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Norwegian Big Bang Theory: Production of Gendered Sound During Team Handball Broadcasts

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This study investigates Norwegian television commentary of men's team handball. Five World Championship games and 5 European Championship games were recorded and all commentaries transcribed. The main focus was to investigate gendered patterns and to suggest ways these patterns might shape particular understandings of the game and its players. By combining Connell's gender perspectives with discourse analysis, implicit and explicit meanings were located within the commentaries. Further data analysis revealed that televised depictions of men's handball hold a dominant focus on a specific form of masculinity. Fueled by gendered symbolism and metaphors, the word *bang* was identified as a key signifier for this particular form of masculinity. The contextual use of *bang* was analyzed as connoting and reproducing specific notions of sport and masculinities.

Keywords: media, symbolism, discourse

Rowe (2004) argues that live commentators' objective, if not occupational imperative, is to enhance the spectators' viewing experience of the game. He lists three enhancement techniques: poetic imagery, supplementary and trivial information, and detailed game analysis by an expert or former elite athlete. Although all these techniques are important and to some degree mixed into a televised whole, poetic imagery, in the form of sound production, receives most of the focus in this article. Using audio technology, production crews strategically place microphones by the court to transmit the sounds of the game: the spectators cheering, referees whistling, sneakers squeaking, and the bouncing of the ball. However, these are not the only sounds presented by the media. As part of the commentators' enhancement techniques and their repertoire of poetic imagery, noise is continuously added where there is none and amplified where it already exists. Such sounds are metaphoric, are verbally produced, and take on many different meanings. In this article, Norwegian commentators on men's team handball are accordingly analyzed as discursive *producers* of sound.

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The analysis presented is, however, not limited to the investigation of particular sounds but also involves an analysis of the commentators' verbal interpretation of the games. The main purpose of this article is to explore the televised production of team handball masculinities. This is done by scrutinizing the journalists' use of gendered metaphors and symbols. By examining gendered symbols and meanings in this context, the inquiry combines theoretical perspectives to show how gender and power are inextricably intertwined (Connell, 1987) and how this relationship is manifested through discourse (Berkaak & Frønes, 2005). First, the theoretical perspective is presented, followed by the methodological outline and a brief description of team handball. This particular article calls for a dialectic understanding of sport broadcasts, incorporating understandings of the game, as well as the distinct media production. The analysis of the media's gendered portrayals is then analyzed through one distinct, yet omnipresent, word in televised team handball. The analysis of the results is divided into three interconnected sections that are ultimately fused in the final discussion. The article demonstrates how symbolic analysis with a strong but limited empirical focus may reveal much broader symbolic meanings. Although this article focuses on one particular case study and therefore is limited in this sense, it nevertheless has much broader implications for understanding how symbolic and cultural meanings are generated, perpetuated, and transmitted to the spectators. This article is ostensibly an empirical study but also aims to make a theoretical contribution to the field of media and sport communication.

Theoretical Perspective

To explore Norwegian broadcasts of men's team handball and develop a gendered understanding of them, it is necessary to outline a theoretical perspective. This article is inspired by Connell's (2002) conception of gender as a social pattern involving a specific relationship with bodies. With regard to male and female bodies, social practices such as sport at times exaggerate (men building muscle mass), at times mythologize (glorifying male athletes' achievements), and at times complicate (strong female athletes glorified) gender differences and similarities. This article is concerned with the ways that bodies are socially constructed and the many implications this has for our personal and collective lives. Gendered patterns can manifest differently in diverse contexts. Gendered manifestations through symbols and metaphors are of particular interest in this article. Like gender, symbols and metaphors are viewed here as patterned and linked. The use of a particular symbolic representation often results in the emergence of other specific and contextually adapted symbols. Moreover, a repeated conglomerate of symbols and metaphors serves to bolster particular implicit understandings of a context. Inspired by Berkaak and Frønes (2005), I explored a gendered understanding of cultural comprehensions and televised depictions of men's team handball.

The poets of sport journalism often portray games and athletic events as mythic and significantly historical (Whannel, 2002). By applying gendered stereotypes, symbols, and metaphors in televised men's sports, they regularly produce theatrical and warlike dramas in which male bodies are symbolically presented as weapons (Messner, 1990; Trujillo, 1995) and the contestants battle to prove their masculinity (Gee, 2009; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000). Researchers (Connell, 1992; Messner, 1992; Sabo, Gray, & Moore, 2000; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2009) argue

that the repetitive nature of such televised images, along with their symbolic connotations forging masculinity and power, are significant elements in reproducing hegemonic conceptions of gender in specific sport discourses, even in society at large. The particular form of sport masculinity (characterized by muscle strength, authority, courage, heterosexuality, and the ability to endure pain and to use violence in combination with physical skills) has been analyzed as representing the hegemonic form of masculinity, in both the performance (Messner & Sabo, 1994) and the mediation (Messner et al., 2000) of male power and performance sports. It is significant that, as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) note, very few men perform or embody prototypical hegemonic masculinity in most of their everyday encounters. However, through fictional male characters (like action movie heroes) and exceptional men who succeed and display contextually ideal (almost fictional) forms of masculinity (like sport heroes), some men come to symbolically represent a hegemonic masculinity.

Uniquely, hegemonic masculinity is explored in this article as a symbolic and metaphorical construct manifested through a discursive production of sound. Hence, the use of the concept does not imply that all male Norwegian handball players are reduced to the hegemonic form of masculinity and that they need the exact same skills to excel or that they all share one identical identity. Research in other sports such as rugby (Harris & Clayton, 2007) and basketball (Lafrance & Rail, 2001) exemplifies this claim. Rather, it is suggested that the hegemonic form of masculinity is an omnipresent (televised) ideal that athletes must negotiate. Symbols are often ambiguous and multivocal and may even contain their own contradictions (Douglas, 1997). For instance, fueled by gendered markers and connotations, symbolic media depictions of male sport stars often produce culturally elevated role models. These role models are at one and the same time ordinary and extraordinary men. Because of this empirical contradiction, the mediation of particular masculinities is indeed based on systems of symbolic reproduction and transformation.

Method

Using discourse analysis, this study examines gendered patterns in the communicative (re)presentation of televised men's handball in Norway. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) note that "discourse analysis focuses on how truth effects are created within discourses that are neither true nor false" (p. 226). Here the approach becomes closely aligned with the study of (gender) ideology. Phillips and Jørgensen (1999) argue that discourse is structured and patterned, and Jepson (2008) regards it as a dynamic system that reflects and shapes thought. However, inspired by Connell's (2002) conceptualizing of bodies and gender, the use of discourse analysis here calls for a dialectic understanding of knowledge production as relating to certain aspects of the material. Identities and social relations are actively constructed through a dialectic process inspired by bodies and inspiring the construction of bodies. Viewer ratings and commercial interests, gendered structures and norms (to name a few), influence discursive patterns and shape how sport journalists think about and discuss athletes' bodily movements. With a focus on gendered patterns in the discursive representation of men's handball, the gender theory and research referred to herein constitute the analytic basis that shapes the following analysis.

This strategy allows an analysis of the interconnectedness of bodies, gender, identity, and discourse in the televised mediation of a specific sport.

The data were collected by recording televised representations of five games from the 2007 World Championship and five games from the 2008 European Championship. Both championships were broadcast on the same Norwegian television channel (TV2) and covered by the same two commentators. In general, one commentator provided the “poetic” imagery and the other supplied the detailed “insider” perspective and game analysis (respectively coded A and B in the analysis; see Rowe, 2004). After the events were recorded (60 min of each game’s “effective” playing time, plus timeouts and short breaks), all verbal statements were transcribed. TV commentary offers the possibility to consider not just what is spoken but also how, that is, the tone and excitement that may be conveyed by the voice. The intonation of the commentators is not the focus of the analysis. However marginally, the analysis also explores newspaper commentary to highlight and add insight to the televised commentary. Because newspaper reports are “cold” media in which there is only the written word to convey meaning, a different journalistic explicitness is demanded. The two different journalistic approaches are here considered to be analytically complementary.

The average handball game yielded a 26-page, 10,510-word document. Following Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the commentators’ verbal presentation was transcribed and loaded into the qualitative-analysis program MaxQDA. Coding of the texts was both data driven (repetitive themes manifesting in the texts, such as the use of intertextuality and metaphors) and concept driven (themes previously located in other sport discourses, such as “sport as war” and “show some guts”). After the texts were broken into segments, the derived concepts were once more related to the texts as whole. Listening to and viewing the broadcast of the games was also an important part of the analysis. This allowed an investigation of the interaction between the bodily movements on the court and their discursive and symbolic (re)representation.

European Team Handball

The International Handball Federation (2009) defines handball (or team handball) as a fast-paced game involving two teams of seven players. Participants pass, throw, catch, and dribble a small ball (with a circumference of 58–60 cm [22.8–23.6 inches] and weighing 0.43–0.48 kg [0.94–1.05 lb] for men and male youth age 16 years and over) with their hands while trying to score goals. The winner is the team with the most goals when the final buzzer or whistle blows. A handball game consists of two 30-minute halves with a 10-minute halftime break. The rectangular playing court is 40 m (131 ft) long and 20 m (66 ft) wide. The court consists of two goal areas and a playing area in between. In addition to this definition, it is necessary to comment on the game’s physical aspects. Handball is a power and performance sport; it is a game in which the participants “learn quickly that they are evaluated in terms of their ability to use violence in combination with physical skills” (Coakley, 2007, p. 203). This ability is traditionally associated with the performance of masculinity and has often resulted in the suggestion, noted earlier, that power and performance sports reproduce stereotypical notions of gender.

Smell/Bang as a Metaphor and Symbol

In the pattern and context of televised men's handball, the Norwegian word and onomatopoeic expression *smell* occurred 58 times during 600 min of game time, approximately once every 10 minutes. The English equivalent, *bang*, will serve as a useful translation throughout this article. A *bang* leaves the occasional need for contextual specifications of connotation, as would also be the case for the Norwegian word *smell*. However, the foremost definition of *bang* applied throughout this article is that of "a loud, sudden, explosive noise, such as the discharge of a gun, a resounding strike or blow, to strike or beat resoundingly, to hit or bump painfully, and to bang up, to damage" (Merriam-Webster, 1997). Central to the analysis of *bang* is also the word's onomatopoeic qualities; it's a word created and formed by the imitation of a sound made by or associated with its referent (such as *cuckoo* or *boom*; Merriam-Webster, 1997).

The word *smell*, like *bang*, has a wide variety of cultural meanings in Norway and is used in quite diverse settings but usually connotes power and abruptness: *smellkys* (a smacking kiss); *baksmell* (come from behind *bang*: tax arrears); state governments, corporate organizations, and individuals facing difficulties and defeat and *går på en smell* (things going bang in one's face). On Friday, July 31, 2009, the front page of the second largest Norwegian newspaper portrayed a terrorist bombing on Mallorca: "We were awoken by a huge bang (*et ekstremt smell*)" (Vassbø, 2009).

In the context of media handball, the onomatopoeic expression *bang* appeared foremost in three distinct contexts: the team "banging against the wall," the ball "banging toward the goal," and bodies "banging against each other." This particular decoding and categorization of *bang* is not an attempt to rigorously classify its distinct connotation in a specific context or to proclaim that the word may only signify one thing in one context and something completely different in another. Rather, the division into three distinct categories is a methodological choice to focus and direct the analysis. The categorization helps contextualize and demonstrate three specific and distinct gendered meanings for *bang*. Second, it serves to reveal gendered patterns that shape and inspire comprehensions and portrayal of all relevant contexts. The commentators regularly demonstrate the multivocal and symbolic qualities of *bang*:

A: Yes! A shot with a bang [*smell*]—Finally!

B: [And that] on a fast break with some bang [*smell*]. Brilliantly played by the Norwegian defense.

The fast break and the shot entail quite different bodily movements. A fast break involves outrunning the opposition and creating a one-on-one situation with the goalkeeper. A shot is ultimately a matter of hand-eye coordination aimed at getting the ball *past* the goalkeeper. During the Norwegian broadcast, they both share certain characteristics. Yet another central aspect (with methodological implications) of the analysis becomes evident: a *bang*'s qualities as a metaphor. Here, for analytic purposes, the relation between symbols and metaphors becomes fluid and entails items and ideas that stand for or represent other ideas. Berkaak and Frønes's (2005) definition of a metaphor is used: "a word or an expression primarily referring to the content or quality of A, which also refers to the content

and quality of B because of a comprehension of resemblance between the content and quality of A and B” (p. 40). In the context of televised men’s handball, *bang* primarily refers to the content and quality of a loud and explosive sound (A), which also refers to both the fast break and the shot (B) because of a comprehension of resemblance between the content and quality of a bang (A) and the athletes’ bodily movements (B). Analytically, the bodies on the court produce explosive noise; they cause damage and perform sudden spurts of energy that may surprisingly resemble a bang. A bang also connects the bodily movements of male handballers to the stringent and hegemonic definition of sport as war. This becomes apparent when discussing the three distinct situations and the context-related connotations of *bang*.

Banging Against the Wall (Not Reaching an Objective)

In research on sport, the body becomes an imperative focus. Athletes are continuously told that it takes tough physical exertion to achieve individual and team objectives. This notion of sport as tough bodily exertion is so common that it often becomes part of male athletes’ sporting and even masculine identities (Messner & Sabo, 1994; I do not imply or neglect that female athletes also incorporate and experience many of the same cognitive and bodily values and norms). By means of game-specific weight training, endurance training, and the sharpening of technical skills, the body is “manipulated” to excel in a particular sport and at an exact player position within the team. Such comprehensions of the body as resembling a tool or a machine that can be upgraded, rebuilt, and adjusted fit what Gjerset and Vilberg (1992) define as the “work demands” of a particular sport. An experienced coach systematically builds a team by trying to shape his players in this manner. On the other hand, individual players must prove that they are tough enough to endure the training, excel during the game, and ignore the pain of fatigue, bruises, and injuries. Furthermore, “The body in the context of sports medicine is an object that can be controlled and manipulated, and thus may be understood as a complex mechanical machine” (Howe, 2004, p. 56). Televised representations of sports often portray athletes as machines. Veen (2004) analyzes German Machine Soccer, and Trujillo (1995) documents National Football League depictions of the male athletic “war” machine, sport as work, and its close connections to masculinity. This pattern is also evident in the Norwegian broadcast of men’s handball. Like a tractor, the handball player plows his way through:

A: Look at the tractor [a Danish player] playing for Flensburg [a German Bundesliga team]! He takes a beating and is laid out once more!

A: We may use first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth gear—but we shall never go into reverse. We need to move forward, up and forward.

This Danish player is well known and idolized for effectively plowing through defenses with little or no regard for his own, or others,’ pain. In addition, the Norwegian team is urged by the commentator to pick up the pace and never to back down. What then happens when these machines derail or cease to function? When an objective is not reached, a game is lost, or the team is knocked out of the play-offs, the Norwegian commentator describes it as a bang. Analogous to a tractor or a car in a high-speed crash into a stone wall, all forward motion comes to a sudden halt and a loud and explosive (“action movie—Hollywood style”) sound erupts.

A: The Norwegian team is trying to get on its feet after two ferocious bangs [*grise-smeller*] versus Sweden and France in their two latest matches.

A: How will the Norwegian team be able to perform collectively after a couple of bangs [*gå på en smell*] leading up to the World Championship?

Situated in the masculine context of televised men's handball, the bang of not reaching an objective symbolizes that great forces are at work or, rather, that the team machinery has come to a sudden stop. This contextual form of *bang* is analyzed as a physical metaphor for pain, describing what is primarily psychological. The bang created by a machine crashing may cause the vehicle to cease functioning, as well as serious injury, even death, to the driver and any passengers. The bang of a handball team or a player not reaching an objective might lead to a momentarily shaken or damaged self-esteem, causing the team or members of the team to cease functioning. In addition, the breakdown of the team machine might lead to the end of further participation in the championship or firing of the coach (or even more seriously, perhaps, the loss of sponsors and a decline in national interest shown by the media and spectators). The onomatopoeic expression *bang* draws on and expresses all these meaning constructions. The crash of a handball team might have been fatal in a symbolic and metaphoric way but not a bodily way. The commentators' portrayal might be understood as depicting the abrupt halting of the flow toward the end goal as a bang. Being a symbolic construction, however, whatever damage has been caused can be quickly repaired, and the team machine can once more be tuned to perfection. The consequence becomes obvious:

A: Basically, lay down your lives!

The Ball Banging Toward the Goal (Being Thrown or Shot)

Berkaak and Frønes (2005) argue that we often define a phenomenon by "tying" metaphorical strings to a familiar phenomenon that is thought to resemble the new. In other words, we frame the unknown in a known context. Serving this purpose, masculine metaphors and intertextuality saturate both televised depictions of male sports at large (Dahlén, 2008) and the portrayal of men's handball in particular (Broch & Fasting, 2009). Using warlike metaphors, commentators symbolically construct the male handballers as warriors. Their arms become rifles, cannons, and rocket launchers. This symbolism conflates notions of a military masculinity with the definition of throwing the ball toward the goal, or shooting.

A: This is like the duels on the dusty streets of the old Wild West: Strand versus Hvidt. A *bang* erupts [*så smeller det*] from Strand! And Strand wins the duel [converting the penalty shot]!

A: I haven't seen anything like this since my days as a military recruit at Sessvollmoen [Norwegian military camp].

B: There has been shooting, and shooting, and shooting. Hagen [a Norwegian player] has blown the Russians off the court.

When intertextual metaphors are applied as discursive tools, the commentary on men's handball is poetically "enriched." This dramatization also serves to include

novices among the television spectators who may not fully understand the rules and regulations of handball. Newcomers to the game of handball may, however, be acquainted with the phenomenon and narratives of the military and the Western film genre and therefore appreciate the plot: The handball matches are narrated as a drama and a contest in which the participants are hustling to prove their masculinity, a prerequisite for success! Like many other power and performance sports, handball is portrayed as war and the players as warriors. This should come as no surprise when winning often depends on the athletes' successful use of controlled aggression and violence: "To score and win, the human body is routinely turned into a weapon to be used against other bodies" (Messner & Sabo, 1994, p. 89). Consequently, when athletes are symbolically portrayed as warriors and their bodies as war machines and weaponry, loud bangs and explosions are produced through the commentators' discourse. The masculine setting and sounds of televised men's handball thus seem redolent with gun smoke:

First half:

A: Gets his shot off. He has a brilliant shot, Børge Lund, but this was well wide of the mark.

Second half:

A: Here comes Børge Lund! The jump shot that was 5 meters off target in the first half bangs [*smeller*] into the goal in the second half!

A: Buchmann scored three penalty shots earlier. This one bangs [*smeller*] off the crossbar.

Børge Lund's and Alexander Buchmann's bodies have become weapons. Their arms are rifles. When Lund misses his first shot, all he needs to do is adjust his rifle aim. When he does, the ball bangs past the goalkeeper and into the net. A bang in the context of shooting becomes a metaphor and discursive tool conveying throwing strength and skill. The connection between throwing the ball toward the goal (shooting) and bodies as weapons is analyzed as tightly connected with the hegemonic notion of handball masculinity. In this broadcast, Lund is portrayed as a brilliant marksman with a powerful, explosive, and deadly accurate aim. The opposite, as when firing with wet gunpowder, does not make much of a sound. Such a rifle is not effective but is dangerous to the team's chances of survival in the championship. Players who abstain from shooting or continuously shoot off target often get pulled from the game (at least for a couple of minutes) to "cool off their guns," to regrow or adjust their aim.

Of course in reality there is no sound resembling a loud bang when a handball player throws the ball toward the goal. Throwing the ball toward the goal does not produce more sound than a pass to a teammate (although it might be thrown with more force). However, a good shot is also often an unexpected and sudden shot delivered with a bang and in such a swift manner that the goalkeeper and defense have little or no time to react. A banging sound may occur if the ball hits a defending player's hands (block) or the goalpost.

These contextual bangs, along with the televised productions of bangs, may symbolize power and may be proof of a distinct masculine conformity. After

blocking a shot, a player might raise his hand and roar aggressively as the spectators applaud. To block a shot can be painful. Fingers occasionally get knocked out of joint, and the defender's face and body are exposed to the shooter's elbow, arm, and hand (follow-through of the shot). Players achieve throwing speeds of 115 km/hr (71.46 miles/hr; Enoksen, 1999). If the ball hits a player or the goalkeeper in the head, it can cause severe concussion. To block a shot, save a shot, to "take one for the team" accordingly becomes a sign of courage because the game's ethos and rules cannot fully protect the players. Furthermore, the sound of a shot hitting the goalpost (depending on whether the player scores or not) is the sound of a marginal advantage or disadvantage. It is nevertheless a sign of muscle strength and skills enabling the player to make the goalpost resound with a bang. Nonetheless, the broadcasted bang when the ball hits the net or when a shot leaves a player's hand is fictive. Rather than conveying sounds, the commentator once more becomes a producer of sound. At the same time, the televised expression connotes particular masculine virtues. The shot was fast and powerful, the shooter was strong and skilled, and he was courageously willing to shoot, for players are seldom free to shoot without defenders physically trying to stop them.

Bodies Banging (Players Tackling and Colliding)

Male handball players, like players in certain other sports, are disproportionately drawn from the section of the population that is genetically predisposed to grow tall, that has the will to grow large, and has the staff and support to encourage growing tall and large. They tend to be taller, larger, and more muscular than the average Norwegian man. And height and weight are characteristics thought to preoccupy television spectators:

A: Alexei Rastvortsen, Number 15. He is 2 meters tall [~6.6 ft]. He weighs 119.2 kg (~262 lb). He goes down on his knees and cannot hold Frank Løke. This says everything about the former Runar player [Frank Løke, who wrestles off the Russian].

True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies—to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body.

—(Connell, 2005, p. 45)

When such large bodies collide and tackle, the fascination with and celebration of particular male bodies and a distinct form of masculinity are revealed. The male athletes are depicted by the media as making explosive noises when they collide and tackle. The connection between noise, destructive power, and the romanticizing of male physical magnitude and strength is reconstructed.

A: Yep, during the pregame matches of the World Championship, it was Bielecki [a Polish player] who injured Johnny Jensen [a Norwegian player]. And who made Johnny Jensen's pregame matches a painful experience. So that duel will be explosive and it's going to bang [*å smelle*] in that duel. It's going to be a heavyweight match, which we usually only witness in the boxing ring.

B: Ha ha ha.

A: Yep, Johnny Jensen has not forgotten, Johnny Jensen has not forgotten it, Bielecki.

Handball players are not allowed to fistfight, nor do their bodies explode on impact. However, the media's use of the boxing-ring metaphor positions the two handball players in a symbolic boxing ring where they cannot escape one another and where they are forced to battle and display their narrative hatred. In this setting of televised men's handball the onomatopoeic expression *bang* serves the purpose of further intensifying individual battles in the games and adding explosive sound effects to these heavyweight handball players. Consequently, when such powers collide, damage is a likely outcome:

B: He returns to the court limping.

A: He he, yep these Croatians kind of look like Napoleon's men returning from the eastern front back in the days when.

B: Gal gets banged up real bad [*ordentlig smell*], down on the Hungarian bench—Blood is pouring from his nose.

B: A penalty throw is rewarded. He is laid out and he stays down, too.

A: He gets banged up [*en smell*] and stays down and he's in pain.

B: He gets banged up [*smell*] in that situation . . . Joachim Boldsen [a Danish player]. He also has to leave the game and take a seat on the bench. Receives a heavy bang [*ordentlig smell*] on the finger.

Tackles are very often referred to as bangs, with consequences ranging from bruises and torn ligaments to broken bones. When the Arsenal (an English Premier League soccer team) striker Eduardo was tackled by Martin Taylor, breaking Eduardo's leg clean in two, the caption in the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* read "Ugly Bang (*Stygg smell*)—Arsenal striker out for a long time" (Sivertsen, 2008). The *bang* metaphor manifests in several journalistic media. In contrast to the audiovisual television broadcasts, influenced by intonation, excitement, and melancholy, the newspaper explicitly highlights that there are different degrees of severity to a bang: small bangs, medium bangs, and big or violent bangs. Injuries that can be repaired by physicians, athletic tape, and drugs are often portrayed as small bangs. However, none of these bangs are exclusively negative. If an athlete breaks a leg, it is a sad day, but the injured player has shown courage, and if he returns to the court, he has shown great (masculine) persistence and dedication. Who makes greater heroes than the athletes who struggle through injuries and illness to return victorious?

Words highlight certain aspects of the entities and events to which they refer and obscure others.

—(Jepson, 2008, p. 130)

When a player is exposed to a bang in this context, he is most often tackled, obstructed, or stopped. Such collisions may cause injuries. However, violence is not part of the Norwegian vocabulary of handball. Rather, to play the game of handball, one must be able to dish out a bang and withstand a bang. Furthermore, *bang* as a metaphor and a symbol is interconnected with a distinct form of masculinity that elevates and glorifies the ability to endure or cause pain, to sacrifice one's own body for the greater purpose, and to avoid the threat of feminization (Coakley, 2007; Messner, 2002; Messner & Sabo, 1994). Cultural patterns are transformed, constructed, and reproduced by symbols, rules, and regulations that are simultaneously external and internal to the individuals. Several of our communicative skills become embodied, both as mental and motor reflexes. Berkaak and Frønes (2005) argue that when a metaphor or a symbol is internalized, it is often unconsciously applied by individuals. A bang becomes a part of the televised manhood formula (Messner et al., 2000) of men's handball:

B: This is how we need to play. We must hold our ground. We must fight and battle [wage war: *krige*].

B: It is all about reaching that level [of playing] and to win the duels, to be willing to absorb the bangs [*smellene*] that are headed our way, and that we know are headed our way. We have to hustle hard.

A: That it was going to be rough, that we knew.

Discussion: Getting a *Bang* Out of It!

This analysis was inspired by an understanding of discourse as the rules and norms that govern the ways we express ourselves through communication and as a dynamic system that reflects and shapes thought. Like gender, symbolic and metaphorical patterns are not static or definite but flexible, fluid, and often ambiguous. Therefore, we should not assume an unproblematic relation between media messages and the implications of these messages. Nevertheless, "shared meanings are possible only because of conventionalized ways of reading" (Saco, 1992, p. 31). In media receptions, as well as in everyday communication encounters, the viewer or listener draws on an established horizon of understanding and earlier experiences with narrative structures (Wilson, 2009). Clark (1985 in Pratto, Hegarty, & Korchmaros, 2008) calls it a "common ground." Furthermore, when symbols are internalized and become embodied in (masculine) identities, as argued here, culture tends to evolve rather slowly. Hence, when Berkaak and Frønes (2005) argue that our world of symbolic representations has fundamentally stable characteristics and that commonality and stability are unmistakably expressed through language, my findings confirm their hypothesis.

In Norway, boys (and girls) are often reminded, both inside and outside sporting contexts, that one should lose and win with the same grin (bang Category 1), that one should not throw like a girl (bang Category 2), and that if you want to play the game—withstand the pain (bang Category 3). In other words, in Norwegian sporting experiences, the abstract word *bang* is part of an overall pattern of communication based on familiar symbols and metaphors.

Berkaak and Frønes (2005) argue that many aspects of human life are abstract. One cannot distinguish hate, friendship, love, grief, or bangs in the same way one can make out a house or a horse. Abstract concepts and their symbolic content are formed when various experiences and understandings are contextualized and given personal and collective meaning. A bang's symbolic power potential, as a carrier of gendered meanings, appears to be omnipresent in Norwegian media sports contexts. In this masculine context the sound of a bang is given a perceivably material point of reference. In line with previous research, this is a hegemonic form of (sport) masculinity. A loud and powerful sound simulates and resembles something else that is loud and powerful. In all three categories applied in this analysis, the onomatopoeic qualities of *bang* lie in the referral, resemblance, and simulation of a loud and powerful *bang*. Team machines do not “cough” when they fail, players do not “fizz” when they shoot or “splash” when they tackle—They *bang*.

The masculine connotation of *bang* is understandable for listeners and viewers because the concept is situated in the masculine context of power and performance sport and because of common, normative, and widely shared ideas about gender. The bang televised through Norwegian broadcasts of handball can be interpreted and analyzed as part of a comprehensive (Norwegian) gendered symbolic and discursive pattern. Preconditioned comprehensions of gender (both consciously and unconsciously) create a sense of order and security in an ambiguous world of symbolic identities (Berkaak & Frønes, 2005). As symbolic representations, male athletic bodies are hard, noisy, muscular, and machine-like and will bang if abruptly stopped or if engaged in metaphorical sport wars.

A bang's symbolic manifestations of masculinity are materialized and embodied by real men. In contrast to movie stars performing fictive identities in a fictive environment, sport stars are often perceived as authentic individuals participating in impulsive and unpredictable contests (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). This specific element of the metaphorical and symbolic contradiction allows viewers to conflate fictive and “factual” notions of gendered behavior. The discursive media depictions of symbolic masculine characteristics and the production of fictive sounds (bangs) are in the particular theoretical framework of this article analyzed as reaffirming stereotypical notions of gender and reifying them as embodied identities of “real” men. The powerful and loud bang produced by the media comes to symbolize the power potential of the male (athlete). The sport discourse containing this symbolic representation of masculinity imposes bodily and material implications as it masks and naturalizes the use and consequences of male physical strength and violence (in sports), while at the same time reifying gender stereotypes in society at large.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this article was to explore the televised production of masculinities and shed light on journalists' use of gendered metaphors and symbolism in doing so. The article has demonstrated how symbolic analysis with a strong, but limited, empirical focus reveals much broader symbolic meanings. In the discursive context of televised Norwegian men's handball, the frequent use and diverse meanings of *bang* were found to elevate, naturalize, and legitimize a distinct form of masculinity. This article documents a hegemonic masculinity rooted in a conservative Norwegian

sporting tradition and manifested through an onomatopoeic expression. Particular to this article is the evidence of the concept's applicability in Norwegian sports broadcasts and in the highly undertheorized team handball context. The single Norwegian word *smell* may take on plural contextual meanings in the Norwegian broadcast of men's handball. Even so, the word's multivocal characteristics, (re) inscribed by the media, come together to signify and reify dominant and traditional comprehensions of men, sport, and masculinity.

To bang, in a Norwegian team handball context, carries both negative and positive associations. Losing games and being banged up is not the aim of the game. However, through the broadcast of Norwegian men's team handball, the spectators learn that a respected male handballer should incorporate notions of a distinct form of masculinity: He should prove he can endure pain, recover physically and mentally after a loss, throw the ball like a rifle shot, and tackle without mercy. By using the word *bang*, the commentators symbolically link loud sounds to embodied masculine identities of male handball players. This particular and contextual handball masculinity saturates the media production of men's handball, and its conglomerate of traditionally masculine qualities exclusively holds a hegemonic position by means of gendered representations, idealizations, and expectations. It becomes a symbolic form of masculinity that all players, regardless of position or individual skills, must relate to and negotiate.

Comparative research on other Scandinavian countries (*bang/smell* is also manifest in Swedish handball) and on other sports, exploring the broadcasts of women's handball, and using other theoretical instruments will stimulate alternative interpretations. As women enter traditional masculine spheres such as the military and sport arenas, sport as war and notions of hypermasculinity become stereotypical images of gender. The combination of Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) gender perspectives with discourse analysis shows how the televised production of sound symbolically and dialectically reproduces gender stereotypes in sport and sport media. Sport media's and sport participation's prominent position in Norwegian society implies that such representations might have implications outside the sport context. The discursive production of *bangs* becomes a guideline for handball players, perhaps even a guideline to "real" manhood. Such profound connections mask many of the social aspects of embodied identities. Using *bang* as a metaphor and discursive tool, the media symbolically imbue the male athletes' bodies with the capacity to bang. Through this symbolic process, it is no longer the commentators who convey and produce sound—it is the male body that bangs.

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