

Chapter ELEVEN

Taking Slap Shots at the House: When the Canadian Media Turns Curlers into Hockey Players

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In the spring of 2014, I tasked students in my course on men and masculinities with finding a social problem related to dominant and celebrated expressions of masculinity. In the resulting presentations, one of the students showed our class a video of a broadcast from the recently completed Sochi Winter Olympics. In the video, which aired on CBC TV, prominent Canadian television personality George Stroumboulopoulos interviewed the recently crowned gold-medal-winning men's curling team, Team Brad Jacobs. Curling, a sport Scottish immigrants introduced to Canada in the late eighteenth century (Reid 2010; Tate 2011), requires participants to slide large stones down long narrow sheets of ice. Both women and men curl, sometimes on the same teams, and popular conceptions of the sport link it to small-town Canadian life, rural communities, and the working class (Cosh 2014). Although the sport's origins are Scottish, its popularity in Canada is unmatched, making the Team Jacobs interview with Stroumboulopoulos especially important within the context of popular understandings of Canadian sports.

Team Jacobs, from Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, is an elite men's curling team. The team has experienced curling success throughout their professional careers, winning several regional titles, a Brier (Canadian men's champions), and an Olympic gold medal. In spite of their success on the ice, they have experienced some criticism off it for their competitive, expressive, boisterous style of play (Montague 2011), with the coach of the British national curling team commenting: "The aggressive style we have seen from [Team Jacobs] here, that's something I don't like about the [changes to the] sport" (*Toronto Sun* 2014). The team's members are not only unique in drawing some consternation from the press and others in the curling community, but they also do not

resemble male curlers past, or even of the 1990s and early 2000s, men like Randy Ferbey, Kevin Martin (aka “Old Bear”), and Russ Howard, who were respectively revered for their good nature, calmness, and maturity (Lopresti 2006; Bishop 2010; Pavia 2015). Instead, this team is muscled and young (for curlers), the oldest player thirty-five-years old, with two in their twenties.ⁱⁱ Stroumboulopoulos called the team “four of the biggest dudes from Sochi” (CBC 2014). During the short segment, he lauded them for changing the popular understanding of curling as a sport where “someone’s dad could win a gold medal” to something more akin to professional men’s collision sports,ⁱⁱⁱ with the team expressing their desire to have children emulate their muscular, fit, and aggressive style of masculinity. Team Jacobs lead Ryan Harnden commented, “hopefully the kids growing up will follow in our footsteps.” When Stroumboulopoulos asked about the response the curlers received in the Olympic Village, the team exclaimed that they had “changed the perception” of curling, presumably from a sport for older players to one that emulated the style and bodily comportment of other, more youthful Olympic and professional sports, such as hockey. Laughing, the team said that people in the Olympic Village often mistook them for Canadian hockey players.

Until recently, Canadian popular culture held curling, Canada’s “other” quintessential winter pastime, as a sport utterly distinct from hockey. The Canadian public and press did not associate the aging bodies of the parents and grandparents who curled with the brawny and aggressive pursuits of young people, as they did and continue to do with hockey players. Curling, with its focus on hospitality and affability, stood well apart from the game of hockey, a sport many Canadians connect to the experiences of boys and men, praised for its pugilistic tendencies and requisite celebration of a particular kind of masculinity. This phenomenon has even expanded into the United States. *The New York Times* published a story during the Vancouver Olympics

about the emerging phenomenon of amateur curling in America, quoting a grandmother who compared it favourably to hockey, saying, “There’s no contact, the kids don’t beat each other up. It’s a sport you can keep for a lifetime” (McGrath 2010, SP5).

Jokes made in the popular press and other venues about curling centre on its accessibility, hospitality, and its associated drinking culture (teams and fans often mix after matches in reception areas). Canadians widely view curling as a leisure pursuit, sometimes overlooking its position as an elite-level sport that is both rationalized and highly professionalized (Wieting and Lamoureux 2001). A website cataloguing notable curling quotes describes a popular curling T-shirt that reads “My drinking team has a curling problem.” The American media reinforce this view. During the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, *Tonight Show* host Jay Leno told his audience that “the gold medal [in curling] ended up going to a Brazilian cleaning team” (MacQueen 2002). Retired National Basketball Association star Charles Barkley kidded, “Curling is not a sport. I called my grandmother and told her she could win a gold medal because they have dusting in the Olympics now.” Hockey jokes, on the other hand, tend to take a different form. Rodney Dangerfield famously joked about the ubiquity of hockey’s celebration of violent masculinity, stating, “I went to a fight the other night, and a hockey game broke out.” A popular Canadian bumper sticker reads, “Be nice to animals. Hug a hockey player.” The disparate jokes circulating in popular culture about curling and hockey demonstrate the differing popular understandings of the two winter sports, with curling linked to a lack of physical exertion and an abundance of hospitality, and hockey (at least in its most celebrated form, male competitive hockey) linked to aggression and violence. In Canada, *Hockey Night in Canada* analyst Don Cherry and numerous others, such as Calgary Flames executive Brian Burke and former NHL player and coach Darryl Sutter, often trumpet this link between hockey and

aggressive masculinity, celebrating those boys and men who put their bodies at risk through fighting and rough play, calling them “good Canadian boys” (Allain 2016). Although public celebrations of both hockey and curling link the sports’ associations with winter, cold temperatures, and ice to notions of Canadian national identity, the understandings of what this identity might look like were distinct—at least until early 2014.

This chapter explores the potentially problematic ways the Canadian media have reproduced curlers as hockey players. Men’s curling is one of the few nationally celebrated sports that focuses on the experiences of old(er) men (i.e., men in mid-life and beyond) and a unique form of bodily comportment not frequently found in other professional men’s sports. Yet in recent years the media has drawn on the language of hockey and emphasized the associated qualities of youth, aggression, and muscularity to frame Team Jacobs as ushering into curling an exciting new masculine identity. I argue that the results of this are the potentially problematic erasure of curling’s once-unique form of Canadian professional sports masculinity. Examining the relationship between this shifting curling masculinity and a hegemonic Canadian national identity linked to a dominant style of masculinity in men’s and boys’ ice hockey, I investigate what is at stake when the media reproduces curlers as hockey players.

National Identity and the Reproduction of Canadian Hockey Masculinity

Thinkers such as Michael Billig, Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm have outlined the amorphous nature of nations and national identities. Born of the modern era, nations—and, more importantly, expressions of nationalism—arise not as natural manifestations of physical boundaries nor geographical terrain; instead, Hobsbawm (2012) says, they are social spaces which depend on public understandings and a shared sense of belonging. Gellner (2009) proposes that while communal religious beliefs were once an important vehicle for constructing and maintaining social communities, today it is the nation that provides this social function.

Theorists of nationalism identify various social structures as buttressing the creation of national communities. Gellner, for example, spotlights a collective language and education system as significant in creating shared national meanings. Billig (1995) highlights the importance of banal nationalism, or acts of nationalism like witnessing the national flag on coins, stamps, and uniforms, as reinforcing national belonging. Alternatively, Anderson (2006) describes the significance of capitalism in acting as a conduit to national belonging, in particular the capitalist enterprise of the printing press and the subsequent development of mass media.

What is significant about each of these theories of nationalism is their focus on the “imagined” or “invented” state of the nation (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Anderson 2006). As Anderson points out, nations are “imagined communities,” where people do not know one another but nevertheless believe that they share a strong connection. Hobsbawm and Ranger illuminate the idea that although the public understands nations as natural, nations are in fact inventions or mythologies imbued with dynamics of power. The dimension of power is significant, as dominant national discourse does not honour, reproduce, or imagine as legitimate all national identities, a fact hard to ignore for many living in Canada. More directly, “not all nationalisms can be satisfied” (Gellner 2009, 2). Ironically, “regardless of the actual inequalities and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 2006, 7). It is therefore important that scholars interrogate just how popular narratives work to produce national imaginings in order to discover the various ways that power operates within national frameworks.

Hobsbawm and Billig each explain that sport is an important entity in the creation of national solidarity and the construction of various national mythologies. Hobsbawm cites (2012, 142–43) the interwar years in particular as a significant time for the growth of sporting nationalism.

During this period, national team sports aided in the development of the nation as an imagined community. George Orwell (1945) asserts that national teams have become the embodiment of national identity, competing with other national teams in acts he calls “war minus the shooting.” This was the case in the well-watched and widely celebrated 1972 Summit Series, a hockey tournament played between Canadian NHL players and the Soviet Union’s national men’s team.^{iv} In the series, both the maple leaf (a symbol of the Canadian nation) emblazoned on the Canadian jerseys and their name—Team Canada—helped to solidify the notion that they represented the national populace (including both anglophone and francophone Canadians), its ideologies, and, most importantly, its (capitalist) character (Earle 1995, 114). As Hobsbawm asserts: “the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven people. The individual, even the one who only cheers, becomes a symbol of *his* nation himself” (2012, 143, emphasis added). Hobsbawm’s use of the masculine pronoun here unintentionally flags for its reader an important and often-overlooked feature of nations and their national mythologies: they are gendered and most often privilege the experiences of particular men (Yuval-Davis 1993). As I will interrogate further below, when culture makers construct sport as important to the creation of imagined communities, and elite-level men’s hockey as important to the imagined creation of the Canadian nation, the position of men in general—and young, fit, white, straight, able-bodied men in particular—comes to hold a more valued place within the nation (Adams 2006, 71). Therefore, when scholars interrogate the ways that the state, sports media, and other culture makers construct Canadian sporting nationalisms, it is important that they be attentive to the ways these constructions (re)produce privilege and common-sense understandings about the importance of these men.

A critical analysis of Canadian hockey provides an instructive example of intersections of gender, sport, and nationalism, highlighting the dynamics of power that operate when Canadians understand themselves as a nation of hockey players. The media, politicians, athletes, and others both comprehend and portray the link between the nation and hockey as commonsensical and essentialized. After all, hockey is widely known as “Canada’s game.” One does not have to look far to find various Canadian culture makers asserting that hockey is a natural outgrowth of the Canadian environment, particularly given Canada’s geographical position in the seemingly cold, hard north. Cherished Canadian humourist and writer Stephen Leacock eloquently described this relationship: “Hockey captures the essence of Canadian experience in the New World. In a land so inescapably and inhospitably cold, hockey is the chance of life, and an affirmation that despite the deathly chill of winter we are alive.” Similarly, in 2014, the year of the Sochi Winter Olympics, then Canadian Minister of State (Sports) Bal Gosal remarked, “Hockey is our national winter game; it is a sport we hold dear in [our] hearts; it is what makes us Canadian” (Department of Canadian Heritage 2014). Even the Canadian financial institution Scotiabank, in an ongoing marketing campaign, celebrates hockey as something quintessential to the nature of Canada and Canadians, declaring hockey season Canada’s “5th season.”

As many inside the nation, and even some from outside, mythologically produce Canada as a northern nation with a natural propensity for developing ice-hockey players, they are also prioritizing certain gendered behaviours. The popular link between Canada and the North is one that helps to privilege particular masculine expressions, perpetuating the idea that Canadian citizens (often white and male) used and continue to use their courageous spirit and brute strength to overcome the harsh physical realities of the land (Allain 2011). Or as Sherrill Grace states (1997, 167) in her examination of gender and representations of the North,

The north is figured as the place of male adventure, the space for testing and proving masculine identities, where sissies and wimps will be turned into real men or be destroyed, or be sent home/south to the women or the bottle.

This type of masculinity works to devalue the gender expressions of those (e.g., women and “less masculine” men) who do not embrace a style of masculinity linked to hard, rough, tough, and sometimes violent expressions. Further, it works to erase from stories of Canadian settlement the essential role of Indigenous people(s) in aiding settlers. Therefore, as the nation celebrates hockey as its preeminent symbol, expressions of hockey associated with young, aggressive, and often white men become the revered standard for appropriate masculinity. It is this expression of what I call Canadian hockey-style masculinity that is one of the most highly publicized and celebrated versions of masculinity within the nation (Allain 2008). For this reason, numerous academics have called for an interrogation of this overly sentimentalized representation of Canadian identity (e.g., Gruneau and Whitson 1993; Robidoux 2002; Adams 2006; Pitter 2006). In this regard, Rick Gruneau and David Whitson emphatically argue that “at the very least, hockey’s enduring link to the idea of ‘Canadianess’ is something to be analysed rather than romanticized” (1993, 7).

Scholars also point out the various ways that the national celebration of hockey works to erase some “other” Canadians from national mythmaking. Pitter (2006) shows that this kind of national mythmaking (i.e., Canada as a land of hockey players) privileges whiteness and works to erase Indigenous and black Canadians from the national imagination. Examining the hockey website that Roch Carrier, author of the iconic children’s book *The Hockey Sweater*, developed for the National Library of Canada, Pitter finds that it does not feature nor discuss black and Indigenous hockey players. This is surprising given the fame and importance of such players as Willie O’Ree and George Armstrong, and the significance of Indigenous peoples to the early

development of the game (Robidoux 2002). Concerned about wholesale erasure of racialized minorities from this dominant national narrative, Pitter questions (2006, 128), “Do these people not play hockey? Or are they not truly Canadian?” Similarly, Adams asserts (2006, 71), “If hockey is life in Canada, then life in Canada remains decidedly masculine and white.” She continues, “hockey produces a very ordinary but pernicious sense of male entitlement: to space, to status, to national belonging.” The celebration of hockey in Canada does work to construct the nation as white and male, but it also works to produce it as young, able-bodied, and linked to a hegemonically masculine style of aggression and the physical domination of some men over other men.

In some ways, curling and its relationship to Canadian national identity pose an important challenge to the dominance of Canadian hockey-style masculinity and the supremacy of a sporting nationalism linked to hockey. The press represents curling, like hockey, as a quintessentially Canadian sport (e.g., see Fitz-Gerald 2015). New Brunswick author David Adams Richards catalogues (2001, 155) the similarities between the two games and their significance to dominant national identity, stating, “As with hockey, curling was our game, and we *hated* when we were beaten at it. . . . It was part of our national consciousness and we couldn’t separate ourselves from it.” An editorial in the *Calgary Sun* (2016) proclaims, “Canadian winter sports and curling arguably fall just behind hockey for overall and grassroots popularity.” Making explicit the link between curling and national identity, the author continues, “while result on the ice is always key, the friendships forged off of it . . . ha[ve] always been about these national celebrations [*sic*] real meaning.” An editorial in *Maclean’s*, published shortly after the Sochi Olympics, makes similar claims, stating that “we have a triad of distinctively Canadian sports: Canadian football, hockey and curling” (Cosh 2014).

Although curling originated with Scottish settlers, its link to winter, ice, and snow has many writers, reporters, and members of the Canadian public connecting it to Canadian identity, but in ways that are mostly distinct from hockey. Like professional hockey players, the majority of curlers are white, and therefore both hockey and curling privilege whiteness and the significance of white citizens within national storytelling. However, unlike Canadian hockey nationalism, which the press and public understand as focusing on punishing physicality, elite-level play, and professionalization (Stark 2001; Cantelon 2006), curling is linked to small-town and rural life. For example, Cosh argues (2014) that while hockey is the sport of the middle class, curling is “a farmer’s game, a peasant tradition. . . . There are still many villages in the West that cannot afford hockey rinks, but that faithfully lay down two curling sheets in a long, narrow shack every fall.” Commentators also link curling to various non-athletic factors—factors Stephen Wieting and Danny Lamoureux call (2001, 146) “extra-kinesthetic aspects of bodily style, comportment, and training.” Historian Krista McCracken (2013) outlines some of these extra-kinesthetic qualities, including community-mindedness, volunteerism, socialness, good moral conduct, and an attitude that ordinary people can be successful through hard work and dedication. Connecting these to Canadian national identity, she states, “The politeness and sportsmanship [of curling culture] has also been called by some as quintessentially Canadian in attitude” (*ibid.*). The emphasis on these “every-person” qualities is evident in *Globe and Mail* coverage of the 2016 Brier in Ottawa:

There was a beer-store manager, a firefighter, a couple of golf pros, a chiropractor, an air-traffic controller, a real estate agent, a heavy-equipment operator, a pilot, an accountant or two, a number of people in sales and small business—and even a couple of curlers. Each day through the week, these Ordinary Canadians will gather for autograph sessions at the nearby Brier Patch [hospitality hall]. (MacGregor 2016c)

Indeed, one of the most controversial moments of the 2015 curling season came when a curler gently tapped a competitor with his broom to remind him not to “puddle” the ice.^v In a statement countering dominant ideology about Canadian men’s hockey, Sean Fitz-Gerald (2015), a sports reporter with the *National Post*, commented: “There are ways to show your frustration in curling. . . . Rarely—if ever—is there an exception for physical contact.”

Canadian Hockey Masculinity and the Transformation of Curling

Because curling occupies national mythmaking in ways similar to hockey, it is important to note just how different the two sports are in terms of the cultures they celebrate and the paradoxical ways some members of the press look to represent them as similar. Examining curling coverage in the Canadian press demonstrates a shift in dominant understandings of curling masculinity and a resulting narrowing of celebratory masculinity linked to Canadian national identity.

Team Brad Jacobs, their eponymous champion, broadcaster George Stroumboulopoulos, and others in the Canadian media celebrated their challenge to previous understandings of appropriate gender expression in the sport of curling. First and foremost, the team opposed a curling identity associated with being “fat” and preferred one that was “ripped” (Costa 2014; Hutchins 2014; Gatehouse 2014). The press also drew attention to the team’s sex appeal, suggesting a shift from sexy older curlers who appealed to “much, much older women” (Bishop 2010) to younger men who enticed younger women. *Maclean’s* cited one young enthusiastic female fan commenting on the team’s lead: “I could watch Ryan Harnden curl alllll damn day. You keep on sweeping sir, #hurryhard” (quoted in Hutchins 2014). Like other hyper-masculine Canadian sports (including men’s elite-level hockey), heteronormativity abounds in curling coverage today. Finally, even the press’s representation of curling fans has changed. In 2012, for

example, Curling Canada (2012) reported on a group of fans travelling to various Brier tournaments dressed in entertaining costumes and holding letters spelling “SOCIABLE.” The fans had once even donned skull caps as they celebrated balding, middle-aged curler Kevin Martin (*ibid.*). More recently, prominent Canadian columnist and writer Roy MacGregor (2016a), once called the “Wayne Gretzky of hockey writing” (Allemand 2012), described Brier fans using tin cans, a little spit, and string to produce “homemade ‘moose calls’” in support of Jacobs and his Northern Ontario teammates. After describing Jacob’s “bushy beard” and suggesting a relationship between the beard and the team’s “aggressive” play, MacGregor used the moose call as a metaphor for the team, at one point referring to them as a “bull moose,” a symbol of hyper-masculine aggression.

Although it is hard to know for sure why this shift is happening at this particular moment in time, there are important factors to consider. First, as Wieting and Lamoureux (2001) document, since curling’s inclusion as a full Olympic sport in 1998, professional curling associations have increasingly rationalized and commercialized the game, resulting in it resembling other mainstream men’s sports. Second, popular Canadian media representations of national identity have continued to emphasize connections between dominant national-identity constructions and a seemingly natural link to rough, tough men in heavily muscled bodies in general, and hockey players in particular. While this is not a recent development, current moral panics about men and “real masculinity” in crisis have reinvigorated and re-entrenched the hegemony of Canadian hockey-style masculinity (Allain 2016). Finally, Canadian sports reporters, athletes, and athletic officials have a tendency to co-opt various men’s sports into the field of the hyper-masculine. Adams notes (2011, 29–31) a shift in the kinds of masculinity celebrated within Canadian figure-skating culture in the 1980s and 1990s, and critiques skating’s “macho turn,” arguing that this

represents a loss because men's skating (not unlike curling) held an important place within sports culture as "one of only a few competitive athletic activities that do little to validate the masculinities of their male competitors." As with the coverage of curling, the Canadian media widely celebrated this change in skating culture and its alignment with dominant sporting masculinities. In fact, Adams finds (2006, 77) that some reporters use hockey language to describe male figure skaters and their skating, asserting, "Hockey analogies are ways through which Canadians can talk to each other about men and masculinity."

As Team Jacobs became the placeholder for a new, masculine curling identity, the press regularly drew on hockey and other aggressive sports, both in metaphor and language, to describe the game and, more importantly, the team's aggressive, hyper-masculine posturing. For example, an article in the *Globe and Mail* explained that "Canadians are as demanding of their curlers as they are of their hockey players at the Winter Olympics" (Spencer 2014). Continuing, the author drew on hockey language, suggesting the team should "elbow aside" its opponent and beat them with "finesse shots and hits." Indeed, many in the hockey community and beyond understand elite-level Canadian hockey as more physically aggressive and violent than the game developed and played in Europe (Allain 2008). Colby Cosh (2014) from *Maclean's* pulled from an understanding of Canadian hockey as aggressive when he asserted, "Wicked Canadians have confiscated the charming Scots pastime of curling, turning it into an unseemly, crude combat." Similarly, MacGregor (2016b) used hockey discourse when he referred to curling's "surgically precise" play as the "neutral-zone trap," a term referencing a (sometimes boring) style of defensive hockey play. He went further in developing the link between curling and hyper-aggressive sports when he described the "intimidat[ing]" look of the Jacobs' team as "more in keeping with ultimate fighting than curling" (MacGregor 2016a).

The linguistic slippage that sees curling and curlers referenced using hockey terminology is only one piece of a complex social reordering of popular understandings of men who curl. My examples above demonstrate how the Canadian press celebrates a new curling masculinity linked to a certain set of attitudes and types of bodily comportment. Journalists and sports commentators widely praise Team Jacobs and their brawny expressions of masculine style as important for the sport, building sponsorship opportunities and signaling a new era of appropriate masculine expression (CBC 2014). Described by the Canadian Press as “young” and “powerful” (Strong 2013), Jacobs and his teammates are celebrated for shifting curling’s identity from fat to fit and from affable to aggressive (Cosh 2014; Fitz-Gerald 2015; Pavia 2015). Writer Jonathan Gatehouse (2014) claims, “They’re more like college football players than the folks down at the community bonspiel.” MacGregor (2016a) similarly describes the team:

the bulging biceps, the fist-pumps and fist-taps, the high fives, the grim-faced intensity and the loud, raw emotion are all there, just as they were in Sochi two years ago when Brad Jacobs and his rink from Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., won the gold medal for Canada and were dismissed as a bunch of uncouth bullies by the coach of the team that took silver.

Although some reporters and even the team itself cite this shift in men’s curling identity as a move from curlers to “athletes” (Gatehouse 2014; CBC 2014), the examples listed above demonstrate what I argue is a shift in masculine identity that sees curlers reproduced as hockey players in the imaginations of those in the Canadian (sports) media. For example, *Calgary Herald* writer Jeff MacKinnon (2015) remarks that Team Jacobs “spent their free time at the 2014 Games...telling folks they were not hockey players.” More recent coverage of the team in the *National Post* uses hockey terms to describe their style of play, stating, “If curling was hockey, they look like they could handle themselves in the corners, too” (Scanlan 2016).^{vi} Given the seeming importance of hockey to Canada and popular representations of Canadian national

identity (Gruneau and Whitson 1993; Robidoux 2002; Adams 2006), it is important to consider what happens when the media, curlers, and others turn curlers into hockey players.

The Problem of Narrowing Canadian Sports Masculinities

Sport sociologists and historians have noted that popular representations of sport in the West have associated it with the pursuits of men and their particular expressions of masculinity (Whitson 1990; Messner 1992; Kidd 2013). Often called “a male institution” (Whitson 1990, 20), men’s and boys’ sports work to secure particular dominant expressions of masculinity and locate them within the bodies of particular men. Theorists have frequently described the various ways that the sports practiced by men and boys work to distance them from girls and women (*ibid.*), creating what Michael Messner calls “the fiction of gender” (2002, 1). In North America, it is the professional sports played by young, strong, oftentimes aggressive men—sports like hockey, football, and basketball—that garner the most media and public attention. Even as women gain access to elite-level sports in growing numbers, the American media increasingly ignores these accomplishments, focusing instead on men’s professional and college sports like baseball, football, and basketball (Cooky, Messner, and Musto 2015). In Canada, sports like hockey, and the requisite expressions of dominant masculinity found therein, are most often associated with the nation and its particularly gendered character.

R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt (2005) direct our attention to the various ways that dominant expressions of masculinity work through cultural exemplars, such as those found in the media representations of professional sports. They argue that sports stars aid in shaping culturally dominant understandings of what appropriate masculine expression should look like. At the same time, many scholars and journalists examining expressions of masculinity in elite-

level Canadian (and North American) men's hockey have cited the shockingly narrow versions of masculinity celebrated therein, and their link to masculine expressions damaging to the lives of young men, young women, and others (Robinson 1998; Burstyn 1999; Robidoux 2001; Branch 2014). Sociologist Kevin Young (2012) describes how the culture of (young) men's sports celebrates enduring pain and injury as part of what it means to be an appropriately masculine man. The results of this kind of celebrated masculinity are a legacy of long-term injuries to men's bodies (including their brains). Nick Pappas, Patrick McKenry, and Beth Catlett (2004) argue that the culture of men's hockey and its popular celebration not only leads to the damage and destruction of the bodies of young men and boys, it further promotes a level of violence both against the bodies of other young men (both hockey and non-hockey players) and violence against women. They assert that there is a deep and enduring relationship between the public and institutional celebrations of violence on the ice and related violence off the ice. The sport of men's and boys' elite-level hockey not only denigrates the experiences of women and girls, it also demands a level of conformity from its participants that marginalizes those who cannot or will not achieve its revered gender expression and play hockey in ways that the Canadian media and public define as both quintessentially Canadian and ideally masculine (Allain 2008). This is especially problematic given the rapid demographic changes in Canada today.

In Canada, where the baby boomers are beginning to retire, leading to an increasingly old(er) Canadian population, it is surprisingly rare to see the bodies of these old(er) men and women on Canadian sports channels, related websites, and in the sports sections of Canadian newspapers. Aside from occasional NHL old-timers games, which are not widely publicized and are produced only because of their relation to more popular hockey events like the NHL's Winter Classic,

Heritage Classic, or all-star weekend, Canadians are generally unable to turn on their TVs and see the bodies of mid- and later-life sports competitors revered and celebrated as athletes, Olympians, and national and world champions. In this regard, men's curling and its celebration of the achievements of men in mid- and later life provides an important contrast to common-sense understandings of professional sports and national champions—and perhaps even more importantly, to common-sense understandings of the nation, its mythology, and who matters.

Given the narrow and oftentimes problematic definitions of appropriate masculinity, especially those linked to exalted expressions of Canadian national identity, and the importance of cultural exemplars of appropriate masculine expression (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), there is something profoundly important about public celebrations of diverse expressions of masculinity. Specifically, they create space for those who cannot or will not express dominant (and sometimes problematic) expressions of masculine style. It is even more important to widely celebrate cultural exemplars of masculinity that are not linked to machismo and youth. Furthermore, Canada is a nation that is growing old. Today there are ever-increasing numbers of Canadians reaching later life; the Canadian public and media need to celebrate aging curling masculinities and frame them as significant in national mythmaking. Moving dominant Canadian masculine identity away from celebrations of using "the body as a weapon" (Messner 1992, 63), and including sports that revere community life, friendliness, and a lack of physical violence is important. The culture of curling also challenges the essentialization of gender-segregated sport, with men and women regularly playing in mixed leagues, and mixed doubles curling premiering in Olympic competition in 2018. Furthermore, in curling clubs, curlers with mobility issues are able to compete both in their own leagues and with able-bodied curlers through modified curling equipment that allows participants to release the curling stone both from a wheelchair and from a

standing position. Curling may also allow those who successfully embody hockey-style masculinity the freedom to step away from the performance of aggression, dominance, and violence, and provide them with freedom to attempt different, less fraught forms of masculinity.

Given the potential of curling to challenge and expand Canadian identity, its requisite link to dominant masculinity, and the way it opens a space to celebrate different forms of bodily comportment, aging, and styles of masculine expressions, we should be concerned about the slippage that now sees media representing and lauding curlers as hockey players. Whereas once the press celebrated curling as a sport joined to the national imaginary in ways *different* from hockey, today they praise men's curling as a sport with the potential to express a similar style of dominant masculinity. As a result, the Canadian media, supported by some curlers and even Curling Canada,^{vii} are at risk of writing out of the national script these old(er) men and their unique approach to national sport, national identity, and gender. This trend is deeply concerning.

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Notes

ⁱⁱ Skip Brad Jacobs was born in 1985, third Ryan Fry in 1978, second E. J. Harnden in 1983, and lead Ryan Harnden in 1986.

ⁱⁱⁱ Collision sports are sports where the purpose is to intentionally make contact with other athletes (and sometimes inanimate objects). This includes team sports such as hockey, rugby, and football.

^{iv} The final game of the 1972 Summit Series was one of the most-viewed television events in Canadian history, with almost 83 percent of the Canadian population estimated to have watched at least part of the game (Zelkovich 2010).

^v Puddling occurs when a curler keeps his body, usually his knee, on the ice too long after delivering a shot. This causes the ice to melt, changing the playing conditions for both teams (Fitz-Gerald 2015).

^{vi} In men's elite-level hockey, fans, commentators, players, and coaches often consider the corners of a hockey arena the most dangerous places on the ice. Within popular understandings of hockey, it is only the toughest players who can go into the corners, withstand the intense physical contact, and come out unscathed. A player who cannot handle himself in these situations or who refuses to go into the corners is considered lacking the requisite masculinity to play the North American game.

^{vii} During Stroumboulopoulos's interview with Team Brad Jacobs in 2014, Ryan Harnden commented that the team had "changed the perception" of curling. Curling Canada, the national curling association, celebrated this claim on their Twitter account, echoing Harnden's statement (Curling Canada 2014).

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