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(MIS)REPRESENTED MASCULINITIES: DISCOURSE AND DISRUPTION IN CANADIAN FIGURE SKATING

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(MIS)REPRESENTED MASCULINITIES: DISCOURSE AND DISRUPTION IN
CANADIAN FIGURE SKATING

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by

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2

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of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

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**(Mis)represented Masculinities: Discourse and Disruption in
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requirements for the degree of
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Dr. Darwin Semotiuk

Abstract

Canadian media outlets have paid significant attention to figure skating, increasingly in reference to the competitive careers of male, Canadian skaters. This analysis investigates the particular representations of masculinity that are textually produced and reproduced in journalism from the *Globe and Mail* and autobiographical writings from select figure skaters. Drawing from the methodology of critical discourse analysis as developed by Norman Fairclough and the theory of hegemonic masculinity from R.W. Connell, these three case studies examine the careers of Toller Cranston, Kurt Browning, and Elvis Stojko. Through an analysis of the careers of these figure skaters which spans four decades, various notions and representations of hegemonic masculinity are documented. Additionally, this study analyzes how these shifts reflect broader socio-historical knowledge in an attempt to construct a unified image of Canada and national discourse.

Keywords: figure skating, masculinity, Canadian nationalism, Kurt Browning, Elvis Stojko, Toller Cranston, critical discourse analysis

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List of Acronyms

Critical Discourse Analysis	CDA
Canadian Figure Skating Association.....	CFSA
International Olympic Committee	IOC
International Skating Union	ISU
North American Free Trade Agreement	NAFTA

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The CFSA [Canadian Figure Skating Association] is in the business of skating, which is providing opportunities and programs for people who want to skate, not of prying into people's lifestyles. It is no one's business whether an individual is homo- hetero- or bisexual. If you skate, you skate.

Brenda Ward, *The Ottawa Citizen*¹

Despite the claim that the disclosure of sexual orientation is “no one’s business” in relation to sporting opportunities, this excerpt ascertains that quite the contrary has been the case in figure skating. This reply, as a response to the widely-disseminated report that a disproportionately large segment of Canadian male figure skaters were homosexuals and dying from AIDS in 1992, provides a glimpse into the complex and often contradictory attitudes about gender and sexuality in figure skating. Sentiments of sympathy, shame, uneasiness, fear, and pride, to name a few, are interwoven, both implicitly and explicitly, within the social history of men’s figure skating. As a sport heavily dependent upon choreography, as well as musical and visual stylization, men’s figure skating is often dismissed as a sport for “sissies and faggots.”² Through such simplifications, men’s figure skating is loosely and antithetically contrasted with the traditional and authentic ice sport of hockey. These assumptions about male figure skaters reveal more about the theoretical tenets of masculinity than the individual characteristics of any skater themselves. Such assumptions emanate from the accumulated, continually enacted, and reproduced articulations of social practices, discourses event, and texts. Following Connell’s theoretical claim that a hegemonic order of masculinities emerges as a result of socially- and historically-constituted practices, men’s figure skating has been, and continues to be, an active site of struggle for

mediating notions of hegemonic masculinity.³ This thesis uses the work of Connell to historically trace the dominant and subordinate representations of masculinity in figure skating. Drawing on scholarship broadly examining the origin and evolution of masculinity and organized sport from the nineteenth century onwards, I first identify the functions that sport served in the maintenance of discourses on masculinity. In an examination of the last four decades of figure skating in North America, I argue that the circulated representations of these individuals promoted embedded ideologies with respect to hegemonic masculinity. These constructions at times fissured notions of homo- and heterosexuality, while others fragmented and exaggerated the dissonance between artistry and athleticism. These constructions worked to conflate homosexuality with artistry, and heterosexuality with athleticism. Canadian figure skaters such as Kurt Browning and Elvis Stojko, are often likened to one another, yet are distanced from fellow Canadians Toller Cranston, Brian Orser, and Emmanuel Sandhu through the operation of these binaries. Representations of Browning and Stojko uphold the culturally desirable, dominant myths of what masculinity ideally should embody. One effect of such representations is that these individuals are successfully commodified and marketed as athletes. The representations of Cranston, by contrast, categorized as homosexual and artistic, are subordinated and distanced from the notion of hegemonic masculinity in athletics. These representations threaten to rupture the dominant hegemonic order of masculinity and, therefore, such representations are less favorably produced, interpreted, and commodified in dominant markets.

Literature Review

In order to provide an historical context for my research question involving figure skating, specifically, I provide a summary of the relevant historical trends linking sport to gender dynamics as examined in literature. Numerous scholars have described the historical development of organized sporting practices as being intimately linked to the expression and reinforcement of hegemonic gender ideologies.⁴ The widespread socioeconomic shifts of the nineteenth century, involving the separation of the home and workplace for Victorian families, had far-reaching implications for the social stratification and gendered norms of society. The middle-class, 'separate sphere' ideal, emphasizing the public and economic significance of men in society, and the private, domestic role of women permeated public consciousness during the formative decades of sport. The ideal middle-class woman, as her husband's complement, endeavored to engage in genteel and refined leisurely pursuits, ultimately, as a signifier of her husband's affluence and social standing.⁵

Physical duties and accomplishments shaped masculine identities for men from a variety of class backgrounds. Labour skills, feats of strength, and fights marked masculine dominance for the labouring class, while duels to defend manly honour consolidated masculine identity for men of higher classes.⁶ Respectable middle-class men were expected to consistently exercise both restraint and autonomy in their daily lives, and in effect, sport, like the fraternal lodge and school, became an arena which mobilized specific forms of masculinity. The celebration of the male physique that took place in these male-exclusive organizations formed a backlash against the first wave of feminism during which women's rights activists sought for female inclusion into the workforce.

The construction of manhood, embedded within men's sport, operated to disseminate an ideal notion of hegemonic masculinity, which increasingly permeated popular consciousness via mass media outlets in Canada.⁷

Sport history scholarship, until the 1970s, primarily highlighted men's lives as the definitive experience, followed by scholarship on the sporting histories of women. The subsequent shift to examine formerly marginalized subjects of historical inquiry produced scholarship on the experiences of varying sexual, racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds within sports studies. During the 1990s, scholarship inspired by gay and lesbian, queer, and men's studies' fields introduced a multiplicity of perspectives with regard to gender and sport participation. Male sporting participation has been the subject of several sociological studies that have brought attention to the fragility of, and maintenance required to successfully reproduce, hegemonic masculinity. Heterosexual masculinity involves a distancing of the masculine performance from feminine performance, where a failure in performance can expose and unravel the essence of masculinity itself.⁸ Given the likeliness of failure in sport, masculine identity derived through athletic achievement remains unstable and must be continuously reasserted.⁹

In *The Arena of Masculinity*, Brian Pronger uses ethnographic data to analyze the experiences of homosexual male athletes in order to understand how homophobia operates within sport, as well as the strategies by which gay athletes publicly and privately negotiate sporting spaces. Many athletes viewed the hypermasculine culture of sport at the time of this publication (1992) as a hostile environment for homosexual men. Using psychoanalytic and Foucauldian theories, Pronger traces the social construction of homosexuality in the 19th century to its more contemporary stigmatized social

classification.¹⁰ Pronger outlines gender ideologies and orders of discourse implicitly deny homoeroticism and prevent the acceptance of subordinate masculinities.

Homophobia operates to maintain the hegemonic relations through sport by regulating gendered performances.¹¹ This rigidity reproduces “a desire for the toughest form of masculinity, an attitude in which “men are men” and an arena in which homosexuality, femininity, and other assumed ‘weaknesses’ are not perceived as being conducive to the ultimate quest for victory.”¹²

In her analysis of lesbians and homophobia in sport, Pat Griffin recounts deliberate efforts made by sporting associations to minimize or eradicate the presence of lesbian athletes, in order to avoid tarnishing the reputation of women’s sport.¹³ In Cold War era America, the promotion of conservative political ideas and lifestyles, combined with anxiety regarding Communist politics, reconfigured discursive knowledge surrounding gay and lesbian people as threats to the moral livelihood of America.¹⁴ As a consequence, police raids on gay and lesbian bars compounded the panic, prejudice, and criminality surrounding homosexuals. Griffin also details several accounts of prejudice against lesbians in varsity athletics, involving varsity team policies actively discouraging lesbians from try-outs, the dismissal of athletes from team rosters after revealing their homosexual orientation, and negative recruiting tactics. Lieber and Kirshenbaum examine popular perceptions of lesbianism, and concluded that young, heterosexual, female athletes were perceived to be vulnerable to being ‘tricked into’ and coaxed into lesbian relationships, based on the notion that lesbians were sexual predators.¹⁵ Both gay and lesbian identities have been considered threatening because of a fear of homoeroticism elicited through the homophobia present in heterosexuals.¹⁶ In response to

homophobic attitudes, movements such as the Gay Games have served as sites of cultural resistance that challenge homophobia at individual and community levels. However, it has been suggested that the institutionalization of a gay and lesbian sports movement may further marginalize gay athletes, and further entrench boundaries of segregation.¹⁷

Figure skating, itself, remains an area within scholarship that is understudied, despite increasing interest in contemporary versions of the sport. As a form of aristocratic leisure during the nineteenth century, the sport was primarily reserved for those members of society with ample leisure time, ownership and access to frozen ponds in urban areas.¹⁸ The Skating Club in London, U.K, founded in 1830, was considered one of the most prestigious social groups; technical skating ability and excellent social standing were prerequisites to membership.¹⁹ Club members hired men of lower standing to clear, maintain, and guard rinks to prevent against vandalism. According to Mary Louise Adams, qualities such as grace, beauty, and expressiveness signified a particular brand of upper-class masculinity, which played an important role in the early development of figure skating.²⁰ The expression of grace, which at this time, implied the transcendence of the aristocratic body to a spiritual closeness with nature, was closely tied to men's skating.²¹ The concept of grace, to early nineteenth century upper-class men, "was a matter of deportment, manners and appearance [...] expressed by a man's posture, his bearing and the attitude of his poses."²² Over the course of the nineteenth century, shifting societal values involved in the appraisal of masculinity influenced the aesthetic characteristics of masculine bodily movement. In early figure skating textbooks from late eighteenth century England and North America, skating curved lines on outside edges, combined with arm movements, were stressed as "becoming and graceful movements" to

maximize the expressive potential of skating.²³ However, the rhetoric of such manuals shifted during the mid-nineteenth century. Alternately, uniformity in group skating, rigidity, innovation, and technical possibilities became increasingly valued over expressive potential, as figure skating was adopted into middle-class norms. The appeal of figure skating as an art form evolved into an appreciation of the science of skating in England.²⁴

Even during these early phases, figure skating became a site where conflicting aspects of stylization functioned as cultural markers. In contrast to the English style, the continental school of style was popularized in Vienna following American Jackson Haines' exhibitions. His European debut in 1868 involved the appropriation of a Viennese waltz and celebrated the pleasures of spectatorship and movement to music. Haines, a ballet master employed in New York, fused the extended and flowing movements of ballet into skating. The reported excitement generated by his theatrical performance style and exaggerated movements, reinforced the expressive potential of skating internationally.²⁵ English critics of this skating asserted that the continental style resembled circus stunts, and perceived actions such as spins to be tastelessly showy and grotesque. Adams notes that the English style of skating was intimately crafted around notions of English nationality and masculinity. That is, the 'English' male body was expected to move in such ways that reflected and reproduced a desirable English nation-state.²⁶

However, it was the continental style that was popularized in the social pages of Canadian periodicals during the early decades of the twentieth century. Ice galas and carnivals at this time were social spaces to see and be seen at, evident in descriptions of

notable community members in attendance at skating performances. Early twentieth century skating texts expressed an upper-class rhetoric when outlining codes of conduct for rink etiquette (no smoking, no gossiping, no shirt sleeves for men).²⁷ Coverage of these events took the form of prose for the admired qualities of skating. At one Toronto Annual Carnival, skating performances were likened to choirs, tulips in Queen's Park, "or the grass on Rosedale's lawns, or a sunset beyond the Humber – something that is fundamentally fine and striking."²⁸ Reports on the Canadian figure skating team members at the Chamonix Olympic Games in 1924 describe the team enjoying horse-drawn sleigh rides, enjoying small bowls of coffee in cafes, and feasting on superb pastries. A poem about Canadian figure skater, Constance Wilson, competitive during the 1920s and 1930s, described her as swanlike, regal, and adorned with pearls.²⁹

A wider audience was introduced to figure skating with the advent of the television. As Mary Louse Adams notes, the relationship between bourgeois values and figure skating began to erode during the 1920s when promoters attempted to commodify the popularity of stars such as Sonja Henie, resulting in a rink-building boom.³⁰ This increase in figure skating rinks across smaller communities allowed for a more diverse population, not simply the upper class, to use the rinks. At the same time, Sonja Henie, a three-time Olympic champion, rose to significant international acclaim through a string of films. By doing so, Henie, who embodied a glamorous feminine image, analogous to the Hollywood film siren, introduced figure skating to the least exclusive reaches of the public eye.³¹ With few other consumable examples of live figure skating available (it was not televised in North America until 1962), Henie, the Norwegian champion, established

the popular image of the blonde Northern European beauty on ice that was widely reproduced in popular culture.³²

As hockey increased in popularity for Canadians, figure skating became analogous to a less athletic, and more artistic and feminine ice sport. Men such as Donald Jackson, hailing from Oshawa, “where men were men and wore hockey skates to prove it”³³ apologetically attributed his entry into figure skating lessons as a strategy to gain athletic capital in hockey by acquiring more practice, the only reasoning his father would accept to allow his son to figure skate. Jackson summarizes, “Although many of us were exposed to the sport early in life, we came to regard it as an essentially effeminate activity-not quite as bad as violin lessons, but much less appealing than tobogganing or heisting bubblegum from the corner store.”³⁴ The connection made between figure skating as a feminine practice emerges from several historically-contingent articulations. The historical gendering of the practice of ‘looking’ theorized in cinema and performance studies, according to Laura Mulvey, associates the action of looking, performed by the viewer, upon the male subject, while the object of the gaze assumes a feminine status.³⁵ Since figure skating is structured around competition, at which judges and audiences engage in looking at a performer complete a sequence of elements, the performer is by this theory, reduced to the feminine role. The practice of looking and being looked at, however, is not sufficient alone to explain the feminization of skating.

Competing orders of discourse have interchangeably structured figure skating as both an art and a competitive sport. Both the increase in the frequency, and the difficulty of jumps, common during the 1950s and 1960s, represented a struggle by male skaters to differentiate themselves from the style of skating characteristic of women.³⁶ In 1948,

Canadian figure skater Barbara Ann Scott gained widespread, international acclaim winning the- Olympic title. The media attention showered on Scott, as argued by Morrow, hinged foremost upon her physical attractiveness and, thus, Scott came to predominantly represent ideologies of femininity, which were only peripherally related to athleticism.³⁷ Scott's image, manipulated to embody a return to the domestic role of women and traditionalism, communicated a preferred brand of Canadian womanhood to international press outlets.³⁸ Analogous representations of female figure skaters are found in Fabos' study of American television coverage of U.S. female contenders for the Olympic championships. The 1968 Olympics coverage by ABC allowed television American audiences, for the first time, to view their own competitor, Peggy Fleming, win the championships during live coverage. Fleming was portrayed as innocent, glamorous, dashing, and beautiful, a version of the Disney character Bambi, known for her shyness and youthful appearance.³⁹ With the increasingly televised nature of figure skating, changes to the judging system minimized the value of tracing school figures (which allowed stockier bodies to succeed), and increased the value of the television-oriented free skate. With most emphasis on the free skate, ABC manipulated the women's program coverage to portray American Dorothy Hamill within a narrative about "a fragile princess ascending a throne."⁴⁰

During the 1988 Olympics, top American contender Debi Thomas was one of the first African American skaters to achieve a high level of international acclaim. However, dominant ideologies could not as easily be circulated through representations of Thomas in comparison to Witt, who possessed more conventional, Northern European standards of beauty. Witt, although not an American, better fit the Western fairy tale narrative.⁴¹

During the 1992 Olympics, the fairytale narrative was once again forced upon the competitors. Through CBS commentary, competitors were portrayed through favourable or unfavourable means based on how accurately their identities could be conflated with the American Olympic princess ideal, through their body shapes, racial backgrounds, skating styles, and family histories.⁴²

The fairy tale rhetoric that emanated from figure skating narratives at the time of Henie and Scott continued to mediate the image-making of more contemporary female figure skating stars. In Fabos' study of U.S. National champion Nancy Kerrigan, evidence suggests that Kerrigan's positive portrayal by the American media is a consequence of beauty capital, "a legitimate and necessary qualification for a woman's rise in wealth, power and class status."⁴³ Fabos notes that attention to particular physical features and the fashion consumption habits of Kerrigan were utilized in an effort to represent her as pure, authentic, upwardly mobile, and virginal, using characteristics such as her un-dyed, uncomplicated hair style, and her modest but original costumes.⁴⁴ These features were painted in stark contrast to Tonya Harding, who was depicted as a member of the "seedy underworld" of the working class and a "white trash whore."⁴⁵ While Kerrigan's modest upbringing, family support, and middle-class values energized the rags-to-riches narrative she was portrayed within, Harding's efforts to succeed, in the absence of a united family, were mocked rather than praised in narratives.⁴⁶ Similar trends were reported in several other sociological studies of women's figure skating. Feuer's analysis of femininity and figure skating concluded that women's figure skating as a spectacle is most highly valued when it directly channels the thematic content of

traditional Hollywood entertainment mediums popularized by Henie, such as the Ice Capades and classic Hollywood musicals.⁴⁷

Recently, several studies have examined the link between figure skating and nationalism in North America. Fenton's dissertation investigates the link between United States national identity and textual, physical, and visual representations of figure skating spanning two Olympic cycles from 1998-2006.⁴⁸ Fenton examines the economic role that television, specifically the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) played in figure skating consumption. Additionally, Fenton examines the flow of representations between judges and competitive skaters that structure the movement practice of American skating, as well as the consumption and critiques of these representations as read by fans. Case studies investigating Michelle Kwan and Johnny Weir provide insight into the critical analysis of issues of gender, ethnicity, class, and nationalism, which are embedded in their representations.

McGarry's study explores the ways in which Canadian figure skating is disseminated by mass media outlets in the construction of Canadian identity.⁴⁹ McGarry also addresses how spectacle, cultures of consumption, and constructs of Canadian nationhood are linked to promote certain identities of class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality through notable Canadian figure skaters. Primarily using ethnographic data surveying television network executives, McGarry found that figure skating was trivialized and dismissed as a women's sport. In coverage of major figure skating events, McGarry found that hegemonic constructions of figure skating images were 'naturalized' through video editing techniques.⁵⁰ For example, video editing facilitated the construction of Emmanuel Sandhu as a less gracious person with the media than Elvis Stojko.⁵¹

Adams also examines the construction of masculinity in figures such as Canadian Kurt Browning. Adams indicates that the formation of narratives surrounding the individual careers of such skaters forges loyalty between audience and performer.⁵² In popular magazine coverage on the first quadruple jump, landed by Browning, Adams argues that journalists framed the event as a triumph of the mechanized and masculinized body of Browning.⁵³

Samantha King's analysis focuses on Canadian men's figure skating and public discourse surrounding AIDS in 1992. During this period, the production of narratives surrounding the disease perpetuated AIDS as an affliction of homosexual men. After the death of several male figure skaters from the disease, these events defined a crisis in men's figure skating, as told through newspaper dailies and exposé journalism, which helped conflate Canadian male figure skating with homosexuality and AIDS.⁵⁴ More broadly, the categorization of homosexual activity constituting an 'at-risk' group, allowed for the heterosexualized Canadian public to be favourably constructed as sympathetic, but in safe distance from the disease.⁵⁵

Most of the literature on figure skating addresses the construction of these televised narratives in relation to femininity and the associated meanings audiences may extract from such narratives. Literature on masculinity and figure skating is limited to tracing the historical, class-based origins and stylization of the sport through content analysis, and ethnographic studies of the meanings audiences give to television-mediated representations of a select few male figure skaters. Little research has systematically examined the construction and enactment of masculinity within figure skating in the late twentieth century. As outlined in the literature review, sport has served as a central tenet

in the maintenance and preservation of hegemonic masculinity. I found that the mediated representations of the male figure skater regulate, and are regulated, by hegemonic aspects of masculinity described by Connell.

Purpose

This study examines how representations of the male figure skater regulate and are regulated by text, discursive events, and social practices surrounding gender. Specifically, I contend that discursive events in the history of figure skating that have challenged traditional masculine discourse have reaffirmed the hegemonic masculine order. Specifically, I contend that instances during the history of figure skating that disrupted or threatened hegemonic masculinity resulted in the elevation and reconstitution of a hegemonic masculine ideal.

Methodology

Two theoretical perspectives informed this study: Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity and a social theory of discourse.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Appropriating the Gramscian concept of hegemony to gender, Connell contends that gender is a systematic power form that is simultaneously dynamic, inherently social, and historically-reproduced. Representations of masculinity, through resistance, may be disrupted or reconstituted in accordance with the interests of society. This study will be informed by Connell's premise that broader 'crisis tendencies' within a gender order compromise dominant masculinities and may elicit attempts to restore this order. The purpose of using this methodological approach focuses the study on the interaction and

articulation of masculinities and how “their making and remaking is a potential process affecting the balance of interests in society and the direction of change.”⁵⁶ In sport, and more broadly within culture, dominant forms of masculinity are promoted as normalized and naturalized ideals. For example, Greig’s study of hegemonic masculinity in boyhood in postwar Ontario discusses newsprint as a genre associating the idea of boyhood with hockey and baseball.⁵⁷ Michael Messner’s studies relate hegemonic gender relations to sports media, institutions, and children’s little league.⁵⁸ As Messner advocates, this perspective centers on the agency of social actors and the ‘situational fluidity’ of gender construction, enabling the possibilities of describing both transgression and conservative practices within a historical context.⁵⁹ Additionally, this conceptualization of hegemony and gender is theoretically compatible with the tools of macro-analysis offered by Fairclough in his approach to critical discourse analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by Norman Fairclough, is a methodological approach, grounded in the combination of socio-theoretical analysis with linguistic studies, identified as a “social theory of language.”⁶⁰ While there are many approaches to CDA, and subsequently what is meant by ‘discourse,’ Fairclough integrates the concept of discourse from linguistics (as ‘text-and-interaction’) with a “socio-theoretical sense of ‘discourse.’”⁶¹ To Fairclough, the dialectical composition of discourse is three-dimensional: simultaneously discourse is text, a discursive practice, and a social practice.⁶² Discourse shapes and is shaped “by power, ideologies, social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief.”⁶³ Fairclough’s version of CDA is informed by two Foucauldian claims from *The Archeology of Knowledge*

which validate studying discourse. First, discourse is actively related to extra-discursive reality in the composition of social relationships, subjects, and knowledge.⁶⁴ Second, discourse is intertextual.⁶⁵ One of the strengths of this methodology rests in its ability to measure theoretical claims by focusing on “concrete instances of practice and the textual forms and processes of interpretation associated with them.”⁶⁶ This involves aspects of micro- and macro-analysis. This approach examines the changes (or consistencies) within the use of language, at the micro-level, as discourse shifts or is maintained at the macro-level. This framework is based on the claim that language does not singularly reflect reality, but additionally plays a role in its construction. Discourse constructs and is constructed through pre-existing bodies of knowledge organized to represent a particular reality and order of thinking. This construction enables a set of possibilities to use language to construct reality, and by doing so renders other linguistic possibilities inappropriate, invisible, or unintelligible. I investigate how masculinity in figure skating was textually discussed (and not discussed), as well as the linguistic choices made in the texts I examine. The discourses embedded within men’s figure skating have determined, for example, why the connotations of one word, ‘tough,’ included in a statement by the director of *Skate Canada*, elicited widespread criticism from national media outlets.⁶⁷ Fairclough argues that cultural meaning is transmitted and received through the producers and interpreters of language when making word choice selections.⁶⁸ The producers of text in the genres I analyze, journalists and athlete-autobiographers, are considered to provide expert knowledge and reliable information for their audiences, which renders a high level of authority between the consumers and interpreters of these texts.⁶⁹

Sources

I identified and selected a corpus of primary samples to analyze, consisting of newspaper articles from the *Globe and Mail* and the auto-biographical works of two figure skaters. The objective when collecting the sample was to focus on widely-circulated materials that reached large audiences and reflected popular discourses on sport. As a result, newspapers have been used as the primary sources for various studies of sport, and several books focus on the relationship between journalism, mass media, and sport. Garry Whannel, for example, has focused significant attention on the role of mass media in constructing representations of male athletes and athletic celebrities.⁷⁰ Traditionally, a large segment of the Canadian population has read newspapers; long-term circulation patterns suggest that roughly 70% of the population regularly reads a newspaper.⁷¹ Newspapers also gain relatively stable and loyal readerships, which fosters a high level of authority between a given paper and its audience.⁷² This has a bearing on the judgment of interpreters who habitually consume articles. A distinction exists between objective journalism, defined as the distancing of a journalist from the truth claims of a report, and the removal of value judgments in the process of news production.⁷³ The distancing of journalists from a truth claim forges trust between the producers and consumers of newspaper texts. Richardson outlines specific strategies used by journalists to affirm a lack of bias in news reporting. Quoting sources in verbalized and competing truth claims, contextualizing background information and evidence, and using 'scare quotes' when including controversial truth claims are some strategies for this purpose. Journalistic texts are not produced from single, uncompetitive forces. The established audiences of newspaper dailies inform text producers regarding which events can be prioritized as newsworthy. The demographic composition of a readership informs

a dialectical relationship with the producers of texts, built upon fulfillment of the readership's expectations.⁷⁴ Particular readerships affect the choice, tone, and style of journalistic texts.⁷⁵

My rationale for specifically choosing to use the *Globe and Mail*, over other Canadian publications, was based on the historical longevity of this paper, as well as the steps the *Globe* has taken to brand and circulate itself as "Canada's national newspaper."⁷⁶ The sample of newspaper accounts which I used, selected from coverage between January to March, spanning from 1971-2002, were available through online databases and microfilm stored at the University of Western Ontario.

To enhance my corpus of newspaper articles, I additionally used autobiographical samples. In lieu of interviews, this was a selection strategy advocated by Fairclough in order to "obtain judgments about aspects of discourse samples in the corpus from 'panels' of people who are in some significant relation to the social practice in focus."⁷⁷ The genre of the autobiographical book, as a source to supplement the mentioned newspaper articles, is informed by literary auto/biography studies. Much of the scholarship in this area of study emerged in an effort to recover historically-marginalized subjects.⁷⁸ Andrew Lesk contrasted the autobiographies of figure skater Toller Cranston and pop star Carole Pope to investigate how each used narrative to promulgate their status as Canadian cultural icons.⁷⁹ Julie Rak's *Auto/biography in Canada: Critical Directions* summarizes three major perspectives that inform auto/biography studies, "an act, a set of discourses about identity, or practices."⁸⁰ As a text, auto/biography is "conditioned by expectations about the works and the identities of the people who make it."⁸¹ I agree with Mary Evans' criticism that within auto/biography, "the narrative has an

implicit structure which organizes content in a way that can marginalize or ignore significant aspects of individual experience.”⁸² While Evans claims that such sources “cannot represent what they claim to represent [...] a ‘whole’ person,” she still acknowledges that autobiographies serve social needs for “the transmission of moral and cultural values.”⁸³

While journalists covered particular events using particular strategies in newspapers, when appropriate, I juxtapose passages from auto-biographies that related to the same events. These passages allowed me, in some cases, to assess the degree to which figure skaters, coaches, and/or other social actors of interest tended to agree with, or dispute, how journalists portrayed their actions. All three of the auto-biographical memoirs I examined were among the top-selling, Canadian non-fiction books during their respective releases. Realistically, followers of figure skating consume the sport through various mediums; thus, it is likely that there is overlap between those who read newspapers and those who read these auto-biographical accounts.

Method

Once the newsprint dailies were selected, articles germane to my study were identified to create the corpus. Articles which had content specifically involving the men’s singles events were given highest priority, then articles discussing figure skating more generally. The articles were read chronologically and grouped by figure skater. I then further categorized the articles by content, with attention paid to moments of conflict or disagreement within discourse. The articles and commentary were read at three levels, the ‘whole’ of the article, sentence by sentence, and word by word. At the micro-level, I

primarily concentrated on word meanings, wording, and argumentation.⁸⁴ When reading whole articles, I examined instances of foregrounding, where journalists emphasized some details at the cost of de-emphasizing others. Additionally, I compared foregrounding across articles, intertextually, as particular information was consistently reproduced in strings of articles.

Delimitations of the Study

The time frame for this analysis spans from 1971-2002, using articles from January to March of each season. This allowed me to primarily examine participation at the Canadian Figure Skating Championships, the World Figure Skating Championships, the Olympic Games, and teasers between these events. Evidently, this led me to only focus upon skaters who were ranked highly enough to compete, and generate news, within these events. This allowed me to analyze how journalists treated Canadian figure skaters in competition against other Canadians, as well as instances when significant rivals were non-Canadian. Additionally, I only examined articles covering Toller Cranston, Kurt Browning, and Elvis Stojko, while each actively competed as a member of the Canadian Figure Skating Association (now called Skate Canada).⁸⁵ Deliberately, there is no case study on Brian Orser, who competed between the careers of Toller Cranston and Kurt Browning. A large portion of the sampled articles on Cranston, Browning, and Stojko frequently mobilize discourses of masculinity to discuss the stylistic innovations of each skater. Each of these skaters was considered to be deliberately and radically different in terms of stylization and masculinity from their predecessors. Such topics received frequent attention for the skaters I analyzed. However, similar rhetoric is largely absent in coverage of Brian Orser. This is potentially due to Orser's stylization being considered

conventional enough, in terms of masculinity, to escape comment from journalists. As Fairclough notes, an effective strategy for analyzing discourse involves focusing on the articulatory events that structure texts, which does not include articles about Orser.⁸⁶ My data sample ends in 2002 to coincide with Elvis Stojko's retirement from Olympic eligibility.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: "Genteel Understatements and a Spray of Petal:" Textually Performing Toller Cranston

Chapter 3: Straightening Skating: Narratives of Kurt Browning

Chapter 4: 'Is Elvis Too Manly?': Athletics, Aesthetics, and Masculinities

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

End Notes

¹ Brenda Ward, "Story on AIDS and figure skating cheap insensitive reporting," *The Ottawa Citizen*, December 26, 1992, Section D, Final Edition.

² Mary Louise Adams, "To Be An Ordinary Hero: Male Figure Skaters and the Ideology of Gender," in *Men and Masculinities* ed. Tony Haddad (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 1993), 163.

³ Raewyn Connell, *Gender* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 144-45.

Robert William Connell and Raewyn Connell are the same author.

⁴ Richard Gruneau, *Class Sports and Social Development* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1983), 36.

⁵ Jennifer Hargreaves, "Victorian Familism and the Formative Years of Sport," in *From Fair Sex to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras*, ed. J.A. Mangan and Roberta Park (Totowa: F. Cass, 1987), 131.

⁶ Kevin Wamsley, "The Public Importance of Men and the Importance of Public Men: Sport and Masculinities in Nineteenth Century Canada" in *Sport and Gender in Canada*, 2nd ed., ed. Philip White and Kevin Young (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2007), 79.

⁷ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 246.

⁸ Michael Kimmel, ed., *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1987), 19.

⁹ Ibid., 59.

¹⁰ Brian Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality and the Meaning of Sex* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 88.

¹¹ Brian Pronger, "Fear and Trembling: Homophobia in Men's Sport," in *Sport and Gender in Canada*, ed. Philip White and Kevin Young (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1999), 188.

¹² Pronger, *The Arena of Masculinity*, 7.

¹³ Pat Griffin, *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport* (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1998), 37.

¹⁴ Ibid., 38.

¹⁵ Ibid., 45.

¹⁶ Corey Johnson and Beth Kivel, "Gender, Sexuality and Queer Theory in Sport," in *Sport and Gender Identities: Masculinities, Femininities and Sexualities*, ed. Cara Carmichael Aitchison (New York: Routledge, 2007), 96.

¹⁷ Caroline Symons. "Challenging Homophobia and Heterosexism in Sport: the Promise of the Gay Games." in Aitchison., 156.

¹⁸ Mary Louise Adams, "Freezing Social Relations: Ice, Rinks, and the Development of Figure Skating," in *Sites of Sport: Space, Place, Experience*, ed. Patricia Vertinsky and John Bale (New York: Routledge, 2004), 60.

¹⁹ Ibid., 64.

²⁰ Mary Louise Adams, "The Manly History of a 'Girls' Sport': Gender, Class and the Development of Nineteenth-Century Figure Skating," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 24, (2007): 873.

²¹ Adams, "Freezing Social Relations," 62.

²² Ibid., 62.

²³ Adams, "Manly History of a Girl's Sport," 877-78.

²⁴ Ibid., 882.

²⁵ Ibid., 885.

²⁶ Ibid., 887.

²⁷ Adams, "Freezing Social Relations," 71.

²⁸ David Young, *The Golden Age of Canadian Figure Skating* (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1984), 130-1.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Adams, "Freezing Social Relations," 71.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Bettina Fabos, "Forcing the Fairytale: Narratives Strategies in Figure skating Competition Coverage," in *Sport and Memory in North America*, ed. Stephen Weiting (Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 189.

³³ Young, *The Golden Age of Canadian Figure Skating*, 135.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ellen Kestnbaum, *Culture on Ice: Figure skating & Cultural Meaning* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003).

³⁶ Ibid.

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- ³⁷ Donald Morrow, "Sweetheart Sport: Barbara Ann Scott and the Post World War II Image of the Female Athlete in Canada," *Canadian Journal of the History of Sport* 18 (1987): 37-38
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.
- ³⁹ Fabos, "Forcing the Fairytale," 190.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 191.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 193.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 201.
- ⁴³ Bettina Fabos, "From Rags to Riches: The Story of Class Advancement in Women's Figure Skating," in *Mediated Women: Representations in Popular Culture*, ed. Marian Meyers (Cresskill: Hampton Press, Inc., 1999), 135.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.
- ⁴⁵ Abigail Feder, "A Radiant Smile from the Lovely Lady: Overdetermined Femininity in 'Ladies' Figure Skating," in *Women on Ice: Feminist Essays on the Tonya Harding/Nancy Kerrigan Spectacle*, ed. Cynthia Baughman (New York: Routledge, 1995), 22.
- ⁴⁶ Fabos, "From Rags to Riches," 143.
- ⁴⁷ Jane Feuer, "Nancy and Tonya and Sonja: The Figure of the Figure Skater in American Entertainment," In *Women On Ice*, 6.
- ⁴⁸ R. Fenton. "Circuits of Representation: Figure Skating and Cultural Meaning in United States Popular Culture" (PhD diss., University of California, 2007), 10.
- ⁴⁹ K. McGarry, "Performing Nationalisms: Spectacle and Identity in High Performance Canadian Figure Skating" (PhD diss., York University, 2003), 14.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 142.
- ⁵² Mary Louise Adams, "To be an Ordinary Hero: Male Figure Skaters and the Ideology of Gender," in *Men and Masculinities*, ed. Tony Haddad (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1993), 173.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 175.
- ⁵⁴ Samantha King, "Consuming Compassion: AIDS, Figure Skating, and Canadian Identity," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 24, (2000): 151.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.
- ⁵⁷ C. Greig, "The Idea of Boyhood in Postwar Ontario, 1945-1960" (PhD diss., University of Western Ontario, 2008), 30.
- ⁵⁸ Michael A. Messner, *Taking the Field: Women, Men and Sports* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁶⁰ Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 5.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 73.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 9.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶⁷ Cam Cole, "Skate Canada is in a tough position," *The Leader Post*, May 30, 2009, C5.

⁶⁸ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 185.

⁶⁹ Norman Fairclough, *Analyzing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003), 110.

⁷⁰ Garry Whannel, *Media Sport Stars: Masculinities and Moralities* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 115-16.

⁷² John E. Richardson, *Analyzing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2007), 41.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Arthur Siegel, *Politics and the Media in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1996), 141.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁷⁸ Julie Rak, *Auto/Biography in Canada: Critical Directions* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2005), 10.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸² Mary Evans, *Missing Persons: The Impossibility of Auto/Biography* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 10.

⁸³ Evans, 1-3.

⁸⁴ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 170-94.

⁸⁵ "About Skate Canada," *Skate Canada*, last modified December 3, 2010

http://www.skatecanada.ca/en/about_skate_canada/history/.

Canada's national governing body for figure skating has undergone several structural and name changes during its history. In 1887, Louis Rubenstein founded the Amateur Skating Association of Canada, which governed both speed and figure skating. In 1939, an administrative body emerged for figure skating exclusively, known as the Canadian Figure Skating Association. In 2000, the Canadian Figure Skating Association changed its name to Skate Canada. The organization is recognized by the International Skating Union and the Canadian Olympic Committee.

⁸⁶ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 9.

CHAPTER TWO

“Genteel Understatements and a Spray of Petal:” Textually Performing Toller Cranston

We skaters do not, as a rule, reminisce together about the world championships in which we have taken part. We absorb what happens to us – good, bad, or indifferent – but we do not discuss the incidents, power struggles, strategies and performances after the fact.¹

The above passage illuminates several themes of relevance to Toller Cranston’s figure skating career. References to Cranston, both within and outside of figure skating narratives, rarely omit mention of his elliptical statements and enigmatic performance persona. The many textual connotations about Toller Cranston, as a painter, coach, choreographer and figure skater, among his many career choices, are contradictory and far from interpretable at surface level. I am concerned with how these contradictory meanings articulate Toller Cranston as a public icon within figure skating, and how this public identity concurrently regulates and regulated by the orders of discourses surrounding sport with respect to masculinity and sexuality within the *Globe and Mail* and two of Cranston’s autobiographical works, *Zero Tolerance* and *When Hell Freezes Over, Should I Bring my Skates?*

Both newspaper sources and autobiographies contain embedded ideologies for particular audiences, which may be discursively traced to expose precisely how the accomplishments and persona of an athlete are constructed to reiterate knowledge about gender. Cranston’s autobiographical endeavors should be considered no exception. Despite the marketable claim that the genre of autobiography delves into the so-called ‘true story,’ the complete, private, and secret life of the narrator, autobiographical performances like Cranston’s craft careful and selective narratives. These particular

narratives from Cranston reveal the opinions and attitudes of the narrator, in more detail than the available newspaper sources.

While disentangling Cranston's personal life from his public identity is not the intent of this project, deciphering the relationships between texts, and discursive and social practices reveal the underlying gendered modes of representations and actions constructing his athletic career. The manner by which figure skating is reported in the *Globe and Mail* reflects more about notions of hegemonic masculinity, in relation to the producers and consumers of the paper, than it does about Cranston's particular performances.

Upon looking at the interaction between these texts, I will attempt to identify how particular, reproduced details of Cranston's career have shaped his public identity. His sporting identity, as a male, and a figure skater, repeatedly confronts and is interpreted in a language particular to the articulation of discourses of masculinity and sport. Readers of the *Globe and Mail*, are invited to construct an image of Cranston as a performer of complex, if not elusive, subjectivities. Textual accounts of his life are rife with mention of Cranston as artistic, tortured, extraordinary, misunderstood, reclusive, and androgynous- a supposed artistic visionary trapped within the confines of a repressive sporting system. While no attempt is made here to discredit his stylistic contributions to the sport, newspaper coverage of Cranston often foregrounds his stylization despite the high degree of athletic proficiency he also demonstrated. From the oblique statements in Cranston's auto-biographical works, one point distinctly emerges; a reluctance to fixing his sexual or gender perspectives is portrayed as more than a superficial, stylistic aspect

of Cranston's persona. It is, according to his statements, one of the underpinnings of his stated artistic performances.

Competitive Career Highlights

Cranston won six consecutive men's national figure skating titles from 1971-76. Over the same years, Cranston placed in the top five at the World Figure Skating Championships, culminating in a career best of third place at the 1974 championships. He represented Canada at both the 1972 Olympic Games in Sapporo and finished ninth. At the 1967 Games in Innsbruck, he finished third.

Figure Skating Event Changes 1968-1976

Major changes in the structure of competitive figure skating events took place during Cranston's amateur career. From 1968-73, both men's and women's singles skaters participated and earned scores in three separate events over the course of several days. The first event, referred to as Compulsory Figures or 'School Figures,' involved participants carving six predetermined patterns using various edges, directions, and feet, over an ice sheet. A panel of judges awarded scores based on skaters' precision, and deducted marks for deviations. This portion of the event accounted for 50% of the total score. A 4-5 minute free skate followed the compulsory figures portion. Several scholars have attributed the subsequent demise in the relative weight of tracing figures to the lack of commercial appeal this portion held for televised events. Free skating events generated higher levels of crowd appeal, excitement, and television marketability in comparison to compulsory figures. However, skaters who excelled at figures could often gain large leads over more engaging (and television-friendly) free skaters. As a result, from 1973-

75, the number of compulsory figures was reduced from six to three, and a short program was implemented to blend both compulsory technical elements and the more television-friendly aspects of the free skating.² The scoring changed to weigh compulsory figures as 40 percent, the short program as 20 percent, and the free skate as 40 percent. In 1976, the scoring was further reweighted to increase the value of the free program to 50 percent, and decrease the weight of figures to 20 percent.

It has been repeatedly acknowledged that Cranston did not excel in the figures component of international events. Cranston relied on the strengths of his free skating routines to achieve such high final placements in competition. At four World Figure Skating Championships, he placed first in the free skating component, but failed to finish higher than third place overall at any World Championships due to lower standings in the figures component and the compulsory program.

Both of Cranston's autobiographical accounts equate his success in figure skating with the construction of an innate artistic vision. Gender, specifically the constraints of hegemonic masculinity, is portrayed as an obstacle that acted to restrict his claim to define himself simultaneously as an athlete, artist, and figure skater

From the introduction of *Zero Tolerance*, Cranston, recounting his boyhood in Kirkland Lake, Ontario, immediately problematizes his social identity. His version of events leading to his participation in figure skating appeal precisely to the gender dichotomies he later finds so problematic. The first page indicates Cranston's belief that particular, biologically-inherited qualities, the athleticism of his father, versus the artistic inclinations of his mother, are responsible for his presumed uniqueness. His choice of

words regarding his birth and early life frame the rest of his story in an overt manner. Fate, destiny, and “visions from birth,” implicate Cranston’s perceived lack of autonomy over the course of events which shaped his life and this becomes relevant in his later reflections on his skating career.

Upon taking up figure skating in the small town of Kirkland Lake, Cranston’s family could only purchase girl’s figure skates, which Cranston’s father “painted black.”³ The inclusion of this detail suggests several possibilities. At surface level, the reader may simply assume that there was a shortage of boy’s skates. However Cranston, authoring this memoir during his adulthood, deliberately recalls that his skates were painted by his father. Foregrounded as one of his primary memories of figure skating, this event is embedded within a series of anecdotes which Cranston recalls and collectively mobilizes to demonstrate the rigid modes of representation in figure skating. This prior statement, for example, is closely followed by discussion of his perspective on an early competition he entered at the age of 11:

Goteborg was a magnification of the earlier competition, with identical results and strangely identical frustration, pain, and loneliness. Why didn’t they understand me? Why didn’t they like me? With each competition, the idiosyncrasies of my style became more pronounced, and each time they interested and irritated more people.⁴

This passage suggests that Cranston attempted, at the age of 11, to re-define the boundaries of the range of social practices which were expected for a boy involved in figure skating. Cranston reveals that even this early on in his career, he was acutely aware of his capacity to construct difference, as a form of stylization, in his social practices, set against the historical orders of discourse which informed the practice of figure skating, even within a competition for youth. The fact that he both “interested” and “irritated”

onlookers indicates that aspects of his stylization were neither uniformly rejected nor accepted by the figure skating community at that time.

Cranston recounts similar rhetoric at a later competition.

I wasn't always a victim. Often I invited controversy. I was uninhibited in a day when lack of inhibition was virtually unknown: uninhibited in interpretation, original moves, and body language – which I felt was inherently neither male or female. In the days when men dressed up as maître d's, skated their long programs in shirts, ties, and tiny matador jackets, were not allowed to raise their hands above their shoulders, I was a renegade. I invented beads on men's costumes. I invented décolleté. Everything I did was new, different and shocking to the Old Guard, and I was punished for it.⁵

There are several points to consider from this passage. Cranston utilizes several tactics to accentuate differences between himself and his competitors. One tactic prevalent in this passage, defined by Richardson, includes naming and reference strategies. This technique involves the selection of particular “identities, roles, and characteristics that could be used to describe us equally accurately, but not with the same meaning.”⁶ This technique identifies not simply the groups to which social actors belong, but also the groups that Cranston seeks to identify them with. In this case, Cranston finds it useful to foreground his uniqueness by contrasting his sense of self against an invented, single, homogenized group of male figure skaters who dress alike and all perform similar programs. He adds depth to this comparison through an analogy by identifying the skating apparel of other men to resemble a maître d, implicating these men as subservient actors. In the latter portion of this sentence, the passive voice of the verb ‘allowed’ is used, “the men were not allowed” which invokes the idea that the powerful social actors in figure skating are not the skaters themselves, but discourse which influenced stylistic conformity on all male skaters, who obeyed, except Cranston. By contrast, Cranston uses

the pronoun “I” and the active participles of verbs, “I *invited* [...] I *invented* [...] I *invented* [...]” (italics mine) to repeat and reinforce his own agency and status as a stylistic innovator. It becomes evident that both bodily motility, as well as aspects of costumes, were heavily regulated aspects of skating with respect to gender. Males were discouraged from raising their hands “above their shoulders” because this manner of presentation, while accepted during the mid-19th century, had become characteristic of femininity by the time Cranston entered competition. However, the claims Cranston makes re-work the history of figure skating as described by Adams in the prior chapter. While Cranston undoubtedly brought novel aspects of stylization to skating, he ignores (perhaps unintentionally) the era of figure skating in which men regularly practiced motility patterns that emphasized gracefulness through, for example, large sweeping arm movements. Cranston instead draws upon the style of his most immediate predecessors. While this allows him to take more credit in his claims to his own uniqueness, it is an example of the selective insertion of histories into a text, where, in this case, the history of figure skating is modified, or re-worked, to fit the producer’s (Cranston’s) motives.⁷

Although Cranston's figure skating career had become a newsworthy item, figure skating, in general, received a relatively small amount of space in the sports sections of newspapers. Newspaper coverage across Cranston's career served to provide ongoing reports over several days for each event, in order to foster anticipation for final results. At the 1973 World Championships, Cranston's win in the compulsory short program was featured as the headlining article in the sports section of the *Globe and Mail*.⁸ His performance, referred to as a "dazzling display," was featured as the headline. In the second paragraph, often used to identify the key actors in newspaper reports, Cranston is introduced as a "23 year old artist."⁹ While this article intends to cover the World Championships, references to Cranston's career as a painter are often inserted into media coverage on his competitive efforts. While fellow Canadian, Ron Shaver, was ranked only one place behind Cranston after the compulsory skate in 1973, the crowd reaction to each skater is represented differently based on the reporter's foregrounding of select criteria to represent each performance. For Shaver, "the crowd reacted favourably to his superb technical ability in jumping,"¹⁰ while Cranston "was the favourite of the crowd, which rose to him, clapping and roaring in expectation after watching his warmup."¹¹ Despite skating "superbly," information on Shaver's participation in the event is secondary to details surrounding Cranston's. The bulk of the article focuses on the unique style of Cranston. The article, suggests then, that technical ability, foregrounded as the primary strength of Shaver's performance, was less significant than Cranston's artistic originality. Shaver was received "favourably," while Cranston was the "favourite."¹² The construction of this media-facilitated dichotomy between artistry and athleticism in figure skating has historically conflated 'artistry' with the feminine domain, and 'athleticism' or

'jumping ability' with the masculine domain. This in part, explains why Cranston's style receives more attention for being original, if not obtuse, compared to other aspects of his skating, and the more conventional skating of Shaver. However, Cranston, like Shaver, also possessed a world-class level of technical proficiency. This aspect of Cranston's skating consistently receives less coverage and attention:

True to form, he produced a program of dazzling elements executing with skill and beauty a triple salchow, double toe loop, double sit spin, and an artistic variation of a sit spin. He completed his two minutes without a fault, demonstrating his unique interpretation of skating.

While the difficult triple salchow, which involves spinning three times in the air before landing, received a huge response, his performance was highlighted by the sit spin during which he curved his body almost out of proportion at high speed.¹³

The technical elements of the performance are not simply listed in the first paragraph; they are accompanied by descriptors, such as 'beauty' and 'dazzling' that moderate his performance. In the second paragraph above, Cranston's technical ability is once again selectively downplayed. The beginning of the sentence briefly describes the difficulty involved in executing a salchow, but defers to a singular highlight of the performance, a variation on a sit spin. An appeal to the authority of one judge quoted in the article amplifies this viewpoint of Cranston as "artistically superb" and "totally original," concluding that "his approach is wonderful."¹⁴ The same judge claims that, "He is the one man who has at last combined sport and art in skating."¹⁵ This claim infers that the marriage between sport and art has occurred "at last," implying that such a combination is tenuous, and had successfully been achieved for the first time. Figure skating was consistently represented as an aristocratic, artistic pursuit during a phase in the mid-19th century. Evidently, the aristocratic roots of figure skating, described by Adams in chapter 1, had been severed from this more contemporary version of figure skating history by the

time Cranston actively competed. A century later, the discourses surrounding the practice of figure skating had shifted significantly. Artistry no longer detonated the same set of meanings as it once did during the mid-19th century, and instead had become feminized. Men who exhibited artistic inclinations were stereotyped as effeminate (a point which I will return to later).

Cranston received significant attention on the national circuit for winning his first Canadian men's championship in 1971. Cranston's participation in the men's event is foregrounded by the headline, "Cranston wins men's figure-skating crown."¹⁶ The opening sentence, "A novel approach to free-skating paid off for 21-year-old Toller Cranston..." defines the oft-repeated details which continuously shaped his career in news daily coverage. The article follows a pattern typically used to cover figure skating and other sports, then offering details on the scoring for the event, mentioning that Cranston received the highest marks for artistic merit ever awarded to a skater. After the article summarizes the scoring for all events, two brief quotes from Cranston, following the event, are included. While it is unknown specifically what he was asked to comment on, the quotations infer that he was asked to speak about some aspect of his free-skating style, "'My free-skating approach is not always acceptable,' he said. 'It's different and a lot of people don't like it'."¹⁷ From this quote, Cranston conflates what is "not always acceptable" with "difference." Neither the quotation nor the article explains precisely what it is about Cranston that an unidentified public finds disagreeable about his style. Newspaper readers are left to make assumptions based on the coherence and overall meaning of this article, the accumulated effect of prior articles on readers, and their own knowledge about Cranston.. Cranston deliberately sought to de-stabilize notions of

hegemonic masculinity through his performances. However, if such a statement was included from a journalist at this time, it would likely be considered contentious. The relationship between the then-existing orders of discourse which implicitly structured what could (or could not) be stated about male athletes in the news, to the readers, acted to limit the parameters of what could have been newsworthy. An at-length discussion of the more nuanced points of Cranston's style would be inexpressible within the logic of the sports pages. As a result, male athletic pursuits that did not act to reinforce notions of hegemonic masculinity, such as figure skating, were 'made to fit' the parameters of sports journalism. Details about Cranston that could not fit or support these parameters were omitted, treated in a circumlocutory manner, or marginalized.

The *Globe and Mail* invites readers to dichotomize painting in opposition to skating through the public persona of Cranston. In the article entitled, "*Cranston faces art or ice choice*," Cranston discusses the central, yet dissident, tenets of his stated artistic practices, both in painting and skating. In the article, these two activities are dichotomized as competing, incompatible facets of Cranston's identity, which he must choose between: "Toller Cranston will soon have to make a decision-skate or paint."¹⁸ With further reading, however, it becomes clear that this representation of the two non-negotiable activities was an embellishment to attract the attention of readers. The exclusivity of the two activities becomes muddled further into the article. While admitting he intended to skate in the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, Cranston stated that his painting was used as a means to fund his skating. He identifies the similarities between both activities, describing skating performances, as a "form of great art" and

contrasting this to the material endurance of painting, “you create something eternally. It’s a lasting thing.”¹⁹

By juxtaposing these quotations, which indicate that Cranston is drawn to each of these activities on the grounds of artistic expression, Cranston is distanced from an athletic persona. His noted preference to frame his skating as an art form, opposed to a sport, distances his public persona from athletic contexts. This indirectly distances figure skating from sport, rendering it an art since these entities are suggested to be incompatible in the narrative of the article. In Adams’ discussion of effeminacy in men’s dance, mainstream discourses of popular culture construct art (in various mediums) at a feminized end of the “spectrum” of masculinity, while sport is positioned as a masculinizing “opposite.”²⁰ While sport for men was seen as a socializing agent that developed desirable qualities in men in accord with hegemonic masculinity, artistic pursuits stood in opposition to this hegemony. Interest in producing music, art, and dance invoked discomfort as such practices were considered to foster subordinated masculinities.

In research locating masculinity in dance, Burt explores the relationship between the historical forms of prejudice directed towards male dancers and the contemporary consequences of these attitudes.²¹ Burt argues this prejudice has resulted in hyper-masculine performances by men to distance themselves from notions of effeminacy, which is frequently conflated with homosexuality. Burt argues that the visibility of the male dancer provokes unease in reference to the universal male spectator. This phenomenon is rooted in 19th century attitudes surrounding the visibility of gendered bodies. During this time, it became increasingly naturalized to refrain from directing

attention to male bodies as spectacle. As a result, male bodies on display, such as in dance, were “nervously dismissed.”²² This relative invisibility and lack of inquiry surrounding male bodies, beyond the realm of dance alone, also contributed to a poverty of language with reference to men’s bodies in performance.²³ A similar trend occurs in accounts of Cranston’s stylization. This unease is evident in descriptions of Cranston’s routines foregrounding the controversial aspects of his skating, without explicitly addressing precisely what is controversial about the aesthetics of his performance.

According to Butler, gender is a performative act, which is rehearsed and repeatedly actualized through individual social actors within existing discourse.²⁴ Through the body, a social actor may perform one’s gender according to a structured range of possibilities; “Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally constructed corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.”²⁵

Journalists of the *Globe and Mail* interpret Cranston’s performances outside of the confines of this normalized corporeal space. The commentary on his skating is reactive, in that it draws a comparison between Cranston and the existing coherent and relatively stable discourses structuring male skating practices. Like Burt argues through Butler in the case of dance, masculinity is performed as, “a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes.”²⁶ The manner in which Cranston deploys his body in performance, invites audiences to view his body in the domain of the non-masculine and

of theatrical spectacle, and therefore contravenes the established discourse surrounding gendered bodies.

Direct commentary on figure skating's significance within the hierarchy of sport journalism in the *Globe and Mail* surfaces in the "Letters to the Editor" section of the publication,

This last weekend, an exciting and interesting event took place in London, Ont., when Toller Cranston won the men's skating championship with unprecedented high scores. It was disappointing to have to wade through an American football game, numerous hockey stories and stories of other events of limited interest to reach a story near the back of the *Globe's* sports section about the skating championships. It was even more disappointing not to find one picture of these deserving young people, even though we were treated to the usual assortment of hockey pictures.²⁷

In Richardson's discussion of the dialectical relationships between newspaper producers and their readership, it is argued that a predictable and stable degree of trust is forged between the papers and their regular audience. This aids in prioritizing certain events as newsworthy and assumes a particular demographic reads certain portions of a paper. Within the sports pages of the *Globe and Mail*, this reader summarizes the hierarchical organization of sporting events according to what the paper deems most newsworthy. Not only is it observed that the volume of coverage on hockey is greater, but is also organized to be read before figure skating. This reader also objects to coverage on a foreign event, "an American football game," which suggests that the publication has a significant number of readers that are most interested in hockey and football, regardless of the nationality of the players. Richardson notes that only some letters to the editor are selected for publication. These selected letters communicate information about the identity of the newspaper, and serve as a site for reinforcing or

resisting this identity.²⁸ In this example, the reader's response foregrounds a neglected demographic within the paper, which editorial staff seek to reintegrate.

As McGarry noted, Canadian figure skating draws a majority female audience and those involved in the televised production of skating covertly consider it a "women's" spectator sport.²⁹ The historical domain of sport as the masculine informs the layout of the *Globe and Mail* sports section, determining not only the location of articles on figure skating, but the amount of coverage the sport receives. As a "women's" sport, coverage on figure skating is less prominently featured within the sports section in comparison to other sports.

Cranston is at times used as a figurehead to foreground the less athletic aspects of figure skating. At the conclusion of the 1972 Winter Olympic Games, an article featuring Cranston and the contentious headline, "Skating '*expensive joke*': Cranston" appeared as the front page article in the sports section.³⁰ The phrase "expensive joke" is emphasized through repetition, not only appearing in the headline, but also in the photo caption, and in the text of the article. By the phrase, "expensive joke," Cranston meant to define judging for a past event as questionable, if not overtly unfair. However, the context is not clarified until the midpoint of the article. Instead, the first seven paragraphs manipulate this quote, claiming only "a fool" would take skating seriously. According to the journalist, the joke involves "skaters who spend unceasing time and money in the vague hope that "sometimes the Gods may be in our favor"."³¹

The article's contents frames the direct quotes from the skater to represent a particular meaning. Phrases accompanying such quotations including, "he *meant*,"

“spoke frankly,” “his candid view,” and *“Cranston hinted”* all impose meaning on Cranston’s quotations to shift the newsworthy focus of the article from the skater’s 11th place finish at the Winter Games to Cranston’s role as an outspoken critic of the judging system.

The response garnered by this article highlights Cranston’s comments as failing to remain within the acceptable margins of a high-profile sportsperson. Appearing in the “Letters to the Editor” section the subsequent day, Cranston was sarcastically ridiculed as “an art critic for the sports pages.”³² Not only does this communicate dissatisfaction with his prior comments, but invites a series of criticisms involving his performance at the Olympic Games. Harold Town refers to Cranston’s “bruised little post-Olympic ego,” and a performance that was “strictly chicken soup.”³³ Finally the respondent states, “I wish I would reply by referring to him as Canada’s little Barbara Ann Scott but this would be an insult to Barbara Ann as she is a great champion and a credit to our country.”³⁴

This comparison between Cranston and Scott not only critiques his figure skating performance, but provides insight into his failure to conform to several theoretical tenets underlying the significance of the male athlete. First, the comparison to a female, generally portrayed as an inferior type of athlete, is meant to demote his gender and status as a male athlete. Second, by using the modifier’s “Canada’s little” in front of Barbara Ann Scott, the author foregrounds Scott’s position as a nationally-acclaimed, feminized skater to emphasize precisely what the author assumes Cranston is not. The adjective “little” in particular emphasizes the femininity entangled in discourse surrounding figure skating. The sentence continues with the clause, “but this would be an

insult to Barbara Ann” who, by contrast, is portrayed as a national “credit” and “great champion.” This emphasizes the reader’s contrasting opinion of Cranston as an inadequate model in terms of athletic accomplishments, masculinity, symbolic value to the nation.

Journalists repeatedly compare Cranston’s performances to dance, specifically, ballet. According to one account, Cranston exhibited the “grace and ease of a ballet dancer” to win his third Canadian figure skating title.³⁵ In another account the *Globe and Mail*, draws an analogy between Cranston and the notorious ballet dancer, Rudolf Nureyev: “His dramatic presence combines with an imaginative choreography and solid technique that Rudolf Nureyev makes from the ballet stage.”³⁶ Nureyev, internationally acclaimed as a revolutionary dancer active during the 1960s-80s, had a significant impact on the role of the male dancer in ballet. In prior decades, female dancers often subsumed the roles of male characters in ballet, or the role of the male dancers predominately functioned to present and highlight the role of female lead dancers. Nureyev’s stardom, which extends beyond the reaches of the ballet community, rested in his popularization of the male body as an object of admiration in dance. The comparison between figure skating and ballet may disclose a lack of expertise and technical vocabulary on the reporter’s part when covering the skating. Even without this technical vocabulary, the reporter draws on knowledge of culturally-scripted discourses surrounding corporeality and patterns of stylization in dance. These pre-conceived corporeal patterns within ballet, to the reporter, are closest to the movement patterns Cranston displays in this performances. The overall impression left from articles which include these comparisons to ballet favourably describe Cranston.

Among the distribution of articles within the sports section, certain columnists regularly attempt to project humorous slants on current events. The opinions and viewpoints of the journalists writing these articles tended to be more transparent and may take precedence over truth claims. One such journalist is Dick Beddoes, whose regular column attempted to reflect his personal impression of newsworthy events. In Beddoes' report on the 1973 Sports Writers and Sportscasters Dinner,

Toller Cranston-Canada's champion figure skater, male section-spoke about painting. Not houses, canvas. His latest work is The Great Strawberry Queen, a \$1,500 collector's item. "It's a queen painted in the form of strawberries. Zillions of strawberries. It's meant to represent the decadence of the age." Ron Andrews, the eminent NHL statistician, was listening, "any whipped cream on those strawberries?" he asked. "No," Cranston said. Someone asked Cranston about the hardest jump he attempts in free skating. "Oh," Cranston explained. "That's a triple salchow with a double cherry flip." "That," Andrews said, "also sounds like something that would be good with whipped cream."³⁷

First, Beddoes identifies Cranston as part of the "male section" of figure skating. The bulk of the article, devoted to identifying notable NHL players and coaches from an all-male contingent, does not identify any other athlete by gender. In no other section of the article is an athlete quoted or interrogated about non-athletic pursuits. The reporter assumes that the readers of the sports section, at the mention of the word 'painting,' would not associate the word with art. Subsequently, a second speaker interrupts the dialogue-based description of his latest artistic project within the text. This speaker is identified as a "NHL statistician," a seemingly irrelevant detail in reference to a figure skater. This reference is made within the text to position Ron Andrews not only as an authority on an ice sport, but an expert on a sport that is more thoroughly covered in the *Globe and Mail* and followed by a significantly male contingent. Andrews' comedic tone, emanating in this narrative as a voice of authority, is used to diminish the seriousness of Cranston and figure skating amongst the

other sports discussed in the article. Cranston responds to Andrews in similar comedic terms, “a salchow with a double cherry flip.”³⁸ However, Andrews is allowed the last comment within the text as a punch line, reaffirming his authoritative status at the expense of Cranston. This punch line trivializes the “most difficult jump” of figure skating. By utilizing different tactics to report on Cranston, including diminishing the difficulty of his skating, foregrounding his painting, and his inferior position amongst NHL players, Cranston is constructed in contrast to the normalized hegemonic masculinities represented through the other actors in the article.

At points, however, Cranston’s choreography is criticized with respect to the underpinnings of effeminacy. In the following excerpt covering the Canadian Championships in 1975, one performance is considered lackluster for reasons hinting at effeminacy; “Some of the choreography seemed cluttered. Often his exaggerated hand and arm movements seemed fussy rather than beautiful. They seemed to break the mood he was trying to create.”³⁹ Particularly, Cranston’s upper-body movements are deemed “fussy” and “exaggerated.” While readers cannot decipher (from the text) the precise repertoire of movements Cranston performed because none are identified, these qualities are understood to be detrimental attributes for a figure skating routine. While the classification of certain physical gestures is a matter of subjective preference, these criticisms in part stem from the historical and traditional practices of men’s figure skating. As Burt argues, these historical practices signify the cultural value and meanings assigned to a vocabulary of physical postures.⁴⁰ By doing so, postures and movement patterns are conflated with notions of gender, where patterns within the historical vocabulary reaffirm the hegemonic order of gender, and patterns outside of this vocabulary are deemed subversive. Male figure skaters

prior to Cranston, as he notes in his autobiography, regularly presented unmoving, stiff upper-bodies during performances. These movement patterns convey notions of emotional restraint, self-control and discipline, which was favorably associated with the culturally ideal notion of hegemonic masculinity during this era. By contrast, ornate patterns that emphasize flowing lines of the male upper-body, opposed to rigidity, convey notions historically associated with femininity, including emotional excess, sensitivity, and fragility. The display of these movement patterns by a male conflated and entangled the culturally-informed dichotomies of gender. Cranston's performance failed to neatly conform within the appropriate range of masculinity within the discourse of figure skating.

The article concedes that while the program was both "ambitious" and contained many of his "well-known artistic trademarks," it lacked "electricity," "excitement," and was "anti-climatic."⁴¹ The author also attributes the negative aspects of this performance to the musical selection: "Perhaps it was his choice of music, a slow, pensive, medley from Prokoflev's Cinderella suite which he says requires the audience to listen rather than feel and be thrilled."⁴² Once again, the identification of his music, "*Cinderella Suite*," which is associated with a female protagonist, would more likely be selected as the vehicle for a female figure skater's routine. The criticisms associated with his choreography and music acknowledge that the program failed to excite or thrill audiences. No mention is made of the number of triples, or the athletically-demanding elements that are regularly recounted as the highlights for audiences.

Several scholars have discussed the role of sport as a vehicle for circulating masculinist imagery with respect to national identity. The Olympic Games and other highly-visible mega-events serve as symbolic testing grounds, where the measure of a nation is

determined by the performance of its team. While the relationship constructed in the press between the national public and its athletes is usually a supportive one, mixed sentiments emerged within the coverage of a column on the 1976 Innsbruck Games. While the following article made contentious claims, it also brought to light several gendered stereotypes inundated with skating, veiled as satire.

We should all bring flowers for Toller Cranston when he takes to the ice here tomorrow night, to honour him the way that figure skaters understand-with genteel understatement and a spray of petals. And we should do it before he begins to skate.

As he takes off his skate guards and puts them on the edge of the boards, we should stand in silence and wave our flowers and tell him: "We're with you baby; we're with you."

We should do it because Cranston skates best to a warm and giving crowd and because he makes his sport exciting and, most of all, because he will need a little edge if he is going to win that gold medal.

And Cranston wants that medal, perhaps, more than ever before.

Yesterday, when he won the short program section of the three-part event, he was magnificent. For about two minutes, he made the ice his own, carving his initials on the surface as surely as lovers do on trees. He kicked his legs high and threw the length of himself into jumps which had respectable height, then curled into fetal positions, then sprang back into jumps.

In the stands at the ice stadium here, men who do not understand Toller Cranston, who think his type of skating effete and non-athletic, men who make jokes about figure skating, suddenly understood, just for a time.

The understanding probably will not last, and the jokes are on the tongue tips, but for almost two minutes, Toller Cranston had the strangers understanding, and with him.

And when he finished, they cheered him. Besides the skating only looks effete. In the pictures, you can see the neck muscles straining and fighting, you can see that the smile is not coming easy, that it hurts.

And you can see that Toller Cranston wants it.⁴³

The opening paragraphs satirically endorses the stereotype of effeminacy by poking fun at Cranston's elements and suggesting that the public should show support in an unusual

manner. It was acknowledged that men, not people in general, are apparently unable to appreciate skating. However, this journalist concedes that Cranston's performance was potentially convincing enough to rupture the tenets shaping skating and masculinity, albeit temporarily. During this performance, men were to have finally 'understood' skating and the performance of Cranston was then unanimously celebrated. This event was portrayed as a transformative moment in the history of figure skating, due to 'normal' men supposedly endorsing a subordinated form of masculinity. However, the clauses used by this journalist suggest that skating was being celebrated despite, not because of, the effete stereotypes. For example, in the end of the passage, the journalist claims that "skating only looks effete," which suggests that the superficial image of skating misleads audiences from the real essence of the sport. While it is suggested that 'everyone' can support skating, it is implied that audiences must tolerate, or overlook effeminacy as an undesirable facet of the sport.

Summary

While Cranston achieved a high level of success as a figure skater, the strategies that journalists used to cover his career reveal much about discourse ordering sport and gendered practices at this time in Canada. Regardless of whether journalists praised or criticized his performances, Cranston's programs were foregrounded as strikingly different from his contemporaries. However, figure skating made up a relatively nominal portion of the sports section in the *Globe and Mail* at this time. While part of this may reflect the size of the Canadian fan base of figure skating, reporting tactics also suggest that figure skating was considered less of a sport, and less important than other activities that were covered in this section. This may also explain why some journalists lacked a technical vocabulary to describe performances beyond triple and double jumps. Journalists stated that Cranston was

stylistically different from his contemporaries, but the discourse surrounding journalism limited discussion on the particularities of these differences. However, the disproportionate amount of coverage focusing on Cranston as a visual artist, as well as certain details concerning his choice of music and choreography, elliptically portrayed Cranston as effeminate. Additionally, audiences may have gleaned many visual details about his performances through television, that need not be explained through newspaper journalism. Finally, the cumulative of these articles, as discursive events shaped particular aspects of identity with respect to manhood. Cranston was not easily constructed as an athlete who demonstrated the necessary requisites of hegemonic masculinity, and his image Cranston was not constructed as analogous to a portrait of Canadian nationalism, which is the case with other successful male athletes. Instead, Cranston was constructed to appear unusual, obtuse, sexually ambiguous, and thus antithetical to an ideal version of a heterosexually-informed Canadian identity.

End Notes

¹ Toller Cranston, *When Hell Freezes Over, Should I Bring My Skates?* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2000), 48.

² Karen A. McGarry, "Performing Nationalisms," 121.

³ Toller Cranston and Martha L. Kimball, *Zero Tolerance: an intimate memoir by the man who revolutionized figure skating* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1997), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶ John E. Richardson, *Analyzing Newspapers*, 49.

⁷ Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 102.

⁸ "Cranston's dazzling display wins compulsory free skating," *The Globe and Mail*, March 3, 1973, 43.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Cranston wins men's figure skating crown," *The Globe and Mail*, January 25, 1971, 20.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "Cranston faces art or ice choice," *The Globe and Mail*, February 3, 1971, 29.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mary Louise Adams, "'Death to the Prancing Prince': Effeminacy, Sport Discourses and the Salvation of Men's Dancing," *Body & Society* 11, no. 4 (December 2005): 64.

²¹ Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacles, Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 11.

²² Ibid., 12.

²³ Ibid., 27.

²⁴ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: an Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 277.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 178.

²⁷ Barbara A. Carter, "Skating championships," *The Globe and Mail*, January 20, 1972, 06.

²⁸ Richardson, "Analyzing Newspapers," 149.

²⁹ Karen A. McGarry, "Performing Nationalisms: Spectacle and Identity in High Performance Canadian Figure Skating" (PhD. diss., York University, 2003), 155-56.

³⁰ Dick Beddoes, "Skating 'expensive joke': Cranston," *The Globe and Mail*, February 14, 1972, S01.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Sport's Editor's Mailbox," *The Globe and Mail*, February 16, 1972, 32.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ "Toronto's Patty Welsh takes junior women's figure-skating title," *The Globe and Mail*, January 20, 1973, 39.

³⁶ "Flawless program gives Curry title, Cranston fourth," *The Globe and Mail*, March 5, 1976, 32.

³⁷ Dick Beddoes, "Fans discuss hockey, horses and The Great Strawberry Queen," *The Globe and Mail*, February 9, 1973.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Nora McCabe, "Cranston, Nightingale retain titles, but without brilliance," *The Globe and Mail*, February 3, 1975, S07.

⁴⁰ Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 12.

⁴¹ McCabe, "Cranston, Nightingale retain titles," S07.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Christie Blatchford, "Christie Blatchford," *The Globe and Mail*, February 10, 1976, 36.

CHAPTER THREE

Straightening Skating: Narratives of Kurt Browning

During the Olympic Games in 1994, the *Globe and Mail* decried Kurt Browning a “fallen hero” of the Lillehammer Games.¹ Keeping with the metaphor of Browning slain in a competitive battle, a monolithic “Canadian skating” public was declared to be “openly grieving” a national loss after Browning stumbled during his opening program.² The graphic nature of this hyperbole precisely gauges how Canadian media outlets depicted Browning’s quest for a gold medal as instrumental within the nationalistic context of the Canada’s performance at the Olympic Games.

Despite his failure to medal at any Olympic Games, Browning captured tremendous public interest throughout his career. Known for highly entertaining performances, Browning achieved an impressive level of success in figure skating that few skaters have equaled. Browning won four World Championship titles in 1989-91, and 1993, in addition to four Canadian titles during the same years. Browning gained a dedicated following and was firmly embraced by Canadian media outlets. However, it was more than Browning’s competitive accolades that propelled him from being a singularly successful athlete to becoming a household name. Browning was more than simply a talented skater; he possessed all of the necessary characteristics to weave a persona nearly inseparable from an ideal portrait of Canadian identity. While Browning actively endorsed and contributed to some aspects of these representations, some were circulated independently of his agency. So invested was the media in framing Kurt as the modest, articulate, and charismatic hero, that even his competitive shortcomings could

not tarnish his image. In fact, such failures only worked to strengthen the media's bond to Browning. Through narratives of sympathy, which cast Browning as an earnest and courageous athlete, he was promptly forgiven and defended by media as an exemplary model of Canadian sporting heroism. The end of Browning's amateur career, to journalists, marked the end of an era in figure skating during which Browning was credited with salvaging the reputation of figure skating by eliminating the "stereotype of effeminate male skaters" plaguing the sport.³

This chapter analyzes the above-mentioned 'era' of masculinity and figure skating, looking at both general ideas about masculinity depicted within orders of discourse at the time, as well as the specific representations surrounding Browning's masculinity itself. Using Adam's work on masculinity and figure skating as a starting point, I unpack another part of the relationship between Browning and figure skating, while also showing how Browning capitalized on hegemonic notions of masculinity. Browning would not likely have achieved such notoriety if not for the oft-repeated narratives surrounding his upbringing, character, and skating stylization. In Browning's autobiography, *Kurt: Forcing the Edge*, and the *Globe and Mail* coverage of his career, the emphasis placed on Browning's upbringing and heritage is not coincidental, but aligns representations of Browning with specific cultural symbols of Canadian identity. An examination of these characteristics helps to explain Browning's ascendancy within media discourse. While Adams offers an explanation of Browning's popularity in terms of an enduring notion of hegemonic masculinity, a more complete examination of the culmination of discursive events surrounding his career is warranted.

Nationalism and Media

Several scholars have demonstrated that mass media outlets are powerful tools in the proliferation and circulation of nationalistic symbols. Benedict Anderson suggests that the development and wide circulation of print literature as a form of commodity played an instrumental role in constructing the concept of an imagined, yet collectively-shared, national consciousness.⁴ The standardization and relatively easy accessibility of newspapers acts to unify readerships as well as fostering and maintaining ideas about nationhood.⁵ Eric Hobsbawm's study of 20 century nationhood illustrates that print journalism, radio, and television play roles in "the ability of the mass media to make what were in effect national symbols part of the life of every individual."⁶ Mass media outlets exercise immense power to identify, configure, and regulate specific representations and symbols of nationalism in everyday life, though at the expense of others.⁷ Scholars have traced the symbolic function of figure skaters in circulating ideas about nationalism through mass media.⁸ Media outlets frame the success of Canadian athletes as evidence of the strength of Canada's nationhood.⁹ Additionally, symbols of nationhood are often represented, and equated with, desirable forms of masculinity. For this reason, media outlets are more likely to focus attention on successful, heterosexual male athletes. Kurt Browning, then, who fits the above criteria, is valorized in circulating messages concerning male virility both within Canada and internationally. McGarry notes that "Canadian male skaters must balance a fine line between an "acceptable" form of masculinity and "unacceptable" forms, the latter of which are increasingly equated with homosexuality."¹⁰

From the period in which Cranston competed, to the years in which Browning rose to prominence, significant political, cultural, and economic changes, altered the trajectory of figure skating in Canada. In 1980, David Dore was elected president of the CFSA (now Skate Canada). Prior to his office, the CFSA lacked sponsorship and marketing programs which heavily increased the operating budget of the organization several-fold. In 1980, the CFSA reportedly had an operating budget of \$2 million and \$275,000 in assets.¹¹ By the time Dore resigned in 2002, the operating budget had increased to \$17 million, and assets similarly rose to \$17 million. Dore successfully established several financing programs for skaters, including the *Athlete's Trust*, and the *Skating Event Trust* which financed elite-level figure skaters and competitions, in addition to the *National Team Program*.¹² Dore explained that he managed figure skating events as products which required "branding strategies" to sell to a consuming audience.¹³ This has led to a steady increase in televised hours of both live and taped figure skating coverage, as well as bidding wars between broadcast networks, such as CTV and CBC for broadcasting rights.¹⁴ At the same time, it fostered an international surge in figure skating interest, which increased the significance of Canadian athletes performing well on the international stage.¹⁵

While Browning's accomplishments highlight an outstanding talent and commitment to success, his celebrated status owes as much to his achievements as it does to the timely social discourses within which his career was situated. Browning rose to competitive success at a time when Canadian television networks competed for ISU and Olympic broadcast rights. Several Canadian figure skaters enjoyed international success during the 1980s, including, but not limited to, Brian Orser, Elizabeth Manley, Tracey Wilson and Rob McCall. During the

1988 Calgary Winter Games, Canadian figure skaters won medals in three out of four disciplines.¹⁶ The international success of skaters like these generated momentum in terms of public interest, drawing large audiences and attracting numerous sponsorships for televised events. By the time Brian Orser retired from his amateur career in 1988 following the Winter Games, Browning was positioned as one of the top-ranked skaters in the world.¹⁷ In this phase of his career, Browning remained outside of media scrutiny, which was, at the time, focused on Orser. Journalists frequently foregrounded details about Browning unrelated to the outcome of athletic competitions. Browning's career was situated within preconceived orders of discourse surrounding Canadian identity and character, which made his activities so compelling. One major narrative thread about Browning, which resonates with this discourse, concerned his family heritage and upbringing, which bound his identity to notions of Canadian nationhood.

Browning's autobiographical memoir proves an invaluable resource for insight into the construction of his public identity. In excerpts within *Kurt: Forcing the Edge*, entitled, "Other Voices", key figures in Browning's life provide commentary, including his parents, his coach, the CFSA director (David Dore), and Browning's agent (Kevin Albrecht). It is not by coincidence that the book is co-authored by the *Globe and Mail*, sports journalist, Neil Stevens, who often covered figure skating for the paper. Strategically released as a teaser before the 1992 Olympic Games, *Forcing the Edge* remained on the *Globe and Mail* National Bestseller List for several weeks in January, 1992.¹⁸

‘He’s One of Us’: Foregrounding Masculinity in Sports Journalism

As explored by Richardson, print journalists utilize naming and reference strategies to associate social actors with a preferred range of identities and characteristics.¹⁹ Since Browning became a model for Canadian athletes according to popular media, details concerning his representations largely circulated according to what Richardson calls, “the ideological square.”²⁰ According to this model, social actors who represent the symbolic underpinnings of the consumers and producers of texts are routinely emphasized in print for their positive characteristics. Shortcomings and negative attributes are de-emphasized or omitted. These representations of Browning, as “one of us,” function in this manner, becoming especially apparent at both the 1992 and 1994 Olympic Winter Games, which I will return to later. Browning’s international success, like many forms of athletics, is often circulated as a tool to produce ideas about Canadian nationalism. In 1991, several Canadian figure skaters, including Browning, won medals at the World Championships; these accomplishments indicated that “Canadian content was at an historic high.”²¹

In an article praising Browning as the “exuberant, well-spoken, handsome heir apparent to Brian Orser,” reporter Matthew Fischer postulated the “culture dominated by moderate, conservative values” has much to do with Browning’s diplomatic character.²² Newspaper coverage of competitive events on Kurt Browning most frequently introduced Browning’s father, Dewy, in paragraphs devoted to Kurt’s background. Despite the fact that both of Browning’s parents were significantly involved in his figure skating career, as mentioned in his autobiography, rarely was any mention of his mother present in the articles. Additionally, Browning’s father was introduced into coverage almost exclusively in relation to his career. Browning was frequently referred to as a “rancher’s son,” and “the son of a now retired

Alberta rancher and hunting guide.”²³ After Browning won his first Canadian title in 1989, he was referred to as “the son of a trail outfitter from Caroline, Alta.”²⁴ The effect of these strategic repetitions was two-fold. First, it firmly grounded Browning’s identity in the familial relationship between father and son. The textual erasure of the relationship between mother and son negated the possibility of Browning’s effacement. Additionally, the father-son relationship was more closely connotated with historical and culturally-specific ideas of Canadian nationhood than the mother-son relationship. The specific career choices of Browning’s father, while not elaborated on, were also historically linked to major components of dominant Canadian historical narratives. Physical labour, trapping, and hunting are more frequently portrayed as activities exemplifying rugged masculinities in historical narratives. Lawrence argues that, “Canadian national identity is deeply rooted in the notion of Canada as a vast, northern wilderness, the possession of which makes Canadians unique and “pure” of character.”²⁵ Likewise, Babe argues that “the bleakness of the Canadian landscape and the country’s inhospitable climate are often said to be of importance in configuring Canadian thought.”²⁶ Ranching is associated with notions of settling, controlling, and reaping resources from land. The inclusion of these details, of course, was irrelevant to Browning’s figure skating career. However, these details assisted in framing Browning’s image as an acceptable and authentic representation of Canadian masculinity. Adams, likewise, notes that male figure skaters must heavily compensate for participating in a feminine sport.²⁷ Connell has noted “hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power.”²⁸ Figure skating is seldom categorized by the *Globe and Mail* as exemplifying hegemonic masculinity, in part, because of this cultural ideal associating figure skating with femininity.

An article with similar themes appeared in pre-Olympic coverage leading up to the 1992 Games:

It's one of life's little anomalies that a rugged outdoorsman who made a living as a rodeo cowboy and hunting guide should sire a figure skater.

A rancher in the semi-wilderness of central Alberta, Dewey Browning taught his son to hunt and track wildlife, and how to skin beaver and muskrat. In his son's eyes, Dewey was like Matt Dillon, TV's marshal of Gunsmoke.

But Dewey Browning's son didn't follow in his footsteps. Instead of spurs on his heels, Kurt opted for picks on his toes.

Even the senior Browning was caught by surprise when young Kurt announced his intention to attend a summer figure-skating school.

'What?' Dewey asked, 'Why?'²⁹

In the opening passage, three ideas related to Dewey, rodeo, hunting, and the "rugged outdoors" were implied to be similar to each other, yet ideologically distant from figure skating. The article also insinuated that there is a biological, hereditary factor that influences the adoption of certain sports. As the article stated, it is supposedly anomalous that an outdoorsman would encourage a son to figure skate. The second paragraph established hegemonically-masculine credibility for Browning, proving through Kurt's repertoire of 'rugged' activities, such as skinning, tracking, and hunting animals. Once Browning's masculinity had been sufficiently established, it was then framed as a surprise that Browning would pursue skating. The latter half of the article circulated the most contentious claims about skating, involving sexuality, through direct quotation from Kurt,

"People would come up to my parents and say, 'Why are you spending all that money?'

Fairy skating, that's what they called it. You walked on your toes and wore girl's skates. But, hey, I'm making a good career out of it," Kurt says with a smile.

He isn't the stereotypical figure skater. In fact, not one of the world's top figure skaters today, he says, is stereotypical.

"The talk in our dressing room is geared towards what's in the other [women's] dressing room," Kurt says.

"People have a weird attitude toward figure skaters – they think we're all into quiet music and pastels. Before they stereotype us, they should realize we're dedicated athletes. It's not easy what we're doing."

In his recently published autobiography, he touches upon the issue of sexuality in the sport. He addresses innuendo that he went out of his way to present a macho image in posing for a photo shoot wearing cowboy boots.

Browning, who also writes in passing about girl friends, has drawn flak for even mentioning the subject of sex.³⁰

In the first portion of the passage, it was acknowledged that unidentified critics from Browning's youth deemed figure skating lessons to be a wasteful expenditure. The qualifier Browning used in the next statement explains that he faced criticism because he engaged in a girl's sport associated with toe pointing and fairies. Browning attempted to clarify that he was not a "stereotypical figure skater." Yet, Browning reinforced the construction of a version of this stereotype to draw a contrast between his identity and the stereotype. He represented this stereotypical 'other' through "quiet music and pastels." These two inanimate ideas bore symbolic weight and mobilized a stereotype involving a subordinated form of masculinity and notions of effeminess. Later in the passage, he states, "*Before they stereotype us, they should realize we're dedicated athletes.*"³¹ The assumption made here is that a logical incompatibility existed between athletes and the effeminate stereotype mentioned in the prior sentence. However, Browning's background was framed in a way that works to modify perceptions surrounding Browning's career. Using these strategies, the *Globe and Mail* can more readily endorse Browning's accomplishments as a successful athlete. This is one way in which Browning's

involvement in a traditionally-imagined, feminine sport did not disrupt, but restored an ideal image of masculinity for the sport.

Additionally, direct quotations from Browning's father appeared in narratives surrounding Kurt's background. In an article foreshadowing the 1989 World Championships, journalists introduced the now-familiar information on Dewey Browning and his career as a hunting guide.³² Used as a voice of heterosexual authority, Dewey Browning reveals that Kurt merely started figure skating because it "really helped his hockey" and allowed for Kurt to receive more ice time in small town Alberta.³³ This story is echoed in *Forcing the Edge* and ideologically connects Browning to hockey, asserting his heteromasculine image.

While Browning refers to Caroline, Alberta's "cowboy atmosphere;" the journalist offers a description of Caroline, Alberta, as "having image problems" and elaborates that,

[The decision to pursue figure skating] is not a move expected from a resident of Caroline, where bone-crunching sports such as hockey and rodeo are pre-eminent and most of the men drive pickup trucks and work as ranchers or in the oil fields.³⁴

The journalist also recounts an incident in which the Canadian Human Rights Commission accused a resident of Caroline, who headed a white-supremacy group, of spreading hate propaganda. While this perspective on Caroline is hardly positive, it associated Browning with a form of rugged, tough masculinity imagined as part of western Canada. Congruent with this depiction, the article was accompanied by two photographs. In one, Browning is performing a jump in competition. Beside this

photograph is an image of Browning in rancher's attire. The juxtaposition of these two photographs bound two seemingly disparate identities, but suggested that notions of effeminacy associated with skating could be moderated by the toughness of Caroline. In her exploration on the shaping of recent global masculinities, Connell notes that the "cult of frontier masculinity" has continued to figure prominently in relation to notions of North American hegemonic masculinity.³⁵

Both *Forcing the Edge* and print journalists repeatedly foregrounded Browning's childhood association with hockey. In the familiar narrative on his life history, Browning was often portrayed as a boy who took up figure skating to improve his hockey playing ability. Finally, Browning traded in his hockey skates permanently to embark on a figure skating career. When Browning's agent, Michael Jiranek, was mentioned in news discourse, journalists did not disregard the importance of mentioning that Jiranek was also Gretzky's agent. Perhaps this detail is one of the most pertinent for Browning's athletic credibility. In *Forcing the Edge*, Browning writes,

I want you to know I was a half-decent hockey player. I was fast and tricky. I could slide the puck between another player's legs, skate around him and be in the clear on a breakaway before the other team knew what was happening. I'd have played hockey day and night, given the chance. If we heard a rumour that a pond had been cleared we'd be off like a shot.³⁶

It is no coincidence that the chapter devoted to Browning's early years constructed a boyhood nearly inseparable from hockey. The rhetorical devices used in the chapter suggest that, to Browning, boyhood simply was hockey. This discourse was echoed across a great array of Canadian media, hockey novels, memoirs, and journalism and has been the subject of many analyses of Canadian identity.³⁷ Through such language, Browning

staked a claim in part of the nationally-imagined, shared experiences of Canadians, which made him seemingly accessible and knowable to the Canadian public.

Coverage in anticipation of the 1992 Olympic Games emphasized similar details in relation to Browning:

Figure skating has evolved subtly in recent years from artistic to aggressive. Browning, in fact, is like a hockey player on figure skates.

He's half looking forward to the day when he can hang up his figure skates and join a decent hockey league.

An avid hockey fan, Browning has been known to camp out overnight to buy playoff tickets and is honorary captain of the Edmonton Oilers.

He may not be Esa Tikkanen, but Browning does have an intense edge to his skating character.

"If I'm not aggressive, I usually don't skate well. If I'm tentative it really kills me."

It's not in his nature to be passive. Energetic, outgoing and witty, the 5-foot-7, 144-pounder loves fast cars and rock 'n' roll – everything from Sting to Motley Crue.

Basically, he's a typical 25-year-old.³⁸

Despite significant differences between figure skating and hockey, the similarities between both sports were repeatedly foregrounded in the above passage. The first two lines suggest, by use of the verb 'evolve,' that the stylistic shift in figure skating exemplified by Browning, was progressive and a well-regarded change, likening figure skating to hockey. By drawing comparison to a hockey player, ideas of aggression were ascribed to Browning's style. To reiterate this point later in the passage, he was described as naturally non-passive. By categorizing Browning as a devoted hockey fan, car enthusiast, and rock and roll fan, Browning was represented as possessing appropriately manly interests.

The article also emphasized the “physicality” of Browning’s 1989-90 program, labeling it, “the most technically loaded program in the history of figure skating.”³⁹ Browning’s physical competence was not only emphasized in the headline, but also within the photo caption, and the first twelve paragraphs of the article. Later on in the article, the concept of physicality was polarized as a heterosexual and masculine trait:

As for Browning, despite having created the most physically demanding program ever, he is disappointed that some people falsely conclude that, because he is a figure skater, he is gay.

‘I know that when I walk into a rink with a male friend people talk, but why do they question this? There is some homosexuality among hockey and football players and politicians, but that doesn’t seem to attract the same attention. There is a lot less homosexuality in figure skating than the public might think. You tell me in what other sport can a red-blooded boy be surrounded by girls?’

One of the reasons Barnett wanted to have Browning as a client, after watching him at the Calgary Olympics, was his potential to appeal to a wide range of sponsors.

‘He already creates a buzz before he skates,’ Barnett said. “The audience responds to him as if he is a rock star, so there is absolutely no need to emphasize the fact that he likes girls.”⁴⁰

In this passage, the journalist suggests that the execution of a physically demanding skating program should act as evidence to negate Browning as gay. Implicit in this statement is the assumption that gay male figure skaters would be either incapable, or unwilling to perform physically demanding programs. The apparent fitness and strength of Browning was repetitively brandished as an exclusive symbol of male heterosexuality. The journalist digresses to allow Browning’s quotation to make the most contentious claims about homosexuality and figure skating. Browning’s recognition of sexual stereotyping within his sport was made apparent through his assertion that skating was no different from other sports or professions. No direct criticism of homosexuality was offered within the article. However, sub-textually, Browning, and the journalist, did

not consider the 'gay' image of figure skating neither to be preferable nor inconsequential. Instead, the current image of the male figure skating community was problematized by using the word, "disappointed" to describe Browning's opinion and he actively attempted to distance the sport from connotations of homosexuality.

The latter two paragraphs in the above passage discussed Browning's marketability in direct relation to his heterosexual appeal. Barnett, Browning's agent, identified the Calgary Games, "where Browning drew shamelessly on his heritage [...] by skating to a rip-snortin' cowboy theme" as a vehicle for Browning to build a significant following.⁴¹ Barnett asserted that there is "no need" to state Browning is heterosexual because, in part, he was treated like a rock star. Here, the claim made by Barnett naturalized the link between culture and gender, as Browning's persona was portrayed to fit an exclusive category of heterosexuality that did not invite confusion. But at the same time, journalists felt it necessary to reproduce the insinuation, despite its 'obvious' nature.

Browning's autobiography expands upon his upbringing. In *Forcing the Edge*, renowned and rugged Canadian landscapes, nature, and the wilderness are tied to his formative years:

[...]I can sit on the porch and look straight ahead to the south, out beyond the pasture to where the spruce and poplars stand tall along the Clearwater River. To the right, I can see the Rocky Mountains, rising from the foothills against a brilliant sky. There is where I grew up, on a country road five miles outside Caroline, Alberta, population 389. This is the place I still think of as home.⁴²

In this passage, Browning mobilizes part of the discourse of dominant Canadian historical narratives. Landscapes are frequently utilized as symbolic markers of Canadian

heritage and are associated with a particular social memory, characteristic of the Canadian cultural imaginary. Browning weaves history into his lineage, describing how his great-grandfather logged and cleared the land, later to become the Browning homestead. He directly mobilizes references to pioneer and frontier culture of the American West, in which men sought to conquer unsettled land and escape the feminized society of the urban East.⁴³

The “Quad”

During the 1980s, a media-facilitated race focused upon which male figure skater would land the first quadruple jump in competition. Coverage on the “quad,” which built up anticipation for the event noted that even Olympic medalists such as Brian Orser and Brian Boitano had failed to complete the jump in competition. In February of 1988, the ISU instated new ruling which allowed judges to deduct marks for falls on jumps.⁴⁴ As a result, many top-ranked skaters removed the quadruple jump from their respective routines. However, the article mentioned that “dangerous” jumps, such as the quadruple, “[were] still a lure for younger skaters trying to attract attention.”⁴⁵ Such difficult jumps, including the quadruple, were referred to as “defying biomechanics,” “gravity-defying,” and, “once unheard of in figure skating.”⁴⁶ In describing the quadruple toe loop in this way, in lieu of focusing on many other possible elements, the *Globe and Mail* reiterated and facilitated the perception of the jump as a monumental and exciting element. This echoed the rhetoric used in other media accounts reported by Adams.⁴⁷ Those who attempted the jump were seen as brave risk-takers, while skaters such as Orser and Boitano “play[ed] it safe” by not including such maneuvers.⁴⁸ The jump has been called part of a “nothing-to-lose approach.”⁴⁹

To complete a jump with four revolutions, additionally, would widen the distance between men’s and women’s technical elements. For a sport laden, at this time, with insinuations of homosexuality, increasingly difficult technical elements were foregrounded textually as a symbolic marker of male athletic prowess in skating. Historically, both male and female skaters have performed jumps, and gradually increased the revolutions. For a variety of reasons, women have been close behind men in

terms of the number of revolutions in jumps. By the 1980s, an increasing number of triple jumps were being performed by a greater number of elite female skaters. Women were also beginning to perform these jumps in combination, narrowing the difference between men's and women's technical proficiency. In the same article addressing men and the quadruple jump, a spokesperson for the ISU also cited health reasons and unflattering falls as reasons to discourage women performing triple jumps:

The new rule is to discourage skaters – particularly women – from doing skills that are not in their capacity. [...] Because of the emphasis on triple jumps, women are trying them, but many of them aren't capable. The men are now up to triple axels, but the women just can't do them. And we are starting to see the injuries. [...] All the falls (particularly in women's events) aren't entertaining or enjoyable to a crowd.⁵⁰

While women have since proven capable of performing all of the triple jumps, the ideologies supporting this passage polarized the physical abilities of men and women, noted through the clauses suggesting impossibility, as women “just can't” and “aren't capable” of triple jumps. The narrowing of women's abilities functioned to emphasize the difficulty and prescriptively dictated how men and women should be presented.

The influence of the ISU, is at times mitigated by the power of sponsors and television networks that air figure skating events. Both national and international figure skating governing bodies earn substantial profits through televised competitions. Consequently, the direction that skating takes can be influenced by these audiences.⁵¹ In 1990, in a report musing on the disappearance of the school figure phase from competition, Canadian Figure Skating Association president, David Dore, states, “Television, which pays handsomely for the broadcast rights to skating competitions, had a hand in it’.”⁵² The statement underlines the assumption that audiences prefer

skating programs to tracing uniform figures (an event which largely was unaired).⁵³

Singular jumping feats function as spectacular, television-friendly phenomena that are easily recognized by audiences, and easily inserted into the production of sports journalism. By the time the race to complete the quadruple jump was underway during the late 1980s, figure skating coverage in Canada was generating “wads of cash for the CFSA and CTV from a bundle of sponsors plugging soup, chocolates, vitamins, watches and women’s deodorant.”⁵⁴

In 1988, Browning was declared “Orser’s successor” based on his completion of a triple Axel-double loop combination.⁵⁵ In 1988, Browning landed the first quadruple jump in sanctioned competition at the World Championships. The following day, front-page coverage of the event ran under the headline, “Canadian’s quadruple jump steals world skating spotlight.”⁵⁶ Despite finishing several places behind fellow Canadian Brian Orser, who skated “the performance of his life,” Browning’s quadruple toe-loop was foregrounded in coverage of the event.⁵⁷ Browning’s accomplishment, it was stated, would “add another Canadian chapter to the sport’s lore.”⁵⁸ This event would come to define Browning in future coverage. The following year, for example, the quadruple jump landed by Browning, “sent out a strong message” to Browning’s international competition foreshadowing the world championships.⁵⁹ Through the circulation of this detail, reports misleadingly attributed the quadruple jump to being one of the most significant elements for competitive success in men’s figure skating. As previously noted, however, the ISU discouraged such jumps in favor of well-rounded programs. Unlike elements of choreography, such as spins or footwork, the focus on the quadruple jump allowed Browning’s image to be textually congruent with a picture of hegemonic

masculinity. The omission of details related to other components of skating at which Browning excels, acted to deny the complexity and depth of figure skating performances. What is actually deemed newsworthy to journalists in this instance, was a uni-dimensional fraction of the totality of a figure skating performance.

The jump was so vigorously covered within newspaper accounts that even the absence of the quadruple jump was discussed at length in competitive highlights.⁶⁰ This was the case at the 1989 World Championships, where “the jewel of his figure skating performance” was attempted with imperfect results.⁶¹ Within the same article, the attempted quadruple jump was described as, “not executed cleanly,” “[...] his landing was imperfect” and “he appeared to land on both skates.”⁶² Pre-competition highlights frequently used the quadruple jump, or lack thereof, to categorize male skaters as “having it” or not. Those who possess the ability to land this jump in competition are portrayed as daring, brave, and courageous athletes. An article entitled, “Browning keeps his crown without trademark jump,” devoted most of its content to this header, including commentary about Browning and his coach’s feelings about attempting the jump.⁶³ According to the article, Browning won his second world title, “without having to use the biggest weapon in his arsenal.”⁶⁴

While Browning continued to collect accolades, little changed within the narratives supporting his public image. A half-page feature from 1991, opened with the familiar pre-ambule on Browning’s life: from the wilds, a pioneer in the “wild west sense”, son of a mountain man, a hockey player at heart (thus one of us):

Kurt Browning is a pioneer in the wild-west sense, pushing back the boundaries of excellence, testing his mettle on a set of gleaming blades.

this event as reported in the *Globe and Mail*, “followed so closely by shame and national introspection, led to a complete re-evaluation of Canadian attitudes toward sport.”⁶⁸ The results of the subsequent Dubin Inquiry advocated for the recognition of Canadian athletes for sporting excellence instead of intense pressure to win medals.⁶⁹ However, *Globe and Mail* journalists observed that Canadian media outlets facilitated a “win-at-all-costs, pressure-cooker atmosphere” as a strategy when covering Olympic events.⁷⁰ Such an attitude extended toward Browning, who was widely predicted to win the gold medal in the men’s event before the event started. A photograph of Browning with a caption observed that Browning faced, “huge pressure to win the men’s event,” which he was portrayed to handle effectively.⁷¹

However, Browning committed multiple errors in the short program of the 1992 Games, leading to a lower than expected placing. Browning’s performances at the games were not only evaluated against other figure skaters, but also inserted into a commentary depicting Canada’s team in nationalistic terms, “In an Olympics in which Canadians have been thumped at every turn with ski injuries, falls on the ice and freak accidents, [Browning’s fall] was another crushing blow to the pretense that Canada is a power in winter sport.”⁷² It is clear that the Winter Games were utilized as a symbolic marker of national reputation, based primarily on athletic outcomes instead of participation. Canadian athletes at the 1992 Games, based on this excerpt, failed to perform up to a pre-conceived standard representing Canada as a top-ranked nation. In the following days, the *Globe and Mail* penned Canadian athletes’ efforts as “a miserable opening week for Canada.”⁷³ The mistake committed by Browning, a fall on a jump combination, was foregrounded as the pivotal event symbolic of Canada’s failure. Although Browning was

penned as “Canada’s undisputed best hope for a gold medal”⁷⁴ before the event, his sixth place finish eliminated such hopes.

As a consequence, journalists who habitually praised Browning, primarily on the grounds of athletic prowess, instead foregrounded the desirably masculine components of Browning’s character in subsequent accounts of his performance. The narrative on Browning shifted from his quest to win gold to his sportsman-like behaviour while accepting defeat, “And when the bad day happened, he not only came out immediately to face the media, he refused interviewer Ron McLean’s offer of an excuse – recent inactivity due to injury.”⁷⁵ This selection of events allows journalists to salvage aspects of the narrative on national identity, which was in part, hinged upon Browning’s activities. In this article, Browning’s behaviour after the performance, instead of the performance itself, and his relationship to the media was foregrounded. By selectively crafting a narrative around Browning which attributed his mistakes to himself, and his apparent choice to conduct interviews, he was portrayed as a brave and responsible figure that “exhibited the kind of class, grace, and maturity that makes us proud to have him as a Canadian.”⁷⁶

When Browning made significant errors throughout his technical program and finished sixth, negative coverage classified Browning and other members of the Canadian Olympic team as “shockingly poor.”⁷⁷ To Canadian journalists, “Browning was all but conceded the gold.”⁷⁸ Other articles echoed this narrative:

But when a flag finally was thrown to the three-time world champion, it came from the crowd —attached to a crutch.

It was a graphic symbol for Browning and for the country's performance so far at these Games.⁷⁹

Alan Clark, head of CBC Sports was quoted as saying 'A lot of wind went out of everyone's sails when Kurt Browning [...] fell on Thursday. [...] 'There was a gasp and a kind of unified, 'Oh, no!''⁸⁰

While the newspapers attempt to reiterate the viewpoint of their audience, a portion of readers opposed reports suggesting Browning, as well as the Canadian Olympic team, performed in a disappointing manner.

Representation and Disruption

In the *Letters to the Editor* section, following the Olympic Games, a series of pieces from readers were published expressing disagreement with the viewpoints portrayed by the *Globe and Mail*. Readers labeled reporting as "smart-mouthed," "overall-bad taste," "sarcastic," and "disrespectful."⁸¹ In this instance, reporters failed to anticipate the value judgments of the audience with relation to support of Canadian athletes, especially with respect to the significant position of men's figure skating. Adams has noted that media narratives in television create dedicated followings for individual skaters, not simply top athletes.⁸² Responses in this portion defended Browning on the grounds of his competitive history and character:

He may not have won the gold medal that was endlessly predicted for him, but the fact that he is a three-time world figure skating champion is no mean feat.

Has it ever occurred to the Canadian media that the stress of Olympic competition is only increased by their constant harassment of our highest-ranked athletes?

The fact that he always conducted himself with grace and style, whatever the circumstance, says a good deal for his character —no fallen hero this, (sic) but an athlete in whom Canadians can take great pride.

What happened to reporter James Christie (Browning Blows Bid for Gold — Feb. 14)? Kurt Browning "sprawling hopelessly across the ice" indeed! This is not what I saw,

rather, a gallant young athlete proudly representing his country suffered a momentary mishap from which he recovered instantly like the champion he is.

If the press thinks [Canadian athletes] are “losers” maybe it should shoulder some blame, for surely such comments erode the team’s self esteem, so important in preventing choking.⁸³

In this instance, the *Globe and Mail’s* readership recognized, as Fairclough noted, that the properties of these texts possessed real implications in constructing knowledge. Several members of the readership suggested that the tone, metaphors, and word choice of journalists negatively impacted the athletes in question. Readers actively contested reporters’ foregrounding strategies that emphasized the errors made by Browning and other athletes. Through publishing these opinion letters, the paper reconfigured knowledge on the 1992 Games, and attempted to re-align the viewpoints of both the paper and its readership. Readers disagreed with the journalists’ approach to covering the 1992 Games, on the grounds that newspaper content had repeatedly depicted Canadian athletes as unsuccessful and worthy of dismissal. Despite Browning’s failure to fulfill nationalistic expectations, his public identity was repeatedly defended and subsequently protected by criticisms. Browning’s relatively stable reputation up until this point helped this cause. Another athlete may not have likely experienced the reversal of the media’s preliminary standpoint. In effect, the symbolic weight of Browning’s masculine character acted to uphold his constructed reputation.

The subsequent competitive year allowed the *Globe and Mail* and other Canadian media outlets with opportunity to capitalize on the budding rivalry between Browning and Elvis Stojko, who had become a major contender in international competition. When both skaters were scheduled to compete in the same events accounts foreshadowed the events as epic battles and duels, replete with violent imagery describing program

elements as “sets of weapons.”⁸⁴ When Browning and Stojko claimed the top two spots at the 1993 World Championships, the event was reported as a “one-two Canadian punch.”⁸⁵

Coverage of the 1994 Olympic Games in Lillehammer largely repeated the narratives of the 1992 Games, where Browning’s participation was foregrounded as the “final trial by fire in the heat of the Olympic flame.”⁸⁶ As with the 1992 Games in Albertville, Browning’s short program eliminated him from medal contention. This shortcoming was constructed sympathetically, unlike the 1992 Games coverage on Browning. Here, Browning’s mistakes were expressed in terms of tragedy for Canada:

The sight of him was heartbreaking.

Kurt Browning always carries himself with a bit of cowboy swagger, and exudes the same off-the-cuff charm that comes through so clearly in his skating.

To see him red-eyed and ashamed and shattered brought home just how cruel this sport can be.⁸⁷

Browning was described as a “fallen hero” while Canadian skating was said to be “grieving.”⁸⁸

“There was Browning in his third Olympics, suffering through an interview after Thursday’s technical program. He failed to complete two of the eight required elements and was 12th, meaning even if he won Saturday’s free skate he wouldn’t get a medal.”⁸⁹

After the men’s long program he was commemorated for “moving men’s skating into an era of athleticism and masculinity.”⁹⁰ David Dore, longtime director of the CFSA deemed him, “the best thing to ever happen to the CFSA.”⁹¹

Summary

A combination of his athleticism, hobbies, and family background positioned Browning more closely to an ideal masculinity than Canadian skaters preceding him. A concerted effort was made to insert Browning into nationalistic discourse. Browning’s

competitive shortcomings at both Olympic Games presented Browning in a way that threatened to disrupt his discursive position, accomplished through the introduction of hegemonic masculinity into skating. It is clear that journalists structured his image with respect to athletic accomplishments first, and then used additional, non-athletic criteria to consolidate these representations, such as his relationship to his hometown, family, and sexual orientation. However, this non-athletic criterion, combined with his competitive record, was substantial enough to sustain his public support despite his later shortcomings. In instances when Browning's mistakes were repeatedly emphasized, readers mobilized to reconfigure the production and interpretation as a part of these discursive events.

End Notes

¹ Stephen Brunt, "Browning a fallen hero once again," *The Globe and Mail*, February 18, 1994, C12.

² Ibid.

³ "Pulling the strings," *The Globe and Mail*, February 5, 1994, A20.

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 37-46.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 142.

⁷ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995), 113.

⁸ Roxane Lyn Fenton, "Circuits of Representation: Figure Skating and Cultural Meaning" (PhD diss., University of California, 2007); Ellen Kestnbaum, *Figure Skating & Cultural Meaning* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003); Karen Ann McGarry, "Performing Nationalisms: Spectacle and Identity in High Performance Canadian Figure Skating" (PhD diss., York University, 2003).

⁹ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identity and Cultural Politics* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1993); David Whitson and Richard Gruneau, eds., *Artificial Ice: Hockey, Culture, and Commerce* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006). Much of the scholarly work done on Canadian nationalism and sport involves hockey.

¹⁰ McGarry, "Performing Nationalisms," 162.

¹¹ Beverly Smith, "Smith: Dore's theatrics get recognized," *The Globe and Mail Blogs*, May 13, 2008, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/blogs/article684659.ece>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ P.J. Kwong, "Grand Prix Dilemma has no Easy Fix,"

<http://www.cbc.ca/sports/blogs/pjkwong/2010/11/grand-prix-dilemma-has-no-easy-fix.html>.

¹⁴ McGarry, *Performing Nationalisms*, 123.

¹⁵ Ibid., 136.

¹⁶ At the 1988 Olympic Games, Brian Orser won a silver medal in the men's event. Elizabeth Manley won a silver in the women's event. Tracey Wilson and Robert McCall won bronze medals in the ice dance event. Denise Benning and Lyndon Johnston finished 6th in the pairs event.

¹⁷ Mary Louise Adams, "To be an Ordinary Hero: Male Figure Skaters and the Ideology of Gender," in *Men and Masculinities*, ed. Tony Haddad (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1993), 174. Media portrayals of Brian Orser are briefly described within this work.

¹⁸ "The Globe and Mail national bestseller list," *The Globe and Mail*, January 11, 1992, C15.

¹⁹ Richardson, *Analyzing Newspapers*, 49.

²⁰ Ibid., 51.

²¹ Neil Stevens, "Canada shines on world stage," *The Globe and Mail*, March 18, 1991, C5.

²² Matthew Fisher, "Browning loads up technically for shot at gold," *The Globe and Mail*, January 30, 1989, D05.

²³ Mary Jollimore, "Browning's thinking clarified by accident," *The Globe and Mail*, February 7, 1990, A17.

Mary Jollimore, "Browning faces stiff challenge at national championships," *The Globe and Mail*, February 3, 1990, A18.

²⁴ Beverley Smith, "Browning proves cream of fresh crop," *The Globe and Mail*, February 13, 1989, D03.

²⁵ Bonita Lawrence, "Rewriting Histories of the Land: Colonization and Indigenous Resistance in Eastern Canada," in *Race, Space and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*, ed. S.H. Razack (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002), 23.

²⁶ Robert E. Babe, *Canadian Communication Thought: 10 Foundational Writers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 24.

²⁷ Adams, "To be an Ordinary Hero," 173.

²⁸ Connell, *Masculinities*, 78.

²⁹ Gary Loewen, "Figure skating lured Browning from tradition," *The Globe and Mail*, February 7, 1992, C14.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, emphasis added.

³² Matthew Fisher, "Browning loads up technically for shot at gold," D05.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ R.W. Connell, "The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World History," *Theory and Society* 22, no. 5 (October 1993): 611-12.

³⁶ Browning and Stevens, *Kurt: Forcing the Edge*, 5.

- ³⁷ See Whitson and Gruneau, *Artificial Ice*; Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*.
- ³⁸ Gary Loewen, "Browning anticipates joining hockey league," *The Globe and Mail*, February 7, 1992, C10.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Loewen, "Browning anticipates joining hockey," C10.
- ⁴² Browning and Stevens, *Kurt: Forcing the Edge*, 5.
- ⁴³ See Paul Nonnekes, *Northern Love: An Exploration of Canadian Masculinity* (Edmonton: AU Press, 2008); Robert E. Babe, *Canadian Communication Thought: 10 Foundational Writers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Sherrill E. Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North* (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002).
- ⁴⁴ Beverley Smith, "Quadruple quandary," *The Globe and Mail*, February 20, 1988, C03.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Adams, "To be an Ordinary Hero," 175.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ "Orser feels no pressure: worlds," *The Globe and Mail*, February 21, 1988, C07.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ McGarry, "Performing Nationalisms," 149.
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CHAPTER FOUR

‘Is Elvis Too Manly?’: Athletics, Aesthetics, and Masculinities

With three world championship titles, two Olympic silver medals, and seven Canadian National titles, Elvis Stojko has enjoyed a consistent and decorated career, propelling him to the status of a celebrity within Canadian popular consciousness. To say he managed to gain a following would be an understatement; more Canadians watched Stojko's long program than any event at the Nagano games, and millions of Canadian viewers followed his career at other high profile events.¹ Stojko intermittently faced both praise and criticism for his stylization throughout his amateur career. The thread running through much of the media discourse surrounding Stojko's career penned his unorthodox stylings and competitive efforts as inherently masculine, aggressive, courageous, heroic, and, unapologetically Canadian. Like Kurt Browning, Stojko was primarily framed as a technically-gifted and athletic skater; Canadian journalists declared Stojko the successor to Browning as a world-class figure skater. Browning was praised for introducing a style of skating which mobilized an historically-contextualized version of hegemonic masculinity which appealed to Canadians. Stojko continued to develop such gendered motifs bordering on, to some critics, a point of exaggeration. However, reactions to Stojko were mixed. At times, Stojko's stylization endured scrutiny with respect to his musical selections, choreography, and costumes.² Critics declared that Stojko lacked the necessary artistry and sophistication of a figure skater, because of his deviations from ballet-inspired movement patterns and classical themes.³ Others heralded Stojko as an ambassador of Canadian sport, who not only attracted large audiences, but lured a growing number of men into the skating's fanbase. The image of Stojko as athlete is

frequently embedded within a discourse on Canadian nationalism. By weaving together and assembling selectively framed aspects of Stojko's image, including qualities of his character, his ability to tolerate injury, and his athletic accomplishments, an oft-repeated rhetoric is constructed, fashioning a monolithic Canadian identity, which is not only distinct from, but superior to, American character (which I will return to in detail).

Stojko, to Canadian mass media outlets, fit the aforementioned criteria, and was an obvious candidate in circulating messages concerning male virility both within Canada and internationally. McGarry demonstrates, however, that such image-making processes must be carefully constructed with respect to figure skating; "Canadian male skaters must balance a fine line between an "acceptable" form of masculinity and "unacceptable" forms, the latter of which are increasingly equated with homosexuality."⁴ Research suggests that female athletes are trivialized based on gender, on the grounds of either not being 'real' athletes, or not involved in 'real' sports.⁵ However, this is not exclusive to discourses on femininity and sport. King has described male figure skaters as "straight men 'trapped' in a gay sport."⁶ The association between homosexual men and figure skating is seldom mentioned in the *Globe and Mail* and, when present, is confined to tongue-in-cheek articles outside of the Sports section in the *Globe and Mail*. One columnist reviewing Stojko's televised special suggested that "Elvis Stojko seems determined to put to rest the idea that male figure skaters are mostly homosexual. In this dazzling showcase of his talent, he sings, he struts, he does a ferocious *Mortal Kombat* karate set-piece and plays comedy with a natural flair."⁷ Another commented that figure skating fans were brought "versions of sadomasochism, with the likes of Elvis Stojko

punching the air dressed in black and steel accessories.”⁸ Sports journalists assigned to regularly cover the sport refrain from such satire.

Stojko primarily attracted the attention of journalists and figure skating followers as a young rival to Kurt Browning. During his early career, however, uncertainties about Stojko’s artistic merits appeared in commentary. As a serious contender for a medal at the 1993 World Championships, Stojko was “not only bringing a powerful, difficult program to the championships but a new maturity and an aura of command. He [had] improved his artistic component markedly.”⁹ The performances of Stojko, to some, approached the subjective limits between sport and art, and the resulting tension was prevalent throughout Stojko’s career. At points when Stojko lost to other competitors in high-profile events, Canadian media framed the outcome as a result of these subjectivities, and particularly framed the Eastern European judging community as biased and old-fashioned in terms of stylistic preferences.¹⁰

While there is little doubt that Stojko, like Browning, was a talented skater, Canadian journalists attributed his success to more than simply hard work and training. During the 1993 World Championships, when Browning and Stojko won gold and silver medals, respectively, journalists constructed the event as a product of Canadian culture,

As with hockey, a culture of figure skating has developed in this country, a self-perpetuating virtuous circle. The best athletes go into skating because skating is popular — the Canadian figure skating association is the largest of its kind in the world — and the sport is popular because Canadians do well in it.¹¹

This example positioned the imagined nation of Canada as a small, yet tough underdog, due to its relatively small population, that has remained “so strong for so long.”¹²

Stojko's involvement with martial arts was an instrumental tool with respect to constructing his identity as inherently masculine. Like Browning, Stojko's familial background and hobbies were structured within narratives to establish Stojko's masculine credibility. Using the same textual structure as newspaper reports on Browning, Stojko was inculcated as "the karate-chopping, guitar-playing, dirt-biking son of a Slovenian landscaper."¹³ Journalists, as well as Stojko himself, deliberately drew upon Stojko's interest in martial arts to build credibility. Journalists did so by foregrounding this aspect of his character. Elvis did so by stylizing himself in ways that he claims were inspired by his martial arts training. This included utilizing movement patterns informed by martial arts, musical selections, and program themes. These strategies framed Stojko as a macho competitor. In the same article, Stojko maintained he trusts martial arts because it has "been around longer than figure skating."¹⁴ He also attributed everything from his physical strength, flexibility, perseverance, focus, and ability to thrive under psychological pressure directly to his acquisition of a black belt in karate. Such lengthy details on karate and kung-fu occupied more space within this article than Stojko's specific figure skating pursuits, and collectively, insinuated that Stojko was a martial artist first, and a figure skater second.

Another way in which Stojko's masculine credibility was established in this article involves mention of his choice of choreographer, "actor-stuntsman-dancer-music producer David Stevenson, a third-degree martial artist."¹⁵ Among other things, he drove a stunt car in the film, *Cool Runnings*. The inclusion of this detail further lends validity to the idea that Stojko was a more legitimate personification of masculinity than his competitors. Most figure skaters worked with dance and skating choreographers to

develop more traditional program themes. Although Stevenson was also a dancer, as mentioned in the article, the word was embedded between stuntman and music producer, to halt the idea that Stojko was somehow rendered less legitimate by working with a dancer. In other words, Stojko's choreographer would not likely be referred to solely as a dancer in this text promoting Stojko as a Canadian athlete. While many of these details seemingly shifted attention away from skating, their inclusion discouraged audiences from mistakenly associating Stojko with any stereotypically effeminate characteristics or potential lifestyles.

1994 Olympic Game Coverage

The tension between stylistic interpretations and masculinity emerged more deliberately in accounts of Stojko's performance at the 1994 Olympic Winter Games in Lillehammer. Kestnbaum looked at CBS coverage and visual imagery of this event, and found that American commentary supported Stojko in the resulting judging commentary.¹⁶ Stojko earned a silver medal while Alexei Urmanov of Russia won the event. The men's event attracted significant coverage and wide Canadian viewership since both Browning and Stojko were considered medal contenders. Canadian journalists portrayed this outcome as the result of conservatism within the figure skating community. In particular, judges representing Eastern European nations were insinuated to be narrow-minded and favoured athletes from their own nations. Stojko, in turn, was constructed as a victim in a number of ways. Commentary shaped Stojko's second place finish as punishment for challenging the supposedly rigid stylistic boundaries and status quo of skating. Stojko was also shaped as a victim due to his physical appearance and body shape, "All [judges] see is a powerful man with short arms and a big head who will never

be drawn on classic lines, will never be balletic in his movements, will never look the part as they want it cast.”¹⁷ Since Stojko’s body type, described as short, was outside of his control, this suggests that Stojko was not responsible for his placement. This passage was immediately followed by a description of Stojko’s program and the marks for artistic merit he received from the judging panel, with marks from the Russian and Belarus judges foregrounded. While the article identified the technical marks he received as “fair”, the lower artistic marks lacked a modifier, implicitly suggesting unfairness. The article made subsequent references to the importance of physical appearance and stylization in figure skating, where “looks certainly count,” suggesting Elvis lacked the preferred look. This journalist conceded that the alternative for Stojko involved, “[turning] him into some fay little Romeo,” in other words, Stojko associating himself with effeminate and subordinate masculinities.¹⁸ With similar condescension, the gold medalist’s performance was described as, “one of those hackneyed, puffy-sleeved, tragic lover things that have been around forever.”¹⁹ This description framed Urmanov as unoriginal, bland, effeminate, and conforming to the demands of the judging panel and Urmanov, as the use of feminizing metaphors and imagery emphasized his apparent lack of masculinity. This pattern of reporting strategy, Richardson’s ideological square, emphasized ‘us versus them’ differences, where foreign figures and nations are framed with minimal positive qualities.²⁰ In other words, Urmanov was inherently inferior to Stojko and undeserving of his placement. No apparent strengths of Urmanov’s figure skating, technically nor artistically, received mention. By contrast, Stojko’s supposedly intentional refusal to submit to the preferences of an imagined, unanimous judging panel framed him as a rebellious and strong figure. While Stojko’s program to the *Bruce Lee*

soundtrack was represented as strongly linked to Stojko's innovation and sense of individuality, the theme itself very much conformed to hegemonic representations of masculinity in other sports and popular culture. Following this, McGarry found that Canadian television networks aired footage of Stojko in a manner that consolidated a coherent, hegemonic portrait of Canadian masculinity, while non-Canadian competitors were represented as effeminate and inferior.²¹

Mediated images of athletes are frequently enacted as widely-circulated symbols of national identity, where athletes' wins demonstrate the strength of a nation. Qualities of Stojko's character were also frequently mobilized as tools for maintaining ideas about Canadian nationhood. In one account, Stojko was described as unapologetically skating "to reflect the person he is, rather than fruitlessly try to turn him into something he [isn't]."²² His coach, Dough Leigh, was quoted as describing Stojko and other young skaters as performing, "from the heart, their own spirits, they walk in their own shoes."²³ The qualities implicit in these statements, individuality, fearlessness, and authenticity were traditionally masculine traits, favourably linked to Stojko, and in turn, to Canadian nationhood. One critique on the men's event at the Lillehammer 1994 Games, by a columnist known for his brusque commentary, summarized that "the obvious question that needed to be answered was why the judges marked Stojko down."²⁴

Following the prolific media coverage detailing disagreement on the artistic merit of Stojko's performances, one dance and music critic summarized the controversy as follows:

Two weeks ago, Stojko was just another athlete in search of a win at the Winter Olympics. When he lost the men's solo figure-skating final, however, Stojko became an artist, too radical for his time. Open-line callers, and most sports writers, decided that the judges had denied him a gold medal because his blunt routine wasn't pretty enough. Overnight, Stojko became the star of the sporting world's *salon des refuses*. His case has revived the semi-dormant issue of whether skating in any form is or can be an art. The language of the sport implies that it can. [...]

The ballet crowd represented the model against which Stojko offended, with his judo kicks and karate chops. Sure, he wasn't built to be a cavalier, though that wasn't the only reason his routine didn't fit. There is a place in ballet for the small, tightly knit dancer; the bravura type, whose strength is virtuosity and ease in the air. [...]

Stojko's martial arts number rejected that. It broke the unofficial codes, though not in a way that worked particularly well on any other terms. The syntax of his routine was garbled, to my eye, not because it didn't flow like ballet but because so little of it impelled the next step. Everything seemed the result of pedestrian decision-making, about how to fill out the time between the required stunts.²⁵

This passage invited audiences to reconsider the one-way flow of information from Canadian media to audiences on coverage of the Olympic event. Since the achievements of Stojko were used within the context of circulating positive national images, viewpoints which criticized his abilities were absent in most accounts of these Olympics, at least from the *Globe and Mail*. Of interest is the author's attempt to categorize Stojko's performance inside or outside of art. The "salon des refuses," translated as the house of the rejected, was the title of a 19th century art exhibition consisting of later critically-acclaimed work rejected from the state-governed exhibitions in France. This excerpt operated as a critique of style independent of the more overtly gendered stylistic stereotypes present in the sports pages of the *Globe and Mail*. When read in this manner, it avoided reproducing the sport/art and masculine/feminine binaries present in other coverage, by suggesting that there was room for improvement and alternative stylizations in Stojko's presentations.

Narratives of Pain and Injury

Through his career, Stojko suffered from a number of injuries that received attention in the press. His willingness to compete despite these injuries was valorized by journalists and thus, contributed to a masculine image-making. Concealment, tolerance, and normalization of pain and injury have been naturalized and reinforced as a gendered attribute of masculinity. In sport, participation despite pain and injury is considered to attest to the strength, heroics, courage, and physical viability of an athlete, which can result in “deleterious consequences for participants.”²⁶ Injuries are not only accepted and normalized as a routine rite of passage for male participants, but also transcend simple tolerance to what Young, White, and McTeer label “a celebrated world of disability.”²⁷ If coping with pain elicits admiration and praise for the masculine sporting body, failing to participate due to injury renders the male body dysfunctionally weak and obsolete. Refraining from participation, in some cases, puts athletes at risk of media scrutiny, financial loss of competitive prize money, sponsorship loss, and disempowerment.²⁸

In this motif, Stojko was framed as a tough figure who was able to tolerate large amounts of pain, and still compete successfully at a world-class level despite injury. This framing not only served to give Stojko masculine credibility, but also generated storylines of interest to audiences and, in turn, could favourably influence Stojko’s marketability. During the pre-competition at the Canadian championships in 1995, Stojko was reported to have suffered a ligament injury. Stojko was described as “the skater who tests himself to the limit, found he could go no further,”²⁹ “doubled over in intense pain as the music from *Total Recall* rocked on”³⁰ (italicized in original), and “even though he did not finish, Stojko received all the acclaim because of his effort to drive through

pain.”³¹ While Stojko eventually withdrew from the Championships, this decision was repeatedly emphasized as a last resort for the competitor.

This narrative re-emerged later in the season surrounding coverage of Stojko seeking the help of a kung-fu master with injury recovery. This excerpt proved Stojko’s toughness by appealing to the expertise of a kung-fu master to confirm Stojko’s ability to withstand pain, “‘Elvis has an incredible pain threshold, much more than I have’ .”³² The content of the article first listed the numerous injuries and illnesses Stojko claimed to have throughout the season, then chronologically recounted the athletic skills he reacquired, emphasizing his impressive speed of recovery in time for the World Championships.

Journalists continued to determine Stojko’s injured body a newsworthy topic during pre-competition articles for international events. From a practice session at the 1995 World Championships, a story focused on an instance where Stojko fell on a triple axel and appeared to rest for a moment on the rink-side, “Later, Stojko downplayed the incident. “It was just another day at the rink,” he said, “It was no big deal.””³³ This pre-coverage of the event set up potential narratives of triumph if Stojko performed well at the event, which in fact happened. After Stojko placed second in the compulsory skate, the injury took precedence in narratives celebrating his accomplishments and character. The toughness of both Stojko’s body and mind was emphasized in accounts of the compulsory and long programs, “Stojko ignored the pain and the pressure [...] He did not shrink from his task. In what he called the toughest men’s competition ever contested, Stojko was only one of two men to land a triple Axel-triple toe loop combination.”³⁴ Canadian coach Doug Leigh called Stojko “superhuman.”³⁵ In what was

constructed as a battle between Stojko and Todd Eldridge of the United States, Stojko defended his second World Championship title. Ignoring, and suffering through, pain and injury, Stojko was portrayed as possessing “unwavering resolve” to “push his limits as far as they would go” while he “[skated] through pain but then adrenaline took over.”³⁶ Repeatedly, the concept of participating despite injury was translated into a narrative of physical mastery, as well as psychological and bodily discipline.

Leading into the men’s free skate during the Olympics, Stojko, ranked second, was described in media-friendly terms: “First, by placing second he’s got the underdog role, one that plays into the concept that he is an underappreciated skater who has bucked convention.”³⁷ When he won the Olympic silver medal for the second Games in a row, attention shifted away from his performance to the groin injury Stojko had been suffering from for the past month. It was referred to as a “pain-wracked performance Saturday night, completing eight triple jumps despite a searing torn groin muscle [...] as he grittily finished a program that included eight triple jumps, Stojko bent over and winced.”³⁸ The coverage was supported by numerous quotes made by Stojko from the post-Olympic press conference; “‘The long program was the toughest thing I’ve ever gone through, but I made it. The pain was there through the whole warm-up but I just blocked it out’.”³⁹

Stojko at the 1998 Olympics

In the last decades, the Olympic Games have dramatically grown in terms of scope, evolving, as a form of spectacle, into a mega-event intimately structured around commercialism and corporate interests. Wenner labels this phenomena “the institutional

alignment of sports and media in the context of late capitalism.”⁴⁰ Guttman reports that American television networks have “bid aggressively” into the hundreds of millions of dollars for the rights to telecast the Games since the Los Angeles Games of 1984.⁴¹ The election of Juan Antonio Samaranch as IOC president in 1980 dramatically altered the trajectory of the Games, both economically and ideologically. Magadalinski and Nauright described the repackaging of the Games under Samaranch’s reign from “clinging to hopelessly outdated ideas to a more streamlined transnational giant that adopted a business-like approach to the management of Olympic events and properties.”⁴² Print media is no exception, actively endorsing an idealism aligned with corporate promotion of the Olympics. Coulter’s analysis of the *Globe* with respect to Olympic coverage suggests Canadian print media channeled such values:

a marked tendency to reinforce the established myths of Olympic sport so far as these myths represent the views and interests of the system of which the paper’s owners and directors are such an active part. This system entails a very well integrated capitalist network in which print media ownership is becoming increasingly the task and privilege of substantial corporate interests.⁴³

Broadcast commentators and journalists disproportionately report upon athletes from their own nation-states, and provide narration that tends to symbolically enhance the qualities of these athletes.

Particular Canadian performances at the Olympics are used by media to enact dialogue on nationalism. These dialogues reveal recurring themes related to popular conceptions of nationalistic discourse within Canada. As noted earlier, victories by athletes at the Games are claimed by media outlets as particular “national victories,” often with reference to superiority over other nations. Poor performances by athletes at the Olympics may be constructed as indicative of the weakness of a nation or reveal

other tensions. For example, Canada, or Canadians, have often been inserted into narratives on identity crisis. Part of such anxieties are related to Canada's geographical proximity to the United States, the saturation of U.S. content in Canada's cultural and entertainment industries, the National Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), corporate U.S. takeovers of Canadian conglomerates, and the strength of the American economy. Due to these influences, the American-Canadian relationship, culturally, politically, and economically, is often portrayed as threatening to an imagined Canadian identity.

During the 1997-98 season, Stojko was again named to the Olympic team, and was also named flag-bearer for the opening ceremonies, a privilege frequently reserved for a medal contender, crowd favourite, and sporting icon or celebrity. Customary during the Games, the *Globe and Mail* devoted an entire section to coverage, with daily medal counts for nations, television schedules, and pre and post competitive highlights. Stojko graced the cover of this section of the paper more than once, and a multi-page spread was published on Stojko several days before the men's figure skating event began. In a national poll conducted by The Angus Reid Group on behalf of the *Globe and Mail*, 34% of Canadian respondents indicated they were most likely to watch Olympic figure skating compared to any other sport.⁴⁴ The newspaper responded to this popularity, with several pages of coverage on figure skating events on particular days. Articles contained everything from profiles of the medal contenders (both Canadian and non-Canadian), to dissecting judging, to educating potential viewers on jumps, and the properties of the skates, all appeared when figure skating was 'Sport of the Day' for the Games.

At these Games, journalists once again framed the outcome of the event as dependent upon the "international judging community finally coming around to [Stojko's]

underappreciated style.”⁴⁵ Quotations from Stojko’s coach, Doug Leigh, also assisted in constructing Stojko as masculine: “‘No gimmicks. No nonsense.’ That’s just the way the man does business. Think Elvis-as-popeye: I am what I am, and that’s all what I am’.”⁴⁶ The quote bears particular value as it attempts to distance Stojko from usual gimmicky, glitzy, show-business-like descriptions of figure skating, and instead suggests Stojko is honest and no-nonsense. This likens Stojko, at least, to male athletes across other sports. Labeled as “the battle of the quads” long-time figure skater reporter Beverly Smith predicted that Stojko would win the gold medal over competitor Ilia Kulik.⁴⁷ While Kulik, like Urmanov, was portrayed to be artistically superior to Stojko, Canadian journalists suggested that “Stojko’s powerful focus and resolve” were the authentic, incorrigible traits of an Olympic champion.⁴⁸ While Stojko was framed favourably by Canadian journalists in anticipation of the event, Russian competitor, Ilia Kulik, considered one of Stojko’s main rivals for the gold medal, was criticized for his outfits. His long program outfit was described as a “black and yellow print number that looks like someone tried to turn a giraffe into a school bus.”⁴⁹

Identity Construction in Defense of American Discourse

A daily *Games* section ran during the Olympics in 1998, and several articles were published on Stojko before the start of the figure skating events. Such articles attempted to construct Stojko as monolithically Canadian in a variety of ways. One article foregrounded Stojko’s refusal to participate in several American ice shows, despite being offered “six figures.”⁵⁰ The reasoning behind this refusal suggested that Stojko thought such ice shows were not competitive enough nor fit his own performance goals. This passage intended to construct Stojko as a figure who wouldn’t ‘sell out’ to the

commercial U.S. sporting arena. Stojko's apparent refusal to follow suit is constructed as a noble act. The insertion of the idea that Stojko must continue to skate in the amateur ranks is portrayed as a noble service performed for Canada. These charges of Stojko's disregard for commercial success and wealth, however, conflict with other information in the article. Stojko was apparently "a self-made millionaire with swagger," who had recently purchased a Porsche.⁵¹ Despite Stojko collecting income from numerous multinational corporate sponsors during his career, U.S. promoters were targeted as "eager to snap out Stojko's services for competitions they create."⁵² Such statements served two functions. First, they portrayed Stojko and his persona as a valuable commodity desired by Americans, which is of historical importance for Canadians. Second, in the wake of widespread Canadian media attention on U.S. takeovers of Canadian corporations, Stojko's apparent refusal to sacrifice his personal goals for U.S. money was an attractive narrative for the Canadian media. Whitson argues that "an important feature of the development of sport has been the tension between the amateur paternal benevolence of traditional sporting organizations and the rising power of capitalist entrepreneurship."⁵³

Defining a Canadian culture, distinct from that of the U.S, has proved to be a politically relevant task to many Canadians. In addition to the concern of Americanization, in the late 1980s and 1990s, the increasingly transnational and pluralistic character of a nation-state such as Canada shifted relevance away from a singular form of cultural identity. That is, "monolithic metanarratives have lost their power in this fluid age of multicultural cosmopolitanism."⁵⁴ Imagery involving able-bodied, white males has traditionally dominated nationalistic discourse. This example of

Stojko versus America suggested anxiety towards a coherent and distinct Canadian identity. Kidd observes that “Americanization reminds Canadians that the sports cartels and their network partners have often used their economic power against what is widely perceived to be the Canadian interests.”⁵⁵

However, Stojko was already earning significant income without giving up his Olympic eligibility, allowing him to remain Olympic-eligible without accepting “American” endorsements. This rhetoric, offered through the depiction of aggressive promoters, associated the United States with commercialization, and enacted a mythic, contrasting impression of a form of purity in Canada, symbolically packaged around an athlete. Stojko was depicted as loyal to a nation, and certain set of nostalgic ideals drawing upon amateurism and the idealized purity of sport. However, Stojko was not the first Canadian athlete supplanted against the threat of Americanization. The framing of this narrative gained contextual significance when contrasted against the framing of Wayne Gretzky’s trade to the Los Angeles’ Kings in 1988. Jackson argues that the “loss” of Wayne Gretzky came to embody Canadians’ worst fear regarding American influence and domination” and was declared the “sell out” of Canada’s game.⁵⁶

Just five days later, after the men’s Olympic event, an article focused on the irrelevance of Stojko’s silver, instead of, gold medal in terms of his relationship to an exhausting array of sponsors:

In many ways, Elvis Stojko’s loss is not a loss at all.

The 25-year-old skater from Richmond Hill, Ont., will limp home to Canada next week with a silver medal in his pocket, but that won’t bother his sponsors. Just before Stojko left for Nagano, two of his major endorsers extended their deals

with him for several years — and neither was conditional on whether he won a gold medal, or whether he turns professional at the end of this season.

Stojko is so popular with sponsors that he almost seems to be beyond the elemental truth that an Olympic gold seals an athlete's financial future. Not many Canadian athletes' faces are seen more often than the determined mug of Stojko, smiling confidently in camera ads, credit-card ads, fruit-drink ads, cake-mix ads, television ads, newspaper ads and even on the shelves of the nation's corner stores. He's also on the front of the Hamburger Helper boxes.

'Sponsors are looking for more than just talent,' his agent, Ed Futerman said, 'They're looking for character. Elvis has both. He's a young man with total integrity.'⁵⁷

Clearly, Stojko had a highly marketable image within the context of Canadian popular culture and, based on the list above, earned a significant amount of income from such partnerships. Stojko's agent recognized that more than athletic talent alone is needed to secure endorsements. Futerman identified "character" as another marketable quality desired by sponsors. Stojko's failure to win a gold medal, then, was made up for in terms of his character; "But it's Stojko's human side, as much as his conquering side, that has delighted his sponsors."⁵⁸ Part of this construction of his character can be extrapolated through several modifiers in this passage. Stojko's triumphant 'limp,' to his "determined mug," to the "charming" and gentlemanly way in which he engaged with an "awestruck" female fan in conversation, interlink to project Stojko in favourable heterosexual terms.

The success or failure of athletic performances, taken as a form of cultural work, become politically-charged symbolic events, channeled by mass media outlets into discourses on nationalism. Such strife was evident in reports of the progress of Canada's athletes at the Nagano Games. In an article entitled, "*Forget has-been Yanks: We're after bigger game,*" the Nagano Olympics were symbolically declared the site of Canada's ascendancy over the United States.⁵⁹ Canadian audiences read that American

journalists reportedly accused Stojko of faking his injury; “it was the Yanks who were loudest in suggesting that maybe Stojko wasn’t really hurt at all, maybe he was just putting on a show to explain away a bad performance.”⁶⁰ In response, one *Globe and Mail* columnist suggested that such criticisms proved Canada has ascended to the status of a “Winter Games power” and criticism from U.S. journalists indicated that “we’ve got under the Americans’ skin.”⁶¹ To one Canadian journalist, Stojko’s “status as national hero was only enhanced by the way he performed so courageously through injury.”⁶² This event was compared to several other athletic rivalries, including a track event earlier in the year, during which Canadian sprinter Donovan Bailey won a 150-meter race against an injured American, Michael Johnson. Another point of tension foregrounded by Canadian media at these Olympics involved an apparent insult directed at a Canadian women’s hockey team member from an American player.⁶³ The thematic link between these stories was clear; and the accumulated effect of such stories aimed to construct a cogent, yet selective representation of U.S athletes as jealous, threatened, and inferior.

Emotionality

Canadian media often praised Stojko on account of his determination, fortitude, and calm demeanor. However, during the press conference immediately following the men’s final in Nagano, Stojko cried in a publicized display, while recounting supportive fan mail received during the Olympics in the wake of falling short of a gold medal. While the intensity of competing under international media attention at the Olympic games undoubtedly fostered pressure, the reaction to this event offered by the Canadian media, was perhaps only surprising at surface value.

However, Stojko faced prior criticism from some journalists and members of the public for presenting an image that was too masculine for figure skating and saturated with masculine hyperbole nearing farce.⁶⁴ His display of tears was crafted into a complementary story concerning the relationship between athlete and public; “Stojko’s display of raw, honest emotion was a win for the perception we have of our top athletes.”⁶⁵ While popular past nicknames for Stojko have included “the terminator” and the “King”, (after Elvis Presley), the construction of his identity, on several levels, pushed beyond the more conservative parameters of masculinity embodied by most male Canadians. Most Canadian men are not rigorously trained, elite athletes who channel characters from martial arts films and ride dirt bikes during their spare time. Connell discusses the relevancy that such idealized and extreme representations of hegemonic masculinity may have to audiences who, in majority, do not fit such models:

the cultural ideal (or ideals) of masculinity need not correspond at all closely to the actual personality of the majority of men. Indeed the winning of hegemony often involves the creation of models of masculinity which are quite specifically fantasy figures. [...] Or real models may be publicized who are so remote from every achievement that they have the effect of an unattainable ideal.⁶⁶

However, the moment when Stojko cried, in the opinion of one journalist, altered “the perception of Stojko and other elite athletes by the media and the public. It changed for the better.”⁶⁷ This incident, embedded within the discourse of sport, caused a discontinuity in not only how Stojko’s image was produced, but was influenced by broader changes in discourse through which Canadian media produced images of masculinity in athletics. This journalist suggested that emotional displays, especially during defeat, create a bond between the public

image and audience, dismantling the unattainable, 'fantasy figure' element of Stojko's image; "Olympic athletes do things at a level few of us have contact with or can or can truly identify with. [...] But to come second, in the circumstances faced by Stojko, and then to have that isolationary bubble burst on him gave him back to his public. Those people can identify with his struggle."⁶⁸ Connell and Messerschmidt argue that hegemonic masculinity "was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative."⁶⁹ Though so few men may enact hegemonic masculinity, this normalizing aspect structures the hierarchical relations of social agents who are dependent upon its attached cultural definitions.

During the same month, an article addressing an apparent cultural shift in masculinity appeared on the front page of one of the *Globe and Mail's* lifestyle sections. The journalist observed the newfound social acceptability of male emotion; "and there is now not just a recognition of the value of emotion, but an insistence that it be expressed. Contrition and male tearfulness have become very thoroughly modern."⁷⁰ Highly-publicized incidents included politicians Brian Mulroney, Tony Blair, and Bill Clinton, athletes, including Olympic hockey player Brendan Shanahan and Stojko, all of which had recently cried during press conferences.⁷¹ This demonstrates the ability of journalists to re-negotiate and mirror shifts in what defines hegemonic masculinity, as dominant notions of masculinity are not fixed sets of qualities, but dynamic practices.

Summary

Stojko's career provides insights into the negotiated terrain of masculinity within Canadian figure skating. His unorthodox stylizations, though not consistently embraced within the international figure skating community, took precedence in Canadian media coverage of his career. The constructed image of Stojko provided a response that alleviated anxieties regarding Canadian male figure skaters and homosexuality. Though issues of sexuality and gender are not overtly discussed in competitive coverage, the construction of Stojko's public identity is guided by desirable notions of hegemonic masculinity. These notions restricted the acceptable limits of gendered practices. Stojko aptly reflected the historically specific and dominant qualities of hegemonic masculinity, illustrated through various aspects of his gendered practices, including, but not limited to, his athletic success, character, stylization, and background. For these reasons, his image was highly marketable. Large Canadian audiences affectively invest in Canadian athletes, and so mediated images of athletes are highly circulated and consumed. These images can be used to mobilize discourses on nationalism. Finally, while Stojko's stylization was hailed as innovative within figure skating by much of the Canadian media, his gendered practices largely reproduced similar gendered practices among other sports. While Stojko's performances could have been taken as a point of departure to raise questions concerning gendered stylizations and practices in sport by the media and figure skating community, these possibilities were subverted in favouring of naturalizing Stojko's masculine practices.

End Notes

- ¹ William Houston, "Truth & Rumours," *The Globe and Mail*, February 16, 1998, O4.
- ² Kestnbaum, "Figure Skating and Cultural Meaning," 316-18.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ McGarry, "Performing Nationalisms," 162.
- ⁵ Michelle Helstein, "Producing the Canadian Female Athlete: Negotiating the Popular logic of sport and citizenship," in *How Canadians Communicate: Contexts of Canadian Popular Culture*, eds. Bart Beatty, et al., (Edmonton: AU Press, 2010), 244.
- ⁶ Samantha King, "Consuming Compassion," 148.
- ⁷ John Haslett Cuff, "Asteroid, epilepsy and Austen fill weekend sweeps bill," *The Globe and Mail*, February 14, 1997, C2.
- ⁸ William Thorsell, "The mother lode of skating melodrama," *The Globe and Mail*, February 18, 2002, A17.
- ⁹ Beverley Smith, "Maturing Stojko set to challenge Browning," *The Globe and Mail*, February 3, 1993, C7.
- ¹⁰ Kestnbaum, "Figure Skating and Cultural Meaning," 317.
- ¹¹ Editorial, "On golden ponds," *The Globe and Mail*, March 15, 1993, A14.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Beverley Smith, "Martial-arts routine brings Elvis to life," *The Globe and Mail*, February 8, 1994, C5.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Kestnbaum, "Figure Skating and Cultural Meaning," 316-25.
- ¹⁷ Stephen Brunt, "Elvis takes silver when judges don't see it his way," *The Globe and Mail*, February 21, 1994.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Richardson, *Analyzing Newspapers*, 21.
- ²¹ McGarry, "Performing Nationalisms," 139.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ William Houston, "Truth & rumours," *The Globe and Mail*, February 21, 1994, D2.
- ²⁵ Robert Everett-Green, "But is it art?" *The Globe and Mail*, February 23, 1994, C1-2.
- ²⁶ Kevin Young and Philip White, "Researching sports injury: reconstructing dangerous masculinities," in *Masculinities, Gender Relations, and Sport*, eds. Jim McKay, et al. (Thousand Oaks: California, 2007), 109.
- ²⁷ Kevin Young, Kevin White, and William McTeer, "Sport, Masculinity and the Injured Body," in *Men's Health and Illness*, eds. Donald Sabo and Frederick Gordon (Sage, Thousand Oaks: California, 1995), 163.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 177-78.
- ²⁹ Beverley Smith, "Stojko limps off the ice," *The Globe and Mail*, January 14, 1995, A14.
- ³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Beverley Smith, "Stojko gets leg up on serious injury with kung-fu exercises from master," *The Globe and Mail*, February 27, 1995, D4.

³³ Beverley Smith, "Stojko shakes off scare at world championships," *The Globe and Mail*, March 8, 1995, C8.

³⁴ Beverley Smith, "Stojko lands second place," *The Globe and Mail*, March 9, 1995, C8.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Beverley Smith, "Stojko battles back to capture gold," *The Globe and Mail*, March 10, 1995, A1.

³⁷ James Christie, "Perfect position," *The Globe and Mail*, February 13, 1998, O1.

³⁸ James Christie, "Stojko takes heart in pain-filled performance," *The Globe and Mail*, February 16, 1998, O2.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Lawrence Wenner, *Mediasport* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 15.

⁴¹ Allen Guttman, *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 149.

⁴² Tara Magdalinski and John Nauright, "Commercialisation of the Modern Olympics," in *The Commercialisation of Sport*, ed. Trevor Slack (New York: Routledge, 2004), 194.

⁴³ B.J. Coulter, "The Canadian Press and the Problem of Responsible Journalism: An Olympic Case Study," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 10, no. 2 (1986): 27.

⁴⁴ Neil Campbell, "Hockey for him, skating for her," *The Globe and Mail*, February 6, 1988, S1.

⁴⁵ Stephen Brunt, "Elvis its now or never," *The Globe and Mail*, February 7, 1998, O1.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Beverley Smith, "Big jump will carry tremendous weight," *The Globe and Mail*, February 12, 1998, O4.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Jere Longman, "Russian skater no worse for wear," *The Globe and Mail*, February 12, 1998, O4.

⁵⁰ Beverley Smith, "Stojko lives up to ideals as king of the rink," *The Globe and Mail*, February 12, 1994, O5.

⁵¹ Ibid.

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⁵³ Gary Whannel, *Fields in vision: television sport and cultural transformation* (Routledge: New York, 1992), 7.

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- ⁵⁷ Beverley Smith, "Elvis remains king, even without crown of gold," *The Globe and Mail*, February 17, 1998, O2.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Stephen Brunt, "Forget has-been Yanks: we're after bigger game," *The Globe and Mail*, February 16, 1998, O3.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Allan Maki, "U.S. insult enrages Canadians," *The Globe and Mail*, February 16, 1998, O12.
- Allan Maki, "Once old friends, now ice cold," *The Globe and Mail*, February 16, 1998, O12.
- ⁶⁴ McGarry, "Performing Nationalisms," 139.
- ⁶⁵ James Christie, "Elvis looking all shook up endears him to regular folks," *The Globe and Mail*, February 19, 1998, O2.
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- ⁷⁰ Murray Campbell, "Who's sorry now?" *The Globe and Mail*, February 28, 1998, Section D1.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Conclusions

In this project, changes in representations of masculinity in Canadian men's figure skating were analyzed. Newspaper articles from the *Globe and Mail*, published between 1971-1998, were collected and analyzed through a method of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Additionally, excerpts from two autobiographies, and letters to the editor, with relevance to my research question, were also analyzed. The first chapter outlined this methodology for further reference. This chapter also presented some of the key premises which inform CDA. One premise of this version of CDA asserts that the production of language is a social practice, and such practices produce and are reproduced by existing practices or discourse. At a broader level, discourse is ordered into sets of conventions, or orders of discourse.¹ These orders of discourse are shaped by the power relations of society. Within this model, knowledge is discursively constructed and such knowledge is produced and reproduced in response to both micro-issues within the coverage and interpretation of figure skating events, and the articulation of macro-issues that influence orders of discourse within figure skating and mass media. Richardson demonstrates that newspaper event coverage, examined in this vein, is influenced by relations of power, informed by the position of journalists, editors, and institutions invested in particular publications. Fairclough acknowledges that in mass media discourse, a substantial divide involving the distribution of power exists between the producers, and the consumers of texts, the readership.² Institutions who claim major stakes in newspaper ownership have significantly more power to shape the production of texts than the consumers of newspapers. However, the producers of news articles are themselves constrained by the

relationship they have with their readership, as well as the figure skaters themselves in this case. I attempted to primarily investigate discursive events which appeared to rupture or reveal crisis in existing social conventions, indicating a change in discourse.

While the professional field of journalism lays a claim to presenting newsworthy stories through an objective lens, critical discourse analysis provides useful tools in exposing the opacity of relations that influence these news stories. Certain modes of knowledge about masculinity are constructed by journalists, which thread together discursive ideas about masculinity and figure skating. Journalists disseminate these threads that, over time, collectively form certain common sense assumptions about men in figure skating. These ideas can be traced through an analysis in which details are foregrounded (or backgrounded) within the narratives surrounding the careers of these skaters.

According to the description of discourse offered by Fairclough, discourses are simultaneously text, discursive practice, and social practice.³ Each level was explored within the data analysis of this thesis. Journalists produced articles about figure skaters. This corresponds to the level of text. The processes of production and interpretation of these articles corresponds to the level of discursive practices. The broadest level of social practice implicates Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity to understand the struggle between competing order of discourse determining hegemonic masculinity.

This project examined the careers of three figure skaters who were considered to introduce novel modes of stylization into the sport. This thesis describes which strategies journalists used to configure knowledge on these differing modes of stylization; all

accounts were heavily imbued with gendered language. This analysis started with Toller Cranston because his mode of stylization dominated accounts of his competitive record. While Cranston's unusual mode of stylization was at times referred to by a single element he executed, journalists omitted details explaining precisely how Cranston was different from his contemporaries. Instead, journalists attempted to focus on content similar to coverage on other sports, including scoring, placements, and outcomes. Details which are relevant to skating competitions that did not fit the logic of sports journalism, for example, detailed accounts of costumes, music, or choreography, tended to be omitted from coverage. Additionally, references to Cranston appearing or acting in an effete manner did not correspond to the logic of sports journalism. However, such claims did appear but were limited to the satirical columns of the sports section. By limiting such comments to these columns, the contentious nature of these comments was diluted as a form of potential humour to newspaper readers. Since Cranston did not present characteristics which were easily equated with notions of hegemonic masculinity, his identity was not heavily used to construct nationalistic interests. In comparison to later skaters, such as Browning and Stojko, who were credited with the masculinization of skating, Cranston's identity threatened to disrupt hegemonic notions of masculinity within the discourses surrounding athleticism. As a consequence, his identity was neither praised nor promoted as part of a preferred vision of Canadian identity.

Significant changes to the sport of figure skating took place between the amateur career of Toller Cranston and the subsequent study of Kurt Browning. The operating budget and revenue of the CFSA dramatically increased during the 1980s, spearheaded by the leadership of former director, David Dore. Due to a growing television audience

which was composed of a large demographic with purchasing power, the CFSA was able to enlist a wide range of powerful corporate sponsors to fund programs. Such sponsors, as Kestnbaum and McGarry noted, preferred to be affiliated with particular images that de-emphasized the effete reputation of men's skating.⁴

Browning exhibited a markedly different mode of stylization in comparison to his contemporaries. Journalists repeatedly praised for Browning with respect to his integration of masculine themes and notions into skating. However, if Browning was portrayed to have engaged in the process of 'masculinizing' skating, it reveals that journalists thought of skating as characteristically feminine prior to this era. Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity is unstable and dynamic; it must continuously be enacted and reenacted through social actors to maintain legitimacy. The results of the latter two case studies involving Browning and Stojko support this claim. Much of the coverage on each of these skaters can be categorized as a defense or affirmation of hegemonic masculinity. This is especially vital for the masculine credibility of male figure skaters, since the practice of figure skating locates masculinity in a jeopardized and contradictory state.⁵

The first event that solidified Browning's reputation as the figurehead of an emerging, reordered discourse on masculinity within skating was his completion of the first quadruple jump in competition in 1988. Journalists had constructed a race between athletes of different nations in anticipation of a skater to land the first 'quad.' This event, as Adams notes, positioned the male body as metaphorical machine, defying the parameters of science and possibility.⁶ During this time, female skaters were increasingly landing triple jumps, which narrowed the culturally constructed gap between the

athleticism of men's and women's skating. The 'quad' helped further differentiate between the athleticism of men and women which was significant in terms of renouncing the effete reputation surrounding men's figure skating.

Instead of channeling the romantic modes of stylization that were commonly associated with his contemporaries, Browning utilized program themes and mobilized movement patterns more closely associated with athleticism. However, Browning's mode of stylization and success did not singularly propel him into media acclaim. A combination of Browning's skating, character, and upbringing aligned Browning's identity with a desirable notion of Canadian identity. Journalists frequently foregrounded Browning's Albertan upbringing, in addition to the hunting, ranching, and farming-oriented occupations of his father, in accounts of his early life. These details act to mobilize dominant narratives of Canadian history and romantically situated the Browning family as inherently connected to Canadian landscapes. A similar narrative emerges in coverage on Stojko's background and hobbies. Stojko's penchant for kung-fu, karate, driving Porsches, and dirt bikes, was frequently used as evidence of Stojko's masculinity. Additionally, Browning's character and personality was often stressed in coverage on competitive events and was claimed as an aspect of 'our' 'Canadianness.' These desirable traits, including modesty, intelligence, work ethic, and his articulate nature, were foregrounded as the products of his upbringing in a white, nuclear, middle-class family with multi-generational ties to their homestead. Because of his background, Browning is frequently given affectionate nicknames by the press, foregrounding his identity using strategies which emphasized his masculinity and heterosexuality. The relationship between Browning and his following was so firmly entrenched that even when he failed

to fulfill certain tenets of hegemonic masculinity, his image was protected by Canadian media outlets. During his appearance at both the 1992 and 1994 Olympic Games, Browning was portrayed as a gold medal favourite by the Canadian media. At both Olympics, however, he competed in an uncharacteristically poor manner and finished several places from the podium. Since Browning could not be praised in relation to his athletic performances in these cases, the way in which he dealt with failure was foregrounded instead. When journalists placed emphasis on Browning's failure, letters to the editor were published which objected to the *Globe and Mail's* overly pessimistic consideration of Browning. During the 1992 Games, media praised Browning for accepting defeat with sophistication, and blamed his poor performance on a back injury and lack of preparation. However, during the 1994 Games, Browning had sustained no injury that press outlets could emphasize. In this case, journalists resorted to representing Browning within narratives of sympathy, which mourned his performances as a national tragedy as hopes for a Canadian gold medal faded.

Like Browning, Stojko was considered an outstanding athletic talent who further pushed the trajectory of masculinity in skating introduced by Browning. However, coverage on Stojko's mode of stylization was mixed and represents limits; some critics thought Stojko lacked the sophisticated choreography of his competitors and relied too heavily upon athletic stunts. Other journalists frequently praised Stojko for introducing movement patterns inspired by martial arts and making figure skating spectatorship 'bearable' for men. During the 1994 Olympic Games, Stojko finished 2nd to Alexei Urmanov, who performed a program which adhered more closely to traditional modes of stylization.⁷ Kestnbaum argues that such traditionally classical modes of stylization

indicate that the skater takes the sport seriously.⁸ Canadian media outlets attributed Stojko's second place finish to conservatism and European bias in the judging community. Using what Richardson deems the 'ideological square,' journalists foregrounded the positive aspects of Stojko and his performance, while simultaneously emphasizing the negative characteristics of Urmanov. Using this strategy, Urmanov was portrayed as a bland, inauthentic, and conforming skater, who was undeserving of the gold medal. By contrast, this amplified Stojko's status as a victim of judging politics. As punishment for not compromising his artistic vision, and refusing to skate a classically-informed routine, Stojko had to accept a silver medal. These accounts, of course, neglected criticisms of the weaknesses in the performances of Stojko and the strengths of Urmanov. However, this injustice constructed by the Canadian media showcased Stojko's determination and independence, as subsequent stories detailed his resolve to continue competing regardless of the opinions of judges.

Another important feature of the coverage on newsworthy events of these skaters involved changes in the quantity, frequency, and location of figure skating coverage within the *Globe and Mail*. Figure skating has come to occupy a more prominent position within the sports section of the paper. During the 1992, 1994, and 1998 Olympic Winter Games, for example, numerous articles about Browning and Stojko, including some full-page spreads, responded to anticipation for the men's events. The activities of Browning and Stojko were significant enough at times to grace the front page of the news section of the paper.

Each case study reveals significant information about how discourse on masculinity is ordered within sport. All three skaters can be considered to have attempted

to influence the orders of discourse within which each was situated. The typology of hegemonic masculinity within the discourse of first order sports, such as hockey, privileges characteristics such as strength and speed. Browning attempted to transform the orders of discourse within figure skating using a mode of stylization which reiterated larger orders of discourse within other sports. Stojko's subsequent attempt to reconfigure orders of discourse which combined martial arts and skating in a novel manner was met with more resistance within the international skating community. However, both Browning and Stojko attracted large television audiences, dedicated followings from demographics with purchasing power, and were supported by significant corporate sponsors, facts which Canadian journalists dutifully acknowledged. This undoubtedly placed restraints on the actual content which was produced about these skaters.

Each of these three individuals embodied varying forms of masculinities with respect to Connell's model. Characteristics foregrounded in coverage of Stojko and Browning, such as their mental and physical toughness, and the athleticism they emphasized through their modes of stylization, consolidated their image as masculine skaters. The masculinity of these skaters is at times conflated with sexuality. These two ideas are intertwined to influence the favourable representation of these skaters. The masculinity of Stojko and Browning was represented through discourse as unconventional to figure skating, which was made evident, for example, through the attention placed on declaring Browning a heterosexual. In one account, the fact that Browning enjoyed driving fast cars, like average young men, was conflated within discourse as an obvious marker of his heterosexuality. The valorization of Browning and Stojko, with respect to

masculinity and sexuality, influenced how their representations were inter-discursively related to nationalism. Additionally, the praise each of these athletes received with respect to masculinity was also inter-discursively related to their relative levels of marketability. Browning and Stojko forged relationships with a wide variety of corporate sponsors, precisely because of such gendered representations. Representations of Cranston were not constructed to resonate with notions of hegemonic masculinity; such representations did not fit the logic of dominant discourses on nationalism, nor did they foster the same level of interest from sponsors.

The strength of the men's event in Canada has not gone unnoticed to event hosts. When I attended the 2010 National Figure Skating Championships, a ticket for the men's final was significantly more expensive than a ticket to see the women's and ice dancing finals combined. At the Olympic Games held in Vancouver in 2010, some of the familiar tensions which I have explored in this project were reintroduced into mass media coverage following the men's event. Evan Lysacek, the gold medalist, did not attempt a quadruple jump in his final program. However, the silver medalist, Evgeny Plushenko, successfully landed a quadruple-triple combination. Some supporters of Plushenko mobilized nationalistic rhetoric, claiming that the location of the Games influenced the outcome; North American audiences favoured witnessing a North American skater win the title. The controversy drew enough attention to elicit comment from Russia's prime minister, Vladimir Putin, who stated that Plushenko's performance was "worth gold."⁹ Plushenko publicly disagreed with his placement, stating, "If Olympic champion doesn't know how to jump quad, I don't know. Now it's not men's figure skating. Now it's

dancing.”¹⁰ Supporters of the outcome argued that Lysacek performed the superior program, in terms of choreography, footwork, spins, and edges. Modes of stylization are imbued with certain values that can be further appropriated in the production of national discourse. This does raise questions about the parameters of representations surrounding masculinities. Just as Stojko was considered too eager to prove his masculinity at times, here too, the more ‘athletic’ skater, Plushenko, appears to be undermined. If skating is to continue to grow in popularity, corporate sponsors will increasingly exert pressure on skating governing bodies to promulgate lucrative images through individual skaters. However, the use of individuals in the dissemination of national discourse is problematic, as those wielding the most influence could undermine the athletic careers of those who don’t ‘fit’ this discourse. As mentioned earlier, shared beliefs in the ascendancy of certain images and values over others defines hegemony. Those who seek to disrupt existing orders of discourse may be treated more harshly using media strategies. When broader social anxieties surface in mainstream media, certain athletes may come to represent ideological relief as outlets that quiet these anxieties. Such is the case with Stojko and Browning with respect to homosexuality. A significant rupture in existing discourse needs to occur before the figure skating community will embrace or support alternative masculinities.

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² *Ibid.*, 42.

³ Fairclough, “Discourse and Social Change,” 72.

⁴ Kestnbaum, “Figure Skating and Cultural Meaning,” 296.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Adams, “To be an Ordinary Hero,” 175.

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