articles kept for analysis had to focus at least 50% of their content on concussions in hockey while referring at

least once to the NHL. This differed from Cusimano et al. (2013), since they included all articles that referred to at least one of their search terms a minimum of three times within the body and/or headline of the article. Consequently, Cusimano et al. (2013) analysed more articles than I did. However, the analysis presented here offers a more thorough analysis of the discursive construction of concussions in media coverage of the NHL and specifically of the shift in how blame has been discussed. For the 1997-1999 timeframe, 69 articles were retained for analysis out of the total of 613 articles found, whereas for the 2010-2012 period, 313 articles were kept for analysis out of the 1878 articles the search yielded, for a total 382 articles.

Discursive fragments from all 382 analysed articles which sought who or what was responsible for the concussions in the NHL were then placed into seven categories: equipment, rules and regulations, hockey and its macho values, nobody (part of the game), coaches, players, and the NHL. These categories were not mutually exclusive, as discursive fragments could refer to more than one object. The equipment category referred to all concerns regarding helmets, padding and other equipment worn (or not worn) by players which may have contributed to concussions. The rules and regulations category was for both in-game rules, such as allowing fighting in the NHL or deeming some hits to head legal, and other regulations, such as concussion protocols teams must follow or the size of NHL rinks. Hockey and its values was a category for all phrases that placed blame on hockey's macho values which were deemed to encourage violent conduct, amongst other potentially destructive behaviours that may cause concussions. Placing the blame on nobody was a category for phrases which indicated that concussions were simply a part of hockey, and despite making any changes, there were always going to be concussions in hockey. The coaches category was for when coaches were being blamed, for example, for putting a player back on the ice too soon after possibly sustaining a

concussion. Placing the blame on the players was a category for when media members blamed players, for example, for being aggressors and not respecting each other on the ice or alternatively for skating with their head down setting themselves up as potential targets which in both cases had the potential to lead to concussions. The NHL category was for all blame placed on the NHL and its leaders for their failure to, for example, implement rules to protect the players, or ignoring scientific evidence on concussions and hockey.

Drawing on Foucault's discourse theory also distinguishes this research from Cusimano et al.'s (2013), which employed a grounded-theory approach to thematic and content analyses. A Foucauldian discourse analysis for this media analysis was preferred because of the media's power to generate truths that influence how we think and act in regards to injuries in sport. Since hockey is an integral part of Canadian culture (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993), it naturally receives a strong media attention. The media discourse of concussions in the NHL circulated knowledge for whom and what is to blame for concussions in hockey. Through the many discursive formations flowing in different directions, discourse analysis helped make sense of how the discourse aided in the shaping of opinions and how it led to actions to protect players from concussions.

Shifting discourses: new objects, different blame

Rules, Regulations & Equipment

In both timeframes, the media discussed at length some changes that could be made to the NHL gameplay rules, the equipment worn by players, and various other regulations (such as rink dimensions and concussion protocols) that could help reduce the incidence of concussions in the NHL. Concerning player equipment changes, the media laid part of the blame for concussions on

the helmets in both timeframes. In the 1997-1999 period, the outrage was over a lack of compulsory league-wide use of helmets that met the safety standards of the Canadian Standards Association (The Gazette, 1997). Some players refused to change to more protective helmets after sustaining concussions: “Lindros hasn’t changed helmets since being levelled by Pittsburgh defenceman Darius Kasparaitis. ‘Helmets are not going to change the outcome a whole’, he said.” (Stevens, 1998, p. S2). Even if a player was wearing a custom helmet with extra padding, like Pat Lafontaine did after sustaining a concussion, the media did not deem that the helmet was enough to save the player from further concussions (Brooks, 1999).

Both timeframes failed to address the issue of players not wearing visors for added safety. Although wearing helmets was mandatory for all incoming players beginning in 1979 (Lynch, 2015), visors were only made compulsory for all incoming players in 2013 (Brophy, 2013). Considering that the NHL was founded in 1917, it took 62 years to require players to wear helmets, then another 37 years for mandatory visors. The NHL and North American hockey culture is typically resistant to change, and, as it will be displayed throughout this analysis, this was a reoccurring theme with regards to concussions. Hockey Hall of Famer Gordie Howe, who played throughout the 40s, 50s, 60s, and 70s, and is regarded as one of the toughest players of all-time, wore a helmet for a short while after getting hit in the head and nearly dying, but eventually took it off because “it makes me sweat” (Gare, 1997, p. A30). It could be hypothesized that wearing a helmet in Howe’s era was emasculating. This is consistent with Messner (1992) and Young et al.’s (1994) argument that male athletes in contact sports were particularly attached to notions of masculinity, such as putting their bodies at risk. In the only article that discussed visors in the 1997-1999 timeframe, wearing them were then portrayed in a similar, non-masculine fashion to how wearing helmets were depicted:

The Maple Leafs' centre admits a visor would likely have saved him from what is at least the seventh concussion of his young career on Monday night. But as soon as he can, he will take off the extra facial protection he was forced to wear at yesterday's practice. McCauley says he simply can't see as well from behind a visor. The plastic fogs up at times and "even though it's clear, it does restrict my vision a little bit." However, his explanations for doffing the protection are sprinkled with the biases that portray visor-wearing NHLers as soft. (Hunter, 1998, p. 1)

Unexpectedly, in the 2010-2012 period, there was hardly any discussion about visors, even though they were yet to be mandatory in the NHL. That the sports coverage failed to construct the need for visors for safety purposes as an object of the discourses in both timeframes could have contributed to the NHL dragging its feet and waiting until 2013 to make them mandatory for all incoming players.

An added dimension of the helmet object was that they were mostly discussed in scientific terms in the later time period, as scientific advancements were being made in helmet engineering to better protect against head trauma. Scientists and engineers were interviewed on their latest helmet technology projects, whether it was technology to better measure the impact of collisions or to improve the protection from collisions. This discursive strategy underlining the advances of current scientific research into how to better protect players from concussions indicated that it was a pressing issue being addressed by bright scientific minds, rendering this new object of the discourse highly visible in the later timeframe. However, according to Mary-Kay Messier, who along with her former NHL-playing brother Mark Messier, was leading a project to improve helmets and increase awareness of concussions, players were unwilling to wear new, more protective helmets:

Part of the culture (in the NHL) is that if you choose a more protective helmet, does that in some way make you a weaker player? [...] I believe that if you took the decision out of the hands of the players, they would be relieved to be able to wear and be accepted with a more protective helmet. (Cowan, 2011, p. D2)

Hockey's macho culture was portrayed as being one of the reasons why players rejected increased protection through these new helmets, just as it had led them in the past to refuse wearing helmets in the first place, then refuse to wear a visor.

Below the neck, the stiffer pads on players were increasingly being discussed as part of the problem, as players hitting each other generated harsher impacts because of it. Some reporters in both timeframes argued that some players had the false feeling of invincibility because of all the equipment worn, leading to more dangerous hits.

Growing scientific evidence has helped those in the sporting world to diagnose concussions in an easier, quicker fashion and has also shown the dangerous effects of returning to play too early after sustaining a concussion (Wetjen, Pichelmann & Atkinson, 2010; Lord-Maes & Obrzut, 1996). Governing bodies for sports, both professional and amateur, have instituted concussion protocols that teams must follow. The NHL's concussion protocol in the earlier timeframe was mostly simply described in the media to inform the audience. As concussions were a fairly recent topic of discussion in hockey, many newspaper articles educated the readers on concussion protocols, something a casual fan most likely did not know about. However, it was rarely criticised. Dr. Charles Burke, at the time the team physician of the Pittsburgh Penguins, had said in 1999 that the NHL had not endorsed any concussions guidelines, and that these were designed for physicians who infrequently treat concussions: "These guidelines are based on people's experience. [...] They have absolutely no basis in

science.” (Brooks, 1999, p. C8). This was the only criticism of the NHL’s concussion protocol in the first timeframe. Despite a quote from a doctor, thus a “specialist” or “expert” in producing scientific knowledge, the concussion protocol was not an object of the blame discourse. Conversely, the media in the 2010-2012 timeframe heavily criticised the NHL’s concussion protocol. The discourse around the concussion protocol changed dramatically in the second timeframe. The criticism escalated after Crosby’s concussion in January 1st 2011, when he remained in the game and played another game a few days later, possibly suffering yet another concussion (Hargreaves, 2013). The protocol was criticised because it allowed team trainers (instead of trained physicians) that were on the bench to make the decision, in the heat of action, whether the player suspected of having sustained a concussion could play or not (Shoalts, 2011b). It was only following Crosby’s concussion that concussion experts were interviewed in articles, criticising the protocol.

With experts now chiming in along with journalists, the concussion protocol’s ineffectiveness became visible to the public, rendering it a new object of the concussion discourse. Suddenly, the NHL faced major scrutiny for having a protocol in place which had not prevented its marquee player, Crosby, from playing despite being visibly shaken from a blindside hit to the head. “Some protocols aren’t worth the paper they’re written on” was said in *The Globe and Mail* about the concussion protocol (Grabovski’s wobble and the protocol, 2011, p. A16). Facing public pressure, the NHL quickly altered its concussion protocol two months later, in March 2011, to having a player suspected of having sustained a concussion in a game go to a “quiet room”, free of distraction, where a team physician could perform a variety of tests to determine if the player had a concussion or not (Rosen, 2011). Crosby’s concussion gave way to the emergence of this object of discourse in the media, leading to the NHL taking action. Despite

these changes, there remained occurrences of players sustaining concussions in games and remaining in the game, without a visit to the “quiet room”. An in-depth analysis of the concussion protocol by *Vancouver Sun* reporter Cam Cole found that some of the unclear language in the protocol allowed players to easily return to play within a same game, as well as there being no specific number of days that a player must be symptom-free before he can return (Cole, 2012).

In terms of the rink regulations in the NHL, the media in the earlier timeframe was highly critical of the seamless glass boards that contoured the ice. Many players were equally as critical in interviews in the articles, complaining about how many more injuries the harder glass creates. The seamless glass was originally put in place in arenas to allow fans to have a better view of the ice. They were finally replaced league-wide for the 2011-2012 season by the more flexible acrylic glass and safer stanchions near the benches, following the horrific injury suffered by NHL player Max Pacioretty in Montreal (NHL.com, 2011). Although Pacioretty was not on the same star level as Crosby (Montreal was, however, one of the NHL premier markets, and the *Montreal Gazette* covered it heavily), it still took an ugly incident for this object of discourse to gain prominence in the media, which led to the NHL quickly making a change. This again showed the slow pace at which the NHL mandated change, as the league weighed pleasing its customers with the seamless glass against protecting its primary assets, the players.

In both timeframes, the media failed to significantly discuss the possible role of the smaller rink size the NHL uses as a possible cause of some of the big collisions that resulted in concussions. It had been speculated that going to a larger ice surface, such as the European professional hockey leagues use, would create more room for players, and thus reduce collisions between them (Cole, 2011). This was, and still is, a tough sell to the NHL because it would mean

removing the expensive front row seats in arenas, which would result in lowering the revenue for NHL clubs (Cole, 2011). More importantly, reducing collisions would be moving away from one of hockey's traditional traits that the NHL markets: violence. Although increasing the size of the rink was an object of the discourse of concussions in the NHL, the media failed to give it importance over other topics. It could be related to how it counters the hockey discourse in Canada placing great emphasis on violence as a requisite part of the game, and because there was no high profile concussion case that has been reported to be clearly caused by the smaller rink size.

The NHL was reported as believing that violence was one of the strongest appeals of its brand of hockey. In its search for the causes of concussions in hockey, the media in the later timeframe was critical of many of the gameplay rules in the NHL, while the media in the 1997-1999 period barely discussed any rule changes to reduce the incidence of concussions. Between 2010 and 2012, some rule changes were briefly discussed, such as reintroducing the red line to slow down the game, or introducing hybrid icing (which the NHL did introduce in 2013 (NHL.com, 2013)). However, the two rules that were discussed and debated the most were the headshot and fighting rules.

Fighting has long been a part of professional hockey in North America. Fighting in hockey was often performed by "enforcers", whose role is to intimidate the opponent or police the game. The players who fight are each given 5 minute penalties, but this does little to stop the fights from happening. When two opposing players throw their gloves off, remove their helmets and prepare to throw punches, crowds in NHL arenas instinctively stand up to cheer on. The bashing of heads, against fists and ice, made concussions a possible occurrence during fights. The debate about fighting in the NHL was an increasingly prominent object of discourse in the

later timeframe, while it was barely discussed in the earlier timeframe as a necessary change to reduce concussions. During the 2010-2012 timeframe, with the rise of concussion awareness, many media members thought that removing fighting from the NHL was an obvious and easy step to protect players from concussions (Hunter, 2011). Contributing to the rise of this object of discourse was also the deaths of several former and current enforcers. It started in the 2009, when it was discovered that deceased former player Reggie Fleming had CTE (Maki, 2009). In the summers of 2010 and 2011, one retired (Bob Probert) and three active enforcers (Wade Belak, Rick Rypien and Derek Boogaard) passed away suddenly, while all struggling with either substance abuse and/or depression (Hayley, 2011; Hickey, 2011b). Two of them were found post-mortem to have had CTE. The media extensively covered these deaths. Much like how Crosby's concussion prompted the media's criticism of concussion protocol, the media extensively criticised fighting and the NHL for keeping it in the game, even though the league was seemingly attempting to reduce the incidence of concussions. Backed with the claims of scientists, the media hypothesised that links could be made between fighting, CTE, depression and substance abuse.

This new object of discourse gained prominence in the context of the concussion research and the deaths of enforcers. In fact, a survey of Canadian hockey fans in 2012 published in *The Globe and Mail* found that 72% supported a ban on fighting in the NHL (MacGregor, 2012). However, with fighting firmly entrenched in hockey culture, this counter discourse struggled to elicit change in the NHL. Those who wanted to maintain fighting in the NHL thought that without enforcers policing the game through fighting, players would take liberties and target opposing teams' star players without fear of retribution (Hume, 2012). The NHL also believed that fighting was a crowd pleaser, which was difficult to argue against when you saw entire

arenas cheering when a fight broke out, despite the 2012 survey saying otherwise. The only recent move made by the NHL to protect players during fights was in 2013, when a new rule was put in place that penalized players who removed their helmets prior to a fight (Wyshynski, 2013). The NHL's hypocrisy in wanting to protect its players but refusing to eliminate fighting was evident. Today, fighting is down league wide, thanks in part to a larger emphasis on speed and skill (enforcers are typically bigger, slower players with limited skill), but immediately eliminating fighting would have arguably increased the safety and long-term health of players.

The other rule which drew a lot of debate in the media was the headshot rule, otherwise known as "Rule 48". The discussion of this rule was a new object of discourse in the later timeframe. It was discussed more than fighting due to the high number of concussions that resulted from hits to the head during the 2010-2012 timeframe. Rule 48 was first introduced for the 2010-2011 season (Roarke, 2012). It prohibited players from hitting an opponent in the head from the blindside or laterally (Roarke, 2012). Its inception aimed to reduce hits that may cause concussions. However, the rule was met with a lot of criticism, from both players and journalists, as not going far enough to eliminate all hits to the head. An opponent to the rule was Sidney Crosby, who had suffered a concussion from a headshot in January 2011 (Shoalts, 2011c). The criticism of the rule circulated even more after his concussion, as it placed a famous name with the rule in question. In September 2011, Crosby said in the *Toronto Star*: "We (the NHL) can go further. [...] At the end of the day, I don't think there's a reason to not take (head shots) out" (Cox, 2011a). Despite only a diplomatic stance about the need for the NHL to better protect players, Crosby speaking out against headshots in the media was instrumental in the rise of this object of discourse. For the following season, the NHL added to Rule 48 that hits from any direction to the head were now prohibited (Roarke, 2012). The heavy criticism that the NHL

received from its marquee player, as well as from the media which shaped public opinion on the matter, forced the NHL to alter Rule 48. This was consistent with McGannon et al.'s (2013) and Cusimano et al.'s (2013) findings that Crosby's concussion in 2011 was used as a platform for rule changes. As was the case with the concussion protocol, Crosby's concussion made the object of the concussion discourse, rule 48 and headshots, more visible, thus giving voice through the media to scientists, concussion experts and journalists to shape the public's opinion on concussions and violence in the NHL, leading the NHL to make changes.

Who (or what) is to blame?

From Rule 48 and fighting, to rink regulations, concussion protocols and player equipment, the previous section outlined the media discourses of the many changes the NHL could have, should have, or had made to help reduce the incidence of concussions in the NHL. Failure to implement positive change led to the media circulating discourse of blame towards the NHL for the incidence of concussions. In both timeframes, the NHL drew criticism for their mishandling of suspensions to players who had induced concussions to opposing players with illegal hits to the head. In the first timeframe, handing out stiffer suspensions was seen as the way to cut down on concussion-inducing hits. In the second timeframe, stiffer suspensions were still discussed as a way to dissuade these types of hits, however, the media criticised the NHL's lack of action in making all hits to the head illegal. Changing this rule in the earlier timeframe was surprisingly hardly discussed, as it was a new object of discourse in the later timeframe. The NHL object of the blame discourse was by a large margin the most circulated discursive formation in the later timeframe. Within this object, Colin Campbell, then the Senior Vice President of the NHL and the man responsible for suspending players for on ice offenses, was

personally criticised three times in the earlier timeframe. In the second timeframe, he, along with Brendan Shanahan (who took this position in 2011) were criticised many times for their handling of supplemental discipline. However, blaming the commissioner of the NHL, Gary Bettman, became a new object of the blame discourse in the second timeframe, as he was heavily criticised when the league's perceived lack of action to reduce concussions in hockey was questioned. He was often the scapegoat in the media for the lack of changes that were discussed in the previous section: the player equipment, various regulations (rink size and structure, concussion protocols) and rules. He was also criticised for seemingly ignoring growing scientific evidence on concussions and hockey. The following is an excerpt from an article in the *Toronto Star* from 2011 about Bettman and his response to the discovery that deceased enforcer Derek Boogaard had CTE:

He was also at his worst on Tuesday offering flippant comments and dismissive questions about the potential impact of Boogaard's brain examination on the sport. Or maybe that's Bettman at his best, fending off the non-believers, keeping the gloves dropping and the gate receipts coming. He's fought the debate over fighting in hockey to a standstill. The death of Don Sanderson changed nothing, and growing evidence on the terrible toll fighting has on the brain will also change nothing [...]. Science is catching up to Bettman, but slowly enough he can stay a few steps ahead. (Cox, 2011, p. S1)

Whether Bettman was disregarding the link between hockey and CTE, or dismissing the rise of concussions in the NHL as just a bad period that will pass or that they only seemed to be on the rise because we can diagnose them better now, he was constantly criticised by journalists in the later timeframe.

“Keeping the gate receipts coming” is an important phrase from the previous quote. It was suggested, in both timeframes, that the NHL marketed violence, which was one of the main reasons why they struggled to make any changes which would reduce the violence.

Yet the NHL remains the only professional league that actively markets fighting, allowing players to risk concussion by punching each other without threat of banishment from the game. It is an integral part of the game, a staple of video screens at arenas around the NHL (Blair, 2012, p. A10)

From Canadian hockey icon Don Cherry’s *Rock’Em Sock’Em Hockey* DVDs depicting the hardest hits and violent fights, to fans in arenas jumping up to their feet when two players squared off for a fight, hockey’s violence has been an integral part of the NHL’s marketing appeal. Despite the growing scientific research finding how dangerous thunderous hits and punches could be to the brain, the NHL was described in media coverage as having trouble eliminating it not only because of its marketability, but also because it would hurt hockey’s true, violent essence: “The NHL business model doesn't care much for players. Let them suffer concussions. Let them bleed. Let careers be ended in violent mayhem. It hurts branding if you "sissify" the game” (Diaz, 2012, p. S6).

Not only would reducing the violence in hockey be seen as a threat to hockey’s marketability, “sissifying” the game would threaten what hockey traditionalists view as core component of hockey. The media laid some of the blame for concussions in the NHL on hockey’s macho culture which encouraged players to deliberately attempt to harm players through hitting or punching players to the head, and to play through injuries and not disclose them to team trainers or doctors. These types of behaviours were central to what sport sociologists have identified as a *culture of risk* in sports (see Donnelly, 2004; Nixon, 1993), or

positive deviance, where athletes overconform to sports values, leading to violence and risk-taking (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). In the earlier timeframe, the conversation about the macho culture in hockey centered uniquely around players coming back too quickly from concussions:

[...] too often our sports culture demands, via unspoken expectations, media and fan pressure or fear of being perceived a 'wimp' that a player who sustains a 'ding in the head' should go back in the fray and risk taking another one for the team's pursuit of victory (Long, 1997, p. F6).

Being perceived as a "wimp" was a significant factor in players returning to play from suspected concussions before it was safe to do so, because being perceived as anything but fully masculine could lead to being stigmatised (Young et al., 1994). This behaviour was also a key component of the aforementioned *culture of risk*, where fighting through pain, and putting your performance ahead of your health is encouraged and/or rewarded for athletes (Nixon, 1992, 1993; Sabo, 2004; Safai, 2003; Young, 1993, 2004). "It used to be one way of showing your stripes, that if you got hit hard you came back and played" said Mark Messier, in a Globe & Mail article (Elliot, 1998). As if it were no longer the case, Messier said this in the past tense. However, in the 2010-2012 timeframe, this object of the discourse was still prevalent, as players returned to play from concussions too quickly, to "earn the respect of the locker room". In an effort to show their peers that they could return to play despite seemingly being injured, Nixon (1992) explained that the athletes' different relationships (coaches, teammates, fans, upper team management) generated pressure on them to "show their stripes". Nixon (1993) also argued this pressure came from mediated cultural beliefs where journalists, and quotes from players, coaches and upper management on athlete expectations, the rewards they receive, the cultural values of sport, the organisational pressures and the socialisation of athletes conveyed messages that injury and pain

should be accepted by athletes. In the later timeframe, players returned from concussions too soon, or failed to disclose their symptoms to their trainer or doctor, for fear of being replaced. With the increased awareness of concussions, the athletes were aware of the dangers of concussions in the later timeframe, yet this did not prevent them from hiding their concussion symptoms. They knew that if they did not play, another athlete would take their place and potentially outperform them. The worry of losing his job, and even losing out on a larger contract, surely impacted a professional player's decision to hide concussion symptoms. Knowledge of some of the devastating effects of concussions was not enough to enable players to admit to experiencing health problems rather than hide them to focus on the potential financial rewards playing in the NHL offered. However, the macho mentality derived from the culture of risk that led players to play at all costs was still the most discussed reason as to why players kept playing despite concussion symptoms.

This macho culture also led to exhibiting violent behaviour, which was discussed in the later timeframe. Phil White, a sociology of sport professor at McMaster University and co-author of studies on sport injuries and masculinity (see Young, White & McTeer, 1994; White & Young, 2006), wrote a special contribution to the Toronto Star in 2011: “[...] a larger problem is that most contact sports are firmly embedded in macho culture. Young athletes quickly learn that acting or being tough is obligatory – by teammates, parents, coaches and TV pundits” (White, 2011, p. IN1). It is a hyper-masculine culture that is difficult to change. And this hockey culture was often blamed for the incidence of concussions, especially in the 2010-2012 timeframe. From the same article, Phil White said:

If masculinity is marked by association with violence, anything less than full commitment to physical aggression undermines it. This is very powerful imagery,

because the average guy will go to great lengths to dissociate himself from the taint of effeminacy. This is why contact sports are so resistant to change (White, 2011, p. IN1)

Holding hockey's culture as guilty was a new object of the blame discourse in the later timeframe. Having a scholar comment in the media, much like having scientists comment on concussions, rendered the hockey culture as the problem as much more visible and significant. Although it did not necessarily elicit change from the NHL, as culture change is a little more complex than just making a few rule modifications, the discourse did shape public opinion on the violent culture in hockey. As previously noted, 72% of Canadian hockey fans were in favour of banning fighting in the NHL, and 87% wanted to see measures taken to prevent concussions, even if it meant modifying the way the game was played (MacGregor, 2012). Additionally, a growing number of articles in the later timeframe, especially after Crosby's concussion, circulated the notion that in light of the concussion epidemic in the NHL, parents were worried about the health and safety of their minor-league playing sons and daughters.

The players responsible for delivering the concussion inducing violence, as well as the recipients of it, were both blamed across the timelines. In the 2010-2012 timeframe, the players delivering the concussion-inducing hits were often blamed. They were blamed for not knowing how to properly hit somebody, for not being responsible on the ice, for hiding their concussion symptoms and for not respecting each other. "We need to respect each other a little more. Sometimes we're looking at each other just as players and not seeing one another as real people who will have lives after hockey" said NHL player Logan Couture about the rising incidence of concussions from bad hits in 2011 (Emmons, 2011, p. B4). Hughes and Coakley (1991) would have argued that players exhibiting these types of behaviours were overconforming to hockey's culture. The players as the objects of the blame discourse was the opposite in the 1997-1999

timeframe, where most of the blame for concussion-inducing hits was on the injured player for failing to protect himself and/or putting himself in vulnerable positions. In some cases, journalists pinned the blame on the victim, such as for Eric Lindros's concussion, when a journalist from *The Globe and Mail* wrote: "Lindros was injured when he took a clean shoulder check to the head while he was looking down" (Delany, 1998, p. S11). In other cases, other players blamed the victim, even if it was their own teammate. When Vancouver Canuck player Matthias Ohlund suffered a concussion in 1999, his team captain Mark Messier said:

He has to take care of himself, [...]. He has to set a precedent where if players hit him, they know they've got to pay the price. Nobody's afraid to hit him because he doesn't protect himself; he doesn't get his stick up. He hasn't earned that respect (MacIntyre, 1999, p. D1).

His coach voiced a similar opinion. Placing the blame on the victim only enabled the perpetrators to continue their violent behaviours, and rendered that behaviour acceptable. This "traditionalist" view of hitting was very rarely shared in the later timeframe, except for a few instances where it was the opinion of a coach or a former player, who were more likely to be in line with the "traditionalist" school of thought. Nevertheless, these statements gave meaning to the opposing discourse. A new object of the discourse in the later timeframe was the coaches, for either allowing players suspected of suffering concussions to return to play, or publicly defending overly violent players for acts committed that caused concussions to opponents. Coaches, being one of the more important figures in an athlete's network of relationships, were enabling violent behaviour while putting victims of violent behaviour back at risk.

The players' union (henceforth the NHLPA), was also blamed in both timeframes. In the earlier timeframe, they were blamed for failing to make the work conditions for the players safer.

This was in reference to the hard seamless glass contouring the ice. From 2010 to 2012, the NHLPA was blamed, like the NHL, for its general inaction. Whether it was for rule changes to outlaw all hits to the head, or a failure to have standardized safe helmets for all players, the NHLPA was seen as “negligent in promoting health and safety issues for its members. It’s one of the few unions that doesn’t have a health and safety committee and it has failed to take a leadership role in the promotion of head and facial protection” (Hickey, 2011a, p. B11). Considering the NHLPA’s role in representing the players, they received a disproportionately low amount of criticism compared to the NHL.

Players were also blamed for the rise of concussions for simply being bigger, stronger and faster than they were in the past. It was illogical to blame players for this, when advancements in training and equipment have been the main reasons for being stronger and faster, as well as the competition for jobs leading players to train harder than ever. Blaming players for this was a way for the media to highlight that there was really nobody to blame for the rise of concussions, because as players got stronger and faster, concussions were inevitably going to be a larger part of the game. Concussions as an unavoidable by-product of NHL hockey was another object of the blame discourse found in both timeframes. There were, however, differences between both timeframes. Players were often quoted between 1997 and 1999 as saying that injuries and concussions were part of the game, and that because hockey is a physical game, “sometimes it happens” (Kerr, 1998, p. S4), whereas players rarely shared that sentiment in the later timeframe. These quotes from the earlier timeframe also came from the players who had just suffered a concussion from questionable hits. This was an important reversal in the discourse, as players no longer thought that concussions were to be accepted as a part of the game. The journalists writing the articles were also guilty of assuming concussions were just a

part of the game. Concussions seemed so mundane that they joked about the concussion inducing hits, such as this quote from *The Gazette* in 1998: “Those hits, the kind that make you think your name is Lucy and you run a body-wrap parlor in Tulsa, are part of the game” (Todd, 1998, p. G1). Although this type of insensitive joke about concussions were not made by journalists in the later timeframe, they were still guilty of sometimes normalising concussions by claiming that accidents happen and hockey will never be without risk. Because of the increased attention to concussions in the later timeframe, the commissioner, deputy commissioner, and senior vice-president of the NHL were often asked to address the issue, and were thus quoted as saying that the concussions were often attributed to accidental hits, such as this quote from the NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly:

There’s nothing we can do that doesn’t change the game fundamentally that’s going to eliminate concussions in our game. Bottom line is they’re fact of life in a contact sport – not just ours – and they continue to be a fact of life. (Head injuries talk of the NHL, 2011, p. S4)

These types of quotes from NHL leaders were always met with criticism by journalists, constructing the NHL and its leaders as the object of the blame discourse. In the earlier timeframe, there was only one quote dismissing concussions as part of the game from a prominent figure in the NHL front-office.

Simply blaming the bigger size and greater speed of players, underlining that accidents happen in hockey and that concussions were a part of the game had the effect of dismissing the significance of concussions in hockey and the NHL in both timeframes. In circulating these objects of the blame discourse, the media marginalised concussions, thus normalising the injury and making it a part of the game. This finding was consistent with the findings of Nixon (1993)

and Young (1990; 1991; 2004). Accepting the status quo, especially on the part of the NHL front-office, meant that change, if it were to happen, would be very slow. Nevertheless, circulating the NHL as the object of the blame discourse, especially after Crosby's concussion, put pressure on the front-office of the league to make changes. From improved concussion protocols, safer boards around the ice and changes to Rule 48, the NHL was forced to make adjustments. However, as hockey culture dictated, too much change could threaten the very essence of the game. Rick Dudley, then the General Manager of the Atlanta Thrashers, summed up why the NHL and "traditionalists" have trouble with changing the game too much:

"I go back and forth all the time on that, [...]. That is an element of hockey that appeals to a great number of people, that war-like element. We can't have rules that eliminate that element. I feel strongly about that. [...] Thing is, there's such a desire in players to compete, and we'd never want to lose that. That's the beauty of our sport, and it's a physical game, so we all have to accept that there are going to be injuries." (Shoalts, 2011a, p. S2)

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrated how the media discourses of blame for concussions in the NHL circulated in many directions across both timelines. The discourse in the later timeframe shifted mostly due to Sidney Crosby's concussion in 2011, the death of enforcers in 2010 and 2011, and the increasing scientific knowledge of head trauma and concussions. Sidney Crosby's concussion spurred the rule book as a new object of the blame discourse, namely the headshot rule that was altered after criticism from journalists and players. Despite several high-profile players suffering concussions in the earlier timeframe, their concussions were not able to garner

the discussion Crosby's concussion did because the general public was not as well informed of the scientific advances. His concussion gave a microphone to scientists and engineers to discuss in the media the latest developments in the effects, detection, management and prevention of concussions in hockey. These new voices, not present in the earlier timeframe, rendered concussions in the NHL as a more visible issue that the brightest minds in the science and engineering fields were attempting to solve.

The NHL as an object of the blame discourse gained prominence in the later timeframe, as it was heavily circulated by the media. An added dimension of this object was directly criticising the commissioner of the league, Gary Bettman, which never happened in the first timeframe. Bettman and other front-office members were questioned by the journalists repeatedly about the apparent concussion epidemic, providing quotes journalists inserted into their highly critical articles of the NHL. The NHL and Bettman were constantly positioned as partly responsible for the concussions, shaping the public's opinion on the NHL and putting tremendous pressure on the league.

The deaths of enforcers Reggie Fleming, Bob Probert, Derek Boogaard, Rick Rypien and Wade Belak also garnered attention to concussions in hockey in the later timeframe. Unlike how Crosby's concussion altered the rule book, their deaths were not enough for the NHL to eliminate fighting from hockey. As journalists called for a ban on fighting, players argued in the later timeframe that fighting still had a place in the game. While players spoke out against headshots, they were unwilling to speak out against fighting, which surely contributed to fighting remaining in the game. This demonstrated how powerful the public voices of the players could be. The deaths of the enforcers did however, along with Crosby's concussion, introduce hockey's culture as a new object of the discourse of the blame. Like the scientists and engineers, this

discursive formation gave voice in the media to social scientists who specialise in the culture of sports to criticise hockey's culture that placed a premium on violent behaviour and hiding injury symptoms. Although the culture object of the discourse could not directly elicit changes, it did shape people's opinions, as the media circulated articles on parents' fear of concussions in youth hockey.

Between 1997 and 1999, when the public was generally unaware of the dangers of concussions, the concussions suffered by marquee players failed to give prominence to the concussion discourse that could lead to change. Instead, the media circulated dominant discourses of approval for the violence, and discourses of the normalising of concussions. Between 2010 and 2012, discourses of blame, responsibility and change gained prominence. The opposing discourses rooted in hockey's culture were pinned against these emerging discourses, leading to changes in some cases, such as Rule 48, and the maintenance of the status quo in others, such as fighting in the NHL.

More is needed to overcome the dominant macho culture in hockey and general positive change that will protect hockey players from concussions and brain trauma. The introduction and circulation of the new objects of the blame and responsibility discourse certainly introduced new ideas for discussion, but as it was demonstrated through the discussion of fighting in hockey, if hockey players aren't speaking out against specific aspects of the culture, change will be hard to come by. Players did speak about the need to respect each other more on the ice in light of the number of headshots that caused concussions in the later timeframe. Their voices were an important part of what spurred change to rule 48. However, players need to be more vocal about other aspects of hockey's culture that are problematic for players' safety to generate more traction for change.

Chapter 5 / Article 2:

The emergence of a new angle in sport media coverage of concussions in the NHL:

The frailty and vulnerability of the athlete

Article prepared for submission to the *Journal of Sports Media*

“This is the NHL’s Concussion Era and it remains to be seen how many players will be robbed of their potential brilliance – or even worse” (Starkman, 2011a).

Although concussions have long been a health hazard in ice hockey and in the NHL, it is only in the past decade or two that the hockey world has acknowledged concussions as a severe problem and a serious threat to the sport and to the professional leagues. Concussions have been found to have detrimental long-term effects, especially in the case of repeated concussions and other traumatic brain injuries (Wetjen, Pichelmann & Atkinson, 2010; Lord-Maes & Obrzut, 1996). They are a common occurrence in most contact sports; however, hockey is one of the sports where athletes are most susceptible to concussions, mostly due to a strategy known as body-checking which is used to slow down or stop an opponent (Wennberg & Tator, 2008; Donaldson, Asbridge & Cusimano, 2013). The combination of skating at high speeds and hard surfaces (the ice and the boards that serve as boundaries around the ice) make body-checking a frequent cause of head injuries in hockey (Donaldson et al., 2013). In the 2011-2012 NHL season alone, there were 84 reported concussions, and another 36 suspected concussions (Donaldson et al., 2013).

Rule changes were made at various hockey levels to help protect hockey players from concussions: in minor hockey, the elimination of bodychecking in the younger age groups saw concussions decrease (Macpherson, Rothman & Howard, 2006). In 2011, Hockey Canada implemented a rule penalizing all contact to the head of a player (voluntary or accidental) (Hockey Canada, 2011). Furthermore, in 2013 body-checking was removed in all Pee wee (under 13 years of age) hockey leagues and below (Hockey Canada, 2013). In the NHL, body-checking was not removed partly because the physical aggression in hockey attracts fans, and because

diminishing what many believe to be part of hockey's essence, physicality and violence, could be seen as a threat to Canada's game (Paul, 2003; Adams, Mason & Robidoux, 2015; Cormack & Cosgrove, 2013; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Robidoux & Trudel, 2006). However, the NHL did introduce a new rule making hits to the head of an opponent illegal, although it did not reduce the number of players suffering concussions (Donaldson et al., 2013). Multiple summits on concussions in hockey, such as Hockey Canada's concussion summit in 2010 or the 4th International Conference on Concussion in Sport in 2012, highlight how concussions in hockey (and other sports) have only recently come to the forefront of important health issues in sports that require further research for better management and prevention. The advancement of scientific knowledge on the effects of concussions and the detection of concussions, as well as media reports of the serious concussions suffered by several prominent NHL players (such as Paul Kariya, Keith Primeau, Eric Lindros, and Sidney Crosby) have contributed to the emergence of the "Concussion Era" in North American hockey.

The media coverage of some of these NHL stars' concussions was intense, especially in Canada, where hockey holds an important place in Canadian culture (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Media reports of concussions in the NHL create and shape meanings about concussions in hockey, the NHL and its rules, and violence in hockey in general. The media exercise power (Foucault, 2003) through the circulation of different discourses through their sport reporting. These discourses produce "truths" about issues being reported, which are then used by media consumers to gain knowledge on these issues.

Drawing on Foucault's discourse theory (1971, 1972, 2003), paying particular attention to Foucault's concepts of discourse, object and subject, this study sought to answer the following question: How have the discourses about concussions in hockey changed from the late 1990s to

the early 2010s? By analysing the newspaper coverage of the approximate beginning of the “Concussion Era” in the late 1990s, and then the early 2010s, I aimed to uncover the similar and distinct emerging discursive fragments reproduced in the media to understand changing meanings and “truths” about concussions and violence in hockey.

The Study

Michel Foucault’s concepts of discourse framed the research process. Foucault’s discourse theory (1971, 1972, 2003) has provided insight into many sports studies and sports media studies (for more recent examples, see Corrigan et al., 2010; Fink et al. 2011; McGannon & Spence, 2012; Cox, 2012; Bridel, 2015). Foucault’s work on discourse and power has been useful to sociologists interested in understanding the ways in which we know what we know, how this information is produced, by whom, and under which circumstances, and whose interests it serves (Mills, 2003). He uses “discourse” to refer to “the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualized group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements” (Foucault, 1972, p. 80). By “general domain of all statements”, Foucault means that discourse can be used to refer to all statements which have meaning and some sort of effect (Mills, 2003). For certain statements to be accepted as “truths”, there needs to be an exercise of power. While power circulates through discourse, power could not be exercised without knowledge, and knowledge gives rise to power (Foucault, 1980). Foucault thought power and knowledge were inseparable, and called the association “power/knowledge”. Discursive formations create different concussion objects in hockey, and these formations will have effects on individuals and how they think about concussions, violence and hockey, through the combination of power and knowledge.

In addition to discourse, Foucault's concepts of the subject and the object were used in the analysis presented in this article. A central component of discursive formations is the objects of which the discursive statements are about (Gutting, 1989). The many discursive formations of concussions in hockey form various discursive objects. Within a discursive formation, there are many different and conflicting objects which define the given discourse (Foucault, 1972). For instance, the discussion of the mental health consequences of concussions, along with just the physical pain, was a new object to emerge in the discourse of concussions in the NHL in the later timeframe. This emerging object of the discourse would have an effect on the public's opinion of concussions and violence in hockey.

Foucault was also interested in the effects of discourse and power relations in how particular kinds of subjects were produced, and the ways in which a human being turned into a subject (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Discourse produces subject positions. Through engaging with the social world through discursive practices, individuals positioned themselves according to the dominant discourses (Foucault, 1982). The presence of subjectivity could only take place if the individual was aware of the discourses they were being subjected to. The emerging media discourse of how concussions have impacted the personal and family lives of hockey players produced a new subject position for hockey players; that of professional hockey players as frail and vulnerable individuals with lives and relationships outside of sport. This new subject position of hockey players may have an impact on the public's perception of the effects of concussions in hockey. Media consumers also used the knowledge produced by the media on concussions and hockey to inform their actions and opinions, such as moving their child to a hockey league with no body-checking. Since their action was influenced by the discourse, they were thus subject to the competing flow of discursive formations on concussions and violence in

hockey. Foucault identified this subjection of individuals as one of the types of struggles individuals face (Foucault, 1982).

While I drew on the data collection methods used by Cusimano et al. (2013) to design my study, important features distinguish my approach. Firstly, to research the changing themes about concussions, Cusimano et al. (2013) studied Canadian and American newspapers, where I chose to focus solely on Canadian content, studying the three largest English language newspapers in Canada's three largest cities and Canada's largest national newspaper. These four newspapers are *The Globe and Mail* (national newspaper), *Toronto Star*, *Vancouver Sun*, and the *Montreal Gazette*. By contrast, Cusimano et al. (2013) analysed two Canadian newspapers: *Toronto Star* and *Vancouver Sun*. I chose to compare a period in the 1990s when concussions in hockey were starting to be of concern, with a more recent timeframe in the "Concussion Era". Each period would be two years, and each had to include at least one prominent Canadian NHL player suffering a serious concussion. Since sport stars are central figures in the media sport industry (Whannel, 2002), their injuries were likely to be highly covered in the media. In the later stages of the 1997-1998 NHL season, two Canadian stars, Paul Kariya and Eric Lindros, suffered serious concussions which would sideline them for an extended period of time. Therefore, the first time period would be from August 1st, 1997 (the month before the start of the new season's training camp) to July 31st, 1999. For the later period, I chose to analyse the four newspapers from August 1st, 2010 to July 31st, 2012 because one of Canadian hockey's biggest stars, Sidney Crosby, missed many games in 2011 and 2012 due to concussions. These two time periods are similar to the two selected by Cusimano et al. (2013) in their content and thematic analyses of specific trends over time (1998-2000 and 2009-2011).

Using the ProQuest database, I searched “NHL AND (concuss* OR head trauma* OR head injur* OR brain trauma* OR brain injur* OR postconcuss* OR post-concuss*)” in both timeframes in all articles in the four newspapers previously mentioned. These search terms were directly taken from Cusimano et al.’s (2013) study. However, a key difference is that my search was restricted to articles about the NHL, whereas Cusimano et al.’s (2013) search was for all hockey articles. For the 1997-1999 timeframe, the ProQuest database retrieved 613 articles, while for the 2010-2012 period, it retrieved 1878 articles. Already, these figures alone showed that concussions were far more frequently discussed in the later time period. However, not all of these articles were analysed. Many of them only mentioned a particular player’s concussion in the game reports or game previews, without the actual focus of the article being on concussions. These articles were discarded from the analysis. The articles that focused at least 50% of their content on concussions in the NHL were retained for this analysis, whereas Cusimano et al. (2013) retained all articles that referred to one or more of their search terms at least three times within the body and/or headline of the article. In effect, Cusimano et al. (2013) analysed more articles, however, the articles retained for this analysis were a lot more focused on concussions so therefore were richer in data about discursive constructions of concussions. Out of the 613 articles from the 1997-1999 timeframe, 69 were analysed. For the 2010-2012 period, 313 articles were analysed out of the 1878 articles. Cusimano et al. (2013) analysed 541 articles over a larger timeframe (1985 to 2011).

The analysis used in this research was a discourse analysis. Where Cusimano et al. (2013) employed a grounded-theory approach to thematic and content analyses, a Foucauldian discourse analysis was used to examine how naturally occurring texts (media discourse) are made meaningful through how they connect with other texts, the different discourses on which they

draw, and how they are produced, disseminated and consumed (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). With the use of Foucault's theories on discourse, subjectivity, and objects, the use of a discourse analysis was a strong and important tool for the study of social phenomena (Phillips & Hardy, 2002), such as the shifting discussions of concussions in hockey.

Of the numerous discourses on concussions circulated by the media, one of the more interesting and unique ones in this study was how the media, in its reporting of concussions in the NHL in the early 2010s, tended to look at the vulnerability or frailty of NHL players who had suffered concussions, instead of only looking at the sporting side of concussions. Comparing the similarities and differences of this discourse in both time periods was important in identifying and understanding the changing discourses about concussions, and the larger public discussions of concussions and their impact on hockey. The analysis presented in this article focuses on the discursive fragments in the newspaper articles about the effects of concussions on the NHL (former and current) player's personal life. This included any day-to-day impact, short and long-term physical and mental health effects, and the effects of the concussion on the player's family. Various objects of the discourse were then uncovered and analysed. Much more frequently than in the late 1990s period, the media reported on the difficulties players and their families faced in their personal lives when dealing with a concussion. Not only did the players mention how they had trouble doing such activities as walking their dogs or playing with their kids at home, the wives and parents of players were also interviewed to discuss how the concussions had impacted their personal lives. Also, the media reported more frequently on the mental health effects of concussions in the later timeframe. Finally, the media were reporting more frequently in the later timeframe on stories of retired players who had suffered concussions, which served as cautionary tales for all hockey players. In discussing the aforementioned topics, the media added a

vulnerability element to their reporting of NHL players who had suffered concussions in the early 2010s, which was not as much the case in the late 1990s.

Research on media coverage of work-place injuries or health issues

This discourse of frail and vulnerable athletes in the sport media coverage of hockey concussions in the late 1990s and early 2010s was absent in previous research on the media representations of sport violence and injury. I thus sought comparative analysis in the scarce literature on media coverage of work place injuries or on occupational safety because of the contextual similarities of professional sports as employment. While there are admittedly stark differences between the average employment and that of a professional athlete, such as the intense media coverage of the NHL, I believe that, to a certain extent, parallels can be drawn with the latter limited literature to think about the media reporting of NHL player injuries.

In his study of the media coverage of farm-related injuries in Sweden from 2000-2005, Lundälv (2006) found that the social and psychosocial consequences suffered by the injured farmer and his family was very rarely described in the media coverage of the incident. Long-term health (mental and physical) and monetary consequences were mostly ignored. Instead, the media focused on the causes and circumstances of the accident. The results described in Lundälv's (2006) study are similar to those found in the present study. The social and psychosocial consequences from the concussed hockey player and his family were also rarely described, nor was the long-term mental and physical health. However, in comparing both time periods, they were more frequently discussed between 2010 and 2012 than they were between 1997 and 1999. Also, the media did tend to focus on the causes (players, rules, equipment, etc.) and circumstances of the play which caused the concussion, much like in Lundälv's (2006)

research. However, Viswanath et al. (2008) found that, in surveying health and medical reporters across several media platforms in the United States in 2005, the media tended to focus on the “human-interest angle” of a medical story to try to make the story more relevant to the audience. Although the media articles on concussions in the NHL are often not medical stories and are rarely written by medical reporters, it could be hypothesized that hockey reporters focused on the frailty of concussed NHL players in an attempt to make the story more relatable to their audience.

Sports media coverage of the vulnerability or frailty of concussed NHL players

Although discursive fragments that focused on the vulnerability of concussed NHL players were not among the most frequently repeated statements in either timeframe, the discourse of frailty still carried weight, especially when considering that the incidence of these discursive fragments almost doubled from the first timeframe to the second. A total of 634 discursive fragments were analysed from the 69 articles in the 1997-1999 timeframe. Of those 634 discursive fragments, 16 (2.52%) discussed the frailty of the concussed players. However, in 2010-2012 timeframe, 185 (4.33%) discursive fragments discussed the same theme in the 4275 total discursive fragments from the 313 articles that were originally analysed.

As sport media consumers, we have become accustomed to reports of athletes injuring themselves, going through intense rehabilitation or playing through considerable pain. Players who brave the pain of injuries are encouraged and/or rewarded, and often celebrated in the media and other social networks (Nixon, 1992, 1993; Sabo 2004; Safai, 2003; Young 1993, 2004). However, the emergence of this new theme opened the door to the reproduction of a new subject position for the injured hockey player; that of the concussed hockey player with serious physical

and mental health concerns which impact his family and his thoughts on early retirement from hockey. Additionally, reporting on the personal lives of injured athletes resonated in a different way in the media. It was as if we could feel the reporter realizing in his or her article that these athletes were individuals with lives outside of sport, just like you and I. The tone used in the reporting on the lives off the ice of the concussed hockey player was very different than the tone used to celebrate the courageous acts of the injured athlete on the field of play. This change of tone, from admiration of the athlete's bravery to feelings of pity for the vulnerable and frail concussed athlete, was enough to warrant further analysis.

From physical pain to struggling with mental health

The physical, day-to-day pain that players go through after sustaining a concussion was perhaps the most common discursive object produced about concussions in both timeframes. Paul Kariya, from his concussion in the first timeframe, had “trouble remembering conversations and concentrating for periods of longer than one hour” (Kariya's season could be finished, 1998, p. F2). From dealing with migraine headaches, to struggling with such mundane activities as walking, reading or watching television, the everyday physical struggles of the concussed NHL players were amply described in both timeframes. This was evident in the later timeframe, when Sidney Crosby suffered his concussions. The intense media scrutiny that surrounded his concussion meant that the media were asking anybody associated with his team for updates on his status, which resulted in nearly daily media stories on Crosby's and other players' recoveries from concussions.

A sub-theme that emerged in the 2010-2012 timeframe was the increased discussion of mental health issues, and more specifically depression, as symptoms of concussions. In the

earlier timeframe, the theme of mental health problems among players having suffered concussions was mentioned three times. Depression was mentioned twice when describing the symptoms the player was experiencing. The other mention of concussions affecting mental health was in a quote from Paul Kariya's sister, about her brother who was suffering from a concussion in 1998: "Other people were more concerned that he might not be able to do the things he once did, hockey-wise. But as a sister, I was more concerned about getting my brother back. The injury changed his personality" (Beamish, 1998, p. E1). This alteration of personality, without explicitly mentioning depression or mental health, was also found in the later timeframe. "His eyes. His mannerisms. It wasn't the same Willie that we knew. He looked different" (Dillman, 2012, p. D6) said then Canucks president and general manager Mike Gillis in 2012 about his player Willie Mitchell, who had suffered a concussion. An extensive article on Willie Mitchell's offseason recovering from his concussion revealed not only the physical but also the emotional toll a concussion had on a person: "It's like a snippet into a terminal illness, so to speak. It gives you a little snippet because not only physically it bothers you. But it's also the emotional aspect of it" (Dillman, 2012, p. D6).

The link between mental health and concussions in hockey was seriously discussed in the summers of 2010 and 2011, when four current or former NHL enforcers (players whose primary role is to fight) abruptly passed away. One of them, Bob Probert, was found to have had CTE (Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy), a degenerative brain disease caused by repetitive blows to the head, after he had suddenly passed away (Shoalts, 2012). Probert had also struggled with alcohol and substance abuse during his career (Hayley, 2011). The three others (Wade Belak, Rick Rypien and Derek Boogaard) had battled substance abuse and/or depression (Hickey, 2011b), and Boogaard was also found to have CTE (Branch, 2011). Although many other factors

may have contributed to their deaths, such as substance abuse, one could argue that one of the causes of the players' poor mental health could be from the head trauma induced from fighting. This transition of discussing concussions in not only a physical sense but also a mental sense brought a vulnerability element to hockey players and their concussions.

Yet, the large majority of discursive fragments did focus on day-to-day physical effects. It remained the dominant discursive object reported about concussions in hockey. Nevertheless, players, such as enforcer Matt Kassian, acknowledged the mental health problems that his colleagues had gone through which may have led to their deaths, but said he would not change his fighting ways (Matheson, 2011). There was, however, an added dimension to the discourse. Not only were articles beginning to describe some of the mental health conditions that concussions and head trauma cause, there were also articles where experts on concussions and mental illnesses were interviewed to educate the reader, such as psychiatrist Shree Bhalerao, in this Sharon Kirkey (2012, p. B8) article:

Too often public discussions around concussions focus on the physical fallout [...] “A huge part (of concussions) is the psychological piece. [...] There’s a stigma – it doesn’t matter who it is, it could be an athlete or not an athlete – there’s that stigma of weakness, that whole mental-health piece” that keeps people from seeking help. [...] “The assumption is: ‘it’s just a head injury’. And so people live with this – the depression, the anxiety. They don’t think there’s a need to get help. Our push is to say: ‘Get help, figure out if the source of the problem is from the head injury and let’s try to treat it.’ ”

As Shree Bhalerao says, there was a stigma associated with poor mental health. This stigma can be a societal stigma, where the public holds prejudicial attitudes towards people with mental illness, or a self-stigma, which is characterized by feelings of shame, withdrawal and loss of self-

esteem experienced by some with mental illness (Arboleda-Florez & Stuart, 2012; Corrigan, Markowitz, Watson, Rowan & Kubiak, 2003). According to Fennell & Boyd (2014), the stigma toward mental illness in Western nations has not seen improvement. However, the public's mental health literacy – which is defined as the understanding of mental disorders, including their recognition, causes and treatment options – appears to have improved over time (Jorm, 2000; Pescosolido 2013; Schomerus, Schwahn, Holzinger, Corrigan, Grabe, Carta, & Angermeyer, 2012). In Canada, the popular Bell Let's Talk campaign, launched by the telecommunications company Bell, has been raising money and awareness for Canadian mental health since 2010. One day a year, on Bell Let's Talk Day, Bell donates 5 cents for every call made and text message sent by their customers, and every tweet and Facebook shares containing “#BellLetsTalk” to get people talking about mental health. Star Canadian athletes have gotten involved as spokespersons for the initiative, such as Olympian Clara Hughes, or simply by using their large social media following by sharing “#BellLetsTalk” across different social media platforms. The first Bell Let's Talk Day yielded over 66,000,000 calls and texts, raising over \$3,000,000 (Bell Let's Talk, 2015). Five years later, in 2015, there was a 100% increase, with over 122,000,000 calls, texts, tweets and Facebook shares, raising over \$6,000,000 (Bell Let's Talk, 2015). Despite there still being a stigma attached to mental illness, initiatives in Canada such as the Bell Let's Talk campaign showed that, as Jorm (2000), Pscosolido (2013) and Schomerus et al. (2012) argued, the public's mental health literacy was on the rise. This could have explained the increased discussion of mental health in Canadian media regarding concussions in hockey.

Although the object of physical pain was present in the discourse in both timeframes, the mental health object emerged more predominantly in the later time period. Looking at the mental

and emotional side of concussions, in addition to the physical pain that comes with concussions, created a new subject position for the athlete in the discursive formations of concussions in the media; that of the athlete as a “suffering” human being instead of just a physical commodity. This added an angle of vulnerability and frailty to the media reporting of concussions in hockey, thus rendering the concussed hockey player as more relatable to the media consumer.

The importance of family duties

To showcase the concussed NHL player as frail or vulnerable, media stories sometimes mentioned the importance of the player’s family, in talking about being healthy enough to be a family man after their hockey career, or about being unable to fulfill family and fatherly duties when dealing with a concussion. This telling quote about NHL player Matthew Lombardi appeared in the later timeframe: “Struggling daily with headaches and neck pain, Lombardi wasn’t able to play with his two kids [...] ‘Honestly, I couldn’t even be with my kids as much as I should have or wanted to be’” (Mirtle, 2011, p. S1).

In the earlier timeframe, the family was never the main focus of the article. The family was instead mentioned in passing. De Baranda Andúlar’s (2014) study on women’s representations in sports newspapers between 1979 and 2010 found that both men and women’s family relationships were increasingly being mentioned in sports newspapers over time. This upward trend was also the case in this study, where many articles in the later timeframe discussed the families of the concussed athlete. Five articles in particular focused on interviews with family members of the concussed athlete. Lauren Pronger, wife of concussed player Chris Pronger, was interviewed in two separate articles where she spoke about the difficulties her family had dealing with her husband’s post-concussion syndrome.

“It’s been a tough go at home. It’s tough for all of us to watch him go through this. [...] They’re confused all the time,” she added of her sons Jack (10), George (7) and daughter Lila (3). “They ask him: ‘Dad, when are we going to a game?’ Or ‘Dad, when are you going to play?’ [...] I think this is very, very frightening for Chris,” (Fisher, 2012, p. E3)

Former NHL player and General Manager of the NHL’s Buffalo Sabres, Darcy Regier, whose son suffered a concussion playing hockey, Marlene Reimer, mother of NHL goaltender James Reimer who suffered a concussion, and Troy Crosby, father of Sidney Crosby, were all interviewed by journalists about their sons’ concussions, and the anxiety that ensued for the parents. “As a parent you are anxious. I don’t care if he’s an NHL player or not, he’s still your son and you worry about him” said Troy Crosby (Shoalts, 2011d, p. S1). “We’re beginning to be a little more concerned than we were at first” said Marlene Reimer about her son’s concussion.

The anxiety stemmed from the uncertainties regarding concussions:

At first, when (the Maple Leafs) said it was just going to be a day-to-day whiplash kind of thing, you just wait it out. But definitely our concerns are getting a little stronger as time passes [...]. That’s the frustrating part for us – not knowing what it is, and why they’re not calling it a concussion when they say ‘concussion-like symptoms’. Like, how is that not a concussion? (Feschuk, 2011b, p. S1)

Darcy Regier, when discussing his young son suffering a concussion in youth hockey:

Parents are telling the traditionally physical junior hockey world that, “If you’re not going to look after the well-being of the players, their fathers, and probably to a greater extent their mothers, are going to have them go and play in an equally competitive and safer environment.” (MacGregor, 2011, p. S1)

The article on Darcy Regier and his views on concussions in hockey was on the front page of the sports section of *The Globe and Mail*. It carried the particularly powerful headline “Dad, I don’t ever want to feel like that again” (MacGregor, 2011, p. S1). Giving a parent’s perspective on concussions could have dissuaded other parents from signing up their kids to play competitive hockey because parents would have thought: what if this happens to my child? Making it front page news with a strong headline made the issue even more visible to parents. However, it should be noted that, ultimately, media outlets aim to increase earnings. Weise (1986) argued that the media accentuate violence, pain and injury in sports through profit increasing articles that would attract customers. The professional sports media’s focus on star athletes and their celebrity status has also attracted larger audiences (Boyle & Hanes, 2000; Smart, 2005), as fans are increasingly interested in the lives of their favourite athletes outside of their sport, such as displayed by their interactions on social media or the appeal of behind-the-scene television shows depicting the athlete’s everyday life. In these cases where family members were interviewed, the media framed the star player’s concussion through a “human-interest” angle, which made the story more relevant to the audience, thus garnering more attention (Viswanath et al., 2008).

By interviewing their family members, the concussed hockey players have been portrayed in the media as part of a family. Very few studies have shown the media depicting male athletes as being part of a family. A media analysis on one of Britain’s biggest celebrities, soccer star David Beckham, showed that he was portrayed in the media as a “loving father, adoring husband [...] the very model of a modern man” (Harris & Clayton, 2007, p. 219). In a study of the media coverage of Olympic athletes, male Olympic athletes were also portrayed in the media as part of the family (Vincent, Imwold, Masemann & Johnson, 2002). Additionally,

the researchers found this familial relationship was shown to be supportive of the male athletes' sporting success. However, in this research, the interviews of family members showed that this family support took a turn towards worry and concern for their hockey-playing spouse, son, or father when they had suffered a serious injury, such as a concussion in these instances. Several studies on the media representations of women in sports found that women athletes were dually portrayed using descriptors that were typically reserved for male athletes (such as physical toughness and competitiveness), while still being described using stereotypical heterosexual and feminine characteristics (Wright & Clarke, 1999; Lippe, 2002; Christopherson, Janning, & McConnell, 2002; Wensing & Bruce, 2003). Wensing and Bruce (2003) have identified this framing technique as ambivalence, where positive descriptions of women athletes are accompanied with others that undermine and trivialize their accomplishments. One of the ways in which the media reinforced their heterosexuality was to refer to the athlete's male counterparts or their children (Christopherson et al., 2002; Wensing & Bruce, 2003). The current study has also shown that the media has portrayed the concussed hockey player as part of the family by referring to the player's female partner and children. However, the reference to the family was not to establish the hockey player's (taken for granted) heterosexuality, but rather to depict them as more than just athletes: as men who had families and personal lives outside of the hockey rink that were important to them (such as their roles as fathers).

Children were a topic that often came up during interviews with players discussing the difficulties of living with a concussion in the later timeframe, but less so in the earlier period studied. In the later timeframe, players expressed concern with being able to raise their children both in the present while they were dealing with a concussion, as well as in the future, if they should experience post-concussion issues after their retirement. "I have to make decisions for

them until they're old enough to be on their own [...] As a relatively young person, I want enough wherewithal and common sense to make the right decisions towards their future” said Dave Scatchard, who retired due to the effects of concussions in 2011 (Starkman, 2011b, p. S1). Between 1997 and 1999, there were only two mentions of a player's children. Pat Lafontaine of the Buffalo Sabres suffered a concussion in 1996 which forced him to miss the rest of the season. Against his team's doctor's orders who recommended he should retire (Panzeri, 1997), other doctors said he was fine to play the following season. “I would never put my health or well-being at risk. [...] My first priority is as a parent and as a husband. That comes way before playing hockey” he said prior to the season (“LaFontaine gets the go-ahead,” 1997, p. C7). Despite saying this, and his wife's wishes that he retire (Panzeri, 1997), Lafontaine played the following season, and suffered another concussion which forced him to finally retire. The only other reference in the earlier timeframe to children (although hypothetical children) was from Alyn McCauley, who said after suffering from post-concussion syndrome: “I think about having kids, but if I'm laying in bed with a migraine, I can't be out spending time with them... there's just some things that are more important than hockey” (Zwolinski, 1999, p. 1). Despite his concerns, McCauley returned to the NHL, just like Lafontaine did before him. This was a recurring theme in both timeframes: players were aware of the dangers and impacts of concussions on their well-being and on their families, yet they were not willing to quit the game.

Hockey players were portrayed in the media as concerned about their family roles, and how the effects of concussions could impede their abilities to fulfill those roles. Similarly, research on female Olympic athletes found that the family role of the female athlete was more often than not negatively associated with the athlete's sporting success in the media (Vincent et al., 2002). This negative association was further discussed by McGannon, Gonsalves, Schinke &

Busanich (2015) in their research on the media representations of Olympic athlete mothers. The researchers found the dual identities of Olympic athlete mothers (i.e.: athlete and mother) were constructed in the media in one of two ways: as two identities in conflict, and as the athlete mother as a superwoman. The two identities in conflict, being a parent and being an athlete, were also found in the present analysis. However, this conflict only surfaced when the hockey player had suffered a concussion, whereas for women, simply being an elite athlete created this conflict (McGannon et. al, 2015). This led to psychological distress for both athlete mothers and concussed hockey players, such as feelings of guilt resulting from time away from their children (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Freeman, 2008).

The family was rarely the focus of articles in the earlier timeframe. This new object of discourse, that of the impact of concussions on the athlete's family, was a recurring theme in the later timeframe, to the point where family members of hockey players were the subjects of numerous interviews regarding concussions. This new object created a new subject position of the athlete as a family man, which tied into the addition of the frail or vulnerable nature of concussed players in the media, because it showcased that these hockey players also had personal lives and families outside of the hockey rink. However, we have seen here that athletes and their families were thinking about the athlete's family role and how sport (and the inevitable injuries that accompany it) can impede it. Where previous media research has shown that there was a familial support for the sporting success of male athletes (Vincent et. al, 2012), this positive family support shifted when there was a serious injury such as concussions that threatened the athlete's family role.

Retired players and the prospect of early retirement

Retired NHL players were often approached by the media in the later timeframe to give their takes on concussion issues in the NHL, how it was when they played, and what they think about it now. Retired players were only approached twice by the media in the earlier timeframe. Despite having to relearn basic motor skills, former player Michel Goulet said in 1997, about having to retire from a serious concussion: “The injury cost me more than goals or a chance to win the Cup. It also cost me millions of dollars” (Joyce, 1997, p. A30). Goulet was more concerned about the accolades and money he could not get than his health possibly declining at a rapid rate because of his concussion. In the later timeframe, retired NHL players showed more concern with concussions in hockey and their repercussions. This was largely due to the early deaths of the previously mentioned four current and former NHL players between 2010 and 2012. Stu Grimson, a former enforcer in the NHL, was worried about the potential link between head trauma in hockey and the untimely deaths of former hockey players, such as Bob Probert:

It leaves me somewhat concerned about what the second half of my life might be like, [...] What are my 60s and my 70s and, God willing, my 80s, going to be like, having suffered some of the trauma I did? (Feschuk, 2011a, p. S6)

Keith Primeau, still dealing with postconcussion syndrome in his retirement, said in 2010: “I’ll take the blame, [...] It was my burning desire to compete and excel and win the ultimate (Stanley Cup) prize” (Fisher, 2011, p. D3). Primeau, who had become an advocate for concussion awareness in hockey, had attempted to use his position as a former hockey player who dealt with concussions to help inform professional players, youth players and their parents on the dangers of concussions. The message was starting to get through to the youth. Marc

Savard, a player whose career was derailed by a serious concussion, said about his son's views on concussions:

I think they're scared, including mine, and he's a big boy [...]. I remember getting in the car with him one night and saying: 'C'mon, son, you've got to take that hit along the boards to make the play'. I said it doesn't hurt. And he's like: 'Yeah, look what happened to you.' So I didn't think about it that way, but they're thinking. (Klein, 2012, p. B3)

The message, however, was more difficult to get through to professional players.

"You've got to have a huge passion for what you do to be able to look past the consequences" (Maki, 2011b, p. S4) said Ryan Vandebussche, another player who retired due to concussions.

"Players today hear about older players [battling with concussions issues] and say, 'That's so sad. But it's not me.' I'm here to tell them it's true. I am that guy" said Keith Primeau (Maki, 2011a, p. S1). Players were aware of the repercussions of concussions but, as Primeau and Vandebussche note, they did not think they would suffer from the after effects of concussions, or they had such a passion for hockey that they were willing to accept the risk. Pierre-Marc Bouchard suffered two concussions in 2009, the second one causing him to miss an extended amount of time. "It's your head, [...]. Your head, after your career, you still want to be able to live your life" (Russo, 2011, p. B8), said Bouchard, while dealing with the second concussion.

Despite expressing their concerns with the repercussions of concussions, Bouchard and many other players returned to play. In a particularly powerful article profiling him, NHL player Willie Mitchell detailed the struggles he went through when dealing with his concussion in 2010. "It's tough. You can't do anything. [...] Living in pain, it's almost like, I always say, a snippet into a terminal illness so to speak" (Dillman, 2012, p. D6). Mitchell was back playing the following season. One player, Dave Scatchard, was highlighted in a few articles because, during

the later timeframe, he retired from hockey due to concussions (Starkman, 2011). Another player, Dan Hamhuis, said he might re-evaluate his hockey future after suffering another concussion. “Certainly, immediate family is definitely more concerned about the long-term and these concussions are scary for them” (Sekeres, 2011, p. S2). Hamhuis was one of the best players on the Canucks, and was still very young. His response created a stir, as quite a few articles covered the story, and players on the Canucks were questioned about what Hamhuis had said. A player threatening to retire in the prime of his career because of concussions could have created a massive impact on how people viewed concussions and hockey. Sidney Crosby was rumoured at one point to be considering retirement when dealing with his concussions, but he quickly denied those rumours (Kennedy, 2011). The media reporting on these players worrying about their health is supported by Anderson and Kian’s (2012) study which argued that the masculine sporting norm of accepting traumatic injuries, such as concussions, for the sake of winning was threatened by the increasing cultural awareness of the harmful impact of concussions, and a “weakening hegemonic model” (p. 168) which allowed some athletes to move away from the traditional masculine sporting culture. In turn, Anderson and Kian (2012) concluded that sport media, like the athletes, were beginning to support the idea that an athlete’s health was more valuable than the traditional masculine culture of sport. Not only were NHL players increasingly concerned about their health due to concussions in the later timeframe, the media were also increasingly reporting on these stories.

Although this important subject position of hockey players as individuals worrying about the long-term impact of their concussions from hockey was gaining traction, the dominant discourse remained that of the players’ subject positions as individuals willing to sacrifice their future health to play the game of hockey. “I think people say things when they are in an

emotional state. [...] I think he's fine. He's looking forward to getting back.” (Ziemer, 2011, p. C1) said a teammate about Hamhuis. “I'm sure people read into that a lot more than what he was saying” (Ziemer, 2011, p. C1) said another teammate. This was a prime example of the many discursive formations produced by the media on the topic of concussions in hockey producing contradictory truths, yet there remained a predominant theme; that of players willing to sacrifice their short-term and long-term health to play hockey. This is supported by previous research on what sport sociologists have called *a culture of risk* (see Donnelly, 2004; Nixon, 1992), where athletes are encouraged and/or rewarded to fight through pain, and/or put their athletic performance ahead of their own health and safety (Nixon, 1992, 1993; Sabo, 2004; Safai, 2003; Young, 1993, 2004). Despite most of the literature predating both time frames, this culture of risk was still prevalent, and it could be the reason why players kept playing professional hockey instead of retiring, despite being aware of the repercussions of concussions. However, there was a shift shown by reports of players in the 2010-2012 timeframe expressing thoughts of retirement due to concussions (even though they rarely actually retired), and more former players using their history of concussions in hockey as a cautionary tale for both current players and future players. These new objects of the discourse contributed to the media giving the concussed hockey player a frail and vulnerable dimension.

Conclusion

Some will have their careers ended; some, such as Paul Kariya and Eric Lindros, before age gets them, will begin their downward slide from superstar to journeyman; and some retired players will die long before their time, their final years, for themselves and their

families, in the living death of dementia. This isn't being alarmist. This is alarming.

(Dryden, 2011, p. F1)

Hockey's concussion era is indeed alarming. The scientific progress made in understanding concussions, coupled with many star players suffering serious concussions and other former players passing away before their time in part due to concussions sustained during their careers have contributed to the rise of the "Concussion Era" in hockey. The media's role in raising awareness for this health issue cannot be understated. However, since concussions are such a hotly debated topic in hockey, it can be argued that the media is exploiting the crisis. Weis (1986) argued that sport media put an added emphasis on violence, pain and injury in articles to attract customers and increase profit. The media is a for-profit enterprise, as they look to capitalise on saleable stories. Can the media be partially to blame for perpetuating or instigating the panic around concussions for profit? Certainly, positioning the concussed hockey player as frail and vulnerable through the personal struggles he goes through gives a relatable, human-interest angle to concussions which make them more relatable to the audience. This, in turn, can create a panic towards the possible repercussions on yourself and your family of concussions in hockey. It is difficult to judge how complicit the media really are in exploiting the concussion crisis for profit. Nonetheless, the sports coverage plays an important role in shaping views and opinions on concussions in hockey.

By increasingly reporting detailed accounts of the day-to-day struggles of concussed players, discussing the mental health implications of concussions, reporting on the impact concussions have on the player's family life, and using retired players as cautionary tales for hockey and concussions, the newspaper reports have given a relatable angle to the reporting of concussions for media consumers by rendering the concussed athlete as frail or vulnerable.

Although the dominant discursive construction of the hockey player was as an athlete, with an emphasis on the short-term impact of concussions, the production of the hockey player as frail subjects surfaced, as evidenced by the differences between the 1997-1999 and the 2010-2012 timeframes. In a time where change was needed to protect players from concussions, this emerging discourse can play a role in altering public discussions about hockey, violence and concussions. Whether it be through pressure from parents for structural changes in youth hockey by removing their children from hockey in favor of other sports, professional players lobbying for stricter rules, or influencing the NHL's commissioner to make significant changes to protect players, showcasing a vulnerable and frail side of the concussed athlete in the media can sensitise people to the dangers of concussions in hockey and push for change.

The emergence of the mental health of concussed athletes, the family, and possible retirement as objects of the discourse was important. These new objects presented new ideas to look at the concussed hockey player, as their new subject position as frail and vulnerable individuals rendered them as more relatable to the public. However, the competing dominant discourse, which placed the concussed hockey player as a mere injured athlete, remained prevalent between 2010 and 2012. Contradictory truths were produced and circulated, as this discourse certainly prevented some rule changes, and reinforced the culture of risk which dictated that players should not retire, even as they expressed concerns over their long-term health and ability to fulfill their familial roles. Players, such as Hamhuis' teammate who dismissed his teammate's pondering of retirement after a concussion as an emotional overreaction, or enforcer Kassian who recognised the poor mental health state of the enforcers who passed away in 2010 and 2011 but refused to reconsider his role as an enforcer, were loud voices for the discourse which maintained the culture of risk and was heavily circulated in the

media. As was shown in Chapter 4, the voices of players are powerful in either generating change, or maintaining the status quo. However, the players beginning to acknowledge the importance of their mental health, their long-term health, and their family roles in light of concussions in hockey was a crucial development.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion

The “Concussion Era” in North America began with the discovery of CTE in the brains of deceased football players in the mid 2000s. For Canadians, the “Concussion Era” really began with the discovery of CTE in the brain of deceased enforcer Reggie Fleming in 2009. Following this, the death of other hockey enforcers and Sidney Crosby’s prolonged absence due to a concussion in 2011 and 2012 served as key media incidents for the analysis of the discourse of concussions in the NHL between 2010 and 2012. The discourse was compared to the discourse between 1997 and 1999, when concussions to star players Eric Lindros and Paul Kariya provided the means for comparisons as important concussions to star players that generated some media attention. However, it was difficult to label Kariya and Lindros’s concussions as key media incidents, as they did not generate nearly as much media coverage as Crosby’s concussion and the deaths of enforcers Fleming, Boogaard, Rypien and Belak.

Chapter 4 of the thesis examined the discourses of blame and responsibility for the concussions in the NHL that were circulated by the media in both timeframes. It was found that Sidney Crosby’s concussion spurred the rule book, specifically the Rule 48 (headshot rule), as a new object of the blame discourse, which placed tremendous pressure on the NHL to alter its rule, which it ultimately did. However, the deaths of multiple enforcers failed to elicit significant changes to the fighting rule, despite the strong discourse of blame on fighting. Lindros and Kariya’s concussions failed to elicit action on the part of the NHL for rule changes, as the discourse of blame did not target the rule book in the earlier timeframe. Concussion experts were not given the media platform that they were given in the later timeframe to express the dangers of concussions, as their presence in the later timeframe made concussions more visible. Those responsible for changes to the rule book, the NHL, became an object of blame that gained prominence in the later timeframe. Commissioner of the NHL Gary Bettman, and other

important front-office members, were the subjects of continuous blame, which did not happen in the earlier timeframe. As journalists, concussion experts and players constantly blamed the NHL for their perceived lack of inaction to protect players from concussions, the public's opinion on the NHL was certainly negative, which put pressure on the league to act. Hockey's culture, which emphasized violence and risk-taking, was also a new object of the blame discourse in the later timeframe, as journalists and experts questioned if hockey was simply too violent of a game. Opposing discourses of approval and normalising of the violence in hockey figured more prominently between 1997 and 1999, but were pinned against discourses of blame, responsibility and change between 2010 and 2012, which led to action in some cases to protect players and the maintenance of the status quo in others.

Whereas Chapter 4 took a macro approach by analysing a wider range of discourses of concussions, Chapter 5 had a more micro approach, focusing on the emerging discourse in the later timeframe which placed the concussed hockey player as a frail and vulnerable subject. The dominant discursive construction of the concussed hockey player in both timeframes was to position the subject as merely an athlete. This meant focusing on how the concussion affected his short-term health, his hockey career and the performances of his team. However, this new subject position of frailty and vulnerability gained prominence in the later timeframe due to an increase in the reporting of the day-to-day struggles that concussed players faced outside of the hockey rink, a newfound importance placed on the discussion of the mental health implications of concussions, the growing coverage on the effects concussions had on the concussed player's family life, and the use of retired players as cautionary tales for the long-term effects of concussions in hockey.

In applying Foucault's conception of power (2003), discourse theory (1971, 1972, 2003) and his concepts of objects and subjects, I was able to reflect on how the media exercised power through the circulation of different discursive fragments regarding concussions in the NHL. Subsequently, "truths" are produced about the concussions, shaping and influencing the beliefs and actions of media consumers. Indeed, the coverage of professional sports and their stars is capable of shaping audience's experiences regarding the topic at hand (Ford, 1997; Hansen & Hansen, 1988; Hargreaves, 1986; Lee, 1992). The way in which Crosby's concussion was covered in the media through discourses of blame on the rules, the NHL and hockey's culture certainly influenced the audience's experiences regarding hockey, whether it was watching an NHL game on TV, or nervously watching their son or daughter play youth hockey.

The discourses of blame and responsibility certainly lead to action on the part of the NHL to make changes, namely the introduction and subsequent modification of the headshot rule. It could not, however, lead to an elimination of fighting. The alternate discourses that normalized pain and injury, deeply embedded in hockey's traditional culture, circulated as a means to prevent too much change, so as not to stray too far from the "true" practices of hockey in Canada. This could explain why fighting was not eliminated from hockey, despite the deaths of several enforcers due to complications from CTE that stemmed from traumatic brain injuries. This was not because of the public's opinion about fighting. Sports media is believed to be based on agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw), meaning that the media may not tell its consumers what to think, but they do tell them what to think about (Billings and Eastman, 2002; Billings, 2004; Denham and Billings, 2002). The discourse the media circulated on fighting certainly gave its consumers something to think about, as 72% of NHL fans in 2012 supported a ban on fighting (MacGregor, 2012). Hockey's dominant cultural values prevented such a drastic change in

hockey practice. The headshot rule was easy to change, as eliminating headshots was only a slight modification of the common hockey practice of body-checking. This was a change the public demanded (90% of NHL fans were in favour of banning all headshots (MacGregor, 2012)), as media gatekeepers circulated this discourse of change that journalists and players argued for. On the other hand, banning fighting, thus eliminating a common practice in NHL hockey, was not achieved. The competing discourses of change and traditional hockey culture met somewhere in the middle, compromising by making a change that would protect its players from potential concussions, without altering the traditional values of the game.

The emerging subject position of the concussed hockey player as frail and vulnerable certainly did not have as much of a role in the NHL taking action or inaction to protect its players from concussions. This new position of the concussed athlete more likely influenced individuals more concerned about the players, such as the parents of a youth player or a young player on a university team, than fans of the NHL. Ultimately, this new subject position more likely affected how parents encourage their children to continue playing hockey or not. It could also impact the NHL, as players may consider early retirement to save their brains from potential harm, much like a few NFL players have done in recent years (Block, 2016). Somewhere down the road, the NHL may be forced to make changes, as rule modifications were more frequently introduced in reaction to the media discourses of blame and responsibility.

Other implications of the results found in this study were important. Although discourses of blame and responsibility led to change in the NHL, and the new subject position of concussed NHL players gave audiences a different, more personal way to look at concussions, the opposing discourses rooted in hockey's traditional culture still prevailed. The media have a responsibility in how they cover concussions. Although improvements were made from the earlier timeframe to

the later one, discourses of rationalisation and normalisation of concussions and violence in the NHL remained. I believe that journalists and other media members must produce responsible content that does not circulate the notion that excessive violence is an essential and accepted part of hockey.

For future research, examining the discourse of concussions in the NHL as it relates to youth hockey would provide some valuable insight into hockey's culture. Many links were made in the media to the potential effects concussions to star NHL players, such as Sidney Crosby, on youth hockey. Parents were said to be nervous about the violence in hockey, because of the repercussions a possible concussion to their children could have. The links between the concussion discourse in the NHL and the changes made (or not made) to youth hockey organizations across Canada could yield interesting results. Equally fascinating would be a comparative analysis to the media discourse of concussions in the U.S.A's top professional football league, the National Football League (NFL). Similarly to hockey in Canada, football in America holds a special place in the country's culture. Football is also a contact sport that arguably has more traumatic brain injuries than hockey, and went through a "Concussion Era" slightly before hockey's. NFL games regularly posts the largest TV audiences in America, and with a population about ten times the size of Canada's, the discourse of concussions in the NFL that the media circulates has a massive reach. Finally, future research that examines how NHL fans articulate the discourses of concussions presented in this thesis would provide valuable insight. My thesis can only hypothesise how the circulating discourses affect public opinion and action. In-depth interviews of hockey fans and parents of youth hockey players could fill that gap and make stronger links between discourse and public opinion.

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