In past decades sports scholars have provided evidence that athletes are locked in a culture that normalizes risk, injury and pain (Albert, 1999; Donnelly, 2004; Hughes & Coakley, 1991; Nixon, 1992). Several factors contribute to the preservation of this culture. Athletes persuade or coerce their peers to accept injuries and pain while continuing their activity (Curry, 1993; Nixon, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1994b, 1996b, 1996a; Sinden, 2010). Coaches motivate athletes to overcome their limits (Curry & Strauss, 1994; Nixon, 1993a, 1994a). Sports organizations intensify training regimes and the use of the athletes’ bodies to maximize results and revenues (Curry & Strauss, 1994; Frey, 1991; Howe, 2001; Nixon, 1993a). Sportspeople also try to resemble the public image of ‘real athletes,’ who accept risk, injuries, and pain to achieve success and gain respect (Kotarba, 1983; Pike & Maguire, 2003; Weinberg, Vernau, & Horn, 2013). These factors seem especially powerful in the case of male athletes, who feel the pressure to imitate stereotypes of aggressive masculinity (McGannon, Cunningham, & Schinke, 2013; Messner, 1990). Some scholars expressed the idea that that athletes become victims of a system that benefits from their pain (Frey, 1991; Hughes & Coakley, 1991; Nixon, 1993a). Athletes are likely to not recognize the need for more protection against risk and injury. Even if athletes would recognize the need for more protection, they usually don’t have the power to change things. Although in some sports the voices of athletes have started to be heard in decision making, most sports federations and leagues are still organized in pyramid structures, that don’t allow those at the bottom to influence the rules made at the top (Mrkonjic & Geeraert, 2013).

Mass media is one of the forces that contribute to the normalization of risk and injury. Sports media celebrates risk taking and the willingness of athletes to play through pain and injury (Curry & Strauss, 1994; Hughes & Coakley, 1991). For example, media promotes images of male athletes that expose themselves to danger, and avoids reporting non-aggressive pictures of men (Sanderson et al., 2016). However, journalists can also share sympathetic voices that help bring change in safety for sportspeople. Media can increase awareness about risks and the consequences of injuries affecting athletes. For example, Anderson and Kian (2012) conducted a textual analysis of media reporting on the self-withdrawal of Aaron Rodgers from an important NFL game, after he hit his head. They found that despite different views on risk, media’s attitudes towards concussions were changing. Moreover, the authors found that increasing awareness about the consequences of concussions and a “softening” of American masculinity discourse allowed some athletes to distance themselves from the idea of sacrifice for sport. As Anderson and Kian (2012) pointed out, media coverage of the concussion crisis ultimately put pressure on NFL to assume more responsibility for player safety. In another example, McGannon et al. (2013) conducted an ethnographic content analysis of media articles published on the concussion suffered by NHL star Sidney Crosby. They found that media questioned and expressed concerns about the sport culture of risk and the effects that concussions can have on players. The authors concluded that media used Sidney Crosby’s case to question NHL safety rules and policies. NHL reacted by taking a closer look at the link between hits and concussions in hockey. Through their coverage of athletes’ opinions on risk and injury, media can accelerate change by giving more influence to athletes that contradict the norms of the culture of risk. Alternatively, media can potentially minimize those voices through their coverage, blocking one of the few ways through which athletes can generate change in safety policies.

The purpose of this paper was to explore how media covers athletes’ viewpoints on risk and injury and how it contributes (or not) through this coverage to the normalization of risk in sport. We were particularly interested in finding the answer to two research questions: (1) How does media discourse support or undermine athletes’ opinions about risk and injuries? and (2) How does media discourse contribute or not to the normalization of risk through its coverage of athletes’ viewpoints?

Research Context
The Whistler Sliding Center is a bobsleigh, luge, and skeleton track that was constructed for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. It was seen at the time as the fastest track in the world. Safety concerns related to the track were first reported in the media at the end of 2008, and the controversy continued until the start of the Olympic games. The media occasionally covered the topic, citing athletes, coaches and officials. Unfortunately, changes made to the track were not sufficient to avoid a tragedy. On, February 12th, in a training run for the Olympic games, Georgian athlete Nodar Kumaritashvili lost control of his sled at curve 16, flew off the track and hit a steel pole. He died later that day.

Method
To respond to our research questions, we used a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. As Jäger (2001) explained, critical discourse analysis is a method that is appropriate when we are interested in studying how knowledge is transmitted, and how it affects individuals and society. Jäger’s (2001) guidelines to conducting CDA specifically focus on press materials. He divides his approach into two steps. First, in his view, the researcher should focus on the overall structure of the articles selected for the analysis. The focus falls on characterizing the media materials, finding discourse strands, themes and sub-themes and identifying the positions that journalists take. In the second step, Jäger (2001) recommends a deeper and more fine analysis of one or two sample texts that are typical of the themes and discourse positions identified at step one. For our analysis, we started by conducting a search on the LexisNexis database of all articles that mentioned the words “Luge”, “Whistler” and “Olympic”. We then narrowed down on the articles that cited athletes talking about safety, risks and injuries. We then moved to follow the steps recommended by Jäger (2001) to conduct our CDA.

Findings and Conclusion
Our analysis found that Canadian newspapers generally minimized the idea that the Whistler track might be dangerous, in several ways: they mentioned the safety of the track in articles that touched on different topics; they mixed the opinions of the athletes with those of organizing officials or athletes that downplayed the track’s risks; they portrayed the track as a Canadian achievement, a tremendous challenge that needs to be overcome by world athletes; and they gave a voice only to Canadian or top athletes who were advantaged by a more difficult track. Meanwhile, international newspapers were more direct in describing the Whistler track as dangerous, but also diluted the message by citing other athletes, coaches or officials that downplayed the risks involved in the Luge 2010 Olympic competition. Following the work of Fairclough (1995), we concluded that sports media gives more coverage to privileged categories of actors. Moreover, sport media promotes the sports ethic when the coverage treats sport events as heroic conquests (Katz & Dayan, 1986). Media institutions can bring change to the sport culture of risk when they give a voice to experienced and well-known athletes that no longer need to follow the sports ethic to raise their status and are close to the end of their careers.